From the Young Patriots to the Rainbow Coalition

A review of *'Hillbilly Nationalists, Urban Race Rebels, and Black Power'*

Introduction

The last twenty years or so have seen a wave of publications recounting and examining the history of the New Left[1] and radical Black[2], Latino[3] and Native American[4] organisations of the 1960s and 70s in the United States. Many of these books have been concerned with the spectacular exploits of these formations, particularly the armed struggle fractions which appeared in the 1970s such as the Weather Underground[5], Black Liberation Army[6] and the paramilitary sections of the American Indian Movement (AIM). In tandem with these works there has been significant interest in the Counter-Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) run by the FBI in the 1960s-70s[7] which is often cited for the decline and sometimes violent collapse of some of these organisations. The consequence of this focus on spectacular actions, political prisoners and state repression has been to the detriment of analyses of day-to-day 'community organising'[8] which most of these movements undertook, to varying degree, in one form or another.

However, in the histories of these movements another aspect beyond 'community organising' has been even more obscured or ignored; that of *White working class* involvement with the New Left and the relationship of these groups to the other radical ethnic organisations. Considering the simple fact that, despite significant stratifications within the class as a whole, the White working class were and remain the *majority of the proletariat in the U.S.*; there are clearly some pertinent questions to be asked. First, what was the form and content of White working class involvement in the New Left in the period? Second, what were the possibilities for the development of national (rather than just local) alliances between the New Left and sections of the White working class?

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[1] Kirkpatrick Sale, *SDS* Random House New York, 1973.

[2] For example: Huey P. Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide* Penguin Classic, 2009, David Hilliard and Lewis Cole, *This Side of Glory: The Autobiography of David Hilliard and the Story of the Black Panther Party* Little, Brown Boston, 1993, Bobby Seale, *Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton* Black Classic Press, 1991. and Kathleen Cleaver, *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party: A New Look at the Panthers and their Legacy* Psychology Press, 2001.

[3] Darrel Enck-Wanzer, Iris Morales and Denise Oliver-Velez, *The Young Lords: A Reader* NYU Press, 2010.

[4] Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Allen Warrior, *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee* The New Press, 1996.

[5] Examples include: William Ayers, *Fugitive Days: Memoirs of an Antiwar Activist* Beacon Press, 2009., Dan Berger, *Outlaws of America: The Weather Underground and the Politics of Solidarity* AK Press Distribution, 2006., Ron Jacobs, *The Way the Wind Blew: A History of the Weather Underground* Verso Books, 1997., Susan Stern, *With the Weathermen: The Personal Journal of a Revolutionary Woman* Doubleday, 1975., Cathy Wilkerson, *Flying Close to the Sun: My Life and Times as a Weatherman* Seven Stories Press, 2007., Jeremy Varon, *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies* University of California Press, 2004. and even a song book! Bernardine Dohrn, William Ayers and Jeff Jones, *Sing a Battle Song: The Revolutionary Poetry, Statements, and Communiqués of the Weather Underground, 1970-1974*Seven Stories, 2006.

[6] David Gilbert and Boots Riley, *Love and Struggle: My Life in SDS, the Weather Underground, and Beyond* PM Press, 2011. and Assata Shakur, *Assata: An Autobiography* Lawrence Hill Books, 1987.

[7] Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression: The FBI's Secret Wars Against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement*, Vol. 7South End Press, 2002 and Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *The COINTELPRO Papers: Documents from the FBI's Secret Wars Against Dissent in the United States*, Vol. 8South End Press, 2002.

[8] As far as the New Left goes, there is one notable exception: Jenny Frost, *An Interracial Movement of the Poor: Community Organizing and the New Left in the 1960s* NYU Press, 2001.

Although, a few scattered biographical works chart the experiences of White working class activists within the New Left in the 1960s[9] and some others provide a *scream* of 'redneck' dissent against the contemporary representation of poor Whites as degenerate 'trailer trash'[10], it is only of late that the above questions have been approached from a historical perspective. A major step in this direction was the publication in 2011 of *'Hillbilly Nationalists, Urban Race Rebels, and Black Power'* by Amy Sonnie and James Tracey which considers histories of radical White community groups in relation to the New Left and the burgeoning 'Black Power' movement of the late 1960s and 70s[11]. Central to the book is oral history evidence from those directly involved, exposing a 'hidden history' of White working class radical community organising in northern US states. This article both reviews this important new text and uses it to chart the history of a forgotten movement.

Urban Race and Class Rebels: A case-study in Chicago

'We are the living reminder that when they threw out their white trash they didn't burn it'[12]

'Hillbilly Nationalists, Urban Race Rebels, and Black Power' presents three phases in the development of radical White working class community organisations in the urban centres of northeast U.S. in the 1960s and 70s. Each phase is examined by the use of detailed case-studies of particular organisations based primarily on paraphrased oral histories provided by some of the participants. The first is located in the formation of community organising projects by the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in the early 1960s. The selected case-study is the activity of Jobs Or Income Now (JOIN) in Chicago. The second charts the creation of organic community-based radical groups (often derived from existing street gangs) partly as a result of the intervention of JOIN organisers in Chicago. The example employed is the development of the Young Patriots (YP) and Rising Up Angry (RUA) in Uptown, a mainly White working class area of the city. The second phase effectively ends in 1969 with the formation of the 'Rainbow Coalition'[13], a city-wide alliance of radical community groups and political organisations of various ethnicities. The final phase initiated by the murder of Black Panther leader Fred Hampton was bathed in political tensions surrounding the competing paths of armed struggle, national formations and community organising[14]. This review principally focuses on Chicago and the white-working class groups that made up the Rainbow Coalition.

Jobs or Income Now!

