

The People's Suitcase

A People's History of El Barrio

Tactical Toolkit and Digital Resources for Liberation Classrooms

Reassessing Inequality and Reimagining the 21st Century
Graduate Center, CUNY

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“School curricula pay lip service to Black history, but Puerto Ricans didn’t make the cut. Martin Luther King is an icon on a postage stamp, no longer part of an ongoing mass movement; but the struggle for human and civil rights did not end at his death... We were there, and a body of our work remains, mostly unpublished until now, scattered about the country in old trunks, closets, and a few libraries, and on microfilm, waiting patiently to see the light of day, to give testimony to our struggle.”

- Iris Morales and Denise Oliver-Velez, *The Young Lords, A Reader*, 2010

Contents

1. Introduction for Educators

2. Conditions of inequality and the Community Response

- Who were The Young Lords?
- What was The Black Panther Party?

3. I See... Activity

4. The Future: Narrating and Envisioning

- Asset Mapping

5. Old Neighborhood | New Neighborhood and Old School |
New School

Introduction for Educators

This digital resource for New York City educators bringing together a host of pedagogical resources, a sample curriculum, and detailed instructions for creating a tactile classroom “People’s Suitcase” for any classroom located in any community or neighborhood.

The curriculum aligns with New York State common core standards and includes activities that strengthen student’s critical thinking and communication skills about historical images and primary historical documents. The toolkit focuses on the fascinating legacy of collective social justice movements of the Civil Rights era, specifically The Young Lords and The Black Panther Party. The sample curriculum and the resources on this website are related directly to the geographical area of East Harlem, El Barrio and also includes resources for current social justice movements in El Barrio.

Time Required:

1 week (about 1 activity per day, 4 activities)

Recommended Grade Level:

6th-8th Grade

Appropriate Courses:

US History
Geography

Social Studies
Urban Studies

English
Civics

This curriculum situates East Harlem youth into just a few of many possible streams of collective political history and culture of El Barrio and will:

- Help educators facilitate meaningful, place-based, liberation-oriented pedagogy of structural inequality in El Barrio.
- Highlight the need for more collective youth and community organizing for equality and social justice now.
- Explore youth individual and collective political agency, perspectives, and challenges. A perspective on more democratic control and management of urban resources and landscape.
- Highlight examples of youth coming together to expose these circuits of dispossession, poor living conditions, health issues that plagued their communities.
- Teach hope and belonging in collective solutions to dispossession and disillusionment. Through honing of critical analytical tools for deconstruction, the toolkit is a contribution to the ongoing global process of decolonization and liberation.

Conditions of inequality and the Community Response

Who were The Young Lords? What was The Black Panther Party?

“Students deserve to learn that individuals, acting collectively, can move powerful institutions to change.”

-Souther Poverty Law Center, Teaching the Movement

Objectives:

Introduce students to looking at historical photographic documents and first accounts as primary sources of data.

Learn about community driven initiatives spearheaded by young people in East Harlem.

Connect, compare and contrast depictions of East Harlem residents from the past to students who live in East Harlem today.

Duration:

1 day

Included Materials:

- 5 sets of archival photographs of The Young Lords in action (also digital for projection)
- “I See...” worksheets

Additional Materials Needed:
pencils and writing paper

Align with These Common Core Standards:

xx
x
x

Who were The Young Lords?

Reading for students:

Ch. 10 of *The Revolution of Evelyn Serrano*. By Sonia Manzano.
(Either assigned, classroom reading, or instructor reads a passage)

Additional resources:

The Young Lords, A READER
Edited by Darrel Enck-Wanzer
FOREWORD BY IRIS MORALES AND DENISE OLIVER-VELEZ
NEW YORK UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2010

“Some of the issues we faced as political young people back in those early halcyon days of the movements of the 1960s and ‘70s have changed. We were “Bc”: “before crack” There was no AIDS pandemic Youth gangs didn’t have automatic weapons. No one had a computer, a cell phone, or email There was no Homeland Security or PAI RIO! Act. The World Trade Center hadn’t been built, much less destroyed. There were no music videos or MIV. Our rap music was spoken word poetry set to the sound of conga drums or do-wops sung on street corners Oprah Winfrey didn’t have a tv show, and J-Lo hadn’t been born.

