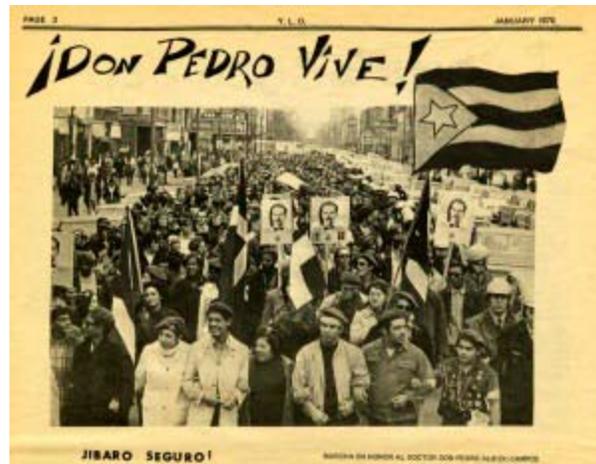


# Latin Liberation News Service: The Newspapers of the Young Lords Organization

Michael Gonzales / 06/21/2013



## Introduction

The Young Lords began in 1959 as a street gang in Chicago's Lincoln Park neighborhood. By the end of the next decade it had transformed into an explosive social movement rooted in communities across the country. After reorganizing and formally adopting revolutionary politics in 1968, members of the newly dubbed Young Lords Organization (YLO) committed themselves to educating, uplifting, and fighting for the struggling poor in Lincoln Park and beyond. Their bold tactics, which included a mixture of street protests, building occupations, and "survival programs", quickly garnered wide media attention. News of their audacious actions inspired activists elsewhere, and by 1970 several chapters of the YLO had formed in New York. The movement would eventually spread even further, to cities such as Milwaukee, Newark, and Philadelphia (among other places).

Young Lords leaders in Chicago and across the nation saw the production and distribution of independent newspapers as an important part of their political work. They considered these newspapers to be one of the principal means through which to spread their message and grow their organization. The work done to produce and distribute these newspapers was also seen as indispensable to the intellectual and political development of the organization and its activists. Newspapers were viewed as an educational tool. They were a medium through which to engage people in dialogue, raising their level of class consciousness and gaining new recruits in the process. As well, these newspapers were seen as a way to connect with outside activists, fellow travelers, and kindred organizations, thereby securing financial support and strengthening bonds of solidarity.

This essay seeks to discuss the newspapers published by the YLO and to tell the stories of the people who produced them. Utilizing information contained in a wealth of documentary and oral history resources (including personal interviews recently conducted with Young Lords leaders) this essay will discuss both the goals Young Lords activists had in mind when they created and distributed their newspapers, as well as the obstacles and challenges that often hampered their efforts.<sup>1</sup> It will also highlight the influence of both local social pressures and international social movements in helping to shape these publications. Hopefully the unique information contained in this discussion will contribute towards a better understanding of this woefully understudied movement.

### **From Gangsters to Communists**

“You have to understand that even before, we were in some ways already revolutionary. Dig?” Chicago YLO Field Marshal Cosmoe Torres told a Ramparts reporter in 1970. “It’s not that we were a gang one minute and the next we were all Communists. What we had to realize was that it wasn’t no good fightin’ each other, but that what we were doing as a gang had to be against the capitalist institutions that are oppressing us.”<sup>2</sup>

While their youthful gang activity in the early 1960s was often impulsive and self-destructive, it can also be seen as a logical response to the pressures of growing up in Chicago under conditions of poverty, racial oppression, and social marginalization. While the group was multi-ethnic and multi-racial from the beginning, most of the early recruits were young men of Puerto Rican descent. These Puerto Rican youth were vastly outnumbered by non-hispanic Whites in their Lincoln Park neighborhood.<sup>3</sup> As well, these young people and their families, many of them recent migrants, encountered myriad forms of discrimination and generally faced a lack of opportunity for economic advancement in Chicago. Perhaps the Young Lords’ early attempts to forge a collective identity can be seen as a form of incipient political organizing, as these young people attempted to deal with the on the ground ramifications of systemic injustices. While definitely plagued by what the original Young Lords co-founder Angel “Sal” del Rivero describes as a “gang mentality,” one could even argue that their numerous criminal activities (such as frequent turf fights, car thefts, and drug use, etc.) were simply misdirected ways of rebelling against an unjust colonial system that continued to exploit their families.<sup>4</sup>

The inchoate rebellious impulses of these early gang members were harnessed and transformed into something much more radical beginning in the mid-1960s. The evolution from street gang to revolutionary organization occurred in response to local pressures, but also within a milieu of global radical movements, elements of which pervaded the Lincoln Park neighborhood.

Certainly the Young Lords early on recognized the ways in which their communities were being targeted by local authorities and institutions. Perhaps most directly, their families were often the main targets of destructive city “urban renewal” projects. These projects were part of a larger gentrification scheme aimed at removing Lincoln Park’s poorest residents, and which would largely displace Puerto Ricans and other Latinos from the neighborhood. While modest urban renewal efforts had been underway in Lincoln Park since the mid-1950s, serious attempts to make Lincoln Park an attractive and fashionable home for young urban professionals began to take shape in the early 1960s. The city’s Community Conservation Board (CCB) produced a plan

in 1962 that called for the widespread removal of deteriorating housing (and poor residents), to be replaced by homes for new middle- to upper-income residents.<sup>5</sup> While the “development” did not come quickly, the destruction wrought by the city’s policies quickly impacted Puerto Rican residents. A 1970 Ramparts article sums up the results: “Entire blocks on Armitage, Halsted, and Larrabee streets now lie bare where Urban Renewal has leveled the homes of Puerto Ricans and poor whites.”<sup>6</sup> Efforts to fight against the continued gentrification of their neighborhood would become a focus of later Young Lords activism and would feature prominently in their newspapers.

Latinos, as well as other ethnic minorities and poor whites, had also long been subject to abuse at the hands of racist Chicago police. The hostile relationship between the police and the Puerto Rican community in Chicago came to a head in 1966 during the three days of street rebellion commonly referred to as the Division Street Riots. The rebellion was sparked by the police murder of a young unarmed Puerto Rican man. Twenty-two year old Arcelis Cruz was shot by the Chicago police on June 12, 1966, following the city’s first Puerto Rican parade.<sup>7</sup> YLO Minister of Information Omar López describes this incident as “the culmination of all the abuse that the police,” had levied against Puerto Ricans, “especially against young people.” He credits those three days as being “key to what happened later in the Puerto Rican community,” because they represented an increasingly militant attitude among Latino youth and awakened many to the “need to organize.”<sup>8</sup> The YLO’s later newspapers would accordingly reflect this militant attitude, often displaying a brazen antagonism towards the police and other state institutions.

This militant attitude was likely also encouraged by the dramatic rise of radical leftwing political activity in Chicago and across the country during this time. A milieu of radical movement activity, which permeated Lincoln Park in the late 1960s, undeniably played an important role in the politicization of these young gang members. Lincoln Park is well known for being the site of many political rallies, is perhaps most famous as the location where camping anti-war protesters were attacked by Chicago police during the infamous 1968 Democratic National Convention. As they grew into adulthood, Young Lords leaders were intrigued by and came to embrace the egalitarian ideals and revolutionary philosophies espoused by various movement leaders.

Undeniably the group which most influenced the Young Lords’ political evolution was the Black Panther Party (BPP). The BPP at this time was intent on organizing young gang members in urban ghettos. In an upending of orthodox Marxist theory, the BPP considered the growing mass of so-called “unskilled” and unemployed poor people living in post-industrial cities, whom they referred to the lumpenproletariat, to be a class with incredible revolutionary potential. “As the ruling circle continue to build their technocracy,” BPP Minister of Defense Huey P. Newton argued, “more and more of the proletariat will become unemployable, become lumpen, until they have become the popular class, the revolutionary class.”<sup>9</sup> One could arguably say that were it not for the efforts of Illinois BPP Chairman Fred Hampton in espousing these ideas and working to make them a reality in Chicago, the Young Lords Organization would never have emerged as a group committed to revolutionary struggle.

Perhaps equally instrumental in the Young Lords’ adoption of radical politics was the leadership and intellectual curiosity of José “Cha Cha” Jiménez, an early member of the Young Lords gang.

Jiménez, along with Ralph Rivera, helped shape the gang's transformation into a group that, while not revolutionary, was routinely engaging in community service activities. Yet Jiménez and Rivera were unsatisfied with the "gift-giving" approach they had taken. While sponsoring dances and food drives did help people in the community, they reasoned, these charity activities didn't attack the real source of the poverty. When Fred Hampton and the Illinois Black Panthers burst onto the scene, Jiménez and Rivera saw the potential for a new model of struggle. Jiménez was also impressed by Fred Hampton's charismatic leadership and inspired by the BPP's affirmation of the revolutionary potential of gang members.<sup>10</sup> After a series of meetings in 1968, the Young Lords Organization formally allied themselves with the BPP by joining the original Rainbow Coalition. The Rainbow Coalition brought street groups like the YLO and the Young Patriots (White Appalachian migrants who sported confederate flags on their jean jackets) together under the leadership of the Black Panther Party.<sup>11</sup> Fred Hampton also reached out to other gangs with somewhat less success, such as the failed alliance (due in large part to FBI interference) with Jeff Fort and the Blackstone Rangers. The Young Lords for their part also reached out to other gangs with some success, such as their work with the Latin Kings. The Latin Kings were the largest "Latin" street gang in Chicago, and like the Young Lords, had already been engaging in a variety of community service projects. The YLO leaders hoped to steer the Latin Kings towards the path of revolutionary struggle.<sup>12</sup>

In general Jiménez and others in the YLO deferred to the Panthers when it came to questions of ideology. Considering the BPP to be the "Vanguard Party" in the growing US revolutionary movement, YLO leaders looked to the Panthers for political guidance. In an interview printed in June 1969 in the BPP newspaper, *The Black Panther*, Jiménez clearly identifies the Panthers as the organization he considered most capable of providing "leadership for the people," and teaching "correct strategic methods" to groups like the Young Lords.<sup>13</sup> In addition to adopting the political ideology of the Black Panthers (which represented a unique development of Marxist-Leninist-Mao Tse Tung thought) the Young Lords Organization also embraced much of the BPP's rhetorical and aesthetic sensibilities.

