‘Dressing Up the Movement’: The Uniforms of the Black Panthers, Brown Berets, and Young Lords

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Abstract

During the 1960s and 70s, fashion functioned as a powerful tool for political movements to convey their messages by crafting a striking and unified image. The style and politics of the Black Panther Party (BPP) inspired radical political movements throughout the country but had an especially strong influence on the Brown Berets and Young Lords, close allies that adopted a distinct BPP-inspired uniform and ideology. While the style of the BPP has been well-researched by historians, the fashion of the Brown Berets and Young Lords remains relatively unexplored, and the organizations have yet to be considered in tandem. This paper analyzes how fashion functioned as an important means of self-definition and ideological expression for these three radical organizations; it argues that the creation of distinct uniforms helped redefine the groups' unique identities as rooted in both international revolutionary principles and nationalist cultural ideals. Close examination of newspapers from the revolutionary organizations, photographs of organizers, oral histories, and autobiographies illuminate the symbolic and transformative power of fashion. The analysis is supported and contextualized by scholarship on the histories of solidarity among Third World peoples inside and outside the United States, the organizational history of each respective social movement, and sociological theory that views fashion as a means of communication. Comparing the uniforms developed by the BPP, Brown Berets, and Young Lords and their use of style as a form of activism highlights both inter-organizational solidarity and points of difference, evident in their shared revolutionary ideologies and divergent gender dynamics.

Introduction: An Unexamined Legacy

At the 2016 Super Bowl when Beyonce and her backup dancers marched onto the field wearing black leather bodysuits and tilted black berets atop their afros, their image of black militantism was immediately recognizable to the world watching. Their display sparked controversy as people saw the performance as a critique of police brutality and a statement of support for Black Lives Matter. Although Beyonce never explicitly stated this about the performance, the uniforms communicated these ideas without words. Her look was an obvious homage to the Black Panther Party (BPP), which was celebrating its 50th anniversary that October.[1] Even 50 years later, the style of the BPP was instantly recognizable and held deep and powerful political connotations that sparked both pride and controversy. Conservative Americans were upset that she was celebrating militant Black icons at what they claimed was a non-political event. Further, as a Black woman, she stole the show from a white man, Chris Martin of Coldplay, rejecting her normative space as a Black woman, and asserting, much like the Panthers, to be seen, heard, and listened to.

When the The BPP uniforms were conceived and popularized in the 1960s they commanded attention, similarly inspiring and dividing Americans. However, to other activists, like Chicanos of the Brown Berets and Puerto Ricans of the Young Lords, the BPP's style provided a model of revolutionary activism. As the closest allies to the BPP, the Brown Berets, a Chicano nationalist organization started in East Los Angeles, and the Young Lords, a Puerto Rican revolutionary nationalist organization active in Chicago and New York City, adapted the

[1] "Beyonce's Super Bowl performance: Why was it so significant?" *BBC,* February 8, 2016, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-35520636; Diana Falzone, "Backlash to Beyonce's Super Bowl performance continues to grow," *Fox News*, February 12, 2016, https://www.foxnews.com/entertainment/backlash-to-beyonces-super-bowl-performance-continues-to-grow. Nancy MacDonell, "How Berets Became a Part of Black History, From the Black Panthers to Beyoncé," *The Wall Street Journal*, February 2, 2022, https://www.wsj.com/articles/berets-black-panthers-beyonce-11643753652.

uniform of the BPP to signal their shared commitment to the end of racism, capitalism, and imperialism.

'Dressing up the Movement' examines the creation and deployment of the uniforms of the Black Panther Party, Brown Berets, and Young Lords from 1966 through 1972.[2] I ask how these organizations used fashion to express their ideology and demonstrate solidarity. Additionally, I ask how their uniforms illuminated differences in ideology and gendered experiences within revolutionary movements. To answer these questions, my thesis explores how and why these uniforms were created, and how the organizations used the uniforms to help design a revolutionary sensibility. Analyzing the uniforms of the BPP, Brown Berets, and Young Lords shows how these groups imagined revolutionary communities that crossed racial and geographic borders. Shared symbols, like the uniform, were expressions of a shared political commitment to challenge inequality and oppression– which still resonate over 50 years later.

I argue that the uniforms of these three revolutionary political movements revealed a cartography of Third World unity. In the 1950s and '60s, battles by colonized nations around the world for liberation, inspired non-white youth in America to build their own movements of resistance. Many revolutionary organizations in the U.S. adopted Third Worldist ideologies that framed their own struggles for freedom and self-determination akin to those of anti-colonial freedom fighters in Third World countries. Their uniforms visually crafted a bridge across all organizations that helped merge seemingly disparate social movements in which Black, Chicano, and Puerto Rican people were unified. Often perceived as engaging in separate movements because of geographical distance or ideological difference, the Panthers, Berets, and Lords

[2] I begin in the year 1966 because that is when the BPP was formed and my project ends in 1972 because by that time, all three organizations had changed greatly, with the Young Lords changing their name to Puerto Rican Workers Party (PRWP) and the Brown Berets officially disbanding in November of 1972.

shared a fight against global colonial legacies. While their uniforms demonstrated togetherness, they also illuminated the ways men and women in the organization negotiated new gender identities that simultaneously reinforced and subverted gender norms. Ultimately, the uniform had three main functions: to "capture the imagination of the people" as Huey Newton (co-founder of the BPP) described it; to create a visual sense of solidarity with both local and global revolutionary movements; and to demonstrate new, revolutionary self-definitions.[3]

Methods and Literature Review

This thesis demonstrates how the shared uniform was a conduit to resist oppression and reimagine realities. Their fashion reflected the varying and sometimes unstable connections fostered between movements. Third World activists in the 1960s and 70s built new forms of resistance and supported movements across the U.S. and the globe, developing a signature style that reflected this global sensibility. Accordingly, I employ a relation framework that draws upon the work of Natalia Molina, Daniel Widener, Laura Pulido, Cynthia A. Young, and Luis Alvarez to examine how racial identities and experiences are shaped through interactions with multiple groups and struggles, rather than viewing these experiences as separate or isolated.[4]

Since these activists recognized the intersecting forms of oppression against which they struggled, I draw on Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality to demonstrate how gender, class, and race informed their styling and self-presentation.[5] I also draw significantly on Black

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[3] Bobby Seale, "Free Huey," *Power to the People: the World of the Black Panthers,* edited by Stephen Shames (New York, NY: Abrams, 2016), 36.

[4] Natalia Molina, "Examining Chicana/o History through a Relational Lens," Pacific Historical Review 82, no. 4 (2013): 520-541; Daniel Widener, *Third Worlds within : Multiethnic Movements and Transnational Solidarity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2024); Laura Pulido, "Introduction," *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 1-11; Cynthia Ann Young, "Introduction," *Soul Power : Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 1-17; Luis Alvarez, "From Zoot Suits to Hip Hop: Towards a Relational Chicana/o Studies," *Latin Studies* 5 (2007): 53-75.

[5] Kimberlé Crenshaw Williams, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," in *Feminist Legal Theories*, edited by Karen J. Maschke, (New York City: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997), 23-51.

and Chicana feminist theories from Patricia Hill Collins, Maylei Blackwell, and Ana Castillo to contextualize the varying gendered experiences of members in the movements and how they developed unique forms of activism, communities within the movement, and identities reflective of their gendered experiences.[6] Revolutionaries used their clothing to communicate and created a visual representation of these new revolutionary identities. I thus analyze fashion as a means of communication, with clothing creating a "visual vocabulary" for their activism.[7] This visual vocabulary allowed for what Nikhil Pal Singh described as an "insurgent form of visibility," the demand to be seen and heard in beautiful and dignified ways that rejected stereotypical presentations of people of color.[8]

My work further demonstrates how style functioned within political movements by bringing fashion history into conversation with relational histories of social movements. While the study of the fashion of these political movements is sparse, I draw on the ideas that fashion was a powerful means to re-aestheticize the body, unlearn internalized racism, and project a sense of political and personal transformation as described by Tanisha C. Ford, Anna Hanchett, Kelly Leigh Mills, Ellie D. Hernández, Amaia Ibarraran-Bigalondo, and Frances Negron-Muntaner.[9] I contextualize their sartorial choices with works from social historians on

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[6] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (London, UK: Routledge,1990); Maylei Blackwell, *¡Chicana Power!: Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2011); Ana Castillo, *Massacre of the Dreamers : Essays on Xicanisma* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2014).

[7] Nathan Joseph, *Uniforms and Nonuniforms Communication Through Clothing* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986); T. N.Phu, "Shooting the Movement: Black Panther Party Photography and African American Protest Traditions," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 38, no. 1 (2008): 165–89.

[8] Nikhil Pal Singh, "Decolonizing America," *Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy,* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 203.

[9] Tanisha C. Ford, *Liberated Threads: Black Women, Style, and the Global Politics of Soul*, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Anna Hanchett, "Style Politics and the Black Panther Party: Power, Resistance and Community: Past and Present," *Bloomsbury Visual Arts*, 2023, 167–77; Kelly Leigh Mills, "Black Power: The Political Fashion and Anti-Fashion of the Black Panther Party" (PhD diss., State University of New York Fashion Institute of Technology, 2007); Ellie D. Hernández, "Chicana/o Fashion Codes: The Political Significance of Style," *Postnationalism in Chicana/o Literature and Culture*, (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2009), 109–24; Amaia Ibarraran-Bigalondo, *Mexican American Women, Dress and Gender: Pachucas, Chicanas, Cholas* (London: Routledge, 2019); Frances

the movements, turning to the works of Robyn Spencer, Ernesto Chávez, and Johanna Fernández.[10] Their work describes the histories and ideologies of the movements that support my analysis of their style, images, and actions.

Primary Sources

To analyze the uniforms worn by these revolutionaries, I draw on a variety of primary sources to understand how they styled themselves, what motivated their fashion choices, and how it felt to wear these clothes. All three groups were highly image-conscious and employed photography to document and circulate their revolutionary identities. These photographs are taken from books of photography produced by the organizations, their newspapers, and "The Gloria Arellanes Papers" of California State University, Los Angeles. I analyze these photographs to build an image of what the Panthers, Berets, and Lords wore. At the same time, my analysis is deeply situated in the historical context of the late 1960s and early '70s to show that the uniform took its charged political meaning from the social-political conditions in which it was worn. I further support this pictorial analysis with accounts from oral histories, interviews, and autobiographies. My goal is to center the words and images of these actors and to demonstrate how their uniforms enabled a powerful sense of identity and solidarity that helped sustain these global revolutionary communities. I also read volumes of their organizational newspapers (BPP's *The Black Panther*, Brown Berets' *La Causa*, Young Lords Organization's *YLO,* and Young Lords Party's *Palante*) from 1967-1972 to observe how they developed their ideology and documented their movements. Through their newspapers, these revolutionaries

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Negron-Muntaner, "The Look of Sovereignty: Style and Politics in the Young Lords," *Centro Journal* 27, no. 1 (2015): 4–33.

[10] Robyn C. Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come: Black Power, Gender, and the Black Panther Party in Oakland* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016); Ernesto Chávez, "'Birth of A New Symbol': The Brown Berets," *Mi Raza Primero, My People First* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2019), 42–60; Johanna Fernández, *The Young Lords: A Radical History* (Durham, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2020).

created images that contrasted the negative and demeaning narratives constructed by mainstream media.

Thesis Organization

This thesis consists of four chapters. Chapter 1 analyzes how the uniforms were used to attract and mobilize their communities. The militant image constructed by the organizations was appealing to both men and women alike; however, the image tended to reinforce patriarchal ideals of men as the protectors of communities. The Panthers, Berets, and Lords all used dramatic, militant, and performative political actions that drew attention to the issues they fought for and in general their movements. The uniforms aestheticized these actions, creating recognizable images that their communities came to trust. These uniforms also fostered a sense of community between revolutionary movements.

Chapter 2 focuses on how the uniform reflected and projected a sense of solidarity with global revolutionary movements. Their uniforms were rooted in the local coalitions formed between the Black Panthers and Brown Berets in Los Angeles, The Panthers and the Young Lords Organization in Chicago, and The Panthers and Young Lords Party in New York City. This sense of community gave members a feeling of purpose, belonging, and empowerment. Being a part of these revolutionary communities provided a space for young Black, Chicano, and Puerto Rican people to engage in self-definition. At the same time, they reinforced masculinist and patriarchal ideals of manhood.

How the uniforms projected a sense of militant, revolutionary, masculinity is the subject of Chapter 3. The uniform provided men with a means to reject their emasculation and take pride in their cultural identity. I then show how women within all the organizations challenged the replication of patriarchal structures and hypermasculine images and ideals. Chapter 4 illustrates

how women adapted the uniforms to subvert gender norms and demonstrate their own self-definitions as revolutionary Black, Chicana, and Puerto Rican women.

Finally, my conclusion discusses the legacy of the uniform and how its style impacted the demise of these organizations. Under intense FBI surveillance and infiltration, the uniforms often turned these revolutionaries into obvious targets for law enforcement and became a trope to which conservative Americans could attach their fears.

Figure 1. Black Panthers at Free Huey Rally DeFremery Park Oakland July 28, 1968.[11]

[11] Stephen Shames, *The Black Panthers*, (New York: Aperture Foundation, 2006), 16-17.

Chapter 1: Capturing the Imagination of the People: Mobilizing the Masses

Introduction

A crowd gathered on Oakland's 17th street as Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, the founders of the Black Panther Party (BPP), led a group of fourteen uniformed Panthers, each with a gun in hand, toward an arrest in progress. "Well, I see you guys are rather spiffy!" called a woman from the crowd. As the Panthers stood, observing the police arrest a Black man for a traffic violation, the crowd watched, wondering who these well-dressed, armed Black men marching down the street were. Huey announced to the crowd "All citizens have a right to stand," then still looking at the crowd, he pointed at the officer and continued, "to observe these police officers who've been brutalizing our people in the community. So no one leave. The law is on your side." The officer pushed back, but the crowd came to the BPP's defense, "Well, go ahead on and tell it, brother!" called the same woman who had complimented the group earlier. Bobby Seale said that after this encounter, twenty one people showed up to the BPP meeting the following day, and three joined.[12]

The uniforms created a form of "insurgent visibility" that commanded the attention of the Black community and demanded that those in power see and hear what the Panthers had to say.[13] This image was empowering and attractive for many non-white youth. The image they created with their uniforms, weapons, and coordinated marches allowed the group to quickly garner a rather polarized reputation around the country. For the police, and white conservative America, the image was alarming and terrifying– but for young people of color, this was exactly the form of resistance that they had been waiting for. Their uniforms helped build a recognizable image that came to represent their ideology and activism. Wearing the uniform during highly

[12] Seale "Free Huey," Power to the People, 39-40.
[13] Singh, "Decolonizing America," Black Is a Country, 203.

publicized, dramatic performance of political action, or "guerrilla theater," built their local and international representation and created an instantly recognizable, inherently political style. Their embrace of militant aesthetics and revolutionary ideology was shocking and alluring. They became icons of the revolution and used their aesthetics to bring global attention to the struggles of non-white youth in American urban centers.

By the second half of the 1960s, many activists embraced militantism as they were disillusioned with the slow change of the Civil Rights Movement and the assassination of powerful civil rights leaders. Despite the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965, many Black Americans and people of color lived in poverty, experienced housing discrimination and educational inequities, lacked access to health care, and suffered from persistent police violence.[14] Further, the rapid deindustrialization of American cities and intensification of neoliberalism following World War Two exacerbated the dire living conditions of low-income and non-white people. Uprisings took place in urban centers throughout the country in response to the deteriorating situation of urban life, a sign that people were fed up with slow change, or lack thereof, and demanded to be treated with dignity and respect no matter what the cost.[15]

This need for real change drove the popularity of militant ideologies. People of color had to protect themselves from violent state oppression and care for their communities when the government refused. Organizations like the BPP, Brown Berets, and Young Lords grew out of this need for protection and community support. Black, Chicano, and Puerto Rican people experienced different yet similar forms of oppression and racialization. Many were radicalized by their experiences with police violence and developed strategies to become a protective force

[14] Hanchett, "Style Politics and the Black Panther Party," *Bloomsbury Visual Arts,* 168.
[15] Thomas J. Sugrue, "Introduction," *The Origins of the Urban Crisis : Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 3-14.

for their people. Growing up in segregated, exploited, and dilapidated communities, Black, Chicano, and Puerto Rican people saw how the failings of their government kept their communities poor, sick, uneducated, and unstable. They developed programs to provide food for children, clothes and free medical care for their communities, and spaces to educate people on their culture. They also recognized their common enemy as the capitalist U.S. government and developed programs that were intended to protect and care for all oppressed groups. These commonalities led them to adopt similar ideologies, mobilization strategies, and fashion styles.

Their militant fashion was a direct response to the police violence, but also signaled a sense of empowered, radical identity, and solidarity with liberation movements throughout the nation and beyond. Turning away from the nice suits and ties and Sunday-best style of the Civil Rights Movement, their cool, militant style helped to popularize these movements, building recognition and trust within their communities and inspiring young people to join their fight. The groups developed the uniform of an urban guerrilla: a mix between revolutionary militant aesthetics and popular 1960s styles. The beret projected a sense of militancy rooted in the histories of liberation movements around the globe. The sunglasses created an aura of coolness, but also bodily autonomy and mystique. Their leather jackets or military fatigues enhanced their militant aesthetic but also imbued their style with a sense of power and rebellion.[16] The militancy of the image and rhetoric was initially directed at and most appealing to men, rooted in a desire to provide a space for male empowerment and transformation. But women also felt the desire to take up arms to protect their communities. Thus the flexible choice of clothing underneath the jackets allowed for women to express their gender identities and subvert patriarchal norms while embracing the militant image of the movement. The uniform was an accessible and everyday

[16] Hollywood films from the 1950s like *Rebel Without a Cause* and *The Wild Ones* created a powerful association between the leather jacket and rebellion, power, and individualism; Mills, *Black Power*, 21.

means of demonstrating consciousness. One could throw on a beret, or leather jacket and feel the sense of power rooted in these revolutionary ideologies. The notability, coolness, and accessibility of the uniform made these organizations both aesthetically and ideologically alluring to young people of color (but also the mainstream media).

