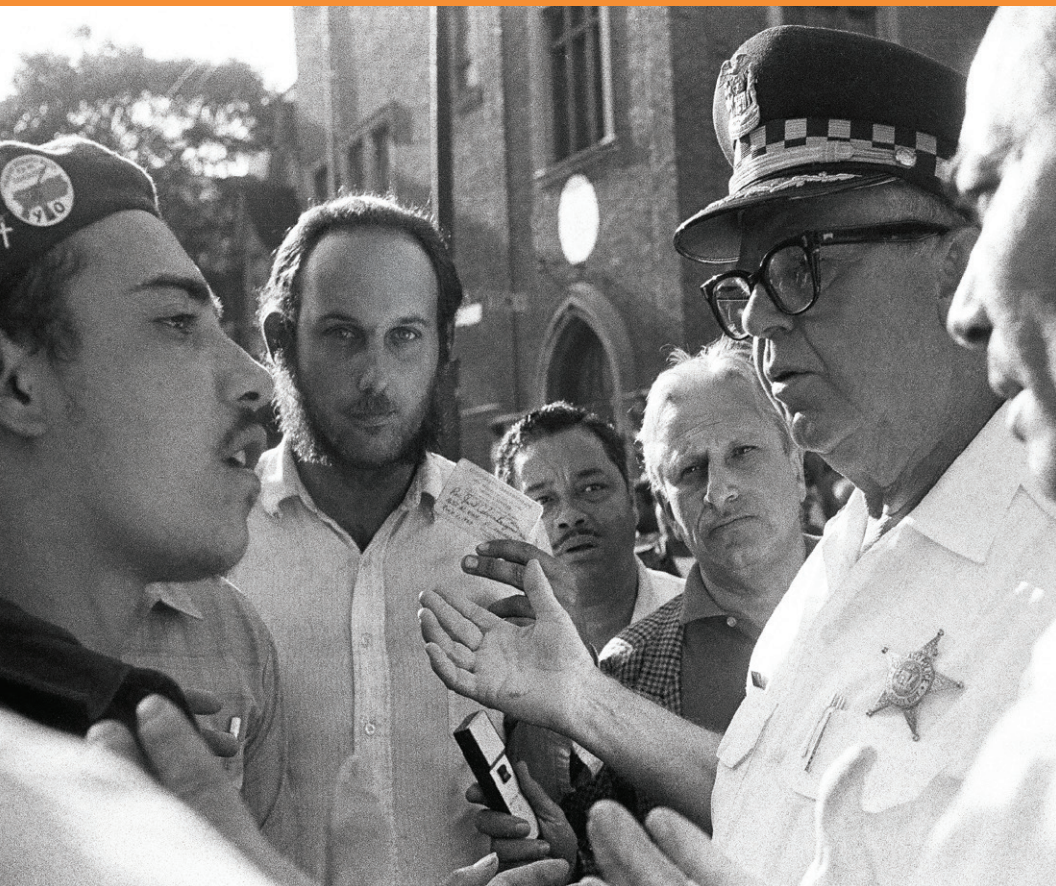


Fighting for Community Control



The Diasporic Origins of Puerto Rican Catholicism in Chicago

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Introduction

In April 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 youth group in the Lincoln Park neighborhood of Chicago’s North Side, in prison on a drug possession charge. Serving a sixty-day sentence, Cha-Cha read for the first time in around six years. The first book he checked out was *The Seven Storey Mountain* by Thomas Merton, a man who felt called by God to convert to Catholicism and who 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 people, Catholics when they go to confession, they feel real good. I had cleansed 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 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 time. Again, we were Catholic, my mother had ingrained it in us.¹

Cha-Cha was ready not only to get his life back together, but to fight for his community. During his sentence, he would read Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X and commit to transforming the Young Lords into a political organization like the Black Panthers. He would leave prison ready to serve his community.

This anecdote, in various forms, is featured in most narratives of the Young Lords, a Chicago group that has become part of the canon of Puerto Rican radical politics in the mainland United States.² The theme

1. “Jose Jimenez Video Interview and Biography, Interview 1,” Mar. 15, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park Collection, Special Collections and University Archives, University Libraries, Grand Valley State University, Allendale, MI (hereafter GVSU), digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/24559. Note: I use diacritical marks as they appear in the original; José Jiménez’s name appears without diacritical marks in this source.

2. Johanna Fernández, *The Young Lords: A Radical History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 35–36; Michael Robert Gonzales, “Ruffians and Revolutionaries: The Development of the Young Lords Organization in Chicago” (master’s thesis, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2015), 8; Ángel G. Flores-Rodríguez, “The Young Lords, Puerto Rican Liberation, and the Black Freedom Struggle: Interview with José ‘Cha Cha’ Jiménez,” *OAH Magazine of History* 26, no. 1 (Jan. 2012): 62; Michael Gonzales, “‘Latin Power to Latin People’: The Black Panther Party’s Influence on the Revolutionary Politics of the Young Lords Organization,” in “The ‘Original’ Rainbow Coalition: In Remembrance,” ed. Judson L. Jeffries and Omari L. Dyson, special issue, *Journal of African American Studies* 23, no. 4 (2019): 336; “Jose (Cha-Cha) Jimenez,” National Young Lords, accessed Apr. 26, 2021, web.archive.org/

of religion within the broader story of the Young Lords is virtually nonexistent; it appears out of nowhere like a “jack-in-the-box,” but its wider significance is ignored.³ This telling of Cha-Cha’s transformation can make religion seem like an incidental trope: through penitence a man learns to right his wrongs while in prison. But taken seriously, the major themes of Cha-Cha’s transformation, which involve race and religion, hint at something more. Cha-Cha’s transformation should be seen within the story of a Puerto Rican community in transition.

Throughout this paper, I argue that the creation of the “Puerto Rican community” in Chicago in the 1950s and 1960s cannot be defined solely in terms of “political organization.” By tracing the diasporic origins of the first generation of Puerto Ricans in Chicago, I will contextualize the well-told political history of the late 1960s and demonstrate that it is necessary to look beyond the political, into the realm of the religious. The Puerto Rican community, as a social structure, began within the particular social context and material conditions present in Puerto Rico, then adapted to survive in the urban context defined by often violent structures that denied Puerto Ricans employment, housing, and institutional support. In his transformation, José Cha-Cha Jiménez realized the political potential of redefining the religious organizational structure of the Puerto Rican community. Finally, this paper argues that Puerto Ricans arrived

web/20210510174402/http://nationalyounglords.com/?page_id=15; Jacqueline 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,” in “The ‘Original’ Rainbow Coalition: In Remembrance,” edited by Judson L. Jeffries and Omari L. Dyson, special issue, *Journal of African American Studies* 23, no. 4 (2019): 393.

3. Jon Butler, “Jack-in-the-Box Faith: The Religion Problem in Modern American History,” *Journal of American History* 90, no. 4 (Mar. 2004): 1357–78.

in Chicago with the necessary organizational structures to form a community, which contradicts the claims of outsider organizers who took sole credit for the community's development.⁴

Religion, Race, and Organizing a Community

There is a tendency in political and economic history to dismiss the role of religious structures as little more than a conservative force.⁵ When religion does appear in histories of political and economic development, 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.⁶ This treatment of religion reinforces a secular bias in American history. In such contexts, religion has historically been defined from a Christian perspective, assuming that all religions have shared traits—a set of beliefs and morals, a God, etc. Religious Studies began as a hierarchical classification system that ranked the proximity of various “world religions”

4. I have revised and shortened my bachelor's thesis for inclusion in *Chicago Studies* 22–23. For the original thesis, see David Owen Carter, “Starting a Revolution at Church: Religion, Race, and Community Organizing in Chicago's Puerto Rican Community” (bachelor's thesis, University of Chicago, 2022), knowledge.uchicago.edu/record/7252?ln=en&v=pdf.

5. Recent publications have begun to contest this view. See Felipe Hinojosa, *Apostles of Change: Latino Radical Politics, Church Occupations, and the Fight to Save the Barrio* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021); Felipe Hinojosa, Maggie Elmore, and Sergio M. González, eds., *Faith and Power: Latino Religious Politics Since 1945* (New York: New York University Press, 2022); and Jorge Juan Rodríguez V, “The Más Allá at First Spanish-The People's Church: Race, Religion, and the New York Young Lords” (PhD diss., Union Theological Seminary, 2021).

6. Butler, “Jack-in-the-Box Faith.”

to Christianity.⁷ As the twentieth century progressed, scholars replaced civilizing missions and scientific racism with a pluralist classification scheme of religion that unified “science, morality, and ‘true religion,’” making non-Christian religions legible while retaining the Christian moral high ground.⁸ Outside academia, religion is generally conceived of in relation to Protestantism with a well-defined set of beliefs, mostly private and individualized, and, where public, never impeding upon the secular.⁹ As such, the jack-in-the-box treatment of religion reinforces a worldview in which religion is inherently apolitical. In reality, social structure is where material conditions intertwine with a mix of secular, political, religious, cultural, and any number of other social formations. The division between religious and secular is not essential and, where present, should be considered as the result of a political project, hegemonic or otherwise.

The social structure of “community” is the amalgamation of racial, national, and religious identities. According to historian 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 socially-constructed macro-level, “are mediated by material conditions, symbolic gestures, and

7. Jonathan Z. Smith, “Religion, Religions, Religious,” in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 275–79.

8. 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.

9. See Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 7–9, which discusses “small-‘p’ protestantism.”

discursive action.”¹⁰ Likewise, normatively, religious social structures have mastered the art of mediating between the everyday micro- and the abstract macro-level through collective ritual, discourse between lay individuals and religious figures, and the dislocation of material conditions to the realm of the supernatural. Religion can be “political,” such as the involvement of the Catholic Church in Chicago politics, despite a putative separation of church and state. Writing about Chicago’s West Side, religious historian Mark Koschmann describes Christian congregations as “the place where people actually embody and enact theology by coming together as part of a worshipping religious community,” but they also “sharply defined themselves racially, culturally, and ethnically.”¹¹ As Martin Luther King Jr. famously said in 1960, “Eleven AM Sunday is our most segregated hour.”¹² In this story, I argue that the relation among these various forms of identity—religious, racial, and national—act not against each other, but instead compose a multilayered and interconnected social project that produces community.

Historiography and Overview

My story describes the transition of a Puerto Rican community organized around religion (in this case, Catholicism) to one organized around secular nationalism. It begins with *Los Caballeros de San Juan* (the Knights of St. John) and the *Damas de María* (Ladies of Mary), a Catholic

10. Thomas C. Holt, “Marking: Race, Race-making, and the Writing of History,” *American Historical Review* 100, no. 1 (Feb. 1995): 10.

11. 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” (PhD diss., St. Louis University, 2018), 23, 25.

12. Martin L. King Jr., “The Most Segregated Hour in America, *Meet the Press*, Apr 17, 1960,” Apr. 4, 2014, www.youtube.com/watch?v=lq881g1L_d8.

fraternal order and its women’s auxiliary that became the largest Puerto Rican organization in Chicago from the mid-fifties to the mid-sixties. Sociologist Félix Padilla and historians Jaime Vidal and Michael Staudenmaier have described the history of the Caballeros and their importance in defining the national boundary of Chicago’s Puerto Rican community, despite being a largely conservative and assimilationist force.¹³ These scholars 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’ influence ended with the Division Street Riots in June of 1966, which marked the Puerto Rican community’s turn from respectability politics to grassroots radical activism. However, the Caballeros are more properly understood by tracing their origins to Puerto Rico; by examining the history of the Catholic Church, which was in political turmoil following the reforms of the Second Vatican Council (1962–65); and by considering the rise of Latin American liberation theology.

Religious historians Jaime Vidal and Reinaldo Román offer insight into religion in early twentieth-century Puerto Rico.¹⁴ Vidal treats the Puerto Rican Catholic Church as both religious and political and theorizes its relationship with Puerto Ricans themselves, claiming that Puerto

13. Felix M. Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), 126–140; Jaime R. Vidal, “Citizens Yet Strangers: The Puerto Rican Experience,” in *Puerto Rican and Cuban Catholics in the U.S., 1900–1965*, ed. Jay P. Dolan and Jaime R. Vidal (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 127–34; Michael Staudenmaier, “Between Two Flags: Cultural Nationalism and Racial Formation in Puerto Rican Chicago, 1946–1994,” (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2016), 81–87.

14. Reinaldo L. Román, *Governing Spirits: Religion, Miracles, and Spectacles in Cuba and Puerto Rico, 1898–1956* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 51–81; Vidal, “Citizens Yet Strangers,” 11–53.

Ricans never became as loyal to the Church as the Church desired. Vidal's *Citizens Yet Strangers* does not cover connections between Chicago's Puerto Rican community and social organizations in Puerto Rico directly. Román's history of Puerto Rican spirituality takes a ground-up approach, filling in some of the gaps left by Vidal, especially discussing the *Hermanos Cheos* (Brothers Joe), a lay religious order that influenced the Caballeros. Religious scholar Ana María Díaz-Stevens and Jesuit historian Edmundo Rodríguez also discuss broader Catholic trends in Latin America and among Latinos, paying particular attention to how Latin Americans adapted their religious traditions within the US Catholic church after Vatican II.¹⁵

The historiography of the Young Lords includes archival records housed at DePaul University and Grand Valley State University. Scholarship on the Young Lords focuses primarily on their period of political activity, which began in the late sixties, with only limited reference to their origins in the early sixties.¹⁶ The Young Lords' connections to the first generation of Puerto Rican immigrants to Chicago (their parents) is even less well studied. The Young Lords are often described as a "gang" that politicized. While the word "gang" is widely used today, including by so-called "gang affiliates" to describe themselves, its etymological development during the 1960s reveals a political intent to delegitimize social formations that were not originally called "gangs." According to Spanish professor Jacqueline Lazú, the Young Lords were called a "crew"

15. 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 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 240–77; Edmundo Rodríguez, "The Hispanic and Church Movements: Schools of Leadership," in *Hispanic Catholic Culture in the U.S.: Issues and Concerns*, ed. Jay P. Dolan and Allan Figueroa Deck (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 206–39.

16. See, among others, Flores-Rodríguez, "The Young Lords," 62; and Secrist, "Occupy Lincoln Park," 392–93.

when they formed "in a segregated, working class, economically tense, machine-run city."¹⁷ Their primary purpose was "for protection. [...] Informal groups of friends bonded, most often along class and/or ethnic lines for safety in the streets." The group was formed in 1961 or 1962 "by approximately ten boys (most of who had been born in 1948)" and continued until 1968, when the Young Lords became a political organization.¹⁸ Historian Martha Arguello stresses that the Young Lords "viewed themselves both as a group banded together for protection and as a social club."¹⁹ Critical gang studies demonstrate that the media, police, and justice system use the term "gang" to dehumanize young boys and men of color, which has led to mass incarceration.²⁰ Particularly pertinent to our context, Mayor Richard J. Daley declared a "War on Gangs" in 1967 to justify the infiltration of any group that was deemed a threat to order in Chicago—from emerging "nations" like the Black P. Stones and Almighty Vice Lords to third-worldist organizations like the Black Panther Party and Young Lords. It also provided an excuse for the arrest of young men of color discovered by the police in groups of four or more,

17. Lazú, "The Chicago Young Lords," 30–31.

18. Gonzales, "Ruffians and Revolutionaries," 5.

19. Martha M. Arguello, "We Joined Others Who Were Poor: The Young Lords, the Black Freedom Struggle, and the 'Original' Rainbow Coalition," *Journal of African American Studies* 23, no 2 (2019): 437.

20. See Linda S. Beres and Thomas D. Griffith, "Demonizing Youth," in "Symposium—The Rampart Scandal: Policing the Criminal Justice System," ed. David W. Burcham & Catherine L. Fisk, special issue, *Loyola of Los Angeles Law Review* 34, no. 2 (2001): 747–66; John M. Hagedorn and Bradley A. MacLean, "Breaking the Frame: Responding to Gang Stereotyping in Capital Cases," *University of Memphis Law Review* 42 (Summer 2012): 1027–60; and Amy Andrea Martinez, "Toward a Decolonial Imaginary to Reexamine and Redefine Mainstream Definitions of 'Gangs' and 'Gang Members' in America," in *Critical and Intersectional Gang Studies*, ed. Jennifer M. Ortiz (New York: Routledge, 2023).

while diverting focus from White groups involved in organized crime.²¹ Using “gang” to describe the Young Lords prior to their politicization reduces their story to one of crime and erases their complex reasons for coming together as a group. For these reasons, I refer to the Young Lords as a youth group or organization and place “gang” in scare quotes.