Also like the Panthers (and unlike many of the revolutionary groups that championed Maoist political ideology at this time) the Young Lords Organization did not spend much time arguing about theoretical minutiae. Their ideological development was instead based much more on a philosophy of praxis, whereby the implementation of "survival programs" and the carrying out of bold direct action protests were seen as important ways to connect with the people in their community, therefore better understanding their concerns. As YLO Minister of Information Omar López told a Ramparts reporter in 1970, they were too "concerned with the immediate needs of the people," to argue much about questions of ideology. Besides, he says, "we're better able to analyze when we're out on the streets talking with the people. Ideas must come after actions, not just from reading Marx, Lenin or Mao."<sup>14</sup>

### **The Birth of Y.L.O.**

The Young Lords Organization began publishing their newspaper, *Y.L.O.*, on March 19, 1969 (Figures 1-2). Billed as the first of what was supposed to be a monthly publication, this issue features twelve pages of articles, artwork, and photographs, in both English and Spanish. The content deals with a variety of local, national, and international struggles. From neighborhood

campaigns for welfare and housing rights to armed revolutionary movements, the first issue of *Y.L.O.* gives voice to a variety of protest communities.<sup>15</sup>



Figure 1: *Y.L.O.* Vol. 1, No. 1, March 19, 1969, Cover.



Figure 2: *Y.L.O.* Vol. 1, No. 1, March 19, 1969, Page 3.

Omar López was perhaps better equipped to engage in this sort of an undertaking than most of the other activists at this time. Not only was he several years older than most of the Young Lords members (including the leadership), he was much more literate. Unlike most other YLO activists, many of whom were high school dropouts (including some who hadn't finished grammar school), López had excelled at school and had even attended classes at Loop City College (now Harold Washington College) in Chicago.<sup>17</sup> Not having grown up a member of the

gang, López was recruited to join the YLO at the age of twenty three. After a 1968 meeting with Cha Cha Jiménez, López quit school and devoted himself to full-time political activism.<sup>18</sup>

Yet despite his marginally higher level of education, López was in no way fully prepared to undertake such an ambitious project such as *Y.L.O.*. He says in a recent interview, “I think it’s important to understand that the people that put together the newspaper, none of us were in any way familiar with journalism, but we felt that we needed to put something out.” What they lacked in experience these young activists quickly made up for in passion and a desire to learn. Modestly downplaying the important analysis and authentic artistic expression on display throughout *Y.L.O.*’s various issues, López admits there were often flaws in the writing and design. “In the final product,” he attests, “you can see that it was a struggle.” Yet he proudly speaks of the “grassroots” nature of the project. Describing the completion of each issue as “like giving birth,” López stresses that from the very beginning they wanted to have “the cadres,” the rank and file members of the organization, participate in crafting the newspapers. “The cadres were all street, young men and women who weren’t very good at academics, but nevertheless had something to say,” López asserts. “When we decided to do a newspaper,” he repeats, “we never envisioned this journalistic vehicle, you know. But it was something that we needed to put out.”<sup>19</sup>

An extended editorial featured prominently on the front page of the first issue explains *Y.L.O.*’s mission. While avoiding overtly ideological rhetoric, it stresses that in order for their movement to succeed they would need to articulate clear revolutionary goals and strategies to the people. Young Lords leaders, it argues, wanted to push the city’s burgeoning “Latin American movement” away from a demand for “reform in the system.” Instead they advocated militant tactics designed to achieve a much more radical political transformation. *Y.L.O.* was seen as a vehicle through which to guide the movement. It offered the Young Lords leaders a means to provide “constant clarification” of their goals and strategies, both “educating the masses” as well as helping to further develop the consciousness of the city’s activists—many of whom, the editorial asserts, worked “diligently, often militantly, to achieve reform measures,” but yet had not developed “a clear understanding of the American system and its complexities.”<sup>20</sup> Omar López, who as Minister of Information and chief architect of *Y.L.O.* was likely one of the primary authors of this editorial, explains in a recent interview that the Young Lords leaders always tried to produce material that was “didactic.” Whether through the pages of their newspapers or through the distribution of leaflets, the YLO Ministry of Information was constantly producing “propaganda” that aimed to inform and educate the community. Yet beyond this instructional purpose, López also contends that the newspaper was an important “vehicle to organize and engage people.”<sup>21</sup>

López’ account squares firmly with the aforementioned editorial, which goes on to explain that “the role of the newspaper is not confined solely to the spreading of information, to political education, and to winning movement allies.” Perhaps more importantly, it asserts, “a newspaper can be the focus of a permanent organization.” *Y.L.O.* was seen as a central means by which to grow the Young Lords Organization, both giving it a central and consistent set of tasks around which to organize as well as providing a tool for recruitment.<sup>22</sup>

## The Black Panther

Not only were the Black Panthers an incredibly influential force in the political evolution of the Young Lords, they also played an important role in the birth of the YLO newspapers. From the very beginning *Y.L.O.* adopted much of the style and substance of the BPP weekly newspaper, *The Black Panther*, mimicking many of its rhetorical and visual strategies. In addition to writing stories about the Black Panthers—such as an obituary for Fred Hampton after he was murdered by Chicago Police in December 1969 (Figure 3)—*Y.L.O.* also borrowed content and sometimes reprinted articles and artwork wholesale from *The Black Panther*—such as the BPP Ten Point Platform and Program and artwork by BPP Minister of Culture Emory Douglas both printed in the first issue (Figures 4-5).



Figure 3: “I Came Down From the Mountain to the Valley” *Y.L.O.*, Vol. 1, No. 5, January, 1970, p 14.

Omar López credits *The Black Panther* for serving as a prototype for *Y.L.O.*, and also as being fundamental to the Young Lords decision to create a newspaper in the first place. “We always said that we were a propaganda unit,” he says. “At one point if we are a propaganda unit, we need to have some propaganda. One of the ideas that came up was to have a newspaper, and of course it wasn’t very difficult for us to come to that conclusion because we fashioned ourselves after the Black Panther Party. The Black Panthers had a newspaper, so we followed that kind of model.”<sup>23</sup> According to the Black Panther model, the regular production of a newspaper served important organizational functions beyond simply the publishing of propaganda. Producing and distributing the newspaper created work, which the Black Panthers identified as an important necessity for the growth of new chapters just getting off the ground. As the BPP Chief of Staff David Hilliard remembers, “the paper...help[ed] us organize new chapters. ‘[W]hat do we do?’ new members in San Diego or Sacramento want to know. ‘[S]ell the newspaper,’ we answered.”

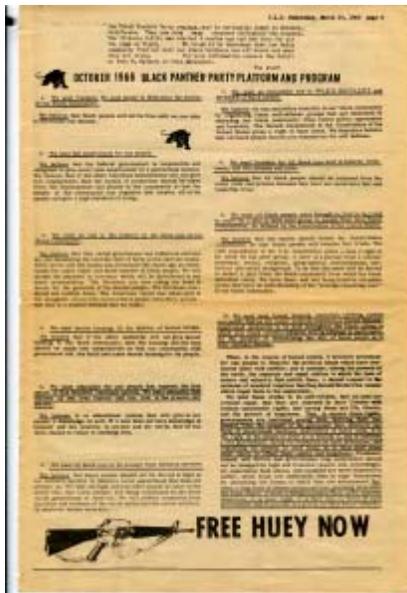


Figure 4: “October 6, 1966 Black Panther Party Platform and Program,” Y.L.O., Vol. 1, No. 1, March 19, 1969, p 8

In addition to helping connect with outside activists and other leftwing organizations (thereby securing important financial support and strengthening bonds of solidarity), distributing newspapers provided the Black Panthers a way to recruit new members into the group. Hilliard remembers going to the streets to sell the paper:

“‘Hey, brother,’ I say, flashing a copy in a strangers face, “read *The Black Panther*. Find out what’s really going on in this country...If the brother takes the copy, I’ve made a potential convert; if he refuses, we get into a conversation that lures other people and ends in a general verbal free-for-all that’s probably the most exciting event on the block in the last ten years.”<sup>25</sup>



Similarly, López remembers sending Young Lords activists out to distribute the *Y.L.O.* newspapers. They went to the street corners in Lincoln Park and elsewhere, as well as to universities, community organizations, and political demonstrations to sell the newspapers. "You know we asked them to try to get donations for the newspaper," López says of these young activists, "but what we wanted them to do was to engage people when they gave the newspaper out...tell them what was in the newspaper and explain to them why we were talking about whatever issue was going on at the time, and to talk about all the other things that the Young Lords were doing in the community."<sup>26</sup>

### **"Young Lords Serve and Protect"**

From the very beginning it was clear to the Young Lords that they were to be the targets of various agents of repression. Perhaps the institution most consistently identified in the pages of *Y.L.O.* as an existential threat was the Chicago police. Blacks, Latinos, and other racial minorities had long been subject to disrespectful treatment at the hands of the Chicago police. As more and more people in the city began to organize, they were increasingly met with violence by local authorities. From the very beginning the Young Lords newspapers focused on issues of police brutality and the role of the police force in suppressing movements, exemplified by the fact that nine separate items about the police were printed in the first issue alone, representing roughly a third of all content.<sup>27</sup> This trend continued in subsequent issues of *Y.L.O.*. Several of these articles dealt specifically with the police repression directed against the YLO leaders and their allies. The leader who seemed to receive the most police harassment, and whose legal challenges received the most coverage in the pages of *Y.L.O.*, was Chairman José "Cha Cha" Jiménez.<sup>28</sup> Yet he was far from the only Young Lord leader to feel the heat of police harassment.

