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“That’s *My Place!*”: Negotiating Racial, Sexual, and Gender Politics in San Francisco’s Gay Latino Alliance, 1975–1983

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I didn’t finish [school]. What happened is I came out of the closet and all hell broke. And I felt I had to leave [home]. In that time that I was in San Jose, I saw an article on gay *Raza* organizing in San Francisco. So that’s how I ended up here. And I said, “*There* I could be free [laughter]. That’s the free city, let me go do that.” And I could still meet other *Raza*. And it was nice because I had always thought there was only *mexicanos*, and Chicanos and Chicanas, and I got to meet Puerto Ricans and everything else.¹

IN 1975, AT AGE TWENTY-TWO and deeply involved in the Chicano politics of the period, butch Chicana lesbian Diane Felix left her native Stockton, California, home for San Francisco. Though not pushed out by her blood kin, she could not imagine staying permanently in agrarian Stockton, with its few opportunities for financial and social well-being. Just ninety miles away from Stockton beckoned the “free city” of San Francisco, where the social movements and visions of the counterculture of

This essay began with my dialogues with the narrators quoted herein and relies extensively on their memory and work. I thank all of them for their support and patience in the writing of this version, especially Diane Felix, Jesús Barragán, Magdalena, Marcos Rodríguez, Carlos Díaz Todd, and Manuel Hernández Valadéz. I also acknowledge the tremendous research support of Luis Alberto de la Garza C. for making the Archivo Rodrigo Reyes available, Carlos Díaz Todd for sharing his personal files, and Kathy Blackmer Reyes for technical support with the images. My discussion also benefits from the critical feedback of Ricardo A. Bracho, Karen Brodtkin, Jorge Ignacio Cortiñas, Julia E. Curry-Rodríguez, Evelyn Nakano Glenn, Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy, Ian Lekus, Waldo E. Martin Jr., and Tomás Sandoval. Despite their many suggestions and advice, any misinterpretations that remain are mine.

¹Diane Felix, audiotaped interview by the author, April 19, 27, 1995, San Francisco, California. Unless otherwise noted, all narrators’ names are their given names, not pseudonyms. My capitalization of *Raza* follows that of most written forms of the period.

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the late 1960s still generated excitement. To attend school and be closer to San Francisco, Diane moved first to San Jose, but soon a small ad in a popular gay newspaper of the day, the *Bay Area Reporter*, called her to San Francisco proper. The ad revealed that other gay *Raza*—Chicanos and Chicanas and Latinos generally—were organizing. Her trip to San Francisco to attend the second meeting of what was to become the Gay Latino Alliance resulted in a permanent move, one that was both personal and political. She decided to help build a collective vision.

Despite the hostility of a few gay Latino men, Diane eventually made her way into the center of the Gay Latino Alliance (GALA). She became a major player in the only organization in the San Francisco Bay Area that was then making political space and demands specifically for lesbian Latinas and gay male Latinos. GALA proved to be the foundation for a local social movement that integrated racial, gender, and sexual politics. Like Diane, hundreds of other women and men who made their way through the sexual and political worlds of GALA between 1975 and 1983 arrived in San Francisco as part of national and even international migrations. Many of these migrants were what Manuel Guzmán refers to as “sexiles,” individuals “who have had to leave their nations of origin on account of their sexual orientation.”² But I believe it is important to expand the idea of the sexile to refer not only to those who left their nation but also to those who left their home state, region, or family base for another place in their own country. Just as crossing national boundaries can expand one’s sexual horizon and provide radically new opportunities for queer collective belonging, so too can regional moves (from Los Angeles to San Francisco, for example).

Sexiles landing in the Bay Area met thousands of individuals who by birth or life experience had always considered the region and, in particular, San Francisco’s Latino Mission District as their home. These queer “homegrown,” as Cathy Arellano explains, never left their turf.³ Whether homegrown or sexiled, these 1970s gay Latino activists were less interested in “transcending” differences than in incorporating the multiple dimensions of their social experience. They sought to address race, sexuality, class, and gender simultaneously and were often quite conscious of the interplay among them.⁴ It was a difficult balancing act

²Manuel Guzmán, “Pa’ la escolita con mucho cuida’o y por la orillita’: A Journey through the Contested Terrains of the Nation and Sexual Orientation,” in Frances Negrón Muntaner and Ramón Grosfoguel, eds., *Puerto Rican Jam: Rethinking Colonialism and Nationalism* (Minneapolis, 1997), 227.

³Cathy Arellano, ed., *Homegrown: An Anthology of Writings from San Francisco’s Mission District* (in progress).

