

# CITY OF WIND, CITY OF FIRE:

## EDUCATION AND ACTIVISM IN CHICAGO 1966-1975

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### *Abstract*

This paper emphasizes the pedagogical contributions that drove the political awareness and action of Black and Brown youth in Chicago from 1966-1975. The critical education of the Communiversity on the South Side and the Chicago Young Lords Organization (ChYLO) on the Northside addressed deficiencies in educational institutions and aided urban youth in combating the post-industrial, socio-political, and economic challenges of Chicago communities. Through a critical analysis of interview and archival data of ChYLO and Communiversity, we highlight their significant contributions to the field of education. In this article, we frame these formations as the work of critical pedagogy. Our analysis of these youth/student organizations uncovers frameworks that contribute to the work of educators and youth via: 1) examination of educational topics rooted in community concerns; 2) the study of texts that promote critical understandings and analysis of unjust structures and systems at local, national, and global levels; and 3) pedagogical practices that account and adjust for the living and learning conditions of poor Black and Brown communities.

*Keywords:* Communiversity, Chicago Young Lords Organization, critical pedagogical development, youth social movements

## CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AND YOUTH MOVEMENT BUILDING

When considering the intersection of critical pedagogy and movement building in the context of the United States, we must name the sociohistorical context of exclusion, segregation, institutional racism, poverty, and gentrification among other forms of oppression. In this article, we highlight specific methods and contributions of the Chicago Young Lords Organization (ChYLO) and Communiversity to the intellectual thought of critical pedagogy, exploring not only the specific ways they named these forms of oppression but how they acted to resist them. Through a critical analysis of interview and archival data of ChYLO and Communiversity, we highlight some of their significant contributions to the field of education. Having grown up in Chicago, we understand and appreciate experiences outside of traditional school spaces and the value of the work of public intellectuals (Darder, 2011). Although ChYLO and Communiversity utilized different pedagogical structures, they both exemplified the necessity of organic intellectual work in Chicago during a critical era of struggle and resistance. However, there is a lack of scholarship that values the ways of knowing demonstrated through the work of ChYLO and Communiversity (Fine, 2017; Dávila, 2019). Thus, we posit that their brand of intellectualism is a “counter-narrative of necessity” (Milner & Howard, 2013) within the field of critical pedagogy. Importantly, we illuminate the contributions of these two distinct groups given the minimal attention and scholarly recognition of their intellectual work.

The leaders of ChYLO and Communiversity understood that schooling and education are not synonymous. Education rooted in a people’s revolution requires more than a narrow engagement of learning limited to books, articles, classrooms, and traditional teaching—methods characteristic of *schooling* (Shuuja, 1994). Education, and in particular education that transforms, must be rooted in students’ lives, including their families and communities. ChYLO and Communiversity reflect the scholarly activism and social justice-oriented education necessary to develop and maintain critical pedagogy.

ChYLO and Communiversity employed a critical praxis that provided the space for many youth and community members to receive an education for liberation, despite the sociopolitical context of 1960s and 1970s Chicago rooted in institutional racism and machine politics working to maintain unjust power structures. Both ChYLO and Communiversity actively resisted the schooling being provided by their community schools alongside the socio-political repression prevalent in Black and Brown communities during this time; a repression fueled by imperialism, deculturation, and colonization. These dynamics are highlighted to provide critical pedagogues with specific curriculum and practices that contribute to movement building.

As such, this article aims to

1. Briefly describe the social conditions/context that prompted the development of movement building for the youth-led organizations in Chicago, specifically the development of the Chicago Young Lords (ChYLO) and Communiversity;
2. Document educational topics rooted in community concerns, inclusive of the study of texts that promote critical understandings and analysis of unjust structures and systems at local, national and global levels, and the subsequent critical praxis that resulted, particularly the curricula developed and disseminated by ChYLO and Communiversity; and,
3. Illuminate the pedagogical practices that account and adjust for the living and learning conditions of poor Black and Brown communities.

The pedagogical approaches taken by the Communiversity and ChYLO counter many educational initiatives that too often focus on remediating and/or punishing “at-risk” populations (often via exclusionary schooling practices under the guise of discipline and order, resulting in suspensions, expulsions, and the trapping of Black and Brown students within the school-prison nexus). The organizing efforts of ChYLO and Communiversity highlight the importance of respecting the developmental trajectories of youth that are “street” involved (Payne & Brown, 2016), while simultaneously cultivating

and building on existing funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) to increase critical consciousness, educational relevance, and transformational praxis for urban youth. These approaches mirror the philosophy of critical pedagogy.

Many young people continue to be pushed out of school or graduate high school not adequately prepared for higher education, the workforce, or life in general. Critical, praxis-oriented education can be employed as a tool for liberation, serving as a form of resistance to reproducing the status quo of class, race, and citizenship that shapes U.S. society, and the subsequent life opportunities and trajectories of urban youth.

## FOREGROUNDING: CHICAGO IN CONTEXT

*City of wind and glass dressed in frozen lace,  
of the wide-stone tower that would not burn,  
of Lake Michigan and the poor who never  
see the sun drop lines of light across the cold ache  
of water... You've been on my mind, City  
of African music festivals and Bud Billiken  
parades, City of name changes I refuse to honor.  
Sears to Willis, the ghost of a Marshall Field's relief  
oxidized into obscurity. Here is my face, City.  
Here is my face and my hands are open for you.  
Here is the body that has rejected your violence,  
that has been missed by your bullets, City.*

—Declaration Williams (2015)

Globally and historically, Chicago is aptly identified as the “Windy City.” America’s greatest Midwest metropolis receives its moniker not for the frigid cold and biting Lake Michigan winter wind chills that attack in hawk-like fashion; instead, the city of Chicago gained its reputation from the voracious political machine that emerged from a slew of the city’s ethnic enclaves vying to control the major city (Bierma, 2004). Chicago’s political notables have gained transnational reputations for a brand of straightforward campaigning, community mobilizations, and governance that has been both admired and chided for its brashness. Chicago’s political identity has been and

still is infamous for developing powerful bureaucratic constituencies, selecting and electing its kings and queens of Chicago's political elite, and creating empire in the city by the lake (Alkalimat & Gills, 1989).

