

# Starting a Revolution at Church

Religion, Race, and Community Organizing in Chicago's Puerto Rican Community

By

D. Owen Carter

Presented to the Department of History  
In Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the BA Degree

The University of Chicago  
April 8, 2022

**Abstract:**

Chicago's Puerto Rican community, between the time it formed in the early 1950s to the grassroots activism of the late 1960s, was organized by Puerto Ricans leaders using organizational strategies that had existed in Puerto Rico ever since the beginning of US colonization in 1900. This paper investigates the conservative community structures that initially consolidated the Puerto Rican community, then turns to the egalitarian model that replaced it, which emphasized serving the community's most marginalized members. Paying attention to religious organizations, this paper traces the service-oriented strategy used by the Hermanos Cheos in Puerto Rico through to Chicago, where members of the Cheos joined the Caballeros de San Juan and created a Christian community known as la Familia de Dios. This community that resisted conservative gender structures and created a space of community members to redeem themselves, rather than be cast out and alienated. Then the paper turns to the broader transition in community politics as many Puerto Ricans desired to build a community based on solidarity rather than hierarchy both among Puerto Ricans and with other groups who were facing the same kinds of oppression. This culminated with the politicization of the Young Lords gang and the formation of the Rainbow Coalition in 1969. The strategy they used to accomplish this arose from the religious organizations, like the Caballeros, who had come before them and their willingness to engage not only in revolutionary politics but revolutionary religion.

## **Acknowledgements**

First, I want to thank my partner, Mya Rivera, for supporting me through my research and for talking through many of my ideas. I would also like to thank her mother, Noni Lazú, who told me so much of what she knows about the Puerto Rican community in Chicago and helped me connect many of the dots with information that simply hasn't been written down anywhere. I also want to thank my parents for reading over my work and providing feedback, and my mom specifically, for helping me think through my theological questions throughout the process. I also thank my friends Abed Alsolaiman and Davis Larkin for the numerous conversations we had that helped me articulate my thinking.

I want to also thank my advisor, Adam Green, for being able to take my thoughts and organize them into one single nugget of information, and for providing feedback that showed me when I was on the right track and when I wasn't. I also want to thank my preceptor, Alex Hofmann, and my peer group, who provided much needed emotional support, writing advice, and general feedback.

I want to thank Morgen McIntosh Hodgetts and Derek Potts at the DePaul University Special Collections who provided enormous assistance during the research process and with whom I had extremely informative conversations. I also want to thank Prof. Ken Sawyer at McCormick Theological Seminary, who has kept a small but informationally dense collection on the YLO, LADO and other associated organizations.

I want to thank the many conversation partners I have had throughout the last year—Yolanda Nieves, my former professor Nicholas Kryczka, Michael Staudenmaier, Thomas Kelliher, and Fr. Roger Haight. Thank you all for providing insight and pushing me in new directions.

ALAC – Archdiocesan Latin American Committee (later incarnation of CCSS)  
 Armitage Avenue Methodist Church  
 Blackstone Rangers, later the Black P. Stone Nation  
 BPP – Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, Illinois Chapter  
 BSC – Black Strategy Center  
 Caballeros de San Juan, Los (The Knights of St. John)  
 Casa Central Evangélica (Evangelical Center)  
 CCCO – Coordinating Council of Community Organizations  
 CCLP – Concerned Citizens of Lincoln Park  
 CCMS – Chicago City Missionary Society  
 CCSS – Cardinal’s Committee for the Spanish Speaking of Chicago  
 CFM – Chicago Freedom Movement  
 CIC – Catholic Interracial Council  
 Continentals  
 CVL – Conservative Vice Lords  
 CYO – Catholic Youth Organization  
 Damas de María, Las (The Ladies of Mary), also Las Hijas de María (the Daughters)  
 FALN – Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional Puertorriqueña (Armed Forces of Puerto Rican National Liberation)  
 FCC – First Congregational Church  
 Hachas Viejas (Old Hatchets)  
 Hermanos Cheos, Los (The Joe Brothers)  
 Hermanos en la Familia de Dios, Los (The Brothers in the Family of God)  
 IAF – Industrial Areas Foundation  
 Isham YMCA  
 LADO – Latin American Defense Organization  
 Latin Kings  
 LPCA – Lincoln Park Conservation Association  
 NSCM – North Side Cooperative Ministry  
 Office of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico  
 PRC – Puerto Rican Congress of Mutual Aid  
 SACC – Spanish Action Committee of Chicago  
 SAF – Spanish American Federation  
 St. Michael’s Catholic Church  
 St. Teresa’s Catholic Church  
 SCLC – Southern Christian Leadership Conference  
 UPTIGHT – United People To Inform Good-doers Here and There  
 UTC – Urban Training Center for Christian Mission  
 YCS – Young Christian Students  
 YLO – Young Lords Organization, Young Lords gang  
 WLAC – Woodlawn Latin-American Committee (later the Caballeros de San Juan)  
 WRU – Welfare Recipients Union  
 WSO – West Side Organization for Full Employment

Alinsky, Saul – famed organizer whose method influenced community organizing across Chicago

Alvarez, Daniel – Cuban minister and director of Casa Central

Benedict, Don – White minister and community organizer on the West Side

Cody, John – Cardinal of Chicago Archdiocese after 1965

Cuza, Luis – Cuban volunteer with LPCA and SAF, worked with the Young Lords

Daley, Richard J. – mayor of Chicago

Díaz, Juan – conservative Puerto Rican member of Caballeros and leader of SACC

Egan, John J. – Catholic priest involved in various community organizations, including the Caballeros and UTC

Flores, Carlos – Afro-Puerto Rican Young Lord

Fort, Jeff – leader of the Blackstone Rangers

Hampton, Fred – leader of the BPP, murdered by the police in 1969

Hargraves, Archie – African American minister and community organizer on the West Side

Headley, Donald – Catholic priest who worked with the Caballeros, the CCLP, and at St. Teresa’s Catholic Church

Herrero, Sergio – Cuban minister at Armitage Avenue Methodist Church

Hunt, Lester – White organizer who worked with the Caballeros

Ignatin, Noel – Mexican member of LADO and the Young Lords

Jiménez, Antonio – Eugenia Rodríguez’ husband

Jiménez, Daisy – Cha-Cha Jiménez’ sister

Jiménez, José “Cha-Cha” – Puerto Rican leader of the Young Lords

Johnson, Bruce – White minister at Armitage Avenue Church, worked with the Young Lords, murdered in 1969

King, Martin Luther – African American leader of the SCLC

López, Obed – Mexican leader of LADO

López, Omar – Mexican Young Lords and brother of Obed López

Mahon, Leo – Catholic priest who worked with the Caballeros

Martínez, Guillermo – Caballero

Meyer, Albert – Cardinal of Chicago Archdiocese between 1958 and 1965

Nolan, Janet – Catholic nun who conducted an ethnography in 1966 of the West Town community

Ramos, Manuel – Young Lord murdered by the police in 1969

Rebollar, Ricardo – Mexican friend of Cha-Cha Jiménez’ at St. Teresa’s

Reed, James – White minister and leader at the NSCM

Rodríguez, Danny – Young Lord and son of Jesús Rodríguez

Rodríguez, Eugenia (doña Genia) – Dama de María, sister of Jesús Rodríguez and mother of Cha-Cha Jiménez

Rodríguez, Jesús “Chu” (don Jesús) – Hermano Cheo and leader of the Hermanos en la Familia de Dios

Ruiz, Carlos “Caribe” – Puerto Rican leader of the Puerto Rican Congress

Silverman, Louis – White member of the YCS and Caballeros’ PR man

Sosa, Juan – Hermano Cheo, Caballero and organizer working with the CCSS

Torres, José – Puerto Rican minister at the First Congregational Church

von Hoffman, Nicholas – White organizer who worked with the Caballeros

## Introduction

In April of 1968, José “Cha-Cha” Jiménez was in solitary confinement at the Chicago House of Corrections. Cha-Cha was the leader of the Young Lords, a turf gang in the Lincoln Park neighborhood of Chicago’s North Side, in prison on drug charges. That month, riots broke out in major cities across the country in the aftermath of Martin Luther King’s assassination. Cha-Cha witnessed rioters filing past his cell and heard over the radio about a group called the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense and their shoot-out with the Oakland Police. Mexican immigrants poured in as well, harassed by prison guards who couldn’t understand them. Cha-Cha offered to translate. One day, the harassment turned to Cha-Cha. A Black prison guard “berated him at full volume for ‘trying to act black.’ [...] ‘You are not black, [...] you are just trying to pretend like you are black so they don’t kick your ass, so they don’t fuck you.’” After silence fell across the cell block, a Black prisoner shouted, “Shut the fuck up, you pig!” and others joined in. Cha-Cha recalled, “They defended me [...] That had a profound impact on me.”<sup>1</sup>

Serving a 60-day sentence, Cha-Cha had a lot of time on his hands, and for the first time since he had been in middle school, he read. The prison librarian, a member of the Nation of Islam, didn’t trust him until Cha Cha’s dark-skinned cousin, also in prison, explained that he was not White but Puerto Rican. The first book Cha-Cha checked out was *The Seven Storey Mountain*, a book by Thomas Merton, a man who felt called by God to convert to Catholicism and underwent a spiritual transformation that led him to become a cloistered monk. Reminded of his own Catholic upbringing, Cha-Cha felt like he, too, could make a change.

“So I went to confession there, and then I felt good, you know, like, how Catholics feel when they go to confession, they feel real good... I had cleansed my—myself. My soul

---

<sup>1</sup> Johanna Fernández, *The Young Lords: A Radical History* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 35-36.

and [chuckles] everything. And I joke about it now, but I mean, I really took it serious, because it was like standing up for your rights. Because, you know, other inmates are taunting you. Because, "Ayy, this guy..." you know, "Cha-Cha got a priest coming up here, he's crazy." You know? But... but I was standing up for... what I believed at that the time. Again, we were Catholic... my mother had ingrained in us."<sup>2</sup>

Cha Cha was ready not only to get his life back together, but to fight for his community. In the remainder of his sentence, he would read Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, and commit to transforming the Young Lords from a turf gang to a political organization like the Black Panthers. He would leave prison ready to save his community.

This anecdote, in various forms, is featured in most narratives of the Chicago Young Lords, a group that has become profoundly important to the political history of the Puerto Rican diaspora in the mainland US.<sup>3</sup> Ironically, however, the theme of religion within the broader story of Young Lords is virtually non-existent, and its appearance comes out of nowhere like a “jack-in-the-box.”<sup>4</sup> This usage of Cha-Cha’s transformation can make it seem incidental and trope-like—a man who, through his penitence, learns to right his wrongs while in prison. But taken seriously, the major themes of Cha-Cha’s transformation—race and religion—hint at something very complex. Cha-Cha’s transformation should be seen as embedded within a Puerto Rican community that was undergoing rapid change in the late 1960s.

---

<sup>2</sup> José Jiménez, “Jose Jimenez Video Interview and Biography, Interview 1,” interviewed by a GVSU student, Mar. 15<sup>th</sup>, 2012, video recording, Young Lords in Lincoln Park Interviews, GVSU.

<sup>3</sup> Fernández, *The Young Lords*, 35-36; Michael R. Gonzales, “Ruffians and Revolutionaries: The Development of the Young Lords Organization in Chicago” (MA Thesis, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2015), 8; Michael Gonzales, “‘Latin Power to Latin People’: the Black Panther Party’s Influence on the Revolutionary Politics of the Young Lords Organization,” *Journal of African American Studies* 23 (2019): 336; Jaqueline Lazú, “The Chicago Young Lords: (Re)constructing Knowledge and Revolution,” *Centro Journal* 25, No. 2 (Fall, 2003): 43; Karen A. Secrist, “Occupy Lincoln Park: the Militant Drama of the Young Lords Organization,” *Journal of African American Studies* 23 (2019): 393; José “Cha Cha” Jiménez, “The Young Lords, Puerto Rican Liberation, and the Black Freedom Struggle: Interview with José ‘Cha Cha’ Jiménez,” interviewed by Ángel G. Flores-Rodríguez, ca. Jan. 2012, transcript, *OAH Magazine of History* 26, No. 1 (Jan. 2012): 62; José Jiménez, “Jose (Cha-Cha) Jimenez,” *National Young Lords*, WordPress, accessed Apr. 26<sup>th</sup>, 2021, [https://web.archive.org/web/20210510174402/http://nationalyounglords.com/?page\\_id=15](https://web.archive.org/web/20210510174402/http://nationalyounglords.com/?page_id=15).

<sup>4</sup> This is a much larger problem in American history, see Jon Butler, “Jack-in-the-Box Faith: The Religion Problem in Modern American History,” *The Journal of American History* 90, No. 4 (Mar. 2004): 1357-1378.

This paper is about Chicago's Puerto Rican community of the 1950s and 60s and its organization. This community, like any other, needs to be approached as something that was already organized, not in need of organization. Its history was one of maintaining the kernel of community in the mainland, through rituals that created a sense of solidarity and obligation. The community adapted, changing to survive in an increasingly oppressive city. It became alienated, its members excluded from oppressive structures and forced to create their own. Through this framework, we can see that Cha-Cha's transformation in prison caused him to feel a profound new sense of solidarity with his family and those around him. Through the act of confession, he committed himself to fight for and serve his community. Puerto Ricans arrived in Chicago not as blank slates, but with evolving forms of organization that enabled practice of a new Puerto Rican community in the mainland.

#### Religion, Race, and Organizing a Community:

This paper, in particular, seeks to problematize the category of "religion." There has been a tendency in historical writing to exclude what is normatively called "religion," and treat anything "religious" as mostly incidental.<sup>5</sup> When religion does appear, it is, in the words of religious historian Jon Butler, like a "jack-in-the-box," appearing out of nowhere and receding just as quickly.<sup>6</sup> By talking about "religion" only in this way, one reifies the distinction between religious and secular, reinforcing a secular bias in American history. Since the line between

---

<sup>5</sup> Within this paper's subject area, this has begun to change within the last couple of years (2021-2022). Felipe Hinojosa makes roughly the same critique in *Apostles of Change: Latino Radical Politics, Church Occupations, and the Fight to Save the Barrio* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2021), where he discusses church takeovers through a religious lens. Likewise, Jorge J. Rodríguez V discusses the Young Lords take-over of First Spanish United Methodist Church in East Harlem in "The Más Allá at First Spanish-The People's Church: Race, Religion, and the New York Young Lords" (Ph.Diss., Union Theological Seminary, 2021). Also see *Faith and Power: Latino Religious Politics Since 1945*, ed. Felipe Hinojosa, Maggie Elmore, and Sergio M. González (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2022).

<sup>6</sup> Butler, "Jack-in-the-Box Faith."



secular and religion is so blurry, this bias can't be based on any objective rationale. "Religion" has historically been defined from a Christian perspective, assuming that all "religions" have a set of shared traits—a set of beliefs, a set of morals, and an organizational structure, just to name a few. The academic study of religion, likewise, has historically constructed a hierarchical classification system that essentially ranks the proximity of various "world religions" to Christianity.<sup>7</sup> As civilizing missions and biologized racism went out of style, they were replaced in universities by a liberal model of religion that unified "science, morality, and 'true religion,'" allowing scholars of the non-Christian world to appreciate and value religious diversity while retaining the Christian moral high ground.<sup>8</sup> Beyond the university too, what comes to mind when one thinks of "religion" typically derives from Protestant Christianity. In the US, Protestantism is hegemonic. Protestant ethics are applied universally to all Americans, Protestant or not (e.g., the conservative notion that one's value is based on their work).<sup>9</sup> And, if something is to be considered "religion," it must look like Protestantism—have a well-defined set of beliefs, be mostly private and individualized, and where public, never impede upon the secular.<sup>10</sup> As such, to write history that treats "religion" as incidental or ignores it entirely is actually to reinforce a

---

<sup>7</sup> See Jonathan Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 275-279.

<sup>8</sup> Robert A. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 184. For examples of this kind of the racial liberalist worldview held by anthropologists, especially with regard to morality, see Margaret Mead and James Baldwin, *A Rap on Race* (Philadelphia, PA: J.B. Lippincott, 1971); and Gene Weltfish and Ruth Benedict, *The Races of Mankind* (Washington, DC: Public Affairs Committee, Inc, 1943), a pamphlet denouncing biological racism while essentializing national and religious difference, which was widely distributed throughout educational and religious institutions in the US. Junaid Rana gives a detailed analysis of racial liberalism and its relationship with religion in "Anthropology and the Riddle of White Supremacy," *American Anthropologist* 122, No. 1 (2019): 105.

<sup>9</sup> Max Weber was probably the first person to consider Protestantism as hegemonic in considering the Protestant work ethic which underpins the American Dream and industrial capitalism, see *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, published in 1905.

<sup>10</sup> See Winnifred F. Sullivan, *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 7-9, where she discusses the concept of "small-'p' protestantism," i.e., religions that are structured according to the Protestant norm.

construct that treats Protestantism as prototypical. My goal is to write about “religion” holistically, where spiritual, social, political, and cultural creatively intertwine.

At the core of this paper is a question about what unites a community and forms collective racial, national, and religious identity. According to the scholar of African American history, Thomas Holt, we should consider race and racism as something that both percolates up from individual actions and influences such actions from the top down. These two levels, the everyday, micro-level, and the socially constructed macro-level, “are mediated by material conditions, symbolic gestures, and discursive action.”<sup>11</sup> Material conditions, gestures and discourse are the core of what shapes the organizational structures that give rise to communities. “Religion” has mastered the art of mediating between the everyday micro and the abstract macro (perhaps the supernatural) through collective ritual, discourse between lay individuals and religious figures, and the relocation of material conditions to the realm of the supernatural (i.e., Marx’s “opiate of the people”). Such a power can be easily transferred to the realm of the “political,” as can be seen with institutions like the Catholic Church. In writing about Chicago’s West Side, religious historian Mark Koschmann describes that “[Christian] congregations are the place where people actually embody and enact theology by coming together as part of a worshipping religious community,” but also “sharply defined themselves racially, culturally, and ethnically.”<sup>12</sup> In this light, it should not be surprising that, as Martin Luther King famously said in 1960, “11 AM Sunday is our most segregated hour.”<sup>13</sup> But there is nothing special about “religion” in this regard; any recurring discourse, collective act, or shared understanding of

---

<sup>11</sup> Thomas C. Holt, “Marking: Race, Race-making, and the Writing of History,” *The American Historical Review* 100, No. 1 (Feb. 1995): 10.

<sup>12</sup> Mark A. Koschmann, “Finding Their Footing in the Changing City: Protestant and catholic Congregations Adapt to the New Urban Environment in Post-World War II Chicago” (Ph.Diss., St. Louis University, 2018), 23, 25.

<sup>13</sup> Jason Tripp, “The Most Segregated Hour in America – Martin Luther King Jr.,” Jason Tripp, Apr. 4<sup>th</sup>, 2014, YouTube video, 0:52, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1q881g1L\\_d8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1q881g1L_d8).

material conditions will lead to the formation of community. Religious, national, and racial formations can overlap and intersect. Organizational structures determine what collective acts will occur. Who participates and how each participant interprets the act, in turn, gives rise to a profound sense of the solidarity and obligation that is the kernel of community.

Some of the organizational strategies discussed in this paper are worth defining explicitly, especially the dichotomy of working inside or outside of the system. At its root, an accommodationist strategy is one that works “within” one of the dominant systems, but more specificity is necessary. Accommodation only works because accommodationists can benefit, either by becoming better equipped to resist by improving their strategic position from which they can change the system or becoming better equipped to survive by avoiding being harmed by the system. Accommodation fails when the costs of working within the system outweigh the benefits, at which people often turn to a different system or create their own (work outside the system). Crucially, working within the system is not the same as assimilating. Assimilation is the strategy of joining the dominant group to gain its privileges and to say, “we want to be like you so you will accept us.” Accommodation is to say, “we follow the same rules you do, so you must accept us as we are.”

One key to understanding how organizational structures are maintained, abandoned, or adapted, is to understand when a group is “following the rules” and when they are “being like” the dominant group. For example, is a Puerto Rican who claims to be an American assimilating? Do they mean that they seek to “be like” Americans (assimilation), or do they mean that they, as a Puerto Rican, are already an American and should be accepted as one (accommodation)? Or are they just saying this because the alternative would be getting labeled as a subversive (also accommodation)? The only thing that can be said definitively without looking at more context is

that they are not saying that they aren't American (separatism). While it is important to differentiate these layers, there is no single action that essentially constitutes one strategy or another, so it is important to contextualize each action.

### Historiography & Overview:

This essay will tell the story of the formation of the Puerto Rican community in Chicago in two parts. Part I will focus on Los Caballeros de San Juan (the Knights of St. John) and the Damas de María (Ladies of Mary), a Catholic fraternal order and its women's auxiliary that became the largest Puerto Rican organization in the city of Chicago between around 1955 and 1965. Several historians, such as Felix Padilla, Jaime Vidal, and Michael Staudenmaier, have told the story of the Caballeros and their importance in defining the national boundary of Chicago's Puerto Rican community for decades, despite being accommodationist or even assimilationist.<sup>14</sup> These narratives typically portray the Caballeros as a "community organization," placing them within the historical context of US labor history and the Civil Rights Movement. The Caballeros' narrative ends with the Division Street Riots in June of 1966, which marked the Puerto Rican community's turn from accommodation to grassroots radical activism. Drawing from these existing narratives, Part I will place the Caballeros in a much broader context, one that has origins in Puerto Rico and continues past 1966. It also embeds the Caballeros within the narrative of the Catholic Church, which was in political turmoil following

---

<sup>14</sup> Felix Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1987), 126-140; Jaime R. Vidal, "Citizens Yet Strangers: The Puerto Rican Experience," from *Puerto Rican and Cuban Catholics in the U.S., 1900-1965* ed. Jay P. Dolan & Jaime R. Vidal (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 127-134; Michael Staudenmaier, "Between Two Flags: Cultural Nationalism and Racial Formation in Puerto Rican Chicago, 1946-1994," (Ph.Diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2016), 81-87.

the reforms of the Second Vatican Council between 1963 and '65 and, in Chicago, with the controversial See of Cardinal John Cody beginning in 1965.

Religious historians Reinaldo Román and Jaime Vidal have both written on religion in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Puerto Rico.<sup>15</sup> Vidal's narrative treats the Puerto Rican Catholic Church as both religious and political, and theorizes its relationship with Puerto Ricans themselves, claiming that Puerto Ricans never became as loyal to the Church as the Church desired. While he does, to some extent, discuss Chicago Puerto Rican's refusal to become loyal to the Church, he does not address specific questions of the origins of the Caballeros as an organizational strategy. Román's history of Puerto Rican spirituality takes a much more ground-up approach, filling in some of the gaps left by Vidal, especially discussing the Hermanos Cheos, a lay religious order who influenced the Caballeros. Religious scholar Ana Maria Díaz-Stevens and Jesuit historian Edmundo Rodríguez also discuss broader Catholic trends among Latinos, paying particular attention to how Latin American religious traditions adapted within the US Catholic church after Vatican II.<sup>16</sup> Rodríguez discusses Latino and Latin American organizational structures within the Church, particularly the *cofradía* (confraternity), while Díaz-Stephens discusses the spiritual role of Latinas throughout the diaspora.

Part II will discuss formation of pan-Latino and multiracial coalitions between poor Whites, African Americans, and other Latinos from 1965 to 1970.<sup>17</sup> Among first generation

---

<sup>15</sup> Reinaldo L. Roman, *Governing Spirits: Religion, Miracles, and Spectacles in Cuba and Puerto Rico, 1898-1956* (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 2007), 51-81; Vidal, "Citizens Yet Strangers," 11-53.

<sup>16</sup> Ana María Díaz-Stevens, "Latinas and the Church," in *Hispanic Catholic Culture in the U.S.: Issues and Concerns*, ed. Jay P. Dolan and Allan Figueroa Deck, S.J. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 240-277; Edmundo Rodríguez, S.J., "The Hispanic and Church Movements: Schools of Leadership," in *Hispanic Catholic Culture*, 206-239.

<sup>17</sup> In the case of this paper, it is particularly important to clarify when I am talking about Black people generally (including Black Puerto Ricans), and when I am talking specifically about Black people who have been culturally and historically connected to the US mainland for several generations, i.e., "African Americans" for lack of a better term. I use the word "Black" when referring to all people racialized as Black, including Afro-Puerto Ricans. I make this distinction while also acknowledging that the term "African American" is flawed also because the term typically

Puerto Ricans, it was the first-generation religious leaders who saw the need for coalition-building. When second generation leadership emerged in the late 1960s, while opposed to White religious institutions, they borrowed heavily from the service-oriented strategies used by the first-generation religious leadership, producing a heavily contested structure I label “revolutionary religion.” Religious scholars Felipe Hinojosa and Mark A. Koschmann have recently explored a ritual paradigmatic of revolutionary religion: the church takeover.<sup>18</sup> Hinojosa focuses on several church takeovers by radical Latino groups across the US, devoting a chapter to the Chicago Young Lords, and arguing this signaled a religious dimension to the radical politics of the late 1960s. Koschmann focuses on religious organizing on Chicago’s West Side, mainly from an African American and White perspective, but devotes a chapter to the takeover of the First Congregational Church, which had housed a Puerto Rican congregation for the last decade. Building on this scholarship, this paper will contextualize the emergence of revolutionary religion as theorized by Hinojosa and Koschmann.

An important aspect of revolutionary religion is Puerto Rican racial identity. An open question in the history of Puerto Rican Chicago is why, unlike in New York, the Puerto Rican community tended to remain on the White (or non-Black) side of the color line. While historians Lilia Fernández and Felix Padilla have discussed Puerto Ricans’ desire to consolidate into a single community, they have not fully grappled with the racial implications of Puerto Ricans’ consistent flight (even when not removed) from African American neighborhoods.<sup>19</sup> Michael

---

is used to emphasize the US and not Africa, the word “African” notwithstanding. Counterintuitively, people living in America who are from Africa are not “African Americans” (unlike, for example, Asian Americans). However, there is not any better alternative.

<sup>18</sup> Hinojosa, *Apostles of Change*, 19-55; Koschmann, “Finding Their Footing,” 150-222.

<sup>19</sup> Both authors do address that Puerto Ricans and African Americans lived in the same neighborhoods and then Puerto Ricans left, but both fail to really explain why this change occurred beyond relatively unsubstantiated speculation. See Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 82-87; Lilia Fernández, *Brown in the Windy City* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 72-77, 102-103. The lack of a complete explanation is likely due to the sparsity of primary sources and general erasure of the history of the West Side Puerto Rican community.

Staudenmaier argues that first-generation Puerto Rican leadership considered themselves White and organized within a conservative and accommodationist paradigm of Puerto Rican nationalism.<sup>20</sup> As for the second generation, historians Lilia Fernández and Michael Gonzales write how the Young Lords Organization (YLO) on the North Side was influenced by both pan-Latino and African American anti-colonial politics.<sup>21</sup> The YLO considered itself a multiracial organization and joined the Rainbow Coalition with the Black Panther Party and the Young Patriots, a group of Appalachian Whites. By focusing on Afro-Puerto Ricans and religious leadership (as opposed to secular nationalist), I argue that some first-generation Puerto Ricans began building a multiracial network and restructuring their organizational strategies, which facilitated the much broader multiracial coalitions constructed by the second generation. While second generation Puerto Ricans in many ways remained committed to the diasporic organizational structures, they also adapted and reimagined them.

In sum, this essay will consider how treating both religious and secular history as one changes the narrative of the formation of Chicago's Puerto Rican community in the 1950s and 1960s. It will consider how organizational strategies were brought from Puerto Rico to Chicago, and how Puerto Ricans did and did not extend beyond their community to forge connections with others. By tracing diasporic origins and the activism of the first generation, this paper will contextualize the well-told political history of the late 1960s and demonstrate that it is necessary to look beyond structures naturalized as political, into the realm of the "religious" and the sub-altern. Overall, this paper argues the Puerto Rican community arrived in Chicago with organizational structures that quickly formed a Puerto Rican community without dependence on outsiders.

---

<sup>20</sup> Staudenmaier, "Between Two Flags," 18-26, 127-133.

<sup>21</sup> Gonzales, "Ruffians and Revolutionaries"; Fernández, *Brown in the Windy City*, 173-206.

## **Part I: Puerto Ricans and the Catholic Church, 1953-1966**

### Agitating Communities and Creating Leadership

Puerto Rico began undergoing rapid change with the election of Governor Luis Muñoz Marin in 1949 and the adoption of commonwealth status in 1952. After half a century of the US government rule justified by the racist assertion that Puerto Ricans were incapable of self-governance, Muñoz made his primary goal to industrialize the mostly agrarian economy and “prove” that Puerto Rico could be more autonomous. The plan to industrialize, known as Operación Manos a la Obra or Operation Bootstrap, caused rapidly rising unemployment as Jíbaros, farmers from the mountains, lost their jobs in the sugar industry. This brought racist fears of overpopulation that led to the use of population controls through the highest rates of forced sterilization of any country in the world and a surge in outmigration to the mainland US. Most Puerto Ricans arrived in New York, leading rapidly to the formation of a “Puerto Rican ghetto” and yet another overpopulation scare. By the early 50s, the government of Puerto Rico worked with US companies to establish migrant labor contracts in the Northeast and Midwest, placing many Puerto Ricans around Chicago, many of whom eventually opted to move into the city and work in factories rather than as farm-laborers.<sup>22</sup>

Most of the Puerto Ricans who arrived in Chicago were Jíbaros. Under Spanish rule, Jíbaros had for centuries been neglected by the Catholic Church, and despite mostly considering themselves Catholic, had little sense of belonging to the Church. From the perspective of the Church, Jíbaros were Catholics who lacked devotion, failing to attend mass and sanctify their marriages (though nearly all were baptized). These things were difficult due to the distance

---

<sup>22</sup> For a far more in-depth overview of history of mid-century Puerto Rican migration to the mainland US, see Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 23-55; and Fernández, *Brown in the Windy City*, 23-56.



between chapels and the lack of infrastructure and priests.<sup>23</sup> The actual spiritual practices of Jíbaros defied any categorical label and probably varied widely.<sup>24</sup> With the beginning of US colonization in 1898 and freedom of religion non-Catholic movements, most notably Spiritism and Pentecostalism, saw a dramatic increase in Jíbaro followers, likely because these religions resonated with existing popular beliefs and simultaneously offered much-needed material and spiritual support. Just as Catholic, Protestant, and Spiritist institutions competed for followers, it is very easy to imagine a Jíbaro who might pray the rosary daily, seek a Spiritist adviser whenever problems arose, and attend Pentecostal church services.

With an inconsistent religious institutional organizational structure, Puerto Rican spiritual practices were usually maintained by women. According to religious scholar Ana Maria Díaz-Stephens, rural societies in Latin America had a form of patriarchy defined by machismo, whereby men competed for power among themselves, leaving room for a ‘matriarchal core’ which “lies at the heart of most Latino religious practice.”<sup>25</sup> While machismo was harmful to women especially in domestic settings, it allowed women positions of power within spiritual practice, a stark contrast from most institutional Churches where the exclusion of women was codified. In the middle class, on the other hand, Díaz-Stevens describes a patriarchal structure defined by marianismo, where women were considered “hyper-moral” objects (like the Virgin

---

<sup>23</sup> Vidal, “Citizens Yet Strangers,” 11-24.

<sup>24</sup> While there is disagreement about the exact origins of Puerto Rican religious practices, the evidence suggests that practices derived from a mix of Spanish, West African, and Taíno practices. Some authors claim that Puerto Rican religious practices were predominantly Spanish in origin, see Vidal, “Citizens Yet Strangers,” 25. Others argue that they were a mix of Spanish, African, and Taíno, see Andrés Pérez y Mena, *Speaking With the Dead: Development of Afro-Latin Religion Among Puerto Ricans in the United States* (New York, NY: AMS Press, 1991), 23. Pérez y Mena discusses specific connections between African and Taíno, and Puerto Rican beliefs on 21-32. For a collection of essays on the topic of non-European influence on Puerto Rican religion, see Various Authors, *Actualidad de las Tradiciones Espirituales y Culturales Africanas en el Caribe y Latinoamérica: Primer y Segundo Simposio*, ed. María E. Torres Muñoz, Marta Moreno Vega, and Mónica Cortéz Torres (San Juan, PR: Centro de Estudios de Puerto Rico y el Caribe, 2010), which has several chapters on Puerto Rico in English and Spanish. However, it should be noted that tracing practices to specific origins is complicated and unreliable, and so I will not make claims about the specific origins of any particular practices.

<sup>25</sup> Díaz-Stevens, “Latinas and the Church,” 245.

Mary) and not allowed outside of the domestic sphere without men, thus making a matriarchal core impossible. The class-based distinction (though not completely rigid) arose because “rural dwellers and lower social class were more concerned with survival than with image making or social prestige.”<sup>26</sup> But among Jíbaro society, Jíbaros could take on powerful roles within their communities, such as the rezadora, a person who people trust and can seek advice from, the comadróna or midwife, and the curandera or healer, roles not as accessible to men.<sup>27</sup>

When Jíbaros began arriving in Chicago in the early 1950s, the first neighborhoods they settled were Woodlawn along 63<sup>rd</sup> street, the Near West Side along Madison Street, the Loop around Congress and Wabash, and the Near North Side along Clark Street (see fig. 1). Acquiring amenities and employment was an immediate and pressing challenge due to language barriers and the shock of navigating an alienating urban environment.<sup>28</sup> Many organizations formed to serve these needs, both secular and religious.

Puerto Ricans arrived in Chicago at a time when the city’s Archdiocese was embroiled in a long-standing battle with its African American national parish over racial discrimination within the Church. For the previous several decades, since Cardinal Mundelein had established an African American national parish in 1917 (against his typical anti-nationalist policy), African Americans had organized a lay movement to advocate for themselves.<sup>29</sup> As more African Americans arrived in Chicago in the 1910s and ‘20s, incidents of racialized violence defined a

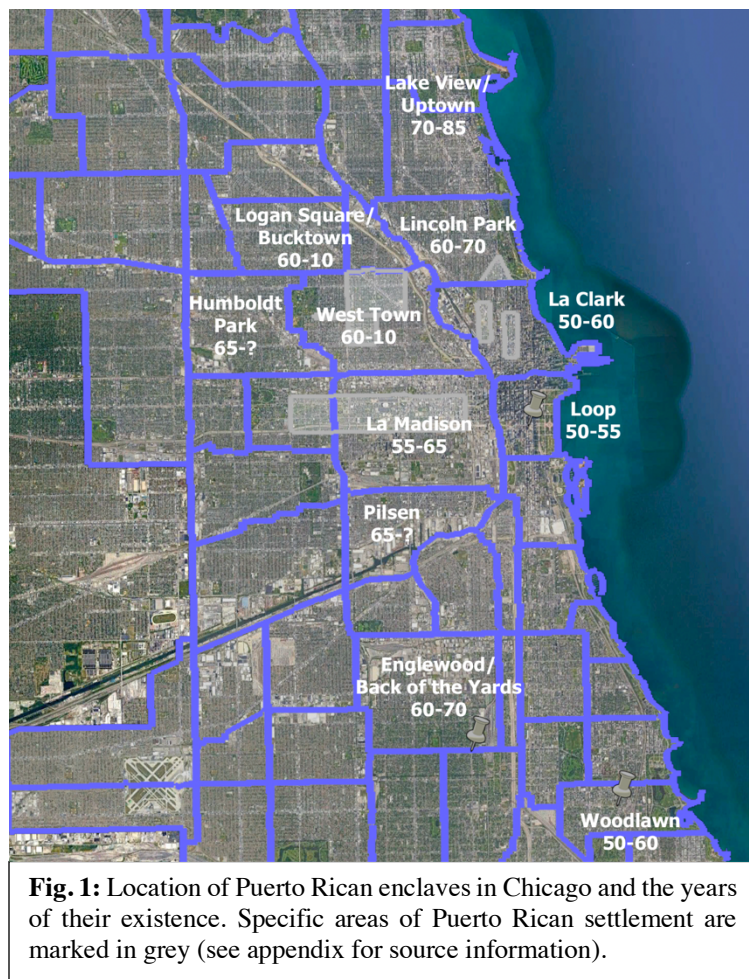
---

<sup>26</sup> Díaz-Stevens, “Latinas and the Church,” 248-49.

<sup>27</sup> Díaz-Stevens, “Latinas and the Church,” 242, 250-51.

<sup>28</sup> Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 110-116.

