

A Young Lord Remembers



In the 1960s and 70s, Latino youths in New York City organized themselves into the Young Lords Party. Like the Black Panthers, this organization practiced direct action, rejected pacifism and had an explicitly anti-capitalist character. Richie Perez related his experiences and gives an overview of the group's history.

Part One

"We didn't drop from the sky: Our people's struggles created the Young Lords."

Did we fail? Did we succeed? How do we evaluate? How do we judge/evaluate generations (or the progressive sectors within each generation)? And how do we evaluate OURSELVES?

Did they advance the starting point for the next generation? Did they connect the next generation to the freedom struggle—that EVERY generation must wage? Did they create organizational structures to do this?

Did they build the fighting capacity of our community by contributing to the preservation and strengthening of existing, or development of new grassroots leader 09/29/2004 they raise the ideological/political education level of the community?

Did they simultaneously preserve our culture and ADVANCE our culture? (i.e., HIP HOP as continuation of the oral tradition, centrality of dance ...) Did they pay special attention to the political development of women and youth (and thereby challenge male dominance/patriarchy in our movement)?

Did they fight racism within our own community? Did they build ties (however fragile) to other communities of color—so that we didn't have to start from zero? Did they fight accommodationism (co-optation) or did they accommodate? Did they abandon the worst off, the most oppressed and marginalized (i.e., prisoners, people with AIDS, victims of the drug plague, victims of domestic violence ...) or did they say and act on the principle that "we must all rise together?"

Did they maintain a generally anti-capitalist perspective or did they buy into "Latino capitalism," the IMPORTANCE OF "Latino representation in Corporate America," "It's no

use fighting it," "I got to get mine," or any other of the many variations that reflect the capitalist ("I" above "we") ethic. Did they set an example in their practice (how they lived their lives) (observable, measurable behavior) about what really matters in life, about what is worth living and dying for? What it means to commit yourself for life to your people's survival and advancement, in this context—what it means to be a "man?"

1969. Almost 35 years had passed since the Civil Rights Act of 1964 ended legal segregation and outlawed many forms of discrimination based on a person's race or ethnic background, the country they came from, and the language they spoke. The situation of the Puerto Rican people, however, did not improve qualitatively despite new laws on the books outlawing discrimination.

Puerto Ricans played an active role in the social movement that shook America to its foundations and led to the 1964 Civil Rights Act and other advances. Young Puerto Ricans coming of age in the 1960s, however, did not know this—we had been robbed of our history. It was not taught in school, and the only books that addressed our history and reality honestly were in academic Spanish—and were thus inaccessible for the majority of us, who were not college graduates and had also been robbed of our language.

The Young Lords Party was made up primarily of young Puerto Ricans who were born in the U.S. or who had spent most of their lives here. Our primary frame of reference was our people's experience in the urban ghettos of America. Like all young people of that era, we were profoundly affected by the Black Liberation Movement: the struggle to end the Vietnam War: and the "cultural revolution" in values and lifestyle that occurred in the 1960s. We experienced these events, however, as oppressed people who were struggling to reconnect to our own history, determine our own priorities, and chart our own course for the future.

Who were we? We were the sons and daughters of the Puerto Rican pioneers. If we were college students, we were the first in our families. Most got in through the first special admissions programs our communities fought for and won in the mid- and late-60s. We were high school students; community youth, mostly unemployed; people who had come out of the gang experience of the late '50s and '60s; people who had done time; Vietnam veterans; former and still-practicing junkies; people who had been politicized (and disillusioned with the "system") while working in the anti-poverty programs created to divert and co-opt the community's anger during the mid- and late-60s. A few of us had worked in America's factories, as automobile workers in Tarrytown, many more as factory workers in the city.

Although many of us could not recognize it at the time, our elders continued to lead us; and in the mid-60s they paved the way for us once again. They created an organizational base of grassroots groups and connected us to the militant movement that was rocking America—so that we, their children, could continue the struggles they began.

1961: ASPIRA founded

The Young Lords Party was a product of the Puerto Rican experience in America and the movements of the 1960s. It was an organizational response of second-generation Puerto Ricans who had consciously aligned themselves with the radical tradition in Puerto Rican history, an organizational alternative for Puerto Ricans who rejected assimilation and reformism. We developed a code of behavior to which we held ourselves and each other accountable. The 13-Point Program which united us and guided us was our response to real events and problems confronting our people.

