**Legacy**

Volume 17 | Issue 1 Article 6

2017

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Margaret McKinney
*Southern Illinois University Carbondale*

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Recommended Citation
McKinney, Margaret (2017) "The Ghetto Brothers: Reconciliation, Music, and the Brokerage of Peace among Bronx Street Gangs in the 1970s," *Legacy*: Vol. 17 : Iss. 1 , Article 6.
Available at: https://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/legacy/vol17/iss1/6

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**Margaret McKinney**

## The Ghetto Brothers: Reconciliation, Music, and the Brokerage of Peace among Bronx Street Gangs in the 1970s

On December 7, 1971, a coalition of African American and Puerto Rican gang members met in New York City, intent on identifying those responsible for the death of Cornell "Black Benjie" Benjamin. Far away from their turf in the South Bronx, these gang members turned a possible violent encounter into an uplifting meeting for hope of peace. During the meeting, a young black man by the name of Marvin "Hollywood" Harper, member of the Savage Skulls gang, addressed the sea of gang members, now known as the "Hoe Avenue Peace Meeting."[1] Harper pointed out that, among some gangs, the violation of the traditional rule of taking one's colors when entering a territory controlled by a different gang and not returning them after leaving, resulted in a sense of great disrespect even for those outlaws. Harper also noted that when they entered the turf of the Spades gang, they refused to return their colors.[2] To that he stated, "All we did [was] ask you people for the colors and you people didn't give us our colors back. You don't see us stripping you people, man. You don't see us stripping the Turbans [gang], you don't see us stripping the Ghetto Brothers. You don't see us stripping no other crowd. When we have static, we settle it among ourselves, man, because we have to live in this district."[3] A crucial element to the success of peace came in the form of respect among gang members.

What was important and surprising in Hollywood's speech was that, in their majority, gang members acknowledged the fact that they needed to treat each other with respect because they all lived in the South Bronx. They equally confronted the economic and social conditions of

their borough. The Hoe Avenue Peace meeting transformed vengeance of African American and Puerto Rican youths into the beginning of cooperation among gang leaders and their members. Their economic and social conditions became their common enemy. These gang members sought to take their social situation into their own hands, and changed their living conditions for the benefit of their communities.

The Black Power Movement played an important role in American political culture, both at the community and national levels, giving way to African-American political emancipation. During the great era of civil rights, communities of color often embraced exclusion from their white counterparts and created bonds of unified struggles. Blacks and "blatinos" (African American and Latino people) embraced their African heritage and strayed from social standards developed for and by white people, including notions of beauty, success, and respectability. The emergence of scholarship on the political culture of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements started soon after the decline of the Black Panther Party and the push for African American studies on college campuses. Early studies focused on the experiences of black activists. They then evolved into more sophisticated studies centered on the political and cultural forces of that historical era. During the 1960s, the Black Power Movement led the way for Puerto Rican nationalist organizations to find their voice in the political culture of the time.

There are three major themes in the historiography of the Black Panther Party: oral histories and biographies, local chapter histories, and histories of the relationships between the Party and the African American communities. The first category contains personal accounts by participants and observers involved in the Party.[4] Some of the early personal accounts found publication in dailies, such as *The Black Panther Party Newspaper*, and other types of press reports. For example, Bobby Seale and Huey P. Newton dominated early writings of the

organizations. Four unique themes tied Seale's and Newton's writing: the overwhelming focus on leaders, police brutality, the general attitude towards Newton, and the mythology of the Party. Newton focused heavily on his contribution to African American intellectual history. Other leaders who produced autobiographies described rank-and-file members as victims of white oppression, as young ghetto dwellers, or simply naïve people.[5]

