



# We Joined Others Who Were Poor: the Young Lords, the Black Freedom Struggle, and the “Original” Rainbow Coalition

Martha M. Arguello<sup>1</sup>

Published online: 19 November 2019

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

## Abstract

This article examines the role that the modern Civil Rights and Black Power Movements played in shaping Puerto Rican organizing in the U.S., namely the evolution of the Young Lords of Chicago and the creation of the “Original” Rainbow Coalition.

**Keywords** Young Lords Organization · “Original” Rainbow Coalition · Puerto Rican · Black Power · Chicago and Urban Removal

The emergence of the Young Lords as a grassroots political organization came on the heels of growing national dissent and the development of other community-oriented and New Left organizations across the United States during the late 1960s. Amid a climate of vocal condemnation of conditions of poverty, racial discrimination, and gender bias, as well as opposition to the War in Vietnam and its accompanying draft, youth groups formed in inner cities and on college campuses. Among them were the Black Panther Party (BPP), Young Lords Organization (YLO), and the Brown Berets, all of which organized in communities of color. The American Indian Movement and a number of Asian New Left Groups such as I Wor Kuen and the Red Guard also emerged during this time period. It is critical to remember that the BPP and YLO fostered coalitions across racial, class, and gender lines, most prominently exemplified by the creation of the “Original” Rainbow Coalition, which consisted of African American, Latinos, and poor whites. Although, combined, African Americans, Latinos, and poor whites comprised the country’s largest population sector, they were consigned to a position of inferiority akin to a kind of colonial status, typically reserved for minorities in foreign lands. This is especially true of Puerto Ricans in Puerto Rico, for their lives, and those in the Diaspora generally remained conjoined, an unbreakable link informed by colonial status. In fact, the situation of Puerto Ricans in America “cannot

---

✉ Martha M. Arguello  
MArguell@scripps.college.edu

<sup>1</sup> Scripps College, Claremont, CA 91711, USA

be seen as abstracted from that of those living in Puerto Rico” (Maldonado-Denis 1969, 26).

## Chicago Migrants

Puerto Ricans arriving in Chicago from the island represented a much later twentieth-century migration than that of those who settled along the Eastern seaboard. For much of the Puerto Rican migrant population, “home” became somewhat transient, as agricultural laborers followed the crops before settling permanently in Chicago. Women, in addition, entered into contracts to work as live-in *domésticas*. Gina Pérez aptly describes the transitory nature of this type of labor. “They [domestic workers] exercised little control over their working hours, wages, and private lives, [and] they were also subject to the whims of employers, who could send them to work elsewhere with less than a day’s notice” (Pérez 2004, 66). Pérez further notes that Puerto Rican women challenged these work conditions by relaying their complaints to government agencies, academics, and local and island media, or by walking off their jobs, often in violation of their contracts.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, agricultural workers left their jobs in the fields and sought other forms of work in the city. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, Puerto Ricans in Chicago were a recognizable segment of the city’s population.

Chicago’s Latino population included Puerto Ricans and ethnic Mexicans, as well as a small number of Cubans and other Latin Americans.<sup>2</sup> A study conducted by the Department of Development and Planning, covering the years from 1960 to 1970, concluded that “Chicago alone among the six U.S. cities with large Spanish-speaking populations had a balance of nearly equal Mexican-American and Puerto Rican groups” (Golden 1973, 36). The ethnic Mexican population was spread across several Chicago neighborhood areas, primarily the Lower Westside and South Lawndale (Golden 1973). In contrast to the more geographically dispersed Mexican communities, Puerto Ricans in Chicago lived within a much tighter radius in the adjoining neighborhoods of Humboldt Park, Logan Square, the West Town area of the Northwest Side, and in the Lincoln Park neighborhood where the YLO was born. The concentration of Puerto Ricans within specific neighborhoods and the geographic proximity of these locales would aid and shape the identity of the Young Lords as a Puerto Rican organization.

Acclimation of newcomers to Chicago neighborhoods was typically made easier through the efforts of family members, friends, acquaintances, fellow travelers, and community organizations. During the 1950s and early 1960s the church-based *Caballeros de San Juan* attempted to ease the path of those entering the burgeoning

<sup>1</sup> Multiple sources illustrate this. Gina Pérez cites a 1940s study by Elena Padilla that illustrated the problems and abuses of *domésticas* in Chicago. The island newspaper *El Mundo* referenced this study in a subsequent article.

<sup>2</sup> I use the term “ethnic Mexican” following the lead of Maricela Chávez whose definition “follow[s] historian David G. Gutiérrez’s usage, [in reference] to those of Mexican ancestry or heritage and who live in the United States regardless of citizenship, generation, or immigrant status.” See: Marisela Rodríguez Chávez, “*Despierten hermanas y hermanos!*: women, the Chicano movement, and Chicana feminisms in California, 1966–1981,” (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2004) 20. I use the terms Mexican, Mexican-American, or Chicana/o, in cases where a historical document uses the terms or an individual self-identifies as such.

community through their early organizing efforts and social events (Padilla 1987). In spite of its assimilationist and religious-centric approach, as an organization, *Los Caballeros* was important for initiating neighborhood-based services. Furthermore, *Los Caballeros* highlighted difficulties and injustices faced by Chicago's Puerto Rican communities. Using Catholic parishes as hubs and as the geographic delineation of community, *Los Caballeros* applied organizing to a local level. This neighborhood-centered approach would also be used by more radical and politically motivated groups in Chicago such as the Black Panthers, the Young Lords, and the Young Patriots.

As noted by Felix Padilla, the work of *Los Caballeros* and of community groups that followed was aided by the relatively small size of Puerto Rican neighborhoods and the ethnic and racial segregation of the city.

The concentration of Puerto Ricans in small size barrios influenced and reinforced continuing individual and group interaction and relationship. Further, this concentric residential pattern permitted community organizing, the listing of support and subsequent mobilization of individuals for community affairs, to be carried out more easily. It was significantly less difficult to organize a population that was concentrated in several blocks of a neighborhood than one which was geographically dispersed. (Padilla 1987, 143).

Chicago was an immigrant hub and received more recent European immigrants than either New York City or the East coast more broadly. In the post-World War II, mid-twentieth century process of community formation, Puerto Ricans came last but also overlapped with segments of the African-American community and Mexican migrations. Relations with these groups, as well as white Appalachian migrants, helped shape the Puerto Rican community.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, tension emerged within neighborhoods previously settled by ethnic Europeans. Newly arrived Puerto Rican families moving into these neighborhoods were often viewed as interlopers. Puerto Rican youth in Chicago thus entered into hostile territory in a city already segmented by ethnic divisions and neighborhood gangs. The subsequent organization of Puerto Rican youth into groups such as the Paragons, the Young Lords, and the Latin Kings resulted in clashes between Puerto Ricans and the “European gangs” (Jimenez 2008). As the Young Lords grew in size, their conflicts and types of adversaries also expanded and included gangs of Italians, white Appalachians, and Latino gangs, each fighting “for control of hangouts, streets and turf” (Ignatin 1969, np). Yet, during this period, the community-based, social component of the Young Lords remained ever-present. They organized block parties, picnics, and socialized in a coffee house named Uptight #2 (Ignatin 1969). Prior to their emergence as a revolutionary organization, the Young Lords viewed themselves both as a group banded together for protection and as a social club that gathered in a local storefront and organized parties and celebrations.