Perhaps the most important and in-depth story about police repression concerns a tragic event that was pivotal in helping to unify the Young Lords' political perspective. On Saturday, May 3, 1969, YLO leader Manuel Ramos was shot and killed by an off-duty Chicago police officer named James Lamb while standing outside of a Young Lords gathering.<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, this tragedy and the seeming lack of justice that followed in its wake actually helped to focus the rebellious energy of the group. Omar López, YLO Minister of Information, says that Jiménez pointed to this murder "to convince the rest of us to what the Young Lords should be." Up to that point Jiménez still faced resistance from a number of YLO members in regards to his effort to steer the group towards revolutionary politics. "When Manuel was killed," López asserts, "everyone was convinced they had to do something."<sup>30</sup> The second issue of *Y.L.O.*, published in May 1969, accordingly provided extensive coverage of the murder and the community response, devoting the cover and several pages to the memory of Ramos (Figures 6-8).<sup>31</sup>



Figure 6: Y.L.O. Vol. 1, No. 2, May, 1969, Cover

Besides police brutality, another local issue that received extensive coverage on the pages of *Y.L.O.* was the Young Lords' response to the city's planned destruction of their community through "urban renewal" projects. Several articles specifically discuss the Lincoln Park Community Conservation Council (LPCCC), a group appointed by Mayor Daley to represent the community in its dealings with the city. Working alongside other community groups (often through the Poor People's Coalition in Lincoln Park), the YLO consistently targeted the LPCCC through direct action protests. Accordingly, numerous articles in *Y.L.O.* provide a critique of the LPCCC—citing its lack of diversity and failure to address the concerns of poorer residents—along with detailed descriptions of the protests mounted against it.<sup>32</sup>



Figure 7: Y.L.O. Vol. 1, No. 2, May, 1969, p 3.

As well, much of the protest activity covered in the pages of *Y.L.O.* centered around issues of gentrification more generally, and included calls to hold nearby institutions accountable for their role in driving low income residents from Lincoln Park. The McCormick Presbyterian Theological Seminary, DePaul University, and Augustana Hospital, for example, all came under fire in *Y.L.O.* articles—blasted for their latest development plans, all of which would presumably entail the displacement of local residents.<sup>33</sup>



Figure 8: *Y.L.O.* Vol. 1, No. 2, May, 1969, p 10-11.

The McCormick Seminary received the most significant coverage, as it was the site of a five day occupation by the Poor People's Coalition (a group which included the YLO) in May 1969.<sup>34</sup> An article in the second issue of *Y.L.O.* (Figure 9) details the events, describing the individuals involved, and explaining their motivations:

“McCormick, in conjunction with other institutions in the community...has instigated and supported an urban renewal program in the community which was and is designed to remove poor people and replace them with middle and upper income residents. This has been done primarily through the destruction of 1100 family housing units and the removal of 3 to 4 times as many families through institutional take over of housing or by housing being priced upwards out of reach of the former residents...the groups who have seized the building are Latin, black and white. They are by and large politically radical and are questioning the legitimacy of the institution and its power, rather than simply trying to force a few concessions...”<sup>35</sup>



Figure 9: “McCormick Take-Over,” Y.L.O. Vol. 1, No. 2, May, 1969, p 4.

The Young Lords’ participation in these sorts of coalitions, as well as the extensive coverage they received in *Y.L.O.*, demonstrates a commitment to building a movement that was non-dogmatic and non-sectarian. The Young Lords worked with a variety of groups in Lincoln Park and beyond, including progressive community organizations (Poor Peoples Coalition, etc.), unions (United Farm Workers, wildcat UPS strikers, etc.), radical groups of Latinos and other ethnic minorities (Latin American Defense Organization, Black Panthers, Indians of All Tribes, etc.), and radical Whites (Young Patriots, Rising Up Angry, etc.). The pages of *Y.L.O.* reflect the Young Lords’ efforts to draw these movements together, as it gave coverage to all of these protest communities and more.



“Figure 10: El barrio Esta Despierto,” Y.L.O., Vol 1, No. 4, Fall 1969, p 5.

The Young Lords complex relationship with other gangs is also on display in *Y.L.O.*, sometimes in interesting ways. An article in the May 1969 issue of *Y.L.O.*, for example, rather diplomatically discusses rumors that the Latin Kings were planning to physically stop a march for welfare justice organized by a coalition of several groups. While admitting that certain members of the Latin Kings had previously “disrupted planning meetings and threatened violence” towards community organizers, the article tries to lay blame for these hostilities on the Youth Action Council, a “YMCA-sponsored group paid by the city ‘to keep things cool’.” While individual Latin King members are portrayed as having been manipulated into these actions, the Latin Kings organization as a whole is shown to have a more enlightened understanding of the situation, as the rumored disruption of the march never occurs.<sup>36</sup> The Latin Kings were the largest “Latin” street gang in Chicago. While the Latin Kings far outnumbered the Young Lords, the YLO had sought to develop good relations between the two groups, in part with the hope of pushing the Latin Kings further to the left. They had some success in these efforts, as can be seen in the Fall 1970 issue of *Y.L.O.*, which celebrates the participation of both the Young Lords and Latin Kings (along with several other gangs) in a United Puerto Rican Coalition (Figure 10).<sup>37</sup> Of course the focus of the organization, and the newspaper, wasn’t always just on street demonstrations and confronting the “pigs.” Like the Panthers, the Young Lords initiated a number of “survival programs” aimed at serving the needs of the people in the community. It should be noted that for the YLO these programs were only possible because of their audacious and years long “occupation” of the Armitage Methodist Church located in the heart of Lincoln Park’s Puerto Rican community. While the church’s progressive pastor Bruce Johnson and his liberal white congregation supported the YLO’s plan to use the church basement for an office and as a site for their planned “survival programs” (which included a food pantry, health clinic, day-care center, and children’s breakfast program), the church also had a much more conservative congregation made up largely of exiles from Castro’s Cuba. By June 1969 the Young Lords had grown impatient with intransigence on the part of this second congregation, so they occupied the building, renaming it “the People’s Church.” This audacious action garnered wide media attention, including in *Y.L.O.*, and drew the attention and the ire of dark and powerful forces intent on squelching this movement.



Figure 11: “You Can’t Kill a Revolution,” *Y.L.O.* Vol. 1, No. 4, Fall 1969, p 3.

During the midnight hours of September 29-30, 1969, Reverend Bruce Johnson and his wife Eugenia were brutally stabbed to death in their own home by assailants whose identities are still unknown. The following issue of *Y.L.O.* printed an obituary of Bruce and Eugenia entitled “You Can’t Kill A Revolution” (Figure 11) which states that their murders “deeply saddened” the members of the YLO, whom “have come to respect them greatly for their dedication to the oppressed people, to the Puerto Rican community, and to our organization.” While suspicion was cast in a number of directions, the crime was ultimately never solved. The Young Lords for their part suspected the Cuban congregation, the Chicago police, or even the FBI of having a hand in the murders, possibly as retribution for their support of the YLO. The obituary claims that the murders were “meant as a warning to all people fighting for their just rights.” It continues by stating that, “[t]hese murders show to what vicious lengths the ruling class will go to prevent the growth of our just struggle.” Instead of silencing the movement, however, it claims that “[w]e will build them the highest memorial anyone could have, by continuing and stepping up our struggle to win freedom for our people and all oppressed people of the earth, for whom Bruce and Eugenia Johnson gave their lives.”<sup>38</sup> Sadly, many Lords have described these murders as the beginning of the end for their struggle. Not only did these murders have a chilling effect on some of the activists themselves, a cloud of suspicion hung over the Young Lords movement that interfered with future coalition building.<sup>39</sup>

### **“Latin Power to Latin People”**

While the Young Lords Organization has often been simplistically pegged as solely a “Puerto Rican nationalist” group, it can more accurately be said that they were a multi-ethnic and multi-racial group that identified their political project as both internationalist in nature as well as based primarily on serving the needs of poor people in their immediate community, whatever their national background. Omar López asserts that “as a gang” the Young Lords “had African Americans, Mexicans, and Puerto Ricans, and even a few Whites, and so you know it was already a reflection of how the Young Lords were made up from the beginning.”<sup>40</sup> As well, while the overwhelming majority of the members were of Puerto Rican descent, several key Young Lords leaders and contributors to *Y.L.O.* were of Mexican background, including López himself, as well as Young Lords co-founder Angel “Sal” Del Rivero, and Hilda Vasquez-Ignatin (perhaps the most prominent female Young Lords leader who contributed important content to *Y.L.O.*).



Figure 12: “Carta de Aztlan,” *Y.L.O.*, Vol. 1, No. 5, January 1970 p 16.

Examining the pages of *Y.L.O.*, one can see that the Young Lords worked to cultivate a shared Latino identity inclusive of both Chicanos and Puerto Ricans. They promoted themselves as an organization that primarily served the needs of their local Latino community, while at the same time standing in solidarity with the unique struggles of poor Black, Brown, and White communities. Articles, images, and slogans in *Y.L.O.* often reference the needs of “Latinos” and the “Latin American movement,” including their rephrasing of the BPP slogan, “Latin Power to Latin People” (Figure 2).<sup>41</sup> López, who was born in San Luis Potosí, Mexico, and moved with his parents at age thirteen to Chicago’s Humboldt Park neighborhood in 1958, explains that the feeling among Latinos in Chicago at that time was that they had to stick together, as there “were so few of us...there was no room for us to discriminate amongst ourselves.”<sup>42</sup>

As well, the Young Lords at times made efforts to connect themselves more directly with the Chicano movement. Very early on, for example, they created buttons with the phrase “Tengo Aztlán En Mi Corazón” (I have Aztlán In My Heart).<sup>43</sup> As well, *Y.L.O.* routinely covered the struggles of Chicanos in the Southwest and elsewhere through features such as the “Carta de Aztlan” in the January 1970 issue (Figure 12), which presents a callout for solidarity with both Los Siete de La Raza (seven San Francisco Chicano youths whose 1970 trial became a cause célèbre for the Latin American community) and the United Farm Workers’ ongoing grape strike.<sup>44</sup>



Figure 13: “Give Alcatraz Back to the Indians,”  
Y.L.O. Vol. 1, No. 5, January, 1970, p 17.

