

Radicals *in* Black & Brown:

Palante, People's Power, and Common Cause in the
Black Panthers and the Young Lords Organization



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The Robert and Sallie Brown Gallery and Museum

THE SONJA HAYNES STONE CENTER FOR BLACK CULTURE AND HISTORY

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHAPEL HILL

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Radicals in Black and Brown

Throughout the course of their relatively short existence from the mid 60's through the mid 70's, the Black Panthers and the Young Lords Organization (YLO) captured the imagination of the nation and the world and stood out as symbols of direct of resistance to the oppression of people of color and poor people in the United States, and to manifestations of imperialism and colonialism around the world. *Radicals in Black and Brown* examines some of the moments when Panthers and Lords crossed paths, reviews some of the common aspects of their histories, and highlights the various ways they influenced each other's politics, strategies and tactics.

Radicals in Black and Brown joins ongoing commemorations around the country that celebrate the founding of both organizations 40 years ago. This exhibit also continues a program series inaugurated at the Stone Center in April 2005, when a group of scholar-activists gathered to discuss various aspects of the radical movements and organizations of the 1960's and 70's that usually are afforded little attention in the popular literature of the Black freedom movement. In March of 2006, the Afro-American Studies and Research Program at the University of Illinois – Urbana Champaign continued the series with the *Race, Roots and Resistance: Revisiting the Legacies of Black Power*, that brought together over 300 participants who debated the role of Black radicals and other radical formations in the Black freedom movement.

The exhibit *Radicals in Black and Brown* is the follow-up to those gatherings and spotlights a major assertion voiced in both: radical groups of the era influenced each other both directly and indirectly and many of these exchanges have yet to be fully examined.

Radicals in Black and Brown is dedicated to the long line of freedom fighters from both communities who struggled for human rights and justice for all peoples, and to freedom fighters, still living, who have devoted their lives to the ongoing struggle for human rights and dignity. ◀

top left
Armiboy, Lincoln Park, Chicago
15 x 15
Black and White Photograph

top right
Huey Newton With James Baldwin (1969)
8 x 10
Black and White Photograph

Power to the Panthers: An Overview of the Black Panther Party, 1966-82

BY CHARLES E. JONES

October 2006 marked the fortieth anniversary of the birth of the Black Panther Party, an organization co-founded in Oakland, California in 1966 by two college students, Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale. Newton and Seale adopted the image of a black panther for their fledgling organization, borrowed from the Lowndes County Freedom Organization, which was established to secure black voting rights in Alabama. The Black Panther Party rapidly evolved from a local, Oakland-based group into a national organization with affiliates in twenty-eight states and Washington, D.C., as well as an international chapter in Algeria. Panther chapters existed in such unexpected locations, as Seattle, Des Moines, Omaha, and Denver; and contrary to conventional wisdom, they also appeared in numerous southern cities, including New Orleans, Memphis, and Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

Throughout the course of their relatively short existence, (1966-1982) the Black Pan-

thers electrified the nation with their dynamic image—berets, black leather jackets, weapons—and their revolutionary zeal. Panther comrades galvanized communities and regularly participated in coalitions with the white Left and other radical groups of color including the Young Lords. Their community outreach activities, later named “survival programs,” fed, clothed, educated, and provided health care to thousands.

The party’s socialist orientation, advocacy of armed resistance, effective community organizing, and inflammatory rhetoric triggered intensive governmental surveillance and political repression. Over a dozen members are known to have died in gun altercations with the police. Panthers were frequently arrested and were often the target of the FBI’s notorious and illegal counterintelligence program, COINTELPRO. The Panthers helped define the turbulent 1960s, and their slogan “All Power to All the People” their political rallies, and their revolutionary art, inspired by Emory Douglas, the BPP minister of culture, were common fixtures of the time. The organization’s bravado, community service, and uncompromising leadership captivated the imagination of oppressed people across the nation and throughout the world.

During its sixteen-year life span, 1966 to 1982, the BPP went through five distinct stages. In the first, from October 1966 to December 1967, the party was a revolutionary California-based organization engaged in grassroots activism in the Oakland Bay area and Los Angeles. The second phase, January 1968 to April 1971, represents the heyday of the Black Panther Party, during which the overwhelming majority of BPP chapters across the United States were formed. This rapid expansion led to intense political re-



Huey Newton With James Baldwin (1969)
8 × 10
Black and White Photograph

Huey Newton With James Baldwin (1969)
8 × 10
Black and White Photograph

pression and factional conflict. In the third phase, May 1971 to July 1974, the party's leadership stressed community outreach programs and electoral politics rather than armed confrontations against the government.