Distrust between existing immigrant groups and newcomers was not unique to 1950s Chicago. De facto segregation, racism, and ethnic claims to specific neighborhoods intensified intergroup hostility. Neighborhood gangs throughout Chicago that

<sup>3</sup> These relations were not always positive. Initially there were tensions between Appalachian youth and Puerto Ricans. However, the late 1960s heralded cooperative efforts between them, as illustrated later in this article.

identified as European or Euro-descended included Ragen's Colts, Pojay Town, the Black Handers, and the Hamburgs<sup>4</sup> (Chicago Commission on Race Relations, 1922). Small neighborhood gangs of white youth were also active in Lincoln Park during the 1950s and early 1960s. Young Lords founder José "Cha Cha" Jiménez identifies the "Romas" and "Oasis" among them. Jiménez further notes the following Puerto Rican gangs as being in existence during the 1950s, prior to the formation of the Young Lords gang in 1957: *Hachas Viejas* or Old Hatchets, *Los Heraldos*, Latin Angels, and Lincoln Park. A distinct list of Black and Latino gangs during the 1960s included the Vice Lords, Egyptian Cobras, Black Disciples, the Black Stone Rangers, and Latin Eagles.

In short, throughout the twentieth century, gangs existed in the working-class sectors of Chicago, comprised of African American, Puerto Rican, Mexican, Appalachian, Polish, Italian, Irish, and other second and third generation Europeans. These Chicago gangs organized along ethnic or neighborhood lines, although the Black and Latino gangs at times blurred those boundaries. Among them, the Puerto Rican gangs were the last to form, reflective of their position in the migration chain. Young Lord leader "Cha Cha" Jiménez recounts stories of getting beaten up by members of "European gangs." His name and physical appearance (light skinned with red hair) also made him a target. These experiences led him and a number of neighborhood friends to form the Young Lords as a means of protection and survival. Jiménez faced increased harassment and violence from police officers as a result of his name, and later, due to his political activities. As a teenager and young adult, whenever police stopped him, they would invariably ask his name, to which he would respond: "My name is José Jiménez." After asking him again, and receiving the same response, "they didn't believe me, so they would start beating me up." (Jimenez 2008). Jiménez's childhood friend and Young Lord member, Angie Adorno Navedo, witnessed one of these encounters with police during a neighborhood dance at a local church. "I remember the police asking him his name." Cha Cha answered, then the police "smacked him one... When he stated his name again, Adorno Navedo notes, "they beat the shit out of him ... and it happened often" (Adorno 1995). She prefaces her comments with an indictment of the racism within the Chicago Police of the era.

You have to remember you are dealing with a racist police force at that time too. Again, take it from me, I am white. But you see it. Now remember [what] my background is and my father taught me that there was a lot of injustice going on. And things have got to be changed right.... So again we are dealing with a racist police force, there's no question [,] there's no doubt about it (Adorno 1995).

Police harassment and excessive use of force ranked high among the complaints that young Puerto Ricans living in Chicago articulated.

As a nascent organization seeking to address the issues most impacting their immediate community such as police brutality and substandard housing, as well as

<sup>4</sup> A young Richard J. Daley was a member of the Hamburgs, a gang implicated in the violence of a 1919 riot that lasted three days, claimed the lives of 38, and injured 537. The Commission tasked with investigating the riot found that most of those killed, injured and jailed were Black. The Commission further stated that the white gangs, often identified as athletic clubs, were the perpetrators of the violence. Additional twentieth century European gangs in Chicago included the Aylwards, Our Flag, Standard, Polish Black Spots, and the Westsiders.

racial and economic injustice, the YLO led direct actions and protests. While their protests initially had a decidedly local focus, they were informed by a history of anti-racist challenges that occurred on a national level.

## **Puerto Rican Chicago and the Era of Civil Rights**

The decade preceding the founding of the Young Lords as a political organization was punctuated by benchmark legal battles in the United States, as well as several of the marches and protests currently identified as signposts of the modern Civil Rights era. Most civil rights chronicles emphasize the 1954 landmark decision of *Brown v. Board of Education*. However, *Mendez v. Westminster* was an earlier case in 1947 in which the lead plaintiff was the daughter of a Puerto Rican and a Mexican. It challenged legal school segregation in California, involving the right of Mexican-descended and other Spanish-surnamed children in Westminster to enroll in white schools. While the *Mendez* case occurred prior to the time frame that impacted the Young Lords, it is important in illustrating the escalation of court cases that challenged discriminatory practices throughout the United States. Puerto Rican neighborhoods in Chicago were neither immune nor unaware of the changes and challenges that emerged across the national spectrum. During the war years, for instance, the “Zoot Suit Riots” or days of attacks against people of Mexican descent in Los Angeles made national headlines and most assuredly impacted Chicano/Latinx communities in Chicago.

The Zoot Suit Riots out west signaled a critical moment for Latinos; it impacted the era of militancy ushered in by the Young Lords in Puerto Rican communities, and was a basis for anger and militancy among Chicago youth in subsequent decades. Similarly, the modern civil rights and black power movements were a major influence in the development of the Young Lords. This was true of other new left organizations as well. Before youth of that era began to learn Puerto Rican history, they learned African American history, which in turn led them to learn about Albizu Campos and other Nationalists.<sup>5</sup> These multiple influences, an ideological position of inter-racial and international solidarity, help explain why, at its height, the YLO was capable of embracing a multi-racial and multi-ethnic coalition committed to the ideals of social justice for Puerto Ricans in America and independence for Puerto Rico.

A central argument and point of this article revolves around the work of the Rainbow Coalition in shaping Puerto Rican organizing in the United States. However, the more immediate historical context of YLO’s origins included violence in the US South against civil rights workers, leaders, and protesters, and the assassination of Malcolm X in 1965. For many YLO members, if there was one person, they were most influenced by, one person who most politicized them, it was Malcolm X.<sup>6</sup> In Chicago as elsewhere, the Young Lords owe a great debt to the Black Power movement. This in

<sup>5</sup> This refers to the influence of, and the dissemination of, information by civil rights groups and leaders of the Black Power Movement. At the university level, Black Studies and Afro American Studies preceded the creation of Puerto Rican Studies courses or programs. For many urban youth, Black history and Black poets and writers often became the gateway to learning Puerto Rican history. This is illustrated by the experiences of Cha Cha Jiménez as well as other Young Lords.

<sup>6</sup> The headline of a YLO newspaper article helps illustrate this point. It reads: “Malcolm Spoke for Puerto Ricans.” This statement resonated with many YLO members in different branches.

no way diminishes the impact that Puerto Rican Nationalists and Latin American revolutionaries such as Ernesto “Che” Guevara had on the Young Lords. Rather, the immediacy of the Black Power movement, the relative youth of its leadership, and the convergence of goals spurred Young Lords to create their own movement.