'In order to be grassroots you have to reach your community in the beauty shops, barbershops, grocery stores, factories, sawmills and cabinet factories'[15]

The community organising effort launched by the SDS in 1963 was essentially a product of disenchantment with the closed system of 'campus politics' in U.S. universities. The previous year the

[9] Notably, Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, *Red Dirt: Growing Up Okie* University of Oklahoma Press, 2006.
[10] Famously, Jim Goad, *The Redneck Manifesto* Simon Schuster, 1997.
[11] Amy Sonnie and James Tracy, *Hillbilly Nationalists, Urban Race Rebels, and Black Power: Community Organizing in Radical Times* Brooklyn: Melville House, 2011.
[12] Headline in the first 'Young Patriots Organisation' broadsheet: The Patriot Vol.1 No.1 March 21st 1970. Sonnie and Tracy, *Hillbilly Nationalists, Urban Race Rebels, and Black Power: Community Organizing in Radical Times* p.1.
[13] This is the 'original' Rainbow Coalition formed in Chicago by The Young Patriots, Black Panther Party and Young Lords in 1969 rather than the national organisation of the same name founded (or co-opted?) by Jesse Jackson in 1984.
[14] The case studies for this period are the October 4th Organisation in Philadelphia and White Lightening in New York, both of which were active through the recession and right-wing backlash of the early 1970s.
[15] Jaja Nkruma Ibid. p.100.

SDS had produced the politically expansive *'Port Huron Statement'*[16] which, although locating the University as the primary site of struggle and pole of coalescence of the New Left, called for *'functional contact'* outside the campus. Despite significant disagreements within the SDS about the proposed move 'off campus'[17], the *Economic Research Action Project* (ERAP) was floated as the organisational vehicle for this supposed national intervention. The programme initially aimed to organise unemployed workers in general, though emerging separatist tendencies within the Civil Rights movement pushed the SDS activists towards *'organising your own'* and thus, in their eyes, engaging with *'disenfranchised whites'*[18]. Significantly, the main ERAP office was opened in downtown Chicago under the local chapter name *Jobs or Income Now*, though within a year the organisation dropped its single-issue focus on the unemployed and propitiously moved its office further north into the run-down Uptown district of the city. Uptown was an interesting area to relocate for the SDS activists as it was colloquially *'known as 'Hillbilly Heaven' or 'Hillbilly Harlem' after the large numbers of Appalachian families who moved there in search of work between 1930 and 1960'*[19]. It was in effect a 'new' community of White economic migrants rather than an established White working class area.

The internal migration of African-American workers from the 'old south' to the 'new' northern and western U.S. industrial centres (such as Detroit, Cincinnati, Oakland etc.) during the depression of the 1930's and the war-drive of the 40s is now well documented[20]. Less well known is the effect on *White* migration from the south of the 30s economic crisis, the mechanisation of agriculture and the post-war automation of the mining industry which rapidly decreased the available employment. Despite the fact that non-White migration from southern states to the north was proportionally larger on an ethnic basis over the period 1910-1960, it is estimated that of a staggering *nine million* emigrants *more than half were White*[21]. Many of these so-called 'Hillbilly' migrants followed similar paths to African-Americans in using existing familial and social networks of recent emigrants to move from rural towns to urban centres of the south and then to the northern industrial heartlands. Although African-American migration from 'Dixie' was fairly constant over the fifty year period, the White exodus rapidly outstripped that of non-Whites in the 1940s and 50s.

Like their African-American counterparts these 'new' White settlers were not well received in the post-war northern urban centres; apart from being the butt of insulting jokes and generalised derogatory epithets (such as *'Hillbillies'*, *'Okies'* and *'Briarhoppers'*), they were variously described by natives as:

'innately inferior, a transplanted "poor white trash" prone to violence, alcoholism, and incest'

'[taking] *scarce jobs from "decent" people, shunned underwear and shoes, knifed one another like blacks, and lived in filth and ignorance*'[22]

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[16] The full version can be read at http://www.h-net.org/~hst306/documents/huron.html

[17] These disputes over the direction of the SDS (i.e. campus or community) were characterised as the Hayden-Haber debate in the National Council of the organisation in 1963. The supporters of 'community' organising were initially successful Frost, *An Interracial Movement of the Poor: Community Organizing and the New Left in the 1960s* p.7-8.

[18] Sonnie and Tracy, *Hillbilly Nationalists, Urban Race Rebels, and Black Power: Community Organizing in Radical Times* p.27-29

[19] Ibid. p.20

[20] Kirby states: '*Proportionately more non-white southerners left the region than whites, and massive black flight, beginning about 1915, has always been perceived as more significant. This is overwhelmingly obvious in the attention scholars have lavished upon black migration. Owing to this attention, dating back to World War I, a rather good portrait of the southern black exodus exists'.* Jack Temple Kirby, "The Southern Exodus, 1910-1960: A Primer for Historians," *The Journal of Southern History* 49, no. 4 1983: 585-600. p.589

[21] Ibid. p.594

[22] Ibid. p.595-6, 599

Tellingly, signs sometimes appeared in public places attempting to segregate *'Negroes and Okies'* from the 'native' White population and *Harper's* magazine, referring to an 'invading army' in Chicago, stated:

'The city's toughest integration problem has nothing to do with Negroes…It involves a small army of white, Protestant, early American migrants from the South – who are usually proud, poor, primitive, and fast with a knife'[23]

This social discrimination was often matched by its institutional form, as City Councils in the north began to regard the so-called 'hillbilly ghettos' as a 'problem' and some restricted access to housing welfare for new migrants[24].