This deradicalization phase was highlighted by the Bobby Seale–Elaine Brown campaign for political office in Oakland. So important was this shift toward electoral politics that Huey P. Newton decided to close all Black Panther Party chapters outside of Oakland, and ordered party members to relocate to Oakland to support the campaign. This phase concluded with the departure of Bobby Seale, who resigned from the organization in July due to irreconcilable differences with Newton. The party's fourth stage, August 1974 to June 1977, is characterized by Newton's exile in Cuba. The official explanation put forth by the BPP was that Newton fled to Cuba to escape a contract placed on his life by the city's drug dealers. However, it is more likely that Newton left the country to avoid pending criminal charges. In his absence, Elaine Brown, a member of the central committee who had served as minister of information to the organization, assumed leadership of the Black Panther Party, which successfully wielded its influence in Oakland politics. In the final phase, July 1977 to June 1982, the party's membership dwindled to fewer than fifty members, and the organization lacked the resources to implement many of its survival programs. The closing of the Oakland Community School in June 1982 marked the end of the Black Panther Party.

U.S. government repression is first and foremost among the multiple factors that contributed to the demise of the Black Panther Party. This systematic political repression not only took a toll on the membership but also diverted critical resources from the Panther's community organizing to the legal defense campaigns that

were mounted to support indicted or imprisoned cadre. However, there were internal problems as well. Newton's substance abuse and erratic dictatorial tendencies severely crippled the organization, contributing to its downfall. A cult of personality around Newton permitted his unprincipled behavior to go unchallenged. In addition, factional conflict over tactics—urban guerrilla warfare versus an emphasis on survival programs—resulted in the death of two Panther comrades in 1971 and prompted the exodus of other members, including several key members who had the stature to challenge Newton's leadership dominance. Finally, the organization eventually ceased to exist due to membership burnout. Black Panther Party membership required a full-time commitment. After years of tireless service, communal living, and constant government harassment, many Panthers eventually left the organization to regain a sense of normalcy.

The legacy of the Black Panther Party has surpassed its actual lifespan, which was less than twenty years. The party's uncompromising defense of the black community inspired and empowered people throughout the world. Its commitment to community service, multiracial politics, and the self-determination of all people, regardless of race, gender, or sexual orientation, provides a model for contemporary political organizations dedicated to the liberation of oppressed people. ◀



The Black
Panther Party's
uncompromising
defense of the
black community
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people through-
out the world

BY DARREL ENCK-WANZER

Various “serve the people” programs generated visibility and intense support for the Young Lords and bolstered their demands for community control, liberation, self-determination, and socialist redistribution.

Crafting the People’s Revolution in El Barrio: The Young Lords’ People’s Church

Crafting the people’s revolution is no easy task, as the New York Young Lords discovered on numerous occasions after their founding in 1969. Not only must one develop appropriate tactics in order to negotiate systemic constraints you must also manage to do so in conjunction with symbolic resources that articulate revolution as essential to the people and vice versa. For the Young Lords this revolutionary tradition was first set in motion over a hundred years earlier with Puerto Rico’s *El Grito de Lares*¹; but the process they began to engage after 1969 was complicated, as well as enriched, by the diverse political and rhetorical traditions that characterized Puerto Rican nationalist thought. After successfully beginning the process of defining a revolutionary space in *El Barrio* through community agitation, the Lords turned their attention to expanding their activities in the community and concretizing what they had envisioned in their 13 Point Program and Platform when they used terms such as “community control,” “self-determination,” and “liberation.”

One of the first points of this expansion revolved around the issue of health and, among other problems, lead poisoning in particular was reaching near epidemic proportions in New York City at that time. Reporting in the *Village Voice* in late-1969 Jack Newfield wrote: “Medical authorities estimate there are 30,000 undiagnosed cases of lead poisoning each year in the city. The victims are usually children between the ages of one and three, who eat flaking or peeling paint from tenement walls.”² In response to this health disaster and the city’s inability (or unwillingness) to address it, the Young Lords struck a deal with the Health Department to administer detection tests for lead poisoning. Using the same kind of grassroots community organizing

they had employed in the peaceful phase of the garbage offensive³; the Lords leafleted El Barrio with flyers that read:

*We are operating our own lead poisoning detection program with students from New York Medical College, beginning Tuesday, November 25, on 112th Street. The Young Lords and medial personnel will knock on your door Tuesday and ask to test your children for lead poison. Do not turn them away. Help save your children.*⁴

In addition to flyering, the Young Lords staged a sit-in to acquire the tests the Health Department had originally offered and, thereby, sparked increased community awareness of both the health problems associated with lead paint and the unacceptable performance of the city’s Health Department.