The Origins of Chicago’s Puerto Rican Community

Most of the Puerto Ricans who arrived in Chicago were rural *Jíbaros*. *Jíbaros* did not belong to any particular class; rather, the term refers broadly to those who raised crops, whether as farm owners, tenants, or wage laborers. Under Spanish rule, *Jíbaros* had for centuries been neglected by the Catholic Church and, despite mostly considering themselves Catholic, were detached from the Church’s institutional structure. According to the Church, *Jíbaros* were Catholics who lacked devotion and who failed to attend mass or sanctify their marriages (though nearly all were baptized). In reality, these practices were due to the distance between chapels and the lack of priests in the countryside.²² The actual spiritual practices of *Jíbaros* defied categorical labels and likely varied

21. Simon Balto, *Occupied Territory: Policing Black Chicago from Red Summer to Black Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 201–4; Andrew Diamond, *Mean Streets: Chicago Youths and the Everyday Struggle for Empowerment in the Multiracial City, 1908–1969* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009) 254–307; John Hagedorn, *The Insane Chicago Way: The Daring Plan by Chicago Gangs to Create a Spanish Mafia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 39.

22. Vidal, “Citizens Yet Strangers,” 11–24.

widely.²³ After US rule in 1898 brought freedom of religion to Puerto Rico, non-Catholic movements, notably Spiritism and Pentecostalism, proliferated among *Jíbaros*.

Religion in rural areas depended more on lay leadership, both male and female. According to religious scholar Ana María Díaz-Stephens, the pattern of competition between men in rural Latin America did not extend to the domain of the church, leaving room for a “matriarchal core,” which “lies at the heart of most Latino religious practice.”²⁴ Men were valued for hard work and their ability to provide, not their religiosity. By contrast, in towns, where men were more likely to be professionals with stable incomes, patriarchal competition within the church reflected on the value of men. Their wives were “hyper-moral” objects (likened to the Virgin Mary) whose appearance outside of the domestic sphere, especially in the church, reflected the social standing of their husbands, but which denied women any independence for religious leadership. But within *Jíbaro* society, *Jíbaras* could assume powerful roles as the *rezadora*, a trusted advisor, the *comadrona* or midwife, and the *curandera* or healer.²⁵

The forms of religious leadership that had successfully guided communities in rural Puerto Rico would need to adapt when migrants moved to mainland cities, such as Chicago. US scholars and outside organizers

23. Scholars disagree on the origins of Puerto Rican religious practices: some argue that Puerto Rican practices were predominantly Spanish in origin, see Vidal, “Citizens Yet Strangers,” 25. Others argue that they were a mix of Spanish, African, and Taíno beliefs, see Andrés Isidoro Pérez y Mena, *Speaking with the Dead: Development of Afro-Latin Religion among Puerto Ricans in the United States* (New York: AMS Press, 1991), 21–32; and Mónica Cortéz Torres, Marta Moreno Vega, and María Elba Torres Muñoz, eds., *Actualidad de las Tradiciones Espirituales y Culturales Africanas en el Caribe y Latinoamérica: Primer y Segundo Simposio* (San Juan: Instituto de las Tradiciones Afrocaribeñas, Centro de Estudios Avanzados de Puerto Rico y el Caribe, 2010).

24. Díaz-Stevens, “Latinas and the Church,” 245.

25. Díaz-Stevens, “Latinas and the Church,” 242, 250–51.

equated culture and religion with the presence of politically legitimate institutions, such as the Catholic Church, and thus assumed that Jíbaros simply lacked culture. In the eyes of contemporary anthropologists, such Puerto Ricans would become the quintessential example of the “culture of poverty,” a pathologically disorganized state, passed down through generations, that supposedly caused poor people to be apathetic and individualistic in the face of deprivation and oppression, thus remaining trapped in poverty. In reality, the geographic concentration of poverty in cities like Chicago had concrete external economic causes—the expansion of US capitalism and imperialism—that Puerto Ricans indeed responded to by adapting existing forms of organization brought from the Puerto Rican countryside.

At the end of Spanish rule in 1898, Puerto Rican society operated within the context of commercial capitalism, with tenant farmers growing a mix of cash crops, especially tobacco, coffee, and sugar. Sugar required a high concentration of capital—monetary investment from the metropole to construct sugar cane mills necessary to process the harvest—that was not available to most Puerto Rican hacenderos.²⁶ The US Foraker Act of 1900 incentivized US capital investment in Puerto Rican sugar, and the productive capacity of the Puerto Rican sugar industry generally increased from 1900 to 1935. After remaining steady for two decades, real unit prices declined in the 1920s as the mechanization and industrialization of agriculture increased worker productivity.²⁷ In order to retain a steady rate of profit, sugar corporations needed to exploit more surplus

26. James L. Dietz, *Economic History of Puerto Rico: Institutional Change and Capitalist Development* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 59–69.

27. Dietz, *Economic History of Puerto Rico*, 98–119. In particular, see Table 2.4 (p. 105). I derived real unit prices of sugar by combining these data with the historical consumer price index, see Robert C. Sahr, “Consumer Price Index (CPI) Conversion Factors 1774 to estimated 2024 to Convert to Dollars of 2012,” liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/sites/liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/files/polisci/faculty-research/sahr/inflation-conversion/pdf/cv2012.pdf.

value from labor.²⁸ For farmers, this meant working more hours to earn the same income. Sugar plantation owners replaced tenant farmers with wage-based seasonal laborers. Tenant farmers who had worked their plot of land all year as their primary means of subsistence needed to take on other forms of work to supplement their farming income.²⁹ By the first decades of the twentieth century, tenants were leaving their farms to earn all of their seasonal wages in sugar factories. During the harvest, they would work nearly eighty-hour weeks for wages lower than in other sugar-producing countries and had to find alternative employment for the remainder of the year.³⁰ From 1910 to 1935 the rate of unemployment among men quintupled.³¹ As men lost access to continuous wage employment in agriculture, women supplemented family income by working in urban factories.³² The workforce also became more mobile, leaving

28. Karl Marx, “Chapter 3: The Relationship between Rate of Profit and Rate of Surplus-Value,” in *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy: Volume III*, tr. David Fernbach (London: Penguin, 1991), 141–62. According to Marx, the rate of profit will decline over time as worker productivity increases. Since the real unit value of sugar began to decline, the labor-power consumed in its production decreased (workers produced more units of output with the same amount of labor-power). In order to maintain the same rate of profit, it is necessary to increase the rate of exploitation by increasing the proportion of surplus extracted from labor.

29. Dietz, *Economic History of Puerto Rico*, 51–52.

30. Dietz, *Economic History of Puerto Rico*, 124–27.

31. Dietz, *Economic History of Puerto Rico*, 130–31.

32. Economic activity among Puerto Rican men and boys over the age of ten increased from 5.4 percent to 24.2 percent. Meanwhile, during the same period, the economic activity among Puerto Rican women and girls decreased from 70.7 percent to 65.7 percent, caused by a graduate shift in the needlepoint industry from decentralized home work (“sweatshops”) to centralized work in town and city factories. See Table 2.14 in Dietz, *Economic History of Puerto Rico*, 131, 142–43.

traditional coffee and tobacco farming for sugar-producing regions, or leaving Puerto Rico entirely in search of higher wages.³³

Puerto Rico attempted to solve unemployment in the forties by developing urban industry rather than fixing rural productive infrastructure and technology.³⁴ Native Puerto Rican politicians, especially Luis Muñoz Marín, who would soon become the island's first elected governor, promoted the shift from agricultural to urban industrial production by offering tax breaks to US corporations. Under *Operación Manos a la Obra* (Operation Bootstrap), the Puerto Rican economy urbanized rapidly, and cities like San Juan became loci of job opportunities.³⁵ Though unemployment declined and average per capita income rose, poverty and unemployment persisted, with concentrated urban slums replacing decentralized poverty in rural areas.³⁶

These events precipitated a Malthusian over-population scare. By the 1960s, men were losing access to work while women were gaining it.³⁷ Anthropologist Oscar Lewis blamed culture, specifically familial structure, for the perpetuation of poverty, rather than structural factors.³⁸ This coincided with a large-scale population control policy, resulting in the

33. At first, Puerto Ricans left on labor contracts for other sugar-producing regions, like Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Hawai'i. After gaining US citizenship in 1916, many migrated to New York for urban industrial work. Dietz, *Economic History of Puerto Rico*, 111, 131–32.

34. Dietz, *Economic History of Puerto Rico*, 149–54.

35. Dietz, *Economic History of Puerto Rico*, 206–28.

36. Dietz, *Economic History of Puerto Rico*, 273–81; Juan Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America*, 2nd ed. (London: Penguin, 2022), 305.

37. Dietz, *Economic History of Puerto Rico*, 276.

38. Oscar Lewis, *La Vida: A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty—New York and San Juan* (New York: Random House, 1966), xlii–lii.

sterilization, often forced, of one-third of Puerto Rican women as well as nonconsensual medical testing of birth-control prototypes. Officials urged Puerto Rican families to adopt the moral ideal of two children.³⁹ Meanwhile, the governments of Puerto Rico and the United States facilitated the migration of large numbers of Puerto Ricans to the US mainland, especially New York.⁴⁰ However, here too, Puerto Ricans became trapped in ghettos, and fears of overpopulation continued into the diaspora.⁴¹

In the thirties and forties, the displacement of tenant and small-scale yeoman farmers also occurred throughout the United States, particularly in the South, as a result of the New Deal's Agricultural Adjustment Act (1933), which subsidized the agricultural industry and permitted an influx of capital. Similar to Puerto Rico in the decades prior, sharecropping evaporated as a form of exploitation in the South and was replaced by migrant farm labor. Similarly, large-scale agribusiness, fueled by migrant labor, replaced independent farmers in the West.⁴² The 1942 Bracero program provided Mexicans with permits to work as cheap farm laborers in the West, while southerners (disproportionately African American) and Puerto Ricans worked the migrant labor routes in the East.

39. Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

40. Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire*, 306; Lilia Fernández, *Brown in the Windy City: Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in Postwar Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 34–37.

41. Iris Lopez, "Agency and Constraint: Sterilization and Reproductive Freedom Among Puerto Rican Women in New York City," *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development* 22, no. 3/4 (Fall and Winter, 1993): 299–323.

42. Jonathan Levy, *Ages of American Capitalism: A History of the United States* (New York: Random House, 2022), 425–26; Louis M. Kyriakoudes, "'Lookin' for Better All the Time': Rural Migration and Urbanization in the South, 1900–1950," in *African American Life in the Rural South, 1900–1950*, ed. R. Douglas Hurt (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 23–26.

They overlapped in the Midwest.⁴³ While Mexicans were continuously at risk of deportation, especially after Operation Wetback deported over two million Mexicans, regardless of legal status, in the mid-fifties, Puerto Ricans and southerners often opted to move to northern cities where there were more and better job opportunities.⁴⁴

Puerto Ricans and African Americans in the South faced similar forms of exploitation and oppression. They were both displaced from their land and moved from place to place to look for work along migrant farming routes until arriving at the mainland's largest cities. Also, sterilization rates among African American women in the South peaked around the same time as among Puerto Rican women,⁴⁵ and both groups had a similar gendered division of labor. Daniel Moynihan's report on *The Negro Family* (1965) and Oscar Lewis's *La Vida* (1966) share the same thesis. Rather than attributing the disproportionate poverty experienced by African Americans to the persistent racial caste system, Moynihan argued that a matriarchal family structure creates a "tangled pathology" in African American households.⁴⁶

43. Kyriakoudes, "'Lookin' for Better,'" 13–14; Fernández, *Brown in the Windy City*, 37–50; Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 56–58.

44. Mike Amezcua, *Making Mexican Chicago: From Postwar Settlement to the Age of Gentrification* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022), 19–46; Fernández, *Brown in the Windy City*, 52–56; James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

45. Randall Hansen and Desmond King, *Sterilized by the State: Eugenics, Race, and the Population Scare in Twentieth-Century North America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 237–58.

46. Office of Policy Planning and Research, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (Washington, DC: United States Department of Labor, March 1965), 29–45; Frederico Salas, "Blaming the Victim No More: African American Critiques of the Moynihan Report, 1965," *Toro Historical Review* 4, no. 1 (May 2018): 1–14.

Beginning in the mid-twentieth century, existing forms of racial exclusion became tied to concentrated urban poverty, and the moral malignment of the industrial reserve army became racialized.⁴⁷ Under Jim Crow, African Americans were excluded from economic advancement: first, tenant farming constrained the movement of farmers, kept them from finding lower rents, and left them indebted to landowners.⁴⁸ Then, as African Americans moved to northern cities during the Great Migration, they were denied full participation in the labor force. Following the New Deal and the consolidation of Whiteness through redlining, concentrated urban poverty was racialized. This transition in American racism no longer justified a racial caste system in terms of biological difference, but instead blamed an endemic, immoral, and culturally backward Black and Puerto Rican lumpenproletariat.

47. The industrial reserve army is defined as both the unemployed "lumpenproletariat" and the parts of the proletariat that were in a continual transition between insecure employment, underemployment, and unemployment, in contrast with the components of the proletariat that had achieved secure employment, especially in the form of union membership or higher education. I choose not to use the word "lumpenproletariat" for its connotation of "dirtiness" and its distinction from the putatively class-conscious proletariat. In reality, the two blurred together in many cases. At the time, the revolutionary potential of the "lumpenproletariat" was much discussed, both as being pathologically apolitical by Oscar Lewis himself, see *La Vida*, xlix–l, and as being the driving force behind anti-colonial Third-Worldist revolution, an idea adopted from Franz Fanon by the Young Lords and the Black Panther Party.

48. Kyriakoudes, "'Lookin' for Better,'" 15–17. Kyriakoudes argues that sharecropping did not constrain the movement of African Americans as much as traditional peonage and that sharecroppers would search around for lower rates. However, as indicated in table 4 (p. 23), 89 percent of African American sharecroppers remained within the same county from 1935 to 1940, indicating a relatively low degree of mobility compared to the following decades.

Many Puerto Ricans who arrived in Chicago in the 1950s were not racially excluded to the same degree as African Americans. For example, many were able to rent apartments across the color line.⁴⁹ However, their economic conditions in Chicago were similar in rates of unemployment, lack of a professional class, and exclusion from labor unions.⁵⁰ As Puerto Rican enclaves formed and began to exhibit the then accepted signs of concentrated poverty, especially the arrival of African Americans into what were once White neighborhoods, those who could would often flee to remaining White-only neighborhoods while others were displaced by urban renewal projects designed to “revitalize” neighborhoods affected by “blight.”⁵¹ Meanwhile, while the historic South Side Black Belt along State Street expanded during this same period, African Americans faced overt housing discrimination in neighborhoods in which some Puerto Ricans were able to live. In the minds of leaders and scholars, a Puerto Rican community that concentrated in one place for too long would become a ghetto, as had happened in San Juan and in New York. But during the mid-fifties and early sixties, Puerto Ricans in Chicago had a relatively higher degree of mobility.⁵²

49. Fernández, *Brown in the Windy City*, 8–12.

50. In 1960 the non-White male unemployment rate in Chicago was 10.8 percent, compared to 5.2 percent overall. Puerto Rican male unemployment was 9.1 percent. Meanwhile, the overall and non-White female employment rates were both 42.3 percent, compared to 33.1 percent for Puerto Rican women. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Censuses of Population and Housing 1960: Final Report Series PHC(1) Census Tracts*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1961), 344, 453, 477. See, also, Fernández, *Brown in the Windy City*, 11–12; Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire*, 305–6; and Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 110–16.