This chapter demonstrates how the uniforms helped build these movements. The uniforms created a recognizable image that established the organizations in the community and the media. Their communities came to trust these groups because they could recognize the protection and care they provided when they saw the uniforms. The uniforms dramatized the movement and created a rousing display of their militant ideology that drew attention to their organization. They helped attract new members through their cool and militant uniforms that were enticing for young people and provided a vehicle for self transformation and empowerment. The uniform was an essential part of their recruitment and mobilization, helping to build the organizations into national movements, creating styles still resonant decades later. The uniform created by the BPP became an iconic look that was adopted and adapted by the Brown Berets and Young Lords to reflect their militant, revolutionary nationalism, but also solidarity with the BPP and liberation movements across the globe.

'What Did I Do To Be So Black and Blue' : the Black Panther Party Uniform

The colors of the Black Panther uniform- black beret, black leather jacket and a blue shirt- were chosen because they act as metaphors for the Black experience in America. Seale says that he and Newton were listening to the blues song "(What Did I Do To Be So) Black and Blue," which made Bobby Seale think that, like the protagonist of the song, "the African American community is all beat-up black-and-blue from over two hundred years of racist

discrimination." So he said to Huey Newton, "Now let's make that our uniform."[17] Wearing it signaled that one is conscious of their history (and reality) of oppression and is ready and willing to challenge it. Newton and Seale decided that Panthers would wear a shiny black leather jacket to mimic the coat of the black panther from which the organization took its name with a baby blue shirt underneath, embodying the "black and blue" of the oppression they sought to resist. Members wore this with black pants and shiny black shoes. The outfit was sharp, memorable, and militant. It showed commitment to the liberation of their people. The Panthers were done being "all beat-up black-and-blue" by the police and they knew how to show it.

Their uniform was a crucial part of their organizational origins. In 1966, after meeting at Merritt College in Oakland California, Bobby Seale and Huey Newton started the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. The organization was initially aimed at empowering Black men to protect their community from constant police harassment.[18] Taking up Malcolm X's militant calls for "a self help program" with a "do-it-right-now philosophy," Newton and Seale built a militant organization that taught young Black people about their constitutional rights, how to use a weapon to defend themselves, and the importance of pride in one's Blackness.[19] The group's militantism was expressed through their rhetoric and paramilitary organizational hierarchy; however, this adherence to militantism tended to reinforce masculinist ideals by promoting the idea that through militancy, Black men could reclaim their pride and manhood. Women still found ideas and aesthetics of militantism appealing and adapted the masculinist rhetoric to create

[17] The Blues music tradition is rooted in the Black experience, the lyrics reflect the lived experience of Black Americans throughout history and have been a powerful source of self-expression and resistance. That Newton and Seale were listening to and inspired by Blues is reflective of how the BPP's ideology, culture, and aesthetics were rooted in Black culture and history. Seale "Free Huey," *Power to the People,* 72.
[18] Spencer, "Seize the Time: The Roots of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California," *The Revolution Has Come,* 31-33.
[19] Malcolm X, "The Ballot or the Bullet," *Malcolm X Speaks,* ed. George Breitman (New York, NY: Grove Weidenfeld, 1965, 23-44.

a new image of revolutionary Black womanhood that presented women as militant warriors, leaders, and mothers active in the revolution. These new images of Black manhood and womanhood were a means of empowerment and communicated the radical ideals of the BPP to the community and beyond.

The BPP created a unique ideology that was accessible for everyday people but brought together Black Nationalist and Third Worldist ideologies. These ideals were outlined in BPP's Ten Point Program, "What We Want, What We Believe." They called for basic rights to "land, bread, housing, education, clothing," and for an end to the "murder" and "robbery" of black people by the capitalist state.[20] Inspired by the ideologies of Malcolm X, Che Guevara, Franz Fanon, and Mao Tse-Tung, the BPP aimed to radicalize the lumpenproletariat by providing a space for personal transformation. Both Malcolm X and Che Guevara emphasized the importance of personal transformation through education as essential to the development of a revolution.[21] Guevara's ideology influenced the BPP's paramilitary activities and coalition building work, and his image became a powerful revolutionary icon and emblem for the Party. Malcolm X's militant calls for community control of institutions guided the development of the BPP's community service programs, first in their police patrols and later in their free breakfast for children program, clothing drives, and free health clinics.[22]

Patrolling police activity while wearing their uniforms helped the Party establish themselves within the Oakland Black community. While these patrols were intended to stop the murder of Black people by the police, they were also aimed at the community; as Seale says "it was more than patrolling police…we were trying to capture the imagination of the people."[23]

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[20] "The Black Panther Party Platform & Program: What We Want, What We Believe," *The Black Panther*, December 6, 1969, 19.
[21] Che Guevara, "Socialism and man in Cuba," *The Che Reader* (London, UK: Ocean Press Books, 2005), 212-230; Malcolm X, "Message to the Grassroots," *Malcolm X Speaks*, 3-17.
[22] Malcolm X, "The Ballot or the Bullet," *Malcolm X Speaks,* 12-44.
[23] Bobby Seale "Free Huey," *Power to the People*, 36.

Anytime they were seen patrolling the police Newton says they "caused traffic jams" because people stopped to admire the Panthers. Newton knew the image of armed Black men patrolling the police would catch people's attention because it was a revolutionary, slightly intimidating, yet exciting image that created a feeling of solidarity.[24] This image also allowed the community to recognize and trust these new urban guerrillas. Seale recalls that "that uniform represented a heck of a lot more to the community than just a uniform. It represented organization."[25] Through their uniforms, the Panthers communicated to their Oakland community that they were organized, militant, and prepared to protect them. They were not "playing cowboys with guns on their belts," as the California Governor Ronald Regean had described them. They were, rather, armed revolutionaries with an ideology and a vital purpose.[26]

This image of men with a purpose was intriguing, alluring, and inspiring for the Black community. Bobby Seale remembers that even the "elderly mother would say, 'Lord, them young men show is sharp. Them young men and women sure are sharp and clean and organized.'" Further, "the brother on the block, the lumpen," would say upon seeing the uniformed Panthers, "'Man them dudes show is sharp. Baby I show wish I had me some knobs and some pimp socks,'" according to Seale. The uniform opened up a dialogue with the community who was interested in learning more about these armed and uniformed Black men patrolling their neighborhoods. This sense of awe and attraction to the uniform was important because it provided the Panthers then with the opportunity to share their platform with the people. Seale continues, "That uniform attracted a heck of a lot more people– the little kids loved it– and it was neat, that uniform."[27] His use of the word "neat" points to what was so appealing about the

[24] Huey P. Newton. "Sacramento and the 'Panther Bill,'" *The Huey P. Newton Reader.* Ed. David Hilliard (New York, NY: Seven Stories Press, 2002), 67.
[25] Bobby Seale, "The Black Scholar Interviews: Bobby Seale." *The Black Scholar* 4, no. 1, (1972): 11.
[26] "Gun Toting Bill Backed by Reagan: Firearms Control Legislation Gains in State Bodies," *Evening Tribune*, May 10, 1967, A-10.
[27] Seale, "The Black Scholar Interviews: Bobby Seale." *The Black Scholar*, 11-12.

uniform, it was a clean and refined look, but still different and more militant than the respectable dress of the Civil Rights Movement. The uniform prompted conversations on the streets, which allowed Panthers to recruit new members and build a reputation in their local community and eventually on the national stage.

The Panthers took their image national on May 2, 1967 when they marched on the California Capitol building to protest gun legislation aimed at the Panthers' armed patrols. Their action was a form of guerrilla theater, a dramatic display of their ideology intended to grab the attention of the public. When the Panthers arrived in Sacramento they immediately stood out. They were instantly flocked with reporters and Bobby Seale read a prepared statement by Newton describing the purpose of their visit and the ideology of the BPP. Then the group marched into the Capitol building to watch the bill proceedings, guns in hand, reporters and police in tow. However, after taking a wrong turn, the Panthers ended up on the legislature floor, Seale read Newton's statement again before they left.[28] Although they did not intend to end up on the floor of the legislature, Seale and Newton knew the power of sending their group to the capitol. They knew it would attract the attention of the media and help popularize the organization. Wearing their uniforms signaled their intentionality, but also created a cohesive and lasting image.

This highly visible display of their politics broadcast the Black experience to the nation. The BPP, as Nikhil Pal Singh describes them, were "practitioners of an insurgent form of visibility." After the Sacramento Incident the BPP grew massively, opening branches in major cities across the U.S. New media from across the country was reporting on the actions of the

[28] Jeffery O.G. Ogbar, "Brown Power to Brown People: Radical Ethnic Nationalism, the Black Panthers, and Latino Radicalism, 1967–1973" *In Search of the Black Panther Party : New Perspectives on a Revolutionary Movement*, edited by Jama Lazerow and Yohuru Williams (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 255-256; Spencer, "In Defense of Self-Defense," *The Revolution Has Come*, 52-55.

BPP, alarmed by the "militantly antiwhite" group of armed Panthers "invading the capitol."[29] However, to young people of color fed up with being brutalized by police and neglected by their government, the image was refreshing, empowering, and inspiring. The BPP used the uniforms to connect with the local Black Oakland community and mobilize chapters in additional cities across the nation, and eventually the globe. They became recognizable by the media and by locals which enabled their immense growth in the coming years. The image was particularly appealing to Black men who had been made to feel emasculated and longed for a place to reassert their manhood. Similarly, young Chicano activists who were beginning to mobilize against police brutality turned to the BPP as a model of masculine militantism. The Brown Berets embraced the militant aesthetic and rhetoric of the BPP, but formed a unique revolutionary ideology rooted in their Chicano identity which was reflected in their adaptation of the Panther uniform.

Dressing Up the Chicano Movement: the Brown Berets Uniform

The uniforms of the Brown Berets added drama and flair to the Chicano Movement. They created an alluring image for young Chicanos looking for a place to find power and dignity. The Brown Berets were a space that empowered young men through developing a militant Chicano identity. Carlos Montes, co-founder of the Brown Berets, says that the "strong" and "disciplined" image "attracted a lot of young folks." The uniforms reflected their commitment to serve and protect the Chicano community from the police. David Sanchez, the other co-founder, claims, "We would wear the uniform so they would know that we were not cops, so that they would know that we're not civilians, so that they would know that we were serious about the whole

[29] Richard Sullivan, "Law to Ban Arms at Capital Pushed," *Evening Tribune*, May 5, 1967, B-12; "Armed Negroes Protest Gun Bill; 30 Black Panthers Invade Sacramento Legislature Lawmakers Startled," *New York Times,* May 3, 1967, 23.

situation."[30] Sanchez continues, "But we were also dressing up the movement, know. Theater. It was like a theater, a good theater."[31] Their uniform was presented in a performative manner to dramatize their actions and presence in the community. "Dressing up the movement" and creating "good theater" for the people brought attention to their cause and their movement. Like the Panthers, the Berets created a guerrilla theater that enticed the Chicano community and the media through their stylized performances of militantism. This image was attractive because it was intriguing and new. For many Chicanos it was empowering and projected the new self-definitions of the Chicano Movement.

Figure 2. Brown Berets marching in anti-police demonstration. [32]

[30] "Oral History interview with David Sanchez conducted by Virginia Espino, Session 7," from the UCLA Center for Oral History Research, *"La Batalla Está Aquí": The Chicana/o Movement in Los Angeles,* February 4, 2013.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Leading the Brown Beret contingency is Fred "Sabu" Resendez. Marchers Pictured: (East Row) Rick Adams, Danny Trejo, Unknown, Charlie, Unknown, Smokey. (West Row) Unknown, Unknown; "Arellanes 2: Anti-Police Demonstration," Gloria Arellanes Papers at California State University, Los Angeles, University Library, 1967-1979.

The Chicano Movement of the 1960-70s was formed through a sense of shared Mestizo identity and belonging through their connection to land. Their identity was based on shared experiences of colonization and oppression, and pride in their indigenous roots in the American Southwest. They developed the ideology of Aztlan, the mythical homeland that united Chicanos across areas of the American Southwest that once belonged to Mexico and, before that, to their indigenous ancestors. Aztlan was a rallying cry for a shared ethno-racial identity and rejection of Anglo-American assimilation.[33]

Chicanos organized conferences throughout the Southwest to build this ideology and community. The Brown Berets were born out of one such conference in April 1966. The Mexican-American Youth Leadership Conference led to the creation of the Young Citizens for Community Action (YCCA) by Vicky Castro, David Sánchez, Moctesuma Esparza, Ralph Ramírez, Rachel Ochoa, George Licón, and John Ortiz.[34] In 1967, they opened La Piranya Coffee House where they hosted revolutionary speakers like Stokely Carmichael, H. Rap Brown, and Reis Tijerina. Chicano youth could also hang out there and have political discussions. However, this revolutionary space quickly attracted attention from state and local authorities who constantly harassed those around the coffeehouse. The increased police harassment further radicalized these Chicanos and, under the leadership of David Sánchez, they adopted a BPP-inspired militant ideology and organizational structure. They also began to wear brown berets with brown military fatigue jackets. They then changed their name to the Brown Berets because that was how the community and police began to identify these revolutionaries.

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[33] Carlos Muñoz Jr., "The Chicano Movement: Mexican American History and the Struggle for Equality." *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology* 17, 1-2 (2018): 40-42; Rodolfo Gonzales, Alberto Urista, "El plan Espiritual de Aztlán," *El grito del Norte*, July 6, 1969, 5, Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California Los Angeles (UCLA).
[34] Chávez, "'Birth of A New Symbol,'" *Mi Raza Primero,* 43-44.

The Brown Berets built their reputation in the community through participation in the greater Chicano movement. They solidified their position as the army of the Chicano movement during the East L.A. Blowouts of March 1968. At the Blowouts, the Berets helped facilitate students walking out of high school classrooms and provided protection for the students from the police. Organized by the Chicano high school teacher, Sal Castro, along with local college and high school students, the East L.A. Blowouts were a mass demonstration of civil disobedience by Chicano students. They protested violent racism in the school system, and demanded smaller class sizes, better public school funding and materials, bilingual education, and a culturally inclusive curriculum and faculty.[35] Although the Blowouts were not planned to happen until May, on March 6th at 10am the Berets ran through the hallways of five different high schools around East L.A. calling students to walkout. Over 2,000 students walked out. Protesters were met with particularly brutal violence by police in riot gear who beat students and attempted to prevent them from walking out. The Berets were present to protect students as best they could.[36] The Brown Berets became a sort of army for the Chicano movement, providing security at other demonstrations like the Chicano Vietnam War Moratorium in 1970.[37] Their uniform was essential in establishing themselves as the protectors of the community. It projected an image of militancy and Brown pride that allowed the Chicano community to recognize and trust the organization.

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[35] Mario T. García, "Blowout: Part I," *Blowout! : Sal Castro and the Chicano struggle for educational justice* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 143.
[36] Ibid. 148, 157, 160, 153.
[37] The Brown Berets were initially a part of the Chicano Moratorium Planning Committee, but some members of the committee were concerned by the more aggressive tactics and rhetoric of the Berets. After the women left the organization in 1971, conflicts with the other leaders of the Chicano Moratorium Planning Committee led the Berets to cease participation in the Moratorium. "National Chicano Moratorium Goes Sour in La Moratorium Effort," *La Causa,* August 29, 1970, Box 1, Folder 6, "Ernesto Chavez Collection of Chicano Movement FBI Records Collection," Chicano Studies Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

The uniforms were designed with community connection in mind. In their newspaper, *La Causa*, David Sánchez outlined his "Three Steps to Chicano Power." The first step is to "relate." He believed that to avoid alienating the community and to build a "channel of communication," one had to dress well because "If you dress different [*sic*], and you are sloppy or dirty, you usually aren't accepted." Through their dress, like the Panthers, Sánchez believed the Berets could help spread their message and mobilize the masses.[38] Berets became known for their brown beret hat that was paired with a brown bush jacket or military fatigue. Underneath, members usually wore popular 1960s style pants for men and mini skirts for women, in all black or all brown. The women developed an inherently feminine style uniform because of the prevalence of machismo within the organization; the militant image tended to reinforce ideals of hyper masculinity, leaving little room for Chicana expression and empowerment. Chicanas thus created their own uniformed style to demonstrate their unique empowered identity. Importantly, their fashion built a sense of trust within the community that allowed them to recruit new members. The Berets aimed to mobilize young Chicano men in gangs they called "*Vatos Locos*," and their uniform created a mutual sense of respect that allowed them to interact with these men. Sánchez recalls that, "We couldn't do it without the brown beret. Somehow, the brown beret hat, the gangs trusted that. They trusted the brown beret hat because they knew that the brown beret hat was used for good things." He continues, "So that was the door opener. They would allow the brown beret to come into their barrios, and nobody else."[39]

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[38] David Sánchez, "Three Steps to Chicano Power," *La Causa,* August 29, 1970, 6, Box 1, Folder 6 "Ernesto Chavez Collection of Chicano Movement FBI Records Collection," Chicano Studies Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles; Chávez, "'Birth of A New Symbol,'" *Mi Raza Primero,* 57.
[39] "Oral History interview with David Sanchez conducted by Virginia Espino, Session 7," from the UCLA Center for Oral History Research, *"La Batalla Está Aquí": The Chicana/o Movement in Los Angeles,* February 4, 2013.

The community trusted the Berets because they knew their mission was "to serve, to observe, and to protect." [40] This was outlined in their Thirteen-Point Program that announced their demands, similar to the BPP's Ten Point Program, "What We Want, What We Believe." It outlined their calls for Chicano education, adequate housing, employment, and food, and denounced the U.S. System while proclaiming solidarity "with all people who are engaged in the struggle for self-determination and freedom." [41] The Brown Berets were a culturally nationalist organization that embraced anti-imperialist ideals that mirrored those of the Panthers, but were rooted in Chicano history. Drawing upon the ideology of Aztlan they identified as a colonized people, citing the histories of conquest by the Spanish and then by the United States in the Mexican-American War. They chose the color brown for their berets and jackets to reflect this history and project their sense of Brown pride.[42]

Their identity as colonial subjects informed their support of liberation movements throughout the world, but their identity as cultural nationalists limited their embrace of the full scope of radical politics like the BPP and Young Lords. The Berets did not want to embrace Marxist or communist ideologies because they feared it would alienate them from the community. Further, they did not want to turn to foreign ideologies to guide their revolution. Rather, they preferred to root their liberation ideology in the histories of Native Americans in the American Southwest.[43] While the Brown Berets were united with the Panthers and Young Lords in their opposition to the oppressive systems of the U.S. government, their cultural nationalism

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[40] Chávez, "'Birth of A New Symbol,'" *Mi Raza Primero,* 49.
[41] "Brown Beret 13 Point Political Program," *La Causa,* March 1971, 10, Box 1, Folder 9, "Ernesto Chavez Collection of Chicano Movement FBI Records Collection," Chicano Studies Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.
[42] David Sanchez, "Appendix B: The Birth of a New Symbol," 1968, from Rona Marcia Fields Fox, *The Brown Berets: A Participant Observation Study of Social Action in the Schools of Los Angeles*. PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1970, 290.
[43] "On the Black or White Revolutionary's Relation to the Chicano Struggle," *La Causa*, March, 1971, 7, Box 1, Folder 9, "Ernesto Chavez Collection of Chicano Movement FBI Records Collection," Chicano Studies Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

fashioned a unique political stance. The Berets adopted the militant aesthetics of liberation fighters like Che Guevara, the BPP, and the Lords, but did not fully embrace the radical ideologies espoused by those revolutionaries. The contention between cultural nationalism and revolutionary nationalism (of the BPP and Young Lords), was exposed at the March 1969 National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference in Denver, which was attended by members of the Young Lords as they were beginning to build their movement.