YLO emerged within an environment of protest, community organizing, and a heightened sense of justice alongside the Black Panther Party, Brown Berets, and others, and the foundation for all of them was laid by the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). SNCC established a precedent for a more militant youth activism throughout the country. While other modern civil rights organizations preceded SNCC and employed direct action techniques, the latter’s emphasis on youth action and militancy attracted young men and women of different races and ethnicities, many of whom later became activists and leaders in various new left organizations.<sup>7</sup>

Frequently recognized for its work in the U.S. South, SNCC workers also organized in many of the country’s Northern cities, and on college campuses, thus providing a template for several organizations that followed. Many members and leaders of the Black Panther Party as well as present-day African American politicians were members of SNCC. Likewise, several members of the Young Lords were SNCC activists. Iris Morales and Rafael Vieira, both part of the East Harlem branch, point to their affiliation with SNCC prior to joining the Young Lords.<sup>8</sup> SNCC also became the vehicle for many white activists who later founded or joined new left organizations. White college students, such as Robert Zellner, credit SNCC for their involvement in the civil rights movement and subsequent leadership in Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Clayborne Carson prefaces an interview of Zellner with the following observation.

The protest movement led by southern black students had a dramatic impact on white college students, for it offered them new and appealing models for political activism. Young white activists were particularly attracted to SNCC’s brash militancy and its distinctive style of organizing communities “from the bottom up.” SNCC’s example contributed to the emergence of a youthful new left and to the rapid growth of the largest student leftist group, Students for a Democratic Society (Carson 1987, 93).

The fact that this racially and geographically diverse group of students was drawn into activism through SNCC speaks to the extent of SNCC’s reach and influence. In naming itself the Black Panther Party for Self Defense, BPP founders adopted the symbol of the Lowndes County Freedom Organization, a civil rights group formed by SNCC. The number of SNCC members who became Young Lords is miniscule, particularly in comparison to the equivalent numbers found in the BPP. Yet the impact of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee on the New Left groups that emerged throughout the mid to late 1960s, among them, the Young Lords Organization, is apparent.

<sup>7</sup> Older organizations such as CORE and the NAACP should also be recognized. The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) was established in 1942 as a “direct action,” multi-racial organization that organized boycotts, sit-ins, and an early “Freedom Ride,” prior to the 1950s. The NAACP led the charge in confronting discrimination in the courts.

<sup>8</sup> Affiliation here used within the context of attending meetings, participating in SNCC actions, or being a member. Personal conversations with named individuals c. 1970.

The YLO and other emergent organizations were both influenced by their predecessors and acted as a stimulus for the birth of other movements. As articulated by Agustin Lao, the Young Lords did not appear in a vacuum, but rather were part of a broader movement that often operated in support of, or in solidarity with an array of New Left organizations that operated at both a national and international level (Lao-Montes 2009). It is important that the Young Lords be viewed within the broader scope of Puerto Rican history, not to mention that of the Latin American left—the tensions later experienced by some members in Puerto Rico notwithstanding, the Young Lords remain an example of the ties that bind.

## Burgeoning National Protest

The impact of the modern Civil Rights and Black Power movements on urban youth and college students cannot be underestimated. Also critical during this time period was the mounting opposition to the war in Vietnam and the escalating numbers of young men drafted into the military. During the Vietnam War, a disproportionate number of draftees came from African American, Latino, and poor white areas of the country. The greater level of injury and death among these soldiers also deepened discontent within these communities. College student involvement in the modern civil rights movement, and their subsequent organizing efforts on college campuses further fueled political organizing in communities of color. The televised images of demonstrators during the 1968 Democratic National Convention (DNC) in Chicago showed the country the rising level of discontent among youth. Although Young Lords members were not active participants in the protests, they were witnesses to that history.

The Anti-War Movement was not confined to the United States. Youth groups, high school and university students protested vehemently against the war, the draft, and the presence of ROTC programs on their campuses on the island. On several occasions, student protestors shut down the Rio Piedras branch of the University of Puerto Rico, which is its largest campus. Student demonstrators were confronted by policemen, which resulted in multiple arrests and the deaths of several protestors and an ROTC cadet. Students also organized demonstrations on other campuses of the University of Puerto Rico (UPR), as well as in high schools in Rio Piedras and San Juan. At the forefront of this organizing were federations of university and high school students (respectively called the *Federación Universitaria Pro Independencia* or FUPI and the *Federación Estudiantil Pro Independencia* or FEPI). These student groups, present in schools and colleges throughout the island, in effect were the youth contingent of the pro-independence movement. Nationalists historically opposed the conscription of Puerto Ricans into the military and urged men to refuse service, particularly in wartime. During World War II, several Nationalists went to jail for their failure to register for the draft (Maldonado-Denis 1969).<sup>9</sup> By the late 1960s and early 1970s, pro-independence youth followed suit: they resisted the draft and encouraged others to do the same through demonstrations and other protest actions. Several were jailed, including two Young Lords members, who were in Puerto Rico at the time.

<sup>9</sup> Several Washington Post articles between 1940 and 1942 also noted the Nationalist Party's position on the draft and reported the jailing of Nationalists who refused to serve.

These challenges occurred on multiple fronts, and in multiple locations: throughout the United States, in Puerto Rico, and in the neighboring countries of Cuba and the Dominican Republic, as well as other parts of Latin America. While the transformation of the YLO from a Chicago gang to a political organization had a local expression, their growing political consciousness had both domestic and international underpinnings. Among the multiple vehicles of dissent, art served to educate and mobilize the local Puerto Rican community in alliance with anti-imperialist struggles.

Political expression during this era appeared on the streets: in the form of murals, posters, and other forms of artistry, as well as in marches. “Posters generally, combine stylized visual messages with short, provocative statements. They mirror the conflicts simmering within popular culture and trace the evolution of *mentalités*” (Lionnet 1998). Although this was written specifically in reference to the circulation of poster art in France during this era, the same holds true for its use by political organizations in Chicago. “The student revolts of 1968 sparked grassroots movements of solidarity and resistance in which the poster was used as a powerful vehicle for spontaneous and organized communication” (Lionnet 1998, 198). Cuban poster art, and visuals that developed and increasingly gained prominence and international circulation after the Cuban Revolution, became political statements in their own right and set an example for images created in the United States and Puerto Rico.<sup>10</sup>

While art served as a means of communicating political ideas, direct action highlighted specific inequities and social wrongs, ultimately leading to the formation of organizations and the building of coalitions. Writing about the civil rights and New Left movements that emerged or expanded during the 1960s, Tom Hayden insists:

*New movements are based not simply on narrow interests or abstract visions, but on moral injuries that compel a moral response.* The argument is a complicated one. A “moral injury” is deeply personal enough to elicit resistance from large numbers of people who share an experience of being violated. But it is concrete enough to be actionable... The civil rights movement began at lunch counters and bus stops. The antiwar movement began with draft notices. The farmworker movement began with short-handled hoes. The Free Speech Movement (FSM) began with the right to leaflet. The larger goals of independence or liberation evolved in the consciousness-raising process of a popular struggle (Hayden 2009, 9).

I might add that the Young Lords Movement began with urban renewal projects in Chicago.