The second theme focused on the history and experiences of Black Panther Party chapters across the United States, and the experiences of the rank-and-file members. The 1960s African American activist generation, for example, wrote about their contributions, experiences, and the significance of their struggles within United States society. In the 1990s, many members wrote autobiographies highlighting their experiences in the Black Panther Party and in the Civil Rights Movement as a whole. These autobiographies provide insight into the everyday lives of Black Panther Party members, and expose the levels of anger, sadness, and stress that many of them incurred as activists for social justice. Elaine Brown provided a detailed account highlighting the pressures involved in the life of a Party activist. She also explained how different members handled those pressures. For example, she described how Newton turned to drugs and isolation. Personally, the pressures of life as an activist and leader eventually forced Brown to flee the Party.[6]

The third theme focuses on the Black Panthers' contributions to African American communities and culture beyond their political programs and violent public images.[7] Scholars such as Jeffrey Ogbar place Black Panther Party political activism at the center of the Black Power Movement. Ogbar's article "Puerto Rico En Mi Corazon: The Young Lords, Black Power, and Puerto Rican Nationalism in the U.S., 1966-1972" focuses on the Party's internal struggles with gender equality. Further, it sheds light on the Party's contribution concerning the

development of African American culture, and how it is symbolic of the social and political changes that they confronted and attempted to change. Today, scholars of the African American diaspora undertake intellectual projects to understand the impact of Black Panthers on American political and social culture, their relationship with other radical organizations, and the influence of the Panthers on Latino radicalism.[8]

Since the end of the Spanish American War, Puerto Ricans continue to face the powerful nature of United States colonialism. Due to the many disadvantages experienced by island and mainland communities, and in light of the social and political struggles of the 1960s Civil Rights Era, Puerto Ricans sought to insert themselves into the radical political movement for justice by taking political strategies from the Black Panther Party. One aspect of radicalism was the inclusion of an Afro-Puerto Rican identity, and the study of reasons for their marginalization. Puerto Ricans' involvement in community projects, education of Puerto Rican history, and understanding of political conditions in the U.S. became of great importance. As a result, many Puerto Ricans showed pride in their culture by displaying the Puerto Rican flag, listening to salsa music, and attending Puerto Rican parades. "Real Puerto Ricanness" came in the form of cultural knowledge, meanings, and symbolic markers given in society across the mainland and beyond.[9]

In cities with large Puerto Rican communities, such as Chicago and New York, Puerto Ricans suffered from poor housing conditions, job discrimination, and poverty. In addition, low-income communities, especially African American and Puerto Rican communities, suffered from a gang problem seemingly endemic of their social conditions. Gang membership often divided communities along racial and ethnic lines in poor communities. In addition, they engaged in criminal activities against each other. The Black Power Movement increasingly influenced gang members' behaviors in that they provided gangsters with the necessary tools to abandon gang life

and join local nationalist organizations, such as the Young Lords Party and Black Panther Party. For Puerto Ricans, the process of politicizing youth gangs proved central in upholding traditional community and racial identity. The Young Lords gang, organized by Chicago's Puerto Rican youth, aimed simply to defend Puerto Rican youth against rival gangs. Under the influence of Black Panther leaders, the Young Lords transformed themselves into a political organization, which protected and educated their community. The Young Lords Organization became a major proponent in the grassroots movement for Puerto Rican nationalist organizations. For them, revolutionary nationalism embraced freedom, justice, and power for the people. Radical Puerto Rican organizations caused people to challenge traditional notions of race, and explicitly addressed their own history of race, calling for a greater notion of African and Latino history. The Young Lords Organization called into question the whiteness afforded to Puerto Ricans by American society. While many Puerto Ricans found it important for society to recognize them as being white, many white people did not accept them as such.[10]