Different Conceptions of Nationalism: The Brown Berets and The Young Lords

Before the Young Lords officially formed their organization, they traveled to Denver to participate in the National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference. This would be one of the only in person meetings between Brown Berets and Young Lords. The uniform helped to facilitate and maintain the sense of solidarity as Latino peoples in the U.S., but also reflected the ideological differences between Berets and Lords. The Lords related to the Chicano struggle and were exploring liberation models to determine how they would mobilize against oppression. The conference taught members of the Young Lords about different s forms of nationalism and created a sense of Latino unity that the Young Lords carried throughout their activism.[44] But the Young Lords also criticized the exclusivity of cultural nationalism they witnessed at the Denver conference.

The Denver conference promoted Chicano cultural nationalism that was rooted in a shared Mexican heritage and culture. The conference produced "El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán," which outlined the goals and ideology of the greater Chicano Movement. Their goal was to establish an independent "Mestizo Nation" for "Bronze People with a Bronze Culture." [45] The

[44] José "Cha Cha" Jiménez, "The Young Lords, Puerto Rican Liberation, and the Black Freedom Struggle," *OAH Magazine of History*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2012, 61–64; Lilia Fernández, "The Evolution of the Young Lords Organization: From Street Gang to Revolutionaries," *Brown in the Windy City: Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in Postwar Chicago* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 205.
[45] Gonzales and Urista, "El plan espiritual de Aztlán."

conference strengthened the collective Chicano identity by emphasizing their shared Mestizo traditions, language, art and history as double colonized people. They promoted the revival and protection of Chicano culture and created a Chicano identity rooted in a celebration of this culture. This was a radical departure from Mexican American activism of previous generations that promoted assimilation and integration into Anglo-American society. The Lords could relate to this as colonial subjects of both the Spanish and American empires. The embrace of indigenous cultures and history was inspiring for the Puerto Rican activists and provided a model for uplifting and creating a new revolutionary Puerto Rican self-definition.

However, Chicano cultural nationalism was limiting for the Young Lords. Many Puerto Ricans also have African heritage, making them a racially diverse people that does not fit neatly within the Black/ white binary. Their racial diversity made the form of Chicano nationalism promoted at the Denver conference problematic when the Chicano leaders announced that Black organizers could not participate fully in the conference because of their cultural differences. The conference leaders soon rescinded the decision and issued a formal apology, but this experience helped the young Puerto Rican leaders better understand the multiple ideologies that guide revolutionary action.[46] The Lords turned to revolutionary nationalism as a more racially inclusive organizing ideology. Revolutionary nationalism developed by the Young Lords was committed to both uplifting Puerto Rican culture and anti-capitalist revolution. Revolutionary nationalism focused more on political and social revolution rooted in an understanding of shared class-based oppression. This conception of nationalism allowed the Lords to create an organization that reflected the racial diversity of Puerto Rico and its history at the same time they built coalitions with people of different racial, gender and sexual identities. [47]

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[46] Fernández, "Coming of Age in the 1960s: The Emergence of the New York Young Lords," *The Young Lords,* 82-84.
[47] Fernández, "The Politics and Culture of the Young Lords Party," *The Young Lords*, 210-217.

This experience did not end the revolutionary friendship between the Berets and the Lords. Criticism was an essential expression of solidarity for the Young Lords who believed that revolutionaries learned from each other. The Lords supported the Chicano struggle and identified with their call for a revolutionary Chicano identity. The organization continued to learn from one another's experiences. When the women in the Young Lords were organizing a resistance to the prevailing chauvinism within the Young Lords, they met with Chicanas from the Brown Berets to discuss their experiences with machismo.[48] They also continuously provided space in their newspaper to cover Chicano struggles throughout the country.[49] Although the Lords differed from the Brown Berets in their conceptions of nationalism, they continued to support each other's struggles and the uniform provided a visible cross country and cross cultural connection between the organizations

Purple Pride: The Young Lords Uniform

The Young Lords also established themselves through creating a striking image within their communities. They used political performances imbued with "a sense of drama, and a flair" to capture the attention of the Puerto Rican community, city officials, and the media.[50] Iris Morales, a leading member of the New York Young Lords Party, remembers that "throughout New York City's poorest neighborhoods, young women in blue jeans proudly wearing the purple beret of the Young Lords were easily identifiable."[51] The Lords became iconic through their purple berets and theatrical actions. Like the Panthers and Berets, the Young Lords uniform and guerrilla theater engaged their community, sparked connection, and built trust. As the Young

[48] Iris Morales, "Women Organizing Women," *Through the Eyes of Rebel Women: The Young Lords, 1969-1976,* (New York, NY: Red Sugar Cane Press, 2016), 51.
[49] Richie Perez, "No Mas Chicanos A Vietnam!" *Palante*, September 11, 1970, 14-15.
[50] Pablo "Yoruba" Guzman, "Before People Called Me a Spic, They Called Me a Nigger," *The Young Lords: A Reader*, edited by Darrel Enck-Wanzer (New York: NYU Press, 2010), 38.
[51] Morales, "Women Organizing Women," *Through the Eyes of Rebel Women,* 44.

Lords grew from a street gang in Chicago to units across the East Coast, they were increasingly iconic because of their purple beret.

Their only unifying element in the Lords uniforms was their purple beret, which reflected the origins and goals of the organization. Rather than embrace a fixed uniform like the Berets and Panthers, however, the Lords wore "anti-uniforms" composed of street style garments.[52] They typically wore large military style or leather jackets with contemporary 60s working-class attire, like baggy blue jeans, a turtle neck or patterned shirt. This allowed them to quickly blend into the crowd and escape when police appeared at their demonstrations. The beret was essential in that it allowed them to be visible to the community, but was easily hidden in situations of danger. The color purple reflected the organization origins and mission of the group to create a safe space for Puerto Rican revolutionary self-definition. They wore a purple beret because that was the color of the original Chicago street gang. The Young Lords had started as a gang in the neighborhood of Lincoln Park in Chicago. They intended to protect themselves from police violence and other street gangs in the area. Jose Cha Cha Jimenez, who was the leader of the gang and later the politicized YLO, chose purple as their gang color because of *West Side Story*. Purple was the color of the Puerto Rican gang in the film. Even though the movie reinforced many stereotypes about Puerto Ricans, seeing Puerto Ricans on the screen made Jimenez feel like it was "more acceptable to be Latinos." [53] In keeping the purple color, the Lords referenced their origins and reflected their mission of uplifting Puerto Ricans by creating a space for self-acceptance.

The beret also was rooted in their origins in a multi-racial coalition and friendship with the Illinois BPP. Jimenez was radicalized during his time in jail when he learned of the BPP in

[52] Joseph, "Sartorial Signs: A Social Vocabulary," *Uniforms and Nonuniforms,* 18.
[53] Fernàndez, "Beginnings," *The Young Lords*, 29.

1968.[54] Once released and when the threat of urban removal grew, Jimenez embarked upon the journey of converting his gang into a revolutionary organization. [55] Jimenez's friendship with Fred Hampton, leader of the Illinois BPP, aided in the group's politicization and they began to meet regularly in private and as part of public actions.[56] On February 27, 1969, they announced their "Rainbow Coalition," a multi-racial, class-based alliance to build solidarity among poor and working-class youth by promoting grassroots organizing to tackle the violent racism and classism in Chicago. Out of this coalition, the Young Lords officially became a political group: changing their name to the Young Lords Organization (YLO), drafting a Ten-Point Program, adopting the paramilitary organizational structure and aesthetic of the BPP, donning purple berets.[57]

The group began to make a name for themselves through dramatic occupations of local churches to demand community investment and protection.[58] The dramatic performances received coverage throughout Chicago. In an interview with Jose Cha Cha Jimenez in the *Black Panther* on June 7, 1969, the YLO story spread to radical communities beyond Chicago. This article caught the attention of a group of young Puerto Rican activists looking to organize a revolutionary group in New York City. Mickey Melendez brought together a radical Puerto Rican student group at SUNY Old Westbury, which included three former CUNY students: Pablo "Yoruba" Guzman, Denise Oliver, David Perez, Juan Gonzalez; a spoken word poet, Felipe Luciano; and Iris Morales, an activist with Real Great Society (RGS), an antipoverty organization in East Harlem. The group initially took on the name Sociedad Albizu Campos (SAC), inspired by leading Puerto Rican nationalist Albizu Campos. But upon reading about

[54] Ibid., 36.
[55] Ibid., 38-40.
[56] Jiménez, "The Young Lords," O*AH Magazine of History*, 63.
[57] Fernández, 42-46.
[58] Fernández, "The Evolution of the Young Lords Organization," *Brown in the Windy City,* 197.

Jimenez and the YLO, they decided in July of that year, to take a road trip to Chicago to meet with them about establishing a New York branch.[59] After returning from Chicago, SAC united with several other Puerto Rican activist groups to form the New York branch of the YLO. They quickly began to participate in political actions in the city, making their first official appearance on July 16th at an event to commemorate the Cuban Revolution where they appeared in their purple berets and black fatigues, holding a banner with the YLO insignia: an AK-47 rifle over PR flag.[60] Drawing on the tactics of the Chicago YLO and Oakland BPP, the New York YLO established their image and presence in the community through performative community-based actions.

The Garbage Offensive of July through September of 1968 allowed the Lords to demonstrate their radical politics and build trust with the community through their recognizable image. The YLO wanted to address the issues their community saw as most important. After surveying residents of East Harlem, they found most people were upset with the city's neglect of collecting trash. So the YLO approached the Department of Sanitation to borrow brooms and pans to sweep up the garbage themselves. They were refused, but still gathered garbage, only to pile it up in the middle of the street to obstruct traffic and to draw attention to the dire need for city services in their neighborhood. Every Sunday, the Lords would gather garbage. The community began to recognize them because of their iconic purple berets and soon began to help out.[61] One reporter recalls that following the Garbage Offensive, when the Young Lords were seen around the community in their purple beret, "people greeted them with cheers and the

[59] Darrel Enck-Wanzer, "Introduction: Toward Understanding the Young Lords" *The Young Lords: A Reader,* 2-3; Johanna Férnandez, "Denise Oliver and the Young Lords Party: Stretching the Political Boundaries of Struggle," *Want to Start a Revolution?: Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle*, edited by Dayo F. Gore, Jenne Theoharis, Kozomi Woodard (New York: NYU Press, 2009), 281; Ibid., "Coming of Age in the 1960s," *The Young Lords,* 49-51.
[60] Fernàndez, "Coming of Age in the 1960s," *The Young Lords*, 84-88.
[61] Ibid., "The Garbage Offensive," *The Young Lords*, 96-106.

clenched fist salute." [62] The public was thrilled and empowered by their presence because they were actively working to serve the community and create a new image of militant, powerful Puerto Ricans. Their Garbage Offensive was a powerful rebuke of negative depictions and exploitation of Puerto Ricans and served as affirmation that Puerto Rican people had the right to be treated with dignity and respect.

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In May of 1970, the Young Lords in New York decided to separate from the YLO in Chicago to form their own group, the Young Lords Party. However, by 1971, YLP leadership shifted the organization's focus to radicalizing people on the island of Puerto Rico. With their move to Puerto Rico, they closed most of their branches in the mainland U.S. Under new leadership, the YLP also changed its ideology to focus on organizing workers and emphasized class struggle as its primary focus. The move to Puerto Rico and reorientation of the YLP caused them to lose most of their local support.[63] By the 1970s, all three organizations had changed greatly and lacked the sense of solidarity that had connected them previously. Tensions exacerbated by the FBI surveillance led to conflicts within the organizations and helped to alienate the revolutionary movements from one another. The paranoia of FBI infiltration of BPP caused leaders to condense the organization and call most members to move to Oakland.[64] For the Brown Berets, persistent sexism led most of the women of the organization to leave in 1970, their absence coupled with the brutal FBI manipulation and infiltration contributed to the group's demise in 1972.[65]

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[62] Frank Browning, "From Rumble to revolution: The Young Lords; Gangs and Revolution," *Ramparts*, October 1970, 24.
[63] Fernàndez, "Organizational Decline," *The Young Lords,* 335-377.
[64] Spencer, "Inside Political Repression, 1969–1971," *The Revolution Has Come*, 88-113.
[65] García, "Gloria Arellanes," *The Chicano Generation*, 192-196; Jennifer G. Correa, "The Targeting of the East Los Angeles Brown Berets by a Racial Patriarchal Capitalist State: Merging Intersectionality and Social Movement Research," *Critical Sociology* 37 (1): 97-98.

As the organizations developed between 1966-72, their consciousness and networks of solidarity depended on image. Through the creation of a revolutionary vision and aesthetic, they built trust and political capital within their communities and united movements. These revolutionaries became a part of the political zeitgeist of 1960s activists because of the iconic image they created in their dramatic actions and performance of guerrilla theater. Their uniforms were a vital extension of their ideology and actions. They reflected their commitment to international struggles for liberation, but also created a sense of unity among the coalitions of revolutionary movements in the United States. This new, empowering image was rooted in militant protection of their own communities. Throughout the next three chapters, I will demonstrate how their uniforms provided a tangible means through which members could experience and express their local and global solidarity.

Chapter 2: Fashioning the Urban Guerrilla: Internationalism and Local Coalitions in Style

Introduction

When the Young Lords wanted to establish their free breakfast for children program and a liberation school at the First Spanish United Methodist Church (FSUMC) in East Harlem, their revolutionary attire spooked the congregation. The Lords began their first free breakfast program in New York with the Panthers at Emmaus House, but the police told the House director, Friar David Kirk, that the Lords were working with gangs, which caused tensions that forced the Lords to look for a new venue.[66] From October through December of 1969, the Lords attended Sunday church services in uniform and pitched their breakfast program to members of the congregation. They were repeatedly turned down. In the church, with people in their Sunday-best, the Lord's radical style stood out. "They came in with Afros and berets looking like the children of Che Guevara," the daughter of one of the parishioners remembers.[67] This was alarming to the congregation members, and especially to the new Reverend, who was in exile from Cuba. Their Afros were also controversial to older congregation members who viewed their long hair as "crazy."[68] However alienating this image was to the congregation, the Young Lords style was a means of demonstrating solidarity and reflecting their ideological commitment to revolutionary internationalism.

This chapter explores how the Young Lords, BPP, and Brown Berets used their uniform to create an image of an international revolutionary community. Their military aesthetic evoked the style of Che Guevara and represented their commitment to international struggles for liberation and socialism. The beret, specifically, was used to evoke the image of freedom fighters

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[66] Emmaus House was an anti-poverty charity founded in Harlem in 1966 by Father David Kirk. They are still active today, https://www.emmausharlem.com/; Johanna Férnandez, "The Church Offensive," *The Young Lords: A Radical History*, 157.
[67] Ibid., 168.
[68] Ibid., 159, 162.

throughout history, from French resistance fighters in World War Two to Che Guevara's iconic photo "Heroic Guerrilla." Their style evoked their Third Worldist ideology, and a sense of connectivity to historical and global revolutionary battles. These histories of struggle inspired them, as they supported and empathized with their brothers and sisters fighting for liberation across the world as people engaged in their own battles for independence from an imperial power. They identified as colonized peoples also fighting against an imperial power, much like their fellow revolutionaries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Further, wearing these uniforms across the three different movements created a visual unity. This visual unity demonstrated their coalitions and the interconnectedness of these movements on the local level. The groups ran community service programs together and supported each other at demonstrations and funerals; the visual unity created by the uniforms fostered a sense of community and embodied solidarity.

Within Third World movements, visual symbolism was an intrinsic part of creating unity. Culture provided a place for youth to connect and to define themselves against racist projections and stereotypes.[69] Dress allowed activists to embody a sense of connection and provided space for self definition. Exploring the shared styles of these three movements reflects their connection to global revolutionary movements, and illuminates their commitment to the local coalitions they built, creating an imagined community through shared symbols. In the New Left, Third Worldist movements in the U.S., "cultural production and political activism complemented" each other, thus their fashion was both constitutive and reflective of their parallel experiences as colonized peoples fighting for liberation.[70] For the Brown Berets, and the Chicano movement as a whole, their history of double colonization (first by the Spanish and then by the Americans) produced their identification as a colonized nation within the U.S. Meanwhile, Puerto Rico also shared the

[69] Widener, "An Art for Both My Peoples," *Third Worlds Within*, 70-87.
[70] Young, "Introduction," Soul Power, 4.

experience of double colonization and was (and still is) a colony, thus the Lords were fighting for the liberation of their home island against the imperial power of the U.S. The Panthers viewed the police as an occupying army and analyzed their experiences with state violence as reflective of their status as an internal colony of the U.S. These analyses that connected them to the Third World struggle abroad "required a production of an imagined terrain able to close the gaps between First and Third World subjects."[71] This "imagined terrain" was created and reflected through the uniforms of the organizations. Their strategic evocation of global struggles demonstrated and created a visible connectivity to their Third World brothers and sisters.