⁴The idea of incorporating multiple dimensions of social experience and difference to understand queer history in the San Francisco area challenges that of transcendence. Famed *Tales of the City* white gay author Armistead Maupin has argued that the city’s queer history

personally and politically, but in the late 1970s GALA succeeded in becoming a visible, powerful organization.

This essay considers the founding, the development, and the dissolution in San Francisco of the Gay Latino Alliance, one of the first organizations of its kind in the nation, and examines how its members negotiated the racial, gender, and sexual politics of the period.⁵ It discusses specifically the coming together of GALA's founders, GALA's negotiation between the "Latino" and "gay" social and political cultures, and GALA's dissolution in the midst of gender and sex conflicts. To explore the intersectional dynamics of their racial, sexual, and gendered work and leisure, the essay relies partly upon surviving documents and heavily upon the memories of former GALA members. It tracks members' efforts to forge a new politics of change in the 1970s and early 1980s and their struggle for community—for, as Ian Lekus puts it, "community as a verb, not a noun."⁶ Challenging the notion that "community" is a given or, worse, an assumed, self-understood entity, the essay highlights

"transcends the usual boundaries of race, class, and religion" (Armistead Maupin, in the foreword to Susan Stryker and Jim Van Buskirk, *Gay by the Bay: A History of Queer Culture in the San Francisco Bay Area* [San Francisco, 1996], 3). A good introduction to early lesbian and gay history in San Francisco, although not focusing on individuals of color, is Nan Alamilla Boyd, "San Francisco Was a Wide Open Town: Charting the Emergence of Gay and Lesbian Communities through the Mid-Twentieth Century," Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 1995, and now published as *Wide Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley, 2003). See also Martin Dennis Meeker Jr., "Come Out West: Communication and the Gay and Lesbian Migration to San Francisco, 1940s–1960s," Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 2000. For a recent sociological analysis of the growth of gay movements in San Francisco, see Elizabeth A. Armstrong, *Forging Gay Identities: Organizing Sexuality in San Francisco, 1950–1994* (Chicago, 2002). While Armstrong's study is useful as a historical overview of the mainstream white gay movements in the city, her study fails to appreciate the intersectional complexity of lesbian and gay movements of color; she asks what gays of color did in relation to "the gay movement" but not how gays of color fit into their own racial ethnic communities. The choice to privilege the first at the exclusion of the second leads Armstrong to make a rather reductive and overly simplistic conclusion about the organizing of lesbians and gays of color in San Francisco, which she dubs a "flight response." While noting correctly that "[m]any people of color found that attempting to make a place for themselves within the gay identity movement was too difficult and too painful," she simplifies the resulting effect, arguing that "[i]nstead, they retreated to privatized lives within their racial ethnic communities. Given the tiny number of organizations of gay people of color founded before 1980 (only eleven), it seems that the 'flight response' was quite common" (149). Armstrong mistakenly identifies GALA as existing from 1975 to 1994; it ended between 1982 and 1983. She also does not include in her analysis the influential Third World Gay Caucus of the late 1970s, in which lesbian women and gay men of color organized regionally.

⁵Although sometime in 1976 or 1977 the "Gay Latino Alliance" became formally the "Gay Latina/Latino Alliance," narrators generally do not include "Latina" in their recollections.

⁶Ian Lekus, written personal communication, November 15, 2002.

individual and collective efforts of Latina lesbians and gay Latinos to name self and group and to mark identity and public space.

“Queer theory” and queer history generally have foregrounded the sexual/erotic dimensions of social experience. The foundational work of John D’Emilio, Elizabeth L. Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, George Chauncey, Estelle Freedman, Esther Newton, and Marc Stein, for example, has shown how much queer sexual desires shaped community life, history, and politics in the twentieth-century United States.⁷ But the histories of racial and ethnic queer communities, only beginning to emerge in the literature, are expanding and challenging this queer historiography by demonstrating that race and ethnicity are indispensable to our understanding.⁸ The theoretical contributions of lesbians of color in particular have exposed the assumptions that the erotic/sexual can be understood apart from intersecting gender, racial, ethnic, and class experiences and conditions.⁹ Following

⁷John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940–1970* (Chicago, 1983; 2nd ed., 1998); Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York, 1993); George Chauncey Jr., *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890–1940* (New York, 1994); John D’Emilio and Estelle Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York, 1988); Esther Newton, *Cherry Grove, Fire Island: Sixty Years in America’s First Gay and Lesbian Town* (Boston, 1993); and Marc Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves: Lesbian and Gay Philadelphia, 1945–1972* (Chicago, 2000).