Beyond the national milieu of rising youth involvement in political causes, living conditions in Chicago’s communities of color led to organizing and protest. As articulated by Tom Hayden, “original grievances arose from everyday life, allowing

<sup>10</sup> Although there were much earlier precedents to the use of posters and imagery promoting political causes, the Cuban art of the mid 1960s and 1970s were a major influence in the proliferation of political messages by grassroots organizations in the US and Puerto Rico. Note the use of posters and printed broadsides in the United States during the American Revolution and the production of European, American, and Cuban lithographs during the mid to late nineteenth century. The prints and posters of José Guadalupe Posada chronicled early twentieth century Mexican politics, and served as purveyors of news and revolutionary fervor during the era of the Mexican Revolution.



the resistance to be carried out by millions of people in their personal milieus” (Hayden 2009, 9). As a result of the Division Street Riots, major complaints within Puerto Rican neighborhoods surfaced, the tone of organizing within the community shifted, and its levels increased. A number of community organizations emerged in the aftermath of these riots, most notably the Latin American Defense Organization (LADO), formed in 1966. Its co-founder Obed López-Zacarias was closely allied with the Young Lords, often acting as a representative for the YLO at conferences and coalition meetings. His brother Omar, in addition to his work with LADO, co-founded the Organization of Latin American Students (OLAS), a year later, and eventually joined the Young Lords, becoming the YLO’s Minister of Information (Lopez 2008). As illustrated by these emergent organizations, young people were no longer content to only increase the visibility of Chicago’s Puerto Rican and Latinx communities and to provide cultural and social activities; they sought to address issues such as poverty and discrimination in the city.

At the height of their popularity, the Young Lords attempted to redress pressing injustices facing Chicago’s Latinx communities, utilizing the bold tactics for which they became known. Among the issues that concerned them most were housing, education, childcare, and health services. The Young Lords successfully occupied, renamed, and acquired the long-term use of the Armitage Avenue Methodist Church building, where they operated various programs including free breakfast for children, a day care center, a health clinic, and an education program. It was there that they maintained their national headquarters.

## Housing and “Urban Removal”

Describing urban renewal as “urban removal,” the Young Lords identified housing as an early focus for neighborhood mobilization. According to Jiménez, many early YLO members were high school dropouts, unskilled in traditional organizing techniques, and angered by community conditions and injustice. Juan González, a Columbia University student leader who later became a YLO leader in New York, expressed similar sentiments regarding the group’s impetus for organizing, citing the poor living conditions that Puerto Rican families experienced: “We knew that our families did not deserve to live under these conditions” (Morales 1996). Thus, challenging structures that generated these conditions became their common cause. The story of a woman and children evicted from their Chicago apartment illustrates the spontaneous and often unconventional methods used by the YLO. “The woman came to us for help, so we broke into an empty apartment next to the [Armitage Avenue Methodist] Church & moved the family in... basically we didn’t have skills but we responded to needs. Sometimes people came to us, often we went to them,” remembers Jiménez (Jimenez 2008).

While many of the programs organized by the Young Lords followed the example of the “survival programs” initiated by the BPP, the YLO placed their own stamp on community organizing. Urban renewal and the displacement of residents in poor communities became a rallying cry for neighborhood meetings and protests. Jiménez credits Pat Devine, a leading white activist in the Chicago area, for encouraging Young Lords to engage in anti-gentrification protests. Recalling their initial meeting, Jiménez

remembers seeing Devine creating posters outside a community gathering place. In the course of the conversation, Devine invited Jiménez and other members to attend a planning meeting of the proposed urban renewal projects.

Jiménez initially rejected the offer, expressing the sentiment that perhaps the project did not directly impact them. At this juncture, the YLO was in its infancy, making the transition from a street gang to a viable political and civil rights organization. “This is happening to your community,” Devine stated to Jiménez and other YLO members, all of whom subsequently attended the meeting (Jimenez 2008). At this pivotal meeting, the heated exchange between the local community redevelopment board and the YLO garnered newspaper coverage. The YLO went on to agitate and organize around issues of urban renewal as a central part of its ongoing work.

Housing actions taken by Young Lords members were not new to Chicago, as illustrated by the methods used by the Communist Party (CPUSA) during the 1930s. Christine Ellis recalled “organizing the unemployed” for the CPUSA, “in a black neighborhood on the West Side of Chicago in 1931.” She stated: “If local marshals evicted a family from their dwelling, the unemployed council just moved all of their possessions back in from the street and took up a collection to pay the rent. Such actions won them the support of the local people” (Ware 1982, 129). Urban renewal seemed to target Puerto Rican communities and exacerbate their already transitory existence. Contesting the gentrification and “urban removal” of Puerto Ricans brought about by urban renewal projects became a central piece of Young Lords organizing in Chicago. In describing their work, Felix Padilla says “the organization’s most notable activity” was their proposal to build “a ‘poor people’s’ housing project on an urban renewal site on the Westside of Lincoln Park” (Padilla 1987, 122). Under this plan, the YLO called for the allocation of 40% of the residential units for poor families, with subsidized rents under Section 8 of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (Padilla 1987). The work of the YLO in this arena developed into a contentious fight between the organization, on the one hand, and the Lincoln Park Conservation Community Council, school officials, and representatives of redevelopment projects on the other.

Urban renewal in Lincoln Park, which the Young Lords deemed “Urban Removal,” had multiple ramifications. For example, the projects proposed by the city involved school expansions such as that of Waller High School, and the systematic elimination of dwellings occupied by the poor. Hence, the work of the YLO on housing rights represented an important shift. From this point the YLO emerged publicly and appeared in the local print media. And their decision to occupy the stage, or “disrupt” meetings to prevent the break-up of their community, reflects the evolution and process of their politicization. They had already made the transformation from street gang to a revolutionary organization within the Puerto Rican community. At one of the first meetings they identified themselves as members of the Young Lords Organization. The *Chicago Tribune*, not surprisingly, was inclined to share the perspective of Chicago’s elite. One newspaper headline read: “Lincoln Park Group Disrupted by Gangs.” The reporter introduced the group in the local media using such language as “gangs,” and described what occurred as a “chair-throwing” and “fist-swinging melee” without reference to what might have caused these actions. Hidden in the article is the important detail that there were members on the planning committee who agreed with the YLO’s demands, that is, “a member of the planning group had demanded the board give residents of the

area more control over school planning” (Shojai 1969). Beyond the expression of community dissent, YLO actions included, as mentioned earlier, moving evicted families into empty buildings and paying landlords so that families could remain in their homes (Jimenez 2008). While certain *Chicago Tribune* reporters would have its readers hold fast to the idea that the Young Lords were nothing but a gang, the YLO’s community-oriented actions conveyed a different message, entirely.

On May 15, 1969, the YLO and members of the Concerned Citizens of Lincoln Park initiated their occupation of the McCormick Theological Seminary; their numbers bolstered by the participation of other organizations. The occupation lasted nearly a week. Through this action, they sought to force the seminary to partner with the YLO and others to “slow down urban displacement” (Jimenez 2012, 61). Although McCormick had previously declined to do so, the seminary agreed to meet the collective demands of the Young Lords as a result of the occupation. The agreement included a contribution of \$50,000 for low-income housing and \$25,000 to be used for the establishment and maintenance of a legal aid office and two area health clinics. Additionally, the YLO called for “resources to open a Puerto Rican Cultural Center.” In the end, however, these demands were not met. The YLO and Concerned Citizens hired an architect to design the housing, but the city refused to approve the plans. Decades later, the chancellor of DePaul University, John T. Richardson, remarked on the university’s missed opportunity to contribute to the surrounding community.