51. Fernández, *Brown in the Windy City*, 9.

52. Fernández, *Brown in the Windy City*, 9.

The “Creation” of Puerto Rican Culture

In the early 1950s, the first Puerto Rican neighborhoods were Woodlawn along 63rd 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). Many secular and religious organizations formed to help newcomers, with the understanding that helping Puerto Ricans to acquire jobs and housing would avoid the formation of another ghetto.⁵³

Prominent among these organizations, the Archdiocese of Chicago sought to avoid the mistakes assimilating Puerto Ricans into parishes that it had made with African Americans in previous decades. In 1917, Cardinal Mundelein of Chicago had established an African American national parish (contrary to his anti-nationalist and assimilationist policy for ethnic migrants from Europe), and African Americans had organized a lay movement to advocate for themselves.⁵⁴ Racial tensions and riots in the teens and twenties between young White and Black men lead Auxiliary Bishop Bernard Sheil to found the interracial Catholic Youth Organization (CYO) in 1930 in response to concerns about “juvenile delinquency.”⁵⁵ Tensions increased in the late forties as more Black people migrated from the South and racialized violence increased across the South Side. The CYO rapidly lost its White membership and dissolved completely in 1954.⁵⁶ By the 1950s, the Archdiocese of Chicago was

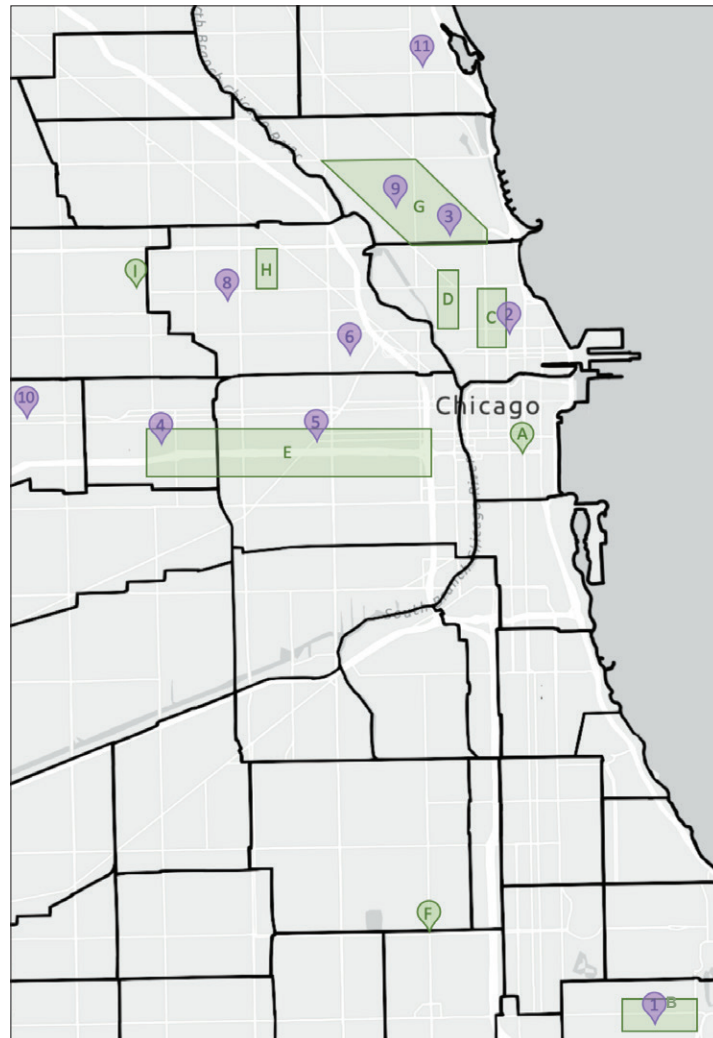
53. Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 110–16.

54. Karen J. Johnson, *One in Christ: Chicago Catholics and the Quest for Interracial Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 18, 29–43.

55. Timothy B. Neary, *Crossing Parish Boundaries: Race, Sports, and Catholic Youth in Chicago, 1914–1954* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 71–98; Allan H. Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890–1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 201–22.

56. Johnson, *One in Christ*, 127–54; Neary, *Crossing Parish Boundaries*, 99–134.

Figure 1: Puerto Rican enclaves, 1940s–1960s (green); councils of the Caballeros de San Juan (purple).



Enclaves

- A.** The Loop, c. 1946–53. Martinez, *Chicago*, 93–98.
- B.** Woodlawn, c. 1950s, Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 110–16; “Alfredo Calixto Video Interview and Biography,” Feb. 8, 2012, GVSU; Wilfredo Santana, video interview with author, May 31, 2023.
- C.** La Clark, c. 1950s–63. Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City*, 135–42; Brooke Robinson, “The Birth of the Young Lords in Chicago,” DePaul University, arcg.is/r4Tjb.
- D.** Cabrini Green, c. 1953, Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City*, 138–48; “Carmen Rance Video Interview and Biography,” Mar. 30, 2012, GVSU; “Ada Nivia López Audio Interview and Biography,” Aug. 24, 2012, GVSU.
- E.** La Madison, c. 1950s–early 1960s, Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City*, 57–130; Robinson, “The Birth of the Young Lords.”
- F.** Englewood, c. 1963, “Alfredo Calixto,” Feb. 8, 2012, GVSU; Wilfredo Santana, video interview with author, May 31, 2023.
- G.** Lincoln Park, 1946–1960s, Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City*, 176–80; Robinson, “The Birth of the Young Lords”; Young Lords in Lincoln Park Interviews, GVSU.
- H.** West Town (specifically, Janet Nolan’s study area), c. 1960. Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City*, 149–58; Janet Nolan *Ethnographic Research on Puerto Ricans in Chicago Collection*, DUL.
- I.** Humboldt Park, c. 1965. Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City*, 149–58; Yolanda Nieves, video interview with author, Dec. 3, 2021.

Councils

Carroll and Headley, “Report of the Cardinal’s Committee for the Spanish Speaking,” Jan. 14, 1964, EXEC/C0620/5#3, ACA.

Councils were likely within a few blocks of parishes; only eleven have verified locations.

- 1.** St. Clara: 6427 S. Woodlawn Avenue, TK
- 2.** Holy Name Cathedral: 735 N. State Street, TK
- 3.** St. Michael: 1633 N. Cleveland Avenue, ACA
- 4.** Our Lady of Sorrows: 3121 W. Jackson Boulevard, TK
- 5.** St. Jarlath: 1725 W. Jackson Boulevard, TK
- 6.** Santa Maria Addolorata: 528 N. Ada Street, ACA
- 7.** St. Joseph: 501 S. Utica Street, Waukegan, IL (not on map), ACA
- 8.** St. Mark: 1048 N. Campbell Avenue, ACA
- 9.** St. Teresa: 1037 W. Armitage Avenue, ACA
- 10.** St. Mel–Holy Ghost: 22 N. Kildare Avenue, MMC
- 11.** Our Lady of Mt. Carmel: 690 W. Belmont Avenue, ACA

TK: Kelliher, “Hispanic Catholics,” 166.

ACA: “Parishes,” Mar. 11, 1971, EXEC/C0670/43, 42958.04, John Cardinal Cody Papers, ACA.

MMC: Council No. 10 of the Caballeros, Boletín Informativo, May 3, 1964, Manuel Martínez Collection.

embroiled in a long-standing battle with its African American national parish over the discriminatory nature of the parish system.

In 1947, the Archdiocese of Chicago funded the *Sociedad Católica Puertorriqueña* (Puerto Rican Catholic Society) and the *Gremio Puertorriqueño de Chicago* (Puerto Rican Guild of Chicago), both in the Loop and organized through the CYO, which hosted dances, offered mutual aid to migrant workers, and settled newcomers in the Loop and the Near North Side in Cabrini-Green public housing.⁵⁷ To some Catholic priests, “the Puerto Rican community was growing at an alarming pace” and reviving fears of another “Puerto Rican ghetto.”⁵⁸ In 1953, at the urging of the Welfare Council of Metropolitan Chicago, the Catholic Church joined the Board of Education, the Community Fund of Chicago, and others to found the Committee on Integration of Spanish-Speaking Citizenry. The committee searched for a new organizational strategy to combat “the development of ghetto communities, and educational difficulties because of linguistic differences.”⁵⁹

At the same time, Woodlawn’s Puerto Rican community sought assistance from the Church. After a Sunday mass at Holy Cross Parish in 1953, several Puerto Rican men approached Fr. Leo Mahon for assistance. Mahon, just out of seminary, had originally sought to work with the African American community.⁶⁰ Mahon agreed to help, despite not speaking Spanish, and together they formed the Woodlawn Latin American

57. Manuel Martínez, *Chicago: Historia de Nuestra Comunidad Puertorriqueña* (self-pub., 1989), 97; Staudenmaier, “Between Two Flags.”

58. “La comunidad puertorriqueña crecía a pasos alarmantes.” Quoted in Martínez, *Chicago*, 98–100.

59. Mirelsie Velázquez, *Puerto Rican Chicago: Schooling the City, 1940–1977* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2022), 45–47.

60. Thomas G. Kelliher Jr., “Hispanic Catholics and the Archdiocese of Chicago, 1923–1970” (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 1996), 131–32.

Committee.⁶¹ Searching for people to assist in organizing the Puerto Rican men, he contacted two friends: Nicholas von Hoffman, a staff researcher at the University of Chicago, and Lester Hunt Jr., an evangelical missionary who had spent several years in rural Cuba.⁶² Mahon, von Hoffman, and Hunt sought organizational assistance from the famed radical organizer, Saul Alinsky, and funding from the archdiocese. In October of 1954, the Woodlawn Latin American Committee transformed from a mutual aid group to the first of more than ten councils of a Puerto Rican fraternal organization called *Los Caballeros de San Juan* (the Knights of St. John).⁶³

The Caballeros’ organizers and would-be advocates from outside the Puerto Rican community adopted Alinsky’s strategies for increasing community-based political power that he had developed in Back of the Yards in the forties and fifties. Alinsky’s method strove to attain broad-based support and empower democratically elected “indigenous” (i.e., community-based) leadership that could eventually take over from outside

61. Kelliher, “Hispanic Catholics,” 131. This story also appears in Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 128, and Vidal, “Citizens Yet Strangers,” 129.

62. Kelliher, “Hispanic Catholics,” 133; Nicholas von Hoffman, *Radical: A Portrait of Saul Alinsky* (New York: Nation Books, 2011), 1–2. Somewhat confusingly, von Hoffman leaves Mahon out of his memoir and credits himself with creating the Woodlawn Latin American Committee: “I took it into my head to organize a mutual self-defense group of some kind [...] the outcome of [which] was an entity called *El Comité Latino Americano*.” Likewise, Sanford D. Horwitt excluded Mahon from *Let Them Call Me Rebel: Saul Alinsky: His Life and Legacy* (New York: Knopf, 1989), 268–74, and attributes the creation of Woodlawn Latin American Committee mainly to von Hoffman.

63. Kelliher, “Hispanic Catholics,” 133; Margery Frisbie, *An Alley in Chicago: The Life and Legacy of Monsignor John Egan*, commemorative ed. (Franklin, WI: Sheed & Ward, 2002), 68–71; Horwitt, *Let Them Call Me Rebel*, 274.

organizers.⁶⁴ Indeed, the Caballeros' leadership was Puerto Rican and was democratically elected by Puerto Ricans from the beginning, and councils were financially self-reliant after the archdiocese covered initial costs.⁶⁵ However, Alinsky and his students also gave themselves credit for the "creation" of this leadership, which they believed could not have formed on its own. The Alinsky method began with the initial "agitation" of the community, which was necessary to "attack [...] the prevailing patterns of organized living in the community."⁶⁶ Von Hoffman explained that "most of the available indigenous leadership will only be practiced in the arts of the small organization" and that their collective power was limited by "having little immediately [...] in common."⁶⁷ Effective indigenous leaders did not exist in a community, they were "found by organizing and [they we]re developed by organizations."⁶⁸ This assumption that communities began with only limited organization follows Oscar Lewis's "culture of poverty" thesis. The culture of poverty at the community level is "above all a minimum of organization beyond the level of the nuclear and extended family" and is inherently anti-revolutionary; transcending

64. Alinsky describes his strategy in depth in *Rules for Radicals* (New York: Random House, 1971).

65. "Los Caballeros," in Martínez, *Chicago*, 153; Cardinal's Committee for the Spanish Speaking in Chicago, "Report for 1961," EXEC/C0730/8, Albert Cardinal Meyer Collection, Archdiocese of Chicago Archives (hereafter ACA).

66. Saul D. Alinsky, "From Citizen Apathy to Participation," presentation, Oct. 19, 1957, p. 3, CJEG 47/14, John J. Egan Papers, University of Notre Dame Archives (hereafter UNDA). This text appears nearly verbatim in Saul D. Alinsky, "Principles of Citizen Action," presentation, May 27, 1963, p. 9, CJEG 67/06, John J. Egan Papers, UNDA; and in 1971 in *Rules for Radicals*, 116, which highlights the centrality of this point for over a decade.

67. Nicholas von Hoffman, "Finding and Making Leaders," presentation, 1963–66, p. 6, CJEG 251/43, National Center for Urban Ethnic Affairs, UNDA.

68. Von Hoffman, "Finding and Making Leaders," 3.

the culture of poverty requires a higher level of organization, such as joining a trade union.⁶⁹ As such, Alinsky attributed the formation of the Caballeros to the agitation of otherwise apathetic community members.

Speaking about Puerto Rican organization in the early days of the Caballeros, Alinsky argued that "one of the issues involved in community organizing [on the near North Side] is the development of certain population controls in terms of housing and occupancy standards. [...] 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."⁷⁰ The conflation of Puerto Rican and African American enclaves with concentrated poverty also reflect the logic of the "culture of poverty," in which hyperlocality and alienation result in poverty and deterioration. For Alinsky, the solution was integration and assimilation into a larger political project and coalition. During the era of the Woodlawn Latin American Committee, Lou Silverman, another organizer, 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."⁷¹ Silverman's comments mirror Lewis's analysis that Puerto Ricans lacked any cultural formation beyond the family and that "landless rural workers who migrate to the cities can be expected to develop a culture of poverty much more readily than migrants from stable peasant villages with a well-organized traditional culture."⁷² As such, developing a "traditional culture" would lead a community toward political organization. Alinsky's reconstruction of community began by "channeling the many diverse forces of self-interests within the community into a common direction for the common good and at the

69. Lewis, *La Vida*, xlviii–l.

70. Saul Alinsky quoted in Horwitt, *Let Them Call Me Rebel*, 279.

71. Horwitt, *Let Them Call Me Rebel*, 272.

72. Lewis, *La Vida*, xlv.

same time respect[ing] the autonomy of individual organizations.”⁷³ But Alinsky defined what constituted the “common good” and legitimate forms of organization worthy of autonomy in a self-serving way. In a jarring anecdote, Alinsky described his encounter with indigenous Canadian protest tactics:

Indians: Well, we can’t organize.

Me [Alinsky]: Why not?

Indians: Because that’s a white man’s way of doing things. [...] You 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 whites stole Indians’ lands, all Indians’ welfare payments are really installment payments due to them and it’s not really welfare or charity.” [...] We kept breaking through one “creative” rationalization after another until finally we got down to the issue of organization.⁷⁴

73. Saul D. Alinsky, “Principles of Citizen Action,” presentation, May 27, 1963, p. 12, CJEG 67/06, John J. Egan Papers, UNDA.

74. Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals*, 110–12. Alinsky attempts to rationalize his rudeness: “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

Leaving aside his arrogance, Alinsky’s organizational goals required that he reject organizational strategies that contradicted his own, which he justified by describing such strategies as “rationalizing inaction.” The example of “creative fishing,” a reference to the 1960s Fish Wars in Washington State to force the US government to recognize a treaty that granted fishing rights, is considered contemptable.⁷⁵ He also dismissed “creative welfare” and tribal sovereignty. Alinsky rejected strategies that did not seek integration within the broader democratic political system or look toward coalitional politics in the manner he envisioned. Projects that did not work within the legitimate democratic political structure were not considered politics or forms of organization.

Von Hoffman and Hunt also questioned the Puerto Rican community’s abilities to self-organize. Responding to a statement by the Chicago Office of the Puerto Rican Commonwealth arguing that Puerto Rican culture could instill a sense of pride and unity among Puerto Ricans, Hunt and von Hoffman asked with concern, “Can Puerto Ricans continue to live in New York and Chicago without undergoing profound

White Canadian organizers] would never say that to us.” For additional context, see Peter Pearson, dir., “Part 2: Rama Indian Reserve,” in *Encounter with Saul Alinsky* (Ottawa, ON: National Film Board of Canada, 1967), video.alexander-street.com/watch/encounter-with-saul-alinsky-part-2-rama-indian-reserve. In this documentary, the indigenous Canadian leader, revealed to be Duke Redbird, is significantly less accepting of the view that indigenous people should work within the democratic system as Alinsky appears to suggest.

75. Bradley G. Shreve, “From Time Immemorial’: The Fish-in Movement and the Rise of Intertribal Activism,” *Pacific Historical Review* 78, no. 3 (Aug. 2009): 403–34.

changes in language and culture, whether they like it or not?”⁷⁶ According to historian Michael Staudenmaier, organizers “encouraged a period of cultural diversity and stressed [its] value,” even as they “looked to [...] complete assimilation as the end of the Americanization process.”⁷⁷ While a degree of cultural pluralism was desirable, it could not reflect any serious material or political divisions or refusal to accept White American or liberal democratic values as they were.

Catholic priests, like Mahon and Donald Headley, trained by Alinsky in the early sixties, adopted a similar perspective.⁷⁸ 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.⁷⁹ The CCSS, run first by Mahon and later by Headley, supervised the Caballeros’ progress toward the goal of integration, at which point the Caballeros would no longer be necessary.⁸⁰ At the local level, each

76. Lester C. Hunt, Jr., and Nicholas von Hoffman, “The Meanings of ‘Democracy’: Puerto Rican Organizations in Chicago,” in *Our Language and Our World: Selections from the Best Articles Published in ETC: A Review of General Semantics 1953–1958*, ed. S. I. Hayakawa (New York: Harper, 1959), 64; Staudenmaier, “Between Two Flags,” 82–83; Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 130–31.