In the course of our existence, the Young Lords learned a lot about our people's history and contributed to that history, advancing the starting point for future struggles. Let me share

some of that history with you. We didn't drop from the sky — we were born out of our people's reality.

This description of life in New York's Puerto Rican community was written in 1964 by the Puerto Rican activists who created the first Puerto Rican community-based anti-poverty programs.

"The Puerto Rican New Yorker is caught today in a poverty trap. His low occupational status dictates low family income; his low income condemns his children to limited educational opportunities and achievement, which in turn sentence him to a low occupational status with low pay, and so on and on." (The Puerto Rican Community Development Project: A Proposal for a Self-Help Project to Development the Community by Strengthening the Family, Opening Opportunities for Youth and Making Full Use of Education).

In 1960, unemployment for Puerto Ricans was 10% compared to 7% for African Americans and 4% for whites. Only 13% of the Puerto Ricans 25 and older had completed high school compared to 40% of the white population. (I graduated from Morris High School in the Bronx in 1961. The first in my family to go to college, I went to Hunter-Uptown/today, called Lehman College. I lived through these statistics.) In 1963, 21,000 academic diplomas were granted to high school graduates. Only 331 went to Puerto Ricans (1.6%); and 762 went to African Americans (3.7%). However, when it came to vocational programs, we did "better" — Puerto Ricans received 7.4% of the diplomas and African Americans 15.2%. Obviously, it follows from all of this, that very few Puerto Ricans were going to ever make it to college - let alone graduate.

Add to this: high levels of Puerto Rican students reading way below grade level (and being punished for this, by being tracked into classes that led nowhere, except maybe the armed forces or prison.), the glaring lack of any bilingual programs, and a prevailing attitude that Puerto Ricans, like African Americans, were "dumb," Puerto Ricans had to confront the institutions of education — and we did. Education struggles took place throughout the 1960s in our communities; and they took place against a backdrop of increasing militancy among oppressed people throughout the nation. (I graduated from Morris HS in the Bronx in 1961 and taught in James Monroe HS in the Bronx from 1965 to 1970. I was fortunate to have been able to learn from these struggles and participate in some of them, as did many of those who later joined the Young Lords.)

1964, for example, was marked by both the first of a long series of urban rebellions (what came to be know as the "long, hot summers") breaking out first in Harlem when a white policeman shot and killed an unarmed Black high school student - and the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and a highly publicized declaration of a national "War on Poverty."

At the same time, the same year -1964, in the South, "Freedom Summer" ended with over 1,000 civil rights demonstrators arrested, 37 Black churches bombed or damaged, and 15 people murdered by racists (including civil rights workers James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner).

That same year, Malcolm X founded the Organization of Afro-American Unity, calling for "freedom by any means necessary," and urging African Americans to unite and struggle for control of the institutions that effected the community, including the schools, the police, and local government. (Malcolm X, speech at the founding rally of the OAAU, June 28, 1964).

New York City that year was the scene of a series of public school boycotts and protest against segregated and inferior education. These actions were historic, because of both their mass character, their impact, and their implications. Puerto Ricans played an important role in these events.

Coordinated by the Citywide Committee for Integrated Schools and Rev. Milton Galamison, the first boycott in February 1964 resulted in a 45% absentee rate in the public schools. 460,000 students out of an enrollment of 1,037,757 stayed out of school. At Benjamin Franklin HS in East Harlem only 350 students showed up for school — out of an enrollment of 2,300. 75% of the students in Bedford-Stuyvesant boycotted. Heavy absence were also reported on the lower East Side, the West Side, and the South Bronx. "Freedom Schools," improvised classrooms in churches and community centers drew thousands. There were pickets at 300 of the city's 860 schools; and 3,500 demonstrated at the Board of Education in Brooklyn. The media saw the school boycotts as the "birth of the civil rights movement in New York City," drew the link between this movement and the rent strike movement that had begun a few years earlier, and speculated that the close cooperation and coordination among Black and Puerto Rican boycotters represented the establishment of an "apparently permanent link" between the two communities.