I think in some ways the Young Lords taught DePaul [University] a few things. They were a lot more conscious than we were of the social consequences of our actions, how our investing in the community made it tougher for the Puerto Rican community to stay there. With the advantage of hindsight, we probably should have formed some sort of partnership with the Young Lords to develop low-income housing (Spiegler, 1995, np).

## Searching for Collective Spaces

The “People’s Church” was created by the takeover of the Armitage Avenue Methodist Church on June 11, 1969, and arose from another clear community need: a day care center. This action and rationale were later replicated by the New York chapter of the Young Lords. The YLO and other area organizations relied on the support of local pastors to offer needed services. Many used church premises to set up offices and operate programs. For example, a *Chicago Times* story on the activities of the S.D.S. and its youth section, the Revolutionary Youth Movement or R.Y.M. II, reported that the Church of the Three Crosses was “one of the S.D.S. prime movement centers” (Spiegler 1995, np). A *Chicago Tribune* article in 1970 shows the longevity of this issue. It asserts the existence of a strategic New Left/church alliance. More importantly, those intent on carrying out urban renewal, who were represented by the Lincoln Park Conservation Association, charged that the religious groups acted as a “parent organization” to the many community-based groups. According to this version, churches are the motivating factor behind the organizing that occurred in Puerto Rican neighborhoods. “The North Side Cooperative Ministry, a group of 26 churches” is specifically named as the entity responsible for community mobilization (Koziol 1969, 1). A

grassroots group called the Concerned Citizens Survival Front was also singled out by the business community as an obstacle to urban renewal. Hugh Patrick Feely, the executive director of the Lincoln Park Conservation Association, was the face of urban renewal, and he made alarming accusations in testimony before the U.S. Senate Internal Security Subcommittee. He said that churches and New Left groups are closely allied in opposition to urban renewal, while also listing a number of gangs as part of this effort. His testimony specifically signaled out the Young Lords as “the most politically oriented in the area.” According to Feely, “the North Side Cooperative Ministry has spawned all these children such as the Young Lords, the Concerned Citizens Survival Front, and the Young Patriots.” The ministers “have acted as the funding agent from different church denominations in Chicago [for] specific movements within Lincoln Park and movements that have spread thruout [sic] the city.” In response, the accused religious leaders “denied the charges,” and countered with the observation that the Conservation Association intended to “create a white, upper income slice of corrupt suburbia in the Lincoln Park area” (Freeburg 1970, 6).

Quite a few newspaper articles chronicled these battles. In a subsequent report, the ministers confirmed that they support “breakfast programs for the poor and legal programs,” as well as bail for “gang members,” who were most likely Young Lords and Young Patriots leadership. The churches did allow the use of their facilities for various community purposes. However, ministers believed that was only normal and part of their religious calling. In turn, they accused the Conservation Association of giving false testimony before the Senate, under the direction of Mayor Richard J. Daley “because the ministry has opposed urban renewal projects in the Lincoln Park area” (Chicago Tribune 1971, np). Young Lords activities had entered the realm of both city and national politics. In the aftermath of the takeover, and with the support of the pastor, Rev. Bruce Johnson, the Young Lords continued to use the Methodist Armitage Avenue Church building as a base of operation, and a site for various programs. The national church hierarchy was concerned. Only twelve people were active parishioners as of May 1970, no children attended the church school, and only one adult class was functioning for religious education. An internal church report noted, “The Armitage Church is for practical purposes, in the control of the Young Lords. However, this is with the consent of the present members of the congregation” (Wilson 1970).

Health care and the absence of medical services and facilities was another leading issue for the YLO. Among the programs they established in Chicago, the YLO neighborhood health clinic was the most ambitious, called the Dr. R. Emeterio Betances Health Center. They were not alone in their attempts to provide services—they partnered with medical students and emergent radical health organizations to promote basic health rights. Radical doctors, nurses, dentists, and other health care professionals were a pivotal part of these activist health programs. Members of the Student Health Organization (SHO) and other progressive doctors and nurses served as visiting medical practitioners in free clinics and provided other forms of support. Significantly, extensive news coverage was not really concerned with the health services that YLO provided the community. Instead, the articles questioned the use of government grants that seemed to be funding radical student organizations. Dr. Neil G. Aronson, MD, one of the physicians who regularly volunteered at the clinic, stressed the importance of the free clinic to the community and he warned, “There will be a crisis if the clinic has to close” (Nicol nd, np). In an unfortunate turn of events, Dr. Murray C. Brown, MD, the city’s

health commissioner, was threatening to shut down the clinic even though it was serving patients who had never before seen a doctor, including a 3-year-old child. Dr. Aronson charged the commissioner with “selectively harassing” clinics run by radical youth organizations such as the YLO. Aronson mentioned the inspection of the YLO clinic by an independent group, the Comprehensive Health Planning Inc., which found it to be “an innovative approach that should be encouraged” (Nicol *nd*, np).

The growing political consciousness of the YLO in Chicago translated into direct action that exposed and contested discriminatory actions and poor living standards. Their programs sought to remedy neighborhood conditions particularly in the areas of housing, child welfare, and medical care. This transformation from a street gang to a political organization was informed by an emerging political consciousness that imbued the era. It responded to existing neighborhood conditions and a host of individual, lived experiences that include migration, settlement, and community building.

### Grassroots leaders

José “Cha Cha” Jiménez, the leader of the Young Lords Organization, has often referenced his experiences as a youth in Chicago barrios as a catalyst for the formation of the Young Lords, first as a gang and the group’s transformation into a political organization. Specifically, Jiménez cites living in substandard housing, neighborhood conflicts with other ethnic groups, encounters with local police, experiences in jail, and exposure to emergent leaders in the African American and Chicano communities of the city as key factors informing his political consciousness and that of other Young Lords’ leaders (Jimenez 2008). The child of migrant camp workers, Jiménez’ early years illustrate an itinerant existence that led his family from poor communities in Puerto Rico to what he called the “rat -and roach- infested apartments” of the Water Hotel of Chicago. The migratory experiences of the Jiménez family, their settlement in poor communities, and subsequent displacement from substandard housing represented a trajectory taken by many of the Puerto Rican families who settled in Chicago during the 1950s and 1960s. During those decades, the Jiménez family moved, along with many other Puerto Rican families, from Chicago neighborhoods such as “La Clark” and “La Madison,” displaced by urban renewal projects and gentrification, the family moved into the area known as Lincoln Park, where groups identifying as “European gangs” lived, and claimed particular sections as their own territory.

Meeting Black Panther leader Fred Hampton and Chicano leader Rudolfo “Corky” Gonzalez proved to be pivotal for Jiménez and the Young Lords, who viewed their leadership and actions within their respective communities as examples of effective organizing. Jiménez’s life, while similar to that of his neighborhood friends and subsequent members of the Young Lords Organization, also exemplified the politicization of many urban youths during the 1960s. Along with other politically aware members, Jiménez led the Young Lords’ transformation from a street gang to an organization focused on human rights. Prior to their formal affiliation with the BPP, the YLO created a host of their own programs that resembled social services and emergency assistance. They prepared food baskets, organized toy drives during holidays for neighborhood children, and in some instances provided rent assistance. To raise funds, they partnered with the Black Stone rangers, a Black gang that had a

reputation for throwing lively parties. They termed these joint fundraisers, “Soul Dances” (Ignatin 1969). Like many of the emergent community organizations of the era, the YLO set up community services such as clothing drives and health clinics.