77. Staudenmaier, “Between Two Flags,” 71.

78. John J. Egan to G. R. Bell, letter, Jan. 26, 1965, p. 2, CJEG 20/12, John J. Egan Papers, UNDA; John J. Egan to John S. Cummins, letter, Apr. 29, 1966, p. 2, CJEG 20/11, John J. Egan Papers, UNDA; John J. Egan, letter, Feb. 14, 1964, CJEG 47/14, John J. Egan Papers, UNDA; “Enrollment—Community Analysis and Change Course,” ca. 1964, CJEG 47/14, John J. Egan Papers, UNDA. The Industrial Areas Foundation trained over thirty priests; Donald Headley and several priests in parishes with Caballeros councils attended the foundation’s courses.

79. “El Comité del Cardenal para los de Habla Hispana en Chicago,” *Vida Latina*, Jun. 1957, in Martínez, *Chicago*, 157–58.

80. Kelliher, “Hispanic Catholics,” 144–45; G. A. Carroll and D. J. Headley to John P. Cody, “Cardinal’s Committee for the Spanish Speaking,” memoran-

Caballeros council was supervised by parish priests, who in turn would benefit from the Caballeros serving as intermediaries to their Puerto Rican congregants.⁸¹ In a progress report to Cardinal Meyer around 1960, Mahon explained that “no 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.” Instead, “one must allow a man [leader] to grow as he works *within* the forming group on *whatever* problems the group faces.”⁸²

The CCSS saw indigenous leadership as arising from the implementation of an external organizational strategy because the Puerto Rican community lacked high-level organization and a “culture of poverty” threatened the formation of a ghetto that would prevent a smooth integration within the rest of White Chicago. There were no acceptable organizational structures that preexisted among the community and no “traditional culture”; thus, Puerto Rican leadership had to be developed. Catholic priests also wanted Puerto Ricans to remain dependent on the Church and never expected to cede power. Realizing that they would never be trusted as much as Puerto Rican leaders, they worked through lay leaders to guarantee their continued relevance in the community.

dum, Mar. 15, 1966, EXEC/C0670/43, John Cardinal Cody Papers Collection, ACA; Letter from Gilbert A. Carroll and Leo T. Mahon to Nicholas Galitzine, Jun. 8, 1956, in Martínez, *Chicago*, 139–42; Lester Hunt [Jr.], “Cardinal’s Committee for the Spanish Speaking,” memorandum, Aug. 1965, CJEG 20/11, John J. Egan Papers, UNDA.

81. Gilbert A. Carroll and Donald J. Headley, “Report of the Cardinal’s Committee for the Spanish Speaking,” Jan. 14, 1964, EXEC/C0620/5#3, Albert Cardinal Meyer Collection, ACA.

82. Gilbert A. Carroll and Leo T. Mahon to Albert Meyer, “Present Position on the Puerto Rican Work,” memorandum, ca. 1960, p. 7, EXEC/C0730/172#8, Albert Cardinal Meyer Collection, ACA.

The Puerto Rican Origins of the Caballeros

The Caballeros can be understood historically as a *cofradía* (confraternity). According to Jesuit historian Edmundo Rodríguez, a *cofradía*, common throughout Latin America, was an all-male organization, often with a female auxiliary, that performed what we would today consider both religious and secular functions. Funded by the wealthiest town residents, *cofradías* were both mutual aid societies and religious brotherhoods. They organized large fiestas for saint days, held elaborate memorials for their members, and provided material and spiritual assistance.⁸³

According to its magazine, *La Vendimia* (The Harvest), the Caballeros fulfilled many of the roles of a *cofradía*. It offered “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.”⁸⁴ 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 fiesta included a procession down State Street attended by Mayor Richard J. Daley and Doña Felisa Rincón, Mayor of San Juan; a mass at Holy Name Cathedral; and a feast and live music by the famous salsa musician, Tito Rodríguez, at the Chicago Armory.⁸⁵ The Caballeros

83. Rodríguez, “The Hispanic and Church Movements,” 209; Edward L. Cleary, “In the Absence of Missionaries: Lay Preachers Who Preserved Catholicism,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 34, no. 2 (Apr. 2010): 68.

84. “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.” “Los Caballeros de San Juan,” *La Vendimia*, in Martínez, *Chicago*, 142.

85. See “Activities of San Juan Day 1956,” *Vida Latina*, Jun. 1957, in Martínez, *Chicago*, 160, 187–210 (photographs).

also held large wakes and funerals for their members.⁸⁶ Headley recalled that when his father died “there were four buses that came from Waukegan. [...] [Puerto Ricans] were lined around Betsfires Funeral Home on 53rd 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, [a] great tribute to the community that we worked in, and actually, we loved very much.”⁸⁷

Sociologist Félix Padilla described the Caballeros as “in essence more social than religious,”⁸⁸ which assumes a secular-religious division within a rural society only recently exposed to urban secular politics.⁸⁹ Padilla’s comments reflect how the Caballeros functioned within the politics of Chicago, but may not be how its members understood themselves initially. Religion, race, and political legitimacy all overlapped within the Puerto Rican culture represented in the Caballeros. For example, the Fiesta Anual de San Juan was announced 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 would henceforth be San Juan Week, a celebration of Chicago’s Puerto Rican community.⁹⁰ Lou Silverman, the Woodlawn

86. “Jose Jiménez Video Interview and Biography, Interview 1,” Mar. 15, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park Collection GVSU, digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/24559; José “Cha-Cha” Jiménez, “[Cruz] María Romero Video Interview and Biography,” Jun. 2, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park Interviews, GVSU, digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/24618.

87. José Jiménez, “Father Donald J. Headley Video Interview and Biography,” Aug. 21, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park Interviews, GVSU, digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/24550.

88. Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 127.

89. Puerto Rico held its first democratic election in 1948.

90. See Martínez, *Chicago*, 180–83.

Latin American Committee's public relations man who had previously said that Puerto Ricans had no culture, claimed that "we made the lamb the national animal of Puerto Rico"; a claim that *Time* magazine repeated: "The lamb is not only the symbol of Puerto Rico but of the Chicago Church's potent and growing organization of Puerto Ricans"⁹¹ (see fig. 2). White American organizers claimed to have "invented" (or perhaps "discovered") the unknown or forgotten cultural symbols of an apolitical people. Silverman and *Time* aligned the success of the Caballeros within the context of secular politics and cultural nationalism.

By contrast, an article in the Puerto Rican magazine *Vida Latina*, explained that, since the time of the Spanish conquest, "the 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)."⁹² Puerto Rican leaders emphasized that the symbols of their organizations had been brought from Puerto Rico, and *Vida Latina* framed their celebration of the Caballeros as religious. The connection to Spain and Christendom also had racial implications, tying Puerto Ricans to Whiteness and not to the culture of poverty's association with non-Whiteness. In contrast to White organizers' goal of assimilating a non-White Puerto Rican community into Chicago's political structure, the project of Puerto Rican leaders was to establish that they were already White and thus did not need outside agitation.

91. Horwitt, *Let Them Call Me Rebel*, 273; "Religion: Fiesta," *Time*, Jul. 2, 1956, quoted in von Hoffman, *Radical*, 131.

92. "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)." Salvador Rubalcava, "Juan El Bautista, Profeta de Altísimo: Para los Caballeros de San Juan," *Vida Latina*, Jun. 9, 1957, 9, in Martínez, *Chicago*, 155. Spanish translations by the author.

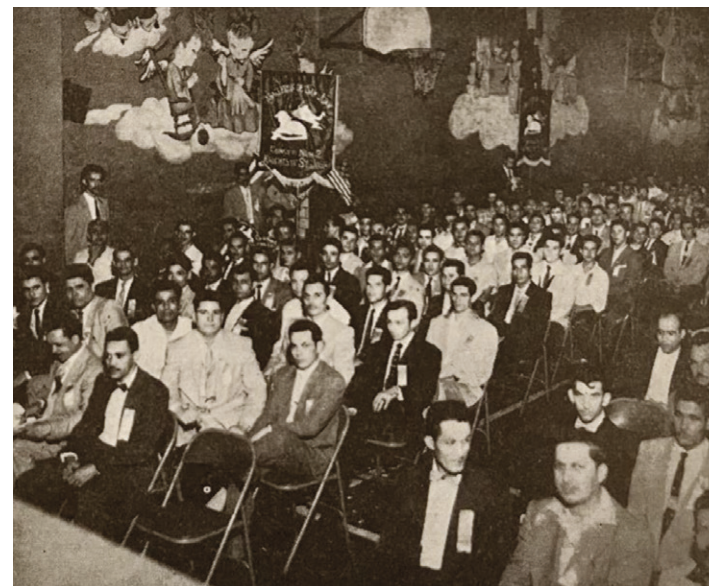


Figure 2: Caballeros Meeting, San Juan Day, 1956. Note the banners with the Lamb of God, inspired by the Puerto Rican coat of arms. Martínez, *Chicago*, 156.

Further examination reveals far more specific connections of the Caballeros to religious practices in the mountains of Puerto Rico. After the United States colonized Puerto Rico in 1898, many priests returned to Spain, which left an even larger institutional void in the countryside.⁹³ Several teenage Catholic Jíbaros began evangelizing in the mountains of Puerto Rico, eventually working together as the Hermanos Cheos, to teach the evils of Protestantism and Spiritism. Unlike ordained priests, the Hermanos Cheos would live among their congregants and serve them in their daily lives, preaching to the illiterate and healing them. Succeeding where the Catholic Church had failed for centuries, they built chapels throughout the countryside and served as intermediaries between the

93. Cleary, "In the Absence of Missionaries," 67.

unreached Jíbaros and the Church hierarchy.⁹⁴ The Cheos toured the countryside of central Puerto Rico with a woman named Elenita, who first came to notice in the town of San Lorenzo.⁹⁵ 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.⁹⁶ This description aptly applies to Elenita, who performed water cures and claimed the power of intercession.⁹⁷ José Morales, leader of the Cheos, was called “*Hombre Dios*,” and Elenita was “*la Virgen*,” “*Madre Redentora*,” or “Our Lady of Mt. Carmel incarnate.”⁹⁸ With power that “spilled over into the secular–political–realm,”⁹⁹ “both men and women obeyed [Elenita’s words] as commands.”¹⁰⁰ But Elenita’s power was also tightly constrained, because it derived from her perceived purity and morality and her association with the Virgin Mary.¹⁰¹

Elenita, “*la Virgen*,” and the Cheos, the “*inspirados*” (inspired ones), likely arose from rural backgrounds, with Elenita following the leadership roles of women who served as lay priests. Although the Cheos adopted some of the values of polite society, this did not grant them legitimacy in the eyes of the Church. Catholic priests and the Catholic press claimed

94. Cleary, “In the Absence of Missionaries,” 67–68.

95. Román, *Governing Spirits*, 52; Vionette G. Negretti, “Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Puerto Rico,” trans. Carlos Caso-Rosendi, *Quod Scripsi, Scripsi* (blog), Mar. 19, 2018, quodscripsi.com/2018/03/19/our-lady-of-mount-carmel-in-puerto-rico.

96. Díaz-Stevens, “Latinas and the Church,” 251.

97. Román, *Governing Spirits*, 55, 59.

98. Román, *Governing Spirits*, 52, 59–60.

99. Díaz-Stevens, “Latinas and the Church,” 253.

100. Román, *Governing Spirits*, 79.

101. Román, *Governing Spirits*, 78–79.

that “the origin of these inspired ones is (Afro) spiritist. [...] These angels are diabolical” and their evangelizing was similar to a “Protestant revival.”¹⁰² 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.”¹⁰³ The desired increase in mass attendance was not worth handing over power to an uneducated laity. The role of priests was “reduced to sacramental functions,” while the Cheos were conducting revivals, administering to the laity, and taking on a stronger leadership role than priests ever had.¹⁰⁴ Even after Elenita’s death in 1909, the Church remained mistrustful of the Cheos, who continued their work near San Lorenzo where a shrine was dedicated to Our Lady of Mount Carmel.¹⁰⁵

By 1913 the Catholic Church realized that the Cheos were too useful to its mission and officially recognized and supported the group’s method of ministry, “provided that the Cheos discontinued the practice of praying publicly for their saint’s inspiration.” By 1927, under a largely North American hierarchy, the Church incorporated the Cheos as a lay movement, with a set of bylaws and a priest as spiritual director.¹⁰⁶ “Only a few years after official recognition, the group’s energies had largely dissipated.”¹⁰⁷

102. *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 Román, *Governing Spirits*, 58.

103. Román, *Governing Spirits*, 58.

104. Román, *Governing Spirits*, 58.

105. Román, *Governing Spirits*, 58.

106. Román, *Governing Spirits*, 60. Cleary, “In the Absence of Missionaries,” 69–70.

107. Román, *Governing Spirits*, 81.

Many *sanlorenceños* would eventually move to Chicago, constituting more than a third of Council No. 1 of the Caballeros in Woodlawn.¹⁰⁸ Eugenia Rodríguez, the mother of José Cha-Cha Jiménez, was born in 1929 in San Salvador, a barrio of Caguas near San Lorenzo. She would later become an important member of the Damas de María, the women's auxiliary of the Caballeros.¹⁰⁹ In Puerto Rico, the Rodríguez family lived near Elenita's shrine and kept a statue of Our Lady of Mount Carmel on their home altar. People would come from the barrio to their house to learn the catechism and pray the rosary with their father, Don Juan.¹¹⁰ Don Juan sent fifteen-year-old Eugenia to a convent after he was unable to care for her due to blindness, but she left the following year to marry Antonio Jiménez, whom she had met in San Salvador.¹¹¹ In the early

108. Kelliher, "Hispanic Catholics," 144, 150, 182. Chicago newcomers first formed small communities with others from their towns in Puerto Rico, see Erika Rodriguez, "The Young Lords and Early Chicago Puerto Rican Gangs: Interview with Puerto Rican Historian Mervin Mendez," Gang Research .net, Jan. 27, 2002, web.archive.org/web/20200810174733/https://gangresearch.net/ChicagoGangs/latinkings/lkhistory.html. The *Hijos de San Lorenzo* appear in Lincoln Park in the Spanish American Federation in 1965, see VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America), "VISTA—As We See It," report, Mar. 1966, p. 11, box 82A, folder 3, Lincoln Park Conservation Association Records, Special Collections and Archives, DePaul University Library, (hereafter DUL).

109. José Jiménez, "Eugenia Rodríguez [Flores] Video Interview and Biography, Interview 1," Jun. 4, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park, GVSU, digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/24610.

110. José Jiménez, "Eugenia Rodríguez [Flores] Video Interview and Biography, Interview 1," Jun. 4, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park, GVSU, digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/24610.

111. Judson Jeffries, "From Gang Bangers to Urban Revolutionaries: The Young Lords of Chicago," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 96, no. 3 (Autumn 2003): 290.

years of Operation Bootstrap, Antonio became a migrant laborer, first in Connecticut and then on Chicago's Near North Side by 1947, where he brought Eugenia and their children to live.¹¹²

Antonio's cousin, Jesús Rodríguez, was born in 1925 in San Lorenzo and joined the Hermanos Cheos in Jayuya, Puerto Rico.¹¹³ After three years of Christian education, he likely taught catechism and became a lay minister under the supervision of other Cheos.¹¹⁴ With more experience, Jesús traveled the island for fifteen years, his apostolate being "very well known among most of the towns of Puerto Rico, where his words pulsed with enthusiasm, sinking into the hearts of his compatriots, in such a way that in short time he became famous, very dear and loved by his countrymen."¹¹⁵ He married Eulalia de Rodríguez and had six

112. Cha-Cha Jiménez Defense Committee, "'Que Viva El Pueblo': A Biographical History of Jose Cha-Cha Jiménez, General Secretary of the Young Lords Organization," ca. 1973, in Yolanda Quiñones and Vicky Romero, "Latina/o Leadership Opportunity Program, 1993–1994," presentation, p. 8, box 81, folder 11, Lincoln Park Conservation Association Records, DUL; Fernández, *The Young Lords*, 16–17.

113. Council No. 10 of the Caballeros de San Juan, "Nervio y Guia," *Boletín Informativo*, Apr. 5, 1964, Manuel Martínez Collection, in the author's possession; José "Cha Cha" Jiménez, audio interview with author, Apr. 16, 2023, recording and transcript in author's possession.

114. Cleary, "In the Absence of Missionaries," 69–70; Council No. 10 of the Caballeros de San Juan, "Nervio y Guia," *Boletín Informativo*, Apr. 5, 1964, Manuel Martínez Collection, in the author's possession.