On a local scale, the uniforms allowed the organizations to foster both the feelings and images of unity; engaging in direct action protests together in uniform, they appeared as soldiers united in a revolution against the local conditions of oppression. Deindustrialization reinforced the segregation of American urban centers and often Black and Brown people lived in the same or nearby neighborhoods, attended the same schools, and experienced similar, yet varying, forms of violence at the hands of police and government authorities.[72] These shared experiences provided a basis for coalition building work. As Natalia Molina puts it, "being from a working-class neighborhood produced a kind of solidarity that cut across the color line."[73] Their unified fashion was a response to their political exclusion and violent oppression by creating an alternative community and means of resisting normative constructions of race and dress.[74] The uniforms functioned to highlight their interracial solidarity and militancy; each organization had a uniform that reflected their unique racial identities, but when worn en masse in demonstrations and photographs, they projected a clear sense of power, unity, and shared ideology.[75] In their

[71] Ibid.
[72] Sugrue, "Introduction," *The Origins of the Urban Crisis* , 3-14; Widener, "The Afro-Asian City," Third Worlds within, 34-60.
[73] Molina, "Examining Chicana/o History through a Relational Lens," *Pacific Historical Review*, 521.
[74] Hernández, "Chicana/o Fashion Codes," *Postnationalism*, 109–124.
[75] Joseph, "The Uniform and Control," *Uniforms and Nonuniforms*, 82-83.

shared uniforms, they presented a new form and image of resistance that was militant, local, and global.

This chapter tracks how the uniforms created a cartography of global and local solidarity. Their berets and military jackets signaled their connection and commitment to international struggles for liberation; their blue jeans, mini skirts and stylish shirts, t-shirts, or turtlenecks were forms of urban street-wear, signaling their connection to urban culture. First, the chapter examines how the uniform was rooted in their internationalist ideologies and a means to put their struggles in lineage with histories of resistance to oppression. By evoking the styles of revolutionaries from around the world and throughout history, the uniforms gave visibility to their imagined revolutionary communities. These visual symbols of solidarity were essential in creating a sense of community and providing hope and support for one another's struggles. Next I discuss how the uniforms fostered a sense of a local revolutionary community in Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York. In each of these cities, the Panthers formed coalitions with either the Berets or the Lords. Their shared uniforms reflected a sense of embodied unity, and connection to international revolutionary communities, and on-the-ground work to build local coalitions.

Urban Heroic Guerrillas: The Beret as an Embodiment of International Unity

After Huey Newton and Bobby Seale had selected the black and blue colors for the uniform, they needed accessories to complete the look. While watching "an old movie about the French underground resistance to Hitler's occupation," they noticed that the French freedom fighters were wearing berets. Seale turned and said, 'Huey, let's wear berets, man.'"[76] The beret connected Black resistance to U.S. fascism to global and historic struggles against fascism.[77]

[76] Bobby Seale, forward, from Stephen Shames and Charles E. Jones, *The Black Panthers* (New York: Aperture Foundation, 2006), 11.
[77] Ibid.

This accessory was the visual embodiment of their view of Black oppression in the U.S. The Panthers considered the U.S. government as a fascist state committing a genocide against Black people through the denial of adequate housing, health care, the sterilization of Black women, and rampant police violence. Early articles in *The Black Panther* newspaper identify the tactics of the police as "Gestapo tactics," which further established a connection between the BPP and resistance fighters during World War II.[78] The beret, which was associated with French resistance fighters and later Che Guevara, symbolically situated Panther's struggles within historic and global contexts of battles against fascism.[79]

The Brown Berets selected the beret both to symbolize their connection to the BPP and situate their movement within the long history of urban guerrilla resistance. One of the co-founders of the Berets, Cruz Olmeda Becerra, recalls that "the beret was like a symbol of urban guerilla warfare from World War II and France…there was a history to that and we would be tying in with that history."[80] Members of the Berets recognized the lineage of freedom fighters within which they existed, and drew inspiration from them. The Chicano movement was rooted in its past. They developed their ideology by examining and reclaiming their people's history in the Southwestern United States. However, they recognized this history of conquest and colonization as a global pattern of exploitation that impacts all people of color. Similar to the BPP, they also characterized the nature of state violence as "Gestapo" tactics. They wrote, for instance, of the "Gestapo Perros" that "terrorize" Chicano families.[81] Like the Panthers, they envisioned themselves as a part of historical and global battles against fascism. By wearing a

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[78] "Gestapo Tactics," *The Black Panther,* March 23, 1969, 5.
[79] Joseph, "Sartorial Signs: A Social Vocabulary," *Uniforms and Nonuniforms*, 9.
[80] "Oral History Interview with Cruz Olmeda Becerra conducted by Virgina Espino, Session 3," from the UCLA Center for Oral History Research, *"La Batalla Está Aquí": The Chicana/o Movement in Los Angeles*, May 20, 2013.
[81] "Gestapo Perros terrorize chicano familia," La Causa, February 28, 1970, Box 1, Folder 4, "Ernesto Chavez Collection of Chicano Movement FBI Records Collection," Chicano Studies Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

uniform inspired by anti-fascist fighters they situated Chicano history within global narratives of resistance and liberation. They fashioned themselves as urban guerrillas within a global battle against racism and imperialism.

The aesthetics and ideology of the Panthers and the Lords were greatly inspired by Che Guevara. Their fashion was both an homage to the revolutionary and a means of communicating their commitment to his ideology. Che Guevara was an Argentine Marxist revolutionary who played a crucial role in the Cuban Revolution and whose ideals and aesthetic influenced Third World radicals for generations after his brutal assassination in 1967. Guevara believed that oppressed peoples worldwide shared a struggle against imperialism and capitalism, and only through guerilla socialist revolution could liberation be achieved. In *Socialism and Man in Cuba*, Guevara writes that "The skeleton of our complete freedom is already formed. The flesh and the clothing are lacking; we will create them."[82] That is exactly what these revolutionaries did. They created the clothing for their freedom. The duty of the Vanguard Party was to create an image to communicate their ideology and radicalize the masses. The BPP fashioned itself as the Vanguard Party through their iconic style, serving as inspiration for militant revolutionary movements across the U.S. and on five other continents around the world.[83] The uniform was a part of this radicalizing image. It was an extension and embodiment of their ideology.

The Panthers and Lords wholeheartedly embraced Guevara's image as the "Heroic Guerilla" and revolutionary ideology. By the 1960s, the photograph of Che Guevara, "Heroic Guerilla," a close up of Guevara staring ahead with a determined look in his eyes and a black beret atop his long wavy hair, had become a transnational icon of anti-establishment and

[82] Guevara, "Socialism and man in Cuba," *The Che Reader*, 212-230.
[83] Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas, "Global Solidarity: The Black Panther Party in the International Arena," *Liberation, Imagination and the Black Panther Party* (London, UK: Routledge, 2001), 34–53.

anti-systemic resistance. His image was used to demonstrate solidarity and empowerment. It was a lens through which to craft linkages to revolutionary history and "a catalyst for building relationships."[84] Both organizations had posters in their offices of "Heroic Guerilla," and the image functioned as the masthead for the international section of the newspaper. They wrote frequently about his ideology in their newspapers and assigned his work as required reading for new members.[85] Newton wrote in his autobiography that he read Guevara's works because he saw him as a "kinsman" since they suffered at the hands of the same oppressor.[86] The Young Lords were also from an island in the Latin American Caribbean sea that suffered from constant imperialist intervention. They were equally inspired by the Cuban revolutionary struggle and turned to Guevara's work to guide their own .[87] By embracing the fashion of Che with the beret and military style jacket, these revolutionaries could feel and look as if they were carrying on Guevara's battles.

The Brown Berets did not fully take up this commitment to Guevara and his socialist revolutionary ideologies. For them, there were differences between aesthetic and ideology. First, as cultural nationalists more than revolutionary nationalists, the Berets were divided over the issue of Che Guevara. David Sanchez did not want to align with Che Guevara. He viewed ideology as alienating and, according to Carlos Montes, said, "We've got to focus on our own

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[84] Prestholdt, "Introduction," *Icons of Dissent : The Global Resonance of Che, Marley, Tupac and Bin Laden* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2019), 3-10.

[85] "Repression Breeds resistance: Huey P. Newton Talks to Sechaba," *The Black Panther,* January 16 1971*,* 10-11; Huey Newton, "Statement by Huey P. Newton, Minister of Defense of the Black Panther Party and Supreme Servant of The People, On the Occasion of Revolutionary Intercommunal Day of Solidarity– March 5, 1971," *The Black Panther,* March 13, 1971 2; "The Week of the Heroic Guerilla," *The Black Panther,* October 16, 1971,13; Prestholdt, "Until Victory Che Guevara and the Revolutionary Ideal," *Icons of Dissent,* 57-58.

[86] Newton. "The Founding of the Black Panther Party," *The Huey P. Newton Reader*, 50.

[87] Juan Gonzalez, "History of Cuba," *Palante*, July 3, 1970, 14-15, 19; Ibid., "Historia de Cuba Part 2," *Palante*, July 31, 1970, 17; Ibid., "Cuba part 3," *Palante*, August 28, 1970, 16-17; Ibid., "Cuba's Socialist Revolution part 4," *Palante*, December 11, 1970, 16; Ibid., "Cuba Part 5," *Palante*, January 15, 1971, 16.

backyard. Don't worry about struggles in other countries."[88] However, many other members demonstrated a connection to Guevara and his internationalist ideals. Gloria Arellanes remembers, "[we] admired Che Guevara… We had posters of Che in our office and later in our health clinic. We pinned Che buttons on our uniforms, and we put his image in *La Causa*. We didn't embrace Che as a Marxist but as a revolutionary and, in particular, a Latin American revolutionary."[89] Second, the Berets felt that embracing a Marxist ideology might alienate them from the community because "there was so much anti-communism, anti-Cuba phobia in the U.S., especially among the Chicano community," Montes recalls. [90] He continued, "We supported revolution throughout the world. We liked the Vietnamese, the Chinese. We liked Che Guevara... Che, he's a hero, but don't bring Fidel."[91] While the Berets embraced Guevara's aesthetics, they were weary of fully embracing his ideology because it was a topic that divided members and potentially alienated the community.

This fear of alienating the community with their radical image was not unfounded. As seen in the church member's reaction to the Lords' presence in the opening of the chapter, Sal Castro and student organizers in the East L.A. Blowouts asked the Berets not to wear their uniforms because they were afraid students would be "spooked by the Che Guevara look of the Berets."[92] The Panthers and the Lords intentionally embraced the alienating aesthetic. Their emulation of Guevara, the "Heroic Guerrilla," allowed them to embody their revolutionary lineage and demonstrate a commitment to international socialist liberation. While the Berets did not support a socialist liberation, they still believed in Guervara's calls for international solidarity

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[88] David Sanchez, "Three Steps to Chicano Power" *La Causa*, August 29, 1970, 6, Folder 6 Vol. 1 no. 8; Oral history interview with Carlos Montes session 3 April 23, 2012.
[89] García, "Gloria Arellanes," *The Chicano Generation*, 140.
[90] "Oral History Interview with Carlos Montes conducted by Virgina Espino, Session 3," from the UCLA Center for Oral History Research, *"La Batalla Está Aquí": The Chicana/o Movement in Los Angeles*, April 23, 2012.
[91] "Ibid.
[92] García, "Blowout: Part I," *Blowout!*, 166.

and used their uniform to create a visual connection to global liberation movements. For all of the groups, the beret enunciated their analysis of the U.S. as a fascist state and situated their struggle within a lineage of resistance movements. Their uniform was a powerful visual connection to international revolutionary communities, but also anchored them in local spaces.

Local Unity

This section will discuss how uniforms created visual unity between the BPP, Brown Berets, and Young Lords as they came together in local coalitions. When members served breakfast to children, ran clothing drivers, or attended funerals for fallen comrades and protests they always proudly wore their berets and jackets. First, I discuss the coalition between the Brown Berets and BPP in Los Angeles. It was based on their spatial proximity in the city and shared experiences with police brutality. Next, I focus on the Young Lords Organization (YLO) in Chicago, where a revolutionary friendship brought together the leaders of the YLO and Illinois BPP (IL BPP), along with local street gangs and other political organizations, into the "Rainbow Coalition." I argue that the uniform was a symbol of multi-racial solidarity and a revolutionary future. Finally, I discuss how the Young Lords Party (YLP) in New York City adopted the Panther uniform to proudly embrace their African heritage and embody their everyday political mobilizations for their brothers and sisters in the NY BPP. Their unity in image and action undermined racial structures that seek to divide communities of color to prevent massive organized resistance. Examining the uniforms reveals the power of symbols to build the image of a movement. Their visual unity gave tangible form to their coalitions and presented them as a united front in the struggle against racism and imperialism.

Creating a 'Label' : the Brown Berets and the Black Panthers in L.A.

The spatial proximity of the Brown Berets and Black Panthers in East Los Angeles facilitated their revolutionary friendship which was visualized through their uniforms. Redlining and discriminatory housing policies left Black and Mexican communities living close together in East and South L.A. In many neighborhoods they experienced the realities of state sanctioned racism, like underfunded schools, lack of public services, limited job opportunities, and police violence. They viewed the nature of these oppressive conditions as akin to those of people living under colonial rule in Third World countries. Their shared experiences provided the basis for local coalitions and their clothes expressed unity, empathy, and solidarity with one another.

Their encounters in political spaces helped build the unity and unified image of the BPP and Brown Berets. After the YCCA opened La Piranya Coffeehouse on the corner of East Olympic Boulevard and Goodrich in East L.A., they began hosting revolutionary speakers. They were increasingly targeted by the police, which pushed Sanchez to adopt a more militant approach and attire.[93] Local Panthers often hung out at La Piranya Coffeehouse with the young Chicanos. This was how they first met, built a friendship, and inspired use of the Berets. Carlos Montes described meeting two leading Panthers, Bunchy Carter and John Huggins, when they came to La Piranya. But he can recall what they wore more than what they talked about. He said,

> There's certain pictures in my mind that I could still see in color, right? I see Bunchy Carter… had a big 'fro, then he had his beret on, right, and a leather jacket. John Huggins was kind of quiet, thin, black leather jacket, with a beard, moustache. No, what did we talk about? I don't even remember. All I remember is that they were real, real mellow and mild, saying, 'We've got to work together, communicate, support each other,' particularly the theme of black and brown unity.[94]

[93] Correa, "The Targeting of the East Los Angeles Brown Berets," Critical Sociology, 90.
[94] "Oral History Interview with Carlos Montes conducted by Virgina Espino, Session 3," from the UCLA Center for Oral History Research, *"La Batalla Está Aquí": The Chicana/o Movement in Los Angeles*, April 23, 2012.

The image of the BPP lasted most vividly in Montes' memory. Their uniform was inspired by a diverse range of revolutionaries and reflected the multi-cultural and multi-racial struggles against oppression that existed throughout history and around the globe. Their calls for a coalition and their fashion were one in the same.

To build a truly unified movement, the Berets needed a visual connection. Founder David Sanchez recalls seeing the BPP uniforms and thinking that they "would go over" well because "it was like a label."[95] The popularity of the BPP showed that the militant aesthetic was appealing, especially to younger street kids whom they were interested in radicalizing. Wearing the uniform turned disheartened youths into powerful soldiers, part of a global movement greater than themselves. Further, the uniform had a clear meaning that people could recognize, the uniform was a "label" in that their politics could be read by allies and enemies– the police. While wearing the uniform increased police violence against the Berets, this visibility was crucial in bringing attention to their cause and building a reputation within the community. [96]

The uniform also reflected their sense of brotherhood with the BPP. Co-founder Becerra said, "we very much respected the Panthers, almost to the point of idolizing them. They were our brothers, you know, and we really saw them very much as our brothers and in a sense we would be, like, in a sense emulating them in terms of form."[97] They fostered this sense of brotherhood by participating in rallies, funerals, and marches together, and sharing newspaper space.[98]

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[95] "Oral History Interview with David Sanchez conducted by Virgina Espino, Session 1," from the UCLA Center for Oral History Research, *"La Batalla Está Aquí": The Chicana/o Movement in Los Angeles*, November 11, 2012.
[96] "Oral History Interview with David Sanchez conducted by Virgina Espino, Session 2," from the UCLA Center for Oral History Research, *"La Batalla Está Aquí": The Chicana/o Movement in Los Angeles*, December 3, 2012; "Oral History Interview with Cruz Olmeda Becerra conducted by Virgina Espino, Session 5," from the UCLA Center for Oral History Research, *"La Batalla Está Aquí": The Chicana/o Movement in Los Angeles*, July 8, 2013.
[97] "Cruz Olmeda Becerra oral history interview conducted by Virgina Espino, Session 4," from the UCLA Center for Oral History Research, *"La Batalla Está Aquí": The Chicana/o Movement in Los Angeles*, May 20, 2013.
[98] Ogbar, "Brown Power to Brown People," *In Search of the Black Panther Party*, 256-257; Angélica María Yañez, "Introduction: Police Brutality and Slain Panther: Six Pallbearers for Thomas Melvin Lewis,"

Wearing the uniform not only paid homage to the international network of freedom fighters, but also highlighted the sense of brotherhood they shared with the members of the BPP.

Dressing the Rainbow Coalition: the YLO and BPP in Chicago

When the Young Lords marched in a funeral procession through the streets of Lincoln Park in Chicago to the Eighteenth District Police Department, they wore their purple berets and black jackets. The Panthers joined them, also donning their signature all black uniform, waving Black Panther flags alongside Puerto Rican flags.[99] The funeral was held for Manuel Ramos, a Young Lord that was murdered by a Chicago Police officer who did not even face criminal charges for his death. The YLO held a joint rally and funeral procession from the church through the streets of Chicago to the cemetery and, finally, to the police department. Around 1000 people participated from the BPP, SDS, Latin American Defense Organization (LADO), and local gangs.[100] The BPP's support at the rally reflected their respect and empathy for the YLO. Marching together down the street of Chicago they appeared militant and united, urban guerrillas of the American revolution.

Chicano and Black Radical Activism of the 1960s: A Comparison between the Brown Berets and the Black Panther Party in California. PhD diss., University of California, San Diego, 2010, 1; "Report on the trials of Los Siete," *The Black Panther,* July 25, 1969, 7; "National Chicano Moratorium Committee Press Release," *The Black Panther,* September 12, 1970, 12; "Speech by Irving Sarnoff, Sept. 3, 1970 in Los Angeles at Rally to Protest Armed Police Assault which Broke Up the National Chicano Moratorium Held on August 29," *The Black Panther*, October 3, 1970, 7; Ceasar Moore "Folsom Prison Salutes Ruben Salazar," *The Black Panther* October 3, 1970, 13.

