

became so politically contentious that the then mayor asked for a compromise. Seizing this unplanned opportunity, local politicians and leaders from the Puerto Rican Agenda, including then alderman Billy Ocasio and PRCC executive director José E. López, proposed the Paseo Boricua concept as a preservation strategy against rapidly approaching gentrification. The compromise led to the inauguration of Paseo Boricua in 1995, a half-mile cultural and commercial strip on Division Street, bookended with two fifty-nine-foot high steel Puerto Rican flags.

Paseo Boricua set into motion a new wave of concerted efforts to resist gentrification that continued into the 2000s. These efforts included the building of multiunit affordable housing complexes, the leveraging of aldermanic powers to constrain developers, the launching of organizing campaigns like Humboldt Park No Se Vende (a play on words meaning both “not for sale” and “won’t sell out”), and the creation of diverse cultural projects—from murals to youth spaces to cultural festivals—that claimed Humboldt Park as a “pedacito de patria” (“small piece of homeland”). The area would become home to the country’s only Puerto Rican museum and boast the city’s highest concentration of Puerto Rican businesses. Even now, almost two decades later, Puerto Rican radicals continue to claim space and build parallel institutions against the forces of gentrification. In doing so, they keep alive their old slogan: “Aquí luchamos, aquí nos quedamos” (“Here we struggled, here we shall stay”).

### 2.C.3.

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James Yaki Sayles

#### From “War for the Cities” (1978)

A member of Chicago’s Black Arts scene, James Yaki Sayles became a prolific writer and dedicated organizer upon his incarceration in the 1970s. He was a central theorist of a prison-centered Black nationalism that referred to Black people in the United States as “New Afrikans” to honor the particular identity created by the transatlantic slave trade. In his influential essay “War for the Cities,” first published in a prison newsletter he edited called the *Fuse* and excerpted here, Sayles locates the growing—and increasingly Black—prison population in the divestment from and displacement of communities of color in Chicago and other major cities. Sayles, who was released in 2004 and died in 2008, would return to these themes often in his prison writings.

Chicago’s Afrikan (black), Puerto Rican, and poor white communities are showing much concern over the plans now in progress to remove them from the in-

ner city into outlying areas. Throughout amerikkka the populations of major cities are increasingly poor, and the majority of the poor are Afrikans.

These growing populations have the potential to acquire and use great power. Those who rule amerikkka know instinctively that the cities are politically, economically, and militarily too valuable to them to be allowed to fall under the control of the Afrikan and other oppressed nations. . . .

We think these points have clear connections to the reasons for there being such large numbers of young Afrikan men and women in Illinois and other US prisons. We also think that a better understanding of these and other points will help bring the struggles outside closer to the struggles inside.

We'll start with what should be some of the most evident, easily understood, and accepted points. The first of these is that Afrikan inner city removal is a nationwide strategic objective of those who rule amerikkka. This objective is made necessary in large part by the deepening economic crisis, and the threat of political/social revolution.

The wealth and high standard of living the US prides itself on is based on its history of trickery and robbery. The US is wealthy because it takes the wealth of others, depriving most of the world from using their resources for their own development. When the people in Afrika, Asia, and South America begin to change this state of things, it is reflected in the US by an "energy crisis" and in many other forms.

Also, when amerikkka has less to steal from other countries it has less booty to distribute inside its own borders, [and] jobs grow scarce. So-called affirmative action in employment and school admissions is challenged. School lunch and daycare programs are cut back or halted. Poor women are denied federal funds for abortions, and larger numbers of Afrikan and other oppressed nation women are "intensively encouraged" to adopt birth control and become sterilized. Prison populations increase. And increasing attention is focused on the cities in ways too numerous to list and analyze here.

The next point is that the plans now being carried out to achieve Afrikan inner-city removal are not "new," and certainly not in Chicago. Neither are such plans the only ones being carried out or experimented with to contain and/or manipulate US Third World/oppressed nation populations. . . .

Point three is that the oppressed are not simply being pushed from the inner city to roam and settle wherever we may please. Just as it's being decided where we will move *from*, it's also being decided where we'll be allowed to relocate.

In raising this point many things come to mind. The most immediate is simply the fact that there is no "free choice," no "equal opportunity" for the oppressed in amerikkka to participate in the "democratic process" of city planning. . . .