115. "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." Council No. 10 of the Caballeros de San Juan, "Nervio y Guia," *Boletín Informativo*, Apr. 5, 1964, Manuel Martínez Collection, in the author's possession.

children.¹¹⁶ In 1957, following an extramarital affair, he left Puerto Rico, leaving a “deep void” on the island, and arrived on the Near North Side.¹¹⁷

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.¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, priests in Chicago insisted that they were responsible for organization among Puerto Ricans, despite this history of lay leadership among their congregations. In a 2012 interview with José Cha-Cha Jiménez, Fr. Donald Headley discussed 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. [...] It’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.

116. Council No. 10 of the Caballeros de San Juan, “Nervio y Guía,” *Boletín Informativo*, Apr. 5, 1964, Manuel Martínez Collection, in the author’s possession.

117. “Hondo vacío.” Council No. 10 of the Caballeros de San Juan, “Nervio y Guía,” *Boletín Informativo*, Apr. 5, 1964, Manuel Martínez Collection, in the author’s possession. See, also, José Jiménez, “Father Donald J. Headley Video Interview and Biography,” Aug. 21, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park Interviews, GVSU, digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/24550; Leo T. Mahon, *Fire Under My Feet: A Memoir of God’s Power in Panama* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), 7–10. People often explain that they leave Puerto Rico for marital or familial reasons. Given that many Puerto Ricans were economically dependent on family, the underlying cause for one family member to migrate remains the need to search for work.

118. Kelliher, “Hispanic Catholics,” 149; José Jiménez, “Father Donald J. Headley Video Interview and Biography,” Aug. 21, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park Interviews, GVSU, digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/24550.

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

Headley: It came, pretty much, from Saul Alinsky’s group. [...] 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.¹¹⁹

By attributing the development of the Caballeros to Alinsky-style outside agitators, Headley implicitly understood that what gave the Caballeros their legitimacy and political power as a community organization could not have been the Cheos. In other words, despite being representative of the richness of Puerto Rican Catholic culture, the Cheos did not exhibit the “high-level organization” needed to transcend the culture of poverty. As with Alinsky and the indigenous Canadian organizers, Headley only recognized work within his own political systems as sufficiently political. This leaves the question of how the Caballeros’ political project differed from that of Catholic priests.

119. José Jiménez, “Father Donald J. Headley Video Interview and Biography,” Aug. 21, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park Interviews, GVSU, digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/24550.

The Caballeros as a Community Elite

Los Caballeros de San Juan were established in 1954 by a group of men, several of whom had been members of the Hermanos Cheos in Puerto Rico. The Caballeros were interested in gaining political power in “the city’s power structure,” while not compromising their “cultural pride and integrity.”¹²⁰ There were twenty-eight thousand Puerto Ricans in the city in 1958; and by 1964, there were two thousand active Caballeros members in eleven councils, located in parishes throughout Chicago.¹²¹ Padilla argues that the Caballeros’ far-reaching membership allowed a “Puerto Rican ethnic consciousness fortified by religious faith [to take] hold of the imagination of many new arrivals.”¹²² 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.”¹²³ But contrasting Alinsky’s vision that it was necessary to integrate within the system in order to gain from it, the

120. Marisol Violanda Rivera, “Survival Under Oppression: The Puerto Rican and Allied Struggle for Representation in Chicago, 1950–1983” (PhD diss., Loyola University Chicago, 2017), 46, 54; Gina M. Pérez, “Puerto Ricans,” *Encyclopedia of Chicago*, ed. Janice L. Reiff, Ann Durkin Keating, and James R. Grossman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 664–65.

121. “Los Caballeros de San Juan,” *Vida Latina*, June 1957, in Martínez, *Chicago*, 153. Martínez says there were eventually thirteen councils, but only eleven can be verified, see Gilbert A. Carroll and Donald J. Headley, “Report of the Cardinal’s Committee for the Spanish Speaking,” Jan. 14, 1964, p. 129, EXEC/C0620/5#3, Albert Cardinal Meyer Collection, ACA; and Gilbert A. Carroll and Leo T. Mahon to Albert G. Meyer, “Work among the Spanish-speaking in the Archdiocese of Chicago,” memorandum, ca. 1958, EXEC/C0-730/172#8, Albert Cardinal Meyer Collection, ACA. According to Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 78, there were about thirty-two thousand Puerto Ricans living in Chicago in 1960.

122. Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 130.

123. Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 129.

Caballeros themselves likely believed they were already owed a position of power within Chicago’s political landscape. Although aided by secular and religious organizers affiliated with Saul Alinsky, the Caballeros’ leaders brought organizational strategies to Chicago that they had used as Cheos in Puerto Rico and, contrary to Padilla’s claims, resisted assimilation on the terms defined by these “outside agitators.”

White organizers battled with the mainstream American press in the early sixties to treat Puerto Ricans as a model minority that was on the way to complete assimilation rather than as a “problem.”¹²⁴ Journalist Mary Merryfield complained in a 1961 *Tribune* article that “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.” Frank Diaz, president of Council No. 3 of the Caballeros at St. Michael’s Church in Lincoln Park, explained this resistance to assimilation as nostalgia and pride on the part of first-generation migrants: “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.”¹²⁵ He further stressed that “the majority now arriving from Puerto

124. When a 1960 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 Defender*, Nov. 28, 1960.

125. Mary Merryfield, “They Need What Is in Our Hearts,” *Chicago Tribune*, Jan. 15, 1961. Díaz was the president of the council located at LaSalle and North, closest to St. Michael’s. Díaz’s comments echo the concerns of Hunt and von Hoffman in their 1956 dispute with the Office of the Puerto Rican Commonwealth, which identifies an unwillingness of some Puerto Ricans to learn English. See Hunt and von Hoffman, “The Meanings of ‘Democracy,’” 64.

Rico are high school graduates who can read and write English.”¹²⁶ A woman Merryfield called “Abuelita,” likely a member of the Damas de María, assured readers that Puerto Rican children are well-behaved during mass and that Puerto Rican youth only committed crimes because they wanted to be like “other American boys.” Diaz and “Abuelita” do not challenge the journalist’s middle-class values (that children ought to be well behaved and complete a high level of education). They defend, perhaps too much and with dubious facts, an alternative Spanish-speaking vision of a White middle class that Puerto Ricans measure up to better than North Americans.¹²⁷

We do not know the professional or economic status of Diaz and “Abuelita,” but their defense of their community places them in a broad understanding of “elites.” As a Caballeros council president, Diaz joined an organization modelled on the *cofradías*, which relied on the charity of the wealthy in Puerto Rico. The Caballeros “fulfilled expectations of proper behavior by holding banquets in honor of leaders in the city,” elaborate memorial services, and more dominant leadership roles for men in church and society.¹²⁸ Historian Lilia Fernández writes that it was

126. Diaz likely exaggerates the level of education. According to a CCSS press release, the average Puerto Rican arrived in Chicago with a fourth- or fifth-grade education (this latter figure reflects 1960 Census data). See Cardinal’s Committee for the Spanish Speaking in Chicago, “Fact Sheet for the Press,” ca. 1955, EXEC/C0700/24#9, Samuel Cardinal Stritch Personal Papers, ACA; Hunt and Von Hoffman, “‘The Meanings of ‘Democracy,’” 53; and Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 131.

127. Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire*, 272–75. In Puerto Rico in the 1940s, there was widespread resistance to the imposition of English-language education. As such, it is not surprising that some Puerto Ricans continued to resist attempts to force the English language upon them after arriving in Chicago.

128. Rivera, “Survival Under Oppression,” 47; Rodríguez, “The Hispanic and Church Movements,” 209.

“middle- and upper-class Puerto Rican students and professionals”¹²⁹ who steered the archdiocese away from the segregated national parish model. Like Fernández, Yolanda Nieves, who grew up in the West Town–Humboldt Park area in the 1960s, explained: “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.”¹³⁰ Another practical concern, emphasized in numerous oral histories, was the importance of owning a car. Maryknoll nun Janet Nolan, who conducted ethnographic work on the West Town Puerto Rican community in 1966, explained that it was difficult for people without cars to access services of the CCSS, whose headquarters were on the Near North Side.¹³¹ On the other hand, by 1960, there were too few Puerto Rican professionals to lead the growing Caballeros organization, and many leaders did in fact work in factories, possibly due to stratification within the Puerto Rican blue-collar working class.

Some evidence suggests that some Caballeros had more stable incomes and credit than was typical in the Puerto Rican community. In 1960, the median annual income for Puerto Rican men over the age of fourteen in urban Illinois was \$3,380, with the wealthiest three thousand Puerto

129. Lilia Fernández, “Chicago’s Catholic Archdiocese and the Challenges of Serving a Multiethnic Latino Population,” 50.

130. Yolanda Nieves, video interview with author, Dec. 3, 2021, recording and transcript in author’s possession.

131. Janet Nolan, “Report: Puerto Ricans and the Church in Chicago, 1967,” pp. 11–12, box 2, folder 10, Janet Nolan Ethnographic Research on Puerto Ricans in Chicago Collection, DUL. See, also, Miguel Morales, “Omar López Transcript #1—Print Only / No Audio Cassette,” Feb. 10, 1995, box 3, folder 14, Collection on the Young Lords, DUL; Yolanda Nieves, video interview with author, Dec. 3, 2021, recording and transcript in author’s possession, and Yolanda Nieves, “Borinquén Record Shop & Botanica,” *Diálogo* 15, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 23–25.

Ricans earning over \$4,000.¹³² The median single-unit home was valued at \$18,500, and the median homeowner earned \$7,900; while it was possible to own a home earning less, first-time buyers depended on access to credit.¹³³ According to Wilfredo Santana, a resident of the Puerto Rican enclave in Englewood, unionized factory work and credit offered by the Caballeros credit union, begun in 1957, probably enabled his parents to purchase their home in the mid-sixties.¹³⁴ The total value of capital within the union was \$60,000 in 1961 and over \$600,000 in 1968.¹³⁵ Over time, the credit union became the primary purpose of the Caballeros, enabling an exodus of shareholders to the suburbs.¹³⁶ As urban renewal throughout the 1960s led to improvements for homeowners and displacement for renters, Puerto Ricans identified Caballeros leaders as selling out their

132. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Censuses of Population 1960: Subject Reports, Puerto Ricans in the United States: Social and Economic Data for Persons of Puerto Rican Birth and Parentage PC(2)-1D* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1965), 27.

133. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Censuses of Housing 1960: Residential Finance*, vol. V, pt. 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1965), 179–80.

134. Wilfredo Santana, video interview with author, May 31, 2023, recording and transcript in author's possession. Puerto Ricans who could not speak English were excluded from higher-paid union jobs. See Fernández, *Brown in the Windy City*, 220.

135. Martínez, *Chicago*, 132–33.

136. José Jiménez, "Father Donald J. Headley Video Interview and Biography," Aug. 21, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park Interviews, GVSU, digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/24550; "LADO [Latin American Defense Organization] is growing!" *LADO*, Jun. 1967, 18, private collection of Ken Sawyer, McCormick Theological Seminary; Vidal, "Citizens Yet Strangers," 134.

community by investing in their own housing rather than protecting their community.¹³⁷

Whether members of the Caballeros were truly materially better off than the rest of the Puerto Rican community is beyond the scope of this paper. What is clear is that the Caballeros positioned themselves symbolically as an elite against the culture of poverty as outlined by Oscar Lewis, which involved people who "have a low level of literacy and education, usually do not belong to labor unions, are not members of political parties, generally do not participate in the national welfare agencies, and make very little use of banks, hospitals, department stores, museums or art galleries. They have a critical attitude toward some of the basic institutions of the dominant classes, hatred of the police, mistrust of government and those in high position, and a cynicism which extends even to the church."¹³⁸ The Caballeros attempted to rebut stereotypes by claiming that Puerto Ricans were educated, involved in politics, worked within the Catholic church, and, in 1957, advocated for Puerto Ricans to enter the police force.¹³⁹ They expressed their elite status with banquets and beauty pageants, where they dressed in suits and invited guests of honor from both Chicago and Puerto

137. José Jiménez, "Guillermo Martínez Video Interview and Biography," Mar. 2, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park, GVSU, digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/24583; José Jiménez, "Father Donald J. Headley Video Interview and Biography," Aug. 21, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park Interviews, GVSU, digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/24550; "LADO [Latin American Defense Organization] is growing!" *LADO*, Jun. 1967, 18, private collection of Ken Sawyer, McCormick Theological Seminary.

138. Lewis, *La Vida*, xlvii.

139. Martínez, *Chicago*, 217–18.

Rico.¹⁴⁰ Padilla describes the Caballeros as being “critical of barrio residents refusing to become part of the[ir] rank and file,” citing a newspaper affiliated with the Caballeros, *El Centinela*, which lamented “the antipathy our people show toward” its prestigious activities.¹⁴¹

A conservative and self-isolating elite among the Caballeros was a concern to the Catholic Church, which needed lay leaders to be intermediaries to the more unreachable laity. A CCSS report described St. Mark’s in West Town as having “leadership, but it is rather personal and divided,” and the area was generally under-resourced. Our Lady of Sorrows in Garfield Park had “too 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.”¹⁴² To counteract the rising class divisions in parishes, the CCSS handpicked Jesús Rodríguez to join the Caballeros for his ability to reach community members inaccessible to priests. Rodríguez is a complex character. On the one hand, he worked in a factory, but

140. Cardinal’s Committee for the Spanish Speaking in Chicago “Fact Sheet on Puerto Ricans in Chicago,” ca. 1956, EXEC/C0700/24#9, Samuel Cardinal Stritch Papers, ACA; “Don Luis Ferre y S. E. Samuel Cardinal Stritch, Homenajes por los Caballeros de San Juan,” *Vida Latina*, Jan. 1958, 12–13, in Martínez, *Chicago*; “Elite Social,” *Vida Latina*, Sep. 1957, in Martínez, *Chicago*; Donald J. Headley to Albert Cardinal Meyer, letter, Feb. 10, 1965, EXEC/C0620/5#3, Albert Cardinal Meyer Collection, ACA; Donald J. Headley to John P. Cody, Jul. 12, 1967, letter, EXEC/C0670/43, 43958.04, John Cardinal Cody Papers Collection, ACA; John P. Cody to Felix L. Rivera and Jesus Rodríguez, letter, Nov. 6, 1967, EXEC/C0670/43#4, John Cardinal Cody Papers Collection, ACA; Martínez, *Chicago*, 174–79, 203–4; Gabino Moyet, *A city-wide meeting of Los Caballeros de San Juan, 1958* (photograph), in Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, between 98 and 99.

141. *El Centinela*, Apr. 1959, 4, quoted in Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 139.

142. Gilbert A. Carroll and Donald J. Headley, “Report of the Cardinal’s Committee for the Spanish Speaking,” Jan. 14, 1964, pp. 2–3, EXEC/C0620/5#3, Albert Cardinal Meyer Collection, ACA.

made sure that his son, Carmelo, was among the first Puerto Ricans in Chicago to attend Harvard in the mid-1960s.¹⁴³ He may have valued the Caballeros’ social power as a means to better his family. On the other hand, the CCSS and the Caballeros offered him the organizational structure to exercise his gifts as lay preacher, which he had first practiced as a member of the Hermanos Cheos in Puerto Rico.

La Familia de Dios

Central to the Catholic Church’s mission of integrating the Puerto Rican community was to encourage traditional familial values. To accomplish this, priests believed that church attendance would correct supposedly broken families and the Puerto Rican community would be able to transcend the culture of poverty. (It is also likely that these efforts were related to the decline in church participation that was occurring throughout the Western world in the late fifties and sixties.¹⁴⁴) The Second Vatican Council (1962–65) promised to modernize the Church and combat poverty, particularly rural poverty caused by agricultural mechanization. Among its major reforms, Vatican II sought to increase participation of the laity in ministry, providing a broader institutional framework for the work that the Hermanos Cheos had already assumed. Especially in Latin America, these reforms were meant to reach Catholic peasants who did not participate in the Church and who had developed “popular religion”

143. Council No. 10 of the Caballeros de San Juan, “Nervio y Guía,” *Boletín Informativo*, Apr. 5, 1964, Manuel Martínez Collection, in the author’s possession; José “Cha Cha” Jiménez, audio interview with author, Apr. 16, 2023, recording and transcript in author’s possession; Janet Nolan, “Action Contacts and Ethnographic Notes, 1966 June–July [Interview with Carmelo Rodríguez],” Jun. 16, 1966, box 1, folder 4, Janet Nolan Ethnographic Research on Puerto Ricans in Chicago Collection, DUL.

144. Hugh McLeod, “The Religious Crisis of the 1960s,” in “Christian Churches and Religion in the 20th Century,” special issue, *Journal of Modern European History* 3, no. 2 (2005): 207–9.

that did not align with official rituals and dogmas.¹⁴⁵ In the context of Chicago, the Church applied this mission to migrants living in urban poverty.