A month later, in March 1964, the Puerto Ricans that were active in the boycotts organized a protest to demand: "more effective integrated and better educational facilities for Puerto Rican children," more Puerto Rican teachers, and a Puerto Rican on the Board of Education. 1,800 people marched across the Brooklyn Bridge to the Board of Education in what the NY Times called "the first citywide civil rights demonstration sponsored by the Puerto Rican community." Those providing leadership to our community during this period included Gilberto Gerena Valentin of the National Association for Puerto Rican Civil Rights and Evelina Antonnetty of United Bronx Parents. (Evelina Antonnetty mentored some of the activists who later founded the NCPRR. Gerena Valentin was part of the organizing group that worked for two years to found the NCPRR.)

In reaction to the challenge of the Black and Puerto Rican struggle, a white backlash emerged, spearheaded by organizations like Parents and Taxpayers. This group organized a boycott to oppose school integration, resulting in a 27% absentee rate. Later, many of the forces involved with Parents and Taxpayers would oppose our challenge to housing discrimination (and the residential segregation it led to and protected) and the establishment of an independent civilian review board.

http://www.tbwt.com/views/specialrpt/special%20report-1_11-03-99.asp

Part Two

In 1965, as urban rebellions exploded in Watts and Chicago, as television audiences saw civil rights marchers attacked in Selma, Alabama, John Lindsay was elected mayor of New York City. Lindsay, acting on a campaign commitment to address housing segregation, proposed a program to build low-income housing in predominantly white sections of the city — what became known as the "scatter-site housing" controversy. White opposition to allowing the people who would occupy "low income housing" — poor Blacks and Puerto Ricans — to live in their communities grew. Italians in Corona, Jews in Forest Hills and Riverdale, white residents of Lindenwood and Howard Beach in Queens were among the most organized of the neighborhood segregationists. Harrison Goldin, then a State Senator, was one of the elected officials who supported the movement to oppose scatter-site housing. Eventually, the scatter-site program was blocked.

****1965 - Manchild in the Promised Land. Also Baldwin**

New York's intensifying racial polarization was starkly exposed in 1966 when a referendum for a civilian review board for the police department was put on the ballot. Sides on the issue

lined up primarily along racial lines, with the majority of African Americans, Puerto Ricans, and liberal whites supporting the establishment of the board — but the overwhelming majority of white New Yorkers opposed it. The Policemen's Benevolent Association (PBA), the Conservative Party, and local groups that had emerged to fight against scatter-site housing formed the core of the anti-civil review forces. The PBA waged a racist fear campaign and put out a poster that showed a white woman coming out of a dark subway station alone. The caption read: "The Civilian Review Board must be stopped!...Your life may depend on it." The Civilian Review Board proposal was defeated at the polls.

1966- Rebellion in Puerto Rican community in Chicago. Intense infiltration, surveillance, and disruption are part of government response. This is documented in: Puerto Rican Chicago (Padilla, 1987); Protectors of Privilege: Red Squads & Police Repression in Urban America (Donner, 1990). Donner also documents infiltration of NYC Young Lords in 1969.)

In 1967, "racial disorders" rocked more than 160 U.S. cities. More than 30,000 national guard troops were deployed in 18 separate cities. In July, 11 died in Newark. In Detroit, 43 were killed, 1,000 injured, and 7,000 arrested. That summer, Puerto Ricans rioted in El Barrio after a police killing. During the rebellion two more community residents were shot to death by police. In New Haven, Puerto Ricans rioted after a white restaurant owner killed a Puerto Rican.

Puerto Ricans and The Long Hot Summers

Between 1965 and 1971, riots broke out in the following Puerto Rican communities, indicating the growing anger among our people: 1965: Chicago; 1966: Chicago, Perth Amboy; 1967: El Barrio, New Haven; 1969: Passaic, Hartford; 1970: El Barrio, South Bronx, Hartford; 1971: Camden, Hoboken, Long Branch-NJ.) RESEARCH NEEDED ON EACH OF THESE.

****1967 - Down These Mean Streets**

By 1968 then, national and local developments had resulted in both an intensified racial polarization in the country and an increased awareness and militancy among people of color. For many activists, the assassinations of Malcolm X (19), Martin Luther King Jr. (19), and Robert Kennedy (19) were only the most current events that confirmed and underscored Rap Brown's message that "Violence was an American as Cherry Pie." The widespread belief among activists of government infiltration, set ups, and subversion of civil rights organizations was supported by the highly visible nationwide program of destruction that the FBI launched against the Black Panther Party and Native American and Chicano revolutionary activists.