<sup>29</sup> See Karen J. Johnson, *One in Christ: Chicago Catholics and the Quest for Interracial Justice* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018). On the founding of the African American national parish, see p. 18. On African American organizing through lay organizations, see pp. 29-43.



color-line, particularly violence between White and Black groups of young men, the precursors to street gangs.<sup>30</sup> To respond to concerns about “juvenile delinquency,” Auxiliary Bishop Bernard Sheil founded the interracial Catholic Youth Organization (CYO) in 1930.<sup>31</sup> Tensions in the Church were exacerbated further in the late 40s with the Second Great Migration and the increasing rate of racialized violence across the South Side. The CYO rapidly lost its White

membership and dissolved completely by 1954. Meanwhile African American lay groups, like the Catholic Interracial Council, were adopting a strategy of respectability to force the Catholic Church to take more seriously the goal of integration.<sup>32</sup>

It was in this context that the Archdiocese of Chicago began its work with Puerto Ricans in 1947 by funding the Sociedad Católica Puertorriqueña (the Puerto Rican Catholic Society) and El Gremio Puertorriqueño de Chicago (the Puerto Rican Guild of Chicago), both in the Loop and

<sup>30</sup> See Allan Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 201-222.

<sup>31</sup> Timothy B. Neary, *Crossing Parish Boundaries: Race, Sports, and Catholic Youth in Chicago, 1914-1954* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 71-98.

<sup>32</sup> On increasing racial tension and the African American lay response, see Johnson, *One in Christ*, 127-154. On the failure and eventual dissolution of the CYO, see Neary, *Crossing Parish Boundaries*, 99-134.

organized through the CYO, which hosted dances and offered mutual aid to migrant workers.<sup>33</sup> Such organizations were the beginnings of a Puerto Rican community in the Loop and the Near North Side, often helping Puerto Ricans find apartments in the Cabrini Green low income housing projects along Larrabee Street between Chicago and North Avenue. To some Catholic priests, “the Puerto Rican community was growing at an alarming pace” and probably reviving fears of another “Puerto Rican ghetto.” So, in 1953, the Catholic Church decided to head back to the drawing board, founding the Committee on Integration of Spanish-Speaking Citizenry and beginning a search for a new organizational strategy.<sup>34</sup>

In their foundational work published in 1945, *Black Metropolis*, St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton applied the word “ghetto” to the South Side Black Belt because it was an enclave that “bec[ame] increasingly more concentrated,” rather than “break[ing] up with the passage of time.” A “ghetto” was an enclave that was constrained by housing policy, law enforcement, and racialized violence.<sup>35</sup> While this is most likely the definition that White organizers, Catholic or otherwise, had in mind when they referred to a potential “Puerto Rican ghetto,” it is important to consider that the term “ghetto” had become a mark of racial difference, not simply the unfortunate result of racial discrimination. By this construction, any Puerto Rican enclave would constitute a “ghetto.” By the early 1950s, many White organizers became concerned about the growing Puerto Rican “problem.” To prevent what had happened in New York, Whites in positions of power responded in two ways: 1) they applied the same segregationist tactics they

---

<sup>33</sup> Martínez, *Chicago*, 97. For more on El Gremio, see Staudenmaier, “Between Two Flags,”

<sup>34</sup> Martínez, *Chicago*, 98-100. The original quote reads “la comunidad puertorriqueña crecía a pasos alarmantes.” Martínez includes a copy of a document entitled “Committee on Integration of Spanish Speaking Citizenry,” from the Chicago Historical Society (now called the Chicago History Museum).

<sup>35</sup> Horace R. Cayton and St. Clair Drake, *Black Metropolis* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1946), 174-213.



**Fig. 2:** Fr. Leo Mahon, director of the CCSS, ca. 1960.

had applied to African Americans, and 2) they attempted to forcibly integrate and assimilate Puerto Ricans into White society.

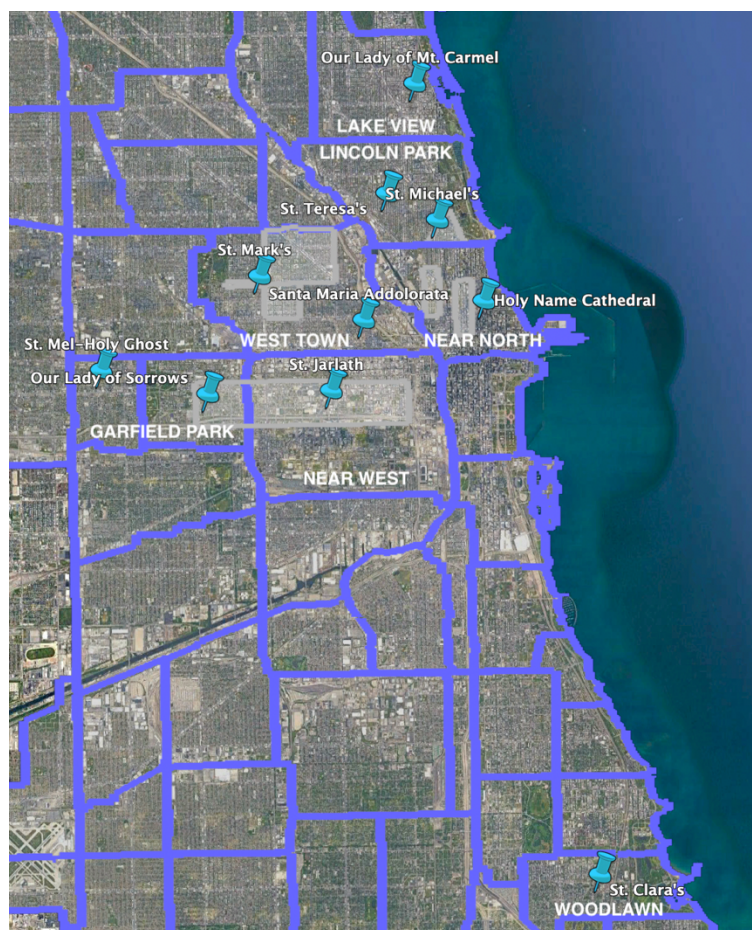
Just as the Catholic Church began to reevaluate its strategy, the Puerto Rican community in Woodlawn also sought to organize another mutual aid organization. After mass on a Sunday in 1953, several Puerto Rican men approached Fr. Leo Mahon requesting spiritual assistance. Mahon agreed to help, despite not speaking Spanish, and

together they formed the Woodlawn Latin-American Committee (WLAC).<sup>36</sup> At this time, Woodlawn was rapidly transitioning from a White middle-class neighborhood to African American and Puerto Rican. Mahon, a priest at Holy Cross parish just out of seminary, had originally sought to work with the African American community.<sup>37</sup> Searching for people to assist in organizing the Puerto Rican men, he reached out to friends at the University of Chicago, a former undergraduate and member of the Young Christian Students (YCS), Nicholas von Hoffman, and an evangelical missionary who had spent several years in rural Cuba, Lester Hunt.<sup>38</sup> Lacking resources, Mahon, von Hoffman, and Hunt turned to Fr. John Egan, another

<sup>36</sup> Thomas G. Kelliher, "Hispanic Catholics and the Archdiocese of Chicago, 1923-1970" (Ph.Diss., University of Notre Dame, 1996), 131. This story also appears in Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 128; and Vidal, "Citizens Yet Strangers," 129.

<sup>37</sup> Kelliher, "Hispanic Catholics," 131-132.

<sup>38</sup> Kelliher, "Hispanic Catholics," 133. On the background of Hunt and von Hoffman, see Nicholas von Hoffman, *Radical: A Portrait of Saul Alinsky* (New York, NY: PublicAffairs, 2011), 1-2. Somewhat confusingly, von Hoffman leaves Mahon out of his memoir entirely, even attributing the creation of WLAC to himself, writing "I took it into my head to organize a mutual self-defense group of some kind ... [t]he outcome of [which] was an entity called El Comité Latino American [The Latino American Committee]." Mahon likewise is written out of the narrative told in Sanford D. Horwitt, *Let Them Call Me Rebel: Saul Alinsky—His Life and Legacy* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 268-274, a likewise mainly attributes the creation of WLAC to von Hoffman.



**Fig. 3:** Approximate locations of Concilios of the Caballeros de San Juan. No. 1 – St. Clara’s; No. 2 – Holy Name Cathedral; No. 3 – St. Michael’s; No. 4 – Our Lady of Sorrows; No. 5 – St. Jarlath; No. 6 – Santa Maria Addolorata; No. 7 – St. Joseph’s (in Waukegan, not included); No. 8 – St. Mark’s; No. 9 – St. Teresa’s; No. 10 – St. Mel-Holy Ghost; No. 11 – Our Lady of Mt. Carmel (see appendix for source information).

young priest who had previously worked with the YCS. Egan acquired \$10,000 from the Archdiocese for the WLAC and decided to reach out for help from Saul Alinsky, who had spent the previous decade organizing the Back of the Yards community and had gained critical acclaim for his radical organizational strategy.<sup>39</sup> Alinsky, too, happened to be looking to organize through the Church.<sup>40</sup>

In October of 1954, with funding from the Archdiocese, the WLAC transitioned from a hyper-

local mutual aid group to a Puerto Rican fraternal organization called Los Caballeros de San Juan (the Knights of St. John) that would eventually have at least 11 councils at various parishes throughout Chicagoland (see fig. 3) and 2,000 active members at time when there were 28,000

<sup>39</sup> Kelliher, “Hispanic Catholics,” 133. According to Egan in Margery Frisbie, *An Alley in Chicago: The Life and Legacy of Monsignor John Egan*, commemorative ed. (Franklin, WI: Sheed & Ward, 2002), 68-71, it was Mahon, Hunt, and von Hoffman (among others) who approached Egan. For more on Saul Alinsky, see Horwitt, *Let Them Call Me Rebel*.

<sup>40</sup> Horwitt, *Let Them Call Me Rebel*, 274.

Puerto Ricans in the city.<sup>41</sup> Felix Padilla argues that the Caballeros, because they had such a far reaching membership, allowed a “Puerto Rican ethnic consciousness fortified by religious faith [to take] hold of the imagination of many new arrivals.”<sup>42</sup> However, their “strategy combined some of the basic tenets of the assimilation and cultural pluralism theories often used by sociologists to discuss group adaptation and relations in American society.”<sup>43</sup> This strategy of limited national identification meant to ease the eventual adoption of White American cultural practices and virtues is what historian Michael Staudenmaier refers to as “liberal Americanization.” Existing narratives of the Caballeros argue that Puerto Rican leaders embraced such a strategy before a far more explicit version of Puerto Rican nationalism arose in the late 1960s.<sup>44</sup> However, while the Caballeros adopted an accommodationist strategy to work within existing power structures, they had no intention of abandoning their Puerto Rican identity and adopting a White American one instead. The question to ask is how the Caballeros were able to construct their own community within the parameters set by Alinsky and the Catholic Church. The first step is to understand the structure created that the Caballeros sought to accommodate.

The strategy organizers and would-be advocates from outside the Puerto Rican community used with the Caballeros was developed by Saul Alinsky during the 1940s and ‘50s. Alinsky’s method was known for being extremely disruptive (notably interfering with Richard Daley’s various attempts to segregate Chicago), striving to attain broad-based support, and

---

<sup>41</sup> On the founding of the Caballeros, see “Los Caballeros de San Juan,” *Vida Latina*, Jun. 1957, in Martínez, *Chicago*, 153. On pg. 129, Martínez says there were eventually 13 councils, but only 11 can be verified, see Gilbert A. Carroll and Donald J. Headley, “Report of the Cardinal’s Committee for the Spanish Speaking,” Jan. 14, 1964, EXEC/C0620/5, 43804.04, Albert Cardinal Meyer Collection, AAC. The membership and size of Puerto Rican community in 1958 are from Memorandum by Gilbert A. Carroll and Leo T. Mahon to Albert G. Meyer, “Work among the Spanish-speaking in the Archdiocese of Chicago,” ca. 1958, EXEC/C0730/172#8, 43809.07, Albert Cardinal Meyer Collection, AAC. According to Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 78, there were about 32,000 Puerto Ricans living in Chicago in 1960, which seems consistent with CCSS’s account.

<sup>42</sup> Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 130.

<sup>43</sup> Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 129.

<sup>44</sup> Staudenmaier, “Between Two Flags,” 73-87.

empowering democratically elected indigenous leadership that could take over from organizers after an initial phase of organizing. At first, these features seem to contradict the idea that organizers retained power over those they organized.<sup>45</sup> The Caballeros' leadership was Puerto Rican and democratically elected by Puerto Ricans, and councils were even financially self-reliant after initial start-up costs were covered by the Archdiocese.<sup>46</sup>

The most obvious way in which Alinsky organizers secured power was in the initial “agitation” of the community, wherein the organizer took initial steps to organize a community so that it could lead itself. In a 1957 lecture, Alinsky explained that “agitation” was necessary to “attack [...] the prevailing patterns of organized living in the community.”<sup>47</sup> According to Alinsky, a community was an already existing organizational structure (or several) that was incompatible with a broad-based organization. In a lecture in the mid-60s, von Hoffman shed light on what exactly was problematic about the existing community structure, saying, “most of the available indigenous leadership will only be practiced in the arts of the small organization.”<sup>48</sup> Von Hoffman defined these small-scale organizations as “having little immediately [in] common,” and thus having little power, and that the leaders of these groups were able only to organize on this small scale. Indigenous leaders weren't “discovered” in a community, they were

---

<sup>45</sup> Alinsky describes his strategy in depth in *Rules for Radicals*, published in 1971. Recall that an “effective” organizational strategy is one that retains members, so Alinsky's method sought to be as “effective” as possible.

<sup>46</sup> On the Caballeros election process, see “Los Caballeros,” in Martínez, *Chicago*, 153. On financing each council, see Report by the Cardinal's Committee for the Spanish Speaking in Chicago, “Report for 1961,” early 1962, EXEC/C0730/8, 43808.05, Albert Cardinal Meyer Collection, AAC.

<sup>47</sup> Presentation by Saul D. Alinsky, “From Citizen Apathy to Participation,” Oct. 19<sup>th</sup>, 1957, CJEG 47/14, John J. Egan Papers, UNDA, 3. Emphasis in original. This text appears nearly verbatim in another presentation in 1963, Presentation by Saul D. Alinsky, “Principles of Citizen Action,” May 27<sup>th</sup>, 1963, CJEG 67/06, John J. Egan Papers, UNDA, 9, and in his 1971 book, Alinsky, *Rules of Radicals*, 116, highlighting how central this point was and that it remained constant for over a decade.

<sup>48</sup> Presentation by Nicholas von Hoffman, “Finding and Making Leaders,” 1963-66, CJEG 67/06, John J. Egan Papers, UNDA, 6.



“found by organizing and [they we]re developed by organizations.”<sup>49</sup> In other words, effective leadership only arose because of the initial step of agitation.

This first step of organizing restructured a group, “channeling the many diverse forces of self-interests within the community into a common direction for the common good and at the same time respects the autonomy of individual organizations.”<sup>50</sup> For a group to be powerful, an agitator had to guide people towards a common goal. This gave Alinsky and von Hoffman the power to define the “common good” and decide what it meant to “respect the autonomy of individual organizations.” Speaking on the issue of Puerto Rican organization in the early days of the Caballeros, Alinsky argued that “it would be a serious mistake to permit a community to become all Puerto Rican, just as it would be to permit it to become all Negro.”<sup>51</sup> Alinsky had decided that it was in the common interest of Puerto Ricans to be assimilated into American society.

The Alinsky method also gives insight into how these Alinsky-style organizers viewed culture. In a jarring anecdote Alinsky included in his 1971 organizing manifesto, *Rules for Radicals*, Alinsky describes working with indigenous Canadians the way they “rationalized their inaction”:

Indians: Well, we can’t organize.

Me [Alinsky]: Why not?

Indians: Because that’s a white man’s way of doing things. [...] [Y]ou see, if we organize, that means getting out and fighting the way you are telling us to do and that would mean that we would be corrupted by the white man’s culture and lose our own values [...] [like] creative fishing. [...] When we go out, we’re out on the water and you can hear the lap of the waves on the bottom of the canoe, and the birds in the trees and the leaves rustling, and—you know what I mean?

Me: No, I don’t know what you mean. Furthermore, I think that’s just a pile of shit [...] From there we went off to creative welfare. ‘Creative welfare’ seemed to have to do with ‘since white stole Indians’ lands, all Indians’ welfare payments are really installment

---

<sup>49</sup> Von Hoffman, “Finding and Making Leaders,” 3.

<sup>50</sup> Alinsky, “Principles of Citizen Action, 12.

<sup>51</sup> Saul Alinsky quoted in Horwitt, *Let Them Call Me Rebel*, 279.

payments due to them and it's not really welfare or charity.' [...] [Like that,] we kept breaking through one 'creative' rationalization after another until finally we got down to the issue of organization.<sup>52</sup>

Aside from showing that Alinsky was arrogant and dismissive, this anecdote demonstrates how Alinsky minimized the indigenous Canadian “way of doing things” (culture) as “rationalizing inaction.” He set up the “creative fishing” issue as a contemptibly irrelevant straw man, then used the same language to delegitimize “creative welfare,” and perhaps other unnamed issues that may have been far more pertinent to organizing. In this way, Alinsky could dismiss anything that impeded the execution of his strategy. As the indigenous Canadian speaking in this passage points out, this is what it meant to be ‘corrupted by the white man’s culture.’

Hunt and von Hoffman applied the same dismissive logic to the Puerto Ricans they organized as well. During the era of the WLAC, Lou Silverman, another member of the YCS, told von Hoffman, “Nick, I’ve been to the library and to the Britannica—*what* Puerto Rican culture? There is no Puerto Rican culture,” to which von Hoffman replied, “You’re the public relations man, invent one.”<sup>53</sup> In addition to demonstrating that von Hoffman apparently didn’t even think to ask the people he was organizing about their culture, this also shows that the contemptuous dismissal of culture corresponded with the belief that Puerto Ricans were essentially blank slates to be molded without consequence, at least until Puerto Rican culture became problematic for organizing. In a well-criticized 1956 essay, Hunt and von Hoffman claimed that Puerto Ricans were incapable of democratic organization due to centuries of

---

<sup>52</sup> Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals*, 110-112. For the sake of brevity, I have excised the parts of this anecdote where Alinsky justifies his rudeness, in which he quotes one of the indigenous Canadians at the meetings saying, “‘When Mr. Alinsky told us we were full of shit, that was the first time a white man has really talked to us as equals—you [the audience, presumably of white liberal Canadian organizers] would never say that to us.’” This strikes me as Alinsky trying to prove he is different from the typical patronizing white person, but this shouldn’t be taken too seriously because clearly, in the above anecdote, Alinsky is being very patronizing.

<sup>53</sup> Horwitt, *Let Them Call Me Rebel*, 272.

Catholicism and living under authoritarian rule.<sup>54</sup> Responding to a statement by the Chicago Office of the Puerto Rican Commonwealth arguing that maintaining Puerto Rican culture could instill a sense of pride and unity among Puerto Ricans, Hunt and von Hoffman asked, “[c]an Puerto Ricans continue to live in New York and Chicago without undergoing profound changes in languages and culture, whether they like it or not?”<sup>55</sup> By challenging the strategic wisdom of promoting Puerto Rican culture, Hunt and von Hoffman appear to have believed that Puerto Ricans simultaneously lacked culture and had a culture that was problematic.

Michael Staudenmaier’s concept of “liberal Americanization,” helps resolve this seeming paradox. He explains that liberal Americanization ““encouraged a period of cultural diversity and stressed [its] value [...],”” even as it “looked to [...] complete assimilation as the end of the Americanization process.”<sup>56</sup> By trying to “invent” a Puerto Rican culture, Hunt and von Hoffman demanded cultural diversity, just on their own terms. Some aspects of Puerto Rican culture apparently did not constitute cultural diversity and posed a problem to the eventual goal of assimilation. In other words, Hunt and von Hoffman, and perhaps Alinsky as well, saw culture as something which had utility only insofar as it served to establish a group identity, but harmful when it created a roadblock for multicultural organizing.

---

<sup>54</sup> Lester C. Hunt and Nicholas von Hoffman, “The Meanings of ‘Democracy’: Puerto Rican Organizations in Chicago,” in *Our Language and Our World*, ed. S.I. Hayakawa (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1959), 52-65. For other criticism of this essay, see Staudenmaier, “Between Two Flags,” 82-83; and Felix Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 130-131. It’s worth noting that this kind of democratic failure, whereby half a group leaves after losing a vote, is a common problem that arises from organizational ineffectiveness, in which group interests are not strong enough for those not in power to feel they have anything to gain by staying in the group. It is not a result of the group being “culturally undemocratic.” The point here, however, is that Hunt and von Hoffman *thought* Puerto Ricans culture was the root of the problem and developed their strategy around this assumption.

<sup>55</sup> Hunt and von Hoffman, “The Meanings of ‘Democracy,’” 64.

<sup>56</sup> Staudenmaier, “Between Two Flags,” 71. Staudenmaier was quoting James Henry Powell, “The Concept of Cultural Pluralism in American Social Thought, 1915-1965” (PhDiss, University of Notre Dame, 1971), 79.



**Fig. 4:** Fr. Donald Headley, priest at the CCSS, ca. 1960.

Catholic priests, like Frs. Mahon and Donald Headley, adopted a similar perspective, being trained directly by Alinsky in the early 60s.<sup>57</sup> With the creation of the Cardinal's Committee for the Spanish Speaking (CCSS) in 1955, the Caballeros would work largely within the structure of the Catholic Church.<sup>58</sup> The CCSS was run first by Mahon, then later by Headley, and largely served to twist the arms of conservative priests and supervise the Caballeros progress towards the goals of growth and eventual integration, at which point the Caballeros would no longer be necessary.<sup>59</sup> Beyond

the CCSS, each council was also supervised by parish priests.<sup>60</sup> In a progress report to Cardinal Meyer around 1960, Mahon explained that “[n]o matter how hard a priest works, how well he preaches, he remains an outsider. In a sense, his influence is scanty compared to that of the real leaders, the laymen.” He also replicated the Alinsky-method notion that “one must allow a man

<sup>57</sup> Letter by John J. Egan to G.R. Bell, Jan. 26, 1965, CJEG 20/12, John J. Egan Papers, UNDA, 2; and Letter by John J. Egan to John S. Cummins, Apr. 29, 1966, CJEG 20/11, John J. Egan Papers, UNDA, 2 mention over 30 priests being trained by the IAF, and mention that “[a] few years back one of [Alinsky’s] assistants conducted a similar training program for both priests and laity.” On an Alinsky training course directory (likely referring to the one mentioned in the above letters), “Enrollment – Community Analysis and Change Course,” ca. 1964, CJEG 47/14, John J. Egan Papers, UNDA, Frs. Donald Headley and Gilbert Carroll are mentioned, as well as several priests stationed at parishes that had councils of the Caballeros. A Letter by John J. Egan, Feb. 14<sup>th</sup>, 1964, CJEG 47/14, John J. Egan Papers, UNDA, describes the course in more detail. For a list of parishes with councils of the Caballeros, see Kelliher, “Hispanic Catholics,” 147.

<sup>58</sup> “El Comite del Cardenal para los de Habla Hispana en Chicago,” *Vida Latina*, Jun. 1957, in Martínez, *Chicago*, 157-158.

<sup>59</sup> For an example of this arm-twisting, see Kelliher, “Hispanic Catholics,” 144-145. A Memorandum by G.A. Carroll and D.J. Headley to John P. Cody, “Cardinal’s Committee for the Spanish Speaking,” Mar. 15, 1966, EXEC/C0670/43, 43958.04, John Cardinal Cody Papers Collection, AAC, ranks parish priests according to how willing and capable they are to work with Puerto Ricans. On the issue of integration, a Letter from Gilbert A. Carroll and Leo T. Mahon to Nicholas Galitzine, Jun. 8, 1956, in Martínez, *Chicago*, 139-142; and a Memorandum by Lester Hunt, “Cardinal’s Committee for the Spanish Speaking,” Aug. 1965, CJEG 20/11, UNDA, make it very clear that the CCSS was established explicitly to achieve the goal of eventually integrating Puerto Ricans, which would be achieved when the Caballeros was an organization that was no longer necessary.

<sup>60</sup> Report by Carroll and Headley, “Report of the Cardinal’s Committee for the Spanish Speaking.”

[leader] to grow as he works within the forming group on whatever problems the group faces.”<sup>61</sup>

As with Hunt and von Hoffman, the CCSS saw indigenous leadership as arising from the implementation of an organizational strategy rather than existing before the initial stage of organization. However, Catholic priests never sought to be made superfluous, explicitly desiring to make Puerto Ricans dependent on the Church. Admitting they would never be trusted as much as Puerto Rican leadership, they saw that working through lay leaders guaranteed their continued relevance in the community.

Through the early 1960s, the Puerto Rican communities in Woodlawn, the Near West Side, and the Near North Side gradually disappeared, replaced by communities in West Town and Lincoln Park. Each time they moved, Puerto Ricans faced mounting difficulty in locating quality housing and stable employment, and protecting themselves from White gangs and a White police force who harassed and brutalized young Puerto Rican men. According to Padilla, these problems drove the Puerto Rican community to reject the strategy of accommodation, specifically by abandoning the Caballeros and shifting towards separatist nationalist politics by the late 60s, with groups like the Young Lords Organization (YLO) in Lincoln Park and the Latin American Defense Organization (LADO) in West Town.<sup>62</sup> However, Padilla’s narrative assumes that the influence of the Catholic Church and the Alinsky method completely determined the actions of the Caballeros. In reality, the Caballeros drew from several diasporic organizational structures that they fought to maintain within the parameters the Catholic church allowed.

---

<sup>61</sup> Memorandum by Gilbert A. Carroll and Leo T. Mahon to Albert Meyer, “Present Position on the Puerto Rican Work,” ca. 1960, EXEC/C0730/172#8, 43809.07, Albert Cardinal Meyer Collection, AAC, 7.

<sup>62</sup> Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 173.

### The Caballeros Came from Puerto Rico

Contrary to the assumptions of Nick von Hoffman and Lester Hunt, the Puerto Ricans who formed the Caballeros brought with them an organizational strategy they had been using to work within a Church that was both powerful and neglectful. They also brought a strong sense of identity they were not easily willing to give up. To reorient the Caballeros within a Latin American historical paradigm, it is helpful to discuss the organization as a *cofradía* (confraternity). According to Jesuit historian Edmundo Rodríguez, a *cofradía* was an organization, usually with membership divided by gender, that served a variety of functions for communities, both in and out of the church. It would organize large fiestas for saint days, and elaborate memorials for members who had passed. It provided material and spiritual assistance, serving both as a mutual aid organization and a religious brotherhood.<sup>63</sup> The Caballeros certainly did all these things, as the Caballeros' magazine, *La Vendimia* (The Harvest), advertised the Caballeros as offering “mutual aid, civic commemorations, sports, classes, legal and medical services, men's living facilities, credit unions, festivals, [and] civic, religious recreational, and self-help activities.”<sup>64</sup>

Between 1956 and 1965, the Caballeros held the Fiesta Anual de San Juan (Annual Festival of St. John the Baptist) in mid-June. The first, in 1956, included a procession down State Street attended by Mayor Daley and Doña Felisa Rincón, Mayor of San Juan, a mass at Holy Name Cathedral at Chicago and State, then at the Chicago Armory on Chicago and Fairbanks, a feast and live music performed by the famous salsa musician, Tito Rodríguez.<sup>65</sup> While being less

---

<sup>63</sup> Rodríguez, “The Hispanic and Church Movements,” 209.

<sup>64</sup> “Los Caballeros de San Juan,” *La Vendimia*, copied in Martínez, *Chicago*, 142. Original appears as “Ayuda Mutua, Actos Cívicos, Deportes, Clases, Servicios Legales y Médicos, Facilidades de Vivienda para Hombres, Uniones de Crédito, Fiestas // Civic, Religious, Recreational and Self-Help Activities.”

<sup>65</sup> See “Activities of San Juan Day 1956,” *Vida Latina*, Jun. 1957, copied in Martínez, *Chicago*, 160. Also see photos on pp. 187-210.

visible in the press, there is evidence to suggest that the Caballeros held large wakes and funerals for their members. Fr. Headley recalled that when his father died,

there were four buses that came from Waukegan. Puerto Ricans. [...] They were lined around Betsfires Funeral Home on 53<sup>rd</sup> and Kedzie [...] for three blocks. [...] All the councils [of the Caballeros], everybody was there, everybody came. It was like [a] two-night wake, it was just tremendous, it was really a great tribute to my dad, great tribute to the community that we worked in, and actually, we loved very much.<sup>66</sup>

The sheer scale of Headley's father's wake indicates the degree of organization that existed around the death of someone who was probably considered an outsider to the community.

Headley's feeling of solidarity with the community arose because of the Caballeros' recreation of a structure that existed in Puerto Rico. While Headley claimed that he and his father "loved" the community, such an act really demonstrates that the community loved and welcomed him.

Other, less descriptive, evidence suggests that large scale funerals were held for members of the Caballeros and respected members of the Puerto Rican community.<sup>67</sup>

Across Latin America, *cofradías* formed as lay organizations that worked within a parish and under the direction of the parish priest but remained autonomous. In places where the Church was mostly absent (such as Puerto Rico), most Catholics primarily experienced public religion through *cofradías* rather than the Church.<sup>68</sup> The *cofradía* as an organizational structure developed before it made sense to distinguish between the religious and secular. When Padilla wrote that the Caballeros were "in essence more social than religious," he was treating them as a

---

<sup>66</sup> Headley interview.

<sup>67</sup> Jiménez interview, María Romero, "María Romero Video Interview and Biography," interviewed by José Jiménez, Jun. 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park Interviews, GVSU.

<sup>68</sup> One consequence of this was that fewer Latin American Catholics paid a tithe, instead expecting wealthy members of *cofradías* to cover the costs of feasts and festivals. See Edward L. Cleary, "In the Absence of Missionaries: Lay Preachers Who Preserved Catholicism," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 34, No. 2 (Apr. 2010): 68.

community organization, an organizational structure which developed in the context of US labor history, where the distinction between religious and secular has been naturalized.<sup>69</sup> Treating the Caballeros as a *cofradía*, it does not make sense to say that the Caballeros were “more social than religious,” to be a lay organization was to be both. In entering a society where the secular-religious paradigm was hegemonic, the Caballeros were difficult to parse as either religious or secular exactly because they were originating from a different paradigm (the lay-clergy paradigm).



**Fig. 5:** Puerto Rican coat of arms, with the Lamb of God holding the Spanish flag. The lamb is associated with John the Baptist, the patron saint of Puerto Rico.

To read the Caballeros as a *cofradía* was to also read a hidden transcript. To many White American observers, they were another community organization on its way to integration. To Puerto Ricans they were much like organizations that had existed on the island. An example of this dual reading of the Caballeros was the Fiesta de San Juan. The fiesta was conceived in a heavily publicized event in 1955, when nine Puerto Rican girls in communion dresses brought a lamb to Mayor Daley’s office, prompting Daley to declare that the week prior to June 24<sup>th</sup> would henceforth be San Juan Week, a celebration of Chicago’s Puerto Rican community.<sup>70</sup> Lou Silverman, the WLAC’s public relations man who previously said Puerto Ricans had no culture, claimed, “[w]e made the lamb the national animal of Puerto Rico,” a framing adopted by the

<sup>69</sup> Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 127.

<sup>70</sup> See Martínez, *Chicago*, 180-183.



American press, with *Time* magazine writing, “The lamb is not only the symbol of Puerto Rico but of the Chicago Church’s potent and growing organization of Puerto Ricans.”<sup>71</sup> By contrast, an article in Spanish appearing in the Puerto Rican magazine *Vida Latina* (Latin Life), explained that the “[t]he islanders have kept until the present the memory of John [the Baptist], and display him on their coat of arms; a little lamb that represents the Lamb of God, and at the bottom is the motto: JOANNES EST NOMEN EIUS (John is his name).”<sup>72</sup> While the American press read the lamb as a symbol of Puerto Rican nationalism and Puerto Rican loyalty to the Church, the Puerto Rican press saw the lamb as symbolizing Puerto Rican identity, confirming that Puerto Ricans still remembered who they were. In the Puerto Rican interpretation, nationalism is fused with religion, just as the lamb appears on the coat of arms.

While the Caballeros should be placed within Latin American religious history, the diasporic connections to Puerto Rican institutions are also far more specific than to *cofradías* in general. Just after the US colonized Puerto Rico in 1898, several teenage Catholic *Jíbaros* began evangelizing the mountains of Puerto Rico, eventually working together as the *Hermanos Cheos*, to teach people the evils of Protestantism and Spiritism. Unlike ordained priests, the *Hermanos Cheos* would live among their congregations and serve them in their daily lives, preaching to the illiterate, and healing them. They built chapels throughout the countryside and served as intermediaries between the unreached laity and the Church hierarchy.<sup>73</sup> Succeeding in what the Catholic Church had failed at for centuries, the *Cheos* began fulfilling the needs of *Jíbaros* who

---

<sup>71</sup> On Silverman “inventing” the lamb, see Horwitt, *Let Them Call Me Rebel*, 273. For the press quote, see “Religion: Fiesta,” *Time*, Jul. 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1956, quoted in von Hoffman, *Radical*, 131.

<sup>72</sup> Salvador Rubalcava, “Juan El Bautista, Profeta de Altísimo: Para los Caballeros de San Juan,” *Vida Latina*, Jun. 9<sup>th</sup>, 1957, 9, copied in Martínez, *Chicago*, 155. The original reads, “Los isleños han conservado hasta el presente el recuerdo de Juan, y lo ostentan en su escudo de armas; un corderito que representa el Cordero de Dios, y al pie esta leyenda: JOANNES EST NOMEN EIUS (Juan es su nombre).”

<sup>73</sup> Cleary, “In the Absence of Missionaries,” 67-68.

had rarely encountered Catholic institutions, and in return, lay people were willing to obey the Cheos, attending mass and sanctifying their marriages.

The rise of the Cheos as preservers of Puerto Rican Catholicism may seem to contradict Díaz-Stevens' matriarchal core theory, but according to religious historian Reinaldo Román, the Cheos should be paired with the rise of another religious figure, Elenita, "Our Lady of Mt. Carmel incarnate," who first appeared in the town of San Lorenzo.<sup>74</sup> Díaz-Stevens explains that when the "comadrona, rezadora, and curandera[ ]were joined, not even the occasional missionary visits from the priest would challenge or detract from her position of respect and influence in the community."<sup>75</sup> This description aptly applies to Elenita, who claimed the power of intercession (i.e. to grant forgiveness as a (re-)incarnate saint) and performed water cures.<sup>76</sup> Elenita and the Hermanos traveled together across the island. José Morales, leader of the Cheos, was called 'Hombre Dios' (man god), and Elenita was called 'la Virgen' (the Virgin), or 'Madre Redentora' (Mother Redeemer).<sup>77</sup> With power that "spilled over into the secular-political-realm," "both men and women obeyed [Elenita's words] as commands."<sup>78</sup> However, Elenita was also held up as pure and hyper-moral (literally "la Virgen"), and thus her power was also tightly constrained.<sup>79</sup>

Despite their success, many Catholic leaders treated the Cheos with suspicion. Catholic priests and the Catholic press made claims that "the origin of these inspired ones is (Afro) spiritist [...] These angels are diabolical," or that their evangelizing reminded one of a

---

<sup>74</sup> Roman, *Governing Spirits*, 52. For some background on the significance of Elenita/Our Lady of Mount Carmel (a.k.a. La Virgen del Carmen), see Vionette G. Negretti, "Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Puerto Rico," Carlos Caso-Rosendi, WordPress.com, accessed Mar. 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022, <https://casorosendi.com/2018/03/19/our-lady-of-mount-carmel-in-puerto-rico/>.

<sup>75</sup> Díaz-Stevens, "Latinas and the Church," 251.

<sup>76</sup> Roman, *Governing Spirits*, 55 (water cures), 59 (intercession).

<sup>77</sup> Roman, *Governing Spirits*, 59-60.

<sup>78</sup> First quote from Díaz-Stevens, "Latinas and the Church," 253; second quote from Román, *Governing Spirits*, 79.

<sup>79</sup> Román, *Governing Spirits*, 78-79.