⁸Rochella Thorpe, “‘A House Where Queers Go’: African-American Lesbian Nightlife in Detroit, 1940–1975,” in Ellen Lewin, ed., *Inventing Lesbian Cultures in America* (Boston, 1996), 40–61, and “The Changing Face of Lesbian Bars in Detroit, 1938–1965,” in Brett Beemyn, ed., *Creating a Place for Ourselves: Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Community Histories* (New York, 1997), 165–81; Trinity A. Ordonez, “Coming out Together: An Ethnohistory of the Asian and Pacific Islander Queer Women’s and Transgendered People’s Movement of San Francisco,” Ph.D. diss., University of California, Santa Cruz, 2000; Horacio N. Roque Ramirez, “Communities of Desire: Queer Latina/Latino History and Memory, San Francisco Bay Area, 1960s–1990s,” Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2001; and Eric C. Wat, *The Making of a Gay Asian Community: An Oral History of Pre-AIDS Los Angeles* (New York, 2002). Two additional studies, useful though problematic in their methodological approaches to their interviewees, are William G. Hawkeswood, *One of the Children: Gay Black Men in Harlem* (Berkeley, 1996), and Leon E. Pettitway, *Honey, Honey, Miss Thang: Being Black, Gay, and on the Streets* (Philadelphia, 1996).

⁹The literature by women of color making intersectional historical experiences central for understanding community lives and systems of oppression is quite exhaustive. Good starting points include Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Freedom, Calif., 1996); Cherríe Moraga, *Loving in the War Years: Lo Que Nunca Pasó por Sus Labios* (Boston, 1983); Ekua Omosupe, “Black/Lesbian/Bulldagger,” *differences* 3, no. 2 (1991): 101–11; Asian Women United of California, ed., *Making Waves: An Anthology of Writings by and about Asian American Women* (Boston, 1989); Carolyn Dunn and Carol Comfort, eds., *Through the Eye of the Deer: An Anthology of Native American Women Writers* (San Francisco, 1999); and the recently reissued and revised third edition of Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Berkeley, 1981; 2nd ed., 2002). A useful historical analysis of women of color in the Bay Area is included in

their lead, I consider how Latinas and Latinos in GALA negotiated same-sex politics in the San Francisco Bay Area from the mid-1970s to the early 1980s. GALA members bridged racial and sexual identities to give political purpose to a community struggling for cultural citizenship.

FROM A PARADE TO A MOVEMENT: THE FOUNDING OF GALA

The builders of the Gay Latino Alliance were concerned that their lives as gay and lesbian Latinos took place in a predominantly white gay context. With no explicitly gay *and* Latino spaces in which to gather, these early founders typically visited and met one another in homes, bars, and clubs in San Jose and San Francisco, but in the bars and in the clubs they were outnumbered by predominantly white crowds.

Returning to San Jose in 1969, proud and confident after serving in the Vietnam War, Arizona native Jesús Barragán made the rounds of Bay Area gay bars in the late sixties. Like other GALA founders, Jesús recalls his gay and his racial consciousness taking shape simultaneously. The youngest of seven siblings in a family that migrated from Arizona to California in 1955, he recalls that in neither state did the term “Chicano” have a political meaning in the 1950s and early 1960s. But upon his return to California in 1969, he became aware of the political changes taking place on college campuses, especially with respect to racial terminology:

[In 1966] I’m at [San Jose] City College, and some of us are calling ourselves Spanish, some of us are calling ourselves Mexicans. And I leave for the service, I’m gone and I re-enroll in 1970. . . . And I’m walking around campus, and I see this guy with a beret at a rally speaking, and he’s saying “Chicanos.” . . . I kinda know who he’s referring to, but I really don’t know what he means. . . . The next semester I enroll in these Chicano studies classes, and then the full meaning of the word becomes known to me. And that’s where changes start happening. I start thinking not only in learning this

Ordone. Two recent studies examining the lives of Latina lesbians in the Bay Area in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s are María Cora, “*Nuestras Auto-Definiciones/Our Self-Definitions: Management of Stigma and Identity by Puerto Rican Lesbians*,” M.A. field studies report, San Francisco State University, 2000, and Karla E. Rosales, “Papis, Dykes, Daddies: A Study of Chicana and Latina Self-Identified Butch Lesbians,” M.A. thesis, San Francisco State University, 2001. Two useful analyses of the *relational* dimensions of queer community history and politics in the context of AIDS are Ian Lekus, “Health Care, the AIDS Crisis and the Politics of Community: The North Carolina Lesbian and Gay Health Project, 1982–1996,” in Allida M. Black, ed., *Modern American Queer History* (Philadelphia, 2001), 227–52, and Cathy J. Cohen, *The Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics* (Chicago, 1999). For further historical analysis of the relationality of race and gender categories in particular, see Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Unequal Freedom: How Race and Gender Shaped American Citizenship and Labor* (Cambridge, Mass., 2002).