Keep in mind that all this occurred alongside a growing anti-Vietnam war movement and almost daily reports of brutal police attacks and beatings, tear-gassings, and shootings of anti-war and civil rights demonstrators across the nation. (The impact of the church bombing in the South that Spike Lee has recently re-engaged: I lived through this and it influenced my political thinking deeply.)

It was in this context that the historic struggles for community control of the schools and access to the universities came to maturity. Responding to growing militancy in communities of color, a plan to "decentralize" the NY City school system was drafted by the Lindsay administration; it called for the establishment of local community school boards with limited powers. This was not the "community control" that our communities had fought for; and ultimate power remained in the hands of the central Board of Education, and the teachers' and supervisor's unions. Despite this, the United Federation of Teachers, led by Albert Shanker,

bitterly opposed any "civilian interference" in the running of the schools. The UFT called a teacher's strike which lasted 90 days. During this time, the city was polarized even further with charges of "anti-Semitism" being launched against Black and Puerto Rican community control advocates and "white racism" being charged against the teacher's union. Centers of community control activism were located in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, Harlem, El Barrio, the Lower East Side, and the South Bronx, where United Bronx Parents (led by Evelina Antonetty, Dona Rosa Escobar, and others whose roles must be documented) played a pivotal role in organizing parents and students.

By 1968, struggles on the nation's campuses had also intensified, with students of color demanding autonomous departments and curriculum, more Third World faculty, and changes in admissions standards. (This is a good example of how each struggle advances the starting point for future struggles.) These struggles were organized by the hundreds of minority students that had entered the universities through smaller, special admissions programs in the 1960s (i.e., the SEEK Program in the City University of New York). Finding themselves in institutions that were hostile to their language, culture, and history, they maintained their ties to their communities and became the backbone of the Open Admissions movement.

The first major struggle for Open Admissions and ethnic studies occurred in San Francisco State College. Spearheaded by the campus Black Student Union, a student strike shut the campus down. Ronald Reagan, who was then governor of California, ignored the educational concerns raised by the students and dismissed them as "militants determined to substitute violence and coercion for orderly grievance procedures available to all." A hardliner replacement, S.I. Hayakawa, was put in as college president to supervise the "restoration of order." With Governor Reagan's very public support, he supervised the police occupation of the campus and the violent repression of demonstrators. Hayakawa defended the police occupation of the campus, banned rallies, and condemned Black and Chicano community leaders who supported the strike. He said Open Admissions represented giving preference to "unqualified" minority students over more qualified applicants. Hayakawa later reemerged on the national scene as one of the founders and representative of the English-only movement.

By the end of the Fall 1969 semester at San Francisco State: 731 students, faculty and community supporters had been arrested; 80 students and 32 policemen had been injured; and there were scores of fires and two bombings of campus buildings. Finally, the college administration agreed to waive entrance requirements for 10% of the freshmen applicants and to immediately recruit 1,000 Third World students. This raised the number of students of color to 4,750 (out of a total enrollment of 17,700 - 26%). A hard won and partial victory.

As the San Francisco State struggle was winding down, the fight over Open Admissions in New York was heating up. In 1968, 54% of New York's public school enrollment was Black and Puerto Rican. 55 out of every 100 of these students would drop out before graduation; and only 13% would graduate with an academic diploma.

At the time, a high school average in the mid- to upper 80s was required for admission to one of the City University of New York's senior colleges. While 45% of white high school students graduated with over 80s average, just about 15% of the Black and Puerto Rican students did. In 1969, before Open Admissions, first-time entering freshmen to all CUNY schools were 13.8% Black, 5.9% Puerto Rican, and 80.3% white. Black and Puerto Rican campus groups, along with community supporters, charged the university officials with maintaining segregated, racially-exclusionary institutions.