“Protestant revival” (not that such claims were unfounded, except their being ‘diabolical’).<sup>80</sup>

Catholic priests also saw the Cheos as a threat to their organizational model. In one instance, a priest in Villalba “ordered an unusually large congregation to vacate the church, suspecting that the increased attendance was a Cheo’s doing.”<sup>81</sup> The willingness of a priest to dismiss a ‘large congregation’ indicates that priests were only interested in increasing mass attendance insofar as people were coming to mass to see them. Organizationally, the role of priests was “reduced to sacramental functions,” while the Cheos were conducting revivals, administering to the laity, and taking on a much stronger leadership role than priests ever had.<sup>82</sup>

By 1913 the Catholic Church began to re-strategize, seeing that the Cheos were too useful in achieving the Church’s mission to ignore, and began to officially recognize and support the group’s method of ministry. However, this recognition was conditional, “[p]rovided that the Cheos discontinued the practice of praying publicly for their saint’s inspiration.” While Elenita had died in 1909, the Church remained mistrustful of the Cheos who continued to operate as they had in San Lorenzo, where a shrine was dedicated to Our Lady of Mount Carmel.<sup>83</sup> By 1927, under a largely North American hierarchy, the Cheos were brought into the Catholic Church as a lay movement, forming a set of bylaws and being assigned a priest as spiritual director.<sup>84</sup> By becoming a part of the



**Fig. 6a:** Eugenia Rodríguez, member of the Damas de María, photo taken from video interview in 2012.

<sup>80</sup> *El Ideal Católico*, Aug. 4, 1906, cited in Cleary, “In the Absence of Missionaries,” 69; Entries from the annals of the Redemptorist order, cited in Esteban Santaella Rivera, *Historia de los Hermanos Cheos: Recopilación de escritos y relatos* (Ponce, PR: Editorial Alfa y Omega, 1970), 178-80, cited in Roman, *Governing Spirits*, 58.

<sup>81</sup> Roman, *Governing Spirits*, 58.

<sup>82</sup> Roman, *Governing Spirits*, 58.

<sup>83</sup> Roman, *Governing Spirits*, 58.

<sup>84</sup> Roman, *Governing Spirits*, 60. Cleary, “In the Absence of Missionaries,” 69-70.

Church, the Cheos could continue to operate without the skepticism they had faced from priests, but only by sacrificing their authority to the Church. While they no longer had to compete with the Church, this sacrifice proved damaging to the group, and “[o]nly a few years after official recognition, the group’s energies had largely dissipated.”<sup>85</sup> However, while diminished in strength, they had not lost their influence entirely.

Many Sanlorenceños would eventually move to Chicago, constituting more than a third



**Fig. 6b:** Jesús Rodríguez, Hermano Cheo and president of Los Hermanos en La Familia de Dios, photo taken ca. 1968.

of Council No. 1 of the Caballeros in Woodlawn, and later moving to the Near North Side, then Lincoln Park, where they joined Councils No. 2 and 3 (Holy Name Cathedral and St. Michael’s).<sup>86</sup> Jesús “Chu” Rodríguez, born in 1925, and his sister Eugenia, in 1929, were born in San Lorenzo and the nearby barrio, San Salvador de Caguas. They would both become important members of the Caballeros on the North Side (and their women’s auxiliary, the Damas de María).<sup>87</sup> Living close to Elenita’s shrine, the Rodríguez family kept a statue of Our Lady of Mount Carmel on their

<sup>85</sup> Román, *Governing Spirits*, 81.

<sup>86</sup> Thomas Kelliher discusses that the Caballeros came from San Lorenzo and Caguas in “Hispanic Catholics,” 150. Kelliher confirmed in an email correspondence that he had gotten this information from an interview with the Caballero, Gabino Moyet, who was from San Lorenzo and was one of the founding members of the Caballeros in Woodlawn, then moved to the Near West Side, then worked for the CCSS, see Kelliher, “Hispanic Catholics,” 144, 150, 182. Early on, Puerto Ricans formed smaller communities with the people from their towns in Puerto Rico, institutionalized by social clubs run through the Puerto Rican Congress, see Mervin Mendez, “The Young Lords and Early Chicago Puerto Rican Gangs,” interviewed by Erika Rodriguez, Jan. 27<sup>th</sup>, 2002, Chicago Gang History Project, accessed Feb. 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022, <https://gangresearch.net/ChicagoGangs/latinkings/lkhistory.html>. The Hijos de San Lorenzo seemed to remain important for quite a while, appearing in Lincoln Park in the Spanish American Federation in 1965, see Part II of this paper and Report by VISTA workers for the LPCA, “VISTA – As We See It,” Mar. 1966, 082A.003, Lincoln Park Conservation Association Records, DUL, 11.

<sup>87</sup> On Jesús Rodríguez, see Council No. 10 of the Caballeros de San Juan, “Nervio y Guia,” *Boletín Informativo*, Apr. 5<sup>th</sup>, 1964, Manuel Martínez Collection. On Eugenia Rodríguez, see Eugenia Rodríguez, “Eugenia Rodríguez Video Interview and Biography, Interview 1,” interviewed by José Jiménez, Jun. 4, 2012, video recording, Young Lords in Lincoln Park, GVSU. On their being related, see App. 1.

home altar. People would come from the barrio to their house to learn the catechism and pray the rosary with their father, don Juan.<sup>88</sup> When don Juan became blind, he sent 15-year-old Eugenia to a convent, but she left the following year to marry Antonio Jiménez, who she met in San Salvador. In the early years of Operation Bootstrap, Jiménez became a migrant laborer, at first working in Connecticut, then landing on the Near North Side of Chicago by 1947, when he brought Eugenia and their children to live with him.<sup>89</sup>

Meanwhile, Jesús would move to Jayúya, Puerto Rico, where he joined the Hermanos Cheos. He would have begun three years of Christian education, starting to teach catechism and eventually became a lay minister under the close eye of the other Cheos.<sup>90</sup> With more experience, Jesús traveled the island for 15 years, his apostolate being “very well known among most of the towns of Puerto Rico, where his words pulsed with enthusiasm, sinking into to the hearts of his compatriots, in such a way that in short time he became famous, very dear and loved by his countrymen.”<sup>91</sup> He would marry Eulalia de Rodríguez and have six children.<sup>92</sup> But in 1957, following the start of an extramarital affair with his wife, he left Puerto Rico, leaving a “deep void” on the island, and arrived on the Near North Side of Chicago.<sup>93</sup>

---

<sup>88</sup> Rodríguez, interview.

<sup>89</sup> Cha-Cha Jiménez Defense Committee, “‘Que Viva El Pueblo:’ A Biographical History of Jose Cha-Cha Jimenez General Secretary of the Young Lords Organization,” ca. 1973, copied in Presentation by Yolanda Quiñone and Vicky Romero, “Latina/o Leadership Opportunity Program, 1993-1994,” 1993-1994, 081.011, LPCA Collection, DUL, 8; Fernández, *The Young Lords*, 16-17.

<sup>90</sup> Somewhat speculative based on Cleary’s description of the typical training process of the Cheos, see “In the Absence of Missionaries,” 69-70. Also see Council No. 10 of the Caballeros, “Nervio y Guia,” which confirms that Rodríguez specifically received Christian education.

<sup>91</sup> Council No. 10 of the Caballeros, “Nervio y Guia.” The original text reads, “Su gran consagración al apostolado es muy conocida en la mayoría de los pueblos de Puerto Rico, donde sus palabras vibraron con entusiasmo compenetrándose en el corazón de sus patriotas, de tal manera que en breve tiempo se hizo famoso, querido y muy amado de sus coterráneos.”

<sup>92</sup> Council No. 10 of the Caballeros, “Nervio y Guia.”

<sup>93</sup> Council No. 10 of the Caballeros, “Nervio y Guia.” Original reads, “hondo vacio.” Also see Donald J. Headley, “Father Donald J. Headley Video Interview and Biography,” interviewed by José Jiménez, Aug. 21, 2012, Chicago, IL, video recording, Young Lords in Lincoln Park Interviews, GVSU; Mahon, *Fire Under My Feet*, 7-10.

At least three leaders of the Caballeros—Jesús Rodríguez, Juan Sosa, and Juan Sierra—had been members of the Hermanos Cheos before they arrived in Chicago.<sup>94</sup> Jesús, Eugenia, and her husband, Antonio, were all factory workers.<sup>95</sup> But Jesús also did not abandon his religious commitments, and “understood the imperative necessity of doing something for those souls [of the Hispanic community] that he began to realize were so dark and deserted without knowledge of the teachings of our brother Jesus Christ, they were so abandoned and scorned for not knowing their true religion.”<sup>96</sup> According to Fr. Mahon, when Jesús came to Chicago,

[n]either I nor anyone else announced the fact of his arrival. But somehow, the word got around [...] [and] Puerto Ricans began to come to the house where he was staying from all over the city. Every night there were scores of visitors to see the man who had preached missions in their barrios back home. I’m sure that if he told them to do something they would surely do it, though they might not obey the same command if it came from a priest or a bishop.<sup>97</sup>

Even Fr. Mahon recognized the power lay ministers from the Hermanos Cheos had among Chicago’s Puerto Rican community. Don Jesús, as he would be called in the community, would become a prominent leader within the Caballeros (particularly Council No. 3 at St. Michael’s), pushing them to adopt a more service-oriented Christian mission, much in the style of the Cheos.<sup>98</sup>

The connection between the Cheos and Caballeros establishes that some organizational structures survived both the colonization of Puerto Rico by the US and the transplantation of

---

<sup>94</sup> Rodríguez and Sosa were mentioned to be Cheos in Kelliher, “Hispanic Catholics,” 149; Rodríguez and Sierra were mentioned in Donald J. Headley, “Father Donald J. Headley Video Interview and Biography,” interviewed by José Jiménez, Aug. 21, 2012, Chicago, IL, video recording, Young Lords in Lincoln Park Interviews, GVSU.

<sup>95</sup> Council No. 10 of the Caballeros, “Nervio y Guía.” Fernández, *The Young Lords*, 16-17.

<sup>96</sup> Council No. 10 of the Caballeros, “Nervio y Guía.” Original reads, “empezó a conocer parte de la comunidad hispana y con su gran caridad, comprendió la imperiosa necesidad de hacer algo por esas almas que él empezó a conoce tan lóbregas y desiertas en el conocimiento de la doctrina de nuestro hermano Jesucristo, tan abandonado y despreciado por no conocer su verdadera religión.”

<sup>97</sup> Leo T. Mahon, “Talk by Reverend Leo T. Mahon,” Nov. 1961, Manuel Martínez Collection, 23. Also quoted in Kelliher, “Hispanic Catholics,” 150. The name of the Cheo is not specified, but given that Jesús was famous in Puerto Rico, it would make the most sense if they were referring to him.

<sup>98</sup> Council No. 10 of the Caballeros, “Nervio y Guía.”

Puerto Ricans from the island to Chicago, forming a cultural link between Puerto Ricans in Puerto Rico and Chicago. Still, White priests in Chicago insisted they were responsible for organization among Puerto Ricans, assuming that Puerto Ricans were “blank slates” even when that assumption made little sense. In a 2012 interview with José “Cha-Cha” Jiménez, leader of the Young Lords and son of Eugenia Rodríguez, Fr. Donald Headley discusses how organizers had to meet people “where they were:”

Headley: So people like Jesús Rodríguez and Juan Sierra descended from that group that we call the Hermanos Cheos, they went through the island, you know, praying the rosary [...] [I]t’s much richer than just saying [Puerto Ricans are] Catholic. It’s a whole cultural reality that is so beautiful and so wonderful and watching people do it is just spectacular. [...] It’s become a cultural inheritance, and this is where people are.

Jiménez: And so [...] the development of the Caballeros... what did the idea come from? [...] I see, a little bit came from the Hermanos [Cheos]...

Headley: It came, pretty much, from Saul Alinsky’s group.<sup>99</sup>

Here, Headley explained that to effectively organize and missionize Puerto Ricans, a White person had to understand Puerto Rican culture. Listening to Headley’s description of Puerto Rican culture, Cha-Cha arrived at the correct conclusion that the Caballeros arose from a specifically Puerto Rican form of Catholicism brought to Chicago by the Cheos. But Headley corrected him, saying it was Alinsky’s group, not the Cheos, who were responsible for organizing the Caballeros. Headley then elaborated that “there is always an outside agitator. So, Leo [Mahon] was kind of like the outside agitator, you know? And so was Nick von Hoffman, so was Lester Hunt. But eventually, the leadership arose in the Puerto Rican community.” According to this logic, it was first necessary for a White priest to learn about Puerto Rican culture, then use the Alinsky method to meet Puerto Ricans “where they were” and only then

---

<sup>99</sup> Headley, interview.

teach them the true way to organize. It was inconceivable that the “docile Puerto Ricans” already knew how to organize themselves. Cha-Cha’s reading, the far more obvious one, is that the Cheos were already leaders of their own community.

### Maintaining Community, Maintaining Hierarchy

From the beginning, it was Puerto Ricans who came to Fr. Mahon seeking assistance and not vice versa. In his memoir, Mahon recalled that, in 1953, “[t]en young Puerto Rican men gathered around me and said simply, ‘We have no priest.’ ‘I speak no Spanish,’ [Mahon] answered sheepishly. Smugly they responded, ‘We’ll teach you.’”<sup>100</sup> In this interaction, there was an exchange of power—Mahon would owe his ability to speak Spanish, essential for leading a Spanish-speaking group, to these men in exchange for the fulfillment of their material and spiritual needs. Mahon later describes how, “[w]hen working with the black community I was the expert guide—‘follow me and you will be saved.’ When working with the Puerto Ricans I was more the servant—‘You have needs, I will help you fulfill them.’”<sup>101</sup> In part the different attitudes Mahon had about African Americans and Puerto Ricans arose from the idea that Puerto Ricans were, at this point, still considered redeemable when African Americans were not.<sup>102</sup> But in addition, Puerto Ricans saw Mahon as a tool for immediate material and spiritual needs and were

---

<sup>100</sup> Mahon, *Fire Under My Feet*, 4. Mahon says this happened in 1955, but that is impossible since the Caballeros were founded in 1954, see “Los Caballeros de San Juan,” copied in Martínez, *Chicago*, 153.

<sup>101</sup> Mahon, *Fire Under My Feet*, 5.

<sup>102</sup> A source that points to the differing treatment of African Americans and Puerto Ricans and fears of Puerto Rican ghettoization is Ethel L. Payne, “Cardinal Stritch Assails Trumbull Park Violence,” *Chicago Defender*, Jun. 13<sup>th</sup>, 1956. However, this also may have been a result of differing organizational strategies. At this point in time, the Catholic Interracial Council (CIC), an African American lay movement, was “[a]ware that many would think whites promoting integration were extremists ... the CIC ... emphasized ... peaceful integration [as] a rational solution,” see Johnson, *One in Christ*, 132. Meanwhile, it was not that “extreme” to advocate Puerto Rican integration, even Mayor Daley was open to the idea. As such, African American laity likely saw Mahon as an ally different from more overtly racist and segregationist priests and willing to take risks, who could aid in the effort to integrate. As such, they may have been more willing to accommodate his priestly paternalism.



not willing to hand him authority or trust him more than was necessary. He could only maintain the role of redeemer if they kept coming.

As the Caballeros expanded throughout Chicago through the late 1950s, their position on assimilation became more complex, but many still opposed it. The mainstream American press transitioned from framing Puerto Ricans as a “problem” to painting them as a model minority, well on its way to complete assimilation.<sup>103</sup> However, when members of the Caballeros were quoted in such articles, they defied the simple assimilationist narrative. In a 1961 article entitled “They Need What Is in Our Hearts,” journalist Mary Merryfields started her article by saying, “I get the feeling of late that the Puerto Ricans haven’t completely accepted us. They seem to be waiting for us to speak Spanish.” The main interviewee of the article, Frank Diaz, president of Council No. 3 of the Caballeros at St. Michael’s Church in Lincoln Park, elaborated,

Our people they not like to go out to night school to learn English—to leave the family. On the education station, a lady teach English. But all the time she speak English. How can Puerto Rican parents understand her? [...] So the man go to the kitchen with his wife to make coffee. They sit and talk about the Island—how warm, how lovely now. The kids they watch but they already learn English at school.<sup>104</sup>

In complaining about the difficulties of living in Chicago, both in terms of learning English and in terms of the weather, Díaz was not making any attempt to appear assimilationist. He was perfect willingly to admit that he would rather be in Puerto Rico.

Díaz further argued that Puerto Ricans did not need to adjust to American life, that attempts to reeducate them were useless and children learned English anyway, and most new arrivals were well educated. Later in the article, he said “the majority now arriving from

---

<sup>103</sup> When, in 1960, a magazine portrayed Puerto Ricans as violent criminals, several White organizers lambasted them for it, saying such a representation “badly clouds the remarkable achievement of Puerto Ricans in Chicago,” see “Three Rap Magazine For Blast At Puerto Ricans,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, Nov. 28<sup>th</sup>, 1960.

<sup>104</sup> Mary Merryfield, “They Need What Is in Our Hearts,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Jan. 15<sup>th</sup>, 1961. The article references that the council Díaz was the president of was located at Lasalle and North, which is closest to St. Michael’s.

Puerto Rico are high school graduates who can read and write English,” contradicting the figure used by the CCSS that the average Puerto Rican arrived in Chicago with a 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> grade education.<sup>105</sup> Díaz’ comments undermined the premise of the article and the CCSS’s mission that Puerto Ricans could not make it on their own in Chicago and needed help. Later in the article, a woman Merryfield called “Abuelita” (likely a member of the Damas de María) assured readers that Puerto Rican children are well-disciplined during mass and that Puerto Rican youth only committed crimes because they wanted to be like “other American boys.” This latter point completely inverts the assimilationist paradigm, placing Puerto Rican culture above American culture in terms of its tendency towards normatively constructive behavior. However, what is also clear is that both Díaz and Abuelita make appeals to conservative values—discipline, “good” behavior, and educational attainment. This framing accepts a hierarchical view of society, simply replacing Americans with Puerto Ricans in the position of “highest” culture, and thus failed to challenge the very structures that marginalized many Puerto Ricans.

Several authors have described the Caballeros as an “elite” within the Puerto Rican community. Lilia Fernández suggests that “middle- and upper-class Puerto Rican students and professionals” initially pushed the Catholic Archdiocese away from a national parish model towards integration, but by 1960, there were too few middle-class Puerto Ricans to make up the entire Caballeros organization, so many were probably working class.<sup>106</sup> Rather,

---

<sup>105</sup> Fact sheet by the Cardinal’s Committee for the Spanish Speaking in Chicago, “Fact Sheet for the Press,” ca. 1955, EXEC/C0700/24#9, 43816.06, Samuel Cardinal Stritch Personal Papers, AAC. This number likely came from Hunt and Von Hoffman, “The Meanings of ‘Democracy,’” 53. Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 131, confirms that, according to the US Census, this number was correct. The point, however, is that Díaz denied that Puerto Ricans needed educational assistance.

<sup>106</sup> Lilia Fernández, “Chicago’s Catholic Archdiocese and the Challenges of Serving a Multiethnic Latino Population,” from *Faith and Power*, 50. According to *U.S. Census*, Economic Characteristics of Persons of Puerto Rican Birth and Parentage, by Age, for Selected Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas, Chicago, IL: 1960, Table 13, 100, quoted in Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 111, 1.6% of employed Puerto Ricans in Chicago were

what made the Caballeros at least appear elite was their conservatism. They valued education, obeying the law, and not being on welfare (whether they needed it or not). They signaled their elite status by holding banquets and beauty pageants, where they dressed in suits and invited important guests of honor like politicians and religious figures from both Chicago and Puerto Rico.<sup>107</sup> Padilla discusses that the Caballeros were “critical of barrio residents refusing to become part of the[ir] rank and file,” citing a newspaper affiliated with the Caballeros, *El Centinela* (The Sentinel), which lamented “the antipathy our people show towards” such prestigious activities.<sup>108</sup> An elite aesthetic wasn’t necessary only to be seen as a good leader, but also as a good Puerto Rican citizen. While most Caballeros were not assimilationist, many did assume they were simply better than Puerto Ricans who were marginalized. At the same time, there was enormous incentive to appear conservative since failure to signal within the bounds of a colonial structure defeats an organizational strategy

---

professionals, technical & kindred workers, 1.2% were managers, officials & proprietors, 5.2% were clerical & kindred workers, and 1.8% were sales workers, and the remaining were skilled and unskilled laborers and service workers. Given that the total Puerto Rican population was around 32,000 in 1960 (see Padilla, 78), the number of middle-class Puerto Ricans was (probably significantly) less than 3,150. The Caballeros had an entirely male membership of 2,000 in 1960, meaning even if all its members were middle class, they would represent the almost the entire Puerto Rican middle class and not account for any women in middle class positions. This is demonstrably impossible since several other (similarly situated) organizations competed with the Caballeros with non-overlapping membership, see Staudenmaier, “Between Two Flags,” 97-98. Thus, while a disproportionate number of Caballeros could have been middle class, it is very likely a large portion of them were working class. Several people interviewed for the Young Lords in Lincoln Park collection offered evidence that members of Caballeros were working class. Guillermo Martínez was a Caballero and worked in a factory, see Martínez, interview; Alfredo Calixto and José Jiménez had fathers who were Caballeros and worked in factories, see Alfredo Calixto, “Alfredo Calixto Video Interview and Biography,” interviewed by José Jiménez, Feb. 8<sup>th</sup>, 2012, Chicago, IL, video recording, Young Lords in Lincoln Park, GVSU; and Jiménez, interview, GVSU. However, it is also likely that the exact class make-up of the Caballeros varied from council to council. This point will be further discussed later.

<sup>107</sup> On Puerto Ricans not being on welfare, see “Fact Sheet on Puerto Ricans in Chicago.” On the banquets and guests, see “Don Luis Ferre y S. E. Samuel Cardinal Stritch, Homenajeados por los Caballeros de San Juan,” *Vida Latina*, Jan. 1958, 12-13; “Elite Social,” *Vida Latina*, Sep. 1957; Letter by Donald J. Headley to Albert Cardinal Meyer, Feb. 10, 1965, EXEC/C0620/5, 43804.04, Albert Cardinal Meyer Collection, AAC; Letter by Donald J. Headley to John P. Cody, Jul. 12, 1967, EXEC/C0670/43, 43958.04, John Cardinal Cody Papers Collection, AAC; Letter by John P. Cody to Felix L. Rivera and Jesus Rodriguez, Nov. 6, 1967, EXEC/C0670/43, 43958.04, John Cardinal Cody Papers Collection, AAC; Martínez, *Chicago*, 174-179, 203-204; Gabino Moyet, *A city-wide meeting of Los Caballeros de San Juan, 1958*, 1958, photo, in Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, between 98 and 99.

<sup>108</sup> *El Centinela*, Apr. 1959, 4, quoted in Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 139.

altogether. To be conservative was, in part, to be acceptable within the dominant society. To be marginalized was to “bring down the race.” The problem with such a strategy is not that it is assimilationist, but that it perpetuates marginalization.

The degree of conservatism also varied between councils. In Lincoln Park, leaders like Frank Díaz emphasized that Puerto Ricans were doubly burdened by pressure to assimilate and hold a job and don Jesús was, himself, both a leader and a member of the working class. Meanwhile, Yolanda Nieves, who grew up in the West Town-Humboldt Park area in the 1960s, described that the Caballeros excluded “people that really were factory workers, you know, who came home to their families, didn’t have that kind of time or energy to participate.”<sup>109</sup> According to Janet Nolan, whose ethnographic work focused on the West Town Puerto Rican community, it was difficult for working class people, many of whom didn’t own cars, to access services of the CCSS, whose headquarters were on the Near North Side.<sup>110</sup>

Evidence from CCSS reports suggest that certain councils on the North Side—Holy Name (No. 2), St. Michael’s (No. 3), and St. Teresa’s (No. 9)—were less exclusionary to working class members. In a report by the CCSS around 1960, Frs. Mahon and Carroll described Council No. 3 at St. Michael’s as “the most striking example of successful work on a large scale with Puerto Ricans in Chicago,” due to its ability to attract larger numbers to mass (35% compared to the city-wide average among Puerto Ricans of 25%), host retreats and dances, organize lay preachers to missionize the community, and send their children to St. Michael’s Catholic high school.<sup>111</sup>

---

<sup>109</sup> Yolanda Nieves, interviewed by D. Owen Carter, Dec. 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021, video recording and transcript, in possession of the author.

<sup>110</sup> Nolan, “Puerto Ricans and the Church,” 11-12. On the fact that getting from West Town to the Near North and Downtown was difficult without a car, see Omar López, “Omar Lopez Interview #1,” interviewed by Miguel Morales, Feb. 10<sup>th</sup>, 1995, audio recording and transcript, 003.005, Collection on the Young Lords, DUL, and Yolanda Nieves discusses how her father was able to assist people on account of his owning a car, see Nieves, interview; and Yolanda Nieves, “Borinquén Record Shop & Botanica,” *Diálogo* 15, No. 1 (Spring 2012): 23-25.

<sup>111</sup> Carroll and Mahon, “Present Position on the Puerto Rican Work,” 3-4.

Guillermo Martínez became a Caballero in 1954 at Holy Name Cathedral on the Near North Side, under the leadership of people like Cesar Rivera, Miguel Chevere, and Jesús Rodríguez. But later, as the Puerto Rican community was displaced north into Lincoln Park by the construction of Carl Sandburg Village in 1960, he described how the members and leaders at Council No. 2 simply transplanted to Council No. 3 at St. Michael's in Old Town. When urban renewal bulldozed the Puerto Ricans near Old Town in the mid-60s, the Caballeros moved to Council No. 9 at St. Teresa's on Armitage.<sup>112</sup> Thus, there was a strong core of less exclusionary leadership on the North Side that followed the Puerto Rican community wherever it went.

Councils on the West Side were more elitist. A 1964 CCSS report described that St. Marks in West Town had “leadership, but it is rather personal and divided,” and the area was generally under-resourced. In Garfield Park, Our Lady of Sorrows, had “[t]oo much of an individual approach,” and St. Mel-Holy Ghost had “a tendency to become a closed society, shutting itself [and the parish off] from the large numbers of uninstructed Puerto Ricans in the area.”<sup>113</sup> If the CCSS desired that lay leaders become intermediaries between priests and the more unreachable laity, this was apparently something that the Caballeros on the West Side were not attempting to do. This model of a conservative and self-isolating elite is contradictory to the service-oriented model of the Hermanos Cheos, and so it is important to acknowledge nuance when characterizing the overall stratification of the Caballeros. While councils on the West Side became stratified, councils on the North Side remained closer to the community's grassroots.

Considering that many Caballeros adopted an elite aesthetic and embraced a hierarchical community structure, it is unsurprising that their masculinity took the form of marianismo,

---

<sup>112</sup> Martínez, interview. On urban renewal on the North Side, see Daniel K. Hertz, *The Battle of Lincoln Park: Urban Renewal and Gentrification in Chicago* (Cleveland, OH: Belt Publishing, 2018), 95-104.

<sup>113</sup> Report by Gilbert A. Carroll and Donald J. Headley, “Report of the Cardinal's Committee for the Spanish Speaking,” Jan. 14<sup>th</sup>, 1964, EXEC/C0620/5#3, 43804.04, Albert Cardinal Meyer Collection, AAC, 2-3.

especially exemplified by the frequent beauty pageants they held. This contrasted the machismo of lower-class Puerto Ricans. Within the dominant White gaze, the question of poverty and machismo were completely intertwined. Oscar Lewis' 1966 influential study, *La Vida: A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty*, blamed poverty on men's failure to control domestic life (much like the 1965 Moynihan Report). Poverty was the result of absent fathers, matriarchal households, and the poor's "obsession with sex."<sup>114</sup> Such arguments, which were commonplace in the script of overpopulation, were likely also taken up by conservative Puerto Ricans who, likewise, blamed poverty on the failure of the poor to adhere to conservative values.<sup>115</sup> On the other hand, the Caballeros also faced pressure from White organizers and priests to adopt a form of masculinity that was distinct from both marianismo and machismo. In a 1956 lecture, Lester Hunt described Puerto Rican men and fathers as "authoritarians," urging that "if you really want to communicate some thing important to the [Puerto Rican] family, tell [the] father."<sup>116</sup> Fr. Mahon, in a 1963 article entitled "Machismo and Christianity" (which would more aptly be called "Marianismo and Christianity"), Mahon argued that the reason men did not attend church as much as women was that, for a man, "[i]n order to truly be a man, he must be the giver, the doer," contradicting the idea of "receiving" the sacraments, which made him feel emasculated.<sup>117</sup> For Mahon and Hunt, marianismo was prevalent among Puerto Rican men, but they understood it and were willing to work around it.

---

<sup>114</sup> Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 180-188.

<sup>115</sup> In fact, Gov. Luis Muñoz Marín, who was quite popular among Puerto Ricans in Chicago, was one of the greatest advocates of Puerto Rican forced sterilization, see Briggs, *Reproducing Empire*, 152-158.

<sup>116</sup> Lester C. Hunt, "The Puerto Rican in Chicago," ca. Nov. 1956, EXEC/C0700/24#9, 43816.06, Samuel Cardinal Stritch Personal Papers, 15.

<sup>117</sup> Leo T. Mahon, "Machismo and Christianity," *Chicago Studies* (Mundelein, IL: Archdiocese of Chicago, 1963), 125-126.

On the other hand, a fact sheet about Puerto Ricans published by the CCSS in the late 1950s attempted to disprove the existence of the culture of poverty in a section called “Nix that Myth,” which claimed that Puerto Ricans didn’t come to the US for welfare, didn’t “carry weapons of any sort,” and were not “zoot-suiters.”<sup>118</sup> While in some sense advocating for Puerto Ricans, this argument also worked within the “culture of poverty” framework. It didn’t argue against the framework, it simply claimed that the framework didn’t apply. In a 1959 article of the newspaper *El Centinela*, Padilla describes how Fr. Mahon published in his column a story about two Puerto Ricans, Juan and José. Juan, who “adapted a street-like manner” and spent his money on going to “socials with friends” or buying “a car watch, television set, etc.,” represented “the ‘don’ts’ of assimilation.” By contrast, José, a “family-centered individual” who sacrificed for his family and saved money for a house, represented the model Puerto Rican citizen. While José made Puerto Ricans look dignified and respectable, Juan brought down the community.<sup>119</sup> Interestingly, Juan and José are largely defined in terms of their relationship with their families. Juan typifies the “absent father” of the culture of poverty, who squanders his money and can’t support his family. José is the opposite, successfully taking care of his family and bringing them to church. Taken in sum, Puerto Ricans like José, while they may have been overly domineering and inferior to Anglo fathers, took their role as father seriously. Such Puerto Ricans uplifted the Puerto Rican community and were well on their way to redemption, with White men as their redeemers. Meanwhile, men like Juan, who messed around in the streets, neglected their

---

<sup>118</sup> Fact sheet by the Cardinal’s Committee for the Spanish Speaking in Chicago “Fact Sheet on Puerto Ricans in Chicago,” ca. 1956, EXEC/C0700/24#9, 43816.06, Samuel Cardinal Stritch Papers, AAC.

<sup>119</sup> *El Centinela*, Jan. 8<sup>th</sup>, 1959, in Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 138. Padilla calls the anecdote of Juan and José “hypothetical,” but Mahon alludes to them elsewhere with last names, implying they may have been real people, see Mahon, “Talk by Rev. Mahon,” 14-15.

families, and squandered their income, brought down the community and were not worth redeeming.

Importantly, also, the White patriarchal model that priests like Mahon and Hunt advocated above all was not that different from marianismo, being just as conservative though less transparent. White men could espouse the rhetoric of equality, yet never treat women and men of color as equals. By default, White men already had more power, and by failing to challenge the status quo, they were maintaining their authority. For example, Fr. Headley said in his interview with Cha-Cha, “I mean, we still have not ordained a woman [...] which is kind of weird, I think.”<sup>120</sup> Headley, who was clearly capable of thinking very carefully about theology and organization, was not willing to challenge the patriarchal structure of the Catholic Church that privileged him other than by saying that it was “kind of weird.” To be considered a good leader during this time, one had to be a man who had extreme self-confidence, who commanded respect and respected only those who he considered his equals—other powerful White men.

Given these archetypal forms of masculinity and their relationship to different organizational structures, it is important to examine how they affected Puerto Rican men and women in practice. A good starting point is the Damas de María (Ladies of Mary, Hijas or Daughters for unmarried women), the women’s auxiliary of the Caballeros. The Damas would prepare food for feasts, organize dances, make home visits and tend to people’s needs (spiritual and otherwise), coming to occupy minor leadership positions once they were able to comfortably negotiate on behalf of others for aid.<sup>121</sup> While archival evidence about the Damas is sparse, Díaz-Stevens’ theory of the matriarchal core still very much holds. Cases like “Abuelita” from

---

<sup>120</sup> Headley, interview.

<sup>121</sup> For women cooking food for the dances and fiestas, see Martinez, interview; Rodríguez, interview. For role as case workers see Report by the Cardinal’s Committee for the Spanish Speaking, “Report for 1961,” ca. early 1962, EXEC/C0730/8#10, 43808.05, Albert Cardinal Meyer Collection, AAC.



Merryfield's *Tribune* article demonstrate that certain women, especially elderly women, were highly respected, despite their virtual non-existence in organizational records. Díaz-Stevens mentions that in a 1980 survey performed in New York where "thirty young people [...] were asked who was the person they most respected in the community aside from their parents," two thirds of respondents indicated "an elderly woman in the community known for her piety and her role as leader of [lay] religious communal rituals and prayer."<sup>122</sup> Eugenia Rodríguez, a Dama known for her piety, certainly took on this role (while admittedly not being elderly). She, like other Damas, taught catechism classes in her home to children from the local Catholic school, St. Michael's, then when they moved, St. Teresa's.<sup>123</sup> Every day, community members would visit the home of Eugenia, known as doña Genia, so she could lead them in praying the rosary. She was influenced by her father, don Juan, in Puerto Rico, even down to the home altar.<sup>124</sup> In public spaces, too, doña Genia and don Jesús would even co-lead Spanish mass at St. Teresa's. Don Jesús would preach while doña Genia prayed the rosary, echoing the relationship between the Cheos and Elenita half a century prior.<sup>125</sup>

Considering the question of men's redeemability, it is important that the Damas helped people with their daily needs, and thus were trusted in a way that male leaders were not. As such, Puerto Rican women were more capable of helping men redeem themselves than Puerto Rican men. For example, Doña Genia's husband, Antonio, straddled the line between "Juan" and "José," machista and marianista. In a 2012 interview, doña Genia's youngest daughter, Daisy Jiménez, described one incident when her father had been out with his friends, a group (or gang)

---

<sup>122</sup> Díaz-Stevens, "Latinas and the Church," 243.

<sup>123</sup> Daisy Jiménez, "Daisy Jiménez Video Interview and Biography, Interview 1," interviewed by José Jiménez, May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2012, Caguas, PR, video recording, Young Lords in Lincoln Park, GVSU.

<sup>124</sup> Jiménez Defense Committee, "Que Viva El Pueblo," 5-7.

<sup>125</sup> Eugenia Rodríguez, interview.

called the Hachas Viejas (the Old Hatchets). During the day, doña Genia hurt herself and “came home crying with a swollen finger, and it was killing her and killing her, and she didn’t know what to do.” Antonio came home with his friends at “two in the morning. And my mom’s crying, and he made her get up out of bed to cook for all these men.”<sup>126</sup> Here, Antonio was a machista, apart from his family all day, failing to be there for his wife, and utterly neglecting her wellbeing to the point of abuse. Antonio was also an alcoholic, and “[t]o get her husband to stop drinking, doña Eugenia made a ‘promesa’ to dress in black for a year. She persuaded her husband to join the Knights of Saint John.”<sup>127</sup> Antonio would not only become a Caballero, but in 1968, he joined Los Hermanos en la Familia de Dios (The Brothers in the Family of God), a group associated with the Caballeros created by don Jesús in 1960 in the model of the Hermanos Cheos.<sup>128</sup> Cha-Cha, doña Genia’s son, explained that Antonio stopped hitting his mother when Daisy was young, roughly around the time he stopped drinking and joined the Caballeros.<sup>129</sup> Antonio’s masculinity cannot be clearly categorized as either machismo or marianismo. However, his redemption, in this case, that he stopped drinking and being physically abusive, was something motivated by doña Genia and achieved by joining the Caballeros.

Don Jesús had a similar redemption. Fr. Mahon recounted don Jesús preaching the story to Fr. Mahon and a group of Puerto Rican men,

[He] told us of his betrayal—how he had gotten involved with another woman and fled Puerto Rico with her, leaving his wife, his children, and so many others scandalized [...] Each night he cried himself to sleep thinking of his wife and children alone and hungry. [...] ‘I felt ashamed, out of place there [with the Caballeros]—a traitor in a group of loyal people. But they welcomed me and I stayed to listen. What I heard that night [at a meeting] and on several other nights was what I needed to hear: God loved me and forgave me. I was his beloved son, no matter what I had done.’ [...] He returned to Puerto

---

<sup>126</sup> Daisy Jiménez, interview.

<sup>127</sup> Jiménez Defense Committee, “Que Viva El Pueblo,” 5; also Eugenia Rodríguez, interview 1.

<sup>128</sup> “Profesión de los Hermanos—1968,” 1968, Manuel Martínez Collection, 4.

<sup>129</sup> Daisy Jiménez, “Daisy Jiménez Video Interview and Biography, Interview 2,” interviewed by Cha-Cha Jiménez, May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2012, video recording, Young Lords in Lincoln Park Interviews, GVSU.