This general pattern of discrimination was mirrored in Uptown, Chicago in the 1960s, where the majority of recent migrants were poor Whites from Appalachia searching for work[25]. As with their African-American fellow-travellers from the South, the 'newcomers' faced problems of exploitative 'slumlords', terrible housing conditions, low waged temporary employment and crucially, aggressive and discriminatory policing[26]. To cap it all, *'after the Housing Act of 1949 authorized local governments to demolish and redevelop areas deemed to be blighted'*, the City Council and property speculators targeted urban renewal programmes on Uptown as a reservoir of valuable urban land. The displacement of working-class communities in Chicago was nothing new:

'between 1941 and 1965, 160,000 Blacks and 40,000 poor Whites were displaced from their homes by freeway construction and city development projects. Only 3,100 received replacement public housing'[27]

From the perspective of civic politics the situation was no better. The infamous Mayor Daley ran Chicago with an *'iron fist'*, employing a political machine reminiscent of the 70 year rule of the PRI in Mexico:

'[Daley] *created a legacy of gerrymandered school districts, segregated housing, and separate and completely unequal access to public resources…His grip extended into the ballot box, too. In neighborhood after neighborhood, precinct captains doled out patronage and failure to support Daley or his anointed candidates could cost a resident "a job, a needed licence, intense inspection by city building inspectors, or other municipal punishment"'*[28]

Daley's lackeys regularly accompanied residents to the polling booths to 'control' voting and were even associated with the assassination of political opponents. It was into this grim scenario that the SDS organisers in JOIN ventured in 1964.

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[23] Sonnie and Tracy, *Hillbilly Nationalists, Urban Race Rebels, and Black Power: Community Organizing in Radical Times* p.21-22

[24] Kirby, *The Southern Exodus, 1910-1960: A Primer for Historians*, 585-600. p.595-6

[25] Many of these migrants from the Appalachian states of Tennessee, Kentucky, The Carolinas, Georgia and Virginia were unemployed farm labourers, mining and textile workers. The latter two occupations produced numerous sufferers of 'black' and 'brown lung' respectively who had lost their jobs due to illness and lack of healthcare insurance. Many unemployed miners had lived on Company land in shanties and were subsequently evicted. Similarly the large number of bank repossessions of farms in Appalachia led to the laying off of many labourers *Hy Thurman Interview and Transcript*, Video, *Hy Thurman Interview and Transcript*, Grand Valley State University Special Collections, 2012
http://cdm16015.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/p16015coll6/id/22/rec/36 00:16:30 - 00:18:00

[26] Even Black Panthers were shocked by the conditions in Uptown*; 'When Bob Lee (later leader of the local Black Panther Party) first visited Uptown as a volunteer, he described one of the most horrible slums imaginable. Many of Chicago's Black neighbourhoods fared as bad or worse, but Lee never imagined white people living under such conditions…they offered proof that the post-war boom did little to help the nation's permanent underclass 'Sonnie* p.22.

[27] Ibid. p.22

[28] Ibid. p.35

In some senses, JOIN followed the path of the initial organising efforts by the Black Panthers; rather than defining a political agenda or manifesto and 'taking it to the people', JOIN activists surveyed the residents of Uptown to find out *their* grievances and priorities. In the process they discovered a hierarchy of complaints ranging from intrusive welfare agencies, greedy landlords, poor housing, and lack of day-care for children to the need for community parks. They also managed to connect with local residents who were up for action and who quickly became JOIN activists themselves. As a result of numerous 'kitchen table' meetings, JOIN launched a series of initiatives including a community school, a welfare rights committee and a successful campaign to secure 'day labourers' protection from exploitative employment agencies. However, these initial successes were threatened by the effect of the escalating war in Vietnam. The refocusing of SDS efforts towards the small but growing anti-war movement in 1965, led to the shelving of the national ERAP initiative, although fortuitously JOIN in Chicago continued on regardless. Through its local support and successes, JOIN was now expanding and mutating into an Uptown 'community union', generating alliances with radical local workplace unions and, through its housing campaigns, coordinating rent-strikes with nearby Latino and African-American communities. The drive for better housing conditions dove-tailed with Martin Luther King's 1966 campaign to desegregate housing in Chicago and JOIN was able to publically demonstrate *'that poor whites could become partners in class-based coalition with communities of colour'*[29].

Despite these positive developments, class-tensions were appearing in JOIN as Uptown residents began to challenge the dominance in the leadership of SDS organisers. This was also reflected in the reaction of male White youth from Uptown to the interventions of women in JOIN who began to meet separately and were perceived to be dividing the organisation with their *'college bullshit'*. This dissatisfaction with the middle-class student organisers in JOIN led some street youth to claim some autonomy with the formation of the *'Uptown Good Fellows'*, a *'cross between a street gang and a loose knit radical social club'*. The *'Goodfellas'* opened up a band hall and a youth hang-out and aimed to:

'Unite local gangs by turning street youths' attention to the "real enemy"…this meant corrupt politicians, war and capitalism, but the Chicago cops made for a more tangible and immediate target'[30]

The Uptown police were notoriously corrupt[31], racist and violent; for residents (White or Black) harassment was 'normal', many had been assaulted and several killed. As a result the *'Goodfellas'* effectively became JOIN's anti-police brutality committee and began to engage with Black and Puerto Rican gangs in researching police violence and killings in nearby neighbourhoods. Despite the fears and vacillations of SDS organisers, these meetings resulted in a march by three hundred residents in August 1966 on the Uptown police station demanding *'community control of the police'*. The reaction of Mayor Daley and the authorities was immediate, with armed police raids on JOIN offices, the police-murder of another Uptown resident close to JOIN and the insertion of informers and agent-provocateurs into the organisation.

The alienation felt amongst white working class members and associates of JOIN with the student organisers from the SDS boiled over in 1967. The effect of the rising 'Black Power' current in the civil rights movement which propelled activists towards autonomous organising around their own ethnicities had a parallel 'class' effect upon JOIN. Rejecting the leading role of the students in controlling resources and power within JOIN, some Uptown community organisers left to form

[29] King's campaign in Chicago began with a march of 60,000 to City Hall in July 1966, though many smaller neighbourhood marches were attacked in the subsequent weeks by reactionary white crowds leading to several JOIN organisers being injured Ibid. p.43-44.