The bedrock of Chicago is found in the city's multitudes of Black folks migrating from the South (mainly Mississippi) during the early twentieth century; European migrants from Ireland, Italy, Germany, and Poland; and the many Puerto Rican migrants who came both from the island of Puerto Rico and also by way of New York City as early as the 1930s (Dyja, 2013). Collectively, these respective ethnicities shaped the communities, political constituencies, social enclaves, and historical richness of Chicago. These strong ethnic enclaves conjure the driving political forces the city is famously and at times infamously known for. Scholars such as Dr. Anderson Thompson refer to Chicago as a "confederation of several immigrant nations" or an "Ethnotheocracy" (*The Communiviews*, 1970a). This strong ethnic pride gave rise to audacious community activism and political mobilizations that thrust Chicago to the national stage in the 1960s. This further established the city during the decade of the Civil Rights Movement as an urban center worthy of investigation to eradicate poverty, racism, housing inequities, joblessness, police brutality, and societal marginalization.

The power of Chicago mayoral dominance is grossly reflected by the tenure of Irish-Catholic mayor Richard J. Daley (1902-1976), who held the top position from April 1955 until December 1976. This political machine was fortified by eleven of sixteen offices controlled by Irish politicians during the 1960s, which governed approximately 80,000 jobs or 80% of all government employment in the city of Chicago and the surrounding Cook County in which the city is situated (*The Communiviews*, 1970a; Cohen & Taylor, 2001; Kilian, Fletcher, & Ciccone, 1979). Thus, with Daley's iron-fist style of governance, the Irish-Catholic mayor deepened racial divisions in the city and assured that Black folks, Puerto Ricans, and other non-European ethnic minorities remained on the fringes of civic empowerment in the city. Conversely, the response to the Daley machine yielded community engagement from a number of ethnic minority organizations in Chicago to combat the vast political inequalities throughout the city.

As the 1966 national call for Black Power emerged through the efforts of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Chicago became a Northern site for SNCC to develop a Black Power Project that complemented the work of King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and also openly challenged the mayoral regime of Richard J. Daley. That same year in Chicago, urban rebellion ensued in the Puerto Rican community of Humboldt Park when teenager Arcelis Cruz was shot and killed by police, triggering the Division Street Riots (Struch, 2006). With the strife of racial tension festering amongst Black and Puerto Rican youth in Chicago, the linchpin of police brutality remained a critical challenge amongst ethnic minorities in the city. Thus, in 1968 when urban rebellions erupted in response to the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., Mayor Daley, in this historical moment, added insult to injury by informing Chicago police officers to “shoot to kill...shoot to maim looters” (Potter & Hunter, 1968). A few months later in 1968, Daley continued his disdain for protests against state power when he issued additional police orders of violence against anti-war protesters during the Democratic convention held in Chicago (Royko, 1988).

By the late 1960s, the multitude of socio-political events transpiring in Chicago established the city as a hotbed for activists, organizational development, student and youth politicization, and mass mobilization developments throughout the city. Thus, activists who sought to challenge the municipal hegemony of the Daley administration continued to emerge throughout the city in high schools, college campuses, community development organizations, and, most critical, in youth street organizations. By 1969, Black and Brown youth became the vanguard of counter-hegemonic community organizing in the city of Chicago and nationwide (Harding, 1969).

## **DATA COLLECTION/METHODS**

A combination of archival and individual interview (from both in-person and phone interviews) data were obtained for document and interview analysis. This was a group process engaged by the authors in which data were obtained from the archives of The Chicago Historical Society, DePaul University Young Lords Newspaper Collections, The

University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) Library Special Collections, and interviews conducted with members of both the Chicago Young Lords and Communiversity. We engaged in content analysis of the historical materials and conversations with the organizations' current and former members. This allowed for a cyclical process in which we were able to obtain clarifying information from members about various themes/topics/events at times, and affirm/expand on an event/topic via the historical documents at other times. This allowed for triangulation of data as well as member checks regarding understanding and clarity for emerging themes, simultaneously safeguarding the meaning and representation of members' voice and historical events.

## **DEVELOPING PATHWAYS**

The origins of ChYLO and Communiversity, while significantly different in their development, had similar aims: anti-oppressive and liberatory education. ChYLO was comprised of “street” youth, while Communiversity founders were student/scholar activists. Whenever possible, we have kept interview quotes verbatim to capture the authentic voices of organization members. Moreover, the authors of this article are connected, and committed to centering non-traditional or less formal iterations of knowledge production; this authenticity simultaneously honors intellectual contributions that have been marginalized and/or completely disregarded by “formally” trained scholars. We outline their origins here to demonstrate the many pathways that can be traversed in the creation and implementation of critical pedagogical praxes. The descriptions of the respective groups illustrate the organic and non-linear growth encompassing their development. In fact, we assert these seemingly erratic developments had a formidable influence on their eventual transformation. The groups moved “back and forth” between action and education; education and action—deeply engaging in praxis (Freire, 2000).

## **THE CHICAGO YOUNG LORDS: (TRANS)FORMATION**

The Chicago Young Lords (ChYLO) began as a turf gang, with Orlando Davila, Sal del Rivero, and five others starting the Young

Lords in 1959 (Jeffries, 2003; del Rivero, 2012). For the first seven years it functioned as a youth gang, responding to White youth gang violence in Chicago. The explicit discrimination and racism prevalent during this time was reflected in the organization of young Whites “protecting” their neighborhoods from racial/ethnic groups, in particular Blacks and Puerto Ricans. In response to the harassment perpetrated against Puerto Ricans, several youths formed street gangs in order to protect themselves. The gang activity youth were involved in, combined with police harassment, led to several arrests. According to a key member, Cha-Cha, his frequent arrests and subsequent visits to jail exposed him to individuals, records, and books that would ultimately shape his understanding of exclusion, oppression, and discrimination occurring within his community and individual experiences. This exposure to writings and speeches of Malcolm X, Che Guevara, and Martin Luther King (among others), led to his understanding that he was fighting the wrong enemy\*