[99] "Manuel Ramos," *Y.L.O.*, May 5, 1969, Young Lords Newspaper Collection, DePaul University Library Digital Collections, 10-11.

[100] Fernàndez, "Beginnings," *The Young Lords*, 46.

Figure 3. Two-page spread from *Y.L.O.* images from Manuel Ramos' funeral. [101]

The Young Lords Organization in Chicago adopted a Panther-style uniform to symbolize their friendship with the BPP and embody their coalition building work. Their shared experiences with racism and classism motivated the Lords to pursue similar solutions to the systemic social issues as the Panthers and led them to adopt a similar military aesthetic. Puerto Ricans came to Chicago in the late 1940s, searching for jobs following Operation Bootstrap.[102] In Chicago they "were forced to live in the most rundown sections of the city," living in

[101] "Manuel Ramos," *Y.L.O.*, 10-11.
[102] Operation Bootstrap was a U.S. led process of industrialization of the island of Puerto Rico that led to mass migration from Puerto Rico to the mainland U.S. as farmers were displaced by the emerging industrial economy. About ⅓ of the island's population migrated to urban centers in the U.S., namely New York City and Chicago; for more on Operation Bootstrap, see Fernàndez, "Coming of Age in the 1960s," *The Young Lords*, 49-89.

"dilapidated hotels" and were continuously (re)moved due to urban "renewal" programs.[103] Black Chicagoans similarly faced segregation, poor and racist education systems, municipal neglect, and housing instability.[104] Young Lords founder, Jose Cha Cha Jimenez, was radicalized by his time in prison in 1968 where he began speaking about these shared experiences with his fellow prisoners. He then learned of the BPP through a Black run radio station that frequently played in the prison. Their actions, ideology, and rhetoric all appealed to him.[105] The Panthers were also attempting to radicalize street gangs, fight against urban removal, and provide food and education for their community. With these goals in mind, Jimenez began to organize the Puerto Rican community when he was released from prison.

It wasn't long before Jimenez's friendship with Fred Hampton, chairman of the Illinois BPP (IL BPP), guided his politicization. He describes his friendship with Hampton that developed after meeting at a friend's house as "very natural." After their first meeting, the two began to talk about how to work together. Jimenez learned from Hampton how to lead a political group and effectively communicate their ideology through speech and image.[106] Together, they organized the "Rainbow Coalition," an "autonomous-affiliate" organization in which all members organized their respective communities under shared anti-racist and anti-capitalist principles. The coalition brought together Panthers and Lords, but also included a white Appalachian gang turned political organization, the Young Patriots, other street gangs in the process of politicization, and radical members of Students Demand Socialism (SDS).[107] This coalition between Black, Puerto Rican, and white people disrupted binary racial segregation and

[103] Ibid., 15; Judson Jefferies, "From Gang-bangers to Urban Revolutionaries: The Young Lords of Chicago," *Illinois History: A Reader*, edited by Mark Hubbard (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2018), 265.
[104] Fernández, "Introduction," *Brown in the Windy City,* 24-25.
[105] Ibid., 36.
[106] Jiménez, "The Young Lords," O*AH Magazine of History*, 63.
[107] Jeb Aram Middlebrook, "Organizing a rainbow coalition of revolutionary solidarity," *Journal of African American Studie*s, 23(4), 405-434.

advanced a new vision of political organizing that united people through a race and class-based analysis of oppression. The uniforms functioned as a visualization of the Rainbow Coalition. The introduction of the Lords' purple as a new color to the army of black and brown berets. The Lords chose to wear purple berets because purple had been the gang's color before politicization. The beret symbolically connected them to the BPP, but the unique color helped define their specific culture and organizational identity.

The uniforms functioned as a form of embodied activism and coalition. Besides expressing solidarity for one another's movements through writing articles in their newspapers, they participated in demonstrations together, always in uniform. The uniforms were a symbol of the Rainbow Coalition and a means to ground their unity in shared spaces and struggle. According to Jeb Aram Middlebrook, symbols like the uniforms "stood in for larger, ideological discussions which explained the motives and reasons behind their day-to-day work."[108] Like David Sanchez' analysis of the uniform as a "label," the Lords and Panthers in Chicago used the uniform to communicate their revolutionary unity. The powerful display of Black and Puerto Rican revolutionaries standing united through subverted racial hierarchies that divide and pit minorities against one another. Segregation and housing shortages caused violent tension between Puerto Rican and Black communities in Chicago, but their uniforms countered this tension by aestheticizing their unity.[109] They created a revolutionary community that advocated for the needs of their own people and recognized the ways systemic violence pushed them to support the struggles of their neighbors.

[108] Ibid., 425.
[109] Fernàndez, "Beginnings," *The Young Lords*, 17-30.

Building Community: The Young Lords Party and Black Panthers in New York

In a display of militant unity, the YLP provided security for Huey Newton during his speech at the Revolutionary People's Constitutional Convention (RPCC) in Philadelphia in September of 1970. The RPCC brought together BPP branches from across the country, along with the YLO and YLP, to create a constitution for the oppressed peoples of America. In a photo from the convention, members of the YLP stand tall, arms behind their backs in a military stance, either looking forward or at Huey, projecting a sense of militancy and reverence for the leader.[110] Interestingly, members of the BPP do not seem to be in uniform, but that only serves to make the Young Lords' uniformed presence more striking. It made clear the Young Lords presence as a Puerto Rican organization standing in solidarity with the Black community.[111] For the New York-based YLP, keeping the same uniform as their parent organization- the YLO in Chicago- signaled a pride in their lineage and reinforced the coalitions they built in New York with the local branch of the Panthers. This was yet another instance when wearing the uniform at highly publicized action alongside the Panthers constituted an embodiment of inter-racial coalition.

[110] Pablo "Yoruba" Guzman, "Writing a Constitution for the People," *Palante*, September 25, 1970, 16.
[111] Elisa Koizumi, *Fashion and Politics: Dress as Activism*. 2018. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 6.

Figure 4. Young Lords Party guard Huey Newton at RPCC. [112]

The YLP turned to similar strategies of resistance as the BPP because of their shared experiences of racialization in New York City. When Puerto Ricans came to New York, they settled in historically Black neighborhoods like Harlem and the Bronx. Thus, competition for limited housing and jobs often pitted them against each other. Both communities suffered from police brutality, segregation, and discrimination, but, as new immigrants, Puerto Ricans experienced nativist backlash from both Black and white people in the city. Further, their Afro-latino heritage complicated their position in the Black/ white racial binary that ruled the mainland U.S.[113] When the Lords partnered with the Panthers they disrupted social tensions that divided Black and Puerto Rican peoples. They rejected pressures to assimilate into white society and demonstrated their belonging to a new, revolutionary, inter-racial society. Rather than

[112] Guzman, "Writing a Constitution for the People," *Palante*, 16.
[113] Edgardo Meléndez, "The Study of Puerto Rican Migration and Incorporation in the United States," *The "Puerto Rican Problem" in Postwar New York City: Migrant Incorporation from the U.S. Colonial Periphery* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2023), 12-32.

attempting to conform to fit into the Black/white binary of the U.S., the Lords created a diverse community of activists united through their shared ideals. These ideals were evident in their uniforms.

Through their partnership with and emulation of the BPP, the YLP showcased both their ethnic pride and racial links with the Panthers. Historically, Puerto Ricans had been taught to deny their African ancestry, but the Young Lords their indigenous and African heritage. This helped empower them to recognize a shared history of enslavement and resistance with the BPP.[114] The Lords embraced Puerto Rico's multi-racial past in their organizing. A quarter of the group was Black and 10% were non-Puerto Rican Latina/os.[115] Uniforms helped bring such a diverse organization together.[116] The YLP's borrowing of BPP style, fashion, and natural hairstyles was a means to reclaim and redefine their racial identity. Rather than downplay their African heritage as they had been taught, the Lords, "wore their blackness literally on their sleeves by dressing in African and African-American inspired fashions."[117] By aligning with the BPP image and style they not only embraced their politics, but also their shared African heritage.

The resemblance of the uniforms created a visual similarity between the groups that reflected their activism. As they organized and protested, they also mobilized their bodies for one another in public demonstrations. The NY BPP and YLP engaged in actions together, attended each other's rallies, and reported such collaborations in their newspapers. During the trial of the New York Panther 21, a trial of 21 members of the BPP framed for conspiracy that jailed them from 1969-1971, the Lords attended rallies and faced police violence in support of the Panthers. In their newspaper, *Palante,* they described how in April of 1970 "hundreds of pigs ambushed 30

[114] Férnandez, "The Politics of Race and Gender," *The Young Lords*, 240-250.
[115] Ibid., "Denise Oliver and the Young Lords Party," Want to Start a Revolution, 272.
[116] Koizumi, Fashion and Politics: Dress as Activism, 6.
[117] Negron-Muntaner, "The Look of Sovereignty," *Centro Journal*, 11.

of us in a train station after a Panther 21 demonstration." Despite this police punishment, the YLP newspaper continued, "purple berets still served breakfasts and now tested people for tuberculosis."[118] By wearing their uniforms while continuing their community service, the Lords carried on the work of the revolution, even when systems of violent state repression imprisoned and brutalized their Panther brothers and sisters.

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The uniform reflected and embodied a sense of revolutionary solidarity. The beret acted as a sartorial allusion to the styles of revolutionary liberation movements from French freedom fighters in World War II to Che Guevara and his ideals of international socialist revolution. Wearing the uniform allowed the organizations to create a visual unity that strengthened their inter-racial revolutionary communities. Their shared uniform allowed members across the Panthers, Berets, and Lords to fashion shared revolutionary ideals and the partnerships they built to achieve them. These young people look like soldiers for the revolution. They were the urban guerrillas of the American revolution. In the next chapter, I turn to how this same militant aesthetic and ideology also reinforced masculinist ideals and recreated patriarchal structures within the organizations.

[118] The Young Lords were pioneers of health activism, one example of this was their occupation of a state TB testing truck that they brought to their community in Harlem. They incorporated various health service programs into their community service programs. "One Year of Struggle," *Palante*, July 17, 1970, 12-13; Felipe Luciano, "Felipe on Political and Armed Struggle," *Palante*, July 31, 1970, 11-14.

Chapter 3: New Soldiers for the Revolution: the Body and Cultural Politics of the Men's Uniforms

Introduction

After Huey Newton of the BPP was acquitted of murder in September of 1968, some off-duty Oakland police officers shot out the posters of Huey sitting on a throne that decorated the window of the BPP Headquarters.[119] This photo was the epitome of a self-defined image of black pride. In the image, Huey Newton sits upright, staring straight into the camera, in uniform: black beret at an angle, black leather jacket on top of a light blue button-up shirt, black pants, black shoes, black socks. He is seated in a rattan chair, shaped like a throne; he holds a spear in his left hand, and a large gun in the right. On the floor, there is a zebra rug with bullet shells. Against the wall are two Zulu-style shields. His posture, uniform, weapons, and throne project the image of a king. He is armed and ready to defend himself and his people. The image was symbolic of the BPP's ideology and efforts. It decorated every Panther office building, was used by protestors at Free Huey rallies, was routinely printed in newspapers of their allies, and was replicated by revolutionaries around the world.[120] The officers knew the importance of this image to the Panthers. Their destruction of it was a metaphorical attack on the empowered, intelligent, and proud image of Blackness of the BPP. [121]

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[119] Newton was arrested in October of 1967 for killing an Oakland Police officer after being ambushed by the OPD. His trial became a major rallying cry for the BPP and attracted support from around the world. Spencer, "Moving on Many Fronts: The Black Panther Party's Transformation from Local Organization to Mass Movement," The Revolution has Come, 75.

[120] See for example Olive Morris of England Black Panther Movement recreation, as cited in Tanisha C. Ford, "We Were People of Soul: Gender, Violence, and Black Panther Style in 1970s London," *Liberated Threads*, 152. Neil Kenlock, Photograph of Olive Morris and Liz Obi of Black Panther Movement, 1973, photograph, University of Bristol, UK. https://www.bristol.ac.uk/history/public-engagement/blackhistory/snapshots2021/eomorris/.

[121] Phu, "Shooting the Movement," *Canadian Review*, 177.

Figure 5. Window of Black Panther Party National Headquarters in Oakland September 29, 1968 after being shot by police.[122]

If wearing the uniform was a form of embodied cultural politics, it was also deeply gendered. Wearers used their bodies as a site of resistance and demonstration of their cultural pride and revolutionary ideology.[123] Yet, this sense of pride and empowerment was often directed at men because many of the male movement leaders believed men needed to reclaim their

[122] Shames, *The Black Panthers*, 42-43.
[123] Ibarraran-Bigalondo, "Introduction," *Mexican American Women*, 11.

masculinity. They created new definitions of masculinity that rejected stereotypical depictions of Black, Chicano, and Puerto Rican men as criminals, lazy, and servile. They projected a new image of power and actively challenged the public's reading of their bodies as criminal and deviant. Luis Alvarez describes this as a "politics of refusal: a refusal to accept humiliation, a refusal to quietly endure dehumanization, and a refusal to conform."[124] The Panthers, Berets, and Lords refused to passively accept their oppression. At the same time, they reified hyper-masculine patriarchal ideals. Their uniforms allowed men to claim militant manhood and commitment to liberation, yet it reproduced toxic spaces that did not often leave room for women's liberation. Still, the uniforms served to re-aestheticize and re-style the body to help heal the psychological wounds of racism and colonialism.[125]

In broad conceptual terms, restyling was an essential tool for people of color to demonstrate agency and create alternative images to the prevailing negative stereotypes that dominated media of the time. The ability to create one's own self-image "offers an agency of self-creation," and fashion helped disrupt and disassemble normative constructions of race and gender.[126] In his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," Dr. Martin Luther King Jr wrote about how racial injustice was also a product of American culture that had denied African Americans the 'self respect and sense of 'somebodiness'' that was afforded to whites."[127] Similarly, Mexican-American youth were punished for their culture in schools and were taught that their path to citizenship was rooted in becoming a part of the white race.[128] Puerto Rican youth were also punished for speaking Spanish and, as Afro-Latina/o people, were taught to deny their

[124] Alvarez, "From Zoot Suits to Hip Hop," Latin Studies, 55.
[125] Ford, "Introduction," Liberated Threads , 7.
[126] Hernández, "Chicana/o Fashion Codes," Postnationalism, 110.
[127] Betty Luther Hillman, "Introduction," *Dressing for the Culture Wars: Style and the Politics of Self-Presentation of the 1960s and 70*s (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), xviii.
[128] Luis Alvarez, "Zoot Style and Body Politics," *The Power of the Zoot: Youth Culture and Resistance during World War II* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 105.

African heritage and pushed to assimilate into white America.[129] Black, Chicana/o, and Puerto Rican people had been taught self-hatred and internalized centuries of racism. For true liberation, many believed, they needed to rediscover a sense of self-pride and personhood. The Panthers, Berets, and Lords gave non-white youth a place to build pride in their culture, bodies, and identities, challenge their dehumanization, and proudly asserted their personhood.[130] Militantism was a means to display a form of self-pride in no longer tolerating abuse and discrimination. The militant uniform captured this sense of pride and dignity.

This chapter demonstrates how uniforms and restyling created new definitions of militant manhood. First, I discuss how uniforms enabled revolutionaries to turn their bodies into "mobile political signs" that projected their new revolutionary masculinity. Next I turn to how the BPP, Brown Berets, and Young Lords constructed and deployed their images of militant manhood through the embrace of the idea that they were the protectors of their communities. They constructed racially counter-hegemonic images of manhood through toughness and courage that relied on conventional notions of masculinity. In particular, they drew from the idea that the role of men was to lead and protect women and families. Restyling the body was a powerful means to reassert their manhood and inspire more young men (and women) to join the struggle.

Embodied Cultural Politics

As the photo of Newton that opened this chapter demonstrates, activists used their bodies to internalize and project their sense of cultural pride and political consciousness. Fashion was a means to assert agency and reflect new revolutionary self-definitions. White supremacy demeaned and denigrated non-white peoples and cultures, so activists strengthened their racial

[129] Negron-Muntaner, "The Look of Sovereignty," *Centro Journal,* 11-12; Férnandez, "The Politics of Race and Gender," *The Young Lords*, 240.
[130] Power of zoot p. 89

heritage and celebrated their natural beauty. The uniform was intended to disrupt images of Black, Chicano, or Puerto Rican people that portrayed them as criminal, dangerous, unintelligent, and inferior to white people. Instead, the uniforms created an empowered, proud, and militant visual of political dissent.[131] Uniforms were key to helping members learn to love themselves and their people, helping to heal the psychological wounds of racism and colonialism.[132]

While each individual item of the uniform was not political on its own, when worn together and within the social-political context of 1960s militant activism, the ensemble took on heightened political meaning. They created intimidating, yet alluring and cool images. The use of sunglasses allowed them to deflect the gaze of the white media. Covering their eyes also created separation with public and media that allowed them to conceal and control their image and body in a society where that right was denied to them.[133] This was revolutionary body politics: reclaiming control over one's own body and re-inscribing it with a sense of pride and power. Through this process, all three organizations emphasized the importance of reconnection with one's cultural roots. It also fomented their promotion of cultural education programs, art that reflected their histories, and their natural beauty as people of color.

The Panthers believed that through the development and promotion of a new, revolutionary Black culture they would lead their people to liberation. Visual culture and the uniform were vehicles for communicating this objective. In an article on "Revolutionary Black Culture" for the BPP newspaper, the author described how Black people were brutally brought to the U.S. and have been forced to adopt "white amerikkkan" culture. To reject this, Black people

[131] Hernández, "Chicana/o Fashion Codes," *Postnationalism*, 110.
[132] Ford, "Introduction," Liberated Threads, 7.
[133] Vanessa Brown, "Cool, Sunglasses and the Modern Woman: Icons of the 1960s," *Film, Fashion & Consumption* 7, no. 2 (2018): 101, 109.

must "develop a revolutionary culture that allows people to dress and talk and eat and sleep the way that pleases them. This culture should be one of freedom."[134] Uniforms were a part of this culture of freedom that the BPP helped to develop. Through restylings, they created a new image of Blackness rooted in their sense of cultural pride. Style allowed the Panthers to choose how they would be seen, understood, and heard, and was thus used to communicate their new Black Revolutionary culture.[135]

The uniforms fostered the exploration of Black culture and the rejection of whiteness. Rita Williams-Garcia, who attended the free breakfast program as a kid, recalled, "I was taught to be proper– behave yourself. You're going out in public, to always know that the white man is listening. With the Black Panthers coming on the scene, it was just a completely different message… You had this whole other portrayal of self, and just digging it."[136] Black people's actions are constantly surveilled and judged by white society. Their existence is constantly policed. The BPP's restyling of the body acknowledges and rejects the white gaze by creating a militant image of Black pride and beauty that deconstructs dominant depictions of Black people. The Panthers know that Black people have been taught nonviolence and to try to assimilate into white society, but they recognize that these ideals are not protecting or serving their people in any way. They needed militant resistance and a new self-image to go along with it. Their uniforms allowed them to present "this whole other portrayal of self," that was rooted in an embrace of Blackness and Black culture and rejection of whiteness. The uniforms enabled Panthers to embody this new Revolutionary Black culture and project their empowered sense of self.