Interestingly, the next page of that issue provides coverage to the budding American Indian movement, with an article detailing the story of the famed occupation of Alcatraz by the group Indians of All Tribes (IAT). The article recounts a recent Thanksgiving visit to the site made by a delegation of Young Lords, led by Cha Cha Jiménez (Figure 13). Articles such as these demonstrate the consistent internationalist perspective of the Young Lords, and the ways in which this perspective pushed them to see their movement as linked with the movements of other colonized national minorities living within the United States

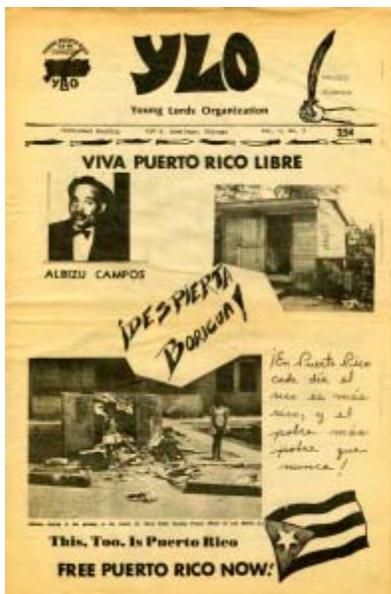


Figure 14: Y.L.O. Vol. 1, No. 5, January, 1970, cover.

Yet with all that being said, *Y.L.O.* was most clearly and consistently used as a vehicle to promote the movement for Puerto Rican independence. Myriad in-depth articles provide historical background and lessons about the independence movement and nationalist leaders such as Pedro Albizu Campos, Dolores “Lolita” Lebrón Sotomayor, and Ramón Emeterio Betances. Still other articles discuss contemporary events and provide persuasive arguments. The fifth issue of *Y.L.O.*, published in January 1970, devotes ten full pages (exactly half of the newspaper), including the cover, to the Puerto Rican independence movement (Figure 14).<sup>45</sup> As well, the Young Lords used this newspaper to cultivate an image of themselves as a group that was deeply influenced by Puerto Rican heritage. Banner images and slogans, such as “Tengo Puerto Rico En Mi Corazón” (I Have Puerto Rico In My Heart), and “Machete Redendor” (Machete Redeemer) allude to this heritage (Figure 14). The “Machete Redendor” banner image (an outstretched arm wielding a machete) is an allusion to the folk hero figure of the jíbaro. The jíbaros were the Puerto Rican peasants that traditionally lived in the mountains or forests and are still often held to represent the hard-working, traditional, and exploited mass of Puerto Ricans. With many of the Young Lords not that far removed from parents or grandparents that could have worn the label jíbaro, it seems the implication is that the “lumpen” jíbaros living in the urban ghettos will have to arm themselves in order to free their nation and their people from tyranny.

Some Young Lords had deeply personal connections to the island and the Puerto Rican Independence movement, having either grown up there or having spent extended periods of time there. Stories these individuals told highlighting the vibrancy of the Puerto Rican movement no doubt electrified other Young Lords cadres. For others one can imagine that a sense of loss and longing for a homeland denied them may in part explain their intense identification with Puerto Rican nationalism. Having grown up in Chicago, many of these youth had never been to Puerto Rico. Yet vastly outnumbered by Whites in Lincoln Park who didn’t consider them to be real Americans, they likely felt marginalized from the American mainstream. They clearly identified themselves as Puerto Ricans, whether they had direct family ties or (in some cases) fairly tenuous connections to the island, in part at least because they weren’t accepted as Americans.

Chairman José “Cha Cha” Jiménez was born in 1948 in Caguas, Puerto Rico, but moved to the United States with his parents at the age of two. Consequently he grew up in Chicago, mostly in Lincoln Park. He did return to the island briefly, however, while still an adolescent. After a number of run-ins with the law, a judge ordered him deported to Puerto Rico for one year in an effort to keep him out of trouble. No doubt his experiences there helped shape his attitude towards the island and its place in their community’s movements, although they did not prevent further run-ins with the law and jail-time upon his return to Chicago.<sup>46</sup>

Others had deeper connections to the island, such as Minister of Finance Alfredo Matias. Born and raised in Toa Baja, Puerto Rico, Matias left the island at the age of fifteen after joining the US army using false identification papers. He moved to Chicago in 1967 after getting kicked out of the army for insubordination and fighting.<sup>47</sup> No doubt his stories, personal history, and ties to the island intrigued and inspired others in the group.

Omar López specifically credits Ralph Rivera, another influential early Young Lords leader, with the initial push to more explicitly embrace the cause of Puerto Rican independence. López says of Rivera, “he was...inspired because of his visit to Puerto Rico. He came back and...began to

direct the group in the nationalist direction.”<sup>48</sup> As well, López remembers that very soon after their exploits became widely publicized the YLO “used to have a lot of input from the old time nationalists that were still living in Chicago. I remember a man called Manuel Ravago,” López says, “he was from the period of the Nationalist history when Lolita Lebrón and all those guys went and shot up congress.” After hinting at Ravago’s role in financing these exploits, López proudly remembers that Ravago donated two flags to the Young Lords, one the Nationalist Party flag (black with white cross) the other a flag of Lares (site of the Grito de Lares), both of which were used displayed at People’s Church and also taken out to lead rallies.<sup>49</sup>

Luis “Tony” Baez was a latecomer to the YLO, but he quickly became an important figure in the development of the newspaper and his work drew the Chicago movement even closer to Puerto Rico. Born and raised in Barrio Borinquen in Caguas, Puerto Rico (coincidentally the same neighborhood where Cha Cha was born), Baez had been an activist beginning at a very young age. While he was still a high school student Baez was recruited into the Puerto Rican Independence Party, and his work with this group intensified once he began his studies at the University of Puerto Rico. Unfortunately due to heavy police repression of the movement, Baez decided to leave the island before finishing his studies. After being arrested, beaten, and then released, Baez received word of threats to his life being promulgated by the police. Fearing for his safety, Baez’ parents convinced him to move to the US mainland. He arrived in Chicago in February 1970, and within three days he was involved with the Young Lords. Baez sardonically remembers that one of his first tasks was to go downtown to State Street and “to sell the paper to White people.” Before long he was promoted to Minister of Education, where he struggled (with some difficulty) to implement an internal education program aimed at raising the level of consciousness of the former gang members. Baez was also responsible for writing much of the later Young Lords’ newspaper’s Spanish language content.<sup>50</sup> Baez’ affiliation and experiences with the Puerto Rican movement no doubt deeply impacted the work of the YLO, and this is manifest in the pages of their later newspapers.

One might wonder how Young Lords leaders who were not Puerto Rican felt about the pages of *Y.L.O.* so consistently being used as platform for Puerto Rican nationalism. Omar López, who lived in Mexico until moving to Chicago at age thirteen, claims that his unwavering support for Puerto Rican independence was thought of as a logical extension of his ideological support for revolutionary nationalism. “Those of us who were not Puerto Rican,” López asserts, “saw [the movement for independence] as an internationalist struggle, and we readily embraced that. So we had no problem at all with the Young Lords being identified totally as a Puerto Rican group that talked about the independence of Puerto Rico, when in the leadership of the Young Lords we had several people that were Mexican and Mexican-American.”<sup>51</sup>

Comments made by Young Lords co-founder Angel “Sal” del Rivero, who was also born in Mexico but mostly raised in Chicago, are not so magnanimous. He complains that numerous historical misrepresentations have mistakenly identified the Young Lords solely as a Puerto Rican nationalist group, downplaying the grassroots and diverse nature of their movement and thereby unfairly delimiting the range of audiences who might find studying their history interesting and relevant. If people understood that they really fought for their community, and not just for some ideals about Puerto Rican independence, he argues, they might better see how the Young Lords’ story relates to their own struggles for justice in their communities.<sup>52</sup>

## A Place for Everyone in the Young Lords Movement?

While the Young Lords Organization was ostensibly fully open to the participation of women, and women played important roles in running the various YLO survival programs, the face of the movement was overwhelmingly male. Lilia Fernandez argues that “from the beginning, the YLO was masculinist and androcentric in its posture, its politics, and its leadership.”<sup>53</sup> She points out that the *Y.L.O.* newspaper often promoted a sort of “macho bravado” through the words and the imagery of the “handsome and charismatic José ‘Cha Cha’ Jiménez,” as it sought to promote him as a “revolutionary figure in the community.” As well, she points to a letter printed in the January 1970 issue of *Y.L.O.* written by “Isabel, revolutionary sister and wife,” which she argues reveals the “gender dynamics of the group and gendered perceptions within the community.” Isabel’s letter, Fernandez argues, “established YLO activism as men’s work...relegated women to secondary supportive roles in the movement and encouraged other YLO wives to be understanding of men’s behavior because of its revolutionary purpose.”<sup>54</sup>

Of course while Fernandez is undoubtedly correct in pointing this out, she also concedes that there were in fact women who played leadership roles in the group. YLO member Hilda Vasquez-Ignatin was perhaps the most visible female leader, both as a public speaker as well as on the pages of *Y.L.O.*. Interestingly, Vasquez-Ignatin was responsible for writing an oft-cited history of the Young Lords that worked to introduce their struggle to a wider audience of supporters in 1969. Printed first in the May 1969 Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) affiliated newspaper *The Movement*, but also then printed later that month in the second issue of *Y.L.O.*, “Young Lords Serve and Protect” represents an effort by the Young Lords to consciously craft their own historical narrative in a way that both admits to and downplays the “problems with police, parole officers, drugs, and all the rest.” At the same time it affirms their early revolutionary potential by simplistically identifying the initial motives in forming the gang as being to defend their communities against the threat of “white gangs in the area.”<sup>55</sup>

In addition to writing for the *Y.L.O.* newspaper and speaking at rallies, Vasquez-Ignatin was also involved in a Chicago based newsletter called *The Voice of the Women’s Liberation Movement* in the late-1960s.<sup>56</sup> Ironically, despite the efforts of the Young Lords to display support for a variety of movements, the Women’s Liberation movement seems inexplicably absent from the pages of *Y.L.O.*. While the newspaper (and the survival programs) depended upon the words, images, and labor of women, *Y.L.O.* never explicitly discussed the struggles of women (and men) who were organizing against sexism. The failure to analyze issues of gender oppression and to discuss the organized efforts of activists challenging patriarchy represents a major weakness in the newspaper. Perhaps not all Young Lords activists understood the ways in which their struggles against oppression, inequality, and exclusion based on racism and class hierarchies were related to struggles against patriarchy, sexism, and heterosexism.