whole area of myself, this whole history, but then there's this whole *gay* side.¹⁰

While attending college by day, Jesús socialized at night in San Jose's gay bars, often with a light-skinned, mixed Puerto Rican–Mexican friend who appeared to have no problems meeting whites and others. Jesús's observations and experiences as a dark-skinned Chicano in these gay bars spurred his interest to meet formally with fellow gay Latinos, but his quests were not initially successful. While politically active in the student Chicano group MEChA, his "gay part," as he recalls, remained a separate matter for a while.¹¹ But what he learned in a black psychology class about standards of beauty and race made him think more carefully about social and sexual interactions between Latinos and white gay men:

One of the things that I saw that really *bothered* me and I told them, I said, "What the problem here is everybody is after the white trophy. That's the problem here. And unless two people are *comadres* [godmothers], you don't want to have nothing to do with each other. But *that's* the problem. After the white trophy, nobody has time. And it's like, you tear each other down . . . viciousness, because you're *after the white trophy*. And to have a white lover is oohhhh! Don't you see?" And I said, "As long as you have someone up there on a pedestal above you, you're gonna be second-class. And I am not saying knock them off, but step up there with them." I went around just saying these things to people and we need to organize. They didn't want [to]. You know what they nicknamed me? "Radical Lesbian." . . . "Oh, here comes Radical Lesbian again."¹²

The gay Latinos that Jesús saw in the bars could relate to one another "like family," gossiping like fellow godmothers (*comadres*), but they could not relate as gay men interested in or attracted to one another. Their

¹⁰Jesús Barragán, audiotaped interview by the author, January 16, 2001, San Francisco, California. An overview of the Chicano movement, emphasizing its struggles for educational access, is Carlos Muñoz Jr., *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement* (New York, 1989). See also Ernesto Chávez, *My People First! "¡Mi Raza Primero!": Nationalism, Identity, and Insurgency in the Chicano Movement in Los Angeles, 1966–1978* (Berkeley, 2002). Important critiques of the heteronormative assumptions of Chicano nationalism and the Chicano movement are Ramón A. Gutiérrez, "Community, Patriarchy, and Individualism: The Politics of Chicano History and the Dream of Equality," *American Quarterly* 45, no. 1 (March 1993): 44–72, and Cherríe Moraga, "Queer Aztlán: The Re-formation of Chicano Tribe," in *The Last Generation: Prose and Poetry* (Boston, 1993), 145–74.

¹¹MEChA is the acronym for the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (Chicano Student Movement of Aztlán), still an active and visible college- and university-based student movement primarily in the Southwest. A good discussion of the ideological, political, and historical meanings of Aztlán as a Chicano homeland is Rudolfo A. Anaya and Francisco A. Lomeli, eds., *Aztlán: Essays on the Chicano Homeland* (Albuquerque, 1989).

¹²Barragán interview.

competition for “the white trophy” came between them, inhibiting rather than fostering a sense of camaraderie as Latino gays. Though his critique earned him the name “Radical Lesbian,” Jesús continued to push. In 1974 he and his friends got a gay bar in San Jose, Tinker’s Damn, to make a space for Chicanos who wanted to commemorate Cinco de Mayo. A Mexican flag, decorations, and an old reel-to-reel player for music put a Chicano/*mexicano* imprint on this gay social space. This momentary cultural visibility at Tinker’s Damn did not generate the community that Jesús was trying to create; to his dismay, his fellow Latino gay friends were not yet interested in establishing a more formal, permanent space. But Jesús, still enrolled in several of San Jose State University’s Chicano studies courses, was intensifying his political position as a Chicano, a process that was not divorced from his growing political-sexual consciousness as a gay man.

Jesús’s experiences echoed those of other GALA founders. San Jose resident Manuel Hernández Valadéz remembers being a consistent sideline observer of the annual Gay Freedom Day parades in San Francisco, attending all but one after 1972. As the size of the parades grew, he recalls wanting to see a Latino float present. Familiar with San Jose’s and San Francisco’s gay nightlife since the late 1960s, Manuel had already met fellow *mexicanos* in the area and had been introduced to the growing bar scene in the South of Market District. Although he lived in San Jose, he realized that San Francisco was the place where he could explore his gayness more openly and that the Gay Freedom Day parade was the event where for the first time he could be both gay *and* Latino, even if only on the sidelines.