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[134] David L. Rice, "A Revolutionary Black Culture," *The Black Panther*, February 2, 1970, 15.
[135] Mills, Kelly Leigh. *Black Power: The Political Fashion and Anti-Fashion of the Black Panther Party.* 2007. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 20.
[136] *The Black Panthers : Vanguard of the Revolution,* directed by Stanley Nelson (2017; San Francisco, CA: PBS), Kanopy.

Similarly, the Young Lords embraced their "Indo-Afro heritage" and rejected whiteness. Racism and nativism worked to punish and denigrate Puerto Rican culture. The Lords believed that

> to combat psychological imperialism we could begin by teaching our people pride in being Borinquenos, that Puerto Rican Spanish is not a bastard tongue, and that we should all attempt to learn it, that our women and men are warriors and to be respected and that we are proud of our Indo-Afro heritage (the Spanish contributed nothing but racism, rape, veneral disease and genocide).[137]

Besides learning Spanish to take pride in their language and heritage, the Lords used style to demonstrate their Afro-Latino identities. As was discussed in the previous chapter, the Lords' emulation of Panther dress and hairstyles can be read as an embrace of their African heritage they had been taught to deny. Wearing Afros signaled their celebration of their natural beauty and also mirrored popular political styles of the time as Black revolutionaries popularized the style and it became synonymous with political consciousness.[138]

The uniforms reflected the Lords' work to create a space to uplift Puerto Rican culture. After the Methodist Church in East Harlem (discussed in the previous chapter) refused to allow the Lords to establish their community service programs, despite months of efforts on the part of the YLP, they staged a militant takeover of the church and occupied the space from December 28, 1969 through January 7, 1970. During their occupation of the church, which they renamed "People's Church," they taught Puerto Rican and Black histories, screened movies of Black and Puerto Rican struggles around the world, shared community meals cooked by local Puerto Rican women– some of whom were mothers of Young Lords– and played, sang, and danced to *Bomba y plena* music to celebrate their Afro-Puerto Rican culture.[139] The church was a radical space for

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[137] Felipe Luciano "On Revolutionary Nationalism," *Palante,* May 8, 1970, 10-11.
[138] Ford, "Soul Style on Campus," *Liberated Threads,* 95-121.
[139] *Bomba y plena* music is traditional Puerto Rican music characterized by fast rhythm and call-and-response singing and is derived from the music of their enslaved African ancestors Fernández, "The Church Offensive," *The Young Lords*, 180.

young Puerto Ricans, and other non-white peoples to celebrate their culture, express themselves, and find an identity through joyous experiences with their revolutionary communities. The Lords wore their uniforms at the Church everyday and each morning the minister of education, Juan González, would give a press conference, always in uniform.[140] Their uniforms functioned as an extension of this space, even when they no longer occupied the church.

Figure 6. Rally outside People's Church.[141]

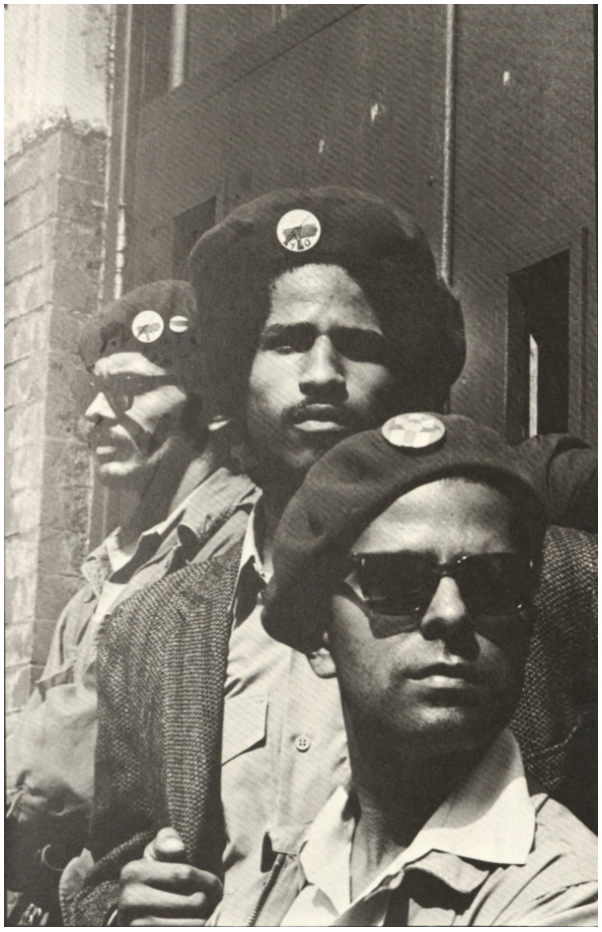
Figure 7. Lords Guarding People's Church.[142]

The brown beret worn by the Chicanos of the Brown Berets was selected to reflect their pride in being a part of the Chicano community. David Sanchez of the Brown Berets first started wearing a blue beret that he bought at a local rummage sale. The militant style appealed to him,

[140] Fernández, "The Church Offensive," *The Young Lords*, 174.
[141] Micheal Abramson, *Palanate: The Young Lords Party* (New York, NY: McGraw Hill, 1971), 102.
[142] Ibid., 111.

but the color didn't feel right. He wore it a few days before he said to himself, "This doesn't make any sense to me. I need a brown beret." As a Chicano, the brown beret reflected his sense of pride in his skin color and Chicano identity. When he and his organization started wearing them around the community, people started calling them the "Brown Berets," and, as Sanchez says "the name kind of just stuck."[143] Police beat up and arrested members of the Brown Berets simply for wearing their uniforms, which only further radicalized David Sanchez and demonstrated to him the powerful message embedded in their image.[144] While this uniform created an impression upon the community and reflected a revolutionary Chicano identity, the police recognized the symbolism of the uniform and systematically targeted the Berets.

The Brown Berets used the body as a site for cultural articulation and pride. This idea was developed in David Sanchez's 1968 Brown Beret manual, "The Birth of a New Symbol." After being arrested at a demonstration in February 1968, David Sanchez penned his famed Brown Berets manual, "The Birth of a New Symbol," from the Wayside Maximum Security Jail.[145] In it, he laid out the goals, philosophy, and duties of the Brown Berets. He broke down the meaning of uniform and how it should be worn, writing, "When I wear the Brown Beret hat, I am wearing the beret to symbolize unity… I wear the beret because I realize the dignity and how proud I am in the color of my skin and race.'"[146] Sanchez's use of the phrase proud "in" the color of his skin illustrates the sense of embodied pride created by the uniform. Their fashion served as a form of material resistance that expressed their psychological resistance to white supremacy.

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[143] "Oral history interview with David Sanchez By Virginia Espino, Session 1," from the UCLA Center for Oral History Research, *"La Batalla Está Aquí": The Chicana/o Movement in Los Angeles,"* November 11, 2012.
[144] "Oral history interview with David Sanchez By Virginia Espino, Session 3," from the UCLA Center for Oral History Research, *"La Batalla Está Aquí": The Chicana/o Movement in Los Angeles,"* December 12, 2012.
[145] Rona Marcia Fields Fox, *The Brown Berets: A Participant Observation Study of Social Action in the Schools of Los Angeles*. PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1970.
[146] David Sanchez, *The Birth of a New Symbol,* 1968, 290.

Being Chicano was a "politicized identity" that informed their goals and organizing methods. They aimed to instill pride in their members to liberate their minds from the violence of internalized racism and educate their people on how to organize against their oppression.[147] Ultimately, the uniform projected an image of Chicano pride through a rejection of whiteness and an embrace of their roots.

The Berets aimed to embody their new identity through their clothes and become a symbol of militant pride for the Chicano movement. When explaining the intention behind "The Birth of a New Symbol," David Sanchez claimed, "We are all linked to this long history that goes all the way back to the arrival—before the arrival of Cortés. So when we say the birth of a new symbol, we are part of that symbol, but we are the new birth of our history." The brown beret hat was this "new symbol." Co-founder Carlos Montes said that "the beret identified us, brown, being brown and proud, cultural pride, racial pride, because prior to that, we were made to feel ashamed of being Mexican, of being brown…people wanted to be white, assimilate, be white. 'White is right.'"[148] By projecting an image of "being brown and proud" the uniforms combatted years of shame of their culture and race. They constructed this "new symbol" of brown pride that the Chicano community embraced in the face of violent state repression. They wore their heritage on their sleeves with pride and came to embody this "new symbol" of militant Chicanismo.

The militant aesthetic of the uniform allowed wearers to embody a sense of militant pride in their culture. Carlos Montes, says the Brown Berets' image was similar to one of soldiers in the U.S. army, but "was a counter to that. Join the Brown Berets, be brown, be proud. Don't join

[147] Ibid.
[148] "Oral History interview with Carlos Montes by Virginia Espino, Session 4," from the UCLA Center for Oral History Research, *"La Batalla Está Aquí": The Chicana/o Movement in Los Angeles,* May 4, 2012.

the army… fight for your people, la causa," was Montes' logic.[149] The Brown Berets attracted young Chicanos looking for a purpose and an identity, they were alienated from their roots because of growing up within systems of violent racism. The image of the Brown Berets communicated that their organization was one such space. The militant attire was a vehicle for cultural pride. Men could still feel the power and masculinity of being a soldier in the army, but instead of supporting imperialism and perpetuating the cycle of their oppression, they became soldiers for the resistance. The militant style fulfilled men's need for a sense of power, but was rooted in celebrating their cultural heritage and helping them unlearn internalized racism and self-hatred.

Militant Masculinity

The embodied cultural politics of the Panthers, Lords, and Berets hinged, at least in part, on their articulations of manhood. They reclaimed their masculinity from the negative depictions circulated in dominant media.Through print, art, fashion, and photography they created and circulated images of new manhood. These gendered expressions positioned men as the protectors of communities, an image rooted in restoring power to men that had been emasculated by society and women, at least according to dominant perceptions of manhood. These "new" conceptions of manhood were still rooted in patriarchal ideals and promoted an often toxic form of hyper-masculinity. The uniforms sustained such notions of manhood and helped justify male dominance in leadership and women's positioning in domestic or supporting roles. These images of manhood were generally aimed at empowering men, but were often still appealing to women, many of whom adopted the revolutionary chic style as a means to assert their own identities as women within the revolution (see chapter 4).

[149] Ibid.

Dominant media often circulated the idea that men were emasculated by society and needed to rediscover their masculinity. When Senator Daniel Moynihan's report, "The Negro Family: The Case For National Action," was published in 1965, it became a dominant narrative for the Lyndon B. Johnson White House on the crisis of race and urban America. Many critics believe Moynihan blamed Black people and families for their own impoverishment, including the so-called blamed Black man's "crushing burden" on the matriarchal structure of Black families. In such a vitriolic context, Black men needed opportunities to demonstrate their power and leadership.[150] Similarly, the Berets claimed that "the racist system only showed [them] as bandits or lazy dumb winos." Instead, they argued, Chicanos needed a new symbol of masculinity. While the Young Lords also conceptualized machismo as "revolutionary" at first, such thinking was challenged by women in the Party.[151] All three simultaneously and inadvertently embraced systemic patriarchal masculinist ideals while attempting to subvert dominant characterizations of non-white masculinity. Their new conceptions of masculinity were counter-hegemonic in that they rejected the normative ideals of achieving manhood by assimilating into white society, but still conformed to patriarchal ideals of masculinity in their idealization of militancy, toughness, and courage. The uniform projected this new image of manhood with vigor. Many male activists believed that "image [was] what colonized the mind," and, by developing and deploying new images of masculinity, they attacked these prevailing stereotypes.[152]

When the Panthers began patrolling the streets of Oakland in their black berets and leather jackets with guns in tow, they demonstrated this new image of militant manhood. They

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[150] Daniel P. Moynihan, "The Tangle of Pathology," *The Negro family: The case for national action,* Washington, DC: Office of Policy Planning and Research, U.S. Department of Labor, 1965.
[151] "13 Point Program and Platform Young Lords Organization," Palante, May 8, 1970, 19; Morales, "The Women's Caucus," *Through the Eyes of Rebel Women*, 49.
[152] Mills, *Black Power*, 19.

were ready to stand up to the police in the name of their people and to protect their loved ones. This was important and empowering, but also reinforced patriarchal standards that made women's participation in the movement difficult. These patrols sent an image of empowerment and deeply frightened the police.[153] Everyday people were excited to see Black people taking a stand against systems of violence. Newton described the police during their encounters as "invariably shocked to meet a cadre of disciplined and armed Black men coming to the support of the community, [they] reacted in strange and unpredictable ways… When we equalized the situation, their real cowardice was exposed."[154] After years of being terrorized and emasculated by the occupying army of police in their neighborhoods, Black men now had the tools to reclaim their masculinity.

These new articulations of manhood were attractive to many young Black men. Young men joined the BPP because "it was admirable and 'tough,' they felt, to be a Panther. There was the uniform: black leather jackets and berets. There were the guns. There was the manhood and the respect to be claimed."[155] Manhood, the uniform, and weapons went hand in hand. When Eldridge Cleaver recalls his first time seeing a Panther in uniform, he writes, "There was a deep female gleam leaping out of the women's eyes… I recognized that gleam out of the recesses of my soul, even though I had never seen it before in my life: the total admiration of a black woman for a black man." [156] His observation speaks to the BPP's initial aim to help Black men reclaim their manhood. In Cleaver's vision of militant Black manhood, men are admired and supported totally by Black women, rather than dominated and emasculated by them. By joining the BPP

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[153] Edward P. Morgan, "Media Culture and the Public Memory of the Black Panther Party," *In Search of the Black Panther Party,* 324-373.
[154]Newton. "Patrolling," *The Huey P. Newton Reader,* 60.
[155] Elaine Brown, "Living for the People," *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 137.
[156] Eldridge Cleaver, "The Courage to Kill: Meeting the Panthers," *Post-Prison Writings and Speeche*s (Menlo Park, CA: Ramparts Magazine Inc., 1969), 29.

and adopting the uniform, Cleaver, too, could capture "the total admiration of a black woman for a black man" for the first time in his life.

Uniforms were the vehicle by which Brown Berets could emulate Black Panther manhood. Embracing this image of manhood, the Brown Berets positioned themselves as the soldiers of the Chicano movement. The uniforms were critical in the performance of this militant, hyper-masculinity. David Sanchez explains that "We wanted to give that look that we were not no chumps and we're not no sissies, you know? That was kind of like a façade which helped actually protect us, protect us away from the police."[157] For the Berets, reclaiming their manhood meant empowerment and protection. Sanchez's use of the word "sissies" further underscores the gendered and sexualized nature of cowardice as defined by the Berets. The militant image was critical for the Brown Berets and Chicano community alike; it communicated a sense of power and resistance.

Similarly, the Young Lords symbolically embraced militancy to empower men as defenders of their communities. Militant resistance equaled strong, as opposed to weak, masculinity. A reporter described the Lords' style as "being a macho, a real man," which meant "standing up to the Man."[158] The dominant ideas were that men should be tough and dominant while women were submissive and supportive. Women in the Lords organized a strong resistance to the proliferation of machismo in the organization. Through the women's intensive attacks on sexist ideology, they encouraged men to rethink gender roles outside of the patriarchy. As will be discussed more in the following chapter, the YLP adopted more egalitarian visions of

[157] "Oral History interview with David Sanchez by Virginia Espino, Session 3," from the UCLA Center for Oral History Research, *"La Batalla Está Aquí": The Chicana/o Movement in Los Angeles"*, December 12, 2012.
[158] Jose Yglesias, "Right on With the Young Lords," *New York Times*, June 7, 1970, 225.

masculinity and femininity that were united in an androgynous uniform that was shared by the male and female members.

Militarism was often employed symbolically to reclaim ethnic and racial pride. The Lords' organizational symbol features a hand holding a rifle over the island of Puerto Rico with the caption, "Tengo Puerto Rico En Mi Corazón." They frequently wrote about the importance of armed self-defense and how to be proper urban guerrillas, but they rarely carried guns and had a no-gun policy.[159] The Lords relied on the militant symbolism within their uniform to project an image of soldiers committed to the socialist revolution. Iris Morals, co-founder and leader of the Women's Union recalls that wearing shirts and berets with pins that had this symbol "validated the roots of those who had left the island but carried the island in their hearts"[160] Adorning themselves in the clothes of their revolutionary culture allowed them to connect with and celebrate their heritage, and embody the pride they felt as true Puerto Rican revolutionaries. For the Lords, this image was intended to combat stereotypical presentations of Puerto Ricans as passive and weak, instead presenting their people as strong, resilient warriors, advocating for the rights of their people.[161]

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The Panthers, Berets, and Lords created images of militant manhood that provided men with a sense of pride and power. These same ideas reinforced gendered ideals of masculinity and femininity. Men were portrayed as the protectors of their communities, a notion that relied on hyper-masculinity and machismo in all three organizations. While women still wore the uniforms, they adapted them to reflect their own experiences as women in the revolution. Panther women circulated their own images of powerful, militant Black female leaders that helped to

[159] In english their slogan is "I hold Puerto Rico In My Heart." Negron-Muntaner, "The Look of Sovereignty," *Central Journal,* 12-14; Luciano, "Felipe on Political and Armed Struggle," *Palante*, 11-14.
[160] Morales, "Introduction," *Through the Eyes of Rebel Women*, 3.
[161] Negron-Muntaner, "The Look of Sovereignty," *Centro Journal*, 14.

create new self-definitions of Revolutionary Black womanhood.[162] Chicanas adopted more feminine styles to assert their identity as female warriors and demanded attention to women's issues within a movement that tended to ignore them.[163] Women in the Lords employed a unisex style to craft their own sense of autonomy as equal partners in the revolution.[164] The next chapter explores these rebel women and their politics of style in more detail.