Puerto Rican identity portrayed in Hollywood directly challenged the actual representation of Puerto Ricans in the United States. The 1960s film "West Side Story" portrayed Puerto Rican males as gang members, and women as sassy.[11] The movie did not accurately interpret Puerto Rican culture or community life. It portrayed the "Sharks" as antagonists and criminals. In part, the gentrification of, and "White flight" from, Puerto Rican and black communities led to the emergence of gangs. Those unable to afford these demographic changes became stuck with property owners unwilling to maintain building codes. In the South Bronx during the 1970s, property owners intentionally burned apartment buildings to collect insurance money, which forced many tenants to move into Section 8 housing.[12] Section 8 housing is a federal program that allows tenants to apply monthly vouchers to their housing

expenses. Abandoned properties attracted a large number of squatters, drug addicts, and drug dealers. Youth gangs existed to defend themselves against Italian and Euromerican gangs in other neighborhoods. Eventually, gangs practically became a living requirement in low-income communities, as protection against other community gangs. "West Side Story" largely ignores the significance of gang culture in Puerto Rican communities. Gangs soon became the foundation of Puerto Rican nationalism, and the fight for equal rights.[13]

Tanisha Ford's article "SNCC Women, Denim, and the Politics of Dress" explores the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), during the 1960s, and women's modification of clothing and hairstyles as a response to the realities of activism in rural south sharecropping communities. Ford explores the reasons why young black women activists abandoned "respectable" clothing and hairstyles to adopt jeans, denim skirts, and a natural hairstyle. Relating to sharecropping communities, desexualizing their bodies, and distortion of gender roles became three main objectives that SNCC activists sought. Performance of respectability became a critical aspect of black organizing during the Civil Rights Movement. Organizers taught black women that clothing and hair choices played an importance performative role in the black freedom struggle. Middle-class educated women either went to Spellman or charm schools whose intent on learning domestic skills, posture, beauty care, and gender standards created a separate sphere from the SNCC. Black activists believed dressing better than whites displayed an act of defiance.[14]

Black women used their bodies as a strategy against Jim Crow. The body acted as a physical barrier, and a marker of social status during nonviolence tactics. After participating in sit-ins, women incurred attacks by white mobs through means of food, water, spit, and other physical abuse. Black women protestors' hair began to turn back into its kinky state, given the

impression of an unkempt appearance. After those attacks, black women underwent intense hair and beauty regimens to restore their respectable bodies. During the Civil Rights Movement, beauty shops became an intricate part of the movement for black activist women. The beauty shop became a place of refuge and sisterhood for black women.[15]

During the Civil Rights Movement, women organized protest and recruited other women to join the movement. Sexualized tactics by police officers created fear within women, making it difficult for women to maintain a respectable body. Black women's respectability became sexually and psychologically degrading. In some instances, white officers stuck women in paddy wagons for hours to "sweat the women out" in order to check for contraband hidden in the women's undergarments. Women in paddy wagons, sweat so much thus enabling police officers to see through their clothing, which gave officers a reason to search women. During this period, the inappropriateness for male officers to search female arrestees proved an advantage for women. SNCC women changed their ideal of a respectable body embracing and relating to the rural southern communities they were canvasing. The adoption of denim built a community that united activists across class and gender lines. Black women apart of SNCC served as an early model of radical black womanhood, the cultural and political body of fashion.[16]

Fashion played a pivotal role in the expression of black pride during the Civil Rights movement and the Black Power Movement. The foundation of these movements consisted of black pride united with a strong expression of solidarity. Fashion statements sent a message to America that African Americans found pride in their heritage**.** Whether it was the wearing of the dashiki, a colorful garment originating from West Africa, or the militant uniform of the Black Panther Party, onlookers did not miss the message that "black was beautiful."[17] The Black Panther uniform sent a powerful message to white society, and became a prominent symbol of

black pride. The beret became a revolutionary icon as other nationalist organizations began wearing it with distinct colors. The afro hairstyle symbolized racial pride for the African American and Latino community. The afro became not only a political statement, but also a new beauty standard. Marketing agencies began using black models with afros to promote their products. Black publications, such as Jet magazine, began displaying celebrities with afros as models. The use of fashion by movements proved a powerful strategy in the altering of American culture, and in the implementation of African elements into American society.