In the late fifties and early sixties, several of the programs established by the Caballeros anticipated the Vatican II reforms. Around 1960, a group of Puerto Ricans explained to Fr. Mahon: “We don’t know anything about our faith and we never talk about it. We are hungry for something more.” They drove Mahon to a realization: “Perhaps I had just become another Saul Alinsky. [...] I was a priest; I could do more than care for their material and physical needs. My understanding of evangelization began to expand.” Together with the Caballeros, Mahon would prepare lessons he thought were invigorating, and “they would tell me whether it was ‘great’ or ‘blah’ or ‘lousy.’ Their bluntness led me to understand how little I had known about the people [African Americans] whom I had [previously] ‘converted.’”¹⁴⁶ By the early 1960s, the Caballeros at St. Michael’s were holding Spanish masses, which was part of a broader shift to the vernacular Mass that allowed people to understand the text of the Gospel.¹⁴⁷ These masses were held in the hall, basement, or gym rather than the chapel, which was reserved for the Latin mass attended by White people. Caballero Guillermo Martínez recalled this incident of discrimination more bitterly than he did the removal of Puerto Ricans

145. Phillip Berryman, *Liberation Theology: Essential Facts About the Revolutionary Movement in Latin America—and Beyond* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 12, 24–26, 69–71. The two *Consejos Episcopales Latino-americanos* (in 1955 and 1968) managed the implementation of Vatican II in Latin America.

146. Mahon, *Fire Under My Feet*, 6.

147. Gilbert A. Carroll and Leo T. Mahon to Albert Meyer, “Present Position on the Puerto Rican Work,” memorandum, ca. 1960, p. 3, EXEC/C0730/172#8, Albert Cardinal Meyer Collection, ACA.

from Lincoln Park, where he was a homeowner, in the following years.¹⁴⁸ Meanwhile, a 1964 CCSS report described the Spanish Mass as “at first, a great victory,” and defended the pastor, who had “done a great deal for the Latins in [Lincoln Park]”; but it also noted that the mass “has become a sore point with the people.”¹⁴⁹ For Headley, one of the report’s authors, Spanish mass was a first step to elevate the spiritual awareness of the community (i.e., “meeting people where they are at”); for community members, such as Martínez, Spanish identity was a point of pride, but also a source of discrimination.

An important example of the rise of lay influence in Chicago’s Puerto Rican community was Jesús Rodríguez. Rodríguez had arrived in Chicago around 1957. As a Cheo, he gained the immediate trust and respect of the Puerto Rican community in Lincoln Park, which made him an asset to Mahon and Headley. Jesús maintained 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.”¹⁵⁰ According to Mahon, when a Cheo, almost certainly Jesús,

148. José Jiménez, “Guillermo Martínez Video Interview and Biography,” Mar. 2, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park, GVSU, digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/24583.

149. Gilbert A. Carroll and Donald J. Headley, “Report of the Cardinal’s Committee for the Spanish Speaking,” Jan. 14, 1964, p. 2, EXEC/C0620/5#3, Albert Cardinal Meyer Collection, ACA.

150. “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 conocer tan lóbregas y desiertas en el conocimiento de la doctrina de nuestro hermano Jesucristo, tan abandonado y despreciado por no conocer su verdadera religión.” Council No. 10 of the Caballeros de San Juan, “Nervio y Guía,” *Boletín Informativo*, Apr. 5, 1964, Manuel Martínez Collection, in the author’s possession.

came to Chicago, “neither I nor anyone else announced the fact of his arrival. But somehow, the word got around. [...] 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.”¹⁵¹ Don Jesús, as he was called in the community, would become among the most prominent leaders within the Caballeros, pushing them to adopt a more service-oriented Christian mission.¹⁵² According to Headley and Mahon, Don Jesús was an amazing preacher, able to “move an audience, [...] to move a mountain from one place to another and throw it into the ocean.”¹⁵³ In fact, Headley learned Spanish and learned to preach by following Jesús’s example.¹⁵⁴ Caballero Guillermo Martínez referred to Jesús as a humanitarian, and Carlos

151. Leo T. Mahon, “Talk by Reverend Leo T. Mahon,” Nov. 1961, p. 23, Manuel Martínez Collection, in the author’s possession; Kelliher, “Hispanic Catholics,” 150.

152. Council No. 10 of the Caballeros de San Juan, “Nervio y Guía,” *Boletín Informativo*, Apr. 5, 1964, Manuel Martínez Collection, in the author’s possession. José “Cha Cha” Jiménez, audio interview with author, Apr. 16, 2023, recording and transcript in author’s possession.

153. José Jiménez, “Father Donald J. Headley Video Interview and Biography,” Aug. 21, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park Interviews, GVSU, digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/24550; Mahon, *Fire Under My Feet*, 7–8.

154. José Jiménez, “Father Donald J. Headley Video Interview and Biography,” Aug. 21, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park Interviews, GVSU, digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/24550.

Flores, later a member of the Young Lords, said that his leadership at St. Michael’s formed the community into a “tight-knit family.”¹⁵⁵

But there was a problem: Jesús had left his wife in Puerto Rico and come to Chicago with another woman. Before assuming formal leadership within the Church, he first had to redeem himself. Soon after his arrival, a group of Caballeros “decided [that Lincoln Park] needed a mission and they asked the ‘Hermanos Cheos’ be allowed to give it. [...] People came to the Hall where the layman preached what many consider to be one of the most effective retreats ever given in Spanish in Chicago.”¹⁵⁶ The intense emotional experience of the retreat, recounted by Mahon, was similar to a revival-style rebirth, with the redeemed drawn closer to the church and his fellow Caballeros:

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.”

155. José Jiménez, “Guillermo Martínez Video Interview and Biography,” Mar. 2, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park, GVSU, digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/24583; José Jiménez, “Carlos Flores Video Interview and Biography,” Mar. 29, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park, GVSU, digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/24539.

156. Gilbert A. Carroll and Leo T. Mahon to Albert Meyer, “Present Position on the Puerto Rican Work,” memorandum, ca. 1960, p. 3–4, EXEC/C0730/172#8, Albert Cardinal Meyer Collection, ACA.

[...] He returned to Puerto 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. [...] There 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].¹⁵⁷

The forgiveness of Don Jesús’ wife, Eulalia, was central to his redemption. Mahon said that Don Jesús described his wife “with the sensitivity of an artist crafting the most exquisite porcelain figure,” giving “her the attributes of an angel” or perhaps the Virgin Mary.¹⁵⁸ Within the Caballeros, the social value of Don Jesús was directly tied to the patriarchal role he maintained in his family. The role of women in Mahon’s narrative is to contrast Eulalia’s purity and moral virtue to the woman who sinned by leaving with him for Chicago; the details of the second woman’s story were not worth recounting.

Mahon started a program of lay leadership called the *Hermanos en la Familia de Dios* (Brothers in the Family of God), with Don Jesús as the president, and offered retreats that were part of the *Cursillos de Cristiandad* (Little Courses in Christianity) movement, which had originated in Spain and spread to the Southwestern United States. Mahon had asked Jesús to preach his emotional lesson on “Sin and Forgiveness” at the first three-day cursillo retreat in 1961.¹⁵⁹

157. Mahon, *Fire Under My Feet*, 9–11.

158. Mahon, *Fire Under My Feet*, 8–9.

159. Mahon, *Fire Under My Feet*, 8.

According to priest and religious historian Phillip Berryman, the cursillos

were a kind of weekend retreat, carefully structured to lead to an emotional conversion experience. Having become *cursillistas*, people continued to gather for regular follow-up meetings, and promoted further *cursillo* activists, by being trained to give conferences recounting their own conversion. *Cursillo* morality focused on sins of marital infidelity or drinking [...] and was little concerned about the impact of social structures. Most of the participants were from the wealthy or professional classes, and they set the tone; the poor who participated might initially feel attracted by the apparent air of Christian “brotherhood,” but they soon came to question its depth and sincerity.¹⁶⁰

Though it might be an exaggeration to claim that the Caballeros were among the “wealthy or professional classes,” their mission and Don Jesús’s narrative would have been seen as a success in line with the cursillo movement.

Like the Caballeros, the initial cursillos were exclusive to men and stressed the value of Puerto Rican men within the familial and patriarchal structure. In 1956, Lester Hunt described Puerto Rican men and fathers as “authoritarians,” urging that “if you really want to communicate something [*sic*] important to the [Puerto Rican] family, tell father.”¹⁶¹ Mahon, in a 1963 article entitled “Machismo and Christianity,” argued that men did not attend church as much as women because, “to truly be a man, he must be the giver, the doer,” whereas “receiving” the sacraments

160. Berryman, *Liberation Theology*, 66.

161. Lester C. Hunt [Jr.], “The Puerto Rican in Chicago,” lecture, ca. Nov. 1956, p. 15, EXEC/C0700/24#9, Samuel Cardinal Stritch Personal Papers, ACA.

would make him feel emasculated.¹⁶² Mahon's description follows Díaz-Stevens's account of rural Latin American society, where a man's standing in the patriarchy was related to providing material sustenance to the family and not via church participation. As such, Mahon felt that the "redemption" of Puerto Rican families in Chicago hinged on bringing Puerto Rican men into the church community.

Although men were the ultimate targets of redemption, encouraging female membership also served that goal, because women might be able to reach their husbands through their work in the *Damas* (ladies) and *Hijas* (unmarried daughters) *de María*, the women's auxiliary of the Caballeros. The Damas occupied what was considered a minor leadership role by preparing food for feasts, organizing dances, making home visits, and tending to people's needs (spiritual and otherwise).¹⁶³ While archival evidence about the Damas is sparse, Díaz-Stevens's theory of the matriarchal core holds. Women like "Abuelita," who was mentioned in Merryfield's article, demonstrate that certain women, especially elderly women, were highly respected, despite their absence from institutional records. Eugenia Rodríguez, a Dama known for her piety, took on such a role: she would pray the rosary and Jesús would preach, similar to the Hermanos Cheos and Elenita half a century prior.¹⁶⁴

162. Leo T. Mahon, "Machismo and Christianity," *Chicago Studies: An Archdiocesan Review* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1963), 125–26.

163. José Jiménez, "Guillermo Martínez Video Interview and Biography," Mar. 2, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park, GVSU, digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/24583; José Jiménez, "Eugenia Rodríguez [Flores] Video Interview and Biography, Interview 1," Jun. 4, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park, GVSU, digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/24610; Cardinal's Committee for the Spanish Speaking, "Report for 1961," EXEC/C0730/8#10, Albert Cardinal Meyer Collection, ACA.

164. José Jiménez, "Eugenia Rodríguez [Flores] Video Interview and Biography, Interview 1," Jun. 4, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park, GVSU, digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/24610.

Several cursillos followed for men and women, both separately and together.¹⁶⁵ Mahon prioritized men's retreats because he was confident that women would follow their husbands to classes, but not vice versa.¹⁶⁶ Indeed, "as soon as men and women were convened together, the Cursillo had a built-in preference for male authority."¹⁶⁷ According to Díaz-Stevens, the women's cursillos gave women "an autonomous space from control by men" and allowed for "the traditions of *rezadora* to become formalized, adapted, and improved," which institutionalized roles that woman already played in the community, both in Chicago and in Puerto Rico.¹⁶⁸ In a 1961 CCSS report, the section entitled "Sisters' Work" described that women had already created on their own much of what the cursillos did. They partook in group meetings and volunteered with the CCSS to teach women community skills, sometimes leading "the volunteer[s] to keep up friendship with the women, introduc[ing] them to her friends, and [could] help them in other ways."¹⁶⁹

The Damas' spiritual work often occurred in the home. Eugenia, known as Doña Genia, taught catechism classes in her home to children

165. Cardinal's Committee for the Spanish Speaking, "Report for 1961," p. 10, EXEC/C0730/8#10, Albert Cardinal Meyer Collection, ACA.

166. José Jiménez, "Monsignor Leo T. Mahon Interview and Transcript," Aug. 21, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park Collection, GVSU, digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/24582; Cardinal's Committee for the Spanish Speaking, "Report for 1961," p. 11, EXEC/C0730/8#10, Albert Cardinal Meyer Collection, ACA.

167. Díaz-Stevens, "Latinas and the Church," 262.

168. Díaz-Stevens, "Latinas and the Church," 261.

169. Cardinal's Committee for the Spanish Speaking, "Report for 1961," p. 11, EXEC/C0730/8#10, Albert Cardinal Meyer Collection, ACA.

from the local Catholic school (first St. Michael's, then St. Teresa's).¹⁷⁰ Every day, community members would visit her home, and she could lead them in the rosary. She also maintained a home altar dedicated to Our Lady of Mount Carmel, as her father had done in Puerto Rico.¹⁷¹ At-home catechism classes were also part of the Church's reforms to reach the laity and bring them into the fold of the church. Berryman describes a similar situation in Rio de Janeiro where Protestant churches had higher attendance than Catholic churches, leading the local bishop to "train people," likely also women, "to be catechists who could gather the people for a weekly, or even daily, prayer service, even what was called 'priestless Mass.' [...] Indeed, catechists were trained in many Latin American countries."¹⁷²

In 1964, Mahon and Mary Xavier, a Maryknoll sister, published the spiritual lessons taught in the retreats with the Caballeros and Damas as *The Family of God: A Course for Catechists*. The guide's narrative structure is from the perspective of José Rodríguez, who grows older with each chapter, beginning with his childhood family in Puerto Rico and ending as a married man of twenty-five.¹⁷³ The course focuses on a virtuous model of the Christian family, outlining the responsibilities of respecting a

170. José Jiménez, "Daisy Jiménez Video Interview and Biography, Interview 1," May 16, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park Interviews, GVSU, digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/24557.

171. Cha-Cha Jiménez Defense Committee, "'Que Viva El Pueblo': A Biographical History of Jose Cha-Cha Jiménez, General Secretary of the Young Lords Organization," ca. 1973, box 81, folder 11, Lincoln Park Conservation Association Records, DUL.

172. Berryman, *Liberation Theology*, 66.

173. It is not clear whether José Rodríguez was a real person or a composite of several Puerto Rican men that Mahon had encountered. Leo T. Mahon and Mary Xavier, *La Familia de Dios: Un Curso para Catequistas* (Maryknoll, NY: Maryknoll Publications, 1964); José Jiménez, "Monsignor Leo T. Mahon Interview and Transcript," Aug. 21, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park Collection, GVSU, digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/24582.

mother, father, and neighbor, and avoiding the sins of murder, theft, and adultery. It retells the story of the prodigal son, who, upon sinning, redeems himself by returning to his family and the Family of God (i.e., the Church). The story ends with José explaining that

I, José Rodríguez, was 25 years old when I learned who I really am. [...] I learned to pray when I was small. I knew the Commandments and how to go to Confession; sometimes I went to Communion. But I thought that was all: prayers to say, things to do, things not to do. And then one day a friend of mine asked me to go with him to a class about religion. I went once—then again. Everything in my life took on new meaning; nothing can ever be the same again. [...] As a boy, I used to live in a small peaceful country; now I live in a great crowded city in one of the largest countries in the world. But now I know it does not make any difference where I live. I am always the son of a loving Father. [...] I realize more and more that there are terrible problems in our world today. [...] All my life has taken new meaning, my life as Christ in the world. Of myself, there is little I can do to change anything, but I know Christ is acting through me. So, I can bring His truth and justice to my labor union; His peace and compassion to my neighbors; His goodness, His respect for authority to my job; His great, self-sacrificing love to my family.¹⁷⁴

Mahon and Xavier's *Family of God* text is quite rich and deserves further study into the broader political project of the CCSS and Catholic Church of this time, especially considering how influential it would ultimately become; the selection above being only one example. For the purposes of this essay, my analysis will be limited to the understanding the influence of the Cheos on its theological premises. José's rebirth narrative includes several key virtues emphasized by the CCSS, such as attending

174. Mahon and Xavier, *La Familia de Dios*, 118–20.

weekly Sunday mass in order to avoid “mortal sin.”¹⁷⁵ However, as Mahon explained in a 1961 lecture, many details of the virtues described in the course arose from Puerto Rican congregants. The father character’s virtue is defined not by fidelity but by the charity he offers to his family and community. He lives as Christ and Christ acts through him, almost as intercessor. Mahon uses the word “God-man” to explain how Mexican and Puerto Rican men described Jesus, the same word, *Hombre Dios*, that the *Hermanos Cheos* used to refer to themselves.

Given the importance of family within the community, the CCSS used it as a rhetorical tool to guide Puerto Rican men toward the *Caballeros* and away from secular “street” life. In a 1959 article in the *Centinela* newspaper, Mahon tells a parable of two Puerto Ricans, Juan and José. Juan represented the “‘don’ts’ of assimilation.” He “adopted a street-like manner,” spending money on “socials with friends” or “a car, watch, television set, etc.” By contrast, José was a “family-centered individual” who made personal sacrifices and saved money for a house.¹⁷⁶ Juan and José are largely defined as fathers: Juan typifies the “absent father” of the culture of poverty, who squanders money and can’t support his family; but José cares for his family and brings them to church.