As noted by Jose “Cha-Cha” Jimenez, a member who represents a formidable leader in ChYLO’s transformation from street-gang to political organization, “Puerto Ricans, similar to the systemic discrimination experienced by Blacks, were excluded from full access to basic human services such as being served at various food establishments or being able to utilize beaches that were in White communities of Chicago” (J. Jimenez, personal communication, December 22, 2017). With an expanded perspective on the condition of his community and the social dynamics in which his lived experiences were entrenched, Cha-Cha was committed to fighting the dynamics of imperialism, colonialism, and racism rampant in Chicago and U.S. society. Cha-Cha’s experience and leadership created a new trajectory for ChYLO, though it was met with some reluctance and resistance on the part of the group. As shared by Cha-Cha, shortly

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\* We will further discuss and analyze the interviews conducted with three members who served in leadership roles after ChYLO transformed from turf-gang to human rights organization. Much of the research conducted on the Young Lords focuses on the New York chapter; we recognize this as a limitation of our data, but it is also reflective of the need to share the perspectives/stories of ChYLO leadership presented here.



after he was released from prison, he met individuals working for the Northside Cooperative Seminary in Chicago:

I ran into this lady, Pat Devine, and Dick Vision. They worked for the Northside Cooperative Ministry...and so she was trying to organize the community, not Latinos, just anybody who was poor, to fight urban renewal.... She wanted me to get people to come to a meeting. I said, 'hey, I can get you thousands of people, I'm the leader of the Young Lords.' Well, I couldn't get anybody; our people don't go to meetings.... They said hey if you want us to go fight, Cha-Cha, we'll go fight, but you want us to go to a meeting, we don't want to go to a meeting. (J. Jimenez, personal communication, December 22, 2017)

This encounter provided an outlet for Cha-Cha's developing political consciousness; he and others began facilitating political education classes in their homes:

...we would go to the street corner with the *Red Book* and still be talking and drinking wine, and smoking weed and everything else. **On the corner—that was our office** [emphasis added]. So we have to really understand how we organized the group. So that means you got people that are from the street, little “gangbangers” and everything else, like I said drinking Wild Irish Rose and all that other stuff, and talking about *On Contradiction* and theory and practice, and the importance of practice. That practice was more important than theory, and that theory comes from practice...and this is how the Young Lords in Chicago were developing. (J. Jimenez, personal communication, December 22, 2017)

By 1968, the Young Lords forged a path into becoming the Young Lords Organization. Their evolution did not follow a linear trajectory, but rather it was slow, incremental, and nuanced change that contributed to their transition. They focused their efforts on political organizing and activism.

For educators and others working with youth that are street involved (Payne & Brown, 2010), the lesson here is to respect where youth are in their development, simultaneously recognizing their

strengths and abilities. In the instance of ChYLO, it is of critical importance to highlight the power of the political education occurring on street corners and in people's homes, efforts initiated and led by youth and young adults. This emphasis is not a romanticization of their activities; conversely, it is an acknowledgement of the structural conditions of racism and capitalism that have and continue to plague poor Black and Brown communities and simultaneously contribute to the poverty, addiction, and street activity often occurring within them. Ultimately—while not neatly or conventionally—the mainly Puerto Rican youth's discussing, analyzing, and strategizing on the street corner led to their development of consciousness, political action, and, eventually, change for the Latinx community of Chicago.

One of the first political actions taken by ChYLO was the disruption of a meeting organized by the Department of Urban Renewal in Lincoln Park. The action taken by the youth represents their analytical sophistication in regard to understanding gentrification and lack of representation within urban planning, resulting in their subsequent impromptu praxis/direct action. As explained by Cha-Cha,

Many of us were dropouts, we didn't want anything to do with school, so that's how we started.... So we're telling the Dept. of Urban Renewal the meeting is cancelled, you can't meet here until you have Black, poor White, and Latino representation. So we're talking political, right? So they looked at us like we're crazy (laughs). Who are you to tell us? The guys wanted to send a message. You think we're kidding? Praahhhh, they start throwing chairs, they didn't hit anybody, they start throwing chairs through the window, they tore up the plumbing, there was a big display of plans for Lincoln Park—they ripped that up. Anyway, the place was closed down for about 6 months, the Dept. of Urban Renewal in Lincoln Park. So that was the first action we had. (J. Jimenez, personal communication, December 22, 2017)

While some may not have agreed with their tactics, they were successful at interrupting economic plans that would have displaced many Puerto Ricans who resided in Chicago's Lincoln Park community. While their efforts did not completely stop the

displacement of Puerto Ricans and other Latinx communities in Chicago, they were able to slow the process and obtain some concessions such as the inclusion of affordable housing within new plans for housing development. This was the first of many actions ChYLO would organize and lead, as they continued to develop political consciousness and organizing to advance the self-determination and liberation of Puerto Ricans and other marginalized communities of Chicago. As illustrated above, their development was incremental. They began to understand the larger systems and practices in place contributing to their displacement and marginalization. As their understanding increased, so did their desire to develop language, theoretical orientations, and praxis that would more adequately address their material (e.g., housing) conditions and subsequent needs.

## **BLACK ACTIVISM & DEVELOPING THE COMMUNIVERSITY**

The idea for the Communiversality emerged from a national conference for Black teachers in Chicago in April of 1968. Conference participants, approximating 1,000 attendees including teachers, administrators, community activists, students, and parents, ascended to Chicago from across the country to dialogue around critical issues that affected Black education (Rickford, 2016; Konadu, 2012). The conveners discussed, debated, and developed solutions for Black educational progress. Moving beyond ideological differences, the conveners agreed that the solutions for educational advancement for Black folks must come from Black educators who were dedicated to commit their professional and political existences to a larger national project of Black education that was focused on liberatory praxis (*The Communitiviews*, 1970b).

At this Chicago conference, the National Association of Afro-American Educators (NAAAE) was formed to engineer a constellation of measures to educate Black people at various levels. At the planning meetings of the NAAAE, a strong Chicago-based faction emerged to implement the goals of the national NAAAE organization. The Chicago group established an adamant position about local Black community participation that was counter-hegemonic and intended to eradicate hierarchies found to be problematic in solving issues in Black education (*The Communitiviews*, 1970b).

