

# CARIBE

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## THE YOUNG LORDS PARTY 1969-1975

Photos by  
Hiram Maristany

Text by  
Felipe Luciano

## CARIBE STAFF

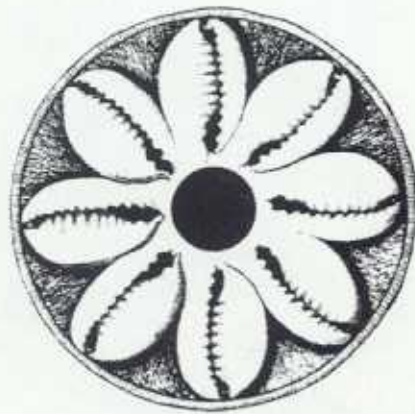
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*administrative assistant*  
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### Editor's Note:

All photographs used in this issue are by Hiram Maristany except those of the opening of the exhibition and the Young Lords panel at Columbia photographed in 1983 which are by Marco Kalisch.



## Table of Contents

From the Publisher	Marta Moreno
Editorial	Duane L. Jones
Background of The Young Lords Party	Kristen Simone
The Need For Change: The Young Lords Party	Marta Moreno
Dedication	Felipe Luciano
Photographs and Text from Fall '83 Young Lords Exhibition	Hiram Maristany, Felipe Luciano
Biographical Sketches	Felipe Luciano, Hiram Maristany

## BACKGROUND ON THE YOUNG LORDS PARTY

compiled by Kristen Simone

The Young Lords Party was a movement of young urban activists who organized in East Harlem in the late 1960s to improve living conditions for Hispanics and Blacks in New York City.

### ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Over a very short period of time The Young Lords addressed many chronic ghetto problems that were not being resolved by established means.

The Young Lords were effective in:

- improving sanitation by demanding increased city services;
- introducing door-to-door testing for TB, lead poisoning, and sickle cell anemia;
- lobbying for regulations on the use of lead-based paint;
- planning and implementing community services such as children's breakfast programs, clothing drives for the poor and day care centers;
- facilitating delivery of health services to the disadvantaged;
- building cultural pride among Puerto Ricans and catalyzing the creation of cultural institutions (such as El Museo del Barrio and the Association of Hispanic Arts Inc.) and Puerto Rican studies programs at colleges and universities.

### ACTIONS

The Young Lords Party was formed in 1969 by a merger of community-action groups in East Harlem and the Lower East Side.

New York's Young Lords took to the streets almost immediately to improve living conditions in Spanish Harlem through a series of bold actions.

The organization's first action was a Garbage Offensive in the streets of El Barrio during the summer of 1969. It was designed to force the Sanitation Department to make more frequent pickups.

The Garbage Offensive was followed by a number of other public actions which drew local and national attention to the work of The Young Lords Party.

The photographic exhibition at the Caribbean Cultural Center covered primarily 1969-72, the Party's most intense period of growth and activity.

Among these events:

**Summer 1969** — East Harlem Garbage Offensive in El Barrio.

— Opening of the Young Lords storefront office on Madison Avenue between 111th and 112th Streets. Leadership of the organization at this time included Felipe Luciano as Chairman; Pablo "Yoruba" Guzman, Minister of Information; Juan Gonzalez, Minister of Education; David Perez, Minister of Defense; and Juan "Fi" Ortiz, Minister of Finance.

**Fall 1969** — Establishment of free breakfast program and extensive testing for lead poisoning and TB leading to New York City investigations revealing epidemics.

— Opening of Young Lords office in Newark.



— Organization of Puerto Rican and Black hospital workers.

**December 1969** — People's Church Offensive: Takeover of Methodist Church at Lexington Avenue and 111th Street after congregation refused to permit Young Lords to run community programs out of Church.

**Spring 1970** — Opening of Bronx Office

— Publication of newspaper *Palante* and broadcast of weekly radio program over WBAI-FM.

— Seizure of New York City TB testing van in El Barrio.

**Summer 1970** — Lincoln Hospital Offensive: The Young Lords Party demands better services for South Bronx residents by taking over a vacant building in hospital complex to run TB and lead poisoning detection programs and create a day care center.

— Opening of Young Lords office on Lower East Side.

— Felipe Luciano steps down as Party Chairman.

New Central Committee: Gloria Gonzalez and David Perez, Field Marshalls; Juan Gonzalez, Minister of Defense; Juan "Fi" Ortiz, Chief-of-Staff; Denise Oliver, Minister of Finance.

— Creation of new branch of Young Lords Party in Philadelphia.

**Fall 1970** — Funeral march for Julio Roldan protesting this Young Lord's suspicious prison death.

— Second takeover of the People's Church.

— March to the U.N. of 10,000 people recognizing the anniversary of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party.

### THE ORGANIZATION

At the outset, the group was allied with the National Young Lords Organization based in



**FREE BOBBY SEALE MARCH — FREE PANTHER 21 MARCH  
— FREE RAFAEL VIERA  
MARCH — 1969**

The sixties represented an era of collective vision and collective responsibility. Whenever the State assaulted one part of the organism all the parts felt the pain. Multi-ethnic, multi-racial marches and rallies were commonplace simply because it had been discovered through painful experience that when one revolutionary group was repressed, another revolutionary group would be next on the list.