The CCSS’ redemption stories were simplistic, offering men a binary choice: church and family or an immoral secular life. In contrast, the redemption of Antonio Jiménez, Genia’s husband, was more complex. In a 2012 interview, Daisy Jiménez, Genia’s youngest daughter, described how her mother had come “home crying with a swollen finger, and it was killing her and killing her, and she didn’t know what to do.” Her

175. Leo T. Mahon, “Talk by Reverend Leo T. Mahon,” Nov. 1961, pp. 5–15, Manuel Martínez Collection, in the author’s possession.

176. *El Centinela*, Jan. 8, 1959, quoted in Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 138. See, also, Leo T. Mahon, “Talk by Reverend Leo T. Mahon,” Nov. 1961, pp. 14–15, Manuel Martínez Collection, in the author’s possession. It is likely that the José described here is the same José in *The Family of God*.

father came home with friends from a group known as the *Hachas Viejas* (Old Hatchets) 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, because that’s what men did at that time.”¹⁷⁷ Antonio was an alcoholic. “To get her husband to stop drinking, Doña Genia made a ‘promesa’ to dress in black for a year. She persuaded her husband to join the Knights of Saint John.”¹⁷⁸ Antonio became a *Caballero* and joined *Los Hermanos en la Familia de Dios* in 1968.¹⁷⁹ José Cha-Cha Jiménez explained that Antonio stopped hitting his mother roughly around the time that his father stopped drinking and joined the *Caballeros*.¹⁸⁰ During my interview with Cha-Cha, he explained his father’s simultaneous involvement with religious (the *Caballeros* and *Hermanos*) and secular (the *Hachas Viejas*) groups. Antonio occupied a position within the circles of both “Juan” and “José,” which reflects a singular reality that included both Catholicism and the demands of living in Lincoln Park among multiple ethnic and racial groups¹⁸¹:

177. José Jiménez, “Eugenia Rodríguez [Flores] Video Interview and Biography, Interview 1,” Jun. 4, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park, GVSU, digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/24610.

178. Cha-Cha Jiménez Defense Committee, “‘Que Viva El Pueblo’: A Biographical History of Jose Cha-Cha Jiménez, General Secretary of the Young Lords Organization,” ca. 1973, in box 81, folder 11, Lincoln Park Conservation Association Records, DUL; José Jiménez, “Eugenia Rodríguez [Flores] Video Interview and Biography, Interview 1,” Jun. 4, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park, GVSU, digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/24610.

179. “Profesión de los Hermanos–1968,” p. 4, Manuel Martínez Collection, in the possession of the author.

180. José Jiménez, “Daisy Jiménez Video Interview and Biography, Interview 2,” May 10, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park Interviews, GVSU, digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/24558.

181. Arguello, “We Joined Others Who Were Poor,” 437.

Cha Cha: My father was part of [the Hermanos], but... my father was also part of the Hachas Viejas, which was a local gang [laughs]. So... so even though he—even though my mother *pushed* him into the church... *dragged* him into the church... [...] the Jiménezes were also part of the local gang. The first local Puerto Rican gang in Chicago. [...]

Author: So, you kind of see [the Church and the Hachas Viejas] as at odds with each other?

Cha Cha: They were separate. [...] You know, one pushed... one talked against the other. One, one felt guilt against the other. But growing up, [...] I [see that] they were both playing a role in defense of the Puerto Ricans.¹⁸²

The Politics of “Gangs”

In 1957, the aftermath of the Trumbull Park riots, sparked by an attack by a large group of mostly young White men on an African American social club, cascaded throughout the city as an escalation in racially motivated violence between groups of youth, often referred to as “gangs.”¹⁸³ According to Oscar Lewis, within the culture of poverty, “occasionally there are informal, temporary groupings or voluntary associations within slums. The existence of neighborhood gangs which cut across slum settlements represents a considerable advance beyond the zero point of the continuum that I have in mind.”¹⁸⁴ Lewis rejected gangs because their higher form of organization does not fit into his “continuum,” which is away from the culture of poverty “to incorporation [...] into the middle

182. José “Cha Cha” Jiménez, audio interview with author, Apr. 16, 2023, recording and transcript in author’s possession.

183. Diamond, *Mean Streets*, 221–22.

184. Lewis, *La Vida*, xlvii–ii.

class.”¹⁸⁵ Despite Lewis’s recognition that “gangs” transcended the culture of poverty, they still were largely thought of as paradigmatic of a maligned, apolitical, and even anti-revolutionary lumpenproletariat. Faced with the illegitimacy of social organization within the industrial reserve army, “racialized individuals find themselves classified as gangs” with “ease.”¹⁸⁶ After stating that the Hachas Viejas were the first Puerto Rican gang in Chicago, Jiménez corrected both his and my usage of the word: “We didn’t use the word gang. You keep using the word gang. Our enemy used the word gang. We just say, ‘Young Lords.’”¹⁸⁷

There were dozens of highly localized groups, like the Young Lords, that did not cut across neighborhoods, leaving them ambiguously located on Lewis’s continuum. Composed of young male newcomers, especially Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, and African Americans, these groups formed quickly or adapted to the purpose of self-defense against White youths and young men.¹⁸⁸ As Cha-Cha described, his father’s generation, likely in their thirties, needed to defend themselves as much as he did, when, in the eighth grade, he and several others founded the Young Lords around 1961.¹⁸⁹ Although the depiction of crime, violence, and machismo in the 1961 film, *West Side Story*, may have affronted Puerto Rican respectability and maligned Puerto Ricans with negative stereotypes, the Young Lords identified with the Sharks by wearing black jackets with a

185. Lewis, *La Vida*, lii.

186. Martinez, “Toward a Decolonial Imaginary,” 79.

187. José “Cha Cha” Jiménez, audio interview with author, Apr. 16, 2023, recording and transcript in author’s possession.

188. Diamond, *Mean Streets*, 209.

189. Cha-Cha Jiménez Defense Committee, “‘Que Viva El Pueblo’: A Biographical History of Jose Cha-Cha Jiménez, General Secretary of the Young Lords Organization,” ca. 1973, box 81, folder 11, Lincoln Park Conservation Association Records, DUL.

purple stripe.¹⁹⁰ These jackets were likely no cheaper than the Caballeros' suits, as Carlos Flores, a member of the Continentals, recalled, "They would all save money to get their [jackets]." ¹⁹¹

The Young Lords were originally called the Egyptian Lords, combining the names of two African American groups on the West Side, the Egyptian Cobras and the Vice Lords.¹⁹² Orlando Dávila, who had attended Doña Genia's catechism classes, cofounded the Egyptian Lords as a branch of the Egyptian Cobras in 1959 or 1960. After the Egyptian Cobras lost their turf to the Vice Lords, the Egyptian Lords organized themselves separately as the Young Lords.¹⁹³ Groups like the Vice Lords and Egyptian Cobras were not localized to a few city blocks, but had used guns to absorb smaller groups and cut across multiple neighborhoods.¹⁹⁴ The Young Lords exhibited political planning by naming themselves self-consciously in relation to these groups.¹⁹⁵

The racial and national identification of male youth groups was multilayered. The first layer was typically non-White newcomers vs. longer-term White residents. Secondary layers of conflicts occurred between and among racial groups based on nationality. Puerto Ricans

190. Gonzales, "Ruffians and Revolutionaries," 4–6.

191. Mervin Méndez, "Carlos Flores (Sept. 11, 1995)," interview, p. 15, MSS 0065_04_003_001, Collection on the Young Lords, DUL.

192. Gonzalez, "Ruffians and Revolutionaries," 5; Ralph Cintron and Erika Rodriguez "Cha Cha Jimenez: The Origins of Puerto Rican Gangs in Chicago," Gang Research.net, Jun. 2002, web.archive.org/web/20210222120401/http://gangresearch.net/ChicagoGangs/younglords/chacha.htm.

193. Gonzalez, "Ruffians and Revolutionaries," 5. The Vice Lords were also attempting to spread to the North Side, see Diamond, *Mean Streets*, 236.

194. Diamond, *Mean Streets*, 215–18.

195. "Jose Jimenez Video Interview and Biography, Interview 1," Mar. 15, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park Collection, GVSU, digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/24559.

often found themselves in rivalries with Mexicans, who more successfully claimed Whiteness, and in mixed relationships with African Americans. By the early sixties and in response to persistent aggression by White groups, alliances formed between racial and ethnic groups, which created some multiracial and multinational solidarity.¹⁹⁶ The stakes of these conflicts were significant: the enforced color lines in Chicago affected access to housing, employment, and recreational facilities, restricted who was allowed to date women in a group's territory, and, increasingly, controlled participation in drug markets.¹⁹⁷

It is therefore inaccurate to say that these youth groups were emblematic of the putatively disorganized culture of poverty or that their politics were separate from organizations with more legitimacy. They played an active role in the maintenance and development of racial, national, and gender identities that no doubt influenced both the political possibilities of legitimate community organizations and micro-level familial dynamics. In addition, larger organized groups of the variety that Lewis described, such as the Vice Lords, existed continuously with local-level neighborhood youth groups, like the Young Lords. The imprecise "gang" label was leveraged by the Daley administration and later by the criminal justice system broadly to criminalize and pathologize the unsupervised organization of (particularly non-White) young men and boys.¹⁹⁸ Meanwhile, generalized fears of "juvenile delinquency" "pointed to the perceived lawlessness and hooliganism among young people as part of the disorganized culture of

196. See several examples in Diamond, *Mean Streets*, 193–239.

197. Hagedorn, *The Insane Chicago Way*, 32–33.

198. See Beres and Griffith, "Demonizing Youth," 747–66; Hagedorn and MacLean, "Breaking the Frame," 1027–60; and Martinez, "Toward a Decolonial Imaginary."

poverty.¹⁹⁹ While “gang” and “juvenile delinquency” were sometimes used interchangeably and sometimes differentiated, both represented the maligned organization or apolitical disorganization of the lumpenproletariat that needed to be cleared out before any true political organization could occur.²⁰⁰

Conservative groups, like the Caballeros and the CCSS, started juvenile delinquency–prevention programs, such as Boys and Girls Clubs and afterschool activities, to keep children off the streets. Detached Worker programs at YMCAs throughout Chicago hired older “gang” members to function as a point of entry for social workers to interact with these youth groups. 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,” and the programs may have had the opposite effect.²⁰¹ Cha-Cha Jiménez rejected the idea that young people were in “gangs” due to the lack of alternative programs: “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.”²⁰² The “civilizing mission” of these alternative programs

199. “The ‘culture of poverty’ model for explaining the nature of life among urban poor is at least a century and a quarter old in the U. S.” Several organizations in the mid-nineteenth century “launched attacks on the juvenile delinquent,” which arose from “the dangerous emergence an inner-city subculture of poverty.” Steven L. Schlossman, “The ‘Culture of Poverty’ in Ante-Bellum Social Thought,” *Science & Society* 38, no. 2 (Summer 1954): 152, 154.

200. For more on fear of juvenile crime in the 1950s, see Jason Barnosky, “The Violent Years: Responses to Juvenile Crime in the 1950s,” *Polity* 38, no. 3 (July 2006): 314–44.

201. Fernández, *The Young Lords*, 30.

202. Jose Jimenez Video Interview and Biography, Interview 1,” Mar. 15, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park Collection, GVSU, digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/24559

could, at times, be dehumanizing. In May of 1966, Juan Díaz, treasurer of Caballeros Council No. 8 at St. Mark’s in West Town and leader of the Latin American Boys Club, told the Maryknoll nun Janet Nolan 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.”²⁰³ Here, again, appears the multilayered interrelation of value to Puerto Rican identity. To Díaz, resistance to the expectations of the Caballeros excluded the Latin Kings from the ideal of Puerto Rican community. By defying proper familial norms (failure to respect their elders and, in particular, a nun) and not speaking Spanish, they were judged too old to change and less than human.

Genia’s son, Cha-Cha, grew up during the moral panic concerning juvenile delinquency and the “gang crisis.” He found himself caught between his pious mother and the need to survive on the streets. From a young age, his mother encouraged him to become a priest, a goal which he took somewhat seriously. His younger sister Daisy recalled that, as children, she and her siblings “played priest and nuns [...] 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.”²⁰⁴ In elementary school, Cha-Cha gained a reputation among neighborhood parents as a troublemaker, and his mother had him meet with a priest. He became an altar boy, first at St. Michael’s Church in Old Town and then at St. Teresa’s

203. Janet Nolan, “Log, 1966 May [The Latin Kings],” May 19, 1966, p. 2, box 1, folder 2, Janet Nolan Ethnographic Research on Puerto Ricans in Chicago Collection, DUL.

204. José Jiménez, “Daisy Jiménez Video Interview and Biography, Interview 1,” May 16, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park Interviews, GVSU, digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/24557.

Catholic School on Armitage Avenue in Lincoln Park. He received financial assistance, presumably due to his mother's reputation among priests, especially Fr. Headley of St. Teresa's.²⁰⁵ 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. [...] He 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.²⁰⁶

Genia pushed Cha-Cha (and her husband) to become more involved with the Church, and a nun at St. Teresa's guided him toward respectability and away from "bad influences." These pious women proved more effective than priests. Carlos Castro, the first Puerto Rican to join the otherwise African American Blackstone Rangers, said in a conversation with Janet Nolan that "sisters could do real good with gangs, [...] better than priests. Because [sisters] respect [gang members]. A priest is just another man. Besides, the sisters have something [in their hearts]."²⁰⁷

205. Cha-Cha Jiménez Defense Committee, "'Que Viva El Pueblo': A Biographical History of Jose Cha-Cha Jiménez, General Secretary of the Young Lords Organization," ca. 1973, box 81, folder 11, Lincoln Park Conservation Association Records, DUL; José Jiménez, "Ricardo Rebollar Video Interview and Biography," Jul. 11, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park, GVSU, digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/24601.

206. Cha-Cha Jiménez Defense Committee, "'Que Viva El Pueblo': A Biographical History of Jose Cha-Cha Jiménez, General Secretary of the Young Lords Organization," ca. 1973, box 81, folder 11, Lincoln Park Conservation Association Records, DUL.

207. Janet Nolan, "Action Contacts and Ethnographic Notes, 1966 June–July

After a visit to St. Michael's School, which was predominantly Puerto Rican and African American, Nolan observed that "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."²⁰⁸ Carlos Flores attended St. Michael's.²⁰⁹ Ricardo Rebollar, a second-generation Mexican who attended St. Teresa's and was a friend of Cha-Cha, felt supported and even challenged by his teachers; when he was an altar boy, he recalled that Fr. Headley told 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.'"²¹⁰ However, despite offering support to young Puerto Ricans and the community as a whole, that support was contingent on maintaining Catholic virtues and abstaining from "delinquent behavior."

[Carlos Castro—YMCA Detached Worker], Jul. 8, 1966, p. 1, box 1, folder 4, Janet Nolan Ethnographic Research on Puerto Ricans in Chicago Collection, DUL.

208. Janet Nolan, "Action Contacts and Ethnographic Notes (folder 1 of 2), 1966 October [A Visit from the Continentals, Oct. 5, 1966, p. 2] and [24's Talk with the Principal of St. Michael's High School, Oct. 6, 1966, p. 2]," both in box 1, folder 7, Janet Nolan Ethnographic Research on Puerto Ricans in Chicago Collection, DUL; "Chicago St. Michael Central H.S. 'Warriors,'" Illinois High School Glory Days, accessed Feb. 7, 2022, [web.archive.org/web/20201021105129/http://www.illinoishsglorydays.com/id826.html](http://www.illinoishsglorydays.com/id826.html)

209. José Jiménez, "Carlos Flores Video Interview and Biography," Mar. 29, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park, GVSU, digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/24539.

210. José Jiménez, "Ricardo Rebollar Video Interview and Biography," Jul. 11, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park, GVSU, digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/2460.

Outside of St. Teresa's, Cha-Cha was in danger from being attacked by White young men. Along with Orlando Dávila, whom he knew from his mother's catechism class, and some other friends, Cha-Cha founded the Young Lords to defend themselves.²¹¹ Cha-Cha was leading two separate lives: one on the streets with the Young Lords and the other as his mother's son, striving to join the priesthood. Alfredo Calixto, a member of the Latin Souls whose parents were also in the Caballeros and Damas, said, "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."²¹² Cha-Cha, too, shared this complex identity. After spending the summer of 1962 contesting territory with White youths at the Lincoln Park beach, once "classes resumed, he split from the gang to readapt himself to a different environment."²¹³

Until the end of the eighth grade in 1963, Cha-Cha and Ricardo were planning to join the Servite Order; Cha-Cha recalled that "I wanted to be a Serv[ite]. That I remember. But to me it wasn't... political, it was just kind of like, we needed to save the Latino [laughs] community or something."²¹⁴

211. Cha-Cha Jiménez Defense Committee, "'Que Viva El Pueblo': A Biographical History of Jose Cha-Cha Jiménez, General Secretary of the Young Lords Organization," ca. 1973, box 81, folder 11, Lincoln Park Conservation Association Records, DUL.