After the NAAAE conference, the local organizers continued to develop the objectives of the national structure with a series of month-long planning meetings. Taking the lead to implement a local structure for the NAAAE, Chicago-area students Robert Starks, Standish Willis, and Earl Jones began planning and organizing for a Black student conference for the Midwest region. This conference site eventually became Rev. John R. Porter's church, the United Methodist Church in the Englewood community on the South Side of the city. Porter's church was ideal for holding such a conference due to the years of support extended to such organizations as SNCC and SCLC during the Chicago Freedom Movement participation in the Poor People's Campaign (Starks, 2016; Pates, 2012; HistoryMakers, 2003; SCLCN, 1966).

The Black student conference also held its initial organizational meetings at Porter's church. Among the many students, scholars, and activists, those in attendance included Drs. Anderson Thompson, Harold Pates, and Bobby Wright; students Robert Starks, Standish Willis, and John Higginson; Professor Bob Rhodes; and activist Ruwa Chiri. College students from the Chicagoland area converged with high school students, community activists, scholars, teachers, and university professors in the planning meetings and developed a Black Congress. The student-led planning and organizing in the Black Congress established the Communiversity, and the Center for Inner City Studies (CICS) became the site for classes of the newly formed Black educational institution (Worrill, 2017; Pates, 2012).

From the outset, the Communiversity's objectives were to address educational, social and political shortcomings for Black folks in Chicago. Educational praxis and institution building were at the ideological base of the Communiversity, and members of the collective were instructed to counter all forms of hegemony and White supremacy. By executing critical pedagogy through curriculum and research, the Communiversity became an educational defense against cultural oppression. Their formation was steeped in addressing community concerns to increase the capacity and critical consciousness of educators and community members. Echoing this

sentiment and according to former Communiversity member, scholar, and activist Dr. Conrad Worrill:

It was through the Communiversity that the transmission of African-centered knowledge through the African lens, sparked the resurgence of the Pan-African Nationalist tradition in Chicago. The Communiversity became the place to study the works of many of our great African-centered scholars such as the late Drs. John Henrik Clarke, Chancellor Williams, Yosef ben Jochannan, Professor John G. Jackson, and many others. (Worrill, 2017, para. 6)

According to a May 1970 monthly newsletter, *The Communiviews*, produced by the Communiversity, the independent Black institution would: 1) help Black people comprehend local, national, and international phenomena that affected Black life; 2) help Black people understand colonialism; 3) aid Black professionals who interfaced with the White colonial world and the Black resistance movement; 4) assist Black students in their developments for the general struggle; 5) aid Black parents and children who were victimized by multiple educational systems; and, 6) help Black community organizations meet their objectives. This would be achieved by instructing on the critical differences between purposes of an organization and an actual “movement” (*The Communiviews*, 1970b, p. 3). Through this framework, the Chicago Communiversity became a cornerstone of Black educational activity moving into the 1970s.

## **ORGANIZING A REVOLUTIONARY FORCE: RESEARCH FOR AND BY THE PEOPLE**

The field of critical pedagogy lives within the larger framing of educational studies and/or teacher education, which are housed in colleges and departments historically rooted in traditional teaching and learning models. These traditional learning spaces are reflective of discourse and practices that are missing the criticality and nuance needed to understand, and more importantly apply, critical pedagogy. Centering the important work of community-based activists and movement building, which offers a nuanced analysis of race, class, and power, is much needed within the field of critical pedagogy. In

this section, we highlight the manner in which both groups engaged in critical pedagogy, inclusive of curricula, action, and praxis. As critical educators we view these processes as interrelated, dynamic, and symbiotic. Therefore, in order to illustrate the organic and natural process these groups employed, we do not dichotomize or parcel out these various components.

A critical identifier of both ChYLO and Communiversity that addresses the field of critical pedagogy is youth leadership: “They [ChYLO] ranged in age from children of twelve years to men and women in their early thirties” (Jeffries, 2003, p. 292). As noted above, Communiversity was initiated and organized by college students. Critical pedagogy can and should center the voices and experiences of youth. ChYLO and Communiveristy were youth- and student-led, a phenomenon that should continue to be part of the conceptualization of critical pedagogy. As exemplified by ChYLO youth and Communiversity students, they created their own teaching and learning spaces in their efforts to resist schooling and traditional Eurocentric curricula. For example, ChYLO developed political education classes, as noted by Jeffries (2003):

Political education classes were held where [ChYLO] members discussed the works of Frantz Fanon, Malcolm X, Che Guevara, Karl Marx, and others. The purpose of these classes was to learn to apply theory to real world situations. In addition to setting up study groups, the [Chicago Young] Lords established classes in martial arts. (pp. 292-293)

The youth of ChYLO and Communiversity assembled a movement, and folks in other parts of the U. S. came to Chicago to build with them. For example, in 1970, a “proposal for the development of a leadership training program for the young lords organization” was created:

...the Young Lords have begun to instrument a plan to turn the Chicago Headquarters into a training center for members of the [Young Lords]. Two types of individuals will be trained in the school. They will either be from areas that have Young Lord branches or where there are persons who can be organized into

a revolutionary force, both being with leadership qualities. The Young Lords feel they have the organization and resources available to them to develop leaders from areas around the United States. These individuals will be selected by recruiters who will travel to the east and west coasts and in the Midwest. Upon finding an [acceptable] party, this person will be paid to travel to Chicago and undergo a month of training in leadership and development of a revolutionary group. (Chicago Police Department, 1930s-1986)

ChYLO was working within a foundation of critical pedagogy in building a training program rooted in a liberatory agenda for and by the people. In the description above, we observe the organizational system that recognized the need to pay youth for their training and travel, a practice that counters the traditional American ways of seeing students as consumers; they were building something different, something rooted in what Darder (2011) names as political grace:

As a revolutionary force, shared political grace enables the establishment of “sites of resistance” where community members can reflect on their social and material conditions and grapple to find solutions, solidly anchored upon their histories, the priorities of their daily lives, and self-determined emancipatory dreams. (p. 10)

Darder’s insight as a world-renowned critical pedagogue speaks to the power of ChYLO and Communiversity’s organizing tactics and ideological development, recognizing how their discourse and praxes mirror critical pedagogy.