[162] Linda Lumsden, "Good Mothers with Guns: Framing Black Womanhood in the Black Panther, 1968–1980," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 86, no.4 (YEAR): 900–922; Ashley D. Farmer, "The Black Revolutionary Woman, 1966–1975," *Remaking Black Power: How Black Women Transformed an Era* (Durham, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 50-92.
[163] Ibarraran-Bigalondo, "Chicanas," *Mexican American Women*, 55-86.
[164] Negron-Muntaner, "The Look of Sovereignty," *Centro Journal,* 17-18 .

Chapter 4: Styling Rebel Women: Defining Revolutionary Womanhood

Introduction

When Gloria Arellanes and Hilda and Grace Reyes designed their Chicana Brown Beret uniform at their friend's mom's garment factory they wanted to imbue their uniforms with "a definite feminine touch." Growing up in working-class families, many of the women came of age with their mothers sewing their clothes and eventually learned how to do so themselves. These young revolutionaries needed uniforms that were financially accessible, used community connections, and do-it-yourself styling to ensure that members could purchase them at a reasonable cost. Drawing on local resources, also supported Chicano controlled businesses, which was an essential component of the Chicano nationalist project. Gloria Arellanes remembers "We didn't need David's or the other ministers' approval of how our uniforms looked. We approved them ourselves… We, along with the men, wore our uniforms with great pride."[165] This chapter examines how women navigated the gendered terrain of revolutionary politics and used the uniform to create their own brand of militant womanhood. Ultimately, the uniforms allowed women members to re-style *their* bodies as a "mobile political sign" that reflected their liberation.[166]

The Chicanas of the Brown Berets independently designed their own uniforms. This allowed them to define and express their identities as Chicanas and assert control over their bodies and their image against systems of patriarchy and machismo that controlled their organizations and lives. The women wore a more tailored blazer (rather than the oversized bush jacket of the men), with a skirt and a pair of boots, all in brown or black. By adapting the men's uniforms with an inherently "feminine touch," Chicanas in the Brown Berets contested "the

[165] García, "Gloria Arellanes," *The Chicano Generation*, 132.
[166] Negron-Muntaner, "The Look of Sovereignty," Centro Journal, 9.

limiting masculinist politics embedded in the gendered project of Chicano nationalism that articulated the subject-citizen of Aztlán as male."[167] They created images of *female* soldiers for Aztlán who fought alongside their male counterparts. Dress was an essential form of Chicana activism that, as Maylei Blackwell described, "[sprang] out of daily life."[168] As Chicanas negotiated gender roles in relation to cultural nationalism through discussion, conferences, and in writing, their uniforms enacted these negotiations and spurred their identity formation. Women across all three organizations engaged in similar challenges to patriarchal oppression and designed images of revolutionary womanhood that embodied their liberated consciousness.

While not all the women talked explicitly about their fashion choices, they still employed style through their acceptance or rejection of the uniform described in the previous chapters. In this chapter, I demonstrate how the uniforms provided another frontier in which female members of the BPP, Brown Berets, and Young Lords engaged in self-definition and worked to combat sexism. I draw on oral histories and analyze fashion images circulated in the newspapers and on fliers for the movements. Fashion and clothes held political meanings that signify messages about the wearer, "creating a nonverbal discourse" of women's values, goals, and identity.[169] The sartorial decisions made by the women within these organizations can be read and analyzed within the contexts of their experiences with chauvinism and how they decided to resist it. Particularly for women, fashion was a means to subvert established norms, communicate agency, and demand visibility.[170] The uniform was a way to re-aestheticize the female body according to their definitions of revolutionary womanhood. Women of color were simultaneously hypersexualized, masculinized or seen as virginal by mainstream media; thus, through style,

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[167] Maylei Blackwell, "Introduction: The Telling is Political," *¡Chicana Power!,* 8.
[168] Ibid., "Chicana Insurgencies: Stories of Transformation, Youth, Bellion, and Chicana Campus Organizing," *¡Chicana Power!,* 47.
[169] Luther, "Introduction," *Dressing for the Culture Wars*, xvii.
[170] Ibarraran-Bigalondo, "Chicanas," *Mexican American Women,* 73.

these women created images of themselves that were feminine and not objectifying.[171] They created images of revolutionary women that were militant, cool, yet inherently feminine to foreground their demand that women be seen and treated as equal partners in the revolution.

Within the context of hyper-masculine revolutionary movements, women created spaces to build and express their own self-definitions to combat the chauvinism that permeated their revolutionary communities. In all three organizations, women were initially excluded from leadership roles and expected to take on patriarchal duties, like cleaning offices, cooking meals for community service programs, and acting as secretaries. Systems of patriarchy and masculinist mentality were built into the foundational ideologies of these organizations. The spaces and means they provided for male transformation and empowerment usually rested on the reinscription of patriarchal ideals.[172] However, female members did not accept this form of revolution. They challenged chauvinism within their organizations, pushing for changes in male (and female) behavior and mentalities, rhetoric, and spaces that centered on women's needs and experiences. Style was another means through which women asserted their space and place in the movement and could engage in self-transformation and self-definition. Focusing on fashion illuminates a key terrain of gender politics in which women imagined an intersectional movement, with more egalitarian gendered roles.

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[171] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (London, UK: Routledge,1990); Debra J. Blake, *Chicana Sexuality and Gender : Cultural Refiguring in Literature, Oral History, and Art* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Ana Castillo, "Saintly Mother and Soldier's Whore: The Leftist/ Catholic Paradigm," *Massacre of the Dreamers*, 91-112; Edna Acosta-Belén, *The Puerto Rican Woman : Perspectives on Culture, History, and Society* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1986).

[172] Ogbar, "Brown Power to Brown People," *In Search of the Black Panther Party*, 277; Antwanisha Alameen-Shavers. "The Woman Question: Gender Dynamics within the Black Panther Party," *Spectrum: A Journal on Black Men* 5, no. 1 (Fall 2016): 33–62.

'A Definite Feminine Touch': Chicana Fashion of the Brown Berets

The Brown Beret uniforms that women designed intentionally evoked femininity. The women chose garments that allowed them to express a gendered identity while maintaining an aesthetic that united them with their male counterparts. The men's uniform did not fit the identity that Chicanas wanted to express. It was too tethered to militant hyper-masculinity for it to be an adequate expression of women's self-definition. Martha Palacios, a rank-and-file female member of the Berets, recalls that "I would consider it a little too military type… [so] I would wear those short skirts, the boots. We all wore that. That was our fashion at the time."[173] The sense of masculinity projected by the uniform was rooted in the projection of militancy, which still appealed to women. To add feminine flair, Palacios chose to wear trendy short skirts and tall boots. By adapting the uniform women preserved a visible connection to style of the Berets while imbuing it with a femininity that reflected their gendered identities and experiences.

Projecting an image of unity and loyalty to the Chicano movement was essential for Chicanas within the organization, who were often labeled "vendidads" (sellouts) for espousing feminist ideologies.[174] The erasure of their femininity in the name of ethnic unity reflected patterns of sexism within the greater Chicano movement. The liberation of women was viewed as secondary to the struggle for Chicanos more broadly and both men and women were reluctant to embrace feminist ideals because they did not identify with the white feminist movement.[175] Within the Chicano movement as a whole, Maylei Blackwell contends that Chicanas were marginalized on three levels. First, women were viewed only as "auxiliary members" to the

[173] "Oral History Interview with Martha Palacios by Virginia Espino Session 3," from the UCLA Center for Oral History Research, *"La Batalla Está Aquí"*: The Chicana/o Movement in Los Angeles, March 5, 2015.
[174] Castillo, "A Countryless Woman: The Early Feminista," *Massacre of the Dreamers*, 32.
[175] For example: at the 1969 Denver Conference that produced "El Plan de Aztlan," no resolution was passed to deal with gender inequality within the movement because although the women held a workshop for women's liberation, they decided in the name of unity and to maintain a connection to the movement not to be "liberated" according to Gloria Arellanes' account of the conference. García,"Gloria Arellanes." *The Chicano Generation*, 175; Muñoz Jr., "The Chicano Movement," *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology*, 42.

movement and relegated to gendered "supporting roles." Second, because they were viewed as secondary participants in the movement, women were discouraged from taking leadership roles and their authority was undermined. Third, there was a refusal to recognize women's "full humanity" and women were treated as sexual objects.[176] Such erasure of women aligned with the longer history of the roles and images of Mexican-American women constructed from Catholic icons of womanhood like *La Virgen De Guadalupe* and *La Llorona.* These constructions established Mexican-American women as a "silent, ending woman," and as the "bearer and continuator of tradition," an obligatory mother.[177] Such patterns presented themselves in the Brown Berets through implications that the revolution would be organized, by and primarily beneficial to men.[178]

Gendered notions of nationalism reinforced patriarchal ideals that relegated women to supporting men and working behind the scenes, rather than alongside male counterparts. The Chicano movement equated the nation with the family as the basis for cultural resistance. This embrace of familialism, however, left patriarchal structures intact.[179] Men tended to view women as subservient and did not quite understand or empathize with women's demands and struggles. Men regularly rejected their demands for agency as "unnecessary."[180] Women performed clerical, secretarial, and "domestic jobs." They did all the cooking for their meetings and even though they supposedly practiced participatory democracy at meetings, discussions tended to be dominated by men. The women also ran and produced the newspaper, even though David Sanchez was listed as the editor. Undertaking all of this work truly made Chicanas the backbone

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[176] Blackwell, "Chicana Insurgencies," *¡Chicana Power!,* 65.
[177] Blake, *Chicana Sexuality and Gender*; Ana Castillo, "Saintly Mother and Soldier's Whore," *Massacre of the Dreamers*, 91-112.
[178] Dionne Espinoza,"'Revolutionary Sisters': Women's Solidarity and Collective Identification among Chicana Brown Berets in East Los Angeles, 1967-1970," *Aztlán* 26, no. 1 (2001): 15–58.
[179] Ibid., 39; Blackwell, "Chicana Insurgencies," *¡Chicana Power!,* 47.
[180] Ibarraran-Bigalondo, "Dress, Clothing, Fashion and Style," *Mexican American Women, Dress and Gender*, 58.

of the organization, and when all the women left in February of 1971, the Brown Berets could not sustain the same level of activism and community service.[181] This was true for other organizations in the Chicano movement too. Chicanas across the movement performed roles dictated by the gendered division of labor like cooking and cleaning, developing, typing, printing, and distributing newspapers and position papers, running fund-raising events, and essentially running the organizations. But because this was "women's work," it was devalued and they were not credited for their contributions.[182]

Although many women tended to work behind the scenes, they still demanded leadership positions and advocated for their Chicana sisters. In the Brown Berets, all ministers of the central committee were male until the appointment of Gloria Arellanes as minister of finance and correspondence in 1968. Even then, however, she described herself as a "glorified secretary." She recalled that the men usually respected her face to face because of her size and attitude, but they did not show other female Berets nearly the same respect. At the same time, men consistently undermined her authority if she was not there to stand up for herself and other Chicanas.[183] Still, her appointment to the central committee allowed her to advocate for Chicanas and make space for the formation and expression of distinct Chicana identities.

Women still eagerly joined the organization and participated wholeheartedly in the movement. Sisters and female friends of the founding male members were some of the first to join the Berets.[184] While cooking food together, making political posters and the newspaper, and running the Free Clinic, they had conversations about their experiences with patriarchal oppression and created a sense of sisterhood that maintained their activism. Transforming the

[181] García, "Gloria Arellanes," *The Chicano Generation*, 190-192.
[182] Blackwell, "Chicana Insurgencies," *¡Chicana Power!,* 68.
[183] García, "Gloria Arellanes," *The Chicano Generation,* 155-157.
[184] Espinoza, "'Revolutionary Sisters,'" *Aztlán*, 23.

guiding masculinist principles of *la familia de la raza* and *carnalismo*, Chicanas in the Brown Berets redefined these in feminine terms: they were united as "a family of sisters" and shared a "kinship as women– that is, sisterhood."[185] Through networks of sisterhood, they developed a collective identity based on Chicana feminist consciousness that implied a linked but autonomous relationship to the Chicano movement.

Just as the Chicanas re-adapted masculinist ideals to fit their gendered identities and experiences, they adapted the hyper-masculine uniforms to better reflect their revolutionary Chicana womanhood. They wore the beret the same as the men, but they turned the brush jackets to be a more fitted brown blazer with buttons down the front and pockets. They also rarely wore pants. Although Chicanas did not unite with the white feminist movement, the choice of wearing mini-skirts reflected their sense of liberation.[186] Mini-skirts came to reflect women's sexual liberation and bodily autonomy. By adopting a feminine uniform rooted in the styles of liberated women at the time, female Brown Berets demonstrated their identities as liberated women at the same time they asserted control over their bodies and image. In a larger social movement in which women were sexually objectified and expected to be "down for the revolution," (meaning sexually available for men) their style enabled them to embrace the sexual liberation of the era while maintaining a militant autonomy over their body.[187] Wearing inherently feminine clothing, like the mini-skirt, helped to combat the erasure of Chicana identity and Chicana issues within the Chicano movement.[188] Creating a new image was an essential component of self-definition and through their sartorial choices, Chicanas produced a unique image of Chicanisma that was intrinsically linked to the styles of Chicanos yet foregrounded their femininity.

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[185] Ibid., 39.
[186] García, "Gloria Arellanes," *The Chicano Generation*, 132.
[187] Blackwell, "Chicana Insurgencies," *¡Chicana Power!,* 71.
[188] Hernández, "Chicana/o Fashion Codes," *Postnationalism*, 109-24.

Revolutionary Fashion Icon: Kathleen Neal Cleaver and the Style of Panther Women

Katheleen Neal Cleaver became the new image of revolutionary Black womanhood, in part thanks to her striking style. In her advertisement for her 1968 campaign for a seat in Oakland's 18th district assembly, Cleaver stands in a black doorway, with her dark sunglasses on, wearing a shiny leather jacket, short black dress, and shiny black boots, holding a shotgun pointed at the viewer. Like the image of Huey in his rattan throne discussed in the previous chapter, this image became iconic within and outside of the Party. Cleaver projects an air of power, style, and coolness. She wears the BPP uniform –black leather jacket and dark shades, shiny black shoes– but with an inherently feminine touch, her short 60s style dress and her choice of knee-high boots. Cleaver and this image became iconic of Black revolutionary womanhood.

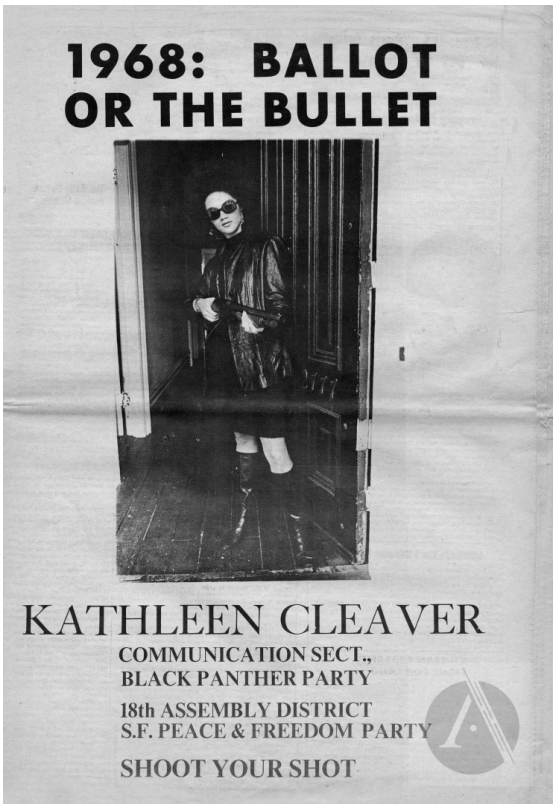

Figure 8. Advertisement for Kathleen Neal Cleaver's 18th District Assembly campaign. [189]

[189] Ballot or the Bullet advertisement for Kathleen Neal Cleaver for Oakland's 18th assembly, *The Black Panther,* November 2, 1968, 3.

While the BPP was initially a male-oriented organization, women were among the earliest members and were crucial to its growth and success. Women were attracted by militant rhetoric and having a space to stand up and protect their communities.[190] Women were close to 50% of the rank-and-file members. As their membership increased they challenged the chauvinistic practices and ideologies the Party had initially adopted. The imagery in the newspaper became a particular site of redefinition and ideological experimentation that allowed women to create their own definitions of revolutionary Black womanhood.[191] These new images and definitions pushed Panther leadership to embrace women's liberation and work to unlearn the patriarchal ideas the Party had replicated and projected.

Women presented themselves simultaneously as warriors, mothers, and revolutionaries. Throughout the newspaper, women appeared in drawings and in photos wearing all Black, wearing berets, and holding a baby in her arms with a gun on her back.[192] While these images reinforced views of women as mothers, they presented motherhood as militant, empowered, and radical. She was not at home taking care of her children, but participating in the revolution with her child. These images of "good mothers with guns," as scholar Linda Lumsden called them, presented alternative frames of Black womanhood.[193] Contrary to the stereotypical images that portrayed strong Black women as emasculating and "unfeminine," Black mothers as "mammies", docile, and "bad" mothers, or hypersexualized Black women as "jezebels," the women of the BPP constructed images of Black women that were strong *and* feminine, militant

[190] Elaine Brown, "Living for the People," *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story* (New York City, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 134; Robyn Ceanne Spencer, "Engendering the Black Freedom Struggle: Revolutionary Black Womanhood and the Black Panther Party in the Bay Area, California," *Journal of Women's History* 20, no. 1 (2008): 90-113.
[191] Farmer, "The Black Revolutionary Woman," *Remaking Black Power*, 51.
[192] Alameen-Shavers, "The Woman Question," *Spectrum,* 33–62.
[193] Lumsden, "Good Mothers with Guns," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly,* 900–922.

revolutionaries *and* caring mothers, sensuous *and* autonomous.[194] Through style, these women projected these definitions of Black womanhood.