Given the absence of feminism on the pages of *Y.L.O.*, it should come as no surprise that there seems to be no recognition of mention in these newspapers to the then just emerging Gay Liberation movement. Yet it should be noted that absence of these struggles in the pages of *Y.L.O.* does not necessarily imply that there was any antagonism. The Young Lords were part of a web of larger social justice movements that were slowly opening up to feminist critiques and challenges to heteronormativity. While most Marxist groups were at least publicly in favor of the

emancipation of women (albeit only as part of a larger socialist revolution), there was still major disagreement within the communist movement about questions of Gay equality. Huey Newton and other Black Panther leaders publicly declared their support for Gay rights (while others had uttered virulent heterosexist remarks). Yet other communist groups (such as the October League faction of SDS) considered homosexuality to be an aberration and social malady caused by bourgeois decadence. Given this atmosphere, perhaps it is telling that they chose not to publicly weigh in on this just emerging debate. Their silence perhaps demonstrates the gulf between their perceptions of the Gay Liberation struggle and what they saw as the most pressing needs of their community. Or perhaps it simply demonstrates a lack of knowledge about the very existence of the Gay movement, which would gain much greater visibility and notoriety as the 1970s progressed.

*P'alante, Siempre P'alante*

When the Young Lords movement spread to New York in the Summer of 1969, it actually began as a student movement. The New York chapter of the YLO was the result of a merger between two different groups of students. One of these, the Sociedad Albizu Campos (SAC), was based in El Barrio (Spanish Harlem), and had been meeting for about six months when they first learned of the work of the Young Lords in Chicago. In a 1971 book detailing the history of the New York Young Lords entitled, Pablo “Yoruba” Guzmán, a member of SAC who then became a leader in the New York YLO, describes this chance discovery:

“What happened was, in 1969, in the June 7 issue of the Black Panther newspaper there was an article about the Young Lords Organization in Chicago with Cha Cha Jiménez as their Chairman. Cha Cha was talking about revolution and socialism, and the liberation of Puerto Rico and the right to self-determination and all this stuff that I aint never heard a spic say. I mean, I hadn’t never heard no Puerto Rican talk like this—just Black people were talking this way, you know. And I said, “Damn! Check this out.” That’s what really got us started. That’s all it was, man.”<sup>57</sup> (Figure 15).<sup>58</sup>



Figure 15: “Interview with Cha Cha Jiménez: Chairman—Young Lords Organization,” *The Black Panther*, June 7, 1969, p 17.

At the same time the members of SAC learned of another group of students that had been meeting regularly in the Lower East Side who were already calling themselves Young Lords. Members of this group had met Cha Cha Jiménez at the May 1969 Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) convention in Chicago, and had received permission to start a New York chapter. After reading the article and meeting with the other student group, the leaders in SAC were convinced that they needed to become Young Lords. They believed that the Young Lords Organization could not only unite the disparate Puerto Rican student movement, but could also, as Yoruba says, unite “the street people with the students of working-class background” such as themselves.<sup>59</sup> After sending a delegation to meet with Cha Cha and other Chicago leaders, SAC and the other group merged, and a unified New York State chapter was formed.



Figure 16: *Y.L.O.*, Vol. 2, No. 6, February/March 1970, p 6-7.

These New York recruits almost immediately began contributing content (including articles, images, and poetry) to the Chicago *Y.L.O.* newspapers. Much of this content highlighted the bold direct action campaigns waged in the New York streets, such as the famed Garbage Offensive featured in the fourth issue of *Y.L.O.*, and the Second People’s Church (the ten day occupation of a large Methodist Church in East Harlem) featured in both the January 1970 and February/March 1970 issues of *Y.L.O.*<sup>60</sup> This latter issue also featured a full center-spread image of a *Jíbaro* wielding a machete, accompanied by a poem entitled “*Jíbaro, mi negro lindo*,” which was written by New York Young Lords Chairman Felipe Luciano (Figure 16).<sup>61</sup> Luciano, of course, was already an accomplished poet who had been an original member of the Harlem based Last Poets before he joined and quickly became Chairman of the New York Young Lords Organization.

In addition to contributing to *Y.L.O.*, the New York Young Lords launched two of their own media projects. Beginning on March 1970 they hosted a weekly radio program which aired on Pacifica Radio station WBAI in New York City.<sup>62</sup> Shortly thereafter they also began publishing a modest mimeographed newsletter entitled *Palante: Latin Revolutionary News Service*.<sup>63</sup> Beginning in May 1970 *Palante* became a bi-weekly full-length newspaper (Figure 17). The New York activists decided to publish their own newspaper for several reasons, some of which involved their growing dissatisfaction with the quality and quantity of the newspapers published out of Chicago.<sup>64</sup>



Figure 17: *Palante*, Vol. 2, No. 2, May 8, 1970, Cover.

In June 1970, after a series of meetings between New York and Chicago leaders ended badly, the two groups decided to go their separate ways. When New York Young Lords leaders went to Chicago in the spring of 1970, they already knew that they wanted to wrest control of the national organization from Cha Cha and the other Chicago activists. Out of a sort of twisted logic, however, came the idea of asking the Chicago leaders to move to New York to build a new national party.<sup>65</sup> Tony Baez remember thinking that it was a ridiculous suggestion. “It was not a college movement,” Baez says, drawing a contrast between the Chicago activism, which was really rooted in the Lincoln Park neighborhood, and the more student-led New York organization. With marriages, kids, and growing families, Baez explains, “there was no way we could move.”<sup>66</sup>

The atmosphere was tense at the meetings, which were held over a period of several days in Omar López’ attic. “It was not a nice coming together of the two groups,” López admits. At times the hostility boiled over into physical altercations. Yoruba in particular drew the ire of “Blood,” a Chicago YLO member named Andre that López describes as “very street” and a “very violent guy.”<sup>67</sup> As Tony Baez describes it, when Yoruba said something that was interpreted as being “anti-lumpenproletariat,” Andre attacked him “beat the living heck out of him.” He continues, “and then we were trying to stop this fight in the middle of this discussion about the two groups.”<sup>68</sup> This flare up of violence in the midst of tense discussions was merely

a distraction, and perhaps the outcome was a foregone conclusion. It seems that the general thinking among the Chicago participants was that the New York leadership had a different vision of what the Young Lords should aspire to be. Perhaps with delusions of grandeur the New York leadership wanted to build a more disciplined “vanguard party” to organize and lead the lumpen across the country. As genuine articles of the lumpenproletariat class who had transformed their street gang into a grassroots community movement, however, the Chicago activists were proud of what they had accomplished. They were not willing to play a secondary role in a movement that they had created.<sup>69</sup>



Figure 18: Palante, Vol. 2, No. 4, June 19, 1970, Cover.

Unable to resolve their conflict, the two groups split into two separate Young Lords organizations in June 1969. The Chicago group retained the name Young Lords Organization (YLO), while the New York faction rechristened themselves the Young Lords Party (YLP). For the next several years they organized separately. Despite their serious differences each group continued to publicly pronounce their support for the other. The leaders of the newly renamed Young Lords Party explained their positions in a center-spread editorial (featuring large photos of the new central committee) printed in the June 5, 1970 issue of *Palante* (Figures 18-19). Citing the gang mentality that still plagued the Chicago organization, the New York activists argued that the Chicago Lords were not disciplined enough (and implicitly suggested they were not educated enough) to provide sufficient revolutionary leadership for the Puerto Rican people. Decrying the fact that the Chicago based *Y.L.O.* “came out only 6 times in 18 months,” they point to this failing as a manifestation of the Chicago group’s lack of discipline. Among other important tasks, they argue, “the National Headquarters” of an effective revolutionary party “has a responsibility to... [p]ublish a national newspaper regularly that will educate and inform our people all across the country.” <sup>70</sup>

More accurately it can be said that at this point *Y.L.O.* had published only six issues during a

span of fourteen months (and was in the process of producing a seventh) all the while billing itself as a “monthly” newspaper.



Figure 19: “Editorial,” *Palante*, Vol. 2, No. 4, June 19, 1970, p 10-11.