The political transformation and leadership position of Jiménez, alongside the politicization of many urban youths during that era, led to the gang’s conversion into a militant organization. Positioned against white gangs in Chicago, Jiménez’ experiences in Lincoln Park helped solidify his Puerto Rican identity, while his prison self-education experience—a blend of African American and Puerto Rican history—led him and other leading members to reorganize and transform the Young Lords gang into a political organization. Jiménez states in an interview that a Muslim trustee in prison began giving him “political books,” among them, the works of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, thus nourishing his interest in history and politics. These books, he says, “led me to want to know about my history...to want to know Albizu and Che,” referring to Don Pedro Albizu Campos, the pro-independence leader of Puerto Rico’s Nationalist Party, and the revolutionary Che Guevara (Jiménez 2008).

Following the lead of historian Robin DG Kelley, we can see that the emergence of the Young Lords in Chicago as a street gang was, intrinsically, but not primarily, a young urban male response to specific conditions that both challenged and enveloped them. Kelley has commented, “I wanted to find out what black working people chose to do to survive and fight back *under the specific circumstances of their own time and place*” (Kelley 1996, 230). The Young Lords’ emergence as a neighborhood gang was an organic process, as was their transformation into a political organization. They were a neighborhood group comprised mainly of young men who had grown up together; their beginnings as a street gang and social club served to protect them from neighboring street gangs and as a way to socialize in an independent setting. The Young Lords’ use of a storefront as a hangout and a place to take dates and party highlights the social aspect of their formation.<sup>11</sup> During the gang period and also the political period, the Young Lords viewed their chosen path as a method of survival.

The initial appeal of the Young Lords rested on the homegrown quality of the organization and their attention to issues that visibly impacted the immediate community. While the leadership at first grappled with changing their identity as a neighborhood gang, when their membership grew, they attracted individuals who did not necessarily share that experience. Chicago YLO programs arose from longstanding community needs and in this process, the grassroots organization collectively arrived at a new political consciousness. As Robin Kelley concludes, “...to be effective, social movements must develop their own leaders and build agendas around people’s actual needs and grievances, irrespective of whether or not they fit the logic of a particular analytical framework” (Kelley 1996, 230).

The YLO examined various ideological paths that included cultural nationalism and socialism, yet their organizing drives always revolved around specific local issues. Leaders who risked arrest to disrupt urban renewal meetings and who mounted large protest actions such as the McCormick Seminary takeover habitually received media

<sup>11</sup> Photographer Carlos Flores captured many of the existing images of the Young Lords during their gang days in Chicago. From his collection we are able to witness the social aspect of the gang. Rather than male-centered imagery, the portraits that Flores presents showcase the young men and women of a community setting. Without identifying them as members of the gang, it would be difficult to deduce that they were gang members from these portraits.

attention in Chicago. A number of community problems relative to housing, medical care, and unemployment eventually began to appear in citywide newspapers, giving some credence to YLO demands. While not necessarily favorable to the work of New Left groups such as the Young Lords, news coverage focusing on medical care, housing, and welfare recipients underscored the need for the targeted work of these organizations. Low-income communities clearly suffered due to the scarcity of medical clinics and health care providers, substandard housing, the displacement of families due to gentrification, and the life of welfare recipients. In aiming to serve the needs of their immediate community, The Young Lords benefitted from the mentoring and influence of the Black Panther Party and, in particular, from the alliances created through the original Rainbow Coalition.

### The “Original” Rainbow Coalition

The original Rainbow Coalition was initially conceived in 1969 by Bob Lee, Field Marshall of the Illinois chapter of the Black Panther Party, and Fred Hampton, Chairman of the ILBPP (Williams 2013; Sonnie and Tracy 2011). Described as the “vanguard of the dispossessed” and “a revolutionary spearhead,” the Rainbow Coalition consisted of the unification of several distinct groups in Chicago: the Black Panther Party, The Young Lords Organization, the Young Patriots Organization (YPO) that claimed roots in Appalachia. Later, this initial group was joined by Rising Up Angry (RUA), an organization of working-class whites also working in Chicago (Williams 2013; Sonnie and Tracy 2011). Collectively, this union represented groups of Black, Puerto Rican, and white poor urban youth in Chicago. While the Black Panthers, Young Lords, and Young Patriots organized in other cities, and the Rainbow Coalition spread to other parts of the country, Rising Up Angry was specific to Chicago. Consequently, RUA is often forgotten in discussions of the coalition. The Rainbow Coalition was most cohesive in Chicago, its birthplace, where the representatives of the various organizations met regularly and partnered in organizing attempts and events. Under the leadership of Fred Hampton, Deputy Chairman of the Illinois state chapter of the Black Panther Party, the drive to unite the various segments of poor communities in Chicago was led. Bob Lee’s first meeting with the Appalachian Young Patriots was a fortuitous encounter, as historian Jakobi Williams narrates: Black Panthers and Young Patriots had never shared the same space until they were accidentally slated to speak together at a community meeting at the Church of Three Crosses.<sup>12</sup> The audience was made up of both white Appalachian migrants and congregants described as “upper-class whites,” who listened to a presentation on police brutality by members of the Young Patriots. Lee, the chapter’s Field Marshall, was on his first speaking engagement to introduce the newly formed chapter of the BPP, and he was shocked by the “intense hostility and class dialogue between the two white groups” present at the meeting (Williams 2013, 132). Lee states: “Coming from the South, it was a culture shock for me, I had never seen that before, because in the South, whites were united around race... I had never seen whites attack poor whites before. I had never seen poor whites

<sup>12</sup> The Church of Three Crosses appears in multiple sources as one of the churches that provided a space for community engagement and discussion.

having to explain themselves to other whites before” (Williams 2013, 133). During this meeting, the first alliance of the Rainbow Coalition came together. Film footage shows Bob Lee effectively linking the complaints of police brutality, poverty, and joblessness voiced by white Appalachian migrants, to the similar grievances of African Americans.

The formation of the Rainbow Coalition stands out in the history of the New Left for having created effective interracial and class unity. It successfully brought together poor youths from different parts of Chicago. While Hampton was a leading force in encouraging the leaders of the various organizations to come together, Lee laid the groundwork for the alliance and helped the other organizations set up survival programs modeled on those of the Black Panthers. These included free breakfast programs, clothing drives, and medical clinics. Under the leadership of Hampton and Lee of the Black Panther Party, José Cha Cha Jiménez of the Young Lords, Michael James and Steve Tappis of Rising Up Angry, and William “Preacherman” Fesperman of the Young Patriots, the Rainbow Coalition became a “truly diverse force that organized in communities throughout the city” (Williams 2013, 128). Hampton’s vision and organizing skills led to a grassroots alliance that many groups had hoped to achieve. His plan of action included the conversion of gang members into political actors. Street-savvy and astute, Hampton hoped to expand the Panthers in Chicago through the recruitment of entire gangs, particularly the largest. Both Jiménez and Hampton were able to negotiate truces among feuding gangs (Williams 2013, 161). In addition, members of the respective organizations provided highly visible examples of cooperation and assistance between African Americans, Latinos, and poor whites on a day-to-day basis. “According to its leaders, the Rainbow Coalition was ‘the best living proof of a new revolutionary class-less society in the making’” (Sonnie and Tracy 2011, 71).