Challenging Institutional Racial Exclusion in NY's Colleges

At City College in Harlem, where Black and Puerto Rican students made up only 3% of the

total student body, campus groups united to demand: (1) A separate school of Black and Puerto Rican studies; (2) A separate freshman orientation program for Black and Puerto Rican freshmen; (3) A voice for SEEK students in the governance of the SEEK program, including the hiring and firing of personnel; (4) A requirement that all education majors take Black and Puerto Rican history and Spanish; (5) An admissions policy that would ensure that the racial composition of all entering classes reflect the Black and Puerto Rican population of the New York City high schools. The demands were signed by the "Black and Puerto Rican Student Community."

After their demands were ignored, 200 Black and Puerto Rican students locked themselves inside the gates of the college's south campus, cutting off access to 8 of the college's 22 buildings. They renamed the occupied campus "Harlem University." White radical students seized two more buildings in support of the demands put forward by the Black and Puerto Rican demonstrators.

Among the groups opposing the CCNY takeover was the Jewish Defense League. They filed for a court injunction to end the occupation of the South Campus; and it was at this point that the JDL coined the term "reverse racism."

During the struggle, violent confrontations broke out as white students tried to break the strike. Harlem residents supported the students with food and blankets and joined the fighting.

Puerto Rican students on other campuses also took action in support of the demands raised at CCNY. At Brooklyn College, for example, students took over the president's office, fought off reactionary whites (including the JDL, which was formed on the Brooklyn College campus), and were attacked by police. 17 Brooklyn College activists were arrested in their homes - at night—for leading the struggle for Open Admissions. This is an important story from our history—it should be documented.

And let me tell you, it was like integrating a previously segregated college. And we weren't like the students in the South in one important way—WE WEREN'T PACIFISTS. WE WERE NOT COMMITTED TO A NON-VIOLENT ETHIC, a non-violent code of behavior. So when we integrated campuses, while our primary tactics were non-violent, we got to kick some ass too, punch motherfuckers out, throw racists down the stairs. We did non-violent actions — but it was a TACTICAL question, not a matter of PRINCIPLE. It was important that our antagonists knew this.

In 1970, the City University of New York adopted a policy which guaranteed admission to every graduate of the city's high schools. As a result of Open Admissions, the number of Black and Puerto Rican freshmen in CUNY more than doubled in the first year. Fifty percent of the Black students and 66% of the Puerto Rican students would not have qualified for any level of CUNY without Open Admissions and the replacing of the traditional admissions requirements (Open Admissions and Equal Access: A Study of Ethnic Groups in the City University of New York. Harvard Education Review, 1979.) Another hard won - but still partial victory.

These were just some of the community struggles that politicized young Puerto Ricans in the 1960s, and contributed to the development of consciousness, organization and leadership in our community. The Young Lords Party became the organizational home for many of the activists that took part in these struggles and for many more that hungered for an organization that would enable them to join the struggle.

http://www.tbwt.com/views/specialrpt/special%20report-3_5-22-00.asp

Part Three

A Young Lord's High School Organizing Story

I want to share with you a story about one of my first organizing experience as a Young Lord. Because of my background, I eventually became a youth and student organizer in the YLP. My first major organizing assignment was among high school students in the Bronx where I worked very closely with Black Panther cadre assigned to the same task. At Morris HS, for example, we supported the formation and development of a student group called WANTU-GENTE (WANTU is "people" in Swahili; GENTE is "people" in Spanish). It was a Black and Puerto Rican student group that modeled itself consciously after the Young Lords and Black Panthers, combining the principles of the YLP 13-Point Program, the BPP 10-Point Program, and their own school-related demands—freedom of assembly, freedom of speech, and freedom of press—as expressed through student-led discussion groups, assemblies, and newsletters that were not subject to school administration prior approval.)

We coordinated a series of very militant and highly organized student walkouts and a huge high school anti-war demonstration. This demo pulled out more than 1,000 Puerto Rican and Black high school students from 5 schools. It was infiltrated by undercover agents, and was eventually attacked by the police as we prepared to picket the Bronx office of the Selective Service. Responding to what they saw as a dangerous development, The Wall Street Journal (!) wrote a front-page article that linked our efforts to a nationwide threat to educational stability. The article was headlined: "Pupil Power. Disruptions Trouble Some U.S. High Schools As Youths Ask Rights . They Demand Officials Share Authority; Black Panthers Enter New York Dispute. What Happens to Education? (Wall Street Journal, Nov. 6, 1970, p. 1)

"The confrontation at Morris High isn't just another racial dispute....The issue at Morris is student demands for new 'political rights'—demands that would involve fundamental changes in the basic structure of authority at the school. The students seek total freedom to distribute all types of political literature in the school, to invite representatives of all political persuasions to speak at school assemblies and to use the school public address system for political purposes. The students say the principal shouldn't have veto power over any of these activities...