Both Omar López and Tony Baez accept some of this criticism, yet they point to their group’s ambitious community work (daycare, health clinic, breakfast program, etc.) and tireless direct action protests to explain that it was not a lack of discipline but instead limited resources that hampered their efforts. “I remember that there was an issue of money,” Baez says, pointing to the dilemma of being a poor organization trying to do too many things. “Where do you put your money?” he asks. “Do you put your money into a newspaper, or do you put it more into the health programs that they had downstairs, the breakfast programs, and stuff like that. And not a lot of money was coming in.”<sup>71</sup> Minister of Finance Alfredo Matias also describes the newspapers as a financial drain on the organization. “I was supposed to be keeping books,” Matias jokingly says, “but we were always broke because the little money we had went to the newspaper.”<sup>72</sup> López admits that scraping together enough money to pay the printer was sometimes an issue, but he also points to the steep learning curve they faced as complete amateurs, many of them high school dropouts with poor writing skills. “It was a project,” he says. “It wasn’t like today, you can just sit at a computer and write it. It was a whole process. It was putting people together.” López stresses that they had to learn how to do layout, prepare images, and even how to type, basically from scratch. As well, lacking supplies and office space, they often relied upon the material resources of others, which likely complicated and slowed their efforts.<sup>73</sup>

López and Baez also both point to the gang backgrounds of the Chicago activists to recast what the New York leaders saw as deficits into strengths. In admitting that the Chicago newspapers lacked the sophistication of the New York publications, López is quick to point out that the Chicago efforts “were much more grassroots,” profiling the activism of “people from the community.”<sup>74</sup> Baez simply describes their difficulties as “part of the growth of a street movement.”<sup>75</sup>

### *“Cada Guaraguao Tiene Su”*

In the Summer of 1970, while in the wake of a schism between themselves and the New York Young Lords chapter, the Young Lords in Chicago produced a publication entitled *Pitirre* (Figure 20). They didn't know that this would be the last YLO newspaper published that year and the last issue ever created in Chicago. Perhaps demonstrating their humility, or instead maybe disdain, this newspaper makes no direct reference to the split with New York.



Figure 20: *Pitirre*, Vol. 2, No. 7, Summer 1970, cover.

It was Tony Baez who came up with the idea of changing the name to *Pitirre*. In part it was meant as an homage to a small circulation mimeographed newspaper by the same name that Baez had produced as a high school student in Barrio Borinquen in Puerto Rico. The name “Pitirre” also derives from an early 20th century poem written by Puerto Rican poet and politician José de Diego.<sup>76</sup> Entitled “*Cada Guaraguao Tiene Su Pitirre*” (Each Hawk Has Its Pitirre), this poem is meant as a metaphor for the relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States. The word “Pitirre,” it is explained on the last page of the newspaper *Pitirre*, “is also the name of a Puerto Rican bird that, because of his ability to fight and destroy the ‘guaraguao’ (a type of Hawk) has everybody’s respect and is seen by many as a symbol of the Puerto Rican Nation. Sooner or later the small country will rise and, like the PITIRRE, we will push out the vicious ‘guaraguao’ that is invading its territory.”<sup>77</sup>

Unfortunately for the Chicago Young Lords activists, things fell apart rather precipitously after the split with New York and not too long after the publication of *Pitirre*. While they had been facing police repression, exhaustion, and money problems for quite some time, these stressors really began to take their toll in the Fall of 1970. Not only was the group still harboring feelings of resentment and disappointment after the split, but there was suddenly a major leadership vacuum when Chairman José “Cha Cha” Jiménez decided to go underground in the Fall of 1970 to avoid an extended prison sentence. Jiménez had been convicted of stealing lumber (valued at

around twenty dollars) from an urban renewal construction site, wood that he planned to use to help renovate the Young Lords daycare program facilities at the People's Church.

Cha Cha's departure (along with the departure of a few others who joined him in clandestine organizing) left the group without effective leadership. Both López' and Baez' accounts of this time period suggest that without Jiménez' dynamic personality and street credibility to back them up, they struggled to effectively establish credible leadership. This problem was also likely compounded by the cadres' deflated spirits following the split with New York. "I remember I cried that night," Baez admits when describing the night he learned that the New York leaders were intent on splitting, "because I was trying to keep the organization together."<sup>78</sup> One can imagine that he was not the only one who felt this way. As well, the continued removal of Puerto Rican families (among them Young Lords) from Lincoln Park due to "urban renewal" took a toll on the organization's dwindling numbers. Owing to all of this, the work of the Chicago YLO significantly declined towards the end of 1970.<sup>79</sup>

### **El Young Lord: Latin Liberation News Service**

While by the end of 1970 the YLO in Chicago had in some ways ceased effectively functioning as a mass based direct action movement, a new YLO chapter emerged in Milwaukee in early 1971. Along with it appeared a new Young Lords newspaper, now renamed *El Young Lord: Latin Liberation News Service* (Figures 21-24). This Milwaukee newspaper recaptured the revolutionary spirit of the earlier Chicago publications, and gave coverage to many of the same protest communities. While it was a short-lived project (possibly only two or three issues produced), the very fact that there were newspapers published by Milwaukee activists now calling themselves Young Lords showcases the resilience of the Young Lords movement.

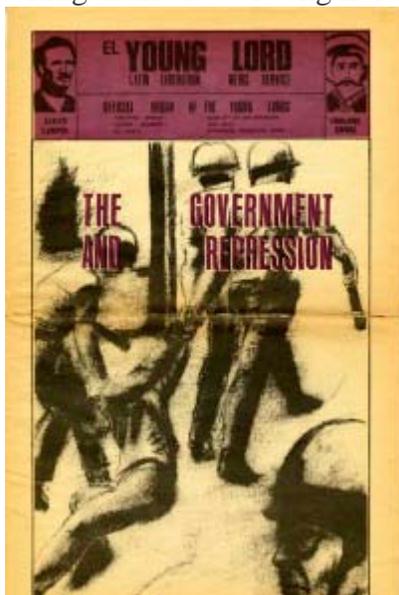


Figure 21: *El Young Lord: Latin Liberation News Service*, Vol. 1, No. 1, April 1 1971, cover.

*El Young Lord* mainly came about because of the influence of Tony Baez and the hard work of Milwaukee activists inspired by what the Young Lords in Chicago had accomplished. Baez had

left Chicago in late 1970 in large part because of dissatisfaction with the collapse of the Young Lords movement there. He chose to move to Milwaukee in part because he had previously traveled there and was impressed by what he saw as a vibrant and rapidly growing Latino movement. With the help of some experienced movement people from the local Latino community, Baez set up a small Milwaukee chapter of the Young Lords Organization.

Mentioning several individuals who were important in building the Milwaukee YLO chapter, including Carmen Cabrera (who now works with him at Centro Hispano in Milwaukee), as well as William and Eddie Quiles. William had been in the Vietnam War before getting involved with the Milwaukee Young Lords chapter. Baez remembers his brother Eddie as being “extremely bright,” and “one of these people with this incredible capacity and knowledge, a great organizer.”<sup>80</sup> Baez found these young new recruits to be self-motivated students, which allowed him to more successfully resurrect the internal education program that he had struggled to implement in Chicago.<sup>81</sup>



Figure 22: “YLO Health Center: Cuidado Medico Es Un Derecho Humano,” El Young Lord: Latin Liberation News Service, Vol. 1, No. 1, April 1 1971, p 10.

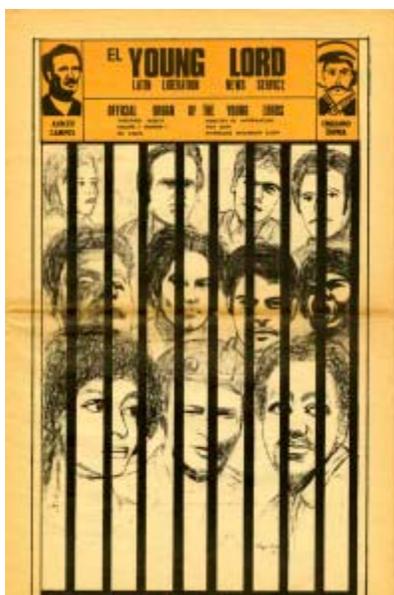


Figure 23: El Young Lord: Latin Liberation News Service, Vol. 1, No. 2, April 15 1971, Cover.

Interestingly, the idea of resurrecting the newspaper came as a result of Baez getting a job. “When I came to Milwaukee initially,” Baez explains, “my first job was to be the Spanish co-editor of *La Guardia*.” *La Guardia* was a Milwaukee based, bilingual, independent newspaper that provided much of the same sort of movement coverage as *Y.L.O.* and *Pitirre* (Figures 25-26). Baez became a member of the twelve person collective that produced *La Guardia* and was paid fifty dollars a week to translate articles into Spanish and to help with the layout. Baez credits Loyd Guzior, “a Puerto Rican kid from the Bronx” and fellow member of the *La Guardia* collective, with envisioning the rebirth of the Young Lords Organization newspapers. Guzior had recently moved to Milwaukee from Madison where he had been studying economics at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. While there he became the chair of the local United Farm Workers (UFW) grape strike solidarity committee. “Cesar Chavez was impressed with his work,” Baez remembers, “and talked with Ernesto Chacon and other people in Milwaukee about [Guzior] coming to Milwaukee and running the grape boycott strike in Milwaukee.” Baez remembers talking with Guzior and others at *La Guardia* when “we came up with the notion that we needed to give some continuity to what was happening with the Young Lords in Chicago.”<sup>82</sup>



Figure 24: *El Young Lord*: Latin Liberation News Service, Vol. 1, No. 2, April 15 1971, p 10.