[30] Ibid. p.46

[31] Hy Thurman a member of the 'Goodfellas' recalled *'I know myself of police officers who would confiscate drugs and resell them…sell prostitution and sell stolen goods…the majority of them were* [bad]. *They didn't want to be controlled at all' Hy Thurman Interview and Transcript* 00:22:30 – 00:23:00

successful independent organisations whilst others took the fight to the SDS conference under the banner *'Tellin' It Like It Is'* and stating:

'We believe the time has come for us to turn to our own people, poor and working class whites, for direction, support and inspiration, to organise around our own identity, our own interests'[32]

A key article co-authored by several white working-class JOIN activists and published in December 1967, *'Take a Step into America'*, argued that:

'the Left needed to be relevant to the everyday needs of everyday people. Those everyday needs were not trivial…no matter how un-revolutionary it seemed to clear up garbage or address the need for healthcare'[33]

The piece also stridently pointed out that the rhetoric about community organising coming from the SDS was understandably confused and naïve (considering their class background) about the real conditions in white-working class communities, particularly the amongst the migrant southern proletariat. The authors also highlighted the lack of reciprocity in the SDS plans for organising outside the university in stating; *'Nowhere…do they* [SDS] *speak of learning from the people they hope to work with'*[34]. Shortly after the publication of *'Take a step..'* leading community organisers in Uptown asked students and other outsiders to leave JOIN (effectively implying that they 'organise their own') in an effort to create a new leadership which reflected the class composition and needs of their community. The Uptown resident activists were now on their own, without either SDS organisers or their contacts and resources.

JOIN continued to function for several months, setting up a health clinic and continuing the fight against displacement of Uptown residents under the 'urban renewal' programmes. However by August 1968 with available resources drying up and none projected[35], the organisation suspended its local activities to engage with the *Peace and Freedom Party* (PFP). The PFP was a national left-wing political party primarily generated by dissatisfaction with the Democratic Party's support for the Vietnam War and failure to fully back the civil rights movement in the 1960s. The perception of the Democratic Party amongst the left and civil rights movement was further weakened by the rise of renegade Alabama Governor, George Wallace. Although originally a moderate on race issues in the Democratic Party and endorsed by the civil rights movement in his defeated 1958 gubernatorial election[36], in the succeeding race in 1962 Wallace stood on a populist racist and pro-segregationist ticket, winning by a landslide. Wallace then stood for the *American Independent Party* against the Democrats and Republicans in the 1968 presidential race with similar racist policies and supported by white supremacist organisations such as the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) and White Citizens' Council (WCC).

[32] Excerpt from Peggy Terry's speech at the December 1967 SDS national convention {{565 Sonnie, Amy 2011}} p.56

[33] Sonnie and Tracy, *Hillbilly Nationalists, Urban Race Rebels, and Black Power: Community Organizing in Radical Times* p.55.

[34] Loren Baritz, *The American Left: Radical Political Thought in the Twentieth Century* Basic Books, 1971. p.409

[35] There was a crisis in the SDS in this period related to competing political objectives and priorities which contributed to the redirection of funds away from community organising. In addition, funds earmarked for JOIN were apparently being redirected to different projects in other areas of Chicago. The political crisis in the SDS would famously explode a year later in 1969 with various terminal splits over whether to follow the paths of national political formation, community and workplace organising or anti-imperialist armed struggle. Interview with co-author, James Tracy (26-06-13).

[36] Wallace was endorsed by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

Wallace's popularity[37], particularly in the southern states, was an anathema to the 'Hillbilly' New Left activists in the north and led Peggy Terry, a prominent Uptown JOIN organiser, to stand as PFP running-mate with Black Panther Eldridge Cleaver. Terry never considered the prospect of winning the Vice-presidency, instead seeing the PFP as a vehicle for directly challenging Wallace's popularity and engaging with Black and (crucially) White working class voters in the South. Although ultimately an electoral failure[38], the PFP campaign concretely demonstrated to the activists the extent of serious racial and political divisions in the U.S. working class. If anything, as the authors' of '*Hillbilly Nationalists'* note, *'the movement* [New Left] *needed to make itself more relevant to working-class people just as JOIN had argued all along'.* Terry and her supporters' efforts in the PFP campaign effectively marked the last act of JOIN's five year saga and demonstrated political courage of quite a different kind to the, soon to be famous SDS offshoot, *Weather Underground.*

The Young Patriots, Rising Up Angry and the Rainbow Coalition

'We've got to face the fact that some people say you fight fire best with fire; but we say you put fire out best with water. We say you don't fight racism with racism. We're gonna fight racism with solidarity…'[39]

From the still-warm embers of JOIN a number of new organisations arose in in Chicago in 1969. The *Young Patriots* essentially followed a similar model to the earlier *Young Lords*, a Puerto-Rican Chicago street gang turned radical political organisation under influential gang leader 'Cha-Cha' Jimenez[40]. The *Patriots* were formed by two former JOIN members, Junebug Boykin and Doug Youngblood, who had both been part of the Uptown Good Fellas anti-police brutality committee and had helped initiate the split with the SDS the year before. It was thus no surprise that the Young Patriots were partly defined by their class composition as *'an organisation of, by and for poor whites'*[41]. The influence of the Black Panther Party on the Patriots was clear when the new organisation released its own ten-point plan[42]; with, however, a subtle difference to their mentors:

'The original Patriots platform never used the word "white", but explained issues of police brutality, unions, the war draft and run-down schools in terms of ***class*** *politics'*[43]

However, the question of whether the displaced Appalachian's the Patriots claimed to represent were an *oppressed nationality*, as had been applied to African-Americans and Native-Americans by the Panthers and AIM, was still hotly debated. The Patriots eventually concluded positively that:

'oppressed whites, particularly poor white southerners, constituted a "people", and in doing so carved out a rare and controversial claim to white ethnic revolutionary nationalism'

This political adjustment, essentially creating the category 'hillbilly nationalist' and in line with the political positions of other radical ethnic organisations led to:

'*A later version* [of the Patriots ten-point plan] *more closely echoed the Panthers' program, though, replacing the word* ***Black*** *with* ***white***'[44]

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[37] Wallace *'received ten million votes and carried the vote in five southern states'* in the 1968 presidential race Sonnie and Tracy, *Hillbilly Nationalists, Urban Race Rebels, and Black Power: Community Organizing in Radical Times* p.63.