Rico to beg forgiveness of his wife and children. He came back with them to Chicago—the prodigal son returned. [...] I can recall that it was the most emotional moment of my life. I cried with [Jesús] and all the others.<sup>130</sup>

In this instance, don Jesús had abandoned his family, the epitome of being an absent father. Like Antonio, it was the Caballeros who gave him the spiritual strength to redeem himself. That this story was so emotional for all of them indicates the intense vulnerability and humanity they were capable of as a group, something atypical of any form of masculinity. While there was no woman who urged him to join, don Jesús' wife, Eulalia, was central to his redemption. To redeem himself, he had to beg forgiveness from her. But, according to Fr. Mahon, don Jesús would describe his wife “with the sensitivity of an artist crafting the most exquisite porcelain figure,” giving “her the attributes of an angel.”<sup>131</sup> While these were the words of Fr. Mahon and not don Jesús himself, they hint that don Jesús treated his wife with hyper-moral objectification rather than genuine respect, in the marianista sense. Meanwhile, the woman with whom he fled to Chicago is absent from the story after don Jesús made amends with his wife. The object of a man's sin, the end of her story was not worth telling.

These two stories complicate the narrative of the Caballeros as a conservative elite of marianistas. In the case of Antonio and don Jesús, the Caballeros were a path to redemption from the low status machista to a respectable Puerto Rican man. Perhaps unsurprisingly, both stories took place on the North Side, where the Caballeros were less conservative and more open to members of their community. Both men were also working class, and the fact that doña Genia consistently had to find alternate sources of income indicates that Antonio was unable to be the sole provider for his family. As Caballeros, they were surely highly respected, but did not easily fit the bill of the high status marianista. In the case of Antonio, it is possible that the respect

---

<sup>130</sup> Mahon, *Fire Under My Feet*, 9-10.

<sup>131</sup> Mahon, *Fire Under My Feet*, 8-9.

community members held towards doña Genia extended to her husband rather than vice versa. At the same time, women were not only the agents, but also the objects of men's redemption. They were either pure, like Eulalia, or completely unheard, like don Jesús' mistress. In this case, the respectability of a woman was determined by her relationship with a man. Even the less conservative Caballeros never attempted to disrupt the idea that there was an underclass that could be blamed for the problems in the Puerto Rican community, and arguably still formulated the concept of redemption around the existence of a hierarchy. While Antonio and don Jesús were able to redeem themselves, this option was not available to the broader Puerto Rican community.

### Organizing Second Generation Puerto Ricans

For young, second-generation Puerto Rican men living in Chicago, it was virtually impossible to go without knowing gang-members who one could go to for protection on the street. Through the 50s and 60s, Puerto Rican gangs like the Latin Kings and the Young Lords formed to protect themselves and their communities from White ethnic gangs and contest the color line.<sup>132</sup> When Cha-Cha Jiménez and several others founded the Young Lords around 1961, Cha-Cha was in middle school. These gangs rapidly organized themselves, adopting an aesthetic that flew in the face of organizations like the Caballeros, but was a well-defined aesthetic, nonetheless. While for many Puerto Ricans the 1961 *West Side Story* may have been an affront to Puerto Rican respectability with its depiction of crime, violence, and machismo, the Young Lords identified with the Sharks, even wearing black jackets with a purple stripe.<sup>133</sup> Gang jackets

---

<sup>132</sup> Fernández, *The Young Lords*, 15.

<sup>133</sup> Gonzales, "Ruffians and Revolutionaries," 4-6.

were likely no cheaper than the Caballeros' suits, as Carlos Flores, a member of the Continentals (and later, of the YLO), recalled, "they would all save money to get their [jackets]."<sup>134</sup>

At the same time, gang-members frequently committed crimes, stealing cars, dealing drugs, and getting into occasionally lethal fights (though not nearly to the level of the "super-gangs" that appeared in the 70s and 80s).<sup>135</sup> As such, many conservative first-generation groups like the Caballeros and the CCSS started juvenile delinquency programs to keep their children off the streets, such as Boys and Girls Clubs and afterschool activities. Detached Worker programs at YMCAs throughout Chicago hired older gang members to function as a point of entry for social workers to interact with gangs. However, these programs did not necessarily prevent crime and may have even provided the organizational impetus and resources necessary to form gangs in the first place. As Cha-Cha Jiménez described, "Puerto Rican youth groups also developed in Lincoln Park as social clubs and they met at the Isham YMCA, organizing dances, picnics and other social activities. [...] These groups later turned into gangs."<sup>136</sup>

The conservative response to the rising number of youth gangs was to redouble their efforts to get gang members to adhere to conservative values. According to historian Johanna Fernández, "the streetwise Young Lords often played along with what they instinctively perceived to be a condescending 'civilizing mission' on the part of social workers."<sup>137</sup> While gang members may have "played along," such programs also could be, at times, dehumanizing. In May of 1966, Juan Díaz, the treasurer of Council No. 8 of the Caballeros at St. Mark's in

---

<sup>134</sup> Carlos Flores, interviewed by Mervin Méndez, Sep. 11<sup>th</sup>, 1995, audio recording and transcript, 003.009, Collection on the Young Lords, DUL, 15.

<sup>135</sup> Hagedorn, *The In\$ane Chicago Way*, 32-33. Hagedorn discusses the late 60s/early 70s as the "transition from turf to profits."

<sup>136</sup> Jiménez, "Jose (Cha-Cha) Jimenez."

<sup>137</sup> Fernández, *The Young Lords*, 30.

West Town and leader of the Latin American Boys Club, told Janet Nolan, a Catholic nun conducting ethnographic research in the neighborhood, that the Latin Kings

aren't even Puerto Ricans. They're Americans. They were born here. [...] They don't even speak Spanish, some of them. They're not even human. [...] Don't think they'll respect you. They don't respect anyone. They're not Puerto Ricans; they're animals! [...] I give up with them. They're too old.<sup>138</sup>

Here, again, it is apparent that Díaz conflated assimilation with becoming criminal, but also with becoming subhuman.

To be Puerto Rican was to speak Spanish and to be respectful

to adults (especially clergy). Díaz saw his job at the Boys Club as saving the young men before they became irreversibly corrupted by crime. As for the Latin Kings, it was too late—they were irredeemably criminalized and subhuman.

Doña Genia's son, Cha-Cha, grew up during the “gang crisis,” caught between his pious mother and the need to survive on the streets. From a young age, Cha-Cha's mother encouraged him to become a priest, a goal which he took seriously. His younger sister Daisy recalled that, as children, she and her siblings “played priest and nuns. We were at the Catholic Church, we did a whole mass. [...] My brother was the priest, he would put on a sheet over him. He would say the entire mass. We would take bread, smash it up, and that was our communion.”<sup>139</sup> When, around elementary school, Cha-Cha got a reputation among neighborhood parents as a troublemaker and his mother had him meet with a priest. He became an altar boy at St. Michael's Church in Old Town and eventually enrolled at St. Teresa's Catholic School on Armitage Avenue in Lincoln



**Fig. 7:** Cha-Cha Jiménez, leader of the Young Lords, photo taken in 1969.

<sup>138</sup> Report by Janet Nolan, “The Latin Kings,” May 19<sup>th</sup>, 1966, 001.002, The Janet Nolan Ethnographic Research on Puerto Ricans in Chicago Collection, DUL, 2.

<sup>139</sup> Daisy Jiménez, interview 1.

Park, with free tuition presumably due to his mother's reputation among priests, especially Fr. Headley, who worked at St. Teresa's.<sup>140</sup>

As described in the report prepared by Cha-Cha's defense committee in 1972 (likely written by himself or with his consultation), at St. Teresa's, Cha-Cha

had been completely transformed from mischievousness to piety. His teacher—a nun—took special interest in him and became his friend. He put his mind to his studies and no longer spent much time with his neighborhood friends, who people thought had been the cause of his mischief. Before and after class and on weekends, he helped around the church and school [doing chores] [...] [H]e was always first or second in the number of candy sales made to raise funds to build a new church [...] [and he] sang in the choir.<sup>141</sup>

As with his father, Antonio, it was Cha-Cha's mother who initially encouraged him to become more involved with the Church. Then, at St. Teresa's, it was a nun who especially encouraged him in becoming a respectable citizen and kept him away from "bad influences." Cha-Cha was not the only young Puerto Rican to have a nun take them under their wing. In a conversation with Janet Nolan, Carlos Castro, the first Puerto Rican to join the African American Blackstone Rangers gang, said in a conversation with Janet Nolan (herself a nun) that "sisters could do real good with gangs, though none have ever tried. Better than priests. Because [sisters] respect [gang members]... a priest is just another man. Besides the sisters have something [in their hearts]."<sup>142</sup> For Castro, there was an explicitly gendered rationale as to why nuns, and presumably pious

---

<sup>140</sup> Jiménez Defense Committee, "Que Viva El Pueblo," 6; Ricardo Rebolgar, "Ricardo Rebolgar Video Interview and Biography," Jul. 11, 2012, Joliet, IL, video recording, Young Lords in Lincoln Park, GVSU.

<sup>141</sup> Jiménez Defense Committee, "Que Viva El Pueblo," 6.

<sup>142</sup> Report by Janet Nolan, "Carlos Castro – YMCA Detached Worker," Jul. 12, 1966, 001.004, The Janet Nolan Ethnographic Research on Puerto Ricans in Chicago Collection, DUL. While Castro's name is redacted, the rule with the Janet Nolan is that if it is possible to verify the individual's identity without knowing their name, then their real name can be used. In this case, it is possible to identify Castro because in Nolan describes that she read about him and saw his photos in the newspaper, see Report by Janet Nolan, Jul. 8, 1966, 001.004, The Janet Nolan Ethnographic Research on Puerto Ricans in Chicago Collection, DUL, 1. Carlos Castro was prominently featured in several *Tribune* articles and was a YMCA detached worker, see "500 Police Keep Watch on N. W. Side: Clear Streets of Crowds," *Chicago Tribune*, Jun. 15<sup>th</sup>, 1966; Photo, *Chicago Defender*, Jun. 15, 1966, 16.

women like doña Genia, were better able to reach gang members when men, especially priests, could not.

Many young Puerto Ricans attended Catholic School, perhaps receiving financial assistance, like Cha-Cha, from the Caballeros or the CCSS. According to Janet Nolan, after a visit to St. Michael's, which was predominantly Puerto Rican and African American, "there seems to be genuine concern among the teachers for the students," and doubted that Puerto Rican youths were "given such gentle personal attention at public schools."<sup>143</sup> Carlos Flores attended St. Michael's.<sup>144</sup> Ricardo Rebolgar, a second-generation Mexican who attended St. Teresa's and was friends with Cha-Cha, also recalled feeling supported and even challenged by his teachers, in particular recalling being the altar boy for Fr. Headley at 8 am mass,

he said [to the congregation] [...] "How dare you come into this place of worship? When you're doing..." and starts listing things like being racist, offensive talking, cheating... [...] I'm going, "Oh, my God, he sounds like you [Cha-Cha], me, and then what we've been talking about for how long that needs to change."<sup>145</sup>

Ricardo felt advocated for, demonstrating the length to which this kind of validation could go in encouraging students.

Outside of St. Teresa's, Cha-Cha began to realize he was in danger from being attacked by White gangs. Along with Orlando Dávila, who he knew from his mother's catechism class, and some other friends, Cha-Cha founded the Young Lords gang to defend themselves.<sup>146</sup> At this point, Cha-Cha was leading two separate lives—one on the streets with the Young Lords gang,

---

<sup>143</sup> Report by Janet Nolan, "24's Talk with the Principal of St. Michael's High School," Oct. 6, 1966, 001.007, The Janet Nolan Ethnographic Research on Puerto Ricans in Chicago Collection, DUL, 2. On St. Michael's being predominantly Puerto Rican and African American, see Report by Janet Nolan, "A Visit From the Continentals," Oct. 5, 1966, 001.007, Janet Nolan Ethnographic Research on Puerto Ricans in Chicago Collection, DUL, 2; for a brief history and photos from St. Michael's yearbook, see "Chicago St. Michael Central H.S. 'Warriors,'" Illinois High School Glory Days, accessed Feb. 7<sup>th</sup>, 2022, <http://www.illinoishsglorydays.com/id826.html>.

<sup>144</sup> Flores, interview, GVSU.

<sup>145</sup> Rebolgar, interview.

<sup>146</sup> Jiménez defense committee, "Que Viva El Pueblo," 7-8.



and one as his mother's son, striving to join the priesthood. Alfredo Calixto, whose parents were also in the Caballeros/Damas and who was in the Latin Souls, described how,

When I left my house, it was— I was a different person. I walked different, you know it was like [...] “Freddie Calixto from the streets.” [...] And when you came into the house, you know, you were “Freddie Cali'to [...] el hijo de Lui' y Juané [the son of Luis and Juané],” and you had to act like that.<sup>147</sup>

Likewise, after spending the summer of 1962 contesting territory with White gangs at the Lincoln Park beach, once “classes resumed, [Cha-Cha] split from the gang to readapt himself to a different environment.”<sup>148</sup> Cha-Cha was not only alternating back and forth between the streets and his home, but between being a gang member and being a diligent student, two things which were not supposed to be simultaneously possible.

Until the very end of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade in 1963, Cha-Cha and Ricardo were planning to join the Servite Order together. Cha-Cha was blocked from this path, as Ricardo recalled, because the priests and sisters at St. Teresa's were unwilling to sign the papers needed to apply, claiming that Cha-Cha's family was behind on their payments and calling into question the legitimacy of Cha-Cha's birth (keeping in mind that his parents were both heavily involved with the Church). Cha-Cha was also suspended for hitting a priest with a snowball, which he recalled was “the straw that broke the camel's back.” Additionally, Cha-Cha describes that he was discriminated against. St. Teresa's was a mostly White school, unlike St. Michael's.<sup>149</sup> For example, the school neglected to invite Cha-Cha's family to his graduation party.<sup>150</sup> Ricardo, who saw himself and Cha-Cha as a team, recalled how he felt when he heard that Jiménez would not be able to join him at seminary: the snowball was “the wrong reason. I mean, you had two eager kids who are

---

<sup>147</sup> Alfredo Calixto, interview.

<sup>148</sup> Jiménez defense committee, “Que Viva El Pueblo,” 8.

<sup>149</sup> Jiménez defense committee, “Que Viva El Pueblo,” 6.

<sup>150</sup> Jiménez defense committee, “Que Viva El Pueblo,” 9.

1. From the local public school, the "slow learner" -- sometimes slow because of an insufficient knowledge of English is transferred to the
2. Vocation school until such time as the student becomes so much of a discipline problem that he is transferred to a
3. Continuation School which he must attend one day a week. He is encouraged to find a job for the other four days of the week. Unfortunately, truant officers have a hard time assuring that the youth will be in school even one day a week. Jobs for illiterate teenage boys for four days a week are almost impossible to find, The youth soon is picked up for delinquency and graduates to one of many
4. Youth Commission camps. Here he may learn quite a bit more about delinquency. When he completes his term at camp he will be sent out to the street again. He will probably be promoted again to
5. St. Charles Reform School which will give the youth his first real experience in a penal institution. When he is old enough, after being relegated to street life again, he will be sent to
6. Cook County Jail for from one to nine months. Unless he dies, receives special help or undergoes a miraculous change of heart from the Lord -- his education will be crowned with assignment to
7. Stateville Penitentiary where he may remain until he dies or is executed, as was the unfortunate youth [REDACTED] last summer.

**Fig 8:** Excerpt from a report by Janet Nolan (Parmelee) to Cardinal Cody, describing how existing educational institutions funneled young Puerto Rican men down a path from public school to prison. Written in 1967, this letter predates the 1971 federal War on Drugs policies that launched mass incarceration and was responding to conditions, mainly in West Town and Lincoln Park, that had already existed for several years (see appendix for source information).

willing to go to the edges of hell. And you suddenly cut them off?" While Ricardo was not prevented from continuing to seminary, he decided that without his friend, he wouldn't go either.

In the end, the difference in treatment between Ricardo and Cha-Cha was likely a result of Cha-Cha's labelling as a troublemaker, intersecting with his being Puerto Rican. Whether or not the school knew about his involvement with the Young Lords, his behavior was scrutinized enough that the administration decided he didn't deserve a chance to continue to seminary. With his path to the priesthood cut off, Cha-Cha doubled down on his involvement with the Young Lords--committing crimes, serving jailtime, and even being "deported" to Puerto Rico for a few months. Ricardo recalled Cha-Cha introducing him to some of the Young Lords and telling

Ricardo, “Hey, you need to be a college boy.” Though both ended their paths to the priesthood, their unequal experiences coming out of Catholic School had reified their paths in life; Ricardo was college-bound, while Jiménez was meant to be in a gang.<sup>151</sup> In a 1967 report to the Archdiocese of Chicago (fig. 6), Janet Nolan highlighted educational institutions as a key to the progressive alienation of young Puerto Rican men. Though she singled out public schools, Cha-Cha’s case demonstrates that this model could be applied to Catholic schools as well. Likewise, Carlos Flores was expelled from St. Michael’s high school for instigating fights and bullying other kids.<sup>152</sup>

Though Cha-Cha was now involved in crime, he remained his mother’s son. For example, his sister Daisy recalled she and her mother, doña Genia, catching Cha-Cha smoking:

We’re walking down the street [...] and I see my brother from far away. [...] He dropped that cigarette so quick, but I already know he was smoking because he had smoke was coming out of his mouth. But my mom totally ignored it, of course, because out of all of this, my brother is my mother’s favorite son. That’s the only son she has, so even though she had three daughters, my brother was always the baby of the family.<sup>153</sup>

He also took on the role of man of the house when his father wasn’t home, taking on the worst aspects of machismo. Daisy described how Cha-Cha would say “‘I want that shirt washed, dried, and ironed in five minutes.’ [...] ‘But we can’t do that.’ [...] ‘Give me that belt right now.’” But doña Genia “‘didn’t understand that we kept telling her, ‘He keeps hitting us,’ and she didn’t care. ‘José, I told you not to touch the girls.’ [...] And my mother would run after him, and they would start laughing at the end.’”<sup>154</sup> In 1966, after his girlfriend left him, Cha-Cha went after her, drunk, beating her and stabbing her new boyfriend (non-lethally).<sup>155</sup> Cha-Cha’s increasingly abusive and

---

<sup>151</sup> See Rebolgar, interview; Fernandez, *The Young Lords*, 22-23.

<sup>152</sup> Flores, interview, GVSU.

<sup>153</sup> Daisy Jiménez, interview 1.

<sup>154</sup> Daisy Jiménez, interview 1.

<sup>155</sup> Jiménez defense committee, “Que Viva El Pueblo,” 11.

violent tendencies demonstrate that he was becoming a machista, his increasingly long prison stints and being a well-known gang member made him the unredeemable, hardened gang member conservative Caballeros believed were bringing down the community. Yet Cha-Cha's mother continued to love him unconditionally, in denial that there was anything wrong with what her son had gotten involved in.

The Division Street Riots of June 1966 occurred because a large part of the Puerto Rican community in West Town were angry about the systems that oppressed them, systems which an accommodationist strategy had tolerated. It was a police shooting that triggered the riots, but scholars and eyewitnesses agree that the riots represented a boiling over of many problems, such as the alienation of young second generation Puerto Rican men and teenagers.<sup>156</sup> Several of the individual incidents that occurred within the riots were orchestrated by the Latin Kings.<sup>157</sup> The riots must be seen through the lens of the disposal, effectively, of second generation Puerto Rican men by White institutions, as seen in the case with Cha Cha. The police killed Arcelis Cruz because they saw him as a lost cause, a drain on society whose life didn't matter. The riots, then, were a form of self-affirmation. They made the most marginal members of the Puerto Rican community hyper-visible, showing the city that they did matter.

But the riots were not just a face-off between alienated Puerto Ricans and the police. Many conservative Puerto Ricans believed the riots would be an enormous black eye for the Puerto Rican community and put themselves in harm's way attempting to restore order. Juan Díaz and many other West Side leaders met at the Latin American Boys Club headquarters

---

<sup>156</sup> See Staudenmaier, "Between Two Flags," 100-134.

<sup>157</sup> Omar López, "Omar López Video Interview and Biography, Interview 1," interviewed by José Jiménez, Feb. 7<sup>th</sup>, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park Interviews, GVSU.

desperately and hopelessly attempting to wrest control of the situation behind the scenes.<sup>158</sup> But some people put themselves directly in the middle of the action. Fr. Headley and several Caballeros who were part of the CCSS's lay ministry, don Jesús' Hermanos en la Familia de Dios stood on police cars and placed themselves directly in harm's way to convince young Puerto Ricans to stop the violence. Several of the Hermanos were arrested.<sup>159</sup> At its core, this was non-violent direct action and Christian pacifism. The Hermanos used their bodies to violence, both on the part of Puerto Rican rioters and the police, for which they were arrested. They placed themselves in front of the rioters not simply because they believed the riot was a flawed strategy, but because among the rioters may well have been their children.

#### Service-Oriented Leadership and La Familia de Dios

The 1960s marked the largest structural change the modern Catholic Church has seen since at least the 1890s. The Second Vatican Council, lasting from 1962 to 1965, promised to modernize the Church and orient its mission around combating the social ills caused by urbanization and industrialization. The reforms were radically progressive, even radically left-wing with the emergence of Latin American Liberation Theology in the late 1960s, which actively encouraged lay participation and a non-hierarchical style of worship with the goal of liberating people from oppressive structures. However, Vatican II also gave rise to a reactionary movement within the Church that opposed the reforms and double down on traditional patterns

---

<sup>158</sup> Juan Díaz and two others, "Interview with Juan Díaz, No. 1, and No. 2 On subject of Near Northwest Side Puerto Rican Riot," interviewed by Janet Nolan, Jun. 15<sup>th</sup>, 1966, Chicago, IL, transcript, 002.009, the Janet Nolan Ethnographic Research on Puerto Ricans in Chicago Collection, DUL, 2-4; Juan Díaz, "Interview with Juan Diaz on Subject of Riot at Damen and Division," interviewed by Janet Nolan, Jun. 17<sup>th</sup>, 1966, Chicago, IL, transcript, 002.009, the Janet Nolan Ethnographic Research on Puerto Ricans in Chicago Collection, DUL, 3, 6, 16, 21

<sup>159</sup> Mervin Méndez, "Recollections: 1966 Division Street Riot," *Diálogo* 2, No. 1 (1997): 32.

of worship. Many people, both lay and clergy, left the church because they opposed the reforms.<sup>160</sup>

In the late 50s and early 60s, several of the programs established by the Caballeros anticipated Vatican II reforms. For example, Fr. Mahon recalled that around 1960, a group of Caballeros came asking for more spiritual fulfillment. They drove Mahon to a realization: “My entire life was dedicated to [Jesus Christ]; why wasn’t I making Him come alive in them ... and in me?” Together with the Caballeros, Mahon would prepare lessons he thought were invigorating, and “[t]hey would tell me whether it was ‘great’ or ‘blah’ or ‘lousy.’ Their bluntness led me to understand how little I had known about the [African Americans] whom I had ‘converted.’”<sup>161</sup> Though still committed to the idea that Puerto Ricans must be integrated, the Caballeros appeared to be driving Mahon to a new understanding of his own faith.

One early reform the Caballeros made was the transition to Spanish mass. By the early 1960s, the Caballeros at St. Michael’s were holding Spanish masses.<sup>162</sup> These masses were held in the hall, basement, or gym rather than the chapel, where they were unwanted by White congregants. Caballero Guillermo Martínez recalled this incident of discrimination more bitterly than he did the forced removal of Puerto Ricans from Lincoln Park in the years following.<sup>163</sup> Meanwhile, a 1964 CCSS described that Spanish Mass was “[a]t first, a great victory,” but “has become a sore point with the people,” later defending the pastor, who the authors believed had “done a great deal for the Latins in [Lincoln Park].”<sup>164</sup> The Puerto Ricans at St. Michael’s had

---

<sup>160</sup> On Vatican II, which is a frustratingly complicated topic, see John W. O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

<sup>161</sup> Mahon, *Fire Under My Feet*, 6.

<sup>162</sup> Carroll and Mahon, “Present Position of the Puerto Rican Work,” 3.

<sup>163</sup> Martínez, interview.

<sup>164</sup> Carroll and Headley, “Report of the CCSS,” 2.

demonstrated their dissatisfaction. In this case, they were not accommodationist and were not afraid to voice their concerns.

Around 1957, Jesús Rodríguez arrived in Chicago. According to Frs. Headley and Mahon, Rodríguez was an amazing preacher, able to “move an audience, [...] [referencing a parable,] to move a mountain from one place to another and throw it into the ocean.”<sup>165</sup> In fact, Headley attributed don Jesús with his learning Spanish and learning to preach.<sup>166</sup> The Caballero Guillermo Martínez referred to don Jesús as a humanitarian, and Carlos Flores described how his leadership at St. Michael’s formed the community into a “tight knit family.”<sup>167</sup> Don Jesús’ connection to the Cheos not only allowed him to immediately gain the trust and respect of the Puerto Rican community in Lincoln Park, but made him an asset to Mahon and Headley. Like the Cheos in Puerto Rico, he would become the mediator between Puerto Ricans and White priests.

Very soon after his arrival, a group of Caballeros “decided [Lincoln Park] needed a mission and they asked the ‘Hermanos Cheos’ be allowed to give it. [...] People came to the Hall where the laymen preached what many consider to be one of the most effective retreats ever given in Spanish in Chicago.”<sup>168</sup> As a result, Mahon decided to start a program of lay leadership called the Hermanos en la Familia de Dios, of which don Jesús would be the president. The concept of the “Familia de Dios” (Family of God) became a crucial way of self-understanding for this part of the Puerto Rican community, resonating with Flores’ comment that don Jesús had created a “tight knit family.” Don Jesús and other Hermanos would urge Mahon to start employing the methods of the Cursillos de Cristianidad movement (Little Courses in

---

<sup>165</sup> Headley, interview. Also see Mahon, *Fired Under My Feet*, 7-8.

<sup>166</sup> Headley, interview.

<sup>167</sup> Martínez, interview. Flores, interview, Young Lords in Lincoln Park.

<sup>168</sup> Carroll and Mahon, “Present Position of the Puerto Rican Work,” 3-4.

Christianity), which had begun to spread from Spain to the Southwestern US. It was at the first three-day cursillo retreat in 1961 that Mahon asked don Jesús to preach a lesson on “Sin and Forgiveness,” and don Jesús would preach the story of his betrayal and redemption. Fr. Mahon described don Jesús’ sermon, saying, “[T]here is no doubt in my mind that what happened that day was a ‘God-experience’—a personal encounter with God through the intervention of [Jesús].”<sup>169</sup> Whether Mahon realized it or not, he placed Rodríguez as an intercessor between himself and God, the exact role of the Hermanos Cheos.

The lessons Mahon had workshopped with the Caballeros in 1960 were eventually publishing in 1964 with the help of a Maryknoll Sister as *La Familia de Dios: Un Curso para Catequistas (The Family of God: A Course for Catechists)*, centered around the figure of José Rodríguez (likely the same José as from “Juan and José,” as in the exemplary family-oriented man).<sup>170</sup> In this case, the Familia de Dios was wrapped up in the discourses over machismo and marianismo. Indeed, the Cursillo Movement was far more liberating for men than women. After the first cursillo for men in 1961, several other cursillos followed for men and women, both separately and together.<sup>171</sup> According to Díaz-Stevens, women’s cursillos allowed women to “[gain] an autonomous space from control by men,” and allowed for “the traditions of rezadora to become formalized, adapted, and improved.”<sup>172</sup> But women already operated within such

---

<sup>169</sup> Mahon, *Fire Under My Feet*, 9-11.

<sup>170</sup> Leo T. Mahon and Mary Xavier, *La Familia de Dios: Un Curso para Catequistas* (Maryknoll, NY: Maryknoll Publications, 1964). Mahon himself made clear that the lessons he had workshopped with the Caballeros were the same lessons that ended up in the manual, see Mahon, “Monsignor Leo T. Mahon Interview and Transcript,” interviewed by José Jiménez, Aug. 21<sup>st</sup>, 2012, Chicago, IL, video recording, Young Lords in Lincoln Park Interviews, GVSU. As for the connection with “Juan” and “José,” see Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 138-139. Padilla doesn’t mention José’s last name, but Mahon also told a remarkably similar story in a lecture he gave in 1961 which uses the full name, “Jose Rodriguez,” Mahon, “Talk by Rev. Leo T. Mahon,” 14-15.

<sup>171</sup> “Report for 1961,” 10.

<sup>172</sup> Díaz-Stevens, “Latinas and the Church,” 261.



spaces, and “[a]s soon as men and women were convened together, the Cursillo had a built-in preference for male authority.”<sup>173</sup>

This analysis holds for the Chicago cursillos. A 1961 CCSS report, in a section entitled “Sisters’ Work,” described how women partook in classes on La Familia de Dios. But the report also described existing group meetings where women volunteering with the CCSS would teach women in the community skills, sometimes leading “the volunteer to keep up friendship with the women, introduc[ing] them to her friends, and is able to help them in other ways.”<sup>174</sup> In this sense, women already had ways of forming religious community independently of men. In fact, Fr. Mahon explicitly prioritized men’s retreats because he was confident that women would follow their husbands to classes, but not vice versa.<sup>175</sup> As such, the Cursillo Movement in Chicago was explicitly meant encourage the development of Christian community among men.

However, the gendered nature of the Cursillo movement did not entirely detract from the fact that the Cursillo created a space for men to express vulnerability and rearranged power dynamics. While the entire episode is told through Fr. Mahon, he was an observer, not the leader. The leader was don Jesús. As a leader, don Jesús did not construct himself as the pinnacle of respectability and virtue, but rather as a highly respected person who still failed and sinned. It was because his community forgave him and allow him to redeem himself that he had the strength to right his wrongs. As a leader, don Jesús made himself equal to everyone else in the room by lowering himself and being honest. It was this honesty and vulnerability that heightened the emotions in the room and created a feeling of solidarity among the men. Responding to don Jesús’ sermon, Fr. Mahon described how he “cried so hard I thought I would physically dissolve.

---

<sup>173</sup> Díaz-Stevens, “Latinas and the Church,” 262.

<sup>174</sup> “Report for 1961,” 11.

<sup>175</sup> “Report for 1961,” 11; also see Mahon, interview.

[...] I cried for the wife I may hurt, had I ever a wife to hurt. I cried for the child I may have abandoned, had I ever had children to abandon.”<sup>176</sup> Here, Mahon’s vow of celibacy was, according to Catholic morality, a mark of virtue that, in this case, made it so that he could not understand the men he was serving. By performing the more virtuous role of priest, Mahon could not understand the needs of those whom he served. Don Jesús, by denying that he was more virtuous, achieved a truer moment of solidarity. This solidarity was the kernel of the men’s community in the Familia de Dios.

While Frs. Mahon and Headley remained integrationists and ultimately were conservative, their experiments with radical organizational structures sometimes defied Church dogma and challenged the hierarchy’s agenda. Under Cardinal Albert Meyer, whose see lasted from 1958 to 1965, Mahon recalled, “My work with the Hispanics led me to do things in non-traditional ways and so I found myself sending Meyer multiple messages and requesting non-traditional responses.”<sup>177</sup> Meyer was willing to grant such requests. Then, in 1961, just before Vatican II began, Pope John XXIII called upon Catholics in Europe and America to send clergy to Latin America, purportedly to rebalance the ratio of laypeople to priests. Fr. Mahon immediately seized the opportunity to propose that Chicago fund a mission organized in the same structure as the Hermanos. Meyer at first rejected the proposal, but after attending the first sessions of Vatican II, he changed his mind. Fr. Mahon would establish a mission called San Miguelito just outside Panama City, leaving Chicago in February of 1963.<sup>178</sup>

Meyer died in 1965 and his successor, Cardinal John Cody, was not as open minded. Mahon described how “Cody was no Meyer, that Vatican II hadn’t touched his heart, and that he

---

<sup>176</sup> Mahon, *Fire Under My Feet*, 10.

<sup>177</sup> Mahon, *Fire Under My Feet*, 15.

<sup>178</sup> Mahon, *Fire Under My Feet*, 15-19.

remained a traditional Prince of the Church.”<sup>179</sup> Cody’s See was rampant with corruption and he acted more in accordance with Mayor Daley than the Pope.<sup>180</sup> His reactionary stance and authoritarian leadership led priests across the archdiocese to unionize under the Association of Chicago Priests, something which had not yet occurred in the US Catholic Church. In this new context, Mahon was seen by other liberal priests as a model humanitarian and a foil to the reign of Cody.<sup>181</sup> He and Cody were nemeses throughout the time they coexisted. As Mahon continued to organize lay ministry, he would again and again run into church leadership that didn’t like what he was doing. This culminated when several bishops in Panama charged him with heresy in 1973, at which point he gave up and returned to Chicago.<sup>182</sup> There, Cody told him he could have “[a]ny parish, except a black parish or a Hispanic parish.”<sup>183</sup> Throughout the 60s, Mahon took on a role within the Catholic Church that Saul Alinsky had within the Daley machine. Both were radicals who shook up the system, but they were also conservative in their unwillingness to give up their own personal power.

On the other hand, it was the advocacy of Frs. Mahon and Headley that allowed the Caballeros and Hermanos to carve out a space for themselves, an institutional anchor that facilitated the organization’s survival. Though these priests repeatedly attempted to shape the organizational structure of the Puerto Rican community to their own interests, community

---

<sup>179</sup> Mahon, *Fire Under My Feet*, 103.

<sup>180</sup> Mahon describes Cody’s corruption when he visited Panama and requested a resort-like residence be constructed for his retirement in *Fire Under My Feet*, 107-108. Fr. Roger Haight, a former Catholic priest who resided in Englewood and Hyde Park in the late 60s and 70s, gave me similar information, Roger Haight (former Catholic priest), in discussion with author, Feb. 4<sup>th</sup>, 2022. Fr. Headley described how Cody was “intent on doing what the mayor [Richard J. Daley] wanted,” see Headley, interview.

<sup>181</sup> Mahon, *Fire Under My Feet*, 105-106. Fr. Haight knew of Fr. Mahon by his reputation as a humanitarian, but interestingly was not aware of his work with the Caballeros, Haight, interview.

<sup>182</sup> Mahon, *Fire Under My Feet*, 166-182. This incident truly was complicated, more so than I can realistically get into. While Mahon tells a story in which he was restricted and unjustly accused by a conservative and corrupt Panamanian hierarchy, it also seems that the Panamanian Church was rightly concerned at how much influence a North American priest had in Panama. Clearly, the contradictory issues that were present in Chicago played out similarly in Panama as well.

<sup>183</sup> Mahon, *Fire Under My Feet*, 190.

leaders were able to take advantage of the autonomy they were given. The cursillos and Spanish masses would not have been possible without the advocacy of the CCSS. As such, when Cody undercut the CCSS, he undercut the Caballeros as well. An article published in the August 1966 edition of the Puerto Rican newspaper, *El Puertorriqueño*, expressed concern that Cody had removed priests who spoke Spanish from West Town parishes, and about a rumor that he had plans to dissolve the CCSS.<sup>184</sup> While Cody didn't dissolve the CCSS, he did reconstitute it as the Archdiocesan Latin American Committee (ALAC) and appointed new staff.<sup>185</sup> At that point, Fr. Headley abandoned working within the Chicago hierarchy, and, like Fr. Mahon, left to go to Panama.<sup>186</sup> In her 1967, Janet Nolan described how people referenced the CCSS as “something of the past.”<sup>187</sup> With Mahon and Headley in Panama, the Caballeros had lost their advocates and, thus, their autonomy.

However, while the Caballeros mostly fell apart after the Division Street Riots, the progressive community structure they had formed over the previous half decade had a lasting impact. According to Fr. Headley, Vatican II gave don Jesús a “different image of church. A church became for him not so much a religious item, but an item for people's faith, so that they would be able to take steps into their own future, and really form their own culture, their own traditions, their own history.” Drawing from Paul's letter to the Galatians, don Jesús would say, “Don't you guys understand what the Gospel is really all about? The good news of Jesus Christ? It's that all of us together equally share the life of the risen Christ. Men and women, Jews and

---

<sup>184</sup> Transcript Janet Nolan of a newspaper article, “The Cardinal's Committee for the Spanish Speaking People,” *El Puertorriqueño*, Aug. 12<sup>th</sup>, 1966, 001.005, The Janet Nolan Ethnographic Research on Puerto Ricans in Chicago Collection, DUL.

<sup>185</sup> *A History of the Offices, Agencies, and Institutions of the Archdiocese of Chicago*, Vol II, ed. Harry C. Koenig. (Chicago, IL: Catholic Bishop of Chicago, 1981), 914.

<sup>186</sup> Headley, interview.

<sup>187</sup> Nolan, “Puerto Ricans and the Church,” 11-12.