In spite of its promise, the histories of coalition members are replete with police harassment and intimidation from the authorities. Manuel Ramos died on May 4, 1969, shot by an off-duty policeman named James Lamb. Ramos was at “a Young Lords party on the Southside,” celebrating the birthday of a YLO member (Williams 2013, 147). Lamb was painting an apartment across the street. Angie Adorno Navedo recounts the course of events:

I don’t know if they got too loud... [Lamb] came over to complain... But he had all this paint, he didn’t say I am a police officer... [and] they got into an argument from across the street... They were exactly in the doorway, and this guy, James Lamb, I will never forget his name, said that Manuel pulled a [gun] out of his pocket ... anyway, [Lamb] ended up shooting, he killed Manuel... Ralph ended up getting shot in the neck. (Adorno-Navedo 1995).

Navedo insisted that Manuel Ramos never carried a gun. “Why is [Lamb] carrying his [gun] when he is painting anyway?” Four Young Lords fought with Lamb and were subsequently arrested, charged with assault. They became known as Los Quatros Lords [sic]. Lamb remained on the force, fueling community protests. “It became political ... it became an issue of racism... This white cop was allowed to get away with shooting him” (Angie Adorno Navedo 1995). In an interview, Adorno Navedo links the later killing of Fred Hampton that same year to the death of Manuel Ramos, not necessarily in the way they were killed or the possible reasons, but in the fact that white policemen



got away with killing a young man of color. Reverend Bruce Johnson and his wife Eugenia, both of them white, were killed on September 28, 1969, their bodies found by the neighborhood postman who noticed an open door and heard their children crying. Upon entering their house, he found the bodies of the Johnsons. Press reports indicated that the Reverend and his wife had been stabbed sixteen and eighteen times respectively. The murders deeply disturbed the surrounding community, both because of who they were, and the level of violence inflicted upon them. The loss of Rev. Bruce Johnson and his wife, Eugenia Johnson, represented a tremendous blow to the Young Lords. Socially conscious and young, Johnson had become a staunch ally and one of the YLO's biggest supporters. He allowed the YLO to convert the Armitage Methodist Church, the church he pastored, into an office and a de facto community center. From that site the YLO operated their free breakfast program and health clinic.

Reverend Johnson liked to ask: "Where do you place yourself in the world?" The Johnsons openly supported the work of the Young Lords as well as that of Concerned Citizens, the group that initially headed the fight against urban renewal in Lincoln Park. No one was ever charged with these murders. A fellow minister said, "I don't believe anyone really investigated." He further noted that police were visibly absent from the church premises on the day of the Johnsons' funerals. "They basically let the Young Lords do their work ... [to] handle the cars and the parking" (Monaco 2013 documentary).<sup>13</sup>

On December 4, 1969, BPP leader Fred Hampton was shot to death by police officers assigned to the Cook County State's Attorney's office as he lay sleeping. Pointing to contradictions in the chain of events as presented by the police department, organizations on the Left leveled accusations of sanctioned murder. The death of Hampton created a void in the leadership of the BPP and greatly impacted the work of the Rainbow Coalition that he had so zealously brought to fruition. Jiménez, a pallbearer at Hampton's funeral, felt the personal pain and collective loss of his death. "I remember Jesse Jackson speaking and trying to hold back my tears. I tried to be a man, but I could not do it. Not just me but a lot of people got afraid and it had a big effect on the movement in Chicago" Jimenez 2012, 64).

## The Red Squad and Hoover's FBI

Like most grassroots and New Left organizations of the era, the Young Lords became the object of continual surveillance and intimidation. This meant that the YLO was subjected to the tactics of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) as well as the "Red Squad," a team of Chicago police officers assigned to investigate groups they perceived to be Leftist. Given Mayor Daley's strong-arm tactics and J. Edgar Hoover's directive to infiltrate, disrupt, and eliminate these organizations, Chicago's Red Squad was able to act with impunity. Hoover's designation of the Black Panther Party as "the most dangerous group in America," placed the YLO, a close ally, under a magnifying glass

<sup>13</sup> José Cha Cha Jiménez, Pat Devine, and DePaul University provided interviews and materials for the making of this documentary, "The Garden Walk of Protest." Two sources give a different date for the Johnsons' deaths. Williams says September 28, 1969, was the date of death, while the documentary reports it as September 30, 1969.

as well. Historically, FBI surveillance of Puerto Rican Pro-Independence groups had been conducted since the early twentieth century (Churchill and Wall 2002). The YLO's leadership became prime targets. YLO members dealt with the day-to-day effects of this intimidation which included getting arrested, having to raise bail, and appearing in court for cases that were often dropped or had the charges reduced. Requested bail often exceeded stipulated amounts for the alleged offenses. YLO member Angie Adorno Navedo recalled the constant scrutiny. "They knew him," she said, speaking of Cha Cha Jiménez: "the police [,] and I guess rightly so in their minds, they got to know who is who and try to curtail certain problems.... But I think probably because they knew he was the president at that time [,] ... they wanted to make sure that he knew who was running the show and it was definitely the police." Adorno Navedo stressed the element of racism in police interactions. "Again, it was a real racist police department ... [and] even older people [,] ...if you got stopped, and [you] weren't white, they probably got beaten up or at least hit or something if you didn't answer correctly. But then again, that was the time of Ed Hanrahan and Mayor Daley Senior.... That was the mood at the time" (Adorno-Naveda 1995).

### **We Joined Others Who Were Poor**

In essence, the Young Lords' transformation from a local gang to political activists, the programs they created, and the subsequent impact of their actions, represents a remarkable achievement. "Our main focus was the neighborhood but also self-determination for Puerto Rico," Cha Cha Jiménez stated. "We brought the colonial issue to Chicago on a massive scale. We did not know words like 'diaspora' or anything like that, but we always knew that we were connected to Puerto Rico. We saw ourselves as part of a shuttle culture, going back and forth all the time" (Jimenez 2012, 61). From their beginnings in the storefronts of Lincoln Park, the Young Lords expanded and quickly attracted more experientially diverse members such as Obed and Omar López, student leaders and, as previously mentioned, the co-founders of the Latin American Defense Organization (LADO). Alberto Chavira was a third-year medical student who ran the Young Lords' health clinic. Angie Navedo helped organize a women's group called Mothers and Others (MAO). Histories of gender are clear from the depth of community support for the Young Lords. Among the women's voices of the Chicago Lords, Hilda Vasquez Ignatin emerges as an early chronicler of the political organization. No longer, "Lordettes," as they had been known during the gang years, women such as Adorno and Ignatin represented the group of strong, active women who joined the YLO, worked in different ministries, and operated various programs. Women of color in working class communities stood their ground against Chicago authorities that were denying their rights and literally destroying their neighborhoods and families. Assessing the impact of women within the organization, Jiménez observes, "They did the work that made us look good in the community, [they subverted] the gang image, [and] stabilized what we were doing" (Jimenez 2008).