On April 1, 1971, they began publishing *El Young Lord: Latin Liberation News Service*. Billed as a weekly publication that served as the “Official Organ of the Young Lords,” *El Young Lord* resembled previous YLO newspapers in several important ways. The content focused on the same multitude of protest communities that *Y.L.O.* featured. As well, *El Young Lord* continued the tradition of drawing together the Puerto Rican and Chicano communities through the cultivation of a shared “Latin” identity. Perhaps *El Young Lord* did so even more explicitly than previous Young Lords newspapers, as its banner now included images of both the Puerto Rican nationalist leader Pedro Albizu Campos as well as the famed Mexican revolutionary general Emiliano Zapata, both of whom had been martyred. Baez explains that while Loyd Guzior was Puerto Rican, “Loyd’s best friends were Chicano,” and even his wife was a Chicana. As a result, Baez recalls, Guzior “was very close to the Chicano movement. He constantly talked to me about it.”<sup>83</sup> Fittingly, when Baez showed these papers to López who was still living in Chicago, “he loved it, because it was Mexican, and so is he.”<sup>84</sup>



Figure 25: La Guardia, Vol. 2, No. 3, March, 1971, Cover.

As with the previous Young Lords publications, *El Young Lord* faced several obstacles which made sustaining it on a long-term basis unfeasible. Admitting that they only ever put out two or three issues, Baez remembers that money was one of their major challenges. As well, *La Guardia* was already a popular newspaper that served Milwaukee's Latino communities and provided in-depth coverage of the same sorts of issues as *El Young Lord*. Since both Baez and Guzior were already members of the *La Guardia* collective, producing a separate Young Lords Organization newspaper (out of the *La Guardia* offices) would likely have seemed like an exercise in redundancy. Yet regardless of the fact that *El Young Lord* was never published with regularity, its very existence in some ways provides a nice postscript to the story of a movement that otherwise seems to have sadly ended all too soon.



### **“You Can’t Kill a Revolution”**

Despite the severe decline of the Young Lords Organization in Chicago and the eventual demise of the Milwaukee Young Lords chapter, the Young Lords movement did not completely disappear in the early 1970s. Cha Cha, for one, was not willing to let the organization simply fade away into oblivion. Disillusioned with the long-term potential of organizing “underground,” Jiménez decided to return to Chicago in December 1972 to turn himself in and serve a one year prison sentence for the theft charges. Upon his release he opened up a new YLO office in the Lakeview region of Chicago. By that time few Puerto Ricans remained in the Armitage neighborhood of Lincoln Park where the Young Lords got their start. Along with a small number of his former associates, Cha Cha hoped to renew the YLO’s community work and protest activities. In 1974-1975 he ran an unsuccessful though spirited campaign for Chicago city alderman. He was inspired by Bobby Seale’s run for Mayor of Oakland and the Black Panther’s call for radical groups to use the electoral process to take over city governments.<sup>85</sup> Despite spirited work this new incarnation of the Young Lords faced difficulties of its own, and was seemingly unable to achieve the same impact as the earlier street movement.

While the Young Lords Organization did not survive past the 1970s, there are important and enduring legacies of this movement. Perhaps the most important legacies involve the continued activism and community engagement of Young Lords veterans. Certainly their early experiences working with the Young Lords and producing their newspapers provided these young people with invaluable lessons that deeply impacted their later activism. At the same time we must recognize that not all of the legacies of the movement are positive. There were many casualties along the way, and some experienced drug addiction, violence, and prison in the wake of their experiences with the Young Lords. Ultimately the history of the Young Lords has yet to be fully written, and so it is still too early to assess the full impact of this movement upon its activists and their communities.

But more than just recognizing the legacies of continued community work, perhaps it is more important for us to examine what the newspapers themselves have to teach us. Hopefully by explicating the content of these papers, tracing their historical development, and exploring the lives of the individuals who produced them, this essay has provided a sort of roadmap with which to navigate one’s investigation. At the very least, the work of these young men and women with no journalism experience yet who simply “had something to say” should provide inspiration to media activists in this era of corporate media monopolies pushing neoliberal agendas. For Omar López, the real lesson to learn from the Young Lords’ experiences in publishing was that “newspapers can and should be an organizing tool for community organizations.” As well, they must be “didactic,” López asserts. “I think one of the things we’ve learned and that we tried to do was to suggest that those papers have to be used to educate people and to raise their awareness of why things are happening to them.”<sup>86</sup>

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## Notes

1. The Young Lords Collection at DePaul University consists of copies of the Chicago and Milwaukee newspapers as well as a variety of party documents, posters, and assorted press. It also contains tapes and transcripts of twenty oral history interviews conducted in the 1990s by DePaul University's Center for Latino Research and the Lincoln Park Project. Another important resource, the Young Lords in Lincoln Park collection, is housed at Grand Valley State University. Unveiled in September 2012, this online archive features a rich collection of more than 110 oral histories, as well as historical photographs and documents. It exists primarily because of the tremendous effort of former YLO Chairman José "Cha Cha" Jiménez. This essay will also feature unique information contained in the tapes and transcripts of personal interviews I recently conducted with former Young Lords leaders Omar López and Dr. Luis "Tony" Baez. As Minister of Information and Minister of Education respectively, these two individuals were the persons most responsible for producing the Chicago and Milwaukee newspapers. Finally, both the Wisconsin Historical Society and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee house extensive collections of a variety of movement newspapers and these archives were quite useful for this research. For more information: The Young Lords Collection: <http://eres.lib.depaul.edu/eres/coursepass.aspx?cid=4075&page=docs>, Young Lords in Lincoln Park Collection: <http://gvsu.edu/younglords/>
- 2 Frank Browning, "From Rumble to Revolution: The Young Lords," *Ramparts*, October 1970, p 20.
- 3 Lilia Fernandez: "In 1960, Puerto Rican children and youths in Lincoln Park, both boys and girls aged ten to nineteen, numbered fewer than 500. White children of the same ages numbered well over 10,000... In the entire community area, there were over 4,800 white boys between the ages of ten and nineteen, compared to fewer than 175 Puerto Rican boys of the same ages, a ratio of 27 to 1.:"  
Lilia Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City*, The University of Chicago Press: Chicago, p 181.
- 4 Angel del Rivero, interview by José Jiménez, July 11, 2012. <http://gvsu.cdmhost.com/cdm/ref/collection/p16015coll6/id/45/rec/9>
- 5 Lilia Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City*, 179
- 6 Frank Browning, "From Rumble to Revolution: The Young Lords," *Ramparts*, October 1970, 21.
- 7 Judson Jeffries, "From Gang Bangers to Urban Revolutionaries," p 289
- 8 Omar López, interview by José Jiménez, February 2, 2012, transcript. <http://gvsu.cdmhost.com/cdm/singleitem/collection/p16015coll6/id/16/rec/46>
- 9 Garrett Epps, "Huey Newton Speaks at Boston College, Presents Theory of 'Intercommunalism'," *The Harvard Crimson*, November 19, 1970. <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/1970/11/19/huey-newton-speaks-at-boston-college/>
- 10 Lilia Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City*, 183
- 11 Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar, "Puerto Rico en mi corazón: The Young Lords, Black Power and Puerto Rican nationalism in the U.S., 1966-1972." *Centro Journal*, Vol 18 No 1 (2006) p 155-156.
- 12 Jeffrey Ogbar, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity*, The Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 2005, p 78.

Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar, "Puerto Rico en mi corazón: The Young Lords, Black Power and Puerto Rican nationalism in the U.S., 1966-1972." *Centro Journal*, Vol 18 No 1 (2006) p 155-156.  
Judson Jeffries, "From Gangbangers to Urban Revolutionaries," p 291.

13 "Interview with Cha Cha Jiménez," *The Black Panther*, June 7, 1969, 17.

14 Frank Browning, "From Rumble to Revolution: The Young Lords," *Ramparts*, October 1970. p 20.

15 Young Lords Organization, Y.L.O., Vol. 1, No. 1, March 19, 1969, p 1&9.

16 Omar López, interview by Michael Gonzales, April 12, 2013.

Luis "Tony" Baez, interview by Michael Gonzales, April 2, 2013.

Luis Baez, interviewed by José Jiménez, August 23, 2012,

transcript.<http://gvsu.cdmhost.com/cdm/singleitem/collection/p16015coll6/id/52/rec/40>

17 Young Lords Project: Omar Lopez Interview #1, February 10 1995, conducted by Miguel Morales, DePaul University Library Special Collections and Archives Department Reproduction

18 Omar López, interview by José Jiménez, February 2, 2012,

transcript.<http://gvsu.cdmhost.com/cdm/singleitem/collection/p16015coll6/id/16/rec/46>

19 Omar López, interview by Michael Gonzales, April 12, 2013.

20 "Why a YLO Newspaper?" *Y.L.O.* Vol 1, No 1, March 19,1969, pg 1 & 9.

21 Omar López, interview by Michael Gonzales, April 12, 2013.

22 "Why a YLO Newspaper?" *Y.L.O.* Vol 1, No 1, March 19,1969, pg 1 & 9.

23 Omar López, interview by Michael Gonzales, April 12, 2013.

24 Christian A. Davenport, "Reading the 'Voice of the Vanguard': A Content Analysis of The Black Panther Intercommunal News Service, 1969-1973," in *The Black Panther Party [Reconsidered]* edited by Charles E. Jones, (Black Classic Press: Baltimore, 1998), p 196-197.

25 Christian A. Davenport, "Reading the 'Voice of the Vanguard': A Content Analysis of The Black Panther Intercommunal News Service, 1969-1973," in *The Black Panther Party [Reconsidered]* edited by Charles E. Jones, (Black Classic Press: Baltimore, 1998), p 196-197.

26 Omar López, interview by Michael Gonzales, April 12, 2013.

27 *Y.L.O.*, Vol. 1, No. 1, March 19, 1969.

28 Examples: "Hands Off Cha Cha and the YLO: Puerto Ricans Demand Justice For Brother Cha Cha," *Y.L.O.*, Vol. 1, No. 5, January 1970, p 15.

"Speak Out: Straight From Moussee," *Y.L.O.*, Vol. 2, No. 6, February, March 1970, p 2.

"Justicia Para Rafael," *Y.L.O.*, Vol. 2, No. 6, February, March 1970, p 3.

"Oppression, Repression, Aggression!" *Y.L.O.*, Vol. 2, No. 6, February, March 1970, p 11.