Greeks, slaves and free.”<sup>188</sup> According to Fr. Headley, Rodríguez had begun to understand the Gospel as a text that could liberate and could bring together community. Liberationist language also became the language of Fr. Mahon’s strategy in Panama. Faced with a skeptical group of (male) revolutionaries, Mahon had to convince them that he could be useful. When they asked, “Well, what are you going to do?” He said, “‘Start a revolution.’ And that’s when they got interested.”<sup>189</sup> While Mahon was able to use the language of revolution to open the door to missionizing, he relied on don Jesús to mediate a feeling of solidarity that Mahon did not have the experience to facilitate himself. In Panama, don Jesús used the language that Jesus was a “great revolutionary leader.”<sup>190</sup> Don Jesús’ change in perspective following Vatican II was a reaffirmation of many of the organizational strategies he and the Cheos had already been using, but with a more radical disposition.<sup>191</sup>

When Cha-Cha had his radical transformation in prison in the spring of 1968, struggling between his identity as a gang member and as a Puerto Rican and Catholic, that reflected a struggle he and many other young men in the Puerto Rican community had dealt with their entire lives. His transformation was the culmination of those tensions within himself, and also within the Familia de Dios the Caballeros and Hermanos in Lincoln Park had created. Cha-Cha himself seems to have had mixed thoughts on how reading Thomas Merton’s *Seven Storey Mountain* impacted him. In a 1969 *Sun Times* article, he claims, “with the Merton book I began thinking maybe I could do something worthwhile. [...] I went to confession then, but I’m not a Catholic

---

<sup>188</sup> Headley, interview.

<sup>189</sup> Mahon, interview.

<sup>190</sup> Todd Hartch, “Ivan Illich and Leo Mahon: Folk Religion and Catechesis in Latin America,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 36, No. 4 (Oct. 2012): 187.

<sup>191</sup> Most of the evangelizing programs run by the Hermanos in Chicago began before Vatican II, and Edward Cleary discusses how the Cheos’ model of evangelizing in the early 1900s was very similar to the base ecclesial communities that emerged after Vatican II, see “In the Absence of Missionaries,” 68. Fr. Haight described to me that he saw many religious communities in Chicago doing what was essentially liberation theology in all but language, Haight, interview.

anymore because all I see is the church taking advantage of the poor.”<sup>192</sup> In a 2012 interview, he said, “I read him only because the books were there. I mean, had it been another book, I would probably have read that one, but I read Thomas Merton. I didn’t really get too much out of it.”<sup>193</sup> Cha-Cha’s internal conflict over the religious part of his transformation makes more sense considering the anti-institutional disposition he held later as a revolutionary, and especially coming from a White monk. Such conflict also reflected Cha-Cha’s experience with religious institutions, as part of his upbringing and as a way to make change for his community, but also as something that had oppressed him and failed to give him the chance of redemption.

But reading Merton’s book certainly moved Cha-Cha to see a priest. Later in the 2012 interview, Cha Cha went on to explain his confession,

So I went to confession there, and then I felt good, you know, like, how people— Catholics when they go to confession, they feel real good... I had cleansed my— myself. My soul and [chuckles] everything. And I joke about it now, but I mean, I really took it serious, because it was like standing up for your rights. Because, you know, other— other inmates are taunting you. Because, “Ayy, this guy...” you know, “Cha-Cha got a priest coming up here, he's crazy.” You know? But— but I was standing up for, what I believed at that the time. Again, we were Catholic, my— my mother had ingrained in us.<sup>194</sup>

Cha-Cha began with some reflexive humor, indicating that he was slightly uncomfortable talking about this moment, even 40 years later. Recounting this story required Cha-Cha to be vulnerable, perhaps something he was not quite willing to do, and hinting why he downplayed the ways in which reading Merton had impacted him. Cha-Cha was most self-conscious when trying to convey what he had felt, saying first that he felt “good,” then trying to specify that he felt how Catholics feel when they confess, then explaining that he felt his soul had been cleansed, at which point he laughs at his past self, just like the other inmates did. Cha-Cha was self-conscious

---

<sup>192</sup> “Puerto Rican Young Lords emulate the Black Panthers,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, Jun. 5<sup>th</sup>, 1969, quoted in Kelliher, “Hispanic Catholics,” 324.

<sup>193</sup> Jiménez, interview, GVSU.

<sup>194</sup> Jiménez, interview.

about using the language of the Church ('cleansing one's soul'). Even in the 1969 article, Cha-Cha disavowed the Church while claiming that Merton had driven him to act. His inability to express himself reflects his inability to resolve the paradox that his transformation required the intervention of the Church—a priest to confess to—and was also a profound moment of political awakening.

Cha-Cha then shifted in tone, from joking to serious, shifting from the perspective of the other inmates, taunting himself, to his own perspective, standing up for who he was. Johanna Fernández, argues that Cha-Cha's experience in prison led him to ask, "an existential question: Who am I?"<sup>195</sup> Part of the answer, certainly for Fernández, was about racial and national identity. But this was also being the hardened gang member versus being his mother's son. In prison, with every reason to act tough and his vulnerability drawing taunts, his obligation to his mother outweighed all of it. Like don Jesús, he had betrayed his family and came to the realization that only he could fix it. And so, he put his masculinity aside, and confessed and made what was in essence a *promesa* that that he would get off drugs and try to save his community. None of this was for the priest to whom he confessed nor the Catholic Church, but for his mother, his family, and his community.

Cha Cha's transformation must be seen in the context of the *Familia de Dios* that don Jesús, doña Genia, the *Hermanos*, and *Caballeros* had created over the last decade. Just as don Jesús had found a community that forgave him and accepted him when he felt alone and outcast, so did Cha-Cha. Doña Genia had sacrificed for her husband and son to save them and bring them back into the community, and Cha-Cha felt obligated to her. He was obligated to his community, the *Familia de Dios*, and through the act of confession he marked that sense of obligation and

---

<sup>195</sup> Fernández, *The Young Lords*, 36.

solidarity. However, he was also not going to accept their beliefs on face. This community had both loved him and rejected him. Their love had divided him in two. He would accept the love of his community, but he would also force them to love him as he was—a gang member and a Puerto Rican worthy of respect. He would show them that a gang could start a revolution.

## **Part 2: Multiracialism and Revolutionary Religion, 1963-1970**

### Puerto Ricans and the Color Line

By the mid 1960s, Chicago and the nation were undergoing rapid change. In 1965, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) arrived in Chicago, kickstarting the Chicago Freedom Movement. In June of 1966, were the Division Street Riots, followed a month later by a riot on the West Side. By this point, poor people all over the city had been displaced by the bulldozer of Mayor Daley’s Department of Urban Renewal in Bronzeville, the Near West and Near North, and Lincoln Park’s Old Town. It was not only Puerto Ricans who were being pushed around, either. Mexicans, African Americans, and poor Whites (especially from Appalachia) also faced removal, as well as high rates of unemployment, housing discrimination, and police brutality.<sup>196</sup>

However, Puerto Ricans (and Mexicans) remained on the White side of the color line. As African Americans moved into Woodlawn, then Englewood, Puerto Ricans left. As African Americans moved into the Near West Side, then Garfield Park, Puerto Ricans left. To some extent, this was a top-down effect caused by realtors and White and Puerto Rican mutual aid organizations that could influence where Puerto Ricans rented apartments.<sup>197</sup> However, the main

---

<sup>196</sup> Hertz, *Battle of Lincoln Park*, 57-71; and Fernández, *Brown in the Windy City*, 91-172.

<sup>197</sup> Several top-down factors are discussed by Fernández, *Brown and the Windy City*, 91-172. For example, the Cabrini Green low-income housing projects were segregated vertically, where “[e]very project building that you went to, the first five or seven floors were all Latinos. In between you had your hillbillies, and the top floors were all



reason Puerto Ricans left African American neighborhoods was because they did not face the same degree of housing discrimination as African Americans.<sup>198</sup> At the same time, one should take care not to draw a direct parallel between Puerto Ricans and White flight. White flight was characterized by neighborhood residents staking an exclusive historic claim to a neighborhood and their place in the Democratic machine, viciously fighting to protect their community (via youth gangs), then fleeing en masse to the suburbs once they felt that all hope was lost. Puerto Ricans had no historic claims, little political power, and were the victims racialized violence both from White gangs and police rather than the perpetrators.

While Whites did not flee neighborhoods that were transitioning from White to Puerto Rican, a growing Puerto Rican population was seen as the “door by which the Negro enters into their communities.”<sup>199</sup> This complex racialization of Puerto Ricans derives from the relatively simple fact that Puerto Ricans are not all racialized the same way. It wasn’t just that Puerto

---

*los negros*,” see Monse Lucas-Figueroa, interview with Lilia Fernández, Jun. 21<sup>st</sup>, 2004, quoted on 145. Groups like the Caballeros discouraged Puerto Ricans from living in low-income housing entirely, see 145. Thomas Kelliher discusses that organizations like the CYO and the Commonwealth Office influenced Puerto Ricans to not settle in one location, see “Hispanic Catholics,” 129. Additionally, the Department of Urban Renewal’s strategy of containing African Americans often meant removing Puerto Ricans and Mexicans from boundary zones. For example, the City’s construction of the University of Illinois Circle Campus in the Taylor Street neighborhood of the Near West side and Carl Sandburg Village on Clark Street on the Near North were meant to act as a barrier between the Loop and the predominantly African American West Side ghetto and the Cabrini Green homes respectively. Both projects were constructed on top of what had been largely Puerto Rican and Mexican enclaves. However, in neighborhoods like Woodlawn, Englewood, and parts of the Near West outside of Taylor Street, the disappearance of Puerto Ricans cannot be explained so easily.

<sup>198</sup> Felix Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 84-88, claims that Puerto Ricans left African American neighborhoods because they didn’t want to integrate into majority African American neighborhoods. This is a somewhat ridiculous claim because Puerto Ricans were okay with living in majority White neighborhoods despite facing significant resistance. The reality was probably a combination of there being slightly better living conditions in White neighborhoods and racial and/or ethnic discrimination against African Americans.

<sup>199</sup> For example, see Report by Juan Diaz, “Interview with <1>: Executive Director of the Northwest Community Organization,” May 19<sup>th</sup>, 1966, 001.002, The Janet Nolan Ethnographic Research on Puerto Ricans in Chicago Collection, DUL. According to <1>, “the problem with the Puerto Rican was not the same as that of the Negro in that the Puerto Rican has more liberty with regard to housing, because he can live wherever he wants. But for many reasons, the Puerto Ricans ends up living among Negroes and finds him-self grouped with them as a ‘minority with problems’ and seeks to escape from this situation. The Puerto Rican who moves into the Northwest Community does so, looking FOR A COMMUNITY that might be at his own level of social life. In spite of this, there is an impression in the white communities that the Puerto Rican is a door by which the Negro enters into their communities.”

Ricans were “neither White nor Black,” it was that Puerto Ricans were White, Black and everything in between. Some Afro-Puerto Ricans migrated to Chicago who did face discrimination as racialized Black people and could not cross the color line without assistance from light-skinned relatives (if they had any).<sup>200</sup> In addition, the racial ideology that existed in Puerto Rico, which was quite different than that of the US, came to define Puerto Rican identity in Chicago. In an interview with Janet Nolan, one woman at first “denied that [racial discrimination in Puerto Rico] existed and said that the situation was very different here in Chicago,” but then changed course and said,

it’s true it exists in Puerto Rico. We are forever bragging that there are no black people in our home town. We have a ‘white town.’ We are from a white section of Puerto Rico.

---

<sup>200</sup> Michael Staudenmaier gives an extensive literature review and discussion on the racial identity of Puerto Ricans in “Between Two Flags,” 18-26, where he claims that it was not clear that Puerto Ricans were considered non-White upon their arrival in Chicago. While there is definitely some truth to this, especially given the Catholic Church’s belief that Puerto Ricans were assimilable as discussed in the previous section, this narrative cannot account for all Puerto Ricans. Staudenmaier addresses this to some extent on pg. 54, saying “In Chicago, by contrast to New York City, black-identified Puerto Ricans seem to have been a tiny minority in the community,” evidencing a *Defender* article from 1946 and a Chicago Commission on Human Relations report conducted in 1958 that claimed 1% of Puerto Ricans were “Negro” and others “have darker shades of complexion.” Assuming this data was representative (it may not be given that it reported only on the Northwest Side, which would have been less accessible to Afro-Puerto Ricans because of redlining), the Puerto Rican community more than tripled in population between 1960 and 1970, so the proportion of Afro-Puerto Ricans could have certainly changed.

That said, there is probably no good source of quantitative data that can get at the necessary level of complexity to explain how Puerto Ricans as a national group navigated Chicago’s racial landscape. The most obvious candidate would be the 1960 and 1970 censuses, but they fall seriously short as to the question of Puerto Rican racial identity, which has always defied the categorical nature of census questions. A more thorough study would collect more anecdotal data and treat it in combination with existing quantitative data. As far as anecdotal evidence, there are numerous Afro-Puerto Ricans interviewed and referenced in the Young Lords in Lincoln Park Interviews and the Janet Nolan Ethnographic Research on Puerto Ricans in Chicago Collection. The photos from Manuel Martínez’ book, *Chicago*, while (appearing to, the photos are all in black and white) depict mostly light and Brown Puerto Ricans, also includes several Afro-Puerto Ricans, one, Sr. Cruz Fuentes, even being *presidente general* of the 13 (or 11?) councils of the Caballeros in 1967, see pg. 214. Incorporating and generalizing from these (only somewhat) limited Afro-Puerto Rican sources is important, regardless of the historical restraints, a sentiment expressed by Carlos Flores in “Desde el Mero Medio: Race Discrimination Within the Latino Community,” *Diálogo* 5, No. 1, (Mar. 2001): 30-31. A few interviewees described that Afro-Puerto Ricans were more likely than light-skinned Puerto Ricans to live in Cabrini Green but were able to move out with assistance from lighter family members, see Ada Nivía López, “Ada Nivía López Audio Interview and Biography,” interviewed by José Jiménez and Melanie Shell-Weiss, Aug. 24<sup>th</sup>, 2012, audio recording, Young Lords in Lincoln Park, GVSU; and Carmen Rance, “Carmen Rance Video Interview and Biography,” interviewed José Jiménez, Mar. 30<sup>th</sup>, 2012, video recording, Young Lords in Lincoln Park, GVSU.

[...] In Puerto Rico discrimination is based more on social class. You have to keep up with the others or they will look down on you.<sup>201</sup>

The conflation of race with class allowed one to deny that inequality of opportunity existed and instead blame inequality of conditions on cultural differences. As a multiracial nation, Puerto Rican nationalism relied on a putative racial unity, giving rise to the script of the racial democracy. The idea that racial discrimination no longer existed in Puerto Rico became naturalized, and so for Afro-Puerto Rican to vocalize concerns about racial discrimination could be considered anti-Puerto Rican.<sup>202</sup>

The ideology of racial democracy did not sit well within the racial caste system that existed in the US. One Puerto Rican, shortly after the Division Street Riots, said, “the problem is that here the whites treat [the Puerto Rican] like a Negro and the Negroes treat him like a white and we don’t have any place to go.”<sup>203</sup> In a similar vein, the national director of the Migrant Division of the Department of Labor (which oversaw the Commonwealth Office in Chicago) said, “We are not understood by the whites or the blacks. Integration for us has been a way of life. If we accept the value system of either side, we split our own families down the [middle].”<sup>204</sup> While part of this sentiment surely was resistance against the racial caste system, another part of it arose from the conservative sentiment that Puerto Rican youths were negatively influenced by American youths. It was Black and White American youth gangs that influenced young Puerto

---

<sup>201</sup> Report By Janet Nolan, “Attitude of the Puerto Ricans Toward the Negro,” Nov. 7<sup>th</sup>, 1966, 001.011, The Janet Nolan Ethnographic Research on Puerto Ricans in Chicago Collection, DUL. There are also other similar conversations, see Report by Janet Nolan, Jun. 14<sup>th</sup>, 1966, 001.003, The Janet Nolan Ethnographic Research on Puerto Ricans in Chicago Collection, DUL, 9-10. In this latter case, it is Juan Díaz who pointed out that racism did, in fact, exist in Puerto Rico.

<sup>202</sup> For example, see Isar P. Godreau, *Scripts of Blackness: Race, Cultural Nationalism, and U.S. Colonialism in Puerto Rico* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 24, “Puerto Rican scholars who have argued otherwise and insisted on writing about racism have often been accused of imposing U.S. notions upon the Puerto Rican context or of partaking in intellectual imperialism.”

<sup>203</sup> Report by Nolan, Jun. 14<sup>th</sup>, 1966, 10.

<sup>204</sup> Report by Janet Nolan, “Public Hearings,” Jul. 15<sup>th</sup>, 1966, 001.004, The Janet Nolan Ethnographic Research on Puerto Ricans in Chicago Collection, DUL, 4.

Rican men to become criminals. The conservative outlook discussed in the previous section was thus also intertwined with racial ideology. The respectable Puerto Rican was not only defined in opposition to the machista, the gang member, or the absent father, but racially defined in opposition to both Blackness and Whiteness.<sup>205</sup>

In the aftermath of the Division Street Riots, Juan Díaz, who had been a Caballero and the director of the Latin American Boys Club, would organize the Spanish Action Committee of Chicago (SACC). SACC was distinctly not accommodationist, picketing the 13<sup>th</sup> District police station and holding demonstrations for better facilities in Humboldt Park. Their direct confrontation with the city led the Daley administration to use the Red Squads to infiltrate and sabotage them. However, despite their confrontational politics, Díaz and the SACC remained conservative. In an interview with Janet Nolan right after the Riots, Díaz seems not only to have believed that working with African Americans would be bad for Puerto Ricans, but even blamed the riots on the SCLC, who had arrived in Chicago in the summer of 1965, and “Black Muslims,” fearing they were there to “take over.” He believed the Civil Rights Movement had the capacity to divide the Puerto Rican community and that Puerto Ricans would “join their side.” That Díaz brought up “Black Muslims,” who were often used as the scapegoat of riots, alongside the SCLC, demonstrates that he conflated a wide range of African American anti-racist ideologies as uniformly inflammatory and a danger to the unity of the Puerto Rican

---

<sup>205</sup> See Jorge Duany, *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move: Identities on the Island & In the United States* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 236-260.

community.<sup>206</sup> When Díaz founded SACC shortly after, it was an organization for only Puerto Ricans that acquired this brand of race-blind nationalism.<sup>207</sup>

So, while Puerto Ricans faced the same problems as other communities in Chicago, the conservative nationalism pervasive among community leaders at the time made multiracial or multinational organizing impossible. While, on the surface, this nationalism might be read as the kind of self-determination for Puerto Ricans advocated by the Young Lords and other groups, this interpretation of self-determination blurred into anti-Blackness. However, not all Puerto Rican leaders were so conservative. As discussed in the previous part, the *Hermanos en la Familia de Dios* under the leadership of Jesús Rodríguez had begun to reimagine what it meant to be a community, de-emphasizing the hierarchical model that place the respectable elite of marianistas at the top and marginalized anyone who did not conform. The community they built was based on a shared understanding of struggle, not so much on a shared elite aesthetic or sense of superiority. As shall be argued later in this section, an implication of this reimagining of community was that leaders looked to form bonds with other communities, first to other Latinos, then to African Americans and poor Whites.

The *Hermanos* were not the only leaders in Chicago who had begun to resist hierarchical conservatism and develop institutionally protected spaces that facilitated the development of community based on compassion and solidarity rather than elitism. Protestant leaders,

---

<sup>206</sup> Juan Díaz and two others, “Interview with Juan Díaz, No. 1, and No. 2,” 2-4; Juan Díaz, “Interview with Juan Díaz,” 3, 6, 16, 21. Díaz simply calls them the “Civil Rights Movement,” but it was certainly the SCLC, as will be discussed more extensively later. The SCLC had been handing out “Freedom Army” arm bands and poorly translated Spanish informational pamphlets at the riots. The “Freedom Army” was a concept created by Rev. James Bevel in 1964 for the March to Montgomery, see Booklet by the SCLC, “Handbook for Freedom Army Recruits,” Spring, 1964, Civil Rights Movement Archive, available at [https://www.crmvet.org/docs/64\\_army.htm](https://www.crmvet.org/docs/64_army.htm). It is not clear whether Díaz’ claim that there were “Black Muslims” at the riots is accurate or simply a result of his paranoia, but either way, they certainly had not “taken over.” Also see Staudenmaier, “Between Two Flags,” 118-120.

<sup>207</sup> Obed López was apparently not allowed to join SACC because he was Mexican (and because he had been labeled a communist subversive), see Obed López and Carolee López, interview.

particularly on the West Side, were also undergoing a parallel process. Despite that several Protestant sects had been missionizing Puerto Ricans for half a century, an extreme minority of Puerto Ricans arriving to Chicago in the 1950s were Protestant. However, many Puerto Ricans converted to Protestantism after arriving to Chicago because Protestant churches offered better mutual aid than Catholic churches and were better able to meet the spiritual needs of Puerto Rican congregants.<sup>208</sup> On this latter point, compared with priest in Puerto Rico, US priests were more demanding, less



**Fig. 9:** Don Benedict (top left) and Archie Hargraves (top right) at a storefront church in Harlem in 1948.

accommodating, and discriminated against Puerto Rican congregants.<sup>209</sup> As such, some Protestant churches resonated better with Puerto Ricans' expectations, not to mention that there were many Puerto Rican ministers but only a single priest.<sup>210</sup> Vatican II only exacerbated these problems (and not just for Puerto Ricans), causing a mass exodus of Catholics who desired a more traditional worship structure rather than the new religious model, despite that the new model was meant to accommodate variation in worship more.<sup>211</sup>

Just as Vatican II began and as the West Side began to transition from White to Puerto Rican and Mexican, then African American, Protestants on the West Side vowed to support their

<sup>208</sup> Kelliher, "Hispanic Catholics," 161-165.

<sup>209</sup> Kelliher, "Hispanic Catholics," 163; Carroll and Headley, "Report for the CCSS"; Nieves, interview.

<sup>210</sup> Fr. José Acevedo, see Kelliher, "Hispanic Catholics," 313.

<sup>211</sup> See Allan Figueroa Deck, "The Challenge of Evangelical/Pentecostal Christianity to Hispanic Catholicism," in *Hispanic Catholic Culture*, 409-239; Haight, interview; Nieves, interview; Rebollar, interview.

new communities and ease the transition.<sup>212</sup> The Chicago City Missionary Society (CCMS), a mostly middle-class and White Congregational organization, distributed funding to several mutual aid and missionary associations.<sup>213</sup> At the time, the president of CCMS was Don Benedict, a White Protestant minister. Benedict and his close African American colleague, Archie Hargraves, both graduates of Union Theological Seminary in Manhattan, had been perfecting a new form of service-oriented mission that built on the Black Social Gospel tradition established earlier in the century by the likes of Reverdy Ransom (see fig. 8).<sup>214</sup> Arriving in Chicago in the 1950s, Benedict and Hargraves founded the West Side Christian Parish in 1952, a network of storefront churches that became the institutional anchors for developing community, then the Urban Training Center for Christian Mission (UTC) in 1963, a center for training ministry in their new style of mission.<sup>215</sup>

Benedict and Hargraves' strategy diverged from Saul Alinsky's, though he still was hired to train ministers. The UTC training program started with a "plunge" into the community to give ministers a taste of life in the ghetto. While this program deserves skepticism, it was, at least in theory, meant to address the inability of ministers to understand the experience of their congregations, precluding the possibility of forming bonds of solidarity. The organization that best exemplifies how Benedict and Hargraves challenged the Alinsky model of organizing was the West Side Organization for Full Employment (WSO) founded in 1964. While being independent, the WSO often sought the UTC for resources and guidance. Where the Alinsky

---

<sup>212</sup> Kelliher, "Hispanic Catholics," 160; Koschmann, "Finding their Footing," 124-129.

<sup>213</sup> Koschmann writes about the early history of the CCMS in "Finding their Footing," 104-106.

<sup>214</sup> Koschmann, "Finding Their Footing," 97-98; also see Terrell D. Goddard, "The Black Social Gospel in Chicago, 1896-1906: The Ministries of Reverdy Ransom and Richard R. Wright, Jr.," *The Journal of Negro History* 84, No. 3 (Summer, 1999): 227-246.

<sup>215</sup> On the WSCP, see Koschmann, "Finding their Footing," 112-124. On the UTC, see 130-145; and Gellman, "Black Freedom Struggles."

method sought to organize “active, above average people—closer to the middle class” (i.e., the “elite”), the WSO sought to “prove that low-income groups could organize. WSO was starting at the bottom and moving up. They began with the predominant group, the unemployed, then tenants and welfare recipients.”<sup>216</sup> This was fundamentally different from the Caballeros, which were always elite enough to accommodate the Catholic Church, whose end goal was to “fix” Puerto Rican models so that they could “foster true Catholic community.”<sup>217</sup> Hargraves and Benedict’s idea of good leadership would have been inconceivable for the Caballeros, picking five men who were “in their thirties, black, streetwise, ghetto-born and bred, and all were ex-convicts.”<sup>218</sup>

Hargraves and Benedict understood the strength of small-scale community organizations that Alinsky’s method dismissed as producing the wrong kind of leaders. In fact, they centered the storefront church as their basic unit of organization, reversing a trend in Chicago’s African American community whereby large churches were the main bases of operation for the Social Gospel. While large churches, by definition, reached a greater number of people, they also tended to be conservative and elite, alienating migrants who had just arrived from the South and were accustomed to more personalized worship.<sup>219</sup> Hargraves and Benedict turned to storefront churches because they were decentralized and thus had a greater degree of autonomy from which to build a community rooted in solidarity. To Benedict, the WSO “marked the continuing evolution that had begun with our storefront ministries.”<sup>220</sup> While certainly disrupting the status

---

<sup>216</sup> Don Benedict, *Born Again Radical* (New York, NY: The Pilgrim Press, 1982), 161.

<sup>217</sup> Hartch, “Illich and Mahon,” 187.

<sup>218</sup> Benedict, *Born Again Radical*, 141.

<sup>219</sup> See Wallace D. Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine: Religion and Culture in Black Chicago, 1915-1952* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 35-70.

<sup>220</sup> Benedict, *Born Again Radical*, 139.



quo in a way Alinsky believed would “split the larger community instead of bringing it together,” the WSO had the potential to heal community divisions brought about by conservatism.<sup>221</sup>

When Latinos began arriving on the West Side in the 1950s and early ‘60s, they too were welcomed by Protestants, with the CCMS funding an organization called Casa Central Evangélica, founded in the mid or late-1950s on Ogden and Adams (near Ashland) on the Near West Side.<sup>222</sup> Casa Central was one of the first pan-Latino organizations in Chicago.<sup>223</sup> It was also the UTC and WSO that welcomed the SCLC to the West Side of Chicago in 1965, where Martin Luther King would engage the city on housing discrimination. The space that Benedict and Hargraves created not only opened the door for a new style of community organizing, but also became a locus where leaders from across the city who had similar goals and ideas could connect and begin working together.

### Laying the Groundwork

The story of Casa Central is inextricably connected with that of the CCMS and UTC, but receives little mention in institutional records and the existing narratives of organizing on the West Side.<sup>224</sup> Don Benedict acknowledged that the UTC trained Latino ministry, but the UTC’s

---

<sup>221</sup> Just as Hargraves and Benedict had begun organizing the WSO, Saul Alinsky had warned Hargraves “against this style of organizing the under class of a lower class community. It would, he said, split the larger community instead of bringing it together,” see Bernard O. Brown, *Ideology and Community Action: The West Side Organization of Chicago, 1964-67* (Chicago, IL: Center for the Scientific Study of Religion, 1978), 85. It should be noted that Alinsky and von Hoffman’s idea of organizing the underclass was getting them angry enough to fight.

<sup>222</sup> This is another case where the exact start date is disputed. According to Martínez, *Chicago*, 247, Daniel Alvarez claimed the organization was started in 1954, but Alvarez wasn’t hired until 1964, and Martínez was unable to locate any documentation to prove the organizations existence until 1957. Supporting the later date is a newspaper article published in 1957 saying Casa Central had been founded recently, see “Agency To Aid Puerto Ricans in New Office,” *Chicago Defender*, May 25<sup>th</sup>, 1957. It is also possible that Casa Central began at a different location then moved to Ogden and Adams in 1957.

<sup>223</sup> Staudenmaier, “Between Two Flags,” 134.

<sup>224</sup> Specifically, Casa Central appears exactly twice in the John J. Egan Collection, UNDA. There is also a collection on the UTC at UIC, but they have not been open to the public due to the pandemic. There are records on the CCMS at the Congregational Library & Archives in Boston, which I was also unable to travel to. The lack of archival

narrative is consistently told in terms of White and Black multiracialism.<sup>225</sup> Casa Central was like many other mutual aid organizations, serving the Spanish Speaking on the West Side, including a significant proportion of Cuban refugees (beginning in 1959) in the resettlement program.<sup>226</sup> In 1961, Rev. José Torres, born in 1923 in Ponce, Puerto Rico, became the director of Casa Central when it moved to the Carpenter Chapel, a facility of the First Congregational Church (FCC) on Washington and Ashland, where Torres had just begun as the minister for the Spanish Speaking congregation, known as Primera Iglesia.<sup>227</sup> Two years later, the UTC made Casa Central its headquarters, and Torres would become an active participant.<sup>228</sup> Rev. Daniel Alvarez, a Cuban who had fled the Castro regime in 1961, took over as director of Casa Central in 1964.<sup>229</sup>

In 1963, Torres was ordained as a minister in the United Church of Christ (UCC) and Primera Iglesia was integrated with the White congregation in the main chapel.<sup>230</sup> Torres and his congregation were drawn to FCC because it had been a part of the Underground Railroad. Torres himself became involved with the Civil Rights Movement, marching from Selma to Montgomery

---

sources connecting Casa Central to the other goings on at UTC may just be a result of looking in the wrong place, but the preliminary search has yielded almost nothing.

<sup>225</sup> Benedict, *Born Again Radical*, 134.

<sup>226</sup> For a description of the services Casa Central offered, see “Casa Central Gives Valuable Aid to Spanish-Speaking Newcomers,” *Chicago Defender*, Aug. 11<sup>th</sup>, 1962. On Cuban refugees, see Cheris B. Current, *Questioning the Cuban Exile Model: Race, Gender, and Resettlement, 1959-1979* (El Paso, TX: LFB Scholarly Publishing LLC, 2010), 74-75. Just as a note on language, I use the term “Spanish Speaking” since “Latino” was not really used by any of these organization. Its use emerged with the Young Lords.

<sup>227</sup> “Church Embarks on Era of Integration; Ordains 3,” *Chicago Tribune*, Feb. 17<sup>th</sup>, 1963; Jane Kertz, “Casa Central to Give Aid to Ailing Latin Americans,” *Chicago Tribune*, Dec. 17<sup>th</sup>, 1961; Memorial Program, “¡El Viejo Vive! En la memoria de nuestra gente,” Feb. 20, 2005, Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional Collection, FA, available at [http://freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC22\\_scans/22.viejo.vive.2.20.2005.pdf](http://freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC22_scans/22.viejo.vive.2.20.2005.pdf), 22.

<sup>228</sup> Koschmann, “Finding their Footing,” 134; Urban Training Center for Christian Mission, “Background and Curriculum for 1965-1966,” 1965, CJEG 23/10, John J. Egan Papers, UNDA, 10; UTC, “¡El Viejo Vive!” 22.

<sup>229</sup> Arthur Jackman, “Flees Castro; Joins Casa Central: Rev. Alvarez Headed Ten Cuban Prisons,” *Chicago Tribune*, Jul. 8<sup>th</sup>, 1965. Alvarez appears to have had a somewhat complicated relationship with Castro, having advocated for the 26<sup>th</sup> of July Movement and attained the role of “commissioner for juvenile delinquency and rehabilitation,” and ran ten Cuban prisons. He left when he became disillusioned (which could have happened for several reasons). 1961 was also when Castro committed to communism after the Bay of Pigs invasion and the stakes of the revolution dramatically increased.

<sup>230</sup> “Church Embarks on Era of Integration.”

with the SCLC (and WSO and UTC) in 1965.<sup>231</sup> Torres and Alvarez would have also encountered hundreds of African American, White, and Latino priests passing by during their training sessions would surely have meant they well understood the UTC's philosophy and were engaged in their mission. While the story of Torres and Alvarez' activism in the early 1960s is woefully incomplete, the connection they formed between Casa Central and the Civil Rights Movement would prove to be only the beginning of a slowly growing African American and Spanish Speaking alliance.

Meanwhile, in 1965, the situation with urban renewal began heating up in Lincoln Park. The mostly White and middle-class Lincoln Park Conservation Association (LPCA), which had formed over a decade prior in 1954, had finally gotten a renewal plan approved by the Department of Urban Renewal.<sup>232</sup> For members of the LPCA, renewal was thought to improve the neighborhood, and for some, "better" meant "more diverse." Yet the new renewal plan, Project I, made no mention to what would happen to the predominantly working class, Puerto Rican, African American, and poor White residents after their homes had been bulldozed. Rev. James Reed began to form a coalition within the LPCA to involve the community members whose homes were going to be destroyed in LPCA meetings.<sup>233</sup> Out of this action, the 23-year-old Luis Cuza, a Cuban graduate student volunteering for the LPCA, would connect the disparate Spanish Speaking organizations in Lincoln Park and form the Spanish American Federation (SAF).<sup>234</sup>

---

<sup>231</sup> Dorian Ortega, "Memories of Chicago's Radical Puerto Rican Church," *La Respuesta*, Aug. 18<sup>th</sup>, 2014, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20190411204021/http://larespuestamedia.com/memories-of-chicagos-radical-puerto-rican-church/>; "¡El Viejo Vive!" 22; Brown, *Ideology and Community Action*, 61.

<sup>232</sup> Hertz, *Battle of Lincoln Park*, 49-52, 105-106.

<sup>233</sup> Hertz, *Battle of Lincoln Park*, 106-108.

<sup>234</sup> Hertz, *Battle of Lincoln Park*, 107. On Cuza being 23, he was 25 in September of 1967 according to Thomas J. Foley, "Romney Trades Heated Words With Chicagoan: Governor Declares He Once Was Poor in Exchange With Puerto Rican Slum [Cuban] Leader," *Los Angeles Times*, Sep. 21<sup>st</sup>, 1967. On Cuza being Cuban (and not Puerto

The SAF comprised of both religious and secular organizations. The religious organizations included Councils No. 3 (St. Michael's) and 9 (St. Teresa's) of the Caballeros and Damas, the CCSS, and Casa Central (which by this point served the Spanish Speaking all over the city), as well as the North Side Cooperative Ministry (NSCM), a coalition of Protestant churches like the CCMS, and Armitage Avenue Methodist Church, where there was a Cuban congregation led by Cuban exile Rev. Sergio Herrero. The secular groups included the Puerto Rican Congress of Mutual Aid (PRC), led by Carlos "Caribe" Ruiz, the Commonwealth Office, and a couple of town clubs, including the Hijos de San Lorenzo.<sup>235</sup> The first leadership elected included Sergio Herrero, Fr. Joseph Betinec, a White priest at St. Michael's, and Manuel Ulloa, a leader at Council No. 3 of the Caballeros (St. Michael's), all religious leaders.<sup>236</sup>

The two main concerns of the SAF were 1) increasing the involvement of the Spanish Speaking of Lincoln Park in conversations about urban renewal and 2) combating juvenile delinquency.<sup>237</sup> For most of the constituent organization, involvement in community politics was a departure from the typical activities of a mutual aid group. In her 1967 letter, Janet Nolan wrote that organizations like the CCSS ended up being considered "just another soup kitchen" and failed to address "underlying causes and set about changing, not annihilating structures," and

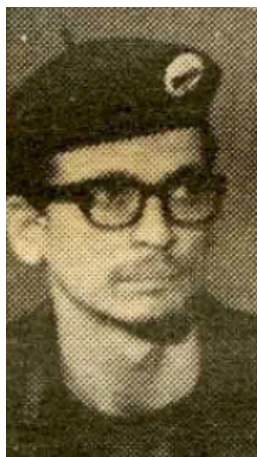
---

Rican as the *LA Times* article suggests), see "Welcome to Luis Cuza," *LPCA Newsletter*, Oct. 1965, 001N.011, LPCA Collection, DUL.

<sup>235</sup> VISTA workers, "VISTA," 10A-11. Above are only the organizations that will be discussed in this paper. It is worth further mentioning that the inclusion of the Hijos de San Lorenzo is evidence that Puerto Ricans from San Lorenzo were particularly politically active (there were certainly many other town clubs that don't appear on this list), and the organization probably included people like Jesús and Eugenia Rodríguez, who were both from San Lorenzo. It should also be noted that Herrero's name may have been "Herrera." Both spellings and pronunciations occur in multiple sources. It seems more likely that it was "Herrero" since it would be harder to mistake "Herrera" for "Herrero" than vice versa, "Herrera" being the more common name.