"School administrators' worry over the rising discontent is compounded by the nature of the support the students are getting....The Panthers are enthusiastically schooling the students on the same uncompromising tactics, rhetoric and discipline that the radical left has brought to other causes in this country in the recent years...

"School officials and others in the area say the Black Panthers and Young Lords have skillfully built up the students' dissatisfaction with the school. 'The kids talk about them (the Panthers and Lords) all the time,' says 15 year old Tony Alers, a Puerto Rican ninth-grader."

Describing the activities of WANTU-GENTE as a group "whose members have close links with the Panthers and the Young Lords," the article continued:

"At a prearranged time that Wednesday morning, Wantu-Gente members ran through the halls calling for students to leave classes. Most did so and gathered in the street outside. Several Young Lords and two members of militant tenants' organization in the area, both with walkie-talkies, appeared to egg the students on. Scuffles developed between officers and students, and some of both groups were hurt. Some students threw bottles at the police from

upper floors of the schools. The officers arrested several demonstrators, and the school was closed for the day.

"Militant students tried to continue the boycott the following Thursday and Friday, but only a few hundred students left school those days."

Only a few hundred students are not bad. The key to the successes of the YLP was the insistence on the building of mass struggles - for it is only in mass struggle that the community can develop the political consciousness, organization, and leadership it needs to survive and advance. The struggle at Morris HS and at other schools was a good example of this. Many of those young activists joined the YLP. Some helped form the Third World Student League years later. Others became part of the Puerto Rican Student Union. Morris HS sent an impressive contingent to the YLP's UN March which brought out 10,000 people in 1970 and for years served as an example for other young people.

Other YLP Offensives and Organizing Campaigns

As a revolutionary group, the Young Lords Party believed that poverty and discrimination could not be eliminated, that independence for Puerto Rico and self-determination in the U.S. could not be achieved without the destruction of monopoly capitalism (imperialism), a system which routinely generates extremes of wealth and poverty. Seeing that historically no wealthy ruling class had ever stepped down voluntarily, the YLP believed that violent struggle would ultimately be needed for liberation; and keeping with that, it advocated for and educated the community about the right of colonized people to armed self-defense and armed struggle.

In its daily organizing work, this meant that the YLP and its supporters refused to be limited to tactics there were defined as "legal" as they intervened in the social issues of the day. Non-violent tactics predominated; but if confrontation or breaking the law was necessary to move an issue or campaign forward, that's what was done. A few examples:

—The garbage offensive. When East Harlem residents identified uncollected garbage as a major problem, the Young Lords, joined by the community, began sweeping the streets and stacking the garbage up on the corners. However, when the Sanitation Dept. continued to ignore the situation, we burned the garbage in the streets, blocking major traffic arteries used by commuters to leave Manhattan for suburbia. When the police came and tried to arrest people, fighting broke out. Afterwards, garbage started getting picked up regularly.

—Tuberculosis. Every weekend, teams of Lords, supporters, and doctors went door to door, testing for tuberculosis and lead poisoning. High concentrations of people in El Barrio tested positive (they either had t.b. or had been exposed to t.b.). After the city refused to station a t.b. testing truck in East Harlem, the Lords seized the truck, and with the help of doctors and health care workers, tested hundreds of people. When the police came to get the truck, the community surrounded it and prevented the arrest of the Lords and the return of the truck. Afterwards, the city started assigning truck coverage to poor communities too. These activities drew public attention and forced city officials to allocate resources to deal with the problems of tuberculosis and lead poisoning.

—The old Lincoln Hospital. The Lords, the Panthers, hospital workers (organized in the Health Revolutionary Unity Movement), and community people (organized as the Think Lincoln Committee) set up "patient-worker complaint tables" in Lincoln and other hospitals. Hundreds of grievances were recorded; but the hospital administration refused to address them. The old Lincoln Hospital was in a building that had been condemned and was severely understaffed and under-financed. After a list of demands and mass demonstrations were also

ignored, the Lords occupied the hospital in the middle of the night. The next morning the media publicized the occupation and the issues that led to it. After hundreds of angry police surrounded the hospital, the Lords slipped out; and only two people were arrested. The publicity about the terrible conditions in the old Lincoln Hospital accelerated the building of the new Hospital that exists today.