The organizing engaged by the groups reflect the ways in which they were developing critical consciousness and pedagogical practices that sought to analyze and address community concerns. As explained by ChYLO leadership:

So, this is what we need to imagine and picture, how this was a people’s revolution. We were studying a people’s revolution, so it’s like we are saying it, *we are doing it* and we are studying it. That’s why we could relate to Mao, because he was talking about a people’s revolution.... To accomplish a survival need,

to provide services for all, so that was the method, with the [ChYLO] program. And we wanted to, we not only wanted to feed the children, but to expose the fact that the state should be feeding the children. We're not a patronizing group, we're about **self-determination** [emphasis added]. So therefore, we were showing people, we can feed ourselves. We don't have to rely on the government, we can feed ourselves, but the government should be—after collecting all those taxes—they should be feeding us. Ya know what I'm saying? So we tried to show them both ways of doing that. (J. Jimenez, personal communication, December 22, 2017)

Here it must be noted the necessity of engaging youth in education through both consciousness raising (via readings) and practice (via action).

In an attempt to highlight and share the specific content of the discourse and praxis of these two groups, we highlight seminal texts, actions, and curricula that make up the pedagogical canon for political education and development of critical consciousness among ChYLO and Communiversity. The literature that informed their practice spanned the globe and ranged over more than a century, exemplifying the efforts of ChYLO and Communiversity to find the specific curriculum that suited their goals to utilize education as a tool of liberation. Jeffries (2003) notes the purpose of ChYLO classes was to learn to apply theory to real-world situations. In Table 1 we describe a sample of the texts most noted and influential across the movement building of ChYLO and Communiversity.



Table 1. *Selected Reading of Communiversality and the Chicago Young Lords*

Book Title	Author/Year	Overview	Key Concepts
<i>Das Kapital</i> Vol. 1	Karl Marx 1867	Also known as <i>Capital: A Critique of Political Economy</i> . English edition first published in 1887. Known as the Bible of the working class.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis of Commodity</li> <li>• Theory of Capitalist System</li> <li>• Exploitation and Division of Labor</li> <li>• Capitalist Accumulation</li> </ul>
<i>The Wretched of the Earth</i>	Frantz Fanon 1963	Considered to be one of the canonical books on the worldwide Black liberation struggles of the 1960s.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Colonization/Decolonization</li> <li>• Political Education of “Masses”</li> <li>• Culture and Conscious for Liberation</li> </ul>
<i>The Autobiography of Malcolm X</i>	Alex Haley 1965	Groundbreaking biography released posthumously of the international revolutionary. Provided youth of all racial and ethnic backgrounds with an educational model for life & activism.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transformative Stages of Life</li> <li>• Organizational Development</li> <li>• Educational Praxis</li> <li>• Reflexive Praxis</li> <li>• Black Intellectualism</li> </ul>

<p><i>Che Guevara Speaks: Collected Speeches and Writings</i></p>	<p>Ernesto Guevara &amp; Steve Clark 1967</p>	<p>Twenty of Che's most influential speeches, letters, and interviews.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working-Class Internationalism</li> <li>• Political Consciousness</li> <li>• Critique of Imperialism</li> <li>• Mobilizing the Masses</li> </ul>
<p><i>Crisis of the Negro Intellectual</i></p>	<p>Harold Cruse 1967</p>	<p>A critique of both integrationism and Black nationalism; urges the development of distinctive centers of cultural and economic influence.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intellectual Polemic</li> <li>• Black Politics</li> <li>• Black Nationalism</li> <li>• Collective Ownership</li> <li>• Black Mass Culture</li> </ul>
<p><i>Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse Tung</i></p>	<p>Mao Tse Tung 1968</p>	<p>A collection of Mao Tse Tung's statements, writings, and speeches.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encirclement and Suppression</li> <li>• Resistance</li> <li>• People's Revolution</li> <li>• Communism</li> </ul>
<p>Note: See Appendix for complete reading lists of ChYLO and Community.</p>			

The Communiversity and ChYLO youth engaged in revolutionary acts and movements by engaging the texts outlined in Table 1. They took seriously their role in resisting the physical and mental oppression they faced on the streets via police repression, harassment, and brutality. Just as importantly, they resisted the ideological repression they experienced through processes of schooling imposed on them by a primarily White, middle-class teaching force, such as compulsory exposure to Eurocentric curriculum in schools and a White supremacist school system. These actions demonstrate a commitment to developing their critical consciousness in order to address community concerns through pedagogical practices.

While the media portrayed Black and Brown youth as “violent” during this particular time period (Chicago Police Department, 1930s-1986), our work (similar to that of Jeffries, 2003 and Lazú, 2013) re-frames members of ChYLO and Communiversity as engaging in acts of organized resistance. Participants understood “one does not win a national war, one does not route the formidable machine of the enemy or transform the individuals if one neglects to raise the consciousness of the men in combat” (Fanon, 1963, p. 86). Reading works by writers such as Fanon increased their awareness, analysis, and documented critique of schools facilitating the development of knowledge production; ChYLO and Communiversity actors were curriculum creators, developing critical alternative narratives anchored in knowledge of self, with the aim of liberation. They became creators and purveyors of liberatory education, studying the transnational movements of Algiers, Cuba, Vietnam, Russia, and China, simultaneously reading the influential writings of Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth* and *Black Skin, White Masks*; *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*; Che Guevara’s *Guerilla Warfare*; and Mao Tse Tung’s *Military Writings* and *Little Red Book* (Chicago Police Department 1930s-1986).

Moreover, ChYLO and Communiversity leaders understood that development of critical consciousness was an aspect of the process; however, it was one of many steps needed to address the powerful forces of capitalism and imperialism. Consciousness-raising and action were each a dynamic component of their efforts. As shared by

ChYLO leadership, their first action was a response, not necessarily a planned event (J. Jimenez, personal communication, December 22, 2017). While they began with action, they also incorporated teachings into their organization, seeing this “intellectual work” as a tool for transformation. As the leadership delved further into their own studies, they understood it would be necessary to share their learning with community members and new ChYLO members, in a more deliberate and organized fashion; “this subsequent raising of awareness and the advances along the road to understanding the history of societies can only be achieved if people are organized and guided” (Fanon, 1963, p. 92).