The black campus movement played a significant role in the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements. In addition, higher education played a role in the notion of a respectable body. Educated SNCC activists either attended college or charm schools. College experiences created a disconnection with working class members. Educated men and women activists learned to readjust themselves in order to live among the laboring class in the South**.** College-educated women were exposed to the class stereotypes that respectable dress brought. The campus movement significantly influenced the Black Panther Party in that the party's early efforts for recruitment occurred at college campuses.[18] The mass of the early Panther membership consisted of college-educated students. The campus movement also influenced Puerto Rican nationalist groups due to its effect on the Black Power movement and the Young Lords. The Young Lords modeled the ideology of the Black Panther Party. However, the level of education of their leaders became one significant difference between the Black Power and Puerto Rican Nationalist Movements.

In 1961, Robert Moses, a powerful urban planner, decided to build the Cross-Bronx Expressway through the Bronx borough.[19] Moses planned to clean out the overpopulated zones of Greenwich Village and SoHo in order to build high-rise apartment buildings. His actions

resulted in the displacement of hundreds of residents from their neighborhoods, forcing them to relocate to the South Bronx. As a result of this urban planning strategy, the traditional neighborhoods slowly perished. With the expansion of the expressway, the Bronx saw a large number of residents leaving for "better" neighborhoods. As multifamily apartment buildings sat abandoned and decaying, the value of the properties plummeted. Low-income black and Puerto Ricans families in the South Bronx experienced an economic crisis, which politicians blamed on white property owners. They imposed unreasonably high rents on their tenants, typically black and Puerto Rican families, who often lived paycheck to paycheck. Mayor Abraham Beame's solution to alleviate the economic burden of these families consisted of turning empty apartment buildings into Section 8 housing.[20]

Under the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) plans, politicians set rental rates low, which left little potential for property owners to make a profit on their properties. These low rent rates posed a problem with the conversion of empty apartment buildings into Section 8 housing. Housing regulations made it virtually impossible to evict tenants for engaging in illegal or destructive behavior within and against their housing facilities. Those regulations resulted in the slow decay of many South Bronx buildings. Large signs in Welfare Centers stated very clearly, in Spanish and English, "the only way to get housing priority is if you are burned out by a fire."[21] Property owners, hoping to collect on their insurance policy money, refused to maintain or bring buildings up to code. The phrase "the Bronx is burning" came from the resulting occurrences of tenants committing arson. Over time, white residents left their well-maintained South Bronx apartments, and moved away from what they perceived as the Puerto Ricans' and African Americans' destructive natures.[22] African Americans and Puerto Ricans, due to their dreadful economic conditions, stayed behind, and lived in poor housing conditions. However, this did not

mean that black and Puerto Rican communities accepted their situations passively.

The informal authority of gangs in the Bronx segregated the borough along racial and ethnic lines. Lack of law enforcement and economic prosperity allowed gangs to take over local communities, as they implemented their own laws on residents**.** For many youths, the decision of becoming a gang brought the feeling safety in their neighborhood, as local gangs continued to oppose one another**.** However, during the 1970s, gang life in the South Bronx did not necessarily reflect the traditional pattern of violence and youth corruption. The decade of the 1960s ushered a sense of social consciousness and radicalism among youth that did not discriminate between the university-educated and gangbanging in the streets of the South Bronx.

Benjamin Melendez, also known as "Yellow Benjy," and his family were one of the hundreds of families who left Greenwich Village and relocated to the Bronx in hopes for better living conditions uptown. Benjy and his brothers joined a gang for protection against other local gangs, because of the dangers of their new surroundings. After joining different gang organizations such as the Coffin Cats, the brothers decided to create their own gang, which they dubbed the Ghetto Brothers.[23] The Ghetto Brothers adopted the symbol of four trash cans and placed them on their vests as a representation of the dilapidated and terrible conditions of living in the South Bronx.[24] Property owners left buildings abandoned, in doing so they also left Puerto Rican and black residents in unlivable housing conditions. The South Bronx lacked employment and recreation opportunities for youth. The trashcans, in this sense, symbolized life in the South Bronx for black and Puerto Rican peoples.