While an important program in its own right,⁵ lead poisoning testing was symbolic of one of the most important points in the Lords’ platform:

WE WANT COMMUNITY CONTROL OF OUR INSTITUTIONS AND LAND

We want control of our communities by our people and programs to guarantee that all institutions serve the needs of our people. People’s control of police, health services, churches, schools, housing, transportation and welfare are needed. We want an end to attacks on our land by urban renewal, highway destruction, universities and corporations.

LAND BELONGS TO ALL THE PEOPLE!⁶

Community control of health programs and the lead poisoning testing program were the first

of many attempts to assert the people's sovereignty and reduce reliance on an oppressive "system."

Various "serve the people" programs (named after their Black Panther counterparts) generated visibility and intense support for the Young Lords in El Barrio and bolstered their demands for community control, liberation, self-determination, and socialist redistribution. One example of increased community support came in the form of the community's response to police harassment of the Young Lords. Speaking about an attempt by police to intimidate and provoke the Young Lords by surrounding the office one day, Pablo "Yoruba" Guzman recounts the community's response:

The people came out into the street and were behind us. They asked what are they here for and we told them what they were here for. Our explanation made a connection with what happened to the Black Panther Party a

*week before and the people said 'Why? You haven't hurt anybody.'*⁷

Within that context of increasing community awareness and support, the Young Lords sought out institutions they felt had not effectively served the needs of the community. In this effort, the Lords approached the First Spanish Methodist Church (FSMC) about using their facilities to run a free breakfast program for poor youth. Initially, the Lords appealed to the FSMC as part of a broader effort to connect with partners in their various outreach programs. Since churches were visible institutions and carried credibility among the people – and since the Chicago Young Lords made a local church a key focus of their initial community service efforts – the Lords worked to ensure that different churches were actually serving the communities where they operated.

The Young Lords discovered that most of the churches in El Barrio had some kind of com-



munity service program that assisted residents in ways other than spiritual and religious services. The FSMC, however, was a special and unfortunate case. Located in the middle of El Barrio, the FSMC only opened its doors on Sundays for official church services and, therefore, became an institution of particular interest to the Lords.⁸ⁱ According to Yoruba, “The First Spanish Church was chosen because it was right smack dead in the center of the Barrio. It’s a beautiful location right in the middle of the community. It was also chosen because it is the one church in the community that has consistently closed itself up to the community.”⁹ As such, the FSMC became the locus of conflict for the Lords and supporters.

Failing in their initial negotiations with the FSMC, the Young Lords made the decision to appeal directly to the membership of the congregation. On December 7, 1969, after having attended services and distributed flyers outside for the previous six Sundays, members of the Young Lords attended the Sunday worship again. At the end of the sermon, a period for free testimonial opened up and Felipe Luciano (then chairperson of the New York Young Lords chapter) attempted to speak to the 80-member congregation: “There is something wrong here,” Luciano said. “This is not a community.” Upon rising and, according to *New York Times* reporter Michael Kaufman, “interrupting the ser-

vice,” Luciano and other Lords were confronted by police officers who had been standing by in anticipation.^{10 ii} In the clash that followed, five Young Lords and three police officers were injured (Luciano the worst with a broken arm), and fourteen Young Lords were arrested. After the clash, about 150 people in the community took part in a march that ended at the FSMC. “At the church, the marchers stopped for a short rally at which they berated the police as ‘cowards’ and repeated their demand...”¹¹

In the weeks that followed, the Lords continued (progressively more forcefully) to negotiate with the FSMC leadership. Each Sunday, the Lords returned to the church services and requested from the parishioners an agreement to use the space for a free breakfast program, a daycare, a makeshift medical clinic (for tuberculosis and lead poisoning testing), and a “liberation school.”^{12 iii} On December 21, for example, about 150 Young Lords and supporters attended Sunday worship. A brief discussion between the Lay board (the governing body of the FSMC), a representative of the church youth, and some Young Lords followed the service, after which Luciano delivered another plea to parishioners for use of the space. By that time, however, most of the church members had departed.¹³