[38] The PFP received just over 110,000 presidential votes nationally, less than 0.2% of the total vote.

[39] Fred Hampton, Chicago Black Panther Party, 1969 Ibid. p.66

[40] For a history and documents of the Young Lords see Enck-Wanzer, Morales and Oliver-Velez, *The Young Lords: A Reader*

[41] Sonnie and Tracy, *Hillbilly Nationalists, Urban Race Rebels, and Black Power: Community Organizing in Radical Times* p.72

[42] For comparative purposes, the 10-point plan of the Black Panther Party can be read here: http://www.marxists.org/history/usa/workers/black-panthers/1966/10/15.htm

[43] Ibid. p.73

[44] Ibid. p.73-4

Despite the allusion to the controversial (and often misunderstood) concept of 'revolutionary white power', the Young Patriots were committed to racial justice and definitively stated *'The South Will Rise Again…Only this time in solidarity with our oppressed brothers and sisters'*[45]

To the dismay of some SDS commentators, the newly formed Young Patriots adopted the Confederate flag (the 'stars-and-bars') as the 'radical' symbol of the organisation. One of the founders of the Patriots, Hy Thurman, recalled the basis for the choice:

'[The flag] *symbolised of course people from the South, but also we were trying to take that flag and give it a whole different definition from what you were accustomed to. We were saying it's not White Power per se, but it's a White Power that respected all people…We wanted to tear down what that flag had meant to people; of course, it meant slavery to a lot of people… We were saying be proud of who you are, but let's not be proud of some of the things that it represented, so let's change it'*[46]

The attempt to subvert the Confederate flag was backed up with a quasi-Marxian analysis of the American Civil War which argued that:

'the Civil War was a pissing match between a feudalistic slave-holding southern planting class and the newly industrialised capitalist North. The divide between North and South…was not created by the common people, but rather by businessmen and wealthy politicians. By this logic the Confederate flag, originally a cultural symbol of the south, was no more offensive than the stars-and-stripes'[47]

Central to the Patriots political strategy was '*revolutionary solidarity with oppressed peoples'* which was interpreted as making concrete local alliances, rather than symbolically supporting far off national-liberation struggles. The Patriots began to engage with Bob Lee, field secretary for the Chicago Black Panthers, in a series of private and community meetings[48] with the aim of forging such an alliance. Within weeks, despite some misgivings in the respective camps, the *Rainbow Coalition*[49] was formed in Chicago, consisting of the Black Panther Party, Young Patriots and Young Lords. Their first public appearance was at a press conference on the first anniversary of Martin Luther King's assassination in April 1969, where they urged:

'The city's poor to stop fighting each other and tearing up their own neighbourhoods. Street rebellions grew from an understandable grief and rage….but only invited police retaliation. It was time to decrease petty turf wars and quell pointless violence. It was time for poor people to claim their rightful place leading movements for revolutionary change in Chicago and beyond'[50]

The impact of this visual *collective* statement is hard to comprehend without a contextual understanding of the nature and intertwining of 'gang' structures and ethnic divides in late 1960s Chicago. Gangs, acting as semi-criminal community organisations, were rooted in particular neighbourhoods but allied together into huge organisations (nations) involving *tens of thousands* of

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[45] Ibid. p.74.

[46] *Hy Thurman Interview and Transcript* 00:01:58 - 00:03:35

[47] Sonnie and Tracy, *Hillbilly Nationalists, Urban Race Rebels, and Black Power: Community Organizing in Radical Times* p.75.

[48] The latter were fortuitously captured in the film *'American Revolution II'*, although Mayor Daley used his influence in the Screen Projectors Union to ban the film from the majority of Chicago cinemas in 1969 *Howard Alk and Mike Gray, American Revolution 2, eds. Mike Gray and Chuck Olin, Vol. Film The Film Group, 1969*

[49] HyThurman, claims that the original idea for the 'Rainbow' came from Young Patriots painting the colours of each of the peoples' in the Uptown community onto Nixon-Agnew 1968 campaign badges *Hy Thurman Interview and Transcript* 00:26:30 - 00:27:10

[50] Sonnie and Tracy, *Hillbilly Nationalists, Urban Race Rebels, and Black Power: Community Organizing in Radical Times* p.67

members. By the 1970s two rival 'nations' ruled the streets of the city as a close associate of Fred Hampton, ex-gang member Blair Anderson[51] recalled:

'The [gang] *groupings in Chicago are like the five point star and the six point star, the People Nation and the Folk Nation; Disciples, Gangsters, Cobras and on the other side* [People Nation] *Vice Lords, P Stone, El Rukns. These are some of the divisions in Chicago. Most of the People Nation were trained by the Civil Rights movement…at that time* [1960s] *they were not gangs. Young men and women brought to a safe environment and who then became politicised. They were also mutual protection societies. That's why Chicago is so cliqued up like it is. It is very, very tribal. The same neighbourhoods have existed for 70, 80 years'*[52]

The public intervention of the 'Rainbow Coalition' of explicit political organisations that were often linked to these gangs through their respective communities not only opened up the possibility of 'peace' between the rival 'nations' but potential class unity across ethnic divides. This was a worrying prospect for Mayor Daley, the local state and federal authorities who had exploited ethnic gang divisions at street level for many years[53]. Their reaction was feared by some foresighted Black Panthers[54] and was not long coming.