In their minds, the Ghetto Brothers insignia represented a problem in the South Bronx in need of a solution. Indeed, they stood as a different type of gang that sought to resolve many of the social problems in their neighborhood. For example, they implemented leadership skills,

community outreach for many social programs such as drug rehabilitation, and careful recruitment of new members. In addition, they focused on coalition building and public relations practices to call attention to the social ills affecting their communities.[25] On one occasion, Benjy and his brothers met Charlie Suarez, also known as "Karate Charlie." Suarez returned to the Bronx as a marine defector. Benjy discovered a natural leader in Karate Charlie. Benjy reasoned that given Suarez's military training, coupled with his own desire to bring discipline and battle readiness to the gang, Karate Charlie should lead the gang as president. This indicated that the Ghetto Brothers sought to abandon their image as simply a violent street gang. They truly committed themselves to improving the conditions of their neighborhood**.** As drugs began flooding the streets of the Bronx, many became addicted to heroin; crime increased tremendously. Drug addicts needed money to feed their fix. This meant that residents fell victim to robbery and assault. In order to prevent members from succumbing to drug addiction, Benjy ordered all members addicted to drugs to detox. His efforts proved successful for some, such as Cornell "Black Benjie" Benjamin, who became third in charge of the Ghetto Brothers and was given the title of "peace counselor."[26]

During the summer of 1971, Joseph Mpa, a member of the Black Panther Party, approached several South Bronx gangs with the intent to teach tactics in order to reduce violence and transform the gangs into positive forces in the community. The Ghetto Brothers, one of the few gangs to respond to Mpa's call, transformed the structure of the typical gang organization to a progressive social organization. For example, the rank of "warlord," a gang member who enforced turf boundaries, changed to "peace ambassadors."[27] The Ghetto Brothers upheld similar principles as the Young Lord Party through addressing concerns about social and economic conditions in their community. The membership of the Ghetto Brothers consisted of primarily

non-college educated individuals, mainly men, and few members with a high school education. This contrasted with the Young Lords membership, which consisted largely of college educated students.

While the Young Lords modeled their ideology from the Black Panther Party, the main difference between the Young Lords and the Ghetto Brothers consisted of the distinctive fact that the Ghetto Brothers' leaders were not college educated. Yet, similarly to the Young Lords, they criticized the quality of healthcare at Lincoln Hospital, the lack of employment for residents, and the lack of recreation opportunities available to Puerto Rican youth. The Brothers organized their members into squads, and cleaned buildings that property owners left to rot. In addition, they created their own free breakfast program and free clothing drive.[28] The Ghetto Brothers remained determined to clean their streets, and become more than just a violent street gang. Their social goals eventually paid off. The Youth Services Agency, in New York, granted the Brothers funds to secure a storefront clubhouse on 163rd Avenue and Stebbins Street.[29] The Ghetto Brothers dealt openly with public officials and journalists. This contrasted with local gangs who met illegally in abandoned buildings.

In addition, the Ghetto Brothers organized a musical band with Benjy, Victor Melendez, Luis Bristo, and Chiqui Concepcion as members.[30] The band often played on the rooftop of their apartment building. Residents in the neighborhood recognized the music of the Ghetto Brothers due to their unique style. To support these musicians, New York University gifted the Brothers with instruments encouraging them to continue playing their music.[31] The Ghetto Brothers mixed salsa, blues, and rock music. Media, newspapers, and television outlets covered the transformation of the Ghetto Brothers from a gang into an organization.[32] Benjy, Black Benjie, and Charlie began appearing on network talk shows, in documentaries, and in magazines. Their

message remained the same: better lives for African Americans and Puerto Ricans.