The following Sunday brought a substantial change in the scene when the Young Lords seized the church. As parishioners left at the end of services, “crosspieces were quickly nailed onto the church’s two doors, which were also chained from the inside.”^{14 iv} Choosing to “take” the church rather than continue futile negotiations, the Young Lords pronounced a “liberated zone” “in the midst of occupied territory.”¹⁵ Promptly renaming the First Spanish Methodist Church as “the People’s Church,” the Young Lords began almost immediately to serve the community. According to a *New York Times* report, “Puerto Rican militants provided free meals, medical care, and history classes for neighborhood



Cha Cha Jimenez (center) and Omar (right)
8 × 10
Black and White Photograph

The Young Lords: Its Origins and Convergences with the Black Panther Party

BY JOHANNA FERNANDEZ

The Young Lords articulated the highest aspirations and the humblest hopes of poor urban communities across the country and captured the imagination of cities like New York and Chicago.

Against the backdrop of America's spiraling urban crisis in the late 1960s, an unexpected cohort of young radicals unleashed a dramatic chain of urban guerilla protests that riveted the media and alarmed Mayors Richard Daley of Chicago and John V. Lindsay of New York. From garbage dumping demonstrations to a series of church and hospital occupations – termed “offensives” in deference to the *Tet* campaign of the Vietnamese – this small, interracial group exploded into the country's consciousness, staging its social grievances with infectious irreverence and distinctive imagination. They had enormous ideas, a flair for the dramatic, and a penchant for linking international crises with local concerns; within a few years this group of young men and women reshaped social protest and won an astounding number of victories. They called themselves the Young Lords.[†]

The Young Lords Organization (YLO) was a Puerto Rican revolutionary nationalist group, born in the 1960's, that consciously fashioned itself after the Black Panther Party (BPP) and ardently championed the independence of Puerto Rico, America's last standing neo-colony. Legendary in movement circles, the history of this little known organization challenges dominant interpretations of the civil rights and black power movements, the U.S. urban crisis, and the character and complexity of the black Diaspora. With a formal leadership largely composed of afro-Latinos (especially in the New York chapter) and with one-quarter of its membership comprised of African Americans, YLP members launched one of the first Latino formations that: saw itself as part of the African Diaspora; that was instrumental in theorizing and identifying the structures of racism embedded in the culture, language, and history of Latin America and its institutions; and that would commit itself to the struggle against

racism in the United States and insist that poor African Americans and Latinos shared common political and economic interests.

These predominantly first generation, poor and working class Puerto Rican movement mavericks led militant, community-based campaigns to alleviate the most visible manifestations of the new poverty in American cities: chronic unemployment, the intractable crisis of public health care, childhood lead poisoning, poor sanitation, drug addiction, hunger, racism, and police brutality. In so doing, the Young Lords articulated the highest aspirations and the humblest hopes of poor urban communities across the country and captured the imagination of cities like New York and Chicago. And in the course of just a few short years they grew from a little-known organization to the stuff of legend; in the process, their media-conscious urban guerrilla protests, combined with the group's multi-racial membership, redefined the character of protest, the color of politics, and the cadence of popular culture in the city.

The issues around which they built a local urban movement would become central in public policy debates during the 1980s and 1990s: a worsening healthcare crisis; the neighborhood consequences of deindustrialization and municipal budget cuts; the growing disrepair of American cities; the swelling incarceration of people who could not be employed by urban economies; and an overtly self-interested American hegemony and foreign policy.

Preoccupied with organizing the poorest sections of society, the Lords – like the Panthers – embraced what Karl Marx identified as the “lumpen proletariat,” the group of permanently unemployed and discouraged workers living on the margins of society, which through the group's Maoist interpretation was regarded as the social class with the greatest revolutionary potential. With this community support, and in many cases,

participation, they organized a series of successful campaigns. In Chicago, the YLO is remembered for its occupation, in 1968, of the McCormick Theological Seminary, which it turned into a social service sanctuary for the poor, and for its activism against urban renewal in the Lincoln Park section of the city. The Chicago group is also important for its participation in the Rainbow Coalition, a class-based activist alliance led by the Chicago Black Panthers that also included the Young Patriots, a Chicago group of politicized white migrants from Appalachia.