Point four is that all of the above helps us to see more clearly exactly why our communities have been allowed to deteriorate, why there are increasing cases of arson, why the schools our children attend don't offer them the "quality education" which would allow them to acquire the skills and confidence required of peoples who have the need and desire to govern themselves.

Our communities are filled with abandoned buildings because it's part of the plan to remove the Afrikan and other oppressed peoples from the inner city. Our schools lack qualified teachers in sufficient number, are in poor physical condition, and lack books and other essential equipment because it's part of the plan to relocate us and to keep us ignorant, unskilled, and dependent upon those who rule amerikkka.

Point five is that we are likely to see more "low income housing" going up in suburbs like Arlington Heights. Truly designed with the oppressed in mind.

This low-income housing will likely include innovations which are now being tested in US prisons and in areas such as Cabrini-Green. City, state and federal money has been spent liberally over the past several years on "pilot projects" such as that now operating in Cabrini-Green Housing Project.

The streets and buildings surrounding the housing area have been altered to fit police and military "emergency" needs. The design of the buildings are altered to give only one way of exit and entrance. So-called convenience shops for laundry, dry cleaning, food shopping, and other essential services have been placed in the buildings so that movement outside of them is reduced. Offices are installed for the welfare agent and the security officers. All occupants are issued identity cards to be shown upon entering or leaving the building. The occupants of each apartment are listed in a central register. Electric cameras and other surveillance equipment is installed, allegedly to "provide resident security against crime and criminals."

But cameras operate twenty-four hours a day. They don't turn themselves on automatically by the scent or sound of a "criminal." The cameras watch *everybody*, all the time. Just like they do here in Stateville and other prisons in amerikkka.

Everything described above as part of the "pilot projects" being carried out in Afrikan and other oppressed communities in the US were first pilot projects in the prisons—usually those with the largest number of Afrikan and other oppressed nation prisoners.

The sixth and last point deserves more space than we're able to give it. That is that clear and important connections can be drawn between the plan to remove the oppressed from the inner city and the presence of such a large number of nonwhite youth in illinois and other amerikkkan prisons. In essence, the prisons are filled with Afrikan youth because of the danger they did and do present to the rulers of the US. In the 60s and early 70s, Afrikan people's fight for self-determination was at a high point, and Afrikan youth were playing important roles in many areas of struggle. In the schools, at the job site, on picket lines and demonstrations, and on the street, Afrikan youth were daily becoming a greater threat to the oppressive power. One area where this threat was most clear was among Afrikan youth organizations, where their revolutionary and nationalist potential was evident through their actions in the community. . . .

If black/nonwhite/poor people are to survive and have a future in amerikkka, we must become responsible to and for each other. We must have mutual

respect, and we must come to depend on ourselves/each other and break our dependence upon the enemy.

We must accept the fact that those who rule amerikkka are neither willing nor capable of satisfying our needs. It is not in their interest to have us employed, fed, clothed, properly housed, educated, and healthy.

Build to Win!!

## **2.C.4.**

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Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now

### **From “People’s Platform” (1978)**

Founded in Arkansas in 1970, the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, or ACORN, became one of the biggest grassroots membership organizations of poor people in the country. It was, by design, a multi-issue organization that responded to local needs. The group developed this nine-point platform at its first national convention, held in Memphis in December 1978. Some on the left viewed ACORN as taking an instrumentalist approach to organizing. ACORN also became a frequent target of conservatives, and it closed in 2010 following a concerted right-wing effort to defund the organization.

#### **Preamble**

We stand for a People’s Platform, as old as our country, and as young as our dreams. We come before our nation, not to petition with hat in hand but to rise as one people and demand.

We have waited and watched. We have hoped and helped. We have sweated and suffered.

We have often believed. We have frequently followed.

But we have nothing to show for the work of our hands, the tax of our labor. Our patience has been abused; our experience misused. Our silence has been seen as support. Our struggle has been ignored.

Enough is enough. We will wait no longer for the crumbs at America’s door. We will not be meek but mighty. We will not starve on past promises but feast on future dreams.

We are an uncommon common people. We are the majority, forged from all minorities. We are the masses of many, not the forces of few. We will continue our fight until the American way is just one way, until we have shared the wealth, until we have won our freedom.

This is not a simple vision but a detailed plan.

Our plan is to build an American reality from the American rhetoric, to de-