The Panther 21 Rally galvanized the entire racial community in New York City to action. We used their arrest to focus attention on both Bobby Seale's arrest and Rafael Viera's arrest in Detroit after a shoot-out between the Republic of New Afrika and the police there. These photos chronicle the march which moved through the streets of Manhattan across the 59th Street Bridge and finally arrived at the Old Queens County Jail where the New York Panthers were being detained.





## **FORMAL INTRODUCTION OF THE YOUNG LORDS ORGANIZATION — TOMPKINS SQUARE PARK JULY 26, 1969**

Though we had already started organizing in East Harlem, the decision was made to go public, to announce to the Puerto Rican community and the community-at-large that there existed a group of young men and women committed to serving and protecting. The date July 26 was selected because it was the anniversary of the attack on Moncada, a large police facility in Cuba by a group of revolutionaries, among them Fidel Castro. We knew that once we formally announced our existence, repression would begin from without

and contradictions would heighten from within. But how else could we organize masses of our people without telling them who we were and what we stood for? The waves reverberated throughout the park.

This was it! The determination in these faces shows we were ready for anything that came. Liberation was on our minds, in our faces, in our bodies. Youth never thinks of death or its own mortality, and although we did not know what our impact would be, we knew our hearts that our cause was just. And we knew we would win!