One of the most significant aspects of the history of the YLO is its genesis. The Young Lords originally emerged in the tumult of Chicago in 1968 as a politicized gang. The Chicago Young Lords was one of numerous inner-city gangs, which in the 1960s relinquished its defensive competition over “turf” control and moved toward progressive and overtly political community organizing, partially as a result of organic grassroots leadership in inner-city neighborhoods and in particular the conscious political intervention of Black Panther Party leader Fred Hampton. The primary architect of the Young Lords’ political conversion was the gang’s chairman Jose “Cha Cha” Jimenez. Like many black and Latino urban youth of his time, the Puerto Rican gang-leader-turned-activist was radicalized in prison. In prison, Jimenez read the story of religious transformation told by Thomas Merton in his best seller *Seven Storey Mountain* as well as *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*.

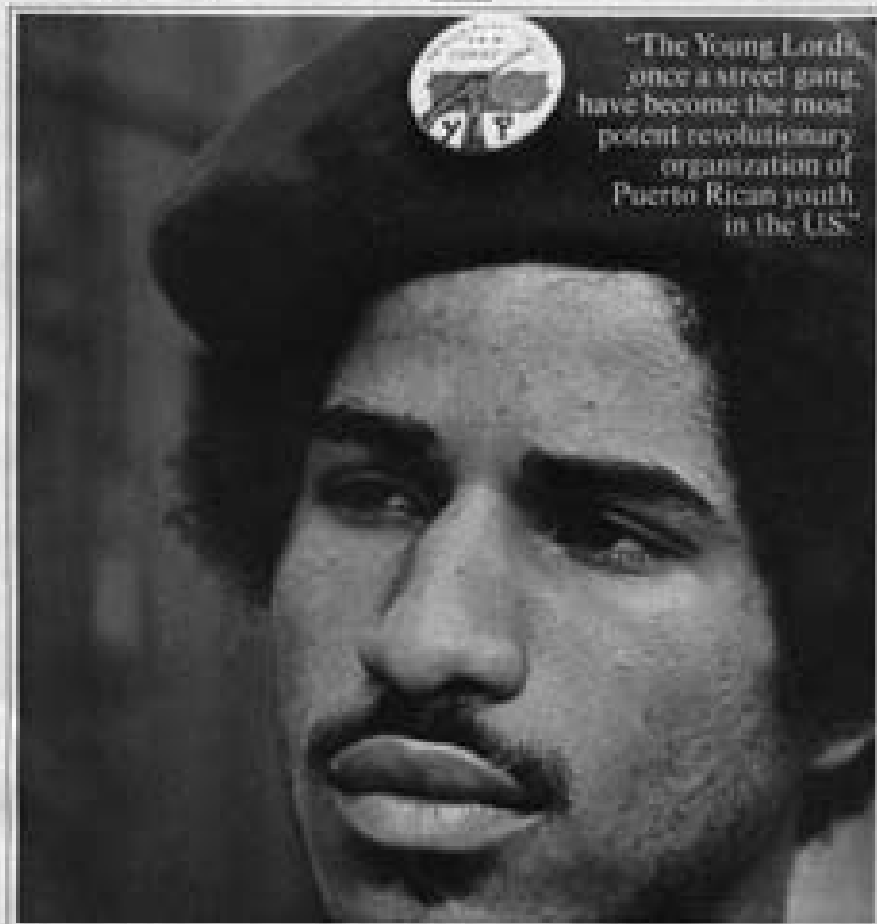
These books were made available to him by a prison inmate and librarian who was a member of the Nation of Islam. Conversations about these books with fellow inmates in the atmosphere of possibility created by the social movements of the era awakened Jimenez to the world of political ideas. Upon release from prison Jimenez was targeted by a War on Poverty program designed to bridge his transition from jail to civilian life and help him find a job. He was also approached by one Pat Divine, a local activist who convinced Jimenez to join the struggle against urban renewal in the Lincoln Park section of Chicago where the Young Lords (gang) was active. During this time, Jimenez was also approached by Panther leader Fred Hampton and before long

he began the Herculean process of redirecting the energies and focus of his gang and transforming the Young Lords into the Black Panther Party’s Puerto Rican counterpart.