A dinner that Manuel hosted in 1975 at his San Jose home with the help of Jesús and their friend Valentín drew a small group of men from San Jose and a larger group from San Francisco—about fifteen in all. While distinctly recalling that the purpose of the first meeting of gay Latinos at his home involved discussing their participation in the parade, Manuel also remembers how others’ political interests eventually led to the formation of GALA: “At first we wanted to have a float in the parade. That was one of the main reasons. Then more people came in, and they started with other ideas, politics and things like that. But after all was said and done that year we did not have the float.”¹³ Although the first Latino float in the Gay Freedom Day parade did not appear until 1976, the debate leading up to its realization was critical for the formation of GALA.

While discussing the significance of having a Latino float, Manuel learned of Rodrigo Reyes, a gay Chicano living in San Francisco who shared some of the same social and sexual spaces with the San Jose men who migrated

¹³Manuel Hernández Valadéz, audiotaped interview by the author, January 31, 2001, San Jose, California.

CHICANO AND GAY?

An organization is now forming in San Francisco to explore and attempt to fill the social, cultural and political needs of the Gay Chicano. Being a Gay Chicano is a unique experience only other Chicano Gays can truly understand. For more information. Please call (415) 221-2012 from 6 pm to 10 pm weekdays. E-22

Figure 1. Rodrigo Reyes's classified ad announcement in the *Bay Area Reporter* called for a meeting among Chicano gays. *Bay Area Reporter*, October 30, 1975: 31. Courtesy of the *Bay Area Reporter*.

there on the weekends. To attract the attention of others seeking to organize gay Latinos, Rodrigo had posted a small ad in the *Bay Area Reporter*, a popular, free gay paper that facilitated communication between the two groups of gay Latinos: Jesús and Manuel and their friends in San Jose and all their acquaintances in San Francisco, and Rodrigo and the few Latinos he knew in the city (Fig. 1). According to Jesús, it was Manuel who saw the similarity between what Rodrigo Reyes had written in the ad and what the San Jose group had been discussing. By bringing the ad to the attention of his San Jose friends and by hosting the dinner, Manuel, who was not “into politics,” although he was watchful of ongoing gay events, became the critical link between two regional groups of gay Latino men who were interested in organizing.¹⁴

¹⁴For gay and lesbian histories, the relationship between the city and county of San Francisco and the larger San Jose and Santa Clara County regions south of San Francisco requires closer examination. While it is unquestionable that, despite their geographic proximity, San Francisco has always been the cultural, social, and political magnet for queer peoples in the region, San Jose and Santa Clara have had their own movements and organizational cultures. Latinas and Latinos have been part of these histories as well, although not necessarily as gay Latinos. Despite San Francisco's centrality in queer Bay Area history, there have been exceptions to this geographic hegemony. The legendary gay roller skater and bar owner Alfonso Reyes, for example, owned the famous Sundown Saloon in San Jose, which with authentic home-cooked Mexican food (prepared by Reyes's mother) was a local destination. As a long-term resident of San Jose, Reyes never became part of GALA but was the main sponsor of the First Annual Gay Freedom Rally & Dance on June 26, 1976, presented by the Lambda Association of San Jose. At this event, Rodrigo Reyes spoke on behalf of GALA. Lambda Association of San Jose, “Program for the First Annual Gay Freedom Day Rally & Dance,” June 26, 1976, 2. For a photojournalist's rendition of San Jose and Santa Clara lesbian and gay history, see Ted Sahl, *From Closet to Community: A Quest*

Placing the ad in the *Bay Area Reporter* was not an immediate decision on Rodrigo's part. For several years after moving to San Francisco from Texas in 1971, Rodrigo went through a "browning" process during which he became more fully aware of Chicano politics and culture, both regional and national. Mediating sexual, racial, and cultural spheres as a gay brown man seeking others, he soon found out that it was no easy feat to find them or to come together as such, given the small number of gay Latino men relative to whites.¹⁵

The Latinos' sense of marginalization in the bar scene was not simply a matter of numbers. Echoing what other narrators recall as a common discriminatory practice in 1970s San Francisco, Rodrigo remarked on the difficulty of entering some bars as a person of color. Like Jesús, Rodrigo also observed the intricate sexual dynamics among gay Latino men that kept them at a distance from one another:

The Castro was growing by leaps and bounds, and I was very much involved in that scene. And that time the bars were dominated by white folks, and there was no place for Latinos really to come together. Of course, we would go to the bars, but it was very difficult to make any contacts with other Latinos unless you were found to be sexually attractive. Basically that was it, I mean, it was a difficult bar situation. You didn't talk to people unless you were attracted to them or they were attracted to you. So contact among Latinos was not easy. In addition to that, there were also some racist discriminatory practices on the part of the bars in that sometimes they would ask for an inordinate amount of IDs from people of color. . . . They would ask for two, three picture IDs. So it wasn't a very happy time for Latino gays. . . . There were some places that Latinos felt welcome, and people did go to them. But still, we were still a marginal group. The dominant group was still white gay men. So these things are happening to me at the

for *Gay & Lesbian Liberation in San Jose & Santa Clara County* (San Jose, 2002). Alfonso Reyes, audiotaped interview by the author, September 20, 2002, San Jose, California.

¹⁵Several writers' and eyewitnesses' accounts of the cultural, racial, gender, class, and sexual transformations of the Castro can be found in Winston Leyland, ed., *Out in the Castro: Desire, Promise, Activism* (San Francisco, 2002). As Gayle S. Rubin notes, "By the late 1970s, the Castro was unquestionably the center of local gay politics, but the Folsom had become the sexual center. The same features that made the area attractive to leather bars made it hospitable to other forms of gay sexual commerce. Many of the nonleather gay bathhouses and sex clubs also nestled among the warehouses. Just before the age of AIDS, the South of Market had become symbolically and institutionally associated in the gay male community with sex" ("The Miracle Mile: South of Market and Gay Male Leather, 1962–1997," in James Brook, Chris Carlsson, and Nancy J. Peters, eds., *Reclaiming San Francisco: History, Politics, Culture* [San Francisco, 1998], 258). While most gay Latino narrators did make references to the Folsom as a sexual center for their adventures, lesbian and gay Latinos, as this essay argues, centered their political struggles in the Latino Mission District in Third World coalitions.

same time. On the one hand, I am still involved in the gay community, and I am starting to develop more of a consciousness of the Chicano movement, so this is going on hand in hand, more or less.¹⁶

Although still moving in separate channels, Rodrigo's life in the gay community and his developing Chicano awareness grew at the same time.

Feeling marginalized as a Latino in white gay venues, Rodrigo discovered a public space for merging his gay and brown identities—not initially in San Francisco but in Los Angeles. Located a one-hour flight or six-hour drive away from each other, the two regions have hosted each other's lesbian and gay travelers for decades. Besides countless Christmas and New Year's parties held in both regions are Gay Pride parades in Long Beach and in the Silverlake and West Hollywood areas of Los Angeles as well as in San Francisco; Halloween celebrations in the Castro and the Folsom Street Fair; and, more recently, Latino-themed two- and three-day-long circuit parties. These events have shaped the periodic travel of queer Latinos between the two regions. Even more frequent, if less visible, is individual traveling, the result of invitations from friends, lovers, families, and acquaintances.

It was a lover's invitation to visit Los Angeles that helped Rodrigo envision and build one of the first known gay and lesbian Latino organizations in the United States.¹⁷ A visit to the Bush Gardens in L.A.'s Silverlake

¹⁶Rodrigo Reyes, videotaped interview by Richard Marquez, June 16, 1991, San Francisco, California, with the permission of Luis Alberto de la Garza C., overseer of the Archivo Rodrigo Reyes (Rodrigo Reyes Archives) in Berkeley, California.