—Lincoln Detox. During the occupation of the old Lincoln Hospital, a preventive medicine community clinic was set up in the auditorium. Afterwards, another demand was met; and the historic acupuncture-detoxification program was established, with licensed doctors, acupuncturists, and staff members hired from the community (including from the YLP and BPP). Ahead of its time, for years the Lincoln Hospital Detox Program served as an international model of treating heroin and alcohol addiction with acupuncture instead of substituting methadone, another addicting chemical—before it was closed down by Mayor Koch in the '70s.

—Prisons & the 2nd People's Church. Working with groups of politicized prisoners, the Young Lords successfully pressured the Dept. of Corrections to institute a series of reforms (i.e., educational programs, improved health care). After a member of the organization was found dead in a Rikers Island cell, the YLP argued that the Corrections Dept. was covering up a killing by guards by calling it a "suicide." Citing other cases, the YLP said this was a routine cover-up mechanism used when prisoners were killed. To further protest the killing, highlight the demands for prison reform, and to educate the community about the right to self-defense in the face of government repression, the Young Lords seized - for a second time - a church in East Harlem. This time we were armed. The occupation of the church lasted for over a month. During that time, "serve the people" programs (i.e., breakfast program, preventive health programs) and the activities of the Inmates Liberation Front were run out of the church. When the Attica rebellion occurred, soon after, protesting prisoners requested a Young Lord participate in the outside negotiating team. Two members did participate, including one that had recently been released and had been part of the Young Lords chapter in Attica.

—In the colleges. Many of the activists who joined the YLP and similar groups in the late '60s had been politicized in the struggle for Open Admissions and Black and Puerto Rican Studies. The YLP enjoyed a close working relationship with many college groups who called upon the organization to support campus-based struggles and in turn supported community-based campaigns. Many of these groups came together to form the Puerto Rican Student Union, which later became part of the Young Lords. Some of the activities that PRSU, the YLP and campus clubs carried out included: consistent education and organization for the independence of Puerto Rico; building takeovers in support of bilingual education and ethnic studies; protests against ROTC recruiting, the Vietnam War and the military occupation of Puerto Rico; disruptions of "academic" conferences that excluded students and community, and organizing a massive student conference at Columbia University to build "Free Puerto Rico Committees" on every campus and strengthen the organizing for Puerto Rico's liberation.

—Police brutality. Community residents frequently ran into Young Lords' offices to ask for help in stopping police abuse. The Young Lords were committed to interfering physically when they witnessed police brutality, unconstitutional street sweeps, or illegal arrests. This led to constant confrontations, hand-to-hand combat, arrests, and government surveillance and repression.

The Young Lords were a power resource for the community. People came to us whenever they needed help. We helped people who had no voice find their voice. We supported parents

who were fighting racism and the mistreatment of their children in the public schools. We stood side by side with workers who asked us to help them to get rid of a gangster-controlled union. We fought the police after they killed a gypsy cab driver. We utilized every method at our disposal to educate and unify our people: the Palante newspaper, the Palante radio show on WBAI, pamphlets, and community education sessions in basements and community centers. The organization served as a bridge, a portal, that allowed people, young and old, to fight for survival and advancement — to connect to the historic mass struggle for freedom and respect. The consciousness, self-knowledge, and pride of a generation was profoundly influenced by the Young Lords.

Conclusion

The young people who formed the YLP saw ourselves as the continuation of the radical Puerto Rican tradition. We united around an advanced program that called for the liberation of Puerto Rican and self-determination in the U.S. We believed that all of us had to transform, that we had all been infected with the poisons of imperialism: racism, sexism, classism. We called this "the revolution within the revolution." The fight against individualism, self-centeredness and ego was part of this. We stressed self-discipline, collective leadership and collective decision-making. The "do your own thing" spirit that many people brought with them weakened our community's ability to carry out effective political action .

We rejected racism, took a strong stand in recognition of our African and Taino heritage (at a period when many Boricuas used to say they were "Spanish") and called for the unity of people of color. We rejected sexism, machismo and male chauvinism; and led by the women in the organization, we attempted to remake ourselves—change our thinking and behavior—while we fought to change the world.