In New York, where college education became available to racial minorities on a mass scale in the 1960s through pioneering programs at the City University of New York, the Young Lords Organization, later renamed the Young Lords Party (YLP) was initiated by politicized students in 1969. It flourished alongside the conflagrations of New York’s city and labor politics in the late 1960s. These men and women – full of passion, and barely adults – came of age during the racially divisive NYC teacher’s strike of 1968, the school decentralization movements, recurrent housing struggles, the welfare rights movement, the prison rebellions at the Tombs and Attica, a string of local street riots, and the

How Harvard, Berkeley et al Set Up the Indonesian Massacre
Civil War in Ireland?; Middle Earth Art; 54 Woodstock: 75

Ramparts



rise of Puerto Ricans (and other Latinos) as an electoral force in the city.

In New York, the Young Lords' most famous act was their audacious garbage dumping protests, which forced the city to conduct regular neighborhood garbage pick-ups. A quieter, but more significant victory was their anti-lead poisoning campaign which the *Journal of Public Health* deemed instrumental in the passage of anti-lead poisoning legislation in New York during the early 1970s. At Lincoln Hospital in the Bronx, the Young Lords were among the first activists to challenge the advent of draconian reductions in social spending and privatization policies in the public sector. In the spring and summer of 1970, the Young Lords' efforts advanced swiftly from discreet one-on-one conversations with patients and employees concerning hospital conditions to a dramatic twelve-hour occupation of one of the hospital's buildings, the Nurses Residence, a building that formed part of the Lincoln complex, which in an earlier era housed the first nursing school for black women in the United States and was a stop on the underground railroad.

In addition to carrying on a tradition of struggle going back to the Underground Railroad, at Lincoln, the Young Lords were also continuing the work of the BPP and various other activists who in the winter of 1969 spearheaded a battle over control of the Community Mental Health Clinic affiliated with Lincoln. Supported by a number of psychiatrists, psychologists, and other health professionals, a team of community mental health workers (some of whom were members of the BPP) seized the facility in an attempt to implement administrative changes which they believed would further democratize

the program's governing structure and meet its stated philosophy of making the community a partner in its own care.

The Young Lords' hospital occupation of July 1970 dramatized Lincoln's deplorable conditions and, as a result, the crisis at Lincoln Hospital became a major item in the city's political debates. The whirlwind of controversy that gripped the medical facility following the Young Lords' actions was recorded in over one hundred mainstream and alternative news articles. As a result, government officials were forced to find ways to improve care in the public hospitals. The Young Lords' actions eventually led to, among other victories, the creation of one of the principle acupuncture drug treatment centers in the western world.

While the Young Lords launched an impressive course of grassroots campaigns in the late sixties, the larger radical movement to which they belonged failed to coalesce around a broad campaign calling for wealth redistribution, the mass creation of jobs, and an extensive housing construction initiative. These fundamental changes would have been necessary to alter the structural problems of urban decline and economic inequality with which the movement was concerned. Moreover, the movement did not leverage the social power required to achieve these radical reforms.

The labor upsurge of the 1970s presented possibilities for a community and labor coalition that may have been capable of enacting more fundamental and lasting socioeconomic and political changes. In fact, the Young Lords and many other groups began to organize in workplaces during this period, but their efforts were stymied by the inexperience of the New Left and the advent of recession, which undermined the mass character of the movement.

Political limitations of the period notwithstanding, the Young Lords represents the best of sixties radicalism. Organizing with the benefit of years of movement experience, the bold confrontational style of Young Lords' campaigns were effective in achieving immediate local reforms. At their best, their community organizing campaigns attempted to extend the meaning of American democracy, especially as they put forth a new vision of society based on humane priorities. ☞



Cha Cha Appearing on Local Program,
Chicago
8 × 10
Black and White Photograph

The Black Panthers and The Young Lords: A Bibliography

An expanded bibliography is available on the Stone Center's web site.

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HISTORY AND OVERVIEW OF THE CENTER

The Sonja Haynes Stone Center for Black Culture and History is part of The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. As a center within the University's Academic Affairs Division, we have a central role in supporting the University's academic mission. We have a commitment to broaden the range of intellectual discourse about African-Americans and to encourage better understanding of the peoples of the African diaspora and their perspectives on important social and cultural issues.

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Michael Harris
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Gallery Hours: 10 a.m. – 7 p.m. weekdays; open on weekends by appointment only; closed University holidays.

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