"Cha Cha: Guilty of Innocent," *Pitirre*, Vol. 2, No. 7, Summer 1970, p 2.

29 Lilia Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City*, p 187

*Y.L.O.* Vol. 1, No. 2, May 1969, p 3

30 Young Lords Project: Omar Lopez Interview #2, February 17 1995, conducted by Miguel Morales, DePaul University Library Special Collections and Archives Department Reproduction

31 *Y.L.O.* Vol. 1, No. 2, May 1969, p 3.

32 Examples include:

“Students Confront DePaul,” *Y.L.O.*, Vol. 1, No.1, March 19, 1969, p 4.

“YLO visits urban renewal,” *Y.L.O.*, Vol. 1, No. 1, March 19, 1969, p 11.

Omar López, “Se Le Niegan Viviendas A Los Pobres,” *Y.L.O.*, Vol. 2, No. 6, February-March, 1970, p 4.

Omar López, “Housing Denied To Poor People,” *Y.L.O.*, Vol. 2, No. 6, February-March, 1970, p 5.

“Urban Renewal Case,” *Pitirre*, Vol. 2, No. 7, Summer 1970, p 2.

33 Examples include:

“Students Confront DePaul,” *Y.L.O.*, Vol. 1, No. 1, March 19, 1969, p 4.

“McCormick Take-Over,” *Y.L.O.*, Vol. 2, No. 2, May, 1969, p 4.

“A Peoples’ Struggle,” *Y.L.O.*, Vol. 2, No. 2, May, 1969, p 14.

“McCormick Revisited,” *Y.L.O.*, Vol. 1, No. 5, January, 1970, p 2.

34 Lilia Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City*, 191.

35 “McCormick Take-Over,” *Y.L.O.*, Vol. 2, No. 2, May, 1969, p 4 & 15.

36 It is also interesting to note that the article accused the disrupters of setting-up Obed López, and having him falsely arrested. Obed was a leader in the Latin American Defense Organization (LADO), one of the groups that was sponsoring the rally. He was also the older brother of YLO Minister of Information Omar López’s brother. This is not mentioned in the article.

500 March for Welfare Justice,” *Y.L.O.*, Vol. 1, No. 2, May, 1969, p 5.

37 “El Barrio Esta Despierto,” *Y.L.O.* Vol. 1, No. 4, Fall, 1970, p 5.

38 “You Can’t Kill a Revolution,” *Y.L.O.* Vol. 1, No. 4, Fall, 1969, p 3.

Lilia Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City*, p 192.

39 Alfredo Matias Interview #1 Friday, September 29, 1995 DePaul University Library Special Collections and Archives Department Reproduction

40 Omar López, interview by Michael Gonzales, April 12, 2013.

41 *Y.L.O.* Vol 1, No 1, March 19,1969, p 3.

42 Young Lords Project: Omar Lopez Interview #1, February 10 1995, conducted by Miguel Morales, DePaul University Library Special Collections and Archives Department Reproduction

Omar López, interview by José Jiménez, February 2, 2012,

transcript.<http://gvsu.cdmhost.com/cdm/singleitem/collection/p16015coll6/id/16/rec/46>

43 Angel del Rivero, interview by José Jiménez, July 11,

2012.<http://gvsu.cdmhost.com/cdm/ref/collection/p16015coll6/id/45/rec/9>

44 “Carta de Aztlán,” *Y.L.O.* Vol. 1, No. 5, January, 1970, p 16.

45 For other articles on the movement for independence, see: “Historia Latina,” *Y.L.O.* Vol. 1, No. 1, March 19, 1969, p 7; “Celebracion De La Revolucion De Lares,” *Pitirre*, Vol. 2, No. 7, p 6; “Los Nuestros: Pedro Albizu Campos,” *Y.L.O.*, Vol. 2, No. 4, p 8.

46 Judson Jeffries, “From Gang Bangers to Urban Revolutionaries,” p 290

47 Alfredo Matias Interview #1 Friday, September 29, 1995 DePaul University Library Special Collections and Archives Department Reproduction

48 Young Lords Project: Omar Lopez Interview #3, February 24 1995, conducted by Miguel Morales, DePaul University Library Special Collections and Archives Department

49 Omar López, Interview by Michael Gonzales, April 12, 2013.

50 Luis Baez, interviewed by Michael Gonzales, April 2, 2013.

Luis Baez, interviewed by José Jiménez, August 23, 2012,

transcript.<http://gvsu.cdmhost.com/cdm/singleitem/collection/p16015coll6/id/52/rec/40>

51 Omar López, interviewed by Michael Gonzales, April 12, 2013.

52 Angel del Rivero, interview by José Jiménez, July 11,

2012.<http://gvsu.cdmhost.com/cdm/ref/collection/p16015coll6/id/45/rec/9>

53 Lilia Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City*, The University of Chicago Press: Chicago, p 195.

54 Ibid, 195.

55 Hilda Vasquez-Ignatin, “Young Lords Serve and Protect,” *Y.L.O.*, Vol. 1, No. 2, May, 1969 p 6-7.

Hilda Vasquez-Ignatin, “Young Lords Serve and Protect,” *The Movement*, May

1969<http://farmworkermovement.com/archives/#sncc>

56 Michael Staudenmeier, *Truth and Revolution: A History of the Sojourner Truth Organization*, 1969-1986, AK Press: Oakland, 2012, p 30

57 Young Lords Party & Michael Abramson, *Palante*, Haymarket Books: Chicago, 1971, 69.

58 “Interview with Cha Cha Jiménez,” *The Black Panther*, June 7, 1969, 17.

59 Young Lords Party & Michael Abramson, *Palante*, Haymarket Books: Chicago, 1971, 69.

60 Felipe Luciano explained the beginnings of the famous Garbage Offensive on the Young Lords radio show: “Rather than attack the jobs, and racism, and education in El Barrio (which were problems, but which had been attacked by so many anti-poverty organizations and by so many poverty pimps, who had raised the people’s hopes to a higher level without ever achieving any kind of concrete solutions to these problems), we decided to take something that nobody had tackled before. So the first offensive was the garbage. It was there. We live with it. We eat it. We smell it. And we die by it. But nobody had really attempted to solve the problem.....now we didn’t go out with a whole bunch of rhetoric, because one of the first things we realized is that our people are sick of rhetoric. Our people are sick of words, words that have no action behind them. So we said nothing, and we swept the streets.” And when the city garbage crews did not come through, they began piling garbage in the middle of the streets and setting it on fire.

*Pálante: self determination for the Puerto Rican colony in New York City. 1970. Pacifica Radio Archive.*

“New York Y.L.O.”, *Y.L.O.* Vol. 1 No 4, Fall 1969, p 17.

*Y.L.O.* Vol 1 No 5, January 1970, p 20.

61 “Jibaro mi negro lindo,” *Y.L.O.* Vol 2 No 6, February/March 1970. p 5&6.

62 *Pálante: self determination for the Puerto Rican colony in New York City. 1970. Pacifica Radio Archive.*

63 Palante, or Pa'lante, is Puerto Rican for Para Adelante, which could be translated as Forward.

64 Morales, Iris. Palante, Siempre Palante! The Young Lords. New York, NY: Third World Newsreel, 1996.

65 Young Lords Party Central Committee, "Editorial," *Palante*, Vol. 2, No. 4, June 5, 1970, p 10-11.

66 Luis "Tony" Baez, interview by Michael Gonzales, April 2, 2013.

67 Omar López, interview by Michael Gonzales, April 12, 2013.

68 Luis "Tony" Baez, interview by Michael Gonzales, April 2, 2013.

69 Angel del Rivero, interview by José Jiménez, July 11, 2012. <http://gvsu.cdmhost.com/cdm/ref/collection/p16015coll6/id/45/rec/9>

Luis "Tony" Baez, interview by Michael Gonzales, April 2, 2013.

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Luis Baez, interviewed by José Jiménez, August 23, 2012, transcript. <http://gvsu.cdmhost.com/cdm/singleitem/collection/p16015coll6/id/52/rec/40>

70 Young Lords Party Central Committee, "Editorial," *Palante*, Vol. 2, No. 4, June 5, 1970, p 10-11.

71 Luis "Tony" Baez, interview by Michael Gonzales, April 2, 2013.

72 Alfredo Matias Interview #1 Friday, September 29, 1995 DePaul University Library Special Collections and Archives Department Reproduction

73 Omar Lopez, interview by Michael Gonzales, April 12, 2013.

They relied upon the office space and materials of *The Seed*, another independent newspaper that López describes as a "hippy magazine."

74 Omar López, interview by Michael Gonzales, April 12, 2013.

75 Luis "Tony" Baez, interview by Michael Gonzales, April 2, 2013.

76 Luis "Tony" Baez, interview by Michael Gonzales, April 2, 2013.

77 *Pitirre*, Vol. 2, No. 7, Summer 1970.

78 Luis "Tony" Baez, interview by Michael Gonzales, April 2, 2013.

79 Omar López, interview by Michael Gonzales, April 12, 2013.

80 Luis Baez, interviewed by Michael Gonzales, April 2, 2013.

81 Luis Baez, interviewed by Michael Gonzales, April 2, 2013.

Luis Baez, interviewed by José Jiménez, August 23, 2012,

transcript.<http://gvsu.cdmhost.com/cdm/singleitem/collection/p16015coll6/id/52/rec/40>

82 Luis Baez, interviewed by Michael Gonzales, April 2, 2013.

83 Luis Baez, interviewed by Michael Gonzales, April 2, 2013.

84 Ibid.

85 Les Bridges, "Cha Cha Jiménez: The gang leader on the lamb is now the politician on the stump," *The Reader: Chicago's Free Weekly*, Vol. 4, No. 18, Friday, February 7, 1975, p 1 & 6.

86 Omar López, interview by Michael Gonzales, April 12, 2013.