Tireless women and men whom we strove to emulate and live up to had names like Lolita Lebron, Don Pedro Albizu Campos, Sojourner Truth, Malcolm X, Blanca Canales, and Fannie Lou Hamer. The “Rainbow Coalition” was Fred Hampton’s revolutionary vision of unity among poor people, not Jesse Jackson’s poverty program.

When we entered the Young Lords in its early days, the leadership was all male. We helped to change that and to create an organization of young women and men struggling together to change the world and ourselves in the process. We connected to a larger movement in our opposition to the war in Vietnam. Inspired by the Cuban and Chinese revolutions and by the liberation struggles in Africa and Latin America, we believed that we could change the US. economic, political, and social system. Puerto Rican and African American youth joined the Young Lords, determined to change the status quo.”

“We awoke early each day to serve breakfast to school children, went door to door testing residents for lead poisoning and anemia, developed ground-breaking programs to deal with drug addiction, conducted community political education classes, and mobilized demonstrations. We advocated

for community control of schools and educational curriculums that included Puerto Rican history and culture We organized hospital and factory workers and worker-community alliances; and from the beginning, health care was a priority. We organized to change prison conditions and defined the prison system as another form of genocide We raised awareness about the triple oppression of women of color by class, race, and gender We wanted to change our communities, and perhaps while doing so, change our brothers. School curricula pay lip service to Black history, but Puerto Ricans didn't make the cut. Martin Luther King is an icon on a postage stamp, no longer part of an ongoing mass movement; but the struggle for human and civil rights did not end at his death. The Black Panthers, Young Lords, Brown Berets, I Wor Kuen, American Indian Movement, and the followers of Malcolm were too dangerous to even pay lip service to and have been relegated to the obscurity of a few documentary glimpses in art film showings. In 1996, public television broadcast two documentaries about Puerto Rico and the role of Puerto Ricans in America's history, both on the Island and in the United States, but since then it has not broadcast anything else.

We were there, and a body of our work remains, mostly unpublished until now, scattered about the country in old trunks, closets, and a few libraries, and on microfilm, waiting patiently to see the light of day, to give testimony to our struggle.”

Furrther reading on the Young Lords:

'Palante' Paper: for the community The Young Lords disbanded by 1976

In *The Young Lords of New York*, History 394 Dr. Thomas Beal and Marcello Duranti relate how the Young Lords Party (1969 to 1974), an “ethnic group of radical intellectuals would help bring attention to the plight of the Puerto Rican community in New York City.” “The Puerto Rican migrants in the 60s and 70s faced “many of the same problems as the European immigrants of the early 1900's. The new migrants had to deal with rampant racism, poverty, deplorable living conditions, lack of access to health care, malnutrition and other problems that effected earlier immigrant populations.” There were “groups such as the Black Panthers, the Young Patriots and The Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) were fighting for great causes, there was no organization representing the growing Puerto Rican population. Realizing a need for Latino consciousness in the New York City community and improvement in the conditions of the Latino status, The Young Lords New York Chapter was formed. The organization consisted primarily of young Latino people who, similar to the Black Panthers, through direct community action and education, made an impact on the conditions of the Latino community.”

At its peak in 1971, the Young Lords had hundreds of members across the east coast. The people in these pictures were members of the group -

young Latino/a's who grew up and lived in East Harlem/El barrio. They and their families and neighbors faced racial, ethnic, and class discrimination, poverty, and because of these social inequalities, their communities lacked even basic access to or community control of the basic material necessities of human life; housing, healthcare and food.