The YLP had a class analysis. We prepared for class war, not race war. Our struggle was with the rich, the white ruling class and corporate America, not with white people.

We did not believe that every Puerto Rican was on the people's side; we knew that the slave master and the colonialists always co-opted a strata of the colonized people to use as buffers.

We promoted a value system and rules of discipline that governed the way we treated each other, our people, our allies, and our enemies. We identified with the most oppressed and believed that the whole community must rise together. It was not just about the most educated or talented; their job was to use their acquired skills to serve and protect the community.

After the YLP - A living Legacy

Most of the members of the Young Lords found ways to serve and protect the community even after the organization ceased to exist. A few became prominent media figures. Some became lawyers or union organizers. Some became part of the clandestine Puerto Rican and Black Liberation movements. Many became the backbone of future organizations and struggles. Throughout the 1970s and '80s former Young Lords were "presente" in key community movements, like the struggle to defend the Lincoln Hospital Accupuncture Detoxification Program (started by the YLP and BPP); the movement to save and expand Hostos Community College; the survival battles around Puerto Rican Studies and Open Admissions; the formation of "minority" construction workers coalitions and challenges to the discriminatory construction industry; media campaigns like the one that established the Sunday salsa show on WBAI (still going today), and Realidades on Channel 13; the nationwide campaign against the racist and sexist movie, Fort Apache, the Bronx. And the movement to free the Puerto Rican Nationalists.

After the YLP ended, I was able to find ways to stay involved in militant community struggles that often were recognized as being in the Young Lords tradition. I, like many YLP cadre, even after the organization ceased to exist, consciously tried to act in accordance with the 13-Point Program and Rules of Discipline. In my heart, and I hope, in my actions, I am still a Young Lord.

After the YLP, while teaching in the Department of Puerto Rican Studies at Brooklyn College, I was involved in the defense of Open Admissions and Puerto Rican Studies, and the nationwide opposition to the reactionary Bakke Decision. Although we couldn't turn back the reactionary national tidal wave, we fought with dignity and earned the respect, and/or fear of our adversaries.

As a result of political activity on the campus, along with student activists, half of whom were women, I was arrested three times, and beaten by the police (on the campus, in the police station, and on an operating table at Kings County Hospital). I was barred from ever setting foot on the campus (I once escaped hidden in a car owned and driven by one of my students), put on trial for two years, and, of course, fired. The jury that fired me was made up of the presidents of all the colleges in the City University of New York. Since this was clearly a kangaroo court, we disrupted the "trial." I wasn't able to work in any college of the City University for years. (Eventually, some of my college president "jurors" died and retired; and I snuck back in, teaching at night at Hunter College. (I left voluntarily in the early 90s.)

Because we were a genuine mass movement with a cause whose legitimacy was widely recognized by our community, and we were organized and politically aware, none of the more than 12 people arrested in the Brooklyn College struggle went to jail - although we were faced with an avalanche of charges, ranging from trespassing to assault and conspiracy to incite a riot. Of course, the student activists, who had not yet earned their degrees suffered the most. Today, the majority of these activists have found ways to continue serving the people.

While I was teaching at Brooklyn College, I was also the faculty advisor to the campus-based Puerto Rican Alliance and a founding member of the Revolutionary Collective (a group that survived the violent demise of the post-YLP Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers Organization and had reunited to struggle together in Brooklyn). By chance, I reconnected to some old YLP friends who were leaders in the U.S.-based movement to free the Puerto Rican nationalist prisoners. Quickly, we all recognized the significant bonds of unity we still shared, and many of the militants at Brooklyn College became active in the movement to free the imprisoned Puerto Rican patriots.

At the peak of our activities, educating our community and building a base of support for the freedom of the Nationalists, while simultaneously defending the right of armed struggle for national liberation, we seized the Statue of Liberty in October 1977. This was a transcendental political action which once again put the question of Puerto Rican independence on the world agenda. One of my best memories is that when the Nationalists were released, soon after the takeover, we were able to give Lolita Lebron the flag we hung on the Statue of Liberty. In front of thousands of ecstatic people, she wrapped it lovingly around her shoulders. The circle was complete.

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