212. José Jiménez, "Alfredo Calixto Video Interview and Biography," Feb. 8, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park, GVSU, digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/24235.

213. Cha-Cha Jiménez Defense Committee, "'Que Viva El Pueblo': A Biographical History of Jose Cha-Cha Jiménez, General Secretary of the Young Lords Organization," ca. 1973, box 81, folder 11, Lincoln Park Conservation Association Records, DUL.

214. José Jiménez, "Ricardo Rebollar Video Interview and Biography," Jul. 11,

But school officials blocked Cha-Cha from joining the seminary. His friend Ricardo recalled that the priests and sisters at St. Teresa's refused to sign the papers for Cha-Cha. They claimed that his family was behind on their tuition payments, called into question the legitimacy of his birth, and had expelled him for hitting a priest with a snowball, which Cha-Cha described as "the straw that broke the camel's back."²¹⁵ 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: "You had two eager kids who are willing to go to the edges of hell. And you suddenly cut them off?" Although Ricardo was allowed to continue to seminary, he decided that without his friend, he would not attend.²¹⁶ In the following years, Cha-Cha seemed to realize that his trajectory was different from his peers: when he introduced Ricardo to some of the Young Lords, Cha-Cha told him, "Hey, you need to be a college boy." Meanwhile, Ricardo felt that it was Cha-Cha's role as a leader in the community that kept him safe and able to pursue higher education without needing to join a group such as the Young Lords for his own self-defense, eventually becoming the first Latino to graduate from DePaul with a master's.²¹⁷

2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park, GVSU, digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/2460.

215. José Jiménez, "Ricardo Rebollar Video Interview and Biography," Jul. 11, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park, GVSU, digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/2460; Cha-Cha Jiménez Defense Committee, "'Que Viva El Pueblo': A Biographical History of Jose Cha-Cha Jiménez, General Secretary of the Young Lords Organization," ca. 1973, box 81, folder 11, Lincoln Park Conservation Association Records, DUL.

216. José Jiménez, "Ricardo Rebollar Video Interview and Biography," Jul. 11, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park, GVSU, digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/2460.

217. See José Jiménez, "Ricardo Rebollar Video Interview and Biography," Jul. 11, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park, GVSU, digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/2460; Fernández, *The Young Lords*, 22–23.

There were no Puerto Rican priests in Chicago in 1961.²¹⁸ The Church's exclusion of Cha-Cha from a legitimate leadership position and social mobility, reflected a generalized moral view of young Puerto Rican men: Cha-Cha was a troublemaker who could not successfully be reformed into a proper leader. Puerto Rican boys and men in the sixties faced an early form of the school-to-prison pipeline, which removed them from society entirely, as observed by Sister Janet Nolan:

1. From the local **public school**, the “slow learner”—sometimes slow because of 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 the
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

218. Jose Antonio Acevedo's obituary states that he was “the first Puerto Rican Archdiocesan priest in Chicago.” After his 1968 ordination, he joined St. Aloysius in West Town, on Claremont and LeMoyné, but left the church a few years later, “frustrated with how the Church was serving the Latino community.” See, Alejandro Molina, “Jose Antonio Acevedo,” Puerto Rican Cultural Center, Jan. 2, 2016, prcc-chgo.org/2016/01/02/jose-antonio-acevedo-priest-father-uncle-educator-and-advocate-for-latinos-in-education; and “Ordained 1968,” St Mary of the Lakes Seminary,” accessed Sept. 3, 2024, www.9898.us/q61a/stmaryofthelakesseminary.pdf.

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.²¹⁹

With his path to the priesthood cut off, Cha-Cha's involvement with the Young Lords escalated to committing crimes, serving time in jail, and being “deported” to Puerto Rico for a few months. Although Cha-Cha was assuming the maligned “Juan” model of manhood described by Fr. Mahon, he remained his mother's son, and she loved him unconditionally. His sister Daisy recalled when she and her mother caught 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 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.”²²⁰ He was also the man of the house when his father wasn't home. 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 their mother “didn't understand that we kept telling

219. Janet Nolan, “Report: Puerto Ricans and the Church in Chicago, 1967,” p. 16, box 2, folder 10, Janet Nolan Ethnographic Research on Puerto Ricans in Chicago Collection, DUL.

220. José Jiménez, “Daisy Jiménez Video Interview and Biography, Interview 1,” May 16, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park Interviews, GVSU, digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/24557.

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.”²²¹ In 1966, an inebriated Cha-Cha also beat a former girlfriend and stabbed her new boyfriend, who survived.²²²

Irrespective of the institutional forces that prevented Cha-Cha from joining the priesthood (perhaps barring some miraculous redemption story), it is unclear if he had a strong vocation. During his 2012 interview with Ricardo, Cha-Cha had apparently forgotten (or perhaps, did not fully realize) his youthful ambition to become a community-oriented priest, which multiple other sources corroborated. When I asked him about his change in course, he described the factors at play:

My mother was getting me more deeper into the church. When I say [I was] “singled out” it means... we were being chased. [...] At the same time, she’s doin’ that [...] I’m refusing, I don’t wanna get into the church, I don’t wanna do nothin’... and then everything kind of climaxed together, and we got chased by [...] adults, you know, and kids chased us. And we got beaten up. My father, he usually had issues with the Mexicans, with the Italians. And then, even though we had issues [before], it climaxed. [The conflicts] had moved to a higher phase.²²³

221. José Jiménez, “Daisy Jiménez Video Interview and Biography, Interview 1,” May 16, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park Interviews, GVSU, digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/24557.

222. Cha-Cha Jiménez Defense Committee, “‘Que Viva El Pueblo’: A Biographical History of Jose Cha-Cha Jiménez, General Secretary of the Young Lords Organization,” ca. 1973, box 81, folder 11, Lincoln Park Conservation Association Records, DUL.

223. José “Cha Cha” Jiménez, audio interview with author, Apr. 16, 2023, recording and transcript in author’s possession.

In this retrospective account, Cha-Cha, like his father, was pushed into the Church by his mother. But if he sought to become a leader of his community, it would be through escalating street politics, not in the Church. As the sixties progressed, the Catholic Church’s and the Caballeros’ inability to serve the needs of their community would ultimately cause them to fail in the face of a quickly radicalizing grass roots.

Toward Liberation

The progressive strain within the Catholic Church continued to radicalize during the 1960s, which drew Fr. Mahon away from Chicago and likely substantially weakened the CCSS. Under Cardinal Albert Meyer (1958–65), Mahon recalled that “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,” which Meyer granted.²²⁴ In 1961 Pope John XXIII called upon European and American Catholics to send clergy to Latin America, in order to rebalance the ratio of laypeople to priests.²²⁵ Mahon seized the opportunity to propose that the Archdiocese of Chicago fund a mission organized in the same structure as the Hermanos en la Familia de Dios. Meyer at first rejected the proposal but changed his mind after attending the first sessions of Vatican II in 1962. Mahon left Chicago in February of 1963 to establish the San Miguelito mission outside Panama City.²²⁶

By his own account, Mahon was guided by leaders in the Caballeros to the experimental forms of ministry that would eventually make him

224. Mahon, *Fire Under My Feet*, 15.

225. Pauline Rose Walbel, “A History of the Sisters of St. Mary of Oregon’s Mission in Tamshiyacu, Peru, 1966–1973” (master’s thesis, Portland State University, July 16, 1990), 4–5, pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/open_access_etds/4132.

226. Mahon, *Fire Under My Feet*, 15–19.

famous. The then Catholic priest, Ivan Illich, who, interestingly, first ministered in New York's Puerto Rican community, at least initially endorsed Mahon's catechetical approach and *The Family of God* as "the most valuable things the United States will ultimately have exported to Latin America."²²⁷ Mahon's mission became a model for pastoral missions in Latin America, most famously adopted by Ernesto Cardenal on the Solentiname Islands in Nicaragua.²²⁸ Phillip Berryman credits Mahon with the creation of the concept of the base Christian community that would be a core feature of Liberation Theology in the coming decades.²²⁹ However, Mahon always opposed folk religiosity as "pagan festivals covered by a layer of Christianity," which in his eyes failed to transcend the illegitimate superstitions of the culture of poverty, and he devoted his efforts to bringing people into the church through "teaching and explanations of each liturgical action."²³⁰

Cardinal Meyer died in 1965 and his successor, John Cody, was not as open minded. Mahon said that "Cody was no Meyer, that Vatican II hadn't touched his heart, and that he remained a traditional Prince of the

227. Todd Hartch, "Ivan Illich and Leo Mahon: Folk Religion and Catechesis in Latin America," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 36, no. 4 (Oct. 2012): 186. Illich would later denounce the Church's missionary efforts as part of a "multifaceted plan to keep Latin America within the ideologies of the West" (185).

228. "Remembering Ernesto Cardenal: Selections from His Archive," University of Texas Libraries, accessed Jan. 22, 2025, exhibits.lib.utexas.edu/spotlight/remembering-ernesto-cardenal/feature/from-kentucky-to-solentiname.

229. Hartch, "Ivan Illich and Leo Mahon," 186; Philip J. Williams, "Attempts to Build a Grassroots Church in Nicaragua," in *The Catholic Church and Politics in Nicaragua and Costa Rica* (London: Macmillan, 1989), 43–63; Berryman, *Liberation Theology*, 67. Berryman appears to have himself served at San Miguelito in the 1960s.

230. Hartch, "Ivan Illich and Leo Mahon," 186.

Church."²³¹ Cody would undercut the CCSS, and by proxy undercut the Caballeros as well. An August 1966 article in *El Puertorriqueño* expressed concern that Cody had removed Spanish-speaking priests from West Town parishes; it was also rumored that Cody planned to dissolve the Cardinal's Committee for the Spanish Speaking, which Headley directed.²³² Cody reconstituted the CCSS as the Archdiocesan Latin American Committee and appointed new staff.²³³ By 1967 people spoke of the CCSS as "something of the past."²³⁴ Headley left Chicago in 1968 to join Mahon at the San Miguelito mission in Panama.²³⁵

The mid-sixties also saw a shift in the power of the Caballeros. A number of secular organizations took control of the Fiesta de San Juan in 1966 and transformed it into the Puerto Rican Parade. On June 12, 1966, a day after the parade, the police shot and wounded a young Puerto Rican man, Arcelis Cruz, and the ensuing riot lasted for three days.²³⁶ Juan Díaz and other Puerto Rican leaders met at the Latin American Boys Club headquarters desperately and hopelessly attempting to wrest control

231. Mahon, *Fire Under My Feet*, 103.

232. Janet Nolan, "Action Contacts and Ethnographic Notes, 1966 August ['The Cardinal's Committee for the Spanish Speaking People,' *El Puertorriqueño*]" transcription of newspaper article, Aug. 12, 1966, box 1, folder 5, Janet Nolan Ethnographic Research on Puerto Ricans in Chicago Collection, DUL.

233. Harry C. Koenig, ed. *A History of the Offices, Agencies, and Institutions of the Archdiocese of Chicago*, vol 2 (Chicago: Catholic Bishop of Chicago, 1981), 914.

234. Janet Nolan, "Report: Puerto Ricans and the Church in Chicago, 1967," pp. 11–12, box 2, folder 10, Janet Nolan Ethnographic Research on Puerto Ricans in Chicago Collection, DUL.

235. José Jiménez, "Father Donald J. Headley Video Interview and Biography," Aug. 21, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park Interviews, GVSU, digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/24550.

236. Félix M. Padilla, "Evolution and Resolution of Conflict," *Diálogo* 2, no. 1 (1997): 9.

of the situation behind the scenes.²³⁷ Fr. Headley tried fruitlessly to stop the crowd from burning a police car, and several members of the *Hermanos en la Familia de Dios* were arrested.²³⁸ But only the Latin Kings were able to maintain discipline and stop the young men and boys from rioting.²³⁹ The parade and subsequent riot, the dissolution of the CCSS, and the loss of their advocates, Mahon and Headley, marked the decisive end to the Caballeros' leadership monopoly within the Puerto Rican community.

Lay leaders in Chicago also continued to develop during the sixties. Vatican II gave Don Jesús a "different image of church. The 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."²⁴⁰ According to Headley, Jesús had begun to understand the Gospel as a text that could both liberate and bring together community. Drawing from Paul's letter to the Galatians, 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.

237. Janet Nolan, "Action Contacts and Ethnographic Notes: Juan Diaz, 1966–1967 [Interview with Juan Díaz, No. 1, and No. 2, Jun. 15, 1966, pp. 2–4] and [Interview with Juan Diaz on Subject of Riot at Damen and Division, Jun. 17, 1966, pp. 3, 6, 16, 21]," both in box 2, folder 9, Janet Nolan Ethnographic Research on Puerto Ricans in Chicago Collection, DUL.

238. Mervin Méndez, "Recollections: 1966 Division Street Riot," *Diálogo* 2, no. 1 (1997): 32.

239. José Jiménez, "Omar López Video Interview and Biography, Interview 1," Feb. 7, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park Interviews, GVSU, digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/24576.

240. José Jiménez, "Father Donald J. Headley Video Interview and Biography," Aug. 21, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park Interviews, GVSU, digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/24550.

Men and women, Jews and Greeks, slaves and free."²⁴¹ 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."²⁴² While Mahon was able to use the language of revolution to open the door to missionizing, he invited Don Jesús to Panama in order to inspire the people, "who were impressed by the commitment and passion of a fellow layman" and who called Christ "not 'king' or 'lord' but 'great revolutionary leader.'"²⁴³

When José Cha-Cha Jiménez had turned to the streets and become a leader of the Young Lords, his choice reflected a struggle that he and many other young Puerto Rican men of the second generation had dealt with their entire lives. But his choice was a mark of immorality in the eyes of the state and his own community leaders. During his radical transformation in prison in the spring of 1968, he was reminded of his mother's attempts to guide him to the priesthood, was ashamed of his past, and was called to confess his sins. He was the prodigal son, and this was an opportunity for redemption. This redemption, however, would not lead him to attend mass, put on a suit, or get married and start a family. Instead, he would redeem himself on his own terms. He would "politicize" the Young Lords and commit himself to fight the conditions that were oppressing himself and his community. He returned home, not

241. José Jiménez, "Father Donald J. Headley Video Interview and Biography," Aug. 21, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park Interviews, GVSU, digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/24550.

242. José Jiménez, "Monsignor Leo T. Mahon Interview and Transcript," Aug. 21, 2012, Young Lords in Lincoln Park Collection, GVSU, digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/document/24582.

243. Hartch, "Ivan Illich and Leo Mahon," 187.

to beg for forgiveness, but to fight for his community and demand acceptance. He would show them that a “gang” could start a revolution.

According to Cha-Cha, though the Caballeros would continue to deride the Young Lords as a gang, Don Jesús, Cha-Cha’s third cousin and the father of two Young Lords, saw them differently. Cha-Cha said of his cousin:

We respected each other, at one point he made that statement, that “Jesus [Christ] was a revolutionary,” because he respected the Young Lords, what the Young Lords were doing, because he was an *independentista* [supporter of Puerto Rican independence], and the Young Lords were independentistas. So, he didn’t have independentistas in the Caballeros. [...] I mean they were there, there were several, but he didn’t really have them. [...] But if he followed the Young Lords, the Caballeros wouldn’t follow him. So, you know, he was walkin’ on a string. [...] But that was about it because even he thought we were a “gang.”²⁴⁴

Relationships between members of the Caballeros were tense for most of the years of the group’s existence, including between independentistas and conservatives and between those who respected the younger generation and those who dehumanized them. But for nearly a decade the Caballeros was the apparatus that advocated for and strengthened the Puerto Rican community in Chicago, until they fragmented and lost power. Their influence had a lasting mark, including on José Cha-Cha Jiménez, who had created the Young Lords in “self-defense” and who

244. José “Cha Cha” Jiménez, audio interview with author, Apr. 16, 2023, recording and transcript in author’s possession.

transformed the Young Lords into an organization that “made a dramatic impact on the national conversation about civil rights and urban communities in the late 1960s and early ’70s.”²⁴⁵ As the Caballeros passed the torch, somewhat unwillingly, to the next generation of Puerto Ricans, the struggle to elevate the Puerto Rican community from poverty and earn respect and power for themselves as they were, would go on. ○

245. Clay Risen, “José Jiménez Dies at 76; Turned a Gang into a Voice for Puerto Ricans,” *New York Times*, Jan. 22, 2015, www.nytimes.com/2015/01/22/us/jose-jimenez-dead.html.

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