For years, social workers actively worked with gangs to secure peace commitments. As result of this initiative, Benjy and Charlie hosted informal gatherings at their storefront clubhouse. They invited gang leaders, specifically those who saw each other as enemies, to the meetings. As the Brothers sought to establish peace among other gangs, violence in the South Bronx escalated. In early November 1971, the Savage Skulls and Spades gangs collided into a violent rumble at a movie theater in the South Bronx.[33] Rumors spread through the South Bronx that some gangs received weapons—machine guns, grenades, and handguns—to fight against other gangs. After the violent altercation at the movie theater, the Brothers summoned an emergency summit in late November to pacify gang tensions. The Savage Skulls, Black Spades, Roman Kings, Nomads, and Bachelors met at the Bethesda Fountain in Central Park in an attempt to end violence.[34] The meeting did not achieve any concrete commitments from the parties involved, and violence in the streets continued to escalate.

On December 2, 1971, a Ghetto Brother member ran into the clubhouse exclaiming that the Seven Immortals, Mongols, and Black Spades entered Ghetto Brothers' territory attacking people.[35] Benjy ordered Black Benjie to mediate the situation between the gangs before the violence escalated further. Unfortunately, while attempting to deescalate the situation and negotiate peace between the gangs, someone had beaten Black Benjie to death. The killing of an unarmed gang member, who was pleading for peace, infuriated many gangs across the South Bronx. In turn, these gangs called for a war against the gang members that killed Benjie. Many gangs came to the Ghetto Brothers clubhouse to bury conflicts and show allegiance to the Brothers. They vowed to take vengeance against the gang members who allegedly murdered Black Benjie. Division and conflict concerning correct measures plagued the Ghetto Brothers

after Black Benjie's death. Suarez advocated for revenge, but Benjy wanted peace and did not want to incite a bloody gang war.[36] The two decided to first visit Black Benjie's mother before deciding on a course of action. She told the boys not to spill any blood in Benjie's honor—peace was the only choice.[37] She did not want any mother to go through the pain she was going through.[38] Many people expected a great gang war, including the media and community members, but ultimately the Ghetto Brothers decided to call for peace.

After the murder of Black Benjie, Benjy and Charlie implemented a peace truce. The Hoe Avenue Peace meeting on December 8 at the Bronx Boys and Girls Club attracted over twenty gang organizations. The presidents and vice presidents of the Savage Skulls, Mongols, Turbans, and twenty other gangs attended the meeting.[39] The objective of the meeting concerned a peace treaty among local gangs. To ensure the peacefulness of the meeting, police officers stood vigilant at the rooftop of the building across the street with rifles.[40] Inside, the tension was palpable, as expectations and the future remained unknown. Suarez opened the meeting reminding everyone that Black Benjie died for peace, hence the reason for the meeting.[41] This reassured the attendees a serene setting.

The initial intention of the meeting took place to expose the killers of Black Benjie, without snitching or calling out specific people. Hollywood, a member of the Savage Skulls, spoke of his loyalty to the Ghetto Brothers. In his speech, he indicated he would take a life for Black Benjie.[42] He proceeded pointing out the Seven Immortals, Mongols, and the Black Spades accusing them of the murder of Black Benjie. Next, one of the leaders of the Black Spades, Bam Bam, accused the Skulls of invading Black Spades territory with guns.[43] At this point, the meeting turning chaotic with gang members becoming agitated. In the commotion, Suarez stood up and silenced the crowed with one word, "Peace."[44] The mood of the meeting changed and

gang leaders stood up expressing their grievances about their social conditions and their desire to change their community for the better. Hollywood rose again and said, “If we don’t have peace now, whitey will come in and stomp us.”[45] They determined to end the rumors and persecution of whoever killed Black Benjie. In addition, gang leaders invoked and worked towards uniting gangs as a large family in the South Bronx, where peace remained a possibility. Benjy stated, “The thing is, we’re not a gang anymore. We’re an organization. We want to help blacks and Puerto Ricans to live in a better environment.”[46] The Hoe Avenue Meeting opened up dialogue between gangs to express themselves without fear or violence from opposing gangs if disagreements occurred. Gangs solidified an agreement of positive enforcement in their communities while improving their social conditions.