## GARBAGE OFFENSIVE — SUMMER/FALL 1969

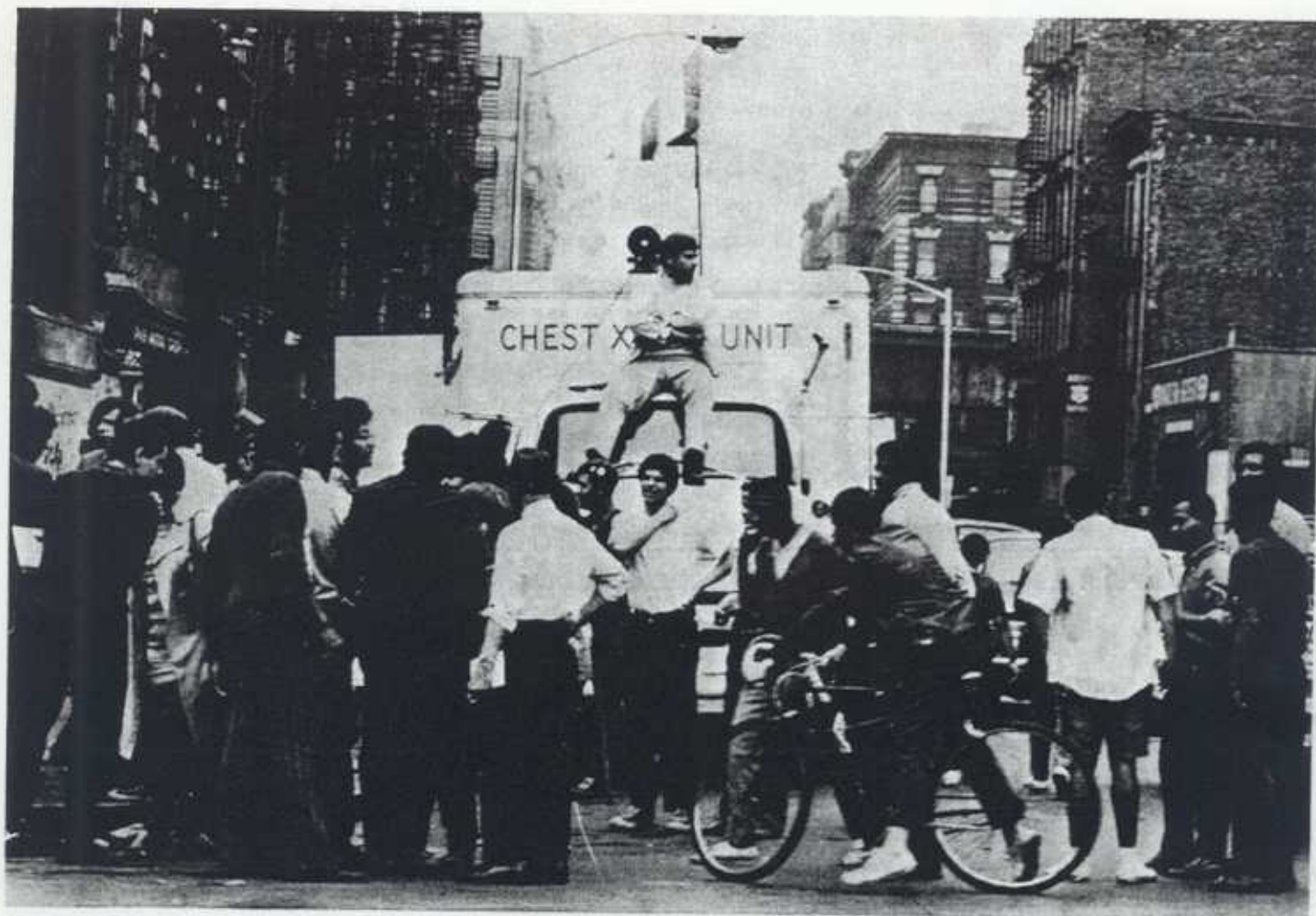


Our first campaign, we decided collectively, would have to be built around an issue of tangible importance to our people: an issue that would not only afford us some chance of winning but also of educating ourselves and our community. Garbage in the community was the most obvious issue. We lived in it, on it, around it. First, there were very few public garbage cans in East Harlem. Secondly, the trucks rarely came inside the blocks to clean the streets or pick-up trash cans. And thirdly, when the trucks did come, half the garbage was thrown into the trucks, the other half was left strewn on the sidewalks.

One Sunday, we went to the local Sanitation depot to ask for brooms to clean up 110th Street between Second and Third Avenues. The man in charge said "No." This was our first confrontation with authority; it was a tense moment in the history of our fledgling organization. New Young Lords were watching, street people were watching. We rushed into the depot, snatched the brooms, and walked calmly out. After sweeping the streets that Sunday, we bagged the garbage and returned the brooms.

After a few Sundays of this, we realized the trucks were still simply not picking up. So, we took the trash cans full of litter and dumped them on Third Avenue. Now the City *had* to pick up the garbage. We were stopping traffic and in turn, commerce. From time to time, motorists would remove the garbage cans. To prevent that, the Young Lords Party would set fire to the garbage, thus forcing the Sanitation Department to do what they should have been doing in the first place — pick up the refuse in El Barrio.

Finance Minister, Juan "Fi" Ortiz was arrested and jailed on minor charges. The Young Lords Party viewed "Fi's" arrest as an attempt by the police to destroy its leadership and harass the organization. We rallied around the First Spanish Methodist Church on 111th & Lexington Avenue and with portable loudspeakers brought our brother's plight before the folks. As we were marching and chanting, some street people took their anger to the next level and broke the windows of a local chain supermarket.



## THE TAKE-OVER OF T. B. TESTING TRUCK

Decent health care was one of the basic tenets of the Party. Demonstrating and organizing around health issues became one of the cornerstones of the Young Lords' philosophy and activity. The first organized group we came into contact with was the Health Revolutionary Unity Movement, Puerto Rican and Black medical workers based in Gouverneur Hospital on the Lower East Side, who believed that patient care was as important as their working conditions. Since we believed in aligning ourselves with those aggressive groups and/or individuals with whom we shared common goals, we supported their demonstrations. It was the first time Geraldo Rivera, a young lawyer, interceded between the Young Lords Party and the police.

The Young Lord's Party, led by the Health Ministry, began door-to-door T. B. testing. We discovered that Puerto Ricans in El Barrio had a higher incidence of tuberculosis than any other group in the entire City. Yet, city-owned T. B. testing trucks seemed to visit every community but ours. In all the months we had been in East Harlem, not once had the mobile lab stopped in our community to X-Ray our people. We called repeatedly. Still, no truck. Finally, we decided to "liberate" the truck and drive it from a scheduled stop to 111th Street and Madison Avenue. We planned it meticulously, when to strike, what to say to the driver, what streets to drive down, making sure the press would arrive at precisely the moment the truck rolled down 111th Street to prevent



the police from attacking, etc. On the humorous side was the fact that very few of us had driver's licenses, much less any experience driving a stick shift.

But the take-over was successful. So suc-

cessful that the staff inside the truck volunteered to stay and continue testing. Later, the New York City Health Department agreed to test regularly in Puerto Rican communities.

## TAKE-OVER OF OLD LINCOLN HOSPITAL IN THE BRONX

After a young Puerto Rican woman died from a minor surgical procedure in the old Lincoln Hospital, the decision was made to occupy the Nurses' Residence and publicize the flagrant disregard for human life, especially poor human life, in New York City hospitals. This was to be our most dangerous offensive because, after all, it involved the occupation of city-owned and operated property.

First, we made ourselves known both to clerical and medical personnel at the hospital by discussing health issues and distributing literature. At the same time, however, we were "casing" the Nurses' Residence for entrances, exits, tunnels, hallways, windows, and security. Secondly, we held a regular all-night party for our members without telling them what they were about to do for fear that an informer might tip-off the police. Then, before dawn, we loaded ourselves into a rented truck driven by a community supporter and drove up to the entrance. Within eight minutes we surprised the hospital security guards and took over the lower floors. Within fifteen minutes the entire structure was occupied. Finally, we prepared ourselves for police attack by taping the windows and barricading the doors.

Many doctors, nurses and staff opted to stay inside with Party members. They too were fed-up with hospital policy. After meeting with the city officials and speaking to the press, the "Lords" evacuated the building later that evening. The police attacked an empty structure. We had made our point!