As they gleaned these messages from studying these texts, this led to a more concerted effort to develop materials, tools, and internal mechanisms for teaching and learning within the organizational leadership and the broader Black and Brown Chicago communities. One of these key curricular tools was a newspaper for which they decided the topics featured and the framing of particular social issues—*Pa’Lante* for ChYLO and *Communiviews* for Communiversity. As noted through historical archives,

[Ch]YLO have also begun publishing a monthly newspaper featuring articles in English and Spanish concerning local struggles, problems and propaganda. In addition there are articles such as: Malcolm X, Uptown Confronts Pigs, reprints from the Black Panther paper, Cuba, National Liberation Struggles.... A Latin American Movement is developing in Chicago for the purposes of putting an end to the injustices, suffering and exploitation which is focused upon our people...a movement that wants a new society whose wealth is controlled and shared by all its members, not by a few; a society in which men and women view each other as brothers and sisters and not as people to be exploited and hated. After speaking of police brutality, community control, jobs, housing, imperialism and the need to overcome tendencies toward reformism in the Latin American movement, the editorial hopes that the newspaper can help aid the development of political consciousness in the community

and in YLO, help develop revolutionary goals, people, strategy, contacts. (Young Lords Newspaper Collection)

The above description enumerates the ways in which ChYLO members drew on community concerns to develop materials that sought to raise awareness of community issues, simultaneously making connections to larger social inequities rampant in society. The generation and dissemination of newspapers served as a powerful tool for consciousness raising and praxis. Gonzales (2013) states, “Newspapers were viewed as an educational tool. They were a medium through which to engage people in dialogue, raising their level of class consciousness and gaining new recruits in the process” (p. 1). A significant contribution of the work was the education of the people (organizing and praxis). ChYLO and Communiversity developed curricula via the creation of literature (e.g., newspapers) that were disseminated, discussed, and debated with folks ranging from the street corner to the classroom.

The newspapers developed by the youth and college students have, and should continue to be, studied and utilized as curricula to better comprehend and analyze the socio-political context of Chicago during the years of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The minister of information, Omar López, “points to the steep learning curve they faced as complete amateurs, many of them high school dropouts with poor writing skills” (Gonzalez, 2013, p.3). Despite their learning curve, the historical materials they produced provide invaluable insight into the crux of youth movement building and critical pedagogy. As Freire (2000) reminds us, “Since the unity of the oppressed involves solidarity among them, regardless of their exact status, this unity unquestionably requires class consciousness” (p. 174). Recognizing the collective identity of ChYLO as street-involved youth of color living in poverty entangled with their plan and action to educate other oppressed people is quite powerful and speaks to Freire’s point on class consciousness and Lopez’s statement regarding his identifying factors of ChLYO members as high school dropouts with poor writing skills. While the college students of Communiveristy had more access to formal educators, their goal was parallel to ChYLO—educating and organizing the community. Similarly, Communiversity members

utilized the *Communitviews* newspaper to address social issues of the Black community. Altogether, this can be a reminder to educators to rethink their notions of expertise and narratives of disposability and instead work to embrace curricular artifacts from youth and student movements like ChYLO and Communiversity.

ChYLO’s Minister of Education, Dr. Luis “Tony” Báez,\* developed critical pedagogical and curricular materials as a tool for educating ChYLO cadres and the larger community on the history of Puerto Rico’s colonization, including the ways in which colonization manifested itself on the island and within the states. As shared by Dr. Báez,

We were not intellectuals trying to produce papers. [Our] goal was deeper understanding, and development of intellect to share with community; [*Pa’lante*] newspaper was [an] organizing tool, [to] let the community know what was going on locally and globally; it was important that it was bilingual [Spanish and English]. (T. Báez, personal communication, February 23, 2017)

These efforts reflect their work in addressing community concerns via newspaper articles that would increase the community’s critical consciousness.

Dr. Báez further shares:

Education was critical to everything we did. [We] created modules that were not too long, but short enough so people could read the thing.... Some of us had to read the whole book and then summarize it. So, we had classes and tools—newspapers and courses—to do that...but **our contributions came from street movement. [We] realized that we could contribute to the philosophical/intellectual knowledge of our communities as they were growing** [emphasis added]. We would sit around and

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\* After his work with the Chicago Young Lords, Dr. Luis Antonio (Tony) Báez went on to be involved locally and nationally in bilingualism, multicultural education, diversity, dual-language education, adult learning, and ESL. Dr. Báez has also been involved in major bilingual and desegregation litigation, serving as a resource to community groups and plaintiffs. In 2017 he was elected to serve as the director of District 6 of the Milwaukee Board of School Directors.

talk/argue, but that was a part of our growth and learning. [We] used [the Black] Panther paper as a model. (T. Báez, personal communication, February 23, 2017)

The underpinnings of the modules, newspaper, and classes, and the subsequent meaning of developing these curricular tools for primarily poor, working-class, Brown communities (in the case of ChYLO) translated into epistemologies of their living conditions, particularly the lack of quality affordable housing, exclusion from stable and living wage employment, police brutality, racism, classism, and government repression. Not only were members engaged in independent study of these texts, but they also had to decipher the language and translate it into dialect(s) that would be received and understood by high school “dropouts.”

Finally, their connection to and understanding of community perspectives allowed them to develop materials and practices that would reach across ages, educational levels, and economic class. ChYLO and Communiversity organizers understood that they “must elevate the people, expand their minds, equip them, differentiate them, and humanize them” (Fanon, 1963, p. 137). Again, this was illustrated via the pedagogy and curricular materials produced, including flyers, leaflets, and newspapers. See Appendix A for examples of this work.

## **JUSTICE-CENTERED PRAXIS IN FUGITIVE SPACES**

The justice-centered praxis utilized by both ChYLO and Communiversity highlights their integral epistemological contributions. Their overarching ideas speak to an ideology rooted in education for liberation, mostly referred to as “political education,” with the most pressing goal of their praxis being self-determination. Both Communiversity and ChYLO’s educational efforts embedded self-determination and liberation into their teachings, discourse, and practices. Both organizations uplifted the community, as evidenced by their efforts to “educate the masses” through curricula (newspapers, classes, and modules created; reading seminal texts), and organizing (speaking to people on street corners, offering classes in the community, engaging in protest).