In the days after the peace meeting and Black Benjie’s funeral, the atmosphere in the South Bronx changed. Turf borders slowly collapsed and gang members walked freely through other gangs’ turf, even with their colors on. Eduardo Vincenti, “Spanish Eddie,” one of the youth services agents, implemented a peace treaty known as “The Family.” He received signatures from every major gang in the Bronx.[47] Some gangs walked away from the meeting considering the treaty a charade and continued their destructive agenda. Those gangsters who considered the meeting a joke sought counsel from the Ghetto Brothers. Members such as Suarez, Vincenti, and Melendez spoke with them explaining the goals of the meeting as well as plausible changes facing the South Bronx. The Ghetto Brothers approached gangs that refused the peace treaty and gave an ultimatum: sign the treaty or disband as a gang—willingly or through force.[48]

The Ghetto Brothers collaborated with the United Bronx Parents, a local community of concerned parents. Together they pushed to create social programs for the community’s children.[49] Both organizations sought bilingual education programs in schools and minority-

hiring practices. These added to the already existing clothing and food distribution programs. In time, gangs banished drug dealers and drug addicts unwilling to enter rehab out of their neighborhoods.[50] Gangs also continued taking abandon buildings, they demanded that property owners maintain and update their buildings per code.

The peace treaty's impact among poor communities of color in the South Bronx proved significant. Social parties became the best way to break down turf and other types of barriers among the different gangs. The Ghetto Brothers often threw house and block parties, with everyone welcomed. At their parties, the Brothers' Band performed their own music. People celebrated the weekend every Friday at gatherings. Community outsiders, who courageously crossed gang turfs, ended at Ghetto Brothers playground," and celebrated their peaceful meeting by joining the Ghetto Brothers' band as they played side by side in unity.[51] Former warlords, now DJs, battled on dance floors.[52] Ismael Maisonave, an owner of a small Latin music label known as Mary Lou Records, approached the Ghetto Brothers offering an opportunity to record a music album.[53] The Brothers quickly agreed to the opportunity and recorded their album titled, *Ghetto Brothers Power Fuerza*. Despite their low record sales, their songs empowered those who listened to them through their uplifting message. The band's signature song, "Ghetto Brothers Power," sent an influential message concerning the possibilities the youth have in this world. For them, the block party became a space of possibility and equality.

The Ghetto Brothers became one of the largest gangs in the South Bronx, growing to over two thousand members. The organization eventually established chapters in New Jersey and Connecticut. The success of the Ghetto Brothers emerged with a positive message, which impacted the community. The Ghetto Brothers demonstrated a different kind of street justice: one which administered the codes of the gangs. The Ghetto Brothers symbolized non-college

educated individuals taking the lead in the fight for social justice. While other gangs, such as the Young Lords and Black Panther Party, have dominated the historiography of African Americans and Puerto Ricans who fought for social justice, the Ghetto Brothers, too, significantly improved the living conditions of their communities, despite a lack of formal secondary and higher education. These heroes of social justice deserve a place within our historical memory.