The local press minimized the work of the Young Lords, often in a demeaning manner. Long after the YLO had transformed itself into a group with political purposes, the mainstream media continued to deride them as a "gang." However, publications on the left increasingly spread the news of their existence. With the formation of the

Rainbow Coalition in Chicago, articles in the Black Panther Party newspaper further disseminated news of the activities of the Young Lords. YLO expansion outside Chicago first occurred with the establishment of the New York chapter in El Barrio. Subsequently, a chapter also operated in Milwaukee. Initially, both of these regional chapters came under the leadership of Chicago, with Jiménez as the chairman of the national organization. Within a year, the New York chapter separated from the Chicago YLO. Keeping the Young Lords name, and remaining a part of the Rainbow Coalition, the New York group organized and expanded under the name of the Young Lords Party (YLP). While the split was amicable, the two chapters cited differences in discipline and direction. Agreeing to work independently yet in solidarity, they continued to organize as Young Lords.

The proliferation of Young Lords chapters served to fill the void for Puerto Ricans, as well as other Latinos and African Americans seeking to join grassroots movements that wed nationalist sentiment to local organizing. Although the international underpinnings of the Chicago organizing was further developed by the New York branches that subsequently became the Young Lords Party (YLP), the politics of the island are evident in the work of the Chicago founding branch. The Young Lords emerged in Chicago at a time when particular events spurred the growth of international protest movements and dissent. Opposition to the war in Vietnam resulted in protests worldwide as well as across the continental United States and Puerto Rico. The anti-colonial struggles in Africa—in Senegal, Guinea and Ghana, in Kenya, Congo and beyond—prompted calls for solidarity by the Young Lords. Their turn to internationalism was part of who they were.

Manuel Maldonado-Denis elaborates on the similarity between advocates for Puerto Rican independence and Black power proponents in the United States. He articulates a position made popular by Franz Fanon: the existence of the colonized mind, and the need to adopt “decolonialized” thinking and behaviors in conjunction with struggles for liberation. “In this respect, [the] goal [of pro-independence groups] is similar to that of the Black Power advocates of the United States, because both groups are faced with a similar situation. Only when Puerto Ricans have achieved decolonization, both psychologically and politically, will they be able to come of age as a true protest movement. Otherwise they run the risk of a total destruction of Puerto Rican nationality, and cultural assimilation by the United States” (Maldonado-Denis 1969, 26). Influenced by the work of Fanon, the Black Panthers and the Young Lords incorporated these ideas into their political ideology and rhetoric. “For us, it was simple,” explained Cha Cha Jiménez. “It was not anything theoretical. It was just like what we saw at Lincoln Park. Other people came to take over the neighborhood and the U.S. did the same thing in Puerto Rico. The whole issue of housing displacement, then, served as a way to explain the issue of U.S. colonialism in Puerto Rico and vice versa” (Jimenez 2012, 61).

## References

- Adorno, A. N. (1995). *Interview by Mary Martinez, January 25. Young Lords Oral History Project*. Young Lords Collection: Special Collections and Archives, DePaul University Library.
- Carson, C. (Ed.). (1987). *Eyes on the prize: America's civil rights years: a reader and guide*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Chicago Commission on Race Relations. (1922). *The Negro in Chicago: a study of race relations and a race riot*. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press), 12.

- Churchill, W., & Wall, J. (2002). *The COINTELPRO Papers: Documents from the FBI's Secret Wars Against Dissent in the United States* (Vol. 8, 2nd ed.). Cambridge: South End Press.
- Freeburg, R. (1970). "Church Influence on New Left Told." *Chicago Tribune* 30 December, 6.
- Golden, H. (1973). "City's Latino Population Rises 125%," *Chicago Sun Times* (Chicago, IL), 9 December 36. Box 1-7, Young Lords Collection, Special Collections and Archives, DePaul University Library.
- Hayden, T. (2009). *The Long Sixties: From 1960 to Barack Obama*. Boulder and London: Paradigm Publishers.
- Ignatin, H. V. (1969). "Young Lords Serve and Protect," *Young Lords Organization* 1, No. 2 (May 5): 6. Box 5, Young Lords Collection, Special Collections and Archives, DePaul University Library.
- Jimenez, J. "Cha Cha" (2008). Correspondence with Author, 20 September.
- Jimenez, J. "Cha Cha" (2012). Interview by Angel G. Flores-Rodriguez, "The Young Lords, Puerto Rican liberation, and the Black Freedom struggle." *OAH Magazine of History* 26, Vol. 26. 1: 61-64.
- Kelley, R. D. G. (1996). *Race rebels: culture, politics, and the Black working class*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Koziol, R. (1969). "1968 rioters in city aided by U.S. pay." *Chicago Tribune*, 8 December, 1.
- Lao-Montes, A. (2009). "Forum, the Young Lords: 40 years later," *Centro de Estudios Puertorriquenos*, Hunter College, CUNY, December 2. <http://centropr.hunter.cuny.edu/about/events/forum-young-lords-party-40-years-later>.
- Lionnet, F. (1998). "Immigration, poster art, and transgressive citizenship: France, 1968-1988," in *Borders, Exiles, Disaporas*, eds. Elazar Barkan and Marie Denise Shelton (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 198
- Lopez, O. (2008). Email message to author, 12 March.
- Maldonado-Denis, M. (1969). The Puerto Ricans: protest or submission? *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 382(1), 26–31.
- Monaco, R. (2013). "The Garden Walk of Protest," Documentary, writer and producer Randall Monaco. Jose "Cha Cha" Jimenez, Pat Devine and DePaul University provided interviews and materials for the making of this film. Two sources give a different date for Ramos' death. Jakobi Williams says September 28, 1969, while the documentary reports it as September 30, 1969.
- Morales, I. (1996). "Palante, Siempre Palante: The Young Lords," documentary, New York: Latino Education Network Service.
- Nicol, J., "Pediatrician sees crisis if city shuts Young Lords clinic," in *Newspapers and Journal Articles*, nd, not paginated. Box 1-7, Young Lords Collection, Special Collections and Archives, DePaul University Library.
- "North side Ministry Admits Some Aid Went to Street Gangs", *Chicago Tribune*, 1 January 1971, B.
- Padilla, F. M. (1987). *Puerto Rican Chicago*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Perez, G. M. (2004). *The Near Northwest Side Story*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Shojai, C. (1969). "Lincoln Park Group Disrupted by Gangs." *Chicago Tribune*, 1 August, 2 section 1.
- Sonnie, A., & Tracy, J. (2011). *Hillbilly nationalists, urban race rebels, and Black Power: community organizing in radical times*. Brooklyn, NY: Melville House Publishing.
- Spiegler, M. (1995). "Forever young: Aided by an old enemy, the Young Lords emerge from obscurity," *New City*, vol. 10, no. 357, April 6, not paginated. Box 1-8, Young Lords Collection, Special Collections and Archives, DePaul University Library.
- Ware, S. (1982). *Holding Their Own: American Women in the 1930s*. Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers.
- 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, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Wilson, R. L. (1970). *The First Spanish Methodist Church and the Young Lords*. New York: Department of Research and Survey National Division of the Board of Missions. The United Methodist Church.

**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.