During a period of US deindustrialization, the state had abandoned vibrant city neighborhoods of Latina/o communities and in general abandoned minority neighborhoods altogether, making clear which communities were considered valuable and not valuable in a society driven by industrial profits. The Young Lords sought ways to both immediately improve and call attention to the neglect and inadequacy of living conditions in El Barrio, the conditions of Latina/o communities all over the East Coast. They preferred to use "direct action" to begin their campaigns because they had little reason to trust politicians, officials, and service providers who never served their neighborhoods. This meant that they occupied buildings, took medical supplies into the ghetto, started collective care programs for children of working parents. They won many concessions from the city government. (Abramson, M. (1971). *The Young Lords Party*. Palante: Young Lords Party,) demanded access to neighborhood facilities like churches and empty store fronts for community services enacted community control of services like hospitals and schools:

"We were looking at how hospitals and those kinds of institutions should be run. Its not just about access to healthcare, but its about how healthcare is administered" (Denise Oliver, prominent Young Lords and Black Panther Party member, interviewed 2009, Wagingnonviolence.org)

Based on community self determination and they were very organized, yet they were just people in the community who got it together. They had their own newspaper called Palante which means "Onward!"

The Young Lords share a collective history that includes both their individual memories of changing everyday life in El Barrio for the better, and of changing the city laws too.

The Young Lords community work:

Clean ups. After the sanitation department repeatedly denied people of El Barrio brooms to clean 110th street, the Young Lords and the citizens of the El Barrio got together to rid the garbage from their communities. They put it in one big pile and brought traffic to a stand still on 111th and 112th street.

Day Care: The Young Lords organized a free daycare for working mothers and fathers who could not afford day care for their children on their meager salaries. This program was a great success, and benefited those members of the community who had to work full time jobs in order to support their

families. (5)

Breakfast Programs: Housed in many of the occupied churches, the Young Lords started a program of free breakfast meals for members of the community. This program promoted community fellowship as well as helped feed New York's Puerto Rican community.

Door-to-Door Lead Poisoning / Tuberculosis Testing:
MAR – MAY 1970 —

Among the various concerns of the Young Lords was the poor health coverage offered to the average Puerto Rican living in New York. Many of the community members had not received the most basic tests—including life-saving tests for lead poisoning and tuberculosis. The Young Lords organized door-to-door lead poisoning testing, and—when they learned the city owned a TB-testing x-ray truck that had never reached the Puerto Rican neighborhoods—the Young Lords commandeered the truck and brought it in for use by their neighborhood. YL eventually forced the city council to pass a law mandating that the city would no longer use lead paint in city housing projects. Lead Poisoning can severely effect the developing brains of children. Prior to the knowledge gathered from large scale lead poisoning tests carried out by the Young Lords in El Barrio, many low income children of color were getting sick and experiencing learning disabilities and deficits because of the high lead content in their homes.

What was the Black Panther Party?

By Trystan Reese, senior field organizer, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force

When you think of the Black Panthers, what comes to mind?

The last time I asked that question, I heard “armed militants” from almost everyone in the room. Black nationalism, a hatred of white people, thugs, cop-killers... these are very real stereotypes that have infected our views on the Black Panther Party and its aims, and have robbed modern freedom fighters of what is arguably the most important organizing that this country has ever seen.

Demands of the Black Panther Party: Land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace.

There is a reason we don't all know the incredible depth of organizing that the Panthers did. The movement was successfully stymied after a gruesome nation-wide campaign to discredit and destroy it. Here are a few interesting tidbits about the Panthers:

- The Black Panthers are the reason we currently have free breakfast programs in public schools today. There was a time when the Black Panthers

were feeding more school children nationwide than the US government was.

- The Black Panthers ran several registered nonprofits, allowing them to apply for and receive grants that facilitated their youth programs, free food and clothing services, elder support systems and sickle cell anemia research. Much of what we currently know about sickle cell anemia is a direct result of those first testing programs.

- In 1970, the Illinois Panthers opened a free health clinic that served over 2,000 people within its first two months of existence.

- Unhappy with the ineffective teaching principles of the public school system, the Panthers founded the Intercommunal Youth Institute which remained open for almost 20 years. Their methods of teaching changed the way educators thought about school structures nationally, and in 1977, the California legislature awarded the Oakland school for “setting the standard for the highest level of elementary education in the state.”

- The Black Panther Party believed deeply in the political process, successfully running political campaigns that placed its members into office around the country. Today, many former Panthers are still in office at the local and federal level.