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[1] "Rubble Kings," Directed by Shan Nicholson (2010: Saboteur Media, 2010 DVD), 20:30.
[2] In the context of the 1970s world of New York's gangs, colors really meant the vests worn by gang members to identify their alliance with a specific gang. In the 1980s, gangs in California, such as the Crips and the Bloods, identified with the colors blue and red, gangs in New York operated differently.
[3] Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005), 59.
[4] Joe Street, "The Historiography of the Black Panther Party," *Journal of American Studies* vol. 44, no. 02 (2009): 351.
[5] Street, *The Historiography of the Black Panther Party*, 351.
[6] Ibid., 353.
[7] Ibid., 353.
[8] Jeffery O. G. Ogbar, "Puerto Rico En Mi Corazon: The Young Lords, Black Power, and Puerto Rican Nationalism in the U.S., 1966-1972," *Centro Journal* vol.18, no. 1 (2006): 149.
[9] Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas, "Implicit Social Knowledge, Cultural Capital, and Authenticity among Puerto Ricans in Chicago," *Latin American Perspectives* vol.31, no. 5 (2004): 36.
[10] Ogbar, "Puerto Rico En Mi Corazon," 153-159.
[11] Frances Negron-Muntaner, "Feeling Pretty: West Side Story and Puerto Rican Identity Discourses," *Social Text* vol. 18, no. 2 (2000): 83-106.
[12] Jill Jonnes, *South Bronx Rising: The Rise, Fall, and Resurrection of an American City* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 219.
[13] Ogbar, "Puerto Rico En Mi Corazon," 155.
[14] Tanisha C. Ford, "SNCC Women, Denim, and the Politics of Dress," *Journal of Southern History*, vol. 29, no. 3 (August 2013): 625-630.
[15] Ibid., 634.
[16] Ibid., 634-638.
[17] Vargas, "Fashion Statement or Political Statement," 96-97.
[18] Shirletta J. Kinchen, "Reviewing the Revolt: Moving Toward a Historiography of the Black Campus Movement." *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1 (June 2014): 118-130.
[19] Ibid., 151.
[20]Jill Jonnes, *South Bronx Rising: The Rise, Fall, and Resurrection of an American City* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 231.
[21] Ibid., 232.
[22] Ibid., 219-231.
[23] Julian Voloj and Claudia Ahlering, *Ghetto Brother: Warrior to Peacemaker* (New York: NBM Comics Lit, 2015), 19.
[24] Ibid., 32.
[25] Ibid., 33-34.
[26] Amir Said, July 6 2015, Benjy Melendez of the Ghetto Brothers (The Cipher), 49:48.
[27] Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, 58.
[28] Benjy Melendez of the Ghetto Brothers, (The Cipher), 51:00.
[29] Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, 59.
[30] Benjy Melendez of the Ghetto Brothers, (The Cipher), 1:03:25.

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[31] Ibid., 59.
[32] Benjy Melendez of the Ghetto Brothers, (The Cipher). 52:00
[33] Chang*, Can't Stop Won't Stop*, 54.
[34] Ibid., 55.
[35] Voloj and Ahlering, *Ghetto Brother*, 50.
[36] Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, 58.
[37] Rubble Kings, Directed by Shan Nicholson, (2010; Saboteur Media, 2010 DVD), 34:44.
[38] Ibid., 35:12.
[39] Rubble Kings., 36:00.
[40] Chang*, Can't Stop Won't Stop,* 58.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.,59.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Voloj and Ahlering, *Ghetto Brother,* 67.
[45] Ibid*.,* 59.
[46] *Rubble Kings*, Directed by Shan Nicholson, (USA, October 2010), 38:50.
[47] Chang*, Can't Stop Won't Stop*, 60.
[48] In the film *Rubble Kings*, Charlie depicts the enforcement of the peace treaty differently from other accounts stating, "Those that did not sign the peace treaty were not forced to disband."
[49] Amir Said, July 6 2015, *Benjy Melendez of the Ghetto Brothers* (The Cipher), 51:08
[50] Ibid., 51:25
[51] Benjy Melendez of the Ghetto Brothers (The Cipher), 1:09:17; see also, *Rubble Kings*.
[52] Voloj and Ahlering, *Ghetto Brother,* 83.
[53] Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, 64.