The political impact of the public launch of the Rainbow Coalition was not just felt by the authorities it also caused dissent within the participant organisations, particularly amongst non-white formations. The authors of *Hillbillies* summarise these contentions:

'For the most part, these debates stemmed from ideological differences amongst radicals of colour about the kind of nationalism they felt they needed. While none of these organisations advocated random violence against white people, tensions flared over the question of working with white leftists. Some members disagreed with the organisations cozy relationship with white liberals; others questioned whether an alliance with the Patriots so soon would compromise the organisations nascent sovereignty. Even those who agreed that nationalism was a first step towards a class-based unity debated the time and effort required to build such an alliance'[55]

Effectively the strategic direction for the Panthers and Young Lords (and many other such groups) was under discussion; were they to remain with the apparently successful model of separate ethnic/cultural empowerment and development or step into the unknown of cross-ethnic alliance around class? Leader of the Young Lords Cha Cha Jimenez summed up the problem by stating:

'There's nothing wrong with the process of building pride in yourself, your community, your culture and people….However, people got stuck in that phase and never moved beyond it'[56]

The Patriots response was to accept the political basis for the fears of white domination in the non-White groups but they also offered a blistering critique of pure cultural nationalism which they recognised had been recuperated (and denigrated) by capitalism in making *'millions on love beads, afro-shirts, and cowboy hats'*. Despite this riposte, all the non-white radical organisations lost

[51] Anderson came from the Blackstones gang as a PeeWee chief into the Black Panthers in the late 1960s. A PeeWee Chief is a leader of a teenage section of a gang (16-18 year olds). Anderson claims he was in command of three hundred plus of these younger members of the Blackstones. Interview with the author July 2012

[52] Interview with the author July 2012

[53] For example: Author: *So that rivalry between areas, did you feel in that period this was being overcome in those moments?* Anderson: *I think it was manipulated by J. Edgar Hoover, by the cops. As a gang leader in Chicago there were several occasions when the Gang intelligence unit, which was the counter-intelligence network of the Chicago Police Department trained by the FBI and CIA, would kidnap me right off the block and take me to my adversaries neighbourhood and drop me off. They knew there were several contracts on me and that I was violating gang treaties…The rest of that summer was armed conflict. This was part of their planning. This was a common strategy and part of the Counter-intelligence programs that they used to keep our groups from becoming politicised.* Interview with Blair Anderson (July 2012)

[54] Bob Lee, for example, was even worried about the impact of the film *'American Revolution II'* which he *'feared…would attract the attention of law enforcement eager to shut down any alliance' Ibid* p.79

[55] Ibid. p.79

[56] Ibid. p.80

members who would not compromise in order to work with whites or refused to make the leap into the suspicious 'Rainbow Coalition'. Panther Bob Lee, one of the key figures in the alliance building effort, stated candidly:

'To tell the truth, it was a necessary purging. The Rainbow Coalition was just a code word for class-struggle'[57]

By the summer of 1969 the Rainbow Alliance was functioning locally in Chicago and was beginning to appear as a radical political model on the national stage. The Young Patriots were an established political force in Uptown and seen as an essential part of the coalition. It was at this time that a second influential group rose from the ashes of JOIN in Chicago, *Rising Up Angry* (RUA). RUA had somewhat different aims to the Patriots. Rather than solely focussing on Uptown neighbourhoods:

'Rising Up Angry set its sights on reaching the young and disenfranchised across the city, many of whom did not identify as poor or share the southern heritage that united the Patriots'[58]

Effectively this meant interventions into solidly white, established, respectable working-class communities[59], in some senses a complete contrast to Uptown's displaced Appalachians. As with the Patriots, RUA's cadre was working-class and their radicalism was *'rooted in working-class culture'*. RUA rejected the middle-class counter-culture of the hippies and students (who themselves had vilified mainstream white working-class leisure activities) and instead celebrated the rebellious white sub-cultures of greasers and rockers[60]. Organisers located music, sport and social activities as new arenas for politicisation[61], areas that the New Left had previously ignored or dismissed. Consequently, RUA's publications mixed a white working-class counter culture of *'fast cars, rock music and softball games'* with articles that *'placed community concerns in a national and global context, validating people's financial struggles, then agitating them to stand with workers of colour'* and a smattering of reports on anti-imperialist struggles world-wide[62].

The male dominance of political organisations that came out of street gangs was challenged in RUA at its very inception, as almost half of the core group's memberships were women. Although the RUA's propaganda was initially aimed at young working-class men, their community projects allowed women to take on central organising roles and make links with the burgeoning feminist movement. However, RUA women were clear that they were evolving *'a version of feminism uniquely rooted in working-class women's' needs'*[63]. Practically, this meant pressing gender issues onto RUA's political agenda, distributing feminist health tracts to working-class women and making links with the new, safe (but still illegal[64]) feminist-run abortion clinics. This focus on womens' health dove-tailed with RUA's commitment to *'Panther inspired service provision and community*