Illuminating these ideals offers current social movements (which are rooted and interconnected to those of only a generation ago) a clear message: self-determination and liberation via education, including political education and organizing with youth, should be foundational to movements of social justice. As powerful as the work of the youth guiding ChYLO and Communiversity was and still is, their intellect has, and continues to be, scrutinized and perceived as less valuable within mainstream media given their racial and class status. Further, we contend these perceptions are held within academia as well, given the lack of scholarship centering and affirming the intellectual work of these groups; it is clear that their epistemological contributions have been overlooked and understudied. These groups are one (of many) examples of youth and community efforts that have not yet made their way into schools, curricula, or education writ large. Jeffries (2003) addresses the ways in which the media of the 1960s and 1970s, led by Daley, shaped the image of ChYLO as delinquent youth and criminals, similar to the ways in which current youth movements such as Black Youth Project (BYP) and Black Lives Matter (BLM) are portrayed in the media today, 50 years later.

We are still fighting for self-determination. The educational movement developed and embraced by ChYLO and Communiversity was rooted in a decolonial vision that is much needed today in our struggle towards justice-centered praxis and the leveraging of fugitive spaces, spaces that were integral to the movements of the 60s and 70s highlighted in this article. Movements of today are still littered with colonial frameworks that are the antithesis to self-determination or power in the hands of the People.

The learning acquired from investigating ChYLO and Communiversity is a reminder of the need to engage in reflexive, liberatory praxis. It is also a reminder that education must be rooted in community concerns; it must be developed in collaboration with youth/students (including their input on various pedagogical methods); and ultimately education should increase critical consciousness for resistance and transformation. In the spirit of problem posing by critical pedagogue Paulo Freire, we propose to readers the following questions: What does it mean to pursue a “just” curriculum in times



of extreme divisiveness and during times/moments that provide the illusion of progress and solidarity? How do we move through the continuous contradictions inherent in an imperialist, capitalist, racist, homophobic, ableist, and misogynistic society? How can *Education* serve as both apparatus and conduit for the examination and production of knowledge, systems and actions/relationships that consistently engage in reflection and praxis—regardless of a person’s status or position in life? And finally, how can we learn from our past and build on this knowledge to inform responses—via various forms of curricula—to the continued inequities in our efforts to stem the tides of injustice prevalent in society?

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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WHAT: Study Group

WHY: To write our own History of the  
Movement of the Sixties

To facilitate the development of consensus concerning an analysis of the movement of the 60s in the American Settlers Colony, it is important that we become familiar with some of the writings and presentations that attempt to give an analysis of this particular time period so that we can better understand the dynamics of that movement as it relates to the status of the movement today.

It is suggested that we organize a study group to familiarize ourselves with the following readings. Hopefully through the study of these readings, we will be able to analyze these works and extract from them the pertinent data that will enable us to write our own History of the sixties.

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# THE COMMUNIVERSITY

( BLACK TEACHER, PARENT, STUDENT COALITION )

VOL. ONE

MAY, 1970

NO.

## THE COMMUNIVERSITY

### TO THE BLACK COMMUNITY

The current social crises facing Black people in all walks of life are profound and far-reaching. The time has come for all responsible Black people to assume an active role in our continuing struggle for liberation and self-determination in this perpetually oppressive and racist society. Whether we want to face it or not, we are all locked in a common and deadly struggle for survival, progress, and human dignity.

The very fabric of any society is woven, sustained, maintained, or changed through the functioning of the educational process. The perpetuation of the ideals of a family, race, or nation is effected through the educating of its members in an organized or goal oriented manner.

In the light of the proposition, it becomes increasingly obvious that something is amiss in the educational process in this society as this process relates to Black people. In our Black schools we have living proof that the current educational process is bankrupt in meeting the vital needs of Black children.

This educational bankruptcy extends and manifests itself in the present fragmentation and oppression of the Black community at large. Black educators who have not yet come to grips with this disheartening reality represent a vast wasteland of talent and professional skill.

The challenge facing the Black educator in these times has brought forth a collective of concerned Black educators in Chicago, henceforth to be known as The Black Teachers Coalition.

The Coalition now sends out the call for all black teachers ready and willing to take an active part in the struggle. It should be made clear here that the functioning of the Coalition will in no way preclude the programs of any existing teacher groups. But

### COALITION COMMITTEES NEED SUPPORT

The newly-formed Black Teacher-Parent Student Coalition met on February 23, 1970, for its initial organizational session. At this meeting the following committees were formed: Education; Communications; Finance; Research; and Operations.

The purpose of each committee is to function in its given area to deal with the over-all goal of the Coalition: to arrive at an alternative or alternative educational systems for educating Black Youth.

These committees are very much in need of willing and able volunteers in order that they might effectively carry out their tasks. Any Brother or Sister who wishes to serve on or assist one or more of these committees in any way will be more welcome. Interested persons may give of their services by communicating with the B.T. P. S. C., LOCK BOX 17148, Chicago, Illinois 60617.

the Coalition has as two of its chief aims: The establishment of better lines of communication between these groups, and acting as a body which will solidify for any event that will necessitate the unity of all Black teachers.

One of the main goals of the Coalition will be to meet directly the needs and aspirations of today's Black youth, our most precious treasure. It goes without saying that our youth are desperately in need of positive guidance and direction in an ever-increasingly technological and socially complex society.

All Black educators must reach the level of awareness which should indicate to them that more relevant alternatives to the present education of Black youth are long overdue. Thus the call for your time, energy, and talent goes forth. We realize that few of us have much extra time and energy to spare, that

### AN ALTERNATIVE INDEPENDENT SYSTEM

By The Staff, Students and Parents

#### Background:

A National Conference for Black teachers was held in Chicago in April, 1968. Educators came from all sections of the country and from all levels of educational involvement (from wayside rural classrooms to widely acclaimed and distinguished colleges and universities). The primary concern of those assembled was to become united around the causes and effects of crises in education and to recognize that the solutions to these problems could and would only come from Black educators who re-commit and re-dedicate their lives to these ends. A basic structure was put together, specific tasks were delegated and the word went forth that the newly-organized A.A.A.E. (Association of Afro-American Educators) would begin to deal with and search for all means to educate in the Black community, qualitatively.