¹⁷Before GALA, Latinos and Latinas had been part of other Third World and/or gay political organizations. In 1970 a gay-identified, feminist, antimilitary organization of New York black and Latino homosexual men drafted a bilingual (Spanish and English) Third World manifesto calling for a revolutionary praxis linking the heterosexually defined nuclear family, capitalism, and white supremacy. See Third World Gay Revolution, "The Oppressed Shall Not Become the Oppressor," in Mark Blasius and Shane Phelan, eds., *We Are Everywhere: A Historical Sourcebook of Gay and Lesbian Politics* (New York, 1997), 400–1. As noted in *We Are Everywhere*, "The Oppressed Shall Not Become the Oppressor" was drafted in 1970. In March 1971 Third World Gay Revolution also drafted "What We Want, What We Believe," a sixteen-point manifesto ending with the following statement, attesting to the combination of revolutionary social movements of the period: "We believe that all people should share the labor and products of society, according to each one's needs and abilities, regardless of race, sex, age, or sexual preferences. We believe the land, technology, and the means of production belong to the people, and must be shared by the people collectively for the liberation of all" (in Karla Jay and Allen Young, eds., *Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation* [New York, 1972], 363–67, originally published in *Gay Flames*, no. 11 [March 1971]). Useful biographical portraits of lesbian, gay, and bisexual activists in San Francisco in the midseventies, including several of color, are in Nancy Adair and Casey Adair, eds., *Word Is Out: Stories of Some of Our Lives* (San Francisco, 1978), and the film version, *Word Is Out: Some Stories of Our Lives*, Mariposa Film Group and Peter Adair (New York Video, 1977). In 1972 another New York-based gay men's group—self-described as "homosexual" men coming from various parts of Latin America—produced a sixty-three-page publication in Spanish, *AFUERA* (New York, 1972), discussing Third World liberation, Marxist thought, and a critique of patriarchy. The word *afuera*, Spanish for "out,"

District set off emotions that made him more fully aware of his desires and attractions as a gay Chicano:

In 1975 I go to Los Angeles on vacation. I had met a Chicano gay man here in San Francisco, and he invited me to come down to Los Angeles and to visit him, so I go. I go and I stay with him and he takes me around, and he takes me to a place called the Bush Gardens, somewhere on Sunset near the Silverlake District. And I walk into this bar and once again, I have an incredible experience. This bar is *full* of *nothing* but Chicanos and Mexicans. White people are a very, very small minority. So for the first time in my life I find myself as a gay man and as a Chicano at the same place, at the same time, and all of a sudden all those people that I grew up with, all my *ideal* types, all the people that I used to have crushes with, were there, present, in this place. And for once I did not feel like a minority of any kind, not a minority as a gay man, not a minority as a Chicano. This was a place where I could be the majority. It felt wonderful. It felt *incredibly* wonderful. That night I met a man who actually fit my stereotype of my high school heroes. And he came home with me, and we became friends.¹⁸

In remarking that “once again” he had “an incredible experience,” Rodrigo compared this trip to Los Angeles in 1975 to his first visit to San Francisco in 1969, a moment when he first felt “at home” as a gay man. But while the first visit aroused his consciousness as a young gay man in the “gay capital” of the country, the “incredible” moments spent among fellow gay Latinos at the Bush Gardens expanded his identity.

By the 1970s Los Angeles was home to a large second- and third-generation Mexican American or Chicano population that had grown intermit-

makes reference to the individual social process of publicly identifying as a gay man or lesbian woman, that is, to the dimension of being “out.” I thank Ricardo A. Bracho for bringing this publication to my attention. The first gay and lesbian Puerto Rican organization, Comunidad Orgullo Gay (COG), was founded in 1974 on the island. See Frances Negrón-Muntaner, “Twenty Years of Puerto Rican Gay Activism: An Interview with Luis ‘Popo’ Santiago,” *Radical America* 25, no. 1 (January–March 1991): 39–51. According to Luis Aponte-Parés, New York’s COHLA (Comité Homosexual Latinoamericano, or Latin American Homosexual Committee) “attempted to march [in 1972] in the Puerto Rican Day Parade. Although unsuccessful, this attempt positioned the early *movimiento* [movement] into strategies and tactics to challenge for years to come the imagined community that Puerto Ricans and other Latinos held of themselves, as well as challenging the gay movement to link their struggle with the issues of people of color” (“Outside/In: Crossing Queer and Latino Boundaries,” in Agustín Laó-Montes and Arlene Dávila, eds., *Mambo Montage: The Latinization of New York* [New York, 2001], 385n69). Another organization developed in Los Angeles in 1981, GLLU (Gay y Lesbian Latinos Unidos).

¹⁸Reyes interview, tape 2.

tently since Mexico's revolutionary period in the early twentieth century and numbered at least 1 million.¹⁹ Consequently, the greater Los Angeles region could offer numerous social and commercial venues for gay Latinos.²⁰ By contrast, San Francisco's more heterogeneous Latino population—made up of Central and South Americans, Mexicans, and Puerto Ricans—did not have an equally strong presence throughout the city. Thus, for Latinos the bar and general nighttime social life in San Francisco was considerably smaller.

Although numbering fewer than 80,000, Latinos in San Francisco in the mid-1970s did take advantage of the particular features of its urban geography to create social and political organizations.²¹ Many of them inhabited San Francisco's Mission District, where they were able to build upon a neighborhood culture that had Latino roots, was relatively contained, and possessed a tradition of labor and progressive

¹⁹On Mexican American communities in Los Angeles, see George S. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900–1945* (Oxford, 1993).