[57] Ibid. p.80
[58] Ibid. p.103
[59] Many of these white enclaves *'home to Chicago cops, sanitation workers and firefighters'* were on the edge of the city boundaries as a local law required *'municipal workers to live within the city limits'* Ibid. p.101.
[60] The connection with white youth rebellion was implicit in the name of the organisation which was taken from a song in the 1968 cult film 'Wild in the Streets'.
[61] Interestingly the *'League of Revolutionary Black Workers'* (LRBW) officially formed in Detroit in 1969 and central to the struggles of African-American workers in the auto-industry began its organising effort around basket-ball and other such social events. General Baker, interview with the author December 2011. For a history of the LRBW see Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin, *Detroit, I do Mind Dying: A Study in Urban Revolution*, Vol. 2 Chicago: South End Press, 2012.
[62] Sonnie and Tracy, *Hillbilly Nationalists, Urban Race Rebels, and Black Power: Community Organizing in Radical Times* p.111
[63] Ibid. p.123
[64] The authors' state: *'Prior to the 1973 Roe vs. Wade decision, women seeking abortions relied on a clandestine network of illegal and sometimes mafia-connected clinics… "Our society's version of equal opportunity means that lower-class women bear unwanted children or face expensive, illegal and unsafe abortions…while well connected middle-class women can frequently get safe and hush hush* [abortions] *in hospitals"'* Ibid. p.122

education' and a successful campaign by residents of Lakeview and Lincoln Park with RUA's women activists led to the creation of a new community health clinic.

RUA developed an organic, sophisticated stance in organising against the American war in Vietnam. Rather than purely viewing the conflict from a top-down geo-political perspective (beloved of the SDS and many other sections of the left), RUA looked from the stand-point of the white working-class as potential volunteers or draftees. They emphasised in community discussions, within the double context of *'the war at home and the war in 'Nam'*, that *'condemning the war did not mean condemning enlistees'*[65]. In addition, RUA recognised from its own experience that the motivations for working-class volunteers were not straight-forward questions of patriotic loyalty or even choice, but included avoiding jail, getting a trade, escaping from poverty or just the search for something different to the boredom of menial work. Crucially, the group quickly engaged with returning veterans of the war through community and familial connections, encouraging them to speak publically about their experiences. Many 'vets' subsequently joined RUA and through this 'slow' process of discussion and community engagement 'Angry' became well-placed to react to the wave of desertions, refusals and outright mutiny in the U.S. armed forces that exploded in 1970-72[66]. The extent of their reciprocal organising efforts with returning combatants was demonstrated as the group's well-informed newspaper was adopted by several chapters of the *Vietnam Veterans Against the War* and RUA organised several large anti-war protests in white working-class Chicago neighbourhoods. As the authors of *Hillbillies* note:

'In contrast to the popular Sixties profile of protesting students, rock musicians and Yippies, Chicago's early Seventies anti-war movement had become a family affair'[67]

The Rainbow Coalition provided both the Young Patriots and Rising Up Angry with resources for strengthening and extending their practical community organising efforts. The Patriots were engaged in several major projects with the Young Lords, Black Panthers and Native-American residents of Uptown which included occupying land and buildings to halt the hated urban renewal programmes which were still on-going, whilst simultaneously demanding affordable housing. They also opened a health centre which became part of a network of independent clinics inspired by the Panthers drive for free community healthcare for the people in Chicago. In a similar parallel, the Patriots launched free breakfast programmes for families which across the city were now feeding thousands of children. All of these projects were actively impeded by the local state, which constantly harassed employees, successfully threatened civic organisations that were sympathetic to the programmes and used legislation to try to close the clinics. When these legal assaults were resisted, police made mass arrests and eventually forced many of the projects to close within a year of their inception.

The repression unleashed by the local state on the community projects of the Rainbow Coalition turned out to be the least of their problems. According to a founding member of the Young Patriots, Hy Thurman:

'It is sad, and documented, that three days after we became the coalition, the Rainbow Coalition, the FBI started putting us under surveillance, considering us to be dangerous….but somehow we were determined by J. Edgar Hoover himself that this coalition was dangerous and we [The Young Patriots] *were dangerous'*[68]

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[65] The authors add *'Residents could join Angry* [RUA] *regardless of whether they were for or against the war'* Ibid. p.111-2

[66] For a history of the anti-war movement in the US armed forces during the Vietnam War see Matthew Rinaldi, *Olive-Drab Rebels: Military Organising during the Vietnam Era* One Thousand Emotions, 2006. and D. Zeiger, *Sir! No Sir!*, ed. P. Broderick, Vol. Film Displaced Films & Pangea Productions Ltd., 2005.

[67] Sonnie and Tracy, *Hillbilly Nationalists, Urban Race Rebels, and Black Power: Community Organizing in Radical Times* p.112-4

[68] *Hy Thurman Interview and Transcript* 00:27:20 – 00:28:00

Hoover's brainchild the Counter-Intelligence Programme (COINTELPRO) was launched in the mid-50s and was aimed at pro-active disruption and neutralisation of political organisations and social movements which were deemed 'subversive' to the U.S. state[69]. In the late 1960s Hoover's gaze shifted from his old enemy the U.S. Communist Party and the Civil Rights movement to the New Left and specifically radical ethnic organisations such as the Black Panther Party and the Young Lords. Tactics developed in the FBI's struggles in the early 60s against the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) and Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) were honed and expanded for application to these new targets. Typically COINTELPRO operations aimed at infiltration of organisations with informers and agent provocateurs, diverse forms of psychological warfare, legal harassment including 'fit-ups' and 'illegal' force including break-ins, beatings and even assassination. Of particular importance to the FBI was the neutralisation of perceived 'messiah' figures that could unite the left, as well as disrupting alliances and 'political fronts' between groups or movements. As Panther Bob Lee explained *'once the [Black Panther] Party departed from the hate whitey trip'* and moved into cross-ethnic class politics they became a major threat. According to Lee *'The Rainbow Coalition was their worst nightmare'*[70] and as a result all of the FBI's COINTELPRO tools were unleashed in Chicago.