<sup>236</sup> "Spanish Group Has 1<sup>st</sup> General Meeting; Tom Eley Elected in Old Town Triangle; Otto Teske, Jr. Leads Sheffield Group," *LPCA Newsletter*, Jan. to Feb. 1966, 001N.012, LPCA Collection, DUL. On Jose Rodriguez being a businessman, see Report by Cuza, ca. Nov. 1965. On Manuel Ulloa being a Vice President of Council No. 3, see Council No. 10 of the Caballeros de San Juan, "Como Se Van Aprogramar Nustras Futuras Actividades," *Boletín Informativo*, ca. 1964, Manuel Martínez Collection.

<sup>237</sup> The two topics discussed at early meetings were entitled "Urban Renewal and the Poor," and "The Problems of the Spanish Youth in Chicago," see VISTA workers, "VISTA," 10.



**Fig 10:** Luis Cuza as a Young Lord at a meeting of the Rainbow Coalition in 1969.

especially failing to address youth problems.<sup>238</sup> So for the SAF have already begun to structural issues in Lincoln Park was irregular. For Puerto Rican organizations, whose main concern had been developing and maintaining a Puerto Rican community, working within the broader community, especially with Cubans who had a tense relationship with the Puerto Rican community, was an important change.<sup>239</sup> As such, the SAF in part served to “[m]ak[e] [Latin Americans] aware of [their] problems and motivate them to do something about them.”<sup>240</sup> Indeed, the SAF was not only the first time many of its members entered community politics, but the

first time many of them had worked together at all.<sup>241</sup>

The SAF also focused on the issue of juvenile delinquency. Over the last two years, Puerto Rican youth gangs had become a much more serious concern in Lincoln Park.<sup>242</sup> In the fall of 1965 as Luis Cuza was forming the SAF, he also started looking into more effective methods to address youth delinquency, an issue which he believed “had been tackled in a very disorganized fashion.” His first step was to attend a Young Lords meeting, commenting that “[Lincoln Park] may be able to learn something from what these kids have done and use this

<sup>238</sup> Nolan, “Puerto Ricans and the Church,” 19-20.

<sup>239</sup> (Light-skinned) Cuban exiles, who were often professionals and greatly privileged by their treatment by the US government via the resettlement program, tended to view Mexicans and Puerto Ricans as below them and tried not to associate with them, see Marta I.K. de Curutchet, “Localization of the Mexican and Cuban Population of Chicago” (Ph.Diss., University of Chicago, 1967), 83, 90-91, 96. An example of this appears in Rebollar, interview, where Rebollar describes a Cuban classmate of his and Cha Cha’s at St. Teresa’s who was friendly with them, but also carried an aura of superiority because they were Mexican and Puerto Rican. The VISTA report claims that Mexicans, having been in Chicago much longer than Puerto Ricans and Cubans, were the ones who had a sense of superiority, see VISTA workers, “VISTA,” 9A. This could have been true, given that no Mexican groups were present in the SAF, but there were also generally fewer Mexicans living in Lincoln Park.

<sup>240</sup> Report by Luis J. Cuza, Jan. 17<sup>th</sup>, 1966, 082A.010, LPCA Collection, DUL.

<sup>241</sup> As discussed previously, the secular and religious Puerto Rican organizations didn’t always get along. For example, the CCSS and Caballeros often were in competition with the Puerto Rican Commonwealth Office and the PRC, so the fact that they worked together through the SAF was an accomplishment. See Kelliher, “Hispanic Catholics,” 305-307, 316-317.

<sup>242</sup> Jiménez Defense Committee, “Que Viva El Pueblo,” 9-10.

knowledge with the Black Eagles and the other gangs in the neighborhood.”<sup>243</sup> That Cuza sought to “learn something” from the Young Lords, who were still far from their politicization, demonstrates his willingness to view the Young Lords as an organization rather than a group that needed to be organized. This marks an important break from the conservative position that gang members were uncivilized and “non even human.” In fact, within a few years, Cuza would become a prominent Young Lord himself (see fig. 10).

The emergence of the SAF can be seen as the first response to rapidly worsening conditions for the Spanish Speaking in Lincoln Park and a sign that Puerto Rican and Cuban leadership were realizing that their disjointed mutual aid organizations were not going to prevent removal. Through 1966 and into 1967, Luis Cuza would continue to act as mediator between the SAF and the LPCA and captured some of the changing attitudes of the SAF leadership. The first line of Cuza’s November 1965 report lists the SAF’s goal as “[h]elp[ing] ease the process of assimilation of the Spanish speaking community of Lincoln Park.”<sup>244</sup> But in January 1966, Cuza wrote,

Members of the Neigh[borhood Groups] who wish to attract [Latin American] people to their org[anization] must do more than just say that they want [Latin Americans]. They must be willing to extend a personal invitation to them (at [a] meeting of [the Spanish Organization]); they should enumerate and publicize those things which are needed by the [Latin American] that the neigh[borhood] org[anization] can do.<sup>245</sup>

Cuza became quickly disillusioned by his work with the LPCA and begun to demand that the LPCA accommodate the needs of Lincoln Park’s Spanish Speaking rather than vice versa. In March, a report on the SAF was planning had taken their efforts build a stronger coalition,

planning a series of meetings with the most influential leaders of the Latin American community and the leaders of other minority groups in Chicago, for example, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Urban League, to bring closer relations

---

<sup>243</sup> Report by Luis J. Cuza, ca. Nov. 1965, 082A.010, LPCA Collection, DUL.

<sup>244</sup> Report by Cuza, ca. Nov. 1965.

<sup>245</sup> Report by Cuza, Jan. 17<sup>th</sup>, 1966.

between the different groups that suffer from many similar conditions. In time it is hoped that joint projects will develop from these associations.<sup>246</sup>

Faced with the problem of removal and now organizing their own broad-based coalition, Cuban and Puerto Rican organizations rapidly dropped their accommodationist orientation and began to take direct action and seek out political allies.

The summer of 1966 was pivotal. In June, just after the Puerto Rican Parade, the Division Street Riots in West Town became the first major riots in Chicago for over a decade. Obed López, a Mexican who had lived in Logan Square for several years and had been active in supporting the Cuban Revolution, was on Division Street when the riots occurred. Encouraged by Afro-Puerto Rican friends, López contacted the SCLC.<sup>247</sup> Several members of the SAF arrived to quell the riots and meet with the Puerto Rican leaders in West Town to coordinate a plan of action.<sup>248</sup> Daniel Alvarez, the Cuban director of Casa Central, would call on Puerto Rican leaders to join forces with Martin Luther King in a strategy of non-violent direct action against Chicago's power structures. The day after the riots, the Chicago Freedom Movement had begun recruiting within the Puerto Rican community in West Town, and King had called for a summit with Puerto Rican leaders.<sup>249</sup>

During the riots, the SCLC and UTC held a summit at a hotel in the Loop that "brought together Negro, white, Indian and Spanish gang members" to convince them to fight the city's power structure rather than each other. While the timing was probably coincidental and it is unclear how many Spanish speaking gang members were actually present, the coincidence of Puerto Ricans rejecting the model of accommodation with the SCLC beginning a strategy to

---

<sup>246</sup> "VISTA," 11.

<sup>247</sup> Obed López and Carolee López, interview.

<sup>248</sup> Benedict, *Born Again Radical*, 186-188; Méndez, "Recollections," 30-35; Díaz, interview.

<sup>249</sup> "King Calls For Puerto Rican Meet," *Chicago Defender*, Jun. 15<sup>th</sup>, 1966.

engage street gangs like the African American gangs was not entirely arbitrary. Puerto Ricans were responding to the same problems the SCLC was beginning to attempt to redress. A *Defender* article mentions the presence of major African American gangs, like the Blackstone Rangers and the Vice Lords, alongside (unnamed) White gangs, with one speaker saying, “segregation, poverty and police brutality were not just problems of the Negro. ‘It happens to poor whites, too.’” The article only went so far as to acknowledge the presence of Indigenous and Spanish speaking gang members.<sup>250</sup> For over a year, the WSO’s membership had overlapped significantly with the Vice Lords and Egyptian Cobras, two West Side gangs.<sup>251</sup> But for such a visible group as the SCLC to see gangs as a unit of organization put the method used by the WSO and Cuza in the spotlight.

In July, the SCLC organized a rally at Soldier Field that would culminate in a march to City Hall, where King would read a list of demands to Mayor Daley to address the housing crisis. It seems that a contingent from the SAF appeared at the rally, with at least Cuza, Alvarez, and Herrero present, with Herrero even speaking alongside King and Ralph Abernathy of the SCLC and Al Raby of the CCCO (among others). The purpose of their presence was to “create a liason between Negro rights groups and Spanish speaking groups.”<sup>252</sup> The SCLC also drew on its newly formed connection with Chicago’s African American gangs, who were also invited to the rally. However, having heard a member of the SCLC say, “they didn’t need all those ‘gangbangers,’” the Vice Lords coordinated with the Blackstone Rangers and other gangs so

---

<sup>250</sup> Betty Washington, “SCLC Organizing Youth Gangs City Wide: Others Join In Downtown Meeting,” *Chicago Defender*, Jun. 15<sup>th</sup>, 1966. Also see Gellman, “Black Freedom Struggles,” 223-224.

<sup>251</sup> Gellman, “Black Freedom Struggles,” 217.

<sup>252</sup> On Cuza and Rodriguez, see “Rally Drawing Many City Segments,” *Chicago Defender*, Jul. 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1966; on Alvarez, see Brown, *Ideology and Community Action*, 61; on Herrero, see Betty Washington, “100,000 Expected At Freedom Rally,” *Chicago Defender*, Jul. 9<sup>th</sup>, 1966; and “30,000 Hear Dr. King At Soldier Field Rally: 98° Temperature Fails to Prevent Huge Turn-Out,” *Chicago Defender*, Jul. 11<sup>th</sup>, 1966.



that, when King rose to speak, a group of 500 gang members also rose and left the rally, a “show of strength” that “was dramatically effective.”<sup>253</sup>

A day after the rally at Soldier Field, another large-scale riot began, this time on the Near West Side extending into Garfield Park, about a mile south of Division Street, when a young African American teenager was arrested for opening a fire hydrant. Leaders of the SCLC, WSO, and UTC, including King, Hargraves and WSO leader Chester Robinson, attempting to quell the riot, just as King, Fr. Headley, and the Hermanos had the month before in West Town. In a particularly poignant incident, a car of Puerto Rican men drove up to a make-shift blockade and Hargraves and Robinson formed a human shield to protect them from the rioting youths.<sup>254</sup> In many ways, the Division Street and West Side Riots were parallel cases, representing the tension between community leaders and “delinquent” youths. In both cases, it was clear that leaders were only in control in so much as they could convince street gang leaders to try to stop the violence for them. A nun from the CCSS described how Puerto Rican community leaders had made a deal with the police on the second day of rioting to all the Latin Kings, Scorpions, and Paragons to quash the riot.<sup>255</sup> However, the Latin Kings had their own initiative, and rather than trying to end the riot, they coordinated it in an organized fashion.<sup>256</sup> Likewise in the West Side Riots, the WSO headquarters became neutral ground for gang leaders to strategize, and it seems that King and Robinson maintained contact with gang leaders throughout the episode.<sup>257</sup>

---

<sup>253</sup> John M. Hagedorn, “Vice Lord History in Pictures,” Chicago Gang History Project, accessed Feb. 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022, <http://gangresearch.net/cvl/cvlhistoryfinal/oneway.html>; Benedict, *Born Again Radical*, 177.

<sup>254</sup> See Benedict, *Born Again Radical*, 177-184; and Brown, *Ideology and Community Action*, 49-59.

<sup>255</sup> Nun from the CCSS “Interview with Sister 76: Cardinal’s Committee for Spanish Speaking,” interviewed by Janet Nolan, Jun. 18<sup>th</sup>, 1966, Chicago, IL, transcript, 001.004, The Janet Nolan Ethnographic Research on Puerto Ricans in Chicago Collection, DUL, 3.

<sup>256</sup> Omar López, interview, DUL.

<sup>257</sup> Benedict, *Born Again Rebel*, 180-182.

The summer of 1966 marked a very rocky beginning point for a multiracial coalition. On the one hand, the recognition of the parallel nature of the two riots is exactly what led to the first serious call for a multiracial coalition between African Americans and the Spanish Speaking via the SAF. But at the same time, the two riots demonstrated the extreme tensions that existed between and among the respective communities. Through the 1960s, Puerto Ricans had segregated themselves away from African Americans, and racial tension was very likely one cause. In fact, the SACC and Puerto Rican press insisted that the Puerto Rican riots were an isolated event, “refusing to make connections between the problems of poor Puerto Ricans and those experienced by both poor whites and blacks.”<sup>258</sup> Simultaneously, the old guard of leadership were only just coming to terms with the fact that they didn’t have as much power over their communities as they had thought, and that their veneer of respectability was not doing them any favors, as demonstrated by the display of force at Soldier Field. But despite the problems, this summer still planted the seed, providing legitimacy for a strategy that saw that organizing from the grassroots was not only possible but necessary.

### The Old Guard and the Emerging Leadership

During a time when Puerto Rican leadership in West Town was secularizing, it is especially important that the leaders who began to make connections with the SCLC were religious. The Caballeros in West Town fractured, with some joining secular organizations like the PRC, or starting new ones, like the SACC. Others became more religious, joining the Hermanos, which, according to Vidal and Nolan, meant becoming more alienated from politics and the working class. But as discussed in the previous section, the Hermanos were among the

---

<sup>258</sup> Michael James, “Movements in Chicago,” *The Movement*, Nov. 1966, Campus Underground, Independent Voices Collection, Reveal Digital, available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/community.28040889>

first to attempt to quell the riots directly at the scene, even getting arrested. Like Hargraves and Robinson, they put their bodies in the way to prevent the mob from lighting a police car on fire. Later, thirty more Hermanos would join them, and several were arrested.<sup>259</sup>

The Puerto Rican Parade in 1966 itself had been the object of contestation between secular and religious leaders. With secular leaders like the PRC winning out, they claimed the 1966 parade was “the first” Puerto Rican parade, erasing the decade of parades hosted by the Caballeros.<sup>260</sup> In 1967, at a meeting of the city’s Puerto Rican athletics program, a representative of the Commonwealth Office (whose conflict with the CCSS had been going on for a decade) “reported all athletic programs with the exception of those of the Cardinal’s Committee.<sup>261</sup> A year later, Carlos Ruiz of the PRC had a dispute with José Valentín, the director the ALAC’s baseball program, likely because of existing tensions between the two organizations. Ruiz proceeded to lodge a complaint directly with Cardinal Cody, knowing this would get the already underfunded ALAC in trouble.<sup>262</sup>

These conflicts were about who had the right to represent the Puerto Rican community. In one sense, the concerns of secular leaders were, in part, justified. The specific targeting of the Caballeros and the CCSS/ALAC may well have been because secular leaders saw that these groups as beholden to the interests of the Catholic Church. Meanwhile, pan-Latino organizations

---

<sup>259</sup> See Nun from CCSS, interview, 5. She mentions a priest from the CCSS and mentions a leader from the Hermanos by the title of “Don,” and Jesús Rodríguez was known in the community as “Don Jesús.” Two of the Hermano’s sons apparently worked for Nolan as interviewers (Rodríguez’ sons were Carmelo, Danny, José, and Miguel), and Nolan had interviewed one of them (would have to have been Carmelo, as he would have been the only one who was university age), see Son of Hermano leader (Carmelo Rodríguez?), “Interview with 23,” Jun. 16<sup>th</sup>, 1966, 001.004, The Janet Nolan Ethnographic Research on Puerto Ricans in Chicago Collection, DUL. Also see Council No. 10 of the Caballeros, “Nervio y Guía”; and Méndez, “Recollections,” 30-35.

<sup>260</sup> Kelliher, “Hispanic Catholics,” 317.

<sup>261</sup> Letter by Gilbert A. Carroll to John Cody, Apr. 11<sup>th</sup>, 1968, EXEC/C0670/43#8, 43958.04, John Cardinal Cody Papers Collection, AAC.

<sup>262</sup> Letter by Carlos Ruiz to John Cardinal Cody, Apr. 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1968, EXEC/C0670/43#8, 43958.04, John Cardinal Cody Papers Collection, AAC; Letter by Carroll to Cody, Apr. 11<sup>th</sup>, 1968. Ruiz explained that Valentín was angry because he thought Ruiz was “interfering with our program,” and Carroll, siding with Valentín, attributed the conflict to a difficulty over “control and prestige,” suggesting that the conflict was not simply a personal dispute.

with non-Puerto Rican leaders might work partly in the interest of groups (Mexicans and Cubans) that often discriminated against Puerto Ricans. Díaz and Ruiz saw themselves as representing the true interests of the community. In his letter to Cody, Ruiz repeatedly emphasize how long he and other leaders that Valentín had disrespected had worked in the Puerto Rican community, demonstrating that he believed that such leaders had proven their commitment to the Puerto Rican community. However, while it is reasonable that secular leaders were skeptical of the Church and, to some extent, the interests of outsiders, they were certainly not guiltless of the same things they were accusing other leaders of. Díaz' conservatism was clearly not in the interest of the large portions of the Puerto Rican community who had rioted in the summer of 1966.

In the aftermath of the Division Street Riots, the existing leadership of the Puerto Rican community split between secular nationalists—groups like the SACC, PRC, and the Commonwealth Office—and religious groups—Casa Central, ALAC, the Caballeros, and the Hermanos—who had begun to form a network with African American religious groups like the SCLC and UTC. These latter groups were also the very groups that had begun employing a new strategy to work with gangs. Contrasting the conservatism of secular leadership, religious groups had built on models of service-oriented theology to construct restorative models of community building. While their strategies still had problems, they enabled community members to see even the most marginalized members of society as redeemable, something that conservatism could not do.

But by 1967, religious wing of Puerto Rican and Spanish Speaking leadership began to falter. In January, the SCLC gradually left Chicago and passed along the buck to Jesse Jackson

and his Operation Breadbasket.<sup>263</sup> Internal divisions afflicted the SAF as the PRC and Commonwealth Office split from Casa Central and the ALAC and the religious leadership of the Caballeros shifted over to the Hermanos.<sup>264</sup> In addition, the LPCA consolidated power, decisively excising any members who were resisted to their plans for the next phase of renewal, which did not take into consideration the SAF's membership.<sup>265</sup> This combination of factors explains why the SAF appears to have dissolved as an coalition in early 1967.<sup>266</sup> However, in response to the LPCA's power grab, a counter faction emerged called the Concerned Citizens of Lincoln Park (CCLP), led by Rev. James Reed and Ramon Campos. The CCLP remained committed to giving a voice to those who were most directly affected by urban renewal and several organizations from the SAF supported and contributed to the CCLP, including Armitage Church and Casa Central, and St. Teresa's Catholic Church, where Fr. Headley worked at the time, offered support as well.<sup>267</sup>

But while religious leaders were facing difficulties and secular leaders retained their pre-riot conservatism, a new generation of leaders was emerging. Obed López was born around 1940 in San Luis Potosi, Mexico, growing up Protestant in a city that was Catholic and conservative, and arriving in Logan Square in the late 1950s. After graduating from high school, he became involved with the labor movement and made connections to the Civil Rights Movement through

---

<sup>263</sup> In the intervening months, the SCLC organized in Marquette Park on the Southwest Side, and King remarked that it he had never seen such hateful counter-protesters. The SCLC was able to make a deal with the Chicago Housing Authority, but in 1967 after the SCLC left, they reneged on it. See "Chicago Campaign," *The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University*, accessed Feb. 25<sup>th</sup>, 2022, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/chicago-campaign>.

<sup>264</sup> On the Caballeros leadership shifting over to the Hermanos, I discuss this in the previous section. Also see Kelliher, "Hispanic Catholics," 310.

<sup>265</sup> Hertz, *Battle of Lincoln Park*, 110-123.

<sup>266</sup> The last mention of the SAF that I have found was in February 1967, see "Legal Advice Clinic," *LPCA Newsletter*, Feb. 1967, 001N.013, LPCA Collection, DUL.

<sup>267</sup> The first issue of the *Lincoln Park Press*, CCLP's bilingual newspaper, lists Casa Central and Fr. Headley as its translators, see *Lincoln Park Press*, Dec. 1967, 012.006, Peter Bauer Papers, DUL, 2. St. Teresa's, especially, appears frequently in issues of the *Lincoln Park Press*, see folders 012.005 and 012.006 from the Peter Bauer Papers, DUL, and folder 131.001 from the LPCA Collection.

the local branch of the 26<sup>th</sup> of July Movement and Fair Play for Cuba. In trying to join SACC, López' affiliation with pro-Castro movements made him the center of controversy when Daley's Red Squads infiltrated the organization. But word got to López later that Juan Díaz had said "derisively" that "Obed López doesn't know that the real reason he's not admitted into SACC is because he's Mexican."<sup>268</sup> In other words, Díaz felt that the problem with López was not his radical politics, but his not being Puerto Rican. Being rejected from SACC, López founded the Latin American Defense Organization (LADO), not just for Puerto Ricans but for all Latin Americans.

Building on the connection López made with the SCLC during the riots, LADO initially worked with Jesse Jackson's Operation Breadbasket. In the summer of 1967, one of LADO's first moves was to organize a boycott of the National Food Store chain, which was engaging in racist hiring practices. This put them on the radar of Jesse Jackson, whose Operation Breadbasket was doing the same work. According to López and his wife, Carolee, the boycott and picket of National's gained LADO some publicity and strengthened his connection to African American ministers who were involved in the Civil Rights Movement.<sup>269</sup> However, with Operation Breadbasket winning the victory almost entirely on their own, López decided to take LADO in a different direction where they could work more independently.<sup>270</sup> According to Martin L. Deppe, an African American minister who worked with Jackson, after winning negotiations, "we invited Spanish-speaking pastors to join us 'in this moral movement to gain jobs for Spanish-speaking people as well as for Negroes.' No response was received. I think we should have been more

---

<sup>268</sup> Obed López-Zacarias, "Obed López-Zacarias Video Interview and Biography," interviewed by José Jiménez, Mar. 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2012, video recording, Young Lords in Lincoln Park, GVSU. Also see López and López, interview. On the Red Squads infiltrating SACC, see Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 168-179.

<sup>269</sup> Obed López and Carolee López, interview.

<sup>270</sup> López-Zacarias, interview.

persistent in this attempt.”<sup>271</sup> Deppe was likely referring to leaders from the SAF or the UTC, indicating that the lack of interest in maintaining a multiracial coalition into 1967 was somewhat mutual, as Spanish Speaking organizations still had too weak a voice to maintain independence or constitute a worthwhile ally.

LADO’s main concern quickly became their welfare union for Latin American (mainly Puerto Rican) mothers.<sup>272</sup> In the first issue of their newsletter in June of 1967, LADO made clear how they differed from other Puerto Rican organizations, saying,

“Now some of the ‘respectable’ organizations want money to hire professional organizers. [...] Perhaps such men would do some good. Or maybe they would only cause more talk, more declarations, more meaningless commotion and cries of ‘Unity! Progress!’ when what they really mean is ‘I want to be your leader! I want power!’ [...] There are no ‘bosses,’ no ‘leaders,’ in LADO[.] No one controls us and we don’t want control over anyone.”<sup>273</sup>

This was undoubtedly directed at conservative nationalist Puerto Rican leadership of groups like Carlos Ruiz and Juan Díaz, and ex-Caballeros who had “sold out” and moved to the suburbs with money they had made as organizers.<sup>274</sup> An editorial, likely written by López’ brother, Hector, described a friend, who was “tired of being pushed around in the neighborhood and of being treated like criminals.” Hector told his friend that “fighting with your fists can make you feel good for a while by does not change much,” instead he should join LADO, where “we’re trying [to fight] with our brains, the way the guys from JOIN are doing it Uptown or like the West Side

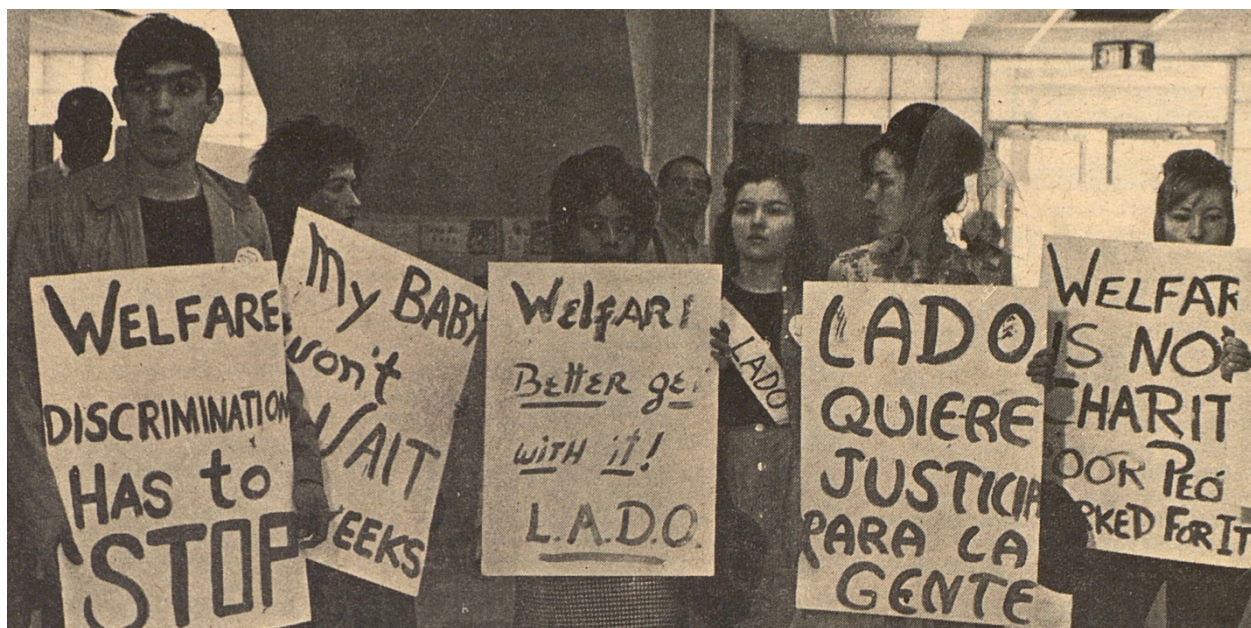
---

<sup>271</sup> Martin L. Deppe, *Operation Breadbasket: An Untold Story of Civil Rights in Chicago, 1966-1971* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2017), 32.

<sup>272</sup> On LADO’s welfare union, see Staudenmaier, “Between Two Flags,” 152-160.

<sup>273</sup> “LADO is growing!” *LADO*, Jun. 1967, 18, private collection, Ken Sawyer, MTS.

<sup>274</sup> Later in the article claims that “[t]he money we make doesn’t stay in our community but flows out to the suburbs with our city ‘leaders,’” see “LADO is growing!” Also see Headley, interview, where Fr. Headley makes the same claim about the organizers of the Caballeros Credit Union in the late 1960s. It is made pretty clear in a article about LADO that appeared in the movement that López felt that the leaders of SACC were sell-outs who refused to do cross-class solidarity, see Mike James, “Militant Organizers Dig In,” *The Movement*, Apr. 1967, Campus Underground, Independent Voices Collection, Reveal Digital, available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/community.28040894>



**Fig. 11a:** LADO picket at the Wicker Park Welfare Office in Jun. 1967.

Organization is doing it on the West Side.”<sup>275</sup> LADO positioned itself against the professionalized elite of the Puerto Rican community and embracing members of the community other organizations deemed irredeemable.

For many Puerto Ricans, LADO’s optics as a group that contrasted from the conservative nationalism of groups like SACC was quite attractive. Carlos Castro, who had been the first (Afro-)Puerto Rican in the Blackstone Rangers then gained some acclaim during the Division Street Riots, began a relationship with LADO because it had been attacked in the Puerto Rican press.<sup>276</sup> Then, in April of 1967, LADO met with several White and African American welfare unions across the city at the WSO headquarters under the title Welfare Recipients Union (WRU).<sup>277</sup> The WRU discussed how to approach working with the Independent Union of Public

<sup>275</sup> Hector [López?], “What’s Happening,” *LADO*, Jun. 1967, 18, private collection, Ken Sawyer, MTS. On Obed’s brother Hector, see López-Zacarias, interview.

<sup>276</sup> James, “Militant Organizers Dig In.”

<sup>277</sup> Marilyn Katz, “Welfare Blues in Chicago,” *The Movement*, Jun. 1967, Campus Underground, Independent Voices Collection, Reveal Digital, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/community.28040894>. The WRU seems to have consisted of several organizations, but those listed were LADO, the WSO, and JOIN, East Garfield Park Community Organization (whom LADO appears to have worked with frequently), the Englewood Civic Organization, the West





**Fig. 11b:** March at City Hall in Jul. 1969, organizations present were Jobs or Income Now (from Uptown), the East Garfield Park Community Organization, and LADO.

Aid Employees (IUPAE), the union of welfare caseworkers who were not directly committed to the rights of recipients, but in some instances their interests aligned.<sup>278</sup> After failing to make a contract with the IUPAE to guarantee that each union would respect each other's picket lines, the recipient unions decided to work independently, with LADO and the IUPAE (unsuccessfully) working together on a strike at the Wicker Park Public Aid Office that June (fig. 11a).<sup>279</sup> Despite this initial failure, the

WRU continued to work together, picketing City Hall in July (see fig. 11b), hosting a film workshop in October, and participating in a "welfare vigil" at the Federal Building in November.<sup>280</sup> The WRU continued to exist until at least August of 1968.<sup>281</sup>

In addition to working within a multiracial coalition of welfare unions, LADO itself was a multiracial welfare union by November of 1967. That month, *The Movement*, a national underground newspaper published by the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, published an article by LADO member, Noel Ignatin, entitled "Integrated Organizing." While

---

Side Recipients Action Group, and the Kenwood-Oakland Community Organization. Also see "100 Relievers Picket County Welfare Unit," *Chicago Tribune*, Aug. 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1968.

<sup>278</sup> Staudenmaier, "Between Two Flags," 148-152.

<sup>279</sup> Staudenmaier, "Between Two Flags," 158-160; Katz, "Welfare Blues in Chicago."

<sup>280</sup> Dick Lawrence, "Poor Fight Urban Renewal," *The Movement*, Jul. 1967, Campus Underground, Independent Voices Collection, Reveal Digital, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/community.28040897>; Nancy Gitlin and Tom Livingston, "Pictures For the Chicago Movement," *The Movement*, Oct. 1967, Campus Underground, Independent Voices Collection, Reveal Digital, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/community.28040900>; Betty Washington, "Welfare Recipients Protest Aid Freeze: Vigil Labels U.S. House Bill 'Unfair,'" *Chicago Defender*, Nov. 13<sup>th</sup>, 1967.

<sup>281</sup> "100 Relievers Picket County Welfare Unit."

LADO had emphasized the need for multiracial and multinational organizing since its inception, this article expressed the stakes of their position with renewed vigor, saying, “there are two doors open to us. One is the door of poverty and discrimination, destruction of our culture and denial of our rights, coupled with a few tiny privileges to make us think we are better than the Negroes. The other door leads to full freedom.”<sup>282</sup> The article described that LADO had begun to work with both poor White and African American residents of Humboldt Park and West Town, using the example of “[a] slum building with an almost equal number of Puerto Rican and black tenants, as well as several whites,” to demonstrate that multiracial organizing was a necessity.

At the same time, the article made clear that LADO would not become the “Poor People’s Defense Organization,” and that many of their meetings were

held in Spanish while interpretation to and from Spanish is provided for those who need it. Black people in LADO, who best of all understand the meaning of destruction of a culture, are quite willing to put up with the inconvenience of getting the meeting through a sometimes inept translation.

In fact, retaining a distinctly Latin American identity was so important that the LADO leadership filed a complaint with *The Movement’s* editorial staff, especially regarding the article’s title, and even accusing them of rewriting the article “as you would have wanted it written.”<sup>283</sup> The chief editor, Joe Blum, privately sent LADO a response calling the letter “harsh” and denying any malicious intent, though apologizing for their over-zealous editing.<sup>284</sup> This tense exchange demonstrates that LADO’s multiracialism was counter-hegemonic both in resisting the colorblind nationalism of more conservative Puerto Rican leaders, but also in continuing to resist the liberal integrationism the Puerto Rican community had been resisting ever since they arrive

---

<sup>282</sup> Noel Ignatin, “Integrated Organizing,” *The Movement*, Nov. 1967, Campus Underground, Independent Voices, Reveal Digital, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/community.28040901>.

<sup>283</sup> Letter by Obed López et al., printed in “We Mis-Edit LADO,” *The Movement*, Jan. 1968, Campus Underground, Independent Voices Collection, Renew Digital, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/community.28040903>.

<sup>284</sup> Letter by Joe Blum to LADO staff, Dec. 17<sup>th</sup>, 1967, 18, private collection, Ken Sawyer, MTS.

in Chicago. In other words, they were trying to demonstrate that multiracial cooperation was possible without sacrificing a uniquely Latin American organizational identity and cared very much that this remained clear in their press coverage.

LADO was not alone among a new generation of Latino leadership who rejected the old guard's conception of nationalism. By September of 1967, Luis Cuza, now 25 years old, was serving as director of a small office at Division and Leavitt in West Town jointly run by Casa Central and the CCSS, likely a product of collaboration through the SAF.<sup>285</sup> When George Romney, then Republican governor of Michigan who had historically worked with the Civil Rights Movement, toured Chicago's West Side, he had planned to visit the office. However, during the past summer, in response to a riot in Detroit, Romney had called in the National Guard, who killed several rioters. At the last minute, LADO issued a press release urging Latino leaders that "the most effective action would be to reject Romney, since he had already given his answer, in Detroit, to the demands of the poor."<sup>286</sup> Several organizations responded, leading Romney to have "head-to-head confrontations with militant Negro and Puerto Rican youth leaders."<sup>287</sup> In meeting with Cuza, who had taken up the call as well, Romney began shouting and made a scene that drew national press coverage.<sup>288</sup>

---

<sup>285</sup> Nolan mentions this office (somewhat disparagingly) in her letter to Cardinal Cody, see "Puerto Ricans and the Church in Chicago," 12.

<sup>286</sup> Ignatin, "Integrated Organization."

<sup>287</sup> Thomas J. Foley, "Romney Gains Noted in Tour of Urban Slums: Political Fortunes Seen as Enhanced by Trip Though GOP Leaders Cling to Doubts," *Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 1<sup>st</sup>, 1967.

<sup>288</sup> See Arthur Siddon, "Cold Greeting Burns Romney: Blasts Agency's Head for Unwelcome Sign," *Chicago Tribune*, Sep. 21<sup>st</sup>, 1967; Thomas J. Foley, "Romney Trades Heated Words With Chicagoan: Governor Declares He Once Was Poor in Exchange With Puerto Rican Slum Leader," *Los Angeles Times*, Sep. 21<sup>st</sup>, 1967; Robert B. Semple, Jr., "Puerto Ricans in Chicago Block Romney Meeting," *New York Times*, Sep. 21<sup>st</sup>, 1967; "Puerto Rican Arouses Romney," *The Washington Post*, Sep. 21<sup>st</sup>, 1967; Warren Weaver, Jr., "Urban Rebellion Feared by Romney: Ending His Tour, He Warns Seeds of Revolution Have Been Sown in Ghettos," *New York Times*, Oct. 1<sup>st</sup>, 1967.

Carlos Ruiz of the PRC issued a statement to the press following the incident asserting that Casa Central “is not known as a Puerto Rican organization and does not represent us. [...] It is just a welfare agency located in our community.”<sup>289</sup> Juan Díaz issued a similar statement and offered an invitation for Romney to visit SACC instead.<sup>290</sup> Ruiz’ statement, implying that Casa Central happened to be in West Town and was run by outsiders, makes it very clear that “our community” meant “only Puerto Ricans” (and Ruiz must have known Cuza, too, through the SAF). The LADO staff responded to these remarks by calling Ruiz and Díaz “Puerto Rican uncle toms.”<sup>291</sup> For Cuza, this was an act of multiracial, class-based solidarity (even though he was middle class). The sign he posted read, “We do not welcome politicians that call out National Guard on poor people,” and attacked Romney for causing the “deaths of many black and white poor.”<sup>292</sup> This incident also may also have marked that Cuza had gone further than Casa Central was willing to go with the *New York Times* reporting that they had “disowned” him.<sup>293</sup>

While LADO’s activities from 1967 to 1968 did not constitute broad based grassroots activism, they brought the WSO’s organizational model to the West Town community, something that was quite alarming to conservative organizers like Díaz and Ruiz, who, at the time, operated larger organizations. As the Young Lords emerged as a political organization and represented the Latino part of the Rainbow Coalition, they would build on LADO’s network of relationships and borrow extensively from LADO’s organizational strategy. As such, LADO’s

---

<sup>289</sup> “Group ‘Not Puerto Rican,’” *Chicago Tribune*, Sep. 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1967.