In Atlanta, Georgia the following year (August 20-24, 1969), the guiding principles were clarified to express that, in order for a real and lasting educative process to have support and acceptance (legitimacy), it must have as its base the total involvement and total dictates of each LOCAL area or community. In order to achieve total involvement, with the entire Black community participating, the Madison Avenue style of executive management and hierarchal omnipotence had to be ruptured. This style of management was the cause of the initiation of the conference.

The Black Communiversality evolved from a month-long concentration on the historical evolution and development of the Black man-from-Africa



READING LIST  
YOUNG LORDS ORGANIZATION  
FREE PUERTO RICO NOW

All members are required to read all these books. After each book a book report should be turned in to the section leader or officer in command to be filed. If you have already read some of these books you are still required to make a book report.

1. Wretched of the Earth  
frantz fanon
2. Revolution in a Revolution  
regis debray
3. Autobiography of Malcolm X
4. Malcolm X Speaks
5. Venceremos  
gerassi
6. Che Speaks
7. Great Fear in Latin America  
gerassi
8. Guerilla Warfare  
che
9. History Will Absolve Me  
fidel castro
10. Dark Skin, White Masks  
Frants fanon
11. Military Writings  
chairman mao
12. Puerto Rico Plebiscite
13. Red Book  
mao tse tung \*
14. State In A Revolution  
lenin\*
15. Communist Manifesto  
marx & engels

16. What Is To Be Done  
lenin
17. The Right Of Nations To Self  
Determinati on lenin
18. Imperialism, The highest Stage  
Capitalism, lenin \*
19. Teachings of Karl Marx  
lenin
20. Selected Works of Lenin  
lenin
21. La Lucha Por Independencia  
Juan antonio corretjer
22. The Women Question \*
23. United Front Against Fascism
24. Fanshen
25. Red Star Over China

As much as possible on Puer to Rico,  
Mexico and Latin America.

All underground newspapers,  
especially Claridad, and the Black  
Panther

RESTRICTED MATERIAL  
DO NOT DISCLOSE OR  
REPRODUCE WITHOUT PERMISSION

Completed



22805

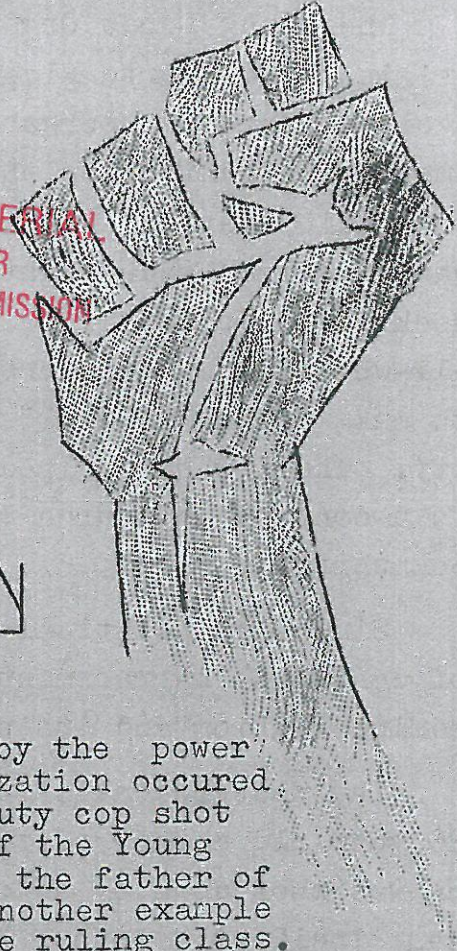
# DEFEND THE

# YOUNG

# LORDS

# ORGANIZATION

RESTRICTED MATERIAL  
DO NOT DISCLOSE OR  
REPRODUCE WITHOUT PERMISSION



The latest and most serious attack by the power structure on the Young Lords Organization occurred just last Saturday night. An off-duty cop shot and killed MANUEL RAMOS, a member of the Young Lords. Manuel was 20 years old and the father of two young children; His murder is another example of the viciousness of an oppressive ruling class. His death will not be forgotten by all those who also are struggling for a better world.

## CHA CHA JIMENEZ

CHAIRMAN - YOUNG LORDS ORGANIZATION

## RICHARD HILL

ORGANIZER - CHICAGO SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY

FRIDAY, MAY 9

3:00 PM

302 S. CANAL ST.

MILITANT LABOR FORUM

7-3

Donation: 50¢ proceeds go to YLO defense



COPS MURDER YOUNG LORD - BUT THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES !

The Young Lords Organization, which was formed in 1959, was originally a Puerto Rican street gang. Since that time it has evolved and been reorganized into a militant, political Latin American organization which is seeking to serve, defend and unite the Latin American Community to fight for basic social change. It has organized and fought the plans of crooked realtors who were seeking to drive all the Puerto Ricans out of their community. An all-white Community Conservation Council was fought when it proposed to make "urban renewal" decisions on the fate of the Latin community. The YLO has helped victims of the Chicago police force which is a continuous source of brutality and harrassment in the Latin community.

Since its political turn, the Young Lords have been the targets of continual harrassment, victimizations and frameups by the city administration and its police force.

The most recent of these incidents is the murder of MANUEL RAMOS, 20 year old member of the Young lords and father of two children. He was shot down by an off duty cop on the night of May 3. In the same incident, another Young Lord was critically wounded and four others were arrested.

This latest attack on the Young Lords is another attempt to silence the growing revolutionary opposition to the racist and exploitive capitalist system which values property above human rights.

The murder of Manuel Ramos will not go unopposed. It is the duty of all defenders of human rights to denounce this political assassination and to support and defend the Young Lords Organization. Money is urgently needed for bail, defense costs and for the family of Manuel Ramos. Please send contributions to:

Young Lords Organization  
2512 North Lincoln  
Chicago, Illinois 60614

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REPRODUCE WITHOUT PERMISSION

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Chicago SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY and YOUNG SOCIALIST ALLIANCE