The first signs of the FBI upping the ante began immediately after the formation of the Rainbow Coalition. In May 1969, after the murder and wounding by off-duty policemen of two members of the Young Lords in Chicago[71], a protest march of 3,000 people was met by jeers from members of the Cobras, from the 'Folk Nation' side of the Chicago gang divide. The Cobras had been informed by police that the *'Young Lords were helping the Panthers take over their [neighbourhoods]'*. Other misinformation campaigns suggested that the Young Patriots were in league with the Klu Klux Klan and *'a steady stream of anonymous letters cast aspersions on political loyalties and interracial liaisons, and turned personal disagreements into deadly conflicts'*[72]. Rumours of armed police raids or attacks on the Rainbow Coalition were rife, leading to intense stress amongst the organisers. The same year, John Howard a veteran member of JOIN who had appeared in the film *'American Revolution II'* vocally supporting the alliance between the Young Patriots and the Panthers was recognised as an anti-racist activist on a trip to his home state of Georgia and was subsequently murdered. Whether the FBI was indirectly responsible for these murders, used proxy-killers[73] or was uninvolved remains a mystery; either way these contiguous events led Rainbow Coalition activists to believe they were now literally *in the firing line*. They were not wrong.

On December 4th 1969, eight months after the first public appearance of the Rainbow Coalition, the FBI, Chicago Police department and an FBI informer in the Panthers conspired together to drug and murder Chicago BPP leader Fred Hampton. Hampton's bodyguard Mark Clark was killed almost immediately as FBI operatives burst into the house in the early hours of the morning, whilst the unarmed Hampton, who never woke from his drug-induced slumber, was executed in cold blood. Four other Panthers were shot and seriously injured in the raid before being beaten unconscious and

[69] For more on COINTELPRO see Churchill and Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression: The FBI's Secret Wars Against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement*, Churchill and Vander Wall, *The COINTELPRO Papers: Documents from the FBI's Secret Wars Against Dissent in the United States* and the documentary *The FBI's War on Black America*, Film, directed by D. Mueller and D. Ellis Maljack Productions, 1989

[70] Sonnie and Tracy, *Hillbilly Nationalists, Urban Race Rebels, and Black Power: Community Organizing in Radical Times* p.84

[71] Manuel Ramos was shot dead and Ralph Rivera was critically wounded.

[72] Ibid. p.85-6

[73] It is claimed in the documentary *'The FBI's War on Black America'* that the FBI had infiltrated the Klu Klux Klan so successfully by the mid-1960s that one-in-four Klansmen were federal informants. A number of these operatives were directly involved in bombings and murders of Civil Rights activists. Mueller and Ellis, *The FBI's War on Black America* 00:15:15 – 00:17:30

dragged into the street, where they were arrested on charges of aggravated assault and the attempted murder of police officers[74]. This incident not only shocked the whole of the New Left but for many acted as a 'declaration of war' by the U.S. state. New Left debates that had festered for years concerning the competing approaches of community and factory organising, national political campaigns and armed direct action became immediate and confrontational in many organisations, not just in the SDS arena[75].

Splits over political direction became explicit in the Young Patriots as a breakaway group the *Patriot Party* (PP) formed in early 1970 in an attempt to take the politics of the organisation onto the national stage. The PP launched chapters in a number of cities including New York and tried to initiate a number of community projects styled on the Chicago model. However, the failure to nurture the organic community connections that had existed in Chicago doomed many to rapid failure. For the PP, this was the least of their problems. From the very moment of formation of the Party surveillance by the FBI and police began and within months intensified into directed harassment. This took the form of armed raids on the Party's offices[76], arrests and incarceration of activists on trumped up charges and attempts to connect the organisation with bombings. Allied with armed attacks by white supremacist groups on organisers in several cities, the pressure began to tell on the Patriot Party. As with many organisations that had made up the Rainbow Coalition the early 70s were characterised by the internal sabotage of organisations by COINTELPRO operations, shootings of activists by the authorities or 'proxy' groups[77], numerous arrests, long court battles and financially crippling legal fees and bail conditions. The Patriot Party eventually spent the majority of its activity either trying to defend its arrested activists or those of the Black Panther Party which was experiencing the same forms of repression, albeit more violently. It is thus no surprise that many of the 'Rainbow' groups were unable to engage in or sustain community organising during this period and eventually, for pragmatic reasons, turned to prison agitation from within and without. The radical prison movement in the U.S. in the 1970s, which was partly inspired by these interventions, essentially marked the end-phase of the community organising efforts of organisations that comprised the Rainbow Coalition.

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(RB 2013)

[74] The wounded Panthers were Verlina Brewer, Ronald Satchel, Blair Anderson and Brenda Harris who were each placed on bail of $100,000 after the raid. During the raid the FBI and police fired about ninety shots to the Panther's one. The latter was attributed to Mark Clark's gun going off as he fell mortally wounded.

[75] A few months before the death of Fred Hampton, at the SDS national convention in June 1969 these competing political strategies were at the centre of a confrontation within the leadership which effectively destroyed the organisation. The splits led to the formation of the anti-imperialist armed struggle network *The Weather Underground*, the *Progressive Labour Party* which classically subsumed issues around 'race' into generalised class struggle in the workplace and the *Revolutionary Youth Movement* which supported *'self-determination of the Black "internal colony" in the United States and national liberation struggles abroad'* Sonnie and Tracy, *Hillbilly Nationalists, Urban Race Rebels, and Black Power: Community Organizing in Radical Times* p.105-6 and Sale, *SDS*.

[76] In February 1970 the whole central committee of the New York chapter of the Patriot Party was arrested on mass after an armed raid by police on the offices of the organisation. This eventually led to the collapse of the New York PP Sonnie and Tracy, *Hillbilly Nationalists, Urban Race Rebels, and Black Power: Community Organizing in Radical Times* p.92

[77] Chicago Patriot Party member, Raymond Tuckett, was murdered in his home state of Kentucky in 1973 whilst in the process of setting up a free health clinic. It was suspected, though not proven, that police had hired a 'hit man' to carry out the killing Ibid. p.99-100

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