<sup>290</sup> Foley, “Romney Trades Heated Words With Chicagoan.”

<sup>291</sup> Ignatin, “Integrated Organizing.”

<sup>292</sup> Foley, “Romney Trades Heated Words With Chicagoan”; Semple, “Puerto Ricans in Chicago Block Romney Meeting.”

<sup>293</sup> Weaver, “Urban Rebellion Feared by Romney.” This does seem, however, like something the mainstream press would make up.

resistance to the conservative elite of the Puerto Rican community was extremely important in the wide-spread adoption of the restorative paradigm of community building.

### Building a Coalition

After the SCLC left Chicago, many of the city's gangs began to reimagine their role in the city.

However, the term “politicized” should not be understood to mean that a gang went from apolitical to political, asocial to social, disorganized to organized.

Gangs of the 1950s and '60s, while their tactics were often violent and illegal, were clearly organizations,

serving a social function—protecting community members from other gangs especially when police protection was non-existent—and sometimes being deeply entrenched in city politics.<sup>294</sup>

Gangs should be thought of as organizational structures capable of doing both good and harm.

Well after their politicization, members of the Young Lords have made a clear distinction between their gang “phase” and their political “phase.”<sup>295</sup> But early on in 1964, they were already organizing dances at the Isham YMCA on Division and Ashland in West Town (fig. 12). They were already a multiracial organization, with African Americans and poor Whites in their core group and Mexican and Cuban branches.<sup>296</sup> When Cha-Cha attended St. Teresa's in the early 60s,



**Fig. 12:** The Young Lords (Cha-Cha to the far right) at their first dance in Feb. 1964.

<sup>294</sup> Gangs played an essential role in the machine. Richard J. Daley had been a member of the Hamburg Athletics Association, a White gang in Bridgeport, see John M. Hagedorn, *A World of Gangs: Armed Young Men and Gangsta Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 65-74.

<sup>295</sup> Mendez, interview.

<sup>296</sup> Cha Cha Jiménez and Raphael Rivera, “Young Lord's Organization History from Gang to Club to Organization,” *Lincoln Park Press*, ca. Nov. 1968, 131.001, LPCA Collection, DUL.

he had already wanted to “save the Latino community.”<sup>297</sup> Hanging out near the Armitage Avenue Church, the White pastor, Bruce Johnson, would teach the Young Lords about Puerto Rican history, while at St. Teresa’s, don Jesús would preach to them about Puerto Rican independence.<sup>298</sup> When Luis Cuza said in 1965 that “[Lincoln Park] may be able to learn something from what these kids have done,” he was likely referencing the fact that the Young Lords had already begun to transform their organization into something he saw as positive for the Lincoln Park community.<sup>299</sup>

On April 4<sup>th</sup>, 1968, Martin Luther King was assassinated, leading to widespread riots across the nation and across Chicago. In Lincoln Park, according to Daisy Jiménez, the riot was “the Blacks against the Whites. Not with the Hispanics. Hispanics can go down the street with no problem.”<sup>300</sup> In the May issue of the *Lincoln Park Press*, the CCLP published interviews with Puerto Ricans, who denounced rioting, but said, “The problems of Black and Puerto Ricans are the same. We have no representation. [...] We must organize and be non-violent like Martin Luther King.” Another interviewee said, “Rioting is stupid. Negroes are destroying their own homes. But we understand it. Puerto Ricans and Negroes are brothers. We have the same problems.”<sup>301</sup> By this time in Lincoln Park, it appears that a degree of solidarity had emerged between African Americans and Puerto Ricans. African Americans differentiated between Puerto Ricans and Whites, indicating they did not see Puerto Ricans as Whites. Likewise, Puerto

---

<sup>297</sup> Rebollar, interview.

<sup>298</sup> José Jiménez, “Jose Jimenez Video Interview and Biography, Interview 2,” interviewer unknown, Jul. 14<sup>th</sup>, 2012, video recording, Young Lords in Lincoln Park Interviews, GVSU; Gonzales, “From Ruffians to Revolutionaries,” 48.

<sup>299</sup> Report by Cuza, ca. Nov. 1965.

<sup>300</sup> Daisy Jiménez, interview 1.

<sup>301</sup> “Neighbors’ views on city’s violence,” *Lincoln Park Press*, May 1968, 131.001. LPCA Collection, DUL.

Ricans, while not endorsing the riots outright, understood the riots because they had experienced the same thing two years prior.

This was also the moment of Cha-Cha's transformation in prison. African American prisoners defended him from the abuse of a prison guard, despite that that prison guard was African American. In this instance, the solidarity among prisoners superseded racial solidarity, but also caused Cha-Cha to reflect on his own racial identity. Cha-Cha later reflected that the incident "really had a profound impact." Given the context of racial change more broadly in the Puerto Rican community, this moment can be read as the crystallization for Cha-Cha of several years of racial formation that formed Puerto Ricans regardless of features and skin-color as non-White. Cha-Cha himself was realizing what the rest of the community was also realizing: Puerto Ricans should be standing alongside African Americans against White supremacist institutions. Both communities had gone through the same things, and thus, on some level, understood each other. The incident with the prison guard allowed Cha-Cha to experience a new feeling of solidarity across what had previously been a division.

But it is also important that the racial and religious elements of Cha-Cha's prison transformation were intertwined. With a new sense of multiracial solidarity, Cha-Cha would re-articulate his obligation to his community in the way that he knew how—through confession. On the surface, this could be seen as ironic, since, to articulate a solidarity formed in opposition to White institutions, Cha-Cha was visited by a presumably White priest representing the Catholic church, possibly explaining why Cha-Cha later would feel uncomfortable relaying his confession. But, as previously argued, the priest himself had little to do with the meaning of Cha-Cha's confession, serving more as a tool than a figure of authority. What is especially meaningful about this moment was Cha-Cha's willingness to lower his shield of masculinity to

be vulnerable in front of the other prisoners. While he did this because of the obligation he felt to his mother and his community, he also felt that he could trust the other prisoners enough to be vulnerable. They had just defended him in a moment of powerlessness, now he could be voluntarily vulnerable in front of them. Here, vulnerability in an all-male environment, like with don Jesús at the first cursillo, was the seed of restorative solidarity.

Once Cha-Cha was released from prison later in the spring of 1968, he committed to reforming the Young Lords (which became the Young Lords Organization, or YLO) as a political organization in the model of the Black Panther Party and made use of many existing connections that had been created over the past couple of years (see fig. 13). After establishing initial connections, the YLO borrowed strategies from the Caballeros and the Hermanos Cheos to establish a feeling of solidarity not only with other Puerto Ricans, but now with other Latinos, African Americans, and White people as well.

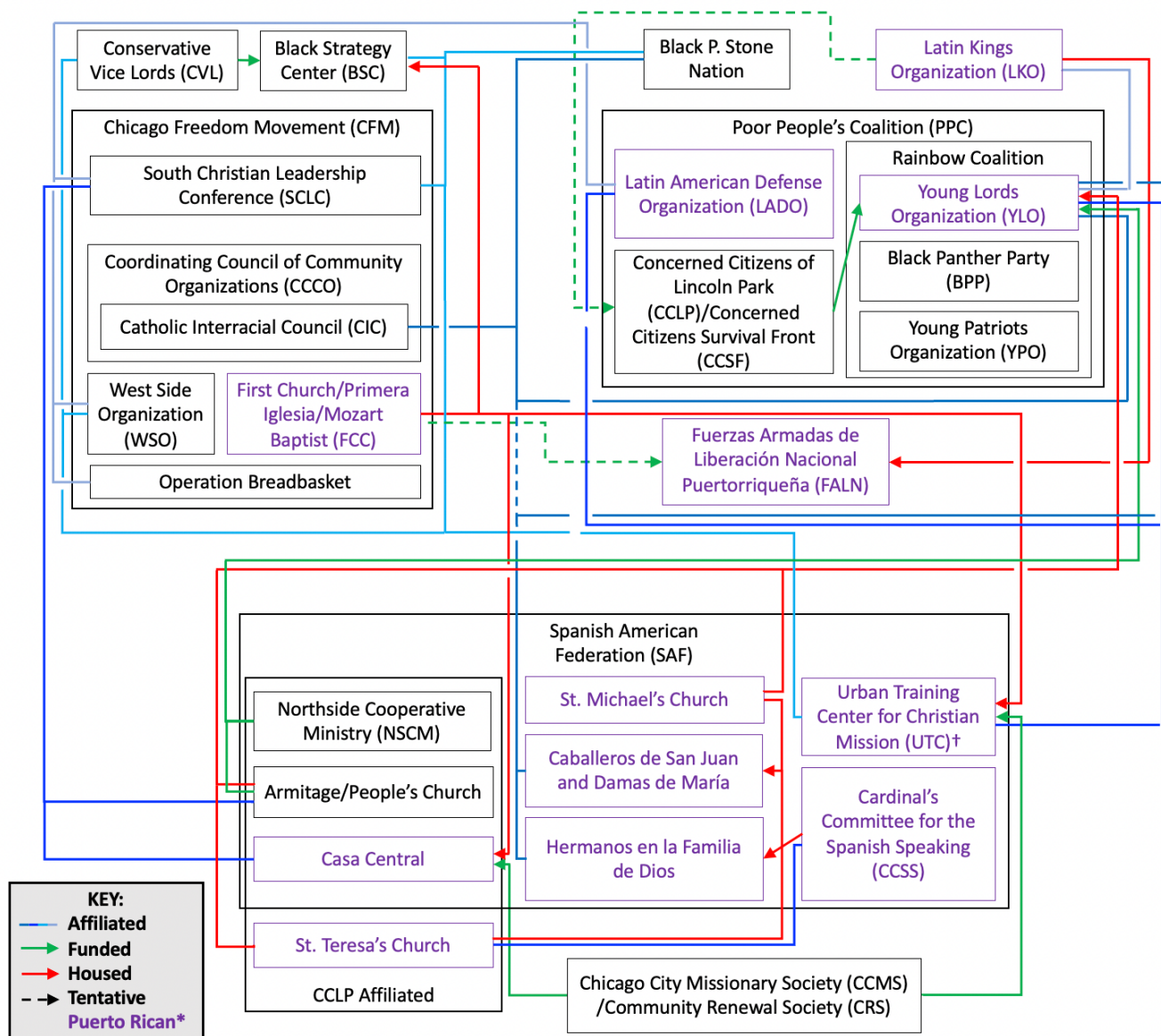
An early example of the Young Lords network building was a GED program created for “hardcore youth” at Argonne National Laboratory in the west suburbs, where they met members of the Blackstone Rangers. In a 2012 interview, Carlos Flores described how Danny Rodríguez, one of don Jesús’ sons who would later become a member of the YLO, was responsible for getting himself and Cha-Cha into the Argonne program.<sup>302</sup> The program was run by Mike Lawson, the African American leader of the parish branch of the Catholic Interracial Council (CIC) at Immaculate Conception in Cabrini Green, only a few blocks away from Holy Name Cathedral and St. Michael’s.<sup>303</sup> In the previous few years, Lawson and the CIC had been involved with the Freedom Movement, marching in Selma and playing a role in inviting the SCLC to

---

<sup>302</sup> Flores, interview, GVSU.

<sup>303</sup> Flores, interview, DUL; Mike Lawson, “Mike Lawson Video Interview and Biography,” interview by José Jiménez, Mar. 9<sup>th</sup>, 2012, video recording, Young Lords in Lincoln Park Interviews, GVSU.





**Fig. 13:** Institutional connections between the SAF (mostly pan-Latino), the CFM (mostly African American), and the PPC (multiracial). It should be noted that the SAF was not nearly as powerful as the PPC or CFM because its main function was to give Latinos a voice at Lincoln Park Conservation Association meetings on urban renewal planning, but it nonetheless represented a coherent network of institutional affiliations. Only organizations discussed in this paper are included, and most likely not all affiliations are listed. (See app. for sources.)

\*Puerto Rican organizations are those that served, organized, and/or were led by Puerto Ricans.

†The UTC did train Puerto Rican ministry, but how many and whether they served the Chicago area after their training is unresolved.

Chicago in 1965.<sup>304</sup> It seems plausible then, especially with his proximity to Lincoln Park, that Lawson would have become connected to the SAF, thus explaining how Danny Rodríguez, through his father, could have connected his peers to the GED program which otherwise only served African American gang members.

The Argonne program was more like the “civilizing mission” strategies employed by more conservative groups to deal with juvenile delinquency. Argonne, like many other powerful institutions at the time, felt compelled to at least appear to be making a difference, and employing “hardcore youths” on their janitorial staff was a flashy way of accomplishing that. However, Lawson pushed Argonne to do better, urging scientists to train youths in the sciences and other skills.<sup>305</sup> Carlos Flores would come away from the program skilled in photography, something he used to extensively document the Puerto Rican community from the late 1960s and on.<sup>306</sup> Lawson also took the members of the Argonne program on a “field trip” to the Democratic National Convention in August, an event Cha-Cha recalled vividly as the first time he witnessed college-educated, middle-class White people being beaten by the police.<sup>307</sup>

While the Argonne program wasn’t particularly radical, it did facilitate a connection between the YLO and the Blackstone Rangers. In November, the YLO and the Rangers would jointly host a “Month of Soul Dances” at the St. Michael’s gym, which would feature Puerto Rican and African American bands.<sup>308</sup> According to Cha-Cha, the YLO’s dances were inspired by those that the Caballeros had hosted earlier in the decade.<sup>309</sup> Alfredo Matias, an Afro-Puerto Rican musician, played at one of the dances with a band called the Afro-Souls, a mostly African

---

<sup>304</sup> Lawson, interview.

<sup>305</sup> Lawson, interview.

<sup>306</sup> Flores, interview, GVSU.

<sup>307</sup> Jiménez, interview 1.

<sup>308</sup> Jiménez and Rivera, “YLO History.”

<sup>309</sup> Jiménez, interview 1.

American band. Matias explained that, when he arrived in Chicago, “I came to live in, you know, a Black neighborhood, and I didn’t know any Latinos until I met, you know [...] Coco [another Afro-Puerto Rican musician], and he introduce me to [Cha-Cha]. Most of the people I knew, they were Black. I didn’t have no White friends at all.”<sup>310</sup> Matias would go on to be an active member of the YLO as the Minister of Finance.<sup>311</sup> The Month of Soul Dances demonstrates how the YLO was beginning to use an organizational strategy borrowed from the Caballeros to form a multiracial political coalition. As Matias’ story shows, this strategy did not just unite African Americans and Puerto Ricans, it also reached some Afro-Puerto Ricans in ways previous organizational strategies hadn’t.<sup>312</sup>

The Month of Soul Dances also grabbed the attention the CCLP, who printed a brief history of the Young Lords and a schedule for the dances in the November issue of the *Lincoln Park Press*.<sup>313</sup> In the intervening months since Dr. King’s assassination, the CCLP had set out to re-establish a group like the SAF, that would bring the voices of the community to the LPCA and influence decisions regarding to urban renewal. Joining with the Neighborhood Commons Corporation (NCC), an African American community organization in Lincoln Park, the organization was not just pan-Latino, but multiracial as well.<sup>314</sup> Its leadership included Sergio Herrero, James Reed, and A. I. Dunlap, an African American minister and leader at the NCC

---

<sup>310</sup> Alfredo Matias, “Alfredo Matias Video Interview and Biography,” interviewed by José Jiménez, Apr. 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park Interviews, GVSU.

<sup>311</sup> Gonzales, “Ruffians and Revolutionaries,” 103.

<sup>312</sup> The question of Afro-Puerto Ricans’ role in the Young Lords deserves more thoughtful attention. Several members of the YLO were Afro-Puerto Rican, such as Sal del Rivero, Carlos Flores, Alfredo Matias, and Ricci Trinidad. It is possible that Afro-Puerto Ricans felt alienated by movements oriented specifically around Puerto Rican nationalism rather than being focused on issues directly affecting the community. This would suggest racism internal to the Puerto Rican community that was particularly prevalent in more conservative organizations. However, more research must be done on this topic.

<sup>313</sup> Jiménez and Rivera, “YLO History.”

<sup>314</sup> “Unrepresented launch new organization,” *Lincoln Park Press*, Jun. 8<sup>th</sup>, 1968, 131.001, LPCA Collection, DUL; “What is ‘Equal Opportunity?’” *Lincoln Park Press*, Jun. 8<sup>th</sup>, 1968, 131.001, LPCA Collection, DUL.

who had been involved in the Civil Rights Movement.<sup>315</sup> By July, the group had consolidated as the Northside Action Group (NAG), its goal to “nag” the LPCA into a more equitable urban renewal plan.<sup>316</sup>

Around mid-1968, Cha-Cha reconnected with St. Teresa’s. Sister Anian of St. Teresa’s, who had been one of Cha-Cha’s teachers when he was in middle school, worked with the Young Lords at Casa Central headquarters on the Near West Side.<sup>317</sup> That Sister Anian was working at Casa Central was likely the result of the continued cooperation between St. Teresa’s, Casa Central, and the CCLP. By this point, the YLO had become connected with all three organizations. In October, a radical Puerto Rican priest named Victor Nazario was invited from Puerto Rico to give a conference at the UTC. Cha-Cha was able to convince a contingent of the Young Lords to attend, where they met Omar and Obed López, forming a connection between LADO and the YLO.<sup>318</sup>

Early in 1969, after building a network of connections with existing political organizations, Cha-Cha was still struggling to legitimize the YLO as a viable political institution. While local organizations supported what the YLO was attempting to do, many long-time members failed to see the YLO the way Cha-Cha did, believing he was crazy to think they could accomplish anything political. This changed in May, when Young Lord Manuel Ramos was shot and killed at a house party by an off-duty policeman named James Lamb. This event led many Young Lords to realize that they needed to fight, and the work that Cha-Cha had done over the last year to build up connections with other organizations finally paid off. The YLO attended

---

<sup>315</sup> “Unrepresented launch new organization.”

<sup>316</sup> “Bulletin: NAG gets IRCUA support,” *Lincoln Park Press*, Jul. 24<sup>th</sup>, 1968, 012.001, Peter Bauer Papers, DUL.

<sup>317</sup> List by José Jiménez for Mervin Mendez, ca. 1993, 009.006, DePaul University Center for Latino Research Records, DUL.

<sup>318</sup> Fernández, *The Young Lords*, 37.

Ramos' memorial service two days later at St. Teresa's, showing up dressed in black with purple berets. Within those two days, the YLO organized a march to the 18<sup>th</sup> District Police Station on the Near North Side. Thousands of neighborhood residents participated, including members of several gangs, including the Latin Kings and the Blackstone Rangers. They marched through Cabrini Green, the turf of the African American gang, the Cobra Stones. Pinned between police and the Stones, Cha-Cha and the YLO leadership, now including Omar López as Minister of Information, walked up to the Stones' leaders, and explained that they were there to honor a friend who had been murdered by the police and protest his death, and the two groups formed an alliance on the spot.<sup>319</sup>

With the momentum gathered by the march and a dramatic increase in their visibility, the YLO, within a week, created a coalition comprised of LADO, the CCLP, the Students for a Democratic Society, Black Active and Determined, the Black Panther Party, the Cobra Stones, and the Blackstone Rangers, to take over the new Administrative Building of McCormick Theological Seminary, an institution that had supported urban renewal.<sup>320</sup> The takeover was the first major success the YLO had, with the Presbyterian church beginning to fulfill the YLO's demands—to build low-income housing, a daycare center, health clinic, and a legal aid office (which still exists), as well as some modest funding for the YLO.<sup>321</sup>

Through 1969, the YLO in Chicago would continue fighting for the Puerto Rican community, establishing the promised daycare center, health clinic, law office, and cultural programs, most of which were run out of Armitage Avenue Church and St. Teresa's. Through the efforts of Black Panther Bob Lee, the Rainbow Coalition formed between the Young Lords,

---

<sup>319</sup> This narrative of the YLO's turning point is described in Omar López, interview, GVSU; Gonzales, "Ruffians and Revolutionaries," 14-15; and Hinojosa, *Apostles of Change*, 19-21.

<sup>320</sup> Hinojosa, *Apostles of Change*, 31.

<sup>321</sup> Hinojosa, *Apostles of Change*, 33-45.

the Black Panthers, and the Young Patriots, another politicized gang of Appalachian Whites in Uptown.<sup>322</sup> However, the YLO was unable to achieve its long-lasting political goals.<sup>323</sup> Being well-disciplined and strongly committed to their organizational strategy of serving members of their community, the YLO fell apart mainly because of police repression and the overwhelming power of the Daley administration.<sup>324</sup> However, to understand the long-lasting impact of the YLO only in terms of political achievement would be a mistake. Instead, the Young Lords dramatically reformed the community legitimizing a restorative form of community that resisted the conservative and hierarchical model that had existed before it. For the first time, the most marginalized members of the Puerto Rican community could be active members in organization. The model the Young Lords used to create this community built on La Familia de Dios and the service orient leadership model that can be traced back to the Hermanos Cheos.

### The Emergence of Revolutionary Religion

Among the primary goals of the Young Lords was to achieve self-determination—which they defined as making their community independent of White institutions. Many of the programs they created, such as the free breakfast for children program, free health clinic, and people’s law office, allowed community members to depend less on public services. While such programs had certainly existed before the YLO (for example, Casa Central offered all these services), it is likely that the YLO took greater efforts to invert the power dynamic between those offering services—the doctors, lawyers, ministers, and professional organizers—and the people

---

<sup>322</sup> Fernández, *The Young Lords*, 41-43.

<sup>323</sup> Specifically, it was unable to stop urban renewal and was eventually driven underground, see Hertz, *Battle of Lincoln Park*, 146-149; Gonzales, “Ruffians and Revolutionaries,” 20.

<sup>324</sup> Harassment by the police both made the Young Lords leadership ineffectual and was a drain on their budget. With the assassination of Fred Hampton in 1969, leaders also probably feared that this harassment would escalate to violence, see Jiménez, interviews 1 and 2; Gonzales, 107-109.

receiving the services.<sup>325</sup> However, to keep these services in operation, the YLO needed to have money and a building to operate out of. Progressive Protestant churches were among a limited number of places to turn (this had, at least, worked in the case of McCormick Seminary). With the Young Lords' close relationship with the CCLP, they were able to use the space at St. Teresa's for their free health clinic, several meetings of the Rainbow Coalition took place in Rev. James Reed's Church of the Holy Covenant, and the YLO was funded through the CCLP and the NCSM.<sup>326</sup> However, the balance between maintaining autonomy and depending on a church for money and space was precarious.

Armitage Avenue Methodist Church, located on Dayton and Armitage in Lincoln Park, was an ideal spot for the Young Lords headquarters. In previous years, a welfare office had been run out of the space and the corner out front became a hangout for the Young Lords and Latin Kings, where the Rev. Bruce Johnson would teach them Puerto Rican history.<sup>327</sup> The church housed two congregations, one White ministered by Bruce Johnson, and one Cuban ministered by Sergio Herrero.<sup>328</sup> After politicizing, the YLO began to use the space as a base of operations for their programs without causing too much of a problem. But when they painted murals of revolutionary nationalists on the walls of the church (see fig. 14), the Cuban congregation, many of whom had fled revolutionary Cuba, were unsettled (especially by the mural of Che Guevara)

---

<sup>325</sup> To demonstrate this definitively, a closer analysis of the YLO's programs is necessary, but similar research has been done on the BPP's and New York Young Lords' programs, see Alondra Nelson, *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight against Medical Discrimination* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 75-114.

<sup>326</sup> Carmen Rance, "Carmen Rance Video Interview and Biography," interviewed by José Jiménez, Mar. 30<sup>th</sup>, 2012, video recording, Young Lords in Lincoln Park Interviews, GVSU; *Extent of Subversion in the "New Left": Testimony of Hugh Patrick Feely and Harry F. Port, Jr., Before the Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws of the Committee on the Judiciary United States Senate*, 91<sup>st</sup> Congress, 1054-1059, (1970) (Hugh Patrick Feely and Harry F. Port, Jr., witnesses), 010.011, Peter Bauer Papers, DUL. On the Young Lords being funded by the NSCM, see *Extent of Subversion in the "New Left"*, 1068-1086.

<sup>327</sup> Jiménez, interview 2.

<sup>328</sup> See Omar López, interview, GVSU; *Extent of Subversion in the "New Left"*, 1052.



**Fig. 14:** Armitage Avenue/People's Church, ca. 1970. On the right side can be seen murals of revolutionaries: Ramón Emeterio Betances, Adelita, Lolita Lebrón, Pedro Albizu Campos, and Che Guevara (from left to right). The mural to the far right is the same icon that appeared on the Young Lords' pins, reading "Tengo Puerto Rico en mi Corazón," with an image of a hand holding a rifle.

and voted to disallow the YLO from using the space.<sup>329</sup> In a letter addressed to the Young Lords in June of 1969, the Cuban congregation at Armitage expressed their approval of the YLO's proposed programs but drew the line at allowing the YLO to use Armitage Church to host those programs. They even expressed a willingness to work with other groups towards the same goals, just not the YLO.<sup>330</sup> This created a problem as the YLO needed the church but were not willing to sacrifice their autonomy to the congregation. So, when the Cuban congregation closed the doors, the Young Lords took over the church.

<sup>329</sup> Flores, interview, GVSU; Jiménez, interview 1.

<sup>330</sup> Letter, "Response of the Armitage Avenue Methodist Church to the Demands of the Young Lords Organization," Jun. 13<sup>th</sup>, 1969, 13, private collection, Ken Sawyer, MTS.



The YLO's new strategy clearly took a confrontational stance with religious institutions, but it was not anti-religion. The YLO was only definitively less religious than the Caballeros in that they did not work within a religious hierarchy. While this is an important distinction, it would also be quite difficult to claim that the YLO was a strictly secular organization. They appropriated religious symbolism, operated almost exclusively out of holy spaces, and borrowed many of their strategies from the Caballeros and Hermanos, both of which fit relatively comfortably within the naturalized category of "religious organization." Therefore, it is useful to consider not just the revolutionary politics of the YLO, but also their revolutionary religion. In other words, by taking over churches and offering a new model for building community, the YLO was not just offering a political discourse, but also a religious or theological discourse as well.

The YLO was reacting against a conservative hierarchical structure that divided members into good and bad, high status and low status. For young Puerto Rican men, this meant that life on the streets was separate from home life. Carlos Flores recalled that he

counted how many times you used God's word in vain so that you could tell the priest, 'I used God's word in vain 47 times this week, Father.' [...] I remember all that stuff: if I cursed 127 times. You try to remember how many times you do this shit, you know, it's like a fucking routine, but I was always going to the same priest because [...] I know that he was not going to tell me to pray a Rosary like ten times.<sup>331</sup>

This section was a small window into how Flores navigated this line between being a gang member and being a Catholic. He didn't mind cursing 127 times, though he felt enough guilt about it to confess, while also trying to find a priest who would give him the least to do for penance. At the same time, Flores' cursing, presumably only something he did on the streets, was constructed as morally reprehensible. In this sense, Flores led a double life, and one was

---

<sup>331</sup> Flores, interview, DUL.

“bad” while the other was “good.” To negotiate this, he had to accept that what he was doing in his street life was less virtuous than what he was doing in church life. Flores internalized that the things that gang members did were bad, but he was going to do them anyway. The way revolutionary religion reframed this was to eliminate the dichotomy. You could be a gang member at church; neither was inherently good or bad.

One important feature of revolutionary religion that deconstructed the existing status hierarchy was the reclamation of religious figures, especially Jesus and the Saints. For example, when former member of the SCLC, C. T. Vivian, continued King’s efforts at reaching gang members, he brought members of the African American gang, the Conservative Vice Lords, to a UTC meeting. Historian Eric Gellman describes that the presence of gang members “‘scared-to-death’ the secretarial staff (for example, a lit cigarette was placed in the mouth of a statue of Jesus on the cross).”<sup>332</sup> While Gellman relegates this evidence to a parenthetical, the placement of a cigarette in Jesus’ mouth was, in essence, a reclamation of Jesus. Rather than viewing it as an intimidation tactic as Gellman does, we should instead see this act as giving Jesus an aesthetic more familiar to gang members. The Vice Lords were making a theological claim that Jesus smoked cigarettes, like they did. He was one of them.

The Young Lords engaged in a similar theological discourse. According to the testimony of Pat Feely, a leader of the LPCA, at the 1972 senate investigation of “subversion in the new left,” Cha-Cha “advocat[ed] the violent overthrow of our Government, advocat[ed] the killing of police officers, [...] [and] real estate and property owners, and supporting the Communist-Marxist theory [...] [and] the revolution in Cuba, stating that the only saint in his life was ‘Che’ Guevara.”<sup>333</sup> Again, we should be taking Cha-Cha’s comment about Che Guevara seriously as

---

<sup>332</sup> Gellman, “Black Freedom Struggles,” 225.

<sup>333</sup> *Extent of Subversion in the “New Left”*, 1103.

not just political, but religious discourse. Cha-Cha placed Che, who had been executed two years earlier, as a martyr in the sense of the Catholic martyrs who had been killed for their faith. The Young Lords saw themselves in Che, influencing their aesthetic. Failing to see himself among the existing saints, Cha-Cha claimed Che as part of his understanding of Catholic canon. It is notable that Cha-Cha's appropriation of Che Guevara as a saint appears as evidence of his subversion, as an addition to his political support of the Cuban revolution. Feely's claim was that Cha-Cha's subversion of religion amounted to evidence for his being a threat to the internal security of the US. Just as the UTC's secretarial staff had felt threatened by the Vice Lords' appropriation of Jesus, Feely felt threatened by Cha-Cha's appropriation of Che. These actors felt threatened not just because of the revolutionary politics of these groups, but because their revolutionary religion undermined conservative hierarchy that was ingrained in the very imagery of the church.

These acts of reclamation must also be seen as a natural development from the service-oriented theology developed by the Hermanos Cheos and the Hermanos en la Familia de Dios, especially don Jesús. As discussed previously, don Jesús' strength as a preacher was that he could relate directly to people. He understood their pain and did not try to act as though he was more virtuous than them. Later, when he began to describe Jesus as a revolutionary, he was claiming that Jesus, too, was a man of the people just as they were. Don Jesús also was a direct influence on the Young Lords, preaching to them about Puerto Rican independence. As such, when the Young Lords began to appropriate religious imagery as revolutionary imagery, it makes sense to see this as part of the development of the theology developed by don Jesús for la Familia de Dios. He was preaching a theology of equality, not of hierarchy; of redemption and forgiveness, not of blame and alienation.

After the YLO painted revolutionary figures on the wall of Armitage Avenue Church and the Cuban congregation withdrew permission to use the space (yet another theological discourse), the YLO took over the church. The church take-over raised the stakes discourse over religious imagery, entering a discourse about the use of sacred space. According to historian and religious scholar Felipe Hinojosa, “Latina/o radicals imagined the sacred space of the church as more than a building where salvation is found: they saw it as a physical space to meet the community’s social needs, which offers refuge to the oppressed and is committed to a preferential option for its neighborhood.”<sup>334</sup> He describes the take-over as “sacred resistance,” that such resistance does not transform sacred into profane but redefines the meaning of sacred, as Jesus did when cleansed the temple by removing money-changers.<sup>335</sup> The Young Lords were not contesting the existence of sacred space, but contesting how that space should be used.

However, Hinojosa’s framing that, for radicals like the Young Lords, the church was “more than” a sacred space and also a “physical space” ideal for running community programs fails to recognize that the Young Lords understood that sacred space should be used for community programs. Fr. Headley described don Jesús’ post-Vatican II outlook on the role of sacred space by saying, the “most important thing in the church is the exit sign, you know? You’re supposed to be able to go out the door and go do something. [...] We’re supposed to go out and share [God’s gift of life] with the people around us.”<sup>336</sup> Similar to the Social Gospel tradition, don Jesús had come to see the church as oriented outward toward the community rather than inward toward the congregation. La Familia de Dios was not something that existed in the church but flowed from it. By taking over Armitage Church and renaming it “People’s Church,”

---

<sup>334</sup> Hinojosa, *Apostles of Change*, 16.

<sup>335</sup> Hinojosa, *Apostles of Change*, 12-13.

<sup>336</sup> Headley, interview.



**Fig. 15:** A service at People's Church, ca. 1969. At the pulpit is a Puerto Rican nationalist, with a Young Lord at either side. One is holding the Puerto Rican Flag (left), the other is holding the flag of Lares (right). On their left in a flag stand is the flag of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party.

the Young Lords were working to recreate La Familia de Dios. The programs were not meant to borrow a sacred space for secular purposes but to allow the sacredness of the church to flow directly into the community. People's Church was where Puerto Ricans would learn what it meant to be Puerto Rican, and where anyone could come and engage in the transnational anti-colonial struggle and be a member of a family. On the anniversary of the Masacre de Ponce in March of 1970, a Puerto Rican nationalist would preach at the church, Young Lords at either side holding the Puerto Rican flag and the Flag of Lares (see fig. 15). Luis Cuza and Noel Ignatin of the LADO used the basement to hold lessons on Maoism.<sup>337</sup> While men were almost always the face of the organization and those who appeared at the pulpit, women in the Young Lords, like

<sup>337</sup> *Extent of Subversion in the "New Left"*, 1088.

Carmen Flores and Angie Rizzo, were essential in running the breakfast programs and health clinics, replicating, for better or worse, the gender roles of the Caballeros and Damas.<sup>338</sup>

In more than one instance, Cha-Cha has remarked that some of the Young Lords' strategies, like holding dances and parties and going door to door to pass out flyers, were directly modeled after the Caballeros. In his interview with Cha-Cha, Fr. Headley explained how the CCSS organized the Caballeros "with a conscious effort to put[ting Puerto Rican leaders] in charge." Cha-Cha replied, "[W]e called it self-determination [...] in the Young Lords. But [...] it's pretty much the same. We got a lot of ideas from the Caballeros de San Juan."<sup>339</sup> Two different conversations were occurring with this exchange. Headley, yet again, argued that it was White priests who were responsible for getting Puerto Rican leaders to the point of self-reliance, which he believed Cha-Cha agreed with. But from Cha-Cha's perspective, Headley was asserting that the Caballeros were in control of their own organization, despite existing within the hierarchy of the church. Cha-Cha's understanding here is important because he understood the Caballeros not as assimilationist or wholly dependent on the Catholic church, but rather as exercising self-determination. This framework influenced the Young Lords.

Beyond being influenced by the Caballeros, the Young Lords explicitly worked with the Caballeros. Cha-Cha recalled that at the march for Manuel Ramos, the Young Lords were joined by the Caballeros and Damas of Council No. 9 (St. Teresa's). Later, don Jesús and the Caballeros would bring Bishop Antonio Parrilla from Puerto Rico to give a mass for the Young Lords.<sup>340</sup> In

---

<sup>338</sup> This is another topic that needs far more careful attention. Omar López describes that unlike White groups, a Latino organization needed separate spheres for men and women to operate, roughly mirroring Díaz-Stevens' argument about the Latina matriarchal core, see Omar López, interview, GVSU. However, more research is required to determine whether López' sentiment was shared by women in the Young Lords, or if the Young Lords also replicated the machismo and marianismo of the Caballeros.

<sup>339</sup> Headley, interview.

<sup>340</sup> Jimenez, interview 1.

at least one instance, the Hermanos at St. Teresa's signed on to a list of demands created by the Young Lords, including a demand that the Lincoln Park Community Conservation Council, which was in charge of approving the LPCA's renewal plans before they were given to the Department of Urban Renewal, should be "composed entirely of poor and working class people, five Latin, five Black and five White." Such a demand was completely non-accommodationist, as it called for the elimination of middle-class White people from (what was thought to be) an essential step in the approval process.<sup>341</sup> While the Caballeros and Hermanos were no longer leaders of the Puerto Rican community, it cannot be said that the Young Lords were opposed to the Caballeros and the Hermanos. It had been the Caballeros and Hermanos, among others, who had begun the Puerto Rican fight against urban renewal, and they supported the Young Lords when the Young Lords politicized.

Of course, the YLO take-over of Armitage Church was an enormous disruption to the status quo and was not easily accepted by everyone. A few months following the take-over, the United People To Inform Good-doers Here and There (UPTIGHT) distributed a pamphlet entitled "Is This Christianity?" around the Lincoln Park community and to several Methodist churches around Chicago.<sup>342</sup> UPTIGHT depicted themselves as the "silent majority," describing that they were "not very well organized, particularly compared to the local youth organizations [...] We don't go around lobbing bricks through windows [...] We do not call policemen 'pigs', [or] beat up concerned citizens."<sup>343</sup> In order to place themselves in the moral high ground, UPTIGHT conflated the revolutionary youth group with criminals and hooligans. In their eyes,

---

<sup>341</sup> Press Release, "Poor and Working Demands to the Conservation Community Council," 1969-70, 081.013, LPCA Collection, DUL, 1. Unfortunately, the YLO was wrong on this particular point, as, in the end, the Department of Urban Renewal would later ignore the Conservation Council's decision to allocate 40% of the urban renewal land to low-income housing, see Hertz, *Battle of Lincoln Park*, 146-152.