- Huey Newton, the co-founder of the Black Panther Party, publicly supported the gay liberation movement. In 1970, he stated that he believed “the homosexual could be the most revolutionary” of all oppressed people. In that same speech, he called for full participation of the gay liberation movement and the women’s liberation movement, asking his fellow Panthers to do the hard personal work of examining and dismantling their own biases and insecurities about homosexuality and feminism.

When the unfair stigma placed on the Black power movement is erased, we see clearly the organizing models and revolutionary principles of the Black Panther Party.

Land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace.

Their work still stands as exemplary examples of a people seeking dignity and self-determination, taking community control over their own destinies.

I See...

In Class Activity 2.): Get into small groups and pass out a packet of photographs to each group (or project images on the screen) and an “I See...” worksheet to each student . Spend a few minutes looking at the 3 photographs from the packet. Encourage the students to discuss first impressions of what they see in the photographs amongst their group.

On the “I See...” worksheets each student write their inferences from the photographs.

Coming back into the larger group, the class discusses each photograph one by one using the notes students have taken in small groups.

Suggested discussion questions for instructor:

Have students write a story that links what is conveyed by each photo together into a single narrative. The students should try to address some of the topics discussed from viewing the photographs in relation to their own experiences, feelings, and thoughts about with [these topics].

Example questions:

What do you see in this picture?

Who is in the picture and what do you think they are doing?

What are some clues that tell you about when, who, what is going on?

Why do you think they are doing this?

[after class discussion on inferences and story sharing]

The Future: Narrating and Envisioning

Be brave. Envision your community's history as you tell it. What do you want remembered and what do you want to pass on? "What kind of city do you want to live in?" and "What skills do you need to sharpen, and lessons do you need learn in order to make that city, that world?"

Examples: what do you want people to know about grandma, your building, your friends, your park, your school – make sure its really important to you to have people remember. What do you want preserved?

Human sculptures – group of 5 – e.g. embody a concept "settler colonialism" freeze in a position and others have to describe it

What is your position in your community?

What are the strengths of your community? What needs to be preserved and nurtured? (Asset mapping)

3) Discussion: Behind the Camera - The Story of the Picture Taker

Duration: ½ day (?)

Included Materials: Could we possibly use the images from Centro photos of kids in public schools in the 1970's same age as the students-- that way students are talking about why children's participation is important and needs to be documented? picture take might be parent teacher who took it to document important contributions/ histories made by child...what do we think?

In Class Activity: Class will be asked to describe and discuss the person who took the photo to answer the following questions:

- How did it happen that someone took this photo 40 years ago, and that we are able to look at it now?
- Who do you think took this photo?
- Why do you think they took this picture?
- What was their motive? What are they trying to say with this photo?
- Who might they have saved it for?
- What were they trying to pass on to us, the future generations?
- What are you trying to pass on to others in your life?
- What is a photo you would take? What story would you want to tell?

Write a letter to the photographer or

each student takes some photos of a meaningful place or time and brings to class to write about?

Core Standards:

- Drawing inferences
- Looking for patterns
- Interpreting information
- Supporting a position
- Making predictions
- Drawing conclusions
- Participating in group planning and discussion

Old Neighborhood | New Neighborhood

Old School | New School

Lesson: Continuity and change, meaningful places

Write about 3 things changed btwn then and now?

What 3 things do you like about now?

What 3 things would you change now?

- (gentrification and cultural and demographic changes) look for images of struggle for ethnic studies in schools

– Timeline for how education spaces have changed and why – neoliberalism and imperialism

Life maps, cognitive maps, mind maps, community, asset, neighborhood maps

- Solidarity with others, community change, meaningful places,
- where do you feel most comfortable, neutral, not comfortable in your neighborhood

Graphs and photographs together: critical bifocality zooming in and out
School closings graphic, about race

Objectives:

Duration:

1 Day

Materials Included:

Old Photos of El Barrio paired with contemporary photos of El Barrio

Materials Needed:

Core Standards:

- Using the vocabulary of time and place
- Placing events in chronological order
- Understanding concepts of time, continuity, and change
- drawing inferences and making conclusions
- decoding images (graphs, cartoons, photos)
- Placing events in chronological order
- Understanding concepts of time, continuity, and change