As a leading woman in the BPP, Kathleen Neal Cleaver came to embody this BPP womanhood in her image and style. She joined the BPP in 1967 and soon after married Eldridge Cleaver, the minister of information for the Party. She quickly became a leading force within the Party and was the first woman on the central committee when she became communication secretary in 1968. She helped build the Free Huey campaign and bring it to an international stage. In 1969, she moved to Algeria and opened the first international branch of the BPP in Algiers with her husband. When she had her first child in 1970, the newspaper frequently showed images of her and her child alongside essays on the importance of revolutionary motherhood.[195] While this may have reinforced the patriarchal roles of women as mothers, Cleaver presented motherhood as a militant and revolutionary act, as essential, not secondary to the revolution. As she became a more powerful presence within the organization, her images increasingly appeared in *The Black Panther*. Ashley Farmer argues that Cleaver's popularity "was indicative of women's growing participation" in the Party and broader Third Worldist movements.[196]

The image of her standing in the doorway with her gun was circulated throughout her campaign in the newspaper and on campaign fliers. It inspired other female Panthers. The black leather jacket was a unisex element of the uniform that mirrored the male uniform.[197] Her use of sunglasses also transformed the cool, anti-gaze of the male panther uniform into a means of feminist defiance. She exerted control over her body and viewers of her images because her gaze

[194] Collins, "Mammies, Matriarchs, & Other Controlling Images," *Black Feminist Thought*, 69-96.
[195] "Another Problem for the Fascists," *The Black Panther*, August 2, 1969, 2.
[196] Farmer, "The Black Revolutionary Woman," *Remaking Black Power*, 66.
[197] Mills, *Black Power*, 21-22

is obscured by dark glasses while she stands "knowingly displaying the fetishized body." Her choice of a black dress is where she diverted from the standard male uniform. Similar to the Chicanas of the Brown Berets, Cleaver foregrounded her radical femininity. The style of a mini-skirt reflected ideas of liberated womanhood and an embrace of female sexuality. Wearing the mini-dress signaled that her definition of Black womanhood was rooted in female liberation. Finally, her choice of an Afro demonstrated her cultural pride and radical politics. The look of natural hair was popularized to demonstrate one's pride in their African ancestry and beauty.[198] Throughout the 1960s, the Afro was popularized by activists as they turned away from respectability politics. The nature of violence against female activists made natural hair more practical to maintain; nice clothes and styled hair were consistently disheveled and destroyed by police or counter-protesters. Thus, as activists increasingly embraced the style, Afros came to signal one's political consciousness.[199] All of Cleaver's choices produced an image of the Revolutionary Black Woman that Panther and radical women of all races could admire and emulate.

At demonstrations, women wore short skirts and tall boots with leather jackets and their hair in an afro. They adopted and modified the male uniform to reflect their particular identities and experiences as women and to portray themselves as equal partners in the revolution. Their re-styling was a powerful rebuke to the controlling images of Black women that restricted their autonomy and helped to redefine black womanhood in revolutionary, militant terms.

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[198] Ford, "Reimagining Africa: How Black Women Invented the Language of Soul in the 1950s," *Liberated Threads*, 77-80.
[199] Ibid., "SNCC'S Soul Sisters: Respectability and the Style Politics of the Civil Rights Movement," *Liberated Threads,* 77-80. Angela Davis also helped make the style an icon of radical politics, the image of her used by the FBI when she was a fugitive made her political ideology synonymous with the style. Women with large afros would be arrested simply because they looked like her and the media increasingly circulated stories criminalizing the hair style. For further discussion on the Afro see Ford, "Soul Style on Campus," *Liberated Threads,* 95-121.

'Rebel Women': the Subversive Fashion of Female Young Lords

Women in the Young Lords generally embraced androgynous styles. This did not signal a rejection of their femininity, but illustrated their efforts to subvert patriarchal depictions of women. Women of the YLP rejected the limited view of Puerto Rican women as "submissive wives and self-sacrificing mothers," as Iris Morales' autobiographical account of her time in the YLP so aptly described. They were "Rebel Women." Generally, the strict familial codes of *machismo* and *marianismo* maintained that women remained within the domestic sphere and men retained authority over deferential wives.[200] When the YLP published their "Young Lords Party Position Paper on Women" in their newspaper, they committed themselves to combatting what they called the "double standard" of machismo and "sexual fascism" that has historically been a basic tenet of Latin culture.[201] Of the three organizations, the YLP made one of the most concerted efforts to address and expel chauvinism from their Party. Their lack of distinct gendered uniforms can be read as an extension of the mission to foster a space of gender equality. The women intentionally chose to embrace the masculine military aesthetic to subvert traditional patriarchal images of Puerto Rican womanhood and demonstrate that they were equal partners in the revolution.

The shared style of men and women created an egalitarian image. Men and women both wore military-style or oversized jackets with a pair of pants. The military-style jacket projected a strong man image, one capable of violence. Women's adoption of this same style signaled their rejection of traditionally defined gender roles, affirming that they too were willing and able to stand up and protect their community.[202] As women in the YLP mobilized against machismo in

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[200] Norma I Cofresí, "Gender Roles in Transition among Professional Puerto Rican Women," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 20, no. 1 (1999): 161–78

[201] Central Committee, "Young Lords Party Position Paper on Women," *The Young Lords: A Reader*, ed. Darrel Enck-Wanzer (New York City, NY: NYU Press, 2010), 169-174.

[202] Negrón-Muntaner, "The Look of Sovereignty," *Centro Journal*, 4–33.

the Party, Iris Morales recalls that, "we committed ourselves to fight patriarchy, and it didn't matter if we wore blue jeans or mini-skirts; or sneakers, combat boots, or platform shoes!"[203] Wearing blue jeans was a means of subverting gendered styles and demonstrating a connection to the working class, as blue jeans were popularized as work wear.[204] Choosing to wear a mini-skirt, however, allowed women to signal their 60s sensibility of liberation and feminism. For the female Young Lords, wearing mini-skirts could be just as revolutionary as wearing blue jeans. They were committed to all people's liberation, no matter how they chose to express themselves.

The women styled themselves to look like female warriors, with a layered femininity combined with the traditionally masculine militant aesthetic. They usually incorporated fun, feminine shirts under their military jackets, wearing patterned blouses, low-cut shirts, and vests paired with baggy jeans.[205] Along with their fashionable shirts, women often wore their combat boots and berets to further subvert traditional feminine styles and embrace the militant aesthetic. Minerva Solla, a rank-and-file member and the first woman to be added to the defense ministry, recalled that "women and men… had combat boots so all the women had combat boots, and then we had our purple beret. So that's how we dressed every day. Not the sexy, not the way we were 'supposed' to be seen by people."[206] As Solla indicated, women intentionally did not dress how they were "supposed" or expected to dress by men or others in or beyond the Puerto Rican community. They were expected to assimilate and emulate white female beauty standards, and be "well dressed" in skirts and dresses, and seldom wear pants.[207] Their embrace of the

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[203] Morales, "Women Organizing Women," *Through the Eyes of Rebel Women,* 51.
[204] Ford, "SNCC'S Soul Sisters" *Liberated Threads*, 77-78.
[205] See women in photographs in Micheal Abramson, *Palanate: The Young Lords Party* (New York, NY: McGraw Hill, 1971), 116-117.
[206] "Oral History Interview with Minerva Solla by Stephanie Ospina," from *Forward Sisters in the Struggle!*, http://b.parsons.edu/~ospis930/parsons/final/ms-transcription.html.
[207] Frances Negrón-Muntaner, "From Puerto Rico with Trash: Holly Woodlawn's A Low Life in High Heels," *Boricua Pop: Puerto Ricans and the Latinization of American Culture* (New York City, NY: NYU Press, 2004), 87–114; Dilia López-Gydosh and Marsha A. Dickson, "'Every girl had a fan which she kept always in motion': Puerto Rican Women's Dress at a Time of Social and Cultural Transition," *The Latin American*

Afro-Latina/o cultural style and of masculine clothes, contradicted these expectations. Solla further acknowledged how women's bodies were "seen" or read by those around them in ways that they did not want to and could not control. Wearing masculine military clothes was a means of rejecting an objectifying gaze and controlling how their bodies were read by men and women alike, in and outside of the Party.

Women's embrace of a mixed-gendered style, however, did not mean the organization was patriarchy-free. Women led the charge in identifying and challenging patriarchal patterns recreated in the movement and exposing the impacts of sexism on both women and men alike.The Lords were unique in that women's liberation was a point of their Thirteen-point platform. Still, his initial commitment to gender equality still reinforced machismo ideals. Point ten read, "We want equality for women, machismo must be revolutionary… not oppressive."[208] While they claimed to support women's equality, even a revolutionary commitment to machismo contradicted the creation of space for women's equal participation and liberation. This "revolutionary machismo" was clearly evident in the all-male central committee and the delegation of women to stereotypically gendered tasks like getting coffee, making food, typing letters, and making fliers.[209] Women recognized the inconsistency in rhetoric and practice and quickly took to formulating and organizing resistance.

In January 1970, following the Church offensive, many women joined the YLP and began to meet independently to discuss the treatment of women within the organization.[210] In

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Fashion Reader, ed. Regina A. Root (Oxford, UK: Berg Publishers, 2005), 198–210; Norma I Cofresí, "Gender Roles," *Frontiers,* 175;

[208] "13 Point Program and Platform Young Lords Organization," *Palante,* May 8, 1970, p. 19.

[209] Frenández, "The Politics of Race and Gender," *The Young Lords*, 238.

[210] Discussed more at length in Chapters 2 and 3, The Church Offensive was a 10 day occupation of the First Spanish United Methodist Church (FSUMC) in Harlem because the Church refused to allow the YLP to establish their free break for children program there. From December 28, 1969 to January 7, 1970, the Lords occupied the church and hosted community cultural events, political education classes, and speakers from other revolutionary movements. Local community members came to the events and supported the occupation. They also hosted press briefings everyday, these actions brought the

their discussions they articulated feelings and experiences of objectification and sexualization by male counterparts, which they termed "sexual fascism."[211] Women explicitly called out sexist ideologies and unexamined sexism within the organization, highlighting point ten as the epitome of the paradoxical understanding of patriarchy. These conversations within the organization prompted them to look to other organizations to see how women addressed chauvinism throughout the revolutionary movement. They met with Yuri Kochiyama (a close ally and friend of Malcolm X), with the women of the BPP, Brown Berets, I Wor Kuen (a Marxist Asian American collective), and other Puerto Rican activist groups in New York.[212] They had built connections with these groups through their Party coalition work, but, through these additional meetings, they developed a gendered sense of solidarity and learned from the struggles of other revolutionary women of color. From the women of the BPP, they learned that they too felt they were "not respected and were generally ignored," often relegated to doing all the "programmatic work" and serving the men. The Chicanas from the Brown Berets told the women of the YLP about how in their male-led organizations, men often rejected and ignored what they deemed "women's issues" and, accordingly, the women had formed separate groups.[213] Taking what they had learned from women throughout the country, they brainstormed how to re-educate all members on the workings of the patriarchy and how to hold all members of the YLP accountable for sexism.[214]

These discussions resulted in a list of demands brought to the all-male central committee at the YLP retreat of May 1970. The demands included a request to revise point ten of the

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organization massive attention and helped grow their base of community support. The space to engage in radicalism was empowering and interesting to Puerto Rican women especially, for accounts from members on their experiences at the Church Offensive see the documentary produced by Iris Morales *Palante Siempre Palante! The Young Lords* (New York, NY: Third World Newsreel, 1996).

[211] Frenández, "The Politics of Race and Gender," *The Young Lords*, 255.

[212] Ibid.; Morales, "Women Organizing Women," *Through the Eyes of Rebel Women*, 51.

[213] Ibid., 53.

[214] Frenández, "The Politics of Race and Gender," *The Young Lords*, 255-256.

Thirteen-Point Platform, to appoint women to the central committee, abolition of the rule preventing women from joining the defense ministry, to outline punishment for sexist behavior, increased opportunities for women to speak and write about their issues, and the formation of men's and women's caucuses to create spaces to discuss gender. The men, however, did not appreciate this list of demands and initially dismissed the grievances brought before the committee. Through one-on-one conversations with male members, the women were able to communicate their experiences and build a sense of empathy by highlighting how sexism was detrimental and counterrevolutionary for men too.[215]

This herculean effort was ultimately successful. Every single demand was accepted and implemented. Women were permitted to join the defense ministry and Minerva Solla became the first woman to join. Denise Oliver was added to the central committee as minister of finance, and women were added to central staff positions throughout the organization's other branches on the East Coast. More women were involved in writing and producing the newspaper and given more opportunities to lead and speak at rallies, demonstrations, press conferences, and radio shows.[216] They also started childcare programs so that members with families, particularly women, could still participate in the organization without external burdens. They started a men's caucus (to complement the women's caucus) to create a space for men to discuss and explore patriarchy and learn how to treat women with respect. Finally, the tenth point of the Thirteen-Point Platform was changed to remove the "revolutionary machismo," and they released their "Young Lords Party Position Paper on Women," in their newspaper in September of 1970. In the paper, they explained the "triple oppression" of women of color and the historical situation of Puerto Rican women within Latin American culture. They also discussed revolutionary women throughout

[215] Ibid.; Morales, "Women Organizing Women," *Through the Eyes of Rebel Women*, 55-56.
[216] Ibid., 57-59.

history that inspired their struggles, citing leading Puerto Rican women like Mariana Bracetti, Lola Rodriguez De Tio, Lolita Lebron, and Blanca Canales; Black revolutionary women like Sojourner Truth, Kathleen Cleaver, Ericka Huggins, Angela Davis; and freedom fighters in Vietnam like La Thi Tham and Kan Lich.[217]

The women of the Young Lords actively tackled chauvinism through direct confrontation and created spaces to talk about how to address the issue for both men and women. The women's direct attack on sexism in the organization and their commitment to militancy was a rejection of gender divisions within the revolution. Women's liberation was not a "revolution within the revolution," but the revolution itself. Their unique approach was effective and created an environment in which women felt at home. This environment was reflected and advanced by their fashion and style, including wearing mixed-gender clothing and embracing an androgynous militant aesthetic. Men and women wore the same clothes, boots, and berets, just as they struggled against the same effects of racism, sexism, and capitalism.

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Examining women's self-developed uniforms shows how their experiences, agency, and self-definitions within these political movements have been obscured. Although the uniforms of these organizations aimed to radicalize and empower men, women within each organization adapted the uniforms to embody *their* revolutionary identities and combat the chauvinism that permeated these revolutionary communities. They were "Rebel Women" whose fashion reflected their struggle to build a revolutionary community in which men and women were equal partners in the battle against racism, sexism, imperialism, and capitalism.

[217] Central Committee, "Young Lords Party Position Paper on Women," *The Young Lords: A Reader*, 169-174.

Conclusion

The uniforms worn by the Black Panthers, Brown Berets, and Young Lords ultimately had three functions: to mobilize the masses through creating an alluring image, create a visual solidarity to reflect their international and local coalitions, and embody their new militant, revolutionary identities. For men, these revolutionary identities were a means to reclaim masculinity, but reinforced patriarchal ideals of hyper masculinity. For women, the uniforms were a form of subverting patriarchal gender norms and crafting self-definition. The messages embedded in these uniforms demonstrated the interconnected and sometimes contradictory ways that these young revolutionaries of color demanded their right to dignity and humanity.

While the uniform was an empowering and enticing image for many, it also turned members into targets for law enforcement. All three organizations were ultimately driven to their ends by FBI infiltration and violent repression from law enforcement.[218] Cruz Olmeda Becerra noted that the police routinely harassed Berets. "They never needed a reason," he said, "because we were dressed like Brown Berets, okay. They don't need a reason."[219] These movements' existence was a threat to the status quo and that was the only justification needed to attack and arrest their members. Their militant demonstration of humanity and dignity– symbolized by their uniforms– was a direct affront to the racist power structure, and those in power worked tirelessly to undermine and destroy these movements. The U.S. government strategically killed and jailed leaders, created divisions with the organizations and their allies, and fabricated harmful narratives about the revolutionaries.[220] Even though the visibility uniforms provided turned them into more obvious targets, the sense of empowerment and message sent to the community held

[218] Correa, "The Targeting of the East Los Angeles Brown Berets," *Critical Sociology*, 97-98.
[219] "Oral History Interview with Cruz Olmeda Becerra by Virginia Espino, Session 5," from the UCLA Center for Oral History Research, *"La Batalla Está Aquí": The Chicana/o Movement in Los Angeles*, July 8, 2013.
[220] Correa, "The Targeting of the East Los Angeles Brown Berets," *Critical Sociology*, 97-98; Ford, "Soul Style on Campus: American College Women and Black Power Fashion," *Liberated Threads*,

great power. The uniform was a means to control their body and image against forces that were seemingly much larger than themselves.

The uniforms sent a message to law enforcement that these revolutionaries would no longer bow to abuse, but they still needed to protect themselves on a daily basis to keep themselves and their movements alive. This was a reason why their uniforms were so simple; they could be easily removed in the case of emergencies. David Sanchez of the Berets recalled, "The good thing about the bush jacket and the brown beret was you could take it off, take off the jacket and take off the beret and you were just a normal person."[221] Similarly, during the Young Lords' Garbage Offensive, when the police would arrive, they would remove their berets and "melt in the community."[222] This strategic visibility helped maintain and nourish the movements. And, although most of these organizations ceased to function by the late 1970s, their militant images remain. They reflect the transformative impact their style and activism had on Black, Chicano, and Puerto Rican communities. Their "insurgent visibility" opened the door for other revolutionary forms of expression and inspired generations of revolutionaries to come.

Panther, Beret, and Lord uniforms revealed the power of shared styles and symbols. Their style and fashion catapulted these revolutionaries into the national spotlight and brought their struggles to the attention of those across the globe. They created iconic and enduring images that spark joy, hope, and anger even half a century later. The uniforms provide a lesson in capturing the revolutionary imagination, but also reveal the shortcomings of revolutionary movements to create gender inclusive spaces and ideology. The Panthers, Berets, and Lords built national movements, created tangible communities, and brought about concrete change through their

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[221] "Oral History Interview with David Sanchez by Virginia Espino, Session 2," from the UCLA Center for Oral History Research, *"La Batalla Está Aquí": The Chicana/o Movement in Los Angeles*, December 3, 2012.

[222] Fernàndez, "The Garbage Offensive," *The Young Lords*, 102.

stylized politics. As this thesis has argued, these young revolutionaries have much to teach us about building communities of resistance through style, personal expression, and direct action.

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