<sup>342</sup> Pamphlet, "Is This Christianity?" ca. Oct. 19<sup>th</sup>, 1969, 078.001, LPCA Collection, DUL; Subversion Report, 1059.

<sup>343</sup> "Is This Christianity?"

the Young Lords never became anything more than prototypical gang members and society's underclass. Retaining their conservative viewpoint that constructed religion as being inherently hierarchical, they were unable and unwilling to see the Young Lords as religious.

The title of the pamphlet, "Is This Christianity?" indicated that UPTIGHT believed that the church should be directed inward towards the congregation, a theology formed in opposition to that of the Social Gospel. The pamphlet asks, "Where will my annual church contribution be going this year? [...] Are we supporting and giving sanctuary [...] to persons dedicated to doing away with this country's government?"<sup>344</sup> So, when the pamphlet asked, "Is This Christianity?" it was asking congregants whether their church leaders were being Christian in allowing something that was putatively a desecration of religion into the church. In other words, it was questioning whether it was Christian for the church to partake in secular activities, especially those which offended the congregants' religious sensibilities. The counterargument to this claim should not be that the church should allow secular activities within its space, but to challenge the idea that such activities are inherently secular. It is impossible to disentangle the religious and political motives of the Young Lords. The very fact that the supposedly secular programs of the Young Lords could offend a group on religious grounds is good evidence that such programs had a distinct religious dimension. Responding to this exact critique, Cha-Cha recounted that when

the reporters asked me, 'Are you going to allow the church to have service?' [...] we said, 'We're not here to disrupt anything from the church, and in fact we're going to be at the service ourselves.' [...] A lot of the Young Lords that are Latinos are Catholic, and [...] we respected any church at that time.<sup>345</sup>

Responding to the conservative backlash from the church hierarchy, the Young Lords did not argue that they had a right to use the space even though they were not religious. Instead, they

---

<sup>344</sup> "Is This Christianity?"

<sup>345</sup> Jimenez, interview 2.



sought to demonstrate that they were religious by partaking in the religious practices of the church.

By transforming the church into a space that welcomed members of the community, the Young Lords also deconstructed the barrier that kept gang members outside of the church. When the Young Lords held their memorial service for Manuel Ramos. Recalling the funeral at St. Teresa's, Omar López described that

the death of Manuel really brought people together. And you could see it at the wake, [...] all of the Young Lords came out, dressed in black, you know with the purple beret? And very disciplined, you know, and I think that that was the first time that people publicly saw that kind of discipline coming out of a youth group in the Latino community [...] [It] was very respectful of what was going on, but also, [...] the images were very powerful.<sup>346</sup>

By appearing at Ramos' memorial and organizing the procession to the police precinct that followed, the Young Lords were participating in the maintenance of a Puerto Rican tradition that they had learned from their parents' organization, such as the wake for Fr. Headley's father that drew Puerto Ricans from across the city. However, what was distinct about this instance was that the YLO presented themselves as gang members by wearing their gang colors (purple and black) and adopting the revolutionary aesthetic by wearing berets. They were presenting themselves as gang members at church.

Only a few months later, Rev. Bruce Johnson of People's Church and his wife Eugenia were stabbed to death in their home, probably an assassination in retaliation for the assistance Johnson provided to the Young Lords.<sup>347</sup> Bailed out of prison by the Methodist church, Cha-Cha

---

<sup>346</sup> Omar López, interview, GVSU.

<sup>347</sup> It may have been CPD, or possibly alt-right Cuban exiles associated with the congregation, or the Italian mafia. See Jiménez, interview 2; Omar López, interview, GVSU.



**Fig. 16:** Fred Hampton's funeral, Dec. 12<sup>th</sup>, 1969.

gave a tribute at their funeral. Speaking alongside James Reed, Sergio Herrero, and Pat Devine of the CCLP, Cha-Cha's tribute apparently took a radical tone, seizing this moment to talk about anti-colonialism and revolution.<sup>348</sup> Nonetheless, the eulogy was well-received, with a member of the Methodist Church hierarchy thanking Cha-Cha for speaking, referring specifically to how Cha-Cha wrapped up by saying "Bruce Johnson was a man, a real man."<sup>349</sup> In some sense, Cha-Cha had fulfilled his childhood goal of becoming a priest (or at least a priest-like leader). But he was a priest not beholden to religious institutions, he was a priest of the revolutionary religion he

<sup>348</sup> Program, "A Celebration of the Life and Death of Bruce and Eugenia Johnson," ca. Oct. 1969, 078.001, LPCA Collection, DUL, 10; *Extent of Subversion on the "New Left"*, 1103.

<sup>349</sup> Letter by Clarence E. Ploch, ca. Oct. 1969, 001.001, Collection on the Young Lords, DUL.

and many others had turned to as a reaction against religious institutions. He was a priest who could also be a gang member.

Two months later, Fred Hampton of the Black Panther Party was assassinated, and Cha-Cha was a pallbearer at his funeral (fig. 16).<sup>350</sup> In an interview with historian Judson Jeffries, Cha-Cha described how

Fred's death still did not hit me until I went to the wake. [...] I am standing on the left wall of the church or whatever and I am listening to Rev. Jesse Jackson. I am not halfway paying attention, but then at the end of Jackson's remarks I just burst into tears. Now here I am leader of the Young Lords and I am balling in public and I am thinking I should not be crying like this in public...but that just showed me the kind of impact that Fred had on me. Now he was gone.<sup>351</sup>

The memorials in the year of 1969 tie together many of ways the YLO had begun to create community. First, these were events that would have been familiar to Puerto Ricans. Just like the Fiesta de San Juan, the Puerto Rican parade, and the wakes for respected members of the Puerto Rican community, these funerals brought people together to be a community.

But these events were understood by more than just those in the Puerto Rican community. Especially in the case of Manuel Ramos and Fred Hampton, just as had been the case for Arcelis Cruz three years prior, the Chicago police had demonstrated their utter disregard for human life they saw as irredeemable. Mayor Daley's War on Gangs and "shoot to kill" order viewed young men of color like Hampton and Ramos as gang members worth exterminating. But their memorials proved otherwise. If the city



**Fig. 17:** Cha-Cha Jiménez and Fred Hampton at a rally in Wicker Park in Mar. 1969.

<sup>350</sup> *Extent of Subversion on the "New Left"*, 1103.

<sup>351</sup> José Jiménez, "An Interview with Jose 'Cha Cha' Jimenez: Leader of the Young Lords Organization," interviewed by Judson L. Jeffries, Sep. 21<sup>st</sup>, 2018, transcript, *Journal of African American Studies* 22 (2018): 271.

would not acknowledge them as human beings, their communities would. The memorial, a collective act of vulnerability, demonstrated by Cha-Cha's shame in weeping for his lost friend, was an act that brought together community. As the Young Lords had organized the Ramos' funeral, the Black Panthers organized Hampton's, because they were his family.

**Conclusion:**

Following the assassination of Fred Hampton, the revolutionary period of the late 1960s came to an end just as quickly as it had emerged. By 1971, the Young Lords had been forced underground, and when they returned in 1974, Cha-Cha began working within electoral politics. Meanwhile, what began as the War on Gangs under the Daley administration was replaced nationally with the War on Drugs in 1971, triggering the era of mass incarceration that institutionalized the hyper-criminalization and dehumanization of young men of color, particularly Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and African Americans in Chicago. Many gangs, such as the Latin Kings, the Blackstone Rangers, and the Vice Lords, backed out of political action entirely, turning to drug trafficking and gang warfare, in part because the Daley administration had eliminated all above-board means of survival. Revolutionary political action continued through the 1970s, but it was forced underground, the most prominent group being the Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional Puertorriqueña (or FALN, Armed Forces for Puerto Rican National Liberation).

But despite the short-lived nature of community built by the Young Lords, they did not fail. The story told above demonstrates that communities do not need an outside force to resist forms of hierarchy. Puerto Rican organizers went through cycles of defending organizational structures only to subsequently to rock and transform them, so as best to survive in an oppressive

city. Arriving in Chicago in the 1950s, the first Puerto Rican leaders were those, like Jesús and Eugenia Rodríguez, who had been leaders in Puerto Rico. Their leadership was based on their status as religious leaders, Hermanos Cheos who had evangelized throughout the mountains of Puerto Rico and whom people trusted for guidance. It was also the role of the rezadora, who anchored the community spiritually, reminding people of what it meant to be Puerto Rican despite living in Chicago. Building from this core, the Caballeros became mediators between the Catholic Church and the Puerto Rican community, providing an institutional anchor that allowed Puerto Rican traditions to be maintained without threatening the powers that were in Chicago. But along with a sense of Puerto Rican identity, the Caballeros also brought a hierarchical structure that alienated people in Puerto Rico and continued to alienate them in Chicago. Often it was the case that lower class and Black Puerto Ricans could not benefit from the model of mediation the Caballeros had established. In addition, Chicago's institutions were not static, and the Catholic Church which had been willing to work with Puerto Ricans in the 1950s was turning a cold shoulder by the mid-60s.

By 1966, it was clear things would have to change. The Division Street Riots awakened many Puerto Ricans to the persistence of problems that had been worsening over the last decade and the inability of existing leadership to do anything about them. Some leaders, new and old saw that Puerto Ricans shared many problems with other Latinos, African Americans, and poor Whites. Rather than working within the city's oppressive systems, they decided that it would be more beneficial to adapt their organizational structures within a power structure that was based in the grass roots. Organizations like the LADO and the Young Lords were able to maintain Puerto Rican and Latin American organizational structures, not by accommodating White power structures, but creating power structures from the grassroots that allowed for their existence

without the need for accommodation. They were able to shake existing hierarchies to their core by demonstrating it was possible for social outcasts to become powerful without needing to change who they were.

It is apparent Puerto Ricans in Chicago were a community already organized, enjoying the capacity for self-organization. Puerto Ricans who arrived in Chicago were not blank slates to be molded into a politically relevant organization. Not only was it harmful to think otherwise, but foolish, because a broad-based coalition that relied on Puerto Ricans abandoning their sense of self and integrating into American society would never have worked. Even those considered as social outcasts were embedded with a complex structure that gave rise to a sense of belonging and solidarity. To label these groups as disorganized or asocial is to return them to blank slates that need molding to form them into proper human beings. In other words, it is to dehumanize them.

At the kernel of the community is a feeling of solidarity that is created through collective ritual acts. On the micro-level, this took the form of giving confession, attending church service, mass, or YLO meetings, going to a social or a baseball game, or getting into a street brawl. On the macro-level, it is the Fiesta de San Juan or the Puerto Rican Parade, the Rally at Soldier Field or the march to the 18<sup>th</sup> precinct police headquarters. It is a demonstration, a picket, a riot, and a takeover, and it is the memorial for Manuel Ramos or Fred Hampton. These acts, who participates in them, and how they resonate with those participating, are how the community is formed, and the community organization is preeminently that which allows these collective acts to happen.

However, the history told here is also not a complete story. Mayor Daley cracked down on grassroots organizing and drove the coalitions underground, and the power structure that had

been developed from the grassroots disappeared and those that stayed above ground had to play within the city's power structures once again. But the histories and practices which articulate and consolidate senses of community, do not need to achieve visibility to prove effective, nor do they need to culminate in manifest power. Looking ahead to further projects, it is important to consider how communities and organization can contribute to the wider formation of identity all the while remaining hidden from the public, and elusive in the historical record.

## Appendix:

### Fig. 1: Puerto Rican Communities in Lincoln Park

Map created using Google Earth.

Neighborhood boundaries are taken from Google Maps, which use the Census' community areas, see Amanda Seligman, "Community Areas," *Encyclopedia of Chicago*, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/319.html>. The location of Cabrini Green is taken from Google Maps. The boundaries of La Madison and La Clark are extrapolated from Brooke Robinson, "The Birth of the Young Lords in Chicago" digital story map, DePaul University, available at <https://arcg.is/r4Tjb>. The bounds of La Madison I have chosen are Washington Blvd. to Harrison St., and Halsted Ave. to Kedzie Ave. The bounds of La Clark are Division St. to Ohio St. and Wells St. to Dearborn St. For the location of the Loop enclave, see Martínez, *Chicago*, 98-100. For the location of the Woodlawn enclave, see Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 78-83. For the location of the Englewood enclave, see Calixto, interview. For a history of the settlement of these neighborhoods, see Lilia Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City: Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in Postwar Chicago*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012). For La Clark, see chapter 4. For La Madison, see chapter 2, on settlement, and 3, on un-settlement. The names "La Clark" and "La Madison" are used frequently by narrators in the *Young Lords in Lincoln Park Interviews*, YLLP.

### Fig. 2: Fr. Leo Mahon

Martínez, *Chicago*, 132.

### Fig. 3: Councils of the Caballeros de San Juan

Map created using Google Earth.

List of councils in 1964, see Carroll and Headley, "Report of the Cardinal's Committee for the Spanish Speaking."

Locations of parishes, councils were likely within a few blocks:

Council No. 1 – St. Clara: 6427 S. Woodlawn, TK.

Council No. 2 – Holy Name Cathedral: Chicago and State, TK.

Council No. 3 – St. Michael's: 1633 N. Cleveland, AAC.

Council No. 4 – Our Lady of Sorrows: 3121 W. Jackson, TK.

Council No. 5 – St. Jarlath: 1725 W. Jackson, TK.

Council No. 6 – Santa Maria Addolorata: 528 N. Ada, AAC.

Council No. 7 – St. Joseph: 501 S. Utica, Waukegan, AAC.

Council No. 8 – St. Mark's: 1048 N. Campbell, AAC.

Council No. 9 – St. Teresa's: 1037 W. Armitage, AAC.

Council No. 10 – St. Mel-Holy Ghost: 22 N. Kildare, MMC.

Council No. 11 – Our Lady of Mt. Carmel: 690 W. Belmont, AAC.

TK – Kelliher, "Hispanic Catholics," 166.

AAC – Directory, "Parishes," Mar. 11<sup>th</sup>, 1971, EXEC/C0670/43, 42958.04, John Cardinal Cody Papers, AAC.

MMC – Council No. 10 of the Caballeros, *Boletín Informativo*, May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1964, Manuel Martínez Collection.

### Fig. 4: Fr. Donald Headley



Martínez, *Chicago*, 121.

**Fig. 6: Rodríguez Family**

Photos:

6a – Eugenia Rodríguez, “Eugenia Rodríguez Video Interview and Biography, Interview 3,” interviewed by José Jiménez, Jun. 14<sup>th</sup>, 2012, video recording, Young Lords in Lincoln Park Interviews, GVSU, available at <https://digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/24612>.

6b – “Profesión de los Hermanos–1968,” 1968, Manuel Martínez Collection.

*Eugenia Rodríguez was the mother of Jose Jiménez.* See Fernández, *The Young Lords*, 17; Eugenia Rodríguez, interview transcript, 1. Rodríguez was her father’s surname, see Eugenia Rodríguez, interview transcript, 1.

*Jesús Rodríguez was the father of Carmelo, Danny, and José Rodríguez.* See List by José Jiménez for Mervin Mendez; (circumstantial) Ricci Trinidad, “Ricci Trinidad Interview and Biography,” interviewed by José Jiménez, Apr. 17<sup>th</sup>, 2012, video recording, Young Lords in Lincoln Park Interviews, GVSU; (Carmelo) Council No. 10 of the Caballeros, “Nervio y Guia”; “Miguel A. ‘Mickey’ Rodriguez: Miguel’s Obituary,” Legacy.com, accessed Mar. 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2022, <https://www.legacy.com/funeral-homes/obituaries/name/miguel-rodriguez-obituary?pid=191281009&v=batesville&view=guestbook>.

*José Jiménez was cousins with Carmelo, Danny, and José Rodríguez.* See Celso Rivera, “Celso Rivera Video Interview and Biography,” interviewed by José Jiménez, Mar. 28<sup>th</sup>, 2011, video recording, Young Lords in Lincoln Park Interviews, GVSU.

*Eugenia Rodríguez was the sister of Jesús Rodríguez.* Follows from the above, given Spanish naming conventions. Also, several pieces of circumstantial evidence: Both were born around the same time and grew up in Barrio San Salvador de Caguas, see Jiménez Defense Committee, “Que Viva el Pueblo,” 3; Eugenia Rodríguez, interview transcript, 1; Council No. 10 of the Caballeros, “Nervio y Guia.” They preached together at St. Teresa’s, see Eugenia Rodríguez, interview. Also, this would explain how doña Genia was able to get her children into Catholic schools without having to pay, see Jiménez Defense Committee, “Que Viva el Pueblo,” 6.

**Fig 7: Cha-Cha Jiménez**

Dave Nystrom, taken Oct. 10<sup>th</sup>, 1969, photograph, in “Young Lords and the voice of the Puerto Rican community,” *Chicago Tribune*, Jul. 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2018, available at <https://www.chicagotribune.com/visuals/vintage/ct-young-lords-puerto-rican-anniversary-photos-20180703-photogallery.html>.

**Fig 8: Nolan’s School-to-Prison Pipeline**

Report by Janet Nolan, “Puerto Ricans and the Church in Chicago,” 1967, 002.010, The Janet Nolan Ethnographic Research on Puerto Ricans in Chicago Collection, DUL, 16.

**Fig. 9: Don Benedict and Archie Hargraves**

Lou Pentler, “Children flock to church in store,” taken 1948, photograph, 8 x 10 inches, RNS RG 1, RT 1040, Box 18, image no. P-7837, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, PA, available at <https://digital.history.pcusa.org/islandora/object/islandora%3A147043>.

**Fig. 10: Luis Cuza**

George of the Jungle, taken Jun. 1969, photograph, in Derek Potts, “One Image, Many Contexts: Charing and Connecting Primary Sources,” *DePaul University Library: The Full Text*, Nov. 7<sup>th</sup>, 2018, <https://news.library.depaul.press/full-text/2018/11/07/one-image-many-contexts-sharing-and-connecting-primary-sources/>.

**Fig. 11: LADO Welfare Union**

10a: Katz, “Welfare Blues in Chicago.”

10b: Lawrence, “Poor Fight Urban Renewal.”

**Fig. 12: Young Lords Dance**

Jiménez and Rivera, “Young Lord’s Organization.”

**Fig. 13: Institutional Map**

Created by author.

## Affiliations:

*Black P. Stone Nation, CVL, BSC, UTC, SCLC, WSO*

Koschmann, “Finding their Footing,” 168, 215, 225; Gellman, “Black Freedom Struggles,” 217, 223, 229; Washington, “SCLC Organizing Youth Gangs City Wide.”

*LADO, SCLC, WSO, Operation Breadbasket*

Obed López and Carolee López, interview; Obed López, interview; Katz, “Welfare Blues in Chicago”; Deppe, *Operation Breadbasket*, 32.

*Black P. Stone Nation, CIC, YLO*

Lawson, interview; Flores, interview, GVSU; Flores, interview, DUL; Arthur Siddon, “Argonne Tells Woes of Minority Hiring,” *Chicago Tribune*, Mar. 1<sup>st</sup>, 1970; “Argonne Says Rangers Won’t ‘Take Over’ Research Center,” *Chicago Defender*, Mar. 30<sup>th</sup>, 1968.

*Caballeros, YLO, Hermanos*

José Jiménez, interview 1; Headley, interview; “Poor and Working Demands to the CCC.”

*CIC, Hermanos, Caballeros*

Councils 2 and 3 of the Caballeros were close to Immaculate Conception, where Mike Lawson worked. They may have come in contact via the CFM.

*YLO, LADO, UTC*

Omar López, interview, GVSU; Omar López, interview, DUL; List of names of people with photographs of the Young Lords by José Jiménez, DUL.

*SCLC, Casa Central, Armitage/People’s Church*

Brown, *Ideology and Community Action*, 61; Washington, “100,000 Expected At Freedom Rally”; “30,000 Hear Dr. King At Soldier Field Rally”; “Rally Drawing Many City Segments.”

*LKO, YLO*

*Extent of Subversion in the “New Left”*, 1067; José Jiménez, “Cha Cha Jimenez: The Origins of Puerto Rican Gangs in Chicago,” interviewed by Ralph Cintron and Erika Rodriguez, Jun. 2002, transcript, CGHP, <http://gangresearch.net/ChicagoGangs/younglords/chachaking.html>.

*St. Teresa’s Church, CCSS*

Rebollar, interview.

*CCLP, St. Teresa’s Church, Casa Central, Armitage/People’s Church, NSCM*

“Unrepresented launch new organization”; “NAG gets IRCUA support”; *Lincoln Park Press*, Dec. 1967.

*SAF*

Report by Cuza, ca. Nov. 1965; Report by Cuza, Jan. 17<sup>th</sup>, 1966; LPCA, “VISTA – As We See It.”

*CFM*

Koschmann, “Finding Our Footing,” 149-155, 161; Gellman, “Black Freedom Struggles,” 219-222.

*PPC*

Hinojosa, *Apostles of Change*, 27-39.

Funding:

*CCMS funded the UTC, Casa Central*

Koschmann, “Finding Our Footing,” 12-13, 206-207

*Armitage/People’s Church, NSCM funded YLO*

*Extent of Subversion in the “New Left”*, 1070-1086.

*CCLP funded the YLO*

*Extent of Subversion in the “New Left”*, 1068.

*LKO funded the CCLP (tentative)*

*Extent of Subversion in the “New Left”*, 1068.

*FCC funded the FALN (tentative)*

Koschmann, “Finding Our Footing,” 230-232.

Housing:

*St. Teresa’s, St. Michaels housed the Caballeros*

Carroll and Headley, “Report of the CCSS.”

*St. Michael’s housed the YLO*

Jimenez and Rivera, “Young Lord’s Organization.”

*St. Teresa’s housed the YLO*

Rance, interview.

*Armitage/People’s Church housed the YLO*

Hinojosa, *Apostles of Change*, 45-48.

*First Congregational Church housed BSC, Casa Central, UTC*

Koschmann, “Finding Our Footing,” 12, 196, 206.

*LKO housed FALN*

Hagedorn, *The In\$ane Chicago Way*, 47.

#### **Fig. 14: Armitage/People’s Church Murals**

Carlos Flores, taken ca. 1970, photograph, in Alejandra Molina, “‘Apostle of Change’ tells how secular Latino activists protested by seizing sacred spaces,” *National Catholic Reporter*, Jul. 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/justice/apostles-change-tells-how-secular-latino-activists-protested-seizing-sacred-spaces>.

#### **Fig. 15: Armitage/People’s Church Service**

Carlos Flores, taken ca. 1970, photograph, in Zach Mortice, “In One of Chicago’s Most Affluent Neighborhoods, Hidden Stories of Resistance Unveiled By App: A new walking tour uncovers a

‘hidden’ history of Lincoln Park,” *Next City*, Nov. 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020, <https://nextcity.org/urbanist-news/in-one-of-chicagos-most-affluent-neighborhoods-hidden-stories-of-resistance>.

**Fig. 16: Fred Hampton’s Funeral**

Photograph of Fred Hampton’s funeral, Dec. 12<sup>th</sup>, 1970, 008.002, DePaul University Center for Latino Research Records, DUL.

**Fig. 17: Fred Hampton and Cha-Cha Jiménez**

Richard Vission, taken Mar. 1969, photograph, in “The Fight for Lincoln Park: The Young Lords, the Black Panthers, Concerned Citizens, and the Struggle Against Urban Renewal,” *History is Revolting*, Dec. 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020, <http://historyisrevolting.com/history/young-lords/the-fight-for-lincoln-park/>.

## Bibliography

### *Archival Sources:*

- AAC – Archives of the Archdiocese of Chicago, Chicago, IL.  
 Albert Cardinal Meyer Collection, AAC.  
 John Cardinal Cody Papers Collection, AAC.  
 Samuel Cardinal Stritch Personal Papers, AAC.
- DUL – DePaul University Library, Chicago, IL.  
 Collection on the Young Lords, DUL.  
 DePaul University Center for Latino Research Records, DUL.  
 The Janet Nolan Ethnographic Research on Puerto Ricans in Chicago Collection, DUL.  
 Lincoln Park Conservation Association Collection, DUL.  
 Peter Bauer Papers, DUL.
- MTS – McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago, IL.  
 Private collection, Ken Sawyer, MTS.
- UNDA – University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, IN.  
 John J. Egan Papers, UNDA.
- Other Collections  
 Manuel Martínez Collection, in possession of the author.

### *Digital Archives:*

- CGHP – Chicago Gang History Project, available at  
<http://gangresearch.net/ChicagoGangs/chiroomnew.html>.
- GVSU – Grand Valley State University Digital Collections, available at  
<https://digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/>.  
 Young Lords in Lincoln Park Interviews, GVSU.
- FA – The Freedom Archives, available at <https://search.freedomarchives.org/>.  
 Fuerzas Armadas de Liberacion Nacional Collection, FA.
- RD – Reveal Digital, available at <https://www.jstor.org/site/reveal-digital/>.  
 Campus Underground, Independent Voices, RD.

### *Newspapers:*

#### *Chicago Defender*

#### *Chicago Tribune*

Mary Merryfield, “They Need What Is in Our Hearts,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Jan. 15<sup>th</sup>, 1961.

#### *Los Angeles Times*

Foley, Thomas J. “Romney Trades Heated Words With Chicagoan: Governor Declares He Once Was Poor in Exchange With Puerto Rican Slum Leader.” *Los Angeles Times*. Sep. 21<sup>st</sup>, 1967.

#### *New York Times*

Weaver, Jr., Warren. “Urban Rebellion Feared by Romney: Ending His Tour, He Warns Seeds of Revolution Have Been Sown in Ghettos.” *New York Times*. Oct. 1<sup>st</sup>, 1967.

*Washington Post*

***Memoirs & Biographical Works:***

- Alinsky, Saul. *Rules for Radicals*. New York, NY: Random House, 1971.
- Benedict, Don. *Born Again Radical*. New York, NY: The Pilgrim Press, 1982.
- Deppe, Martin L. *Operation Breadbasket: An Untold Story of Civil Rights in Chicago, 1966-1971*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2017.
- Frisbie, Margery. *An Alley in Chicago: The Life and Legacy of Monsignor John Egan*, commemorative ed. Franklin, WI: Sheed & Ward, 2002.
- Horwitt, Sanford D. *Let Them Call Me Rebel: Saul Alinsky—His Life and Legacy*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989.
- Mahon, Leo. *Fire Under My Feet: A Memoir of God's Power in Panama*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007.
- Nieves, Yolanda. "Borinquén Record Shop & Botanica." *Diálogo*. Vol. 15, No. 1 (Spring 2012): 23-25.
- Von Hoffman, Nicholas. *Radical: A Portrait of Saul Alinsky*. New York, NY: PublicAffairs, 2011.

***Ethnographic Studies:***

- Cayton, Horace R. and St. Clair Drake, *Black Metropolis*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1946.
- de Curuchet, Marta I.K. "Localization of the Mexican and Cuban Population of Chicago." Ph.Diss., University of Chicago, 1967.
- Hunt, Lester C., and Nicholas von Hoffman. "The Meanings of 'Democracy': Puerto Rican Organizations in Chicago." In *Our Language and Our World*, ed. S.I. Hayakawa. New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1959, 52-65.
- Mahon, Leo T. "Machismo and Christianity." *Chicago Studies*. Mundelein, IL: Archdiocese of Chicago, 1963.

***Interviews:***

- Haight, Roger (former Catholic priest). In discussion with author. Feb. 4<sup>th</sup>, 2022.
- Jiménez, José. "An Interview with Jose 'Cha Cha' Jimenez: Leaders of the Young Lords Organization." Interviewed by Judson L. Jeffries, Sep. 21<sup>st</sup>, 2018, transcript. *Journal of African American Studies* 22 (2018): 267-273.
- Jiménez, José. "The Young Lords, Puerto Rican Liberation, and the Black Freedom Struggle: Interview with José 'Cha Cha' Jiménez." Interviewed by Ángel G. Flores-Rodríguez. ca. Jan. 2012, transcript, *OAH Magazine of History* 26, No. 1 (Jan. 2012): 61-64.
- Méndez, Mervin. "Recollections: 1966 Division Street Riot." *Diálogo* 2, No. 1 (1997): 32.
- Nieves, Yolanda (Puerto Rican resident of Humboldt Park). Interviewed by D. Owen Carter. Dec. 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021. Video recording and transcript. In possession of author.

**Other Primary Sources:**

Jiménez, José. “Jose (Cha-Cha) Jimenez.” *National Young Lords*. Accessed Apr. 26<sup>th</sup>, 2021. [https://web.archive.org/web/20210510174402/http://nationalyounglords.com/?page\\_id=15](https://web.archive.org/web/20210510174402/http://nationalyounglords.com/?page_id=15).

Martínez, Manuel. *Chicago: Historia de Nuestra Comunidad Puertorriqueña* (self-published, 1989).

Mahon, Leo T., and Mary Xavier. *La Familia de Dios: Un Curso para Catequistas*. Maryknoll, NY: Maryknoll Publications, 1964.

Ortega, Dorian. “Memories of Chicago’s Radical Puerto Rican Church.” *La Respuesta*. Aug. 18<sup>th</sup>, 2014. Available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20190411204021/http://larespuestamedia.com/memories-of-chicagos-radical-puerto-rican-church/>.

Tripp, Jason. “The Most Segregated Hour in America – Martin Luther King Jr.” Jason Tripp. Apr. 4<sup>th</sup>, 2014. YouTube video. 0:52. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1q881g1L\\_d8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1q881g1L_d8).

**Secondary Sources:**

*A History of the Offices, Agencies, and Institutions of the Archdiocese of Chicago*. Ed. Harry C. Koenig. Chicago, IL: Catholic Bishop of Chicago, 1981.

Best, Wallace D. *Passionately Human, No Less Divine: Religion and Culture in Black Chicago, 1915-1952*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.

Briggs, Laura. *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.

Brown, Bernard O. *Ideology and Community Action: The West Side Organization of Chicago, 1964-67*. Chicago, IL: Center for the Scientific Study of Religion, 1978.

Butler, Jon. “Jack-in-the-Box Faith: The Religion Problem in Modern American History.” *The Journal of American History* 90, No. 4 (Mar. 2004): 1357-1378.

Cleary, Edward L. “In the Absence of Missionaries: Lay Preachers Who Preserved Catholicism.” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*. Vol. 34, No. 2 (Apr. 2010), 67-70.

Current, Cheri B. *Questioning the Cuban Exile Model: Race, Gender, and Resettlement, 1959-1979*. El Paso, TX: LFB Scholarly Publishing LLC, 2010.

Duany, Jorge. *Puerto Rican Nation on the Move: Identities on the Island and in the United States*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.

Fernández, Johanna. *The Young Lords: A Radical History*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2020.

Fernández, Lilia. *Brown in the Windy City*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012.

Flores, Carlos. “Desde el Mero Medio: Race Discrimination Within the Latino Community.” *Diálogo* 5, No. 1, (Mar. 2001): 30-31.

Gellman, Erik S. “Black Freedom Struggles and Ecumenical Activism in 1960s Chicago.” From *The Pew and the Picket Line: Christianity and the American White Working Class*. Ed.

- Christopher D. Cantwell, Heath W. Carter, and Janine G. Drake. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2016, 211-237.
- Goddard, Terrell D. "The Black Social Gospel in Chicago, 1896-1906: The Ministries of Reverdy Ransom and Richard R. Wright, Jr." *The Journal of Negro History* 84, No. 3 (Summer, 1999): 227-246.
- Godreau, Isar P. *Scripts of Blackness: Race, Cultural Nationalism, and U.S. Colonialism in Puerto Rico*. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2015.
- Gonzales, Michael R. "Ruffians and Revolutionaries: The Development of the Young Lords Organization in Chicago." MA Thesis, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2015.
- . "'Latin Power to Latin People': the Black Panther Party's Influence on the Revolutionary Politics of the Young Lords Organization." *Journal of African American Studies* 23 (2019): 335-351.
- Hagedorn, John M. *The In\$ane Chicago Way*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2015.
- . *A World of Gangs: Armed Young Men and Gangsta Culture*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.
- Hartch, Todd. "Ivan Illich and Leo Mahon: Folk Religion and Catechesis in Latin America." *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 36, No. 4 (Oct. 2012): 185-188.
- Hertz, Daniel K. *The Battle of Lincoln Park: Urban Renewal and Gentrification in Chicago*. Cleveland, OH: Belt Publishing, 2018.
- Hinojosa, Felipe. *Apostles of Change: Latino Radical Politics, Church Occupations, and the Fight to Save the Barrio*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2021.
- Holt, Thomas C. "Race, Race-making, and the Writing of History." *The American Historical Review*. Vol. 100, No. 1 (Feb. 1995), 1-20.
- Johnson, Karen J. *One in Christ: Chicago Catholics and the Quest for Interracial Justice*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Kelliher, Thomas G. "Hispanic Catholics and the Archdiocese of Chicago, 1923-1970." Ph.Diss., University of Notre Dame, 1996.
- Koschmann, Mark A. "Finding Their Footing in the Changing City: Protestant and catholic Congregations Adapt to the New Urban Environment in Post-World War II Chicago." Ph.Diss., St. Louis University, 2018.
- Lazú, Jaqueline. "The Chicago Young Lords: (Re)constructing Knowledge and Revolution." *Centro Journal* 25, No. 2 (Fall, 2003): 28-52.
- Neary, Timothy B. *Crossing Parish Boundaries: Race, Sports, and Catholic Youth in Chicago, 1914-1954*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Negretti, Vionette G. "Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Puerto Rico." Carlos Caso-Rosendi. WordPress.com. Accessed Mar. 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022. <https://casorosendi.com/2018/03/19/our-lady-of-mount-carmel-in-puerto-rico/>.
- Nelson, Alondra. *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight against Medical Discrimination*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011.



- O'Malley, John W. *What Happened at Vatican II?* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010.
- Orsi, Robert A. *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.
- Padilla, Felix. *Puerto Rican Chicago.* Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1987.
- Pérez y Mena, Andrés. *Speaking With the Dead: Development of Afro-Latin Religion Among Puerto Ricans in the United States.* New York, NY: AMS Press, 1991.
- Ramos-Zayas, Ana Y. *National Performances: The Politics of Class, Race, and Space in Puerto Rican Chicago.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003.
- Rana, Junaid. "Anthropology and the Riddle of White Supremacy." *American Anthropologist*. Vol. 122, No. 1 (2019), 99-111.
- Rodríguez V, Jorge J. "The colonial gospel in Puerto Rico." *The Christian Century*. Jan. 3, 2017, available at <https://www.christiancentury.org/blog-post/practicing-liberation/colonial-gospel-puerto-rico>.
- . "The Más Allá at First Spanish-The People's Church: Race, Religion, and the New York Young Lords." Ph.Diss., Union Theological Seminary, 2021.
- Roman, Reinaldo L. *Governing Spirits: Religion, Miracles, and Spectacles in Cuba and Puerto Rico, 1898-1956.* Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 2007.
- Secrist, Karen A. "Occupy Lincoln Park: the Militant Drama of the Young Lords Organization." *Journal of African American Studies* 23 (2019): 389-404.
- Smith, Jonathan Z. "Religion, Religions, Religious." In *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 269-284.
- Spear, Allan. *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1967.
- Staudenmaier, Michael. "Between Two Flags: Cultural Nationalism and Racial Formation in Puerto Rican Chicago, 1946-1994." Ph.Diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2016.
- Sullivan, Winnifred F. *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.
- Various Authors. *Actualidad de las Tradiciones Espirituales y Culturales Africanas en el Caribe y Latinoamérica: Primer y Segundo Simposio.* Ed. María E. Torres Muñoz, Marta Moreno Vego, and Mónica Cortéz Torres. San Juan, PR: Centro de Estudios de Puerto Rico y el Caribe, 2010.
- Various Authors. *Faith and Power: Latino Religious Politics Since 1945.* Ed. Felipe Hinojosa, Maggie Elmore, and Sergio M. González. New York, NY: NYU Press, 2022.
- Various Authors. *Hispanic Catholic Culture in the U.S.: Issues and Concerns.* Ed. Jay P. Dolan and Allan Figueroa Deck, S.J. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994.
- Vidal, Jaime R. "Citizens Yet Strangers: The Puerto Rican Experience." From *Puerto Rican and Cuban Catholics in the U.S., 1900-1965.* Ed. Jay P. Dolan & Jaime R. Vidal. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994, 11-143.