²⁰A useful study of the Los Angeles area's population, employment, and poverty rates that includes racial ethnic analyses is Paul Ong and Evelyn Blumenberg, "Income and Racial Inequality in Los Angeles," in A. J. Scott and E. W. Soja, eds., *The City: Los Angeles and Urban Theory at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley, 1996), 311–35.

²¹U.S. Department of Commerce, *County and City Data Book* (Washington, D.C., 1977), 66. There is no existing monograph on Latino history in the Bay Area. Census data on Latino populations in San Francisco in the last fifty years are sketchy at best and difficult to determine. In 1950 the "nonwhite" population of the city was more than 77,000, roughly 10 percent of the total of 775,357 (U.S. Department of Commerce, *County and City Data Book* [Washington, D.C., 1956], 26). But "[t]he nonwhite population comprise[d] Negroes, Indians, Japanese, Chinese, and other nonwhite races. Persons of Mexican birth or ancestry who were not definitely Indian or members of other nonwhite races were classified as white" (*ibid.*, xv). In 1960, although the total population was lower than in 1950, quite likely a result of migration of whites to the suburbs, nonwhites accounted for 18.4 percent of the total, or more than 136,000 (U.S. Department of Commerce, *County and City Data Book* [Washington, D.C., 1962], 42). Once again, who was "white" or "nonwhite" based on national origin was not completely clear: "The nonwhite population consists of Negroes, Indians, Japanese, Chinese, Filipinos, Koreans, Asian Indians, Malayans, and other persons of nonwhite stock. Persons of Mexican birth or descent who are not definitely of Indian or other nonwhite descent are classified as white" (*ibid.*, xx). By 1970 the proportion of nonwhites in the total population of the city had more than doubled, accounting for 44.3 percent of more than 715,000 (U.S. Department of Commerce, *County and City Data Book* [Washington, D.C., 1977], 66). Although China was "the leading country of origin" for the nonwhite population in San Francisco, Mexico was for the surrounding counties of Alameda, San Joaquin, and Sacramento (U.S. Department of Commerce, *County and City Data Book* [Washington, D.C., 1972], 54, 67). By 1970 the San Francisco–Oakland region was the sixth largest metropolitan region in the country, with more than 2.5 million people (*ibid.*, xxix). It is not until the 1980 census that "Hispanics" get accounted for, making up 12.28 percent of San Francisco's total population of 678,974, totaling more than 83,000 (U.S. Department of Commerce, *County and City Data Book* [Washington, D.C., 1988], 56).

organizing.²² This neighborhood provided a locus for Latina lesbians and gay Latinos to gather, whether at private house parties or at bars and restaurants such as El Intimo and La Rondalla.

Soon after returning from his trip to Los Angeles, Rodrigo decided to place his small ad:

But the most significant result of this experience is that when I came back to San Francisco, I was unhappy. I had tasted paradise literally, and I missed it. There was nothing like that here. There was no place like that—there was nothing that could ever fill that, make me feel as wonderful as I'd felt being in that place. So I decided to do something about it. I put an ad in one of the local gay papers, and the ad was a simple little thing that read "Chicano gay club forming. If interested, please call."²³

Because Rodrigo himself had not yet met many other gay Latinos, the ad was a necessary first step to begin organizing. Though brief, it was an affirmation of being simultaneously Latino and gay.²⁴ Through it Rodrigo found a receptive audience: "I got a few calls, and among those calls was a man [Manuel] who told me, a *mexicano* gay man who said, 'Well, I know some people in San Jose, some Chicanos and *mexicanos* who are trying to organize something. Would you be interested in coming to San Jose to talk with them?' I said, 'Sure.'" Manuel's response to the ad facilitated the meeting that united Jesús and Rodrigo. As one of several San Francisco residents who attended this first meeting, Rodrigo became one of the most easily recognizable members of the Gay Latino Alliance.

Only men were present at the informal first dinner at Manuel's house. After assessing the political and geographical situation, the group decided to move the meetings from San Jose to San Francisco and to publicize a plenary event. To recruit additional members, the initial organizers did

²²Other useful sources are Manuel Castells, *The City and the Grassroots: A Cross-Cultural Theory of Urban Social Movements* (Berkeley, 1983), 106–37; Marjorie Heins, *Strictly Ghetto Property: The Story of Los Siete de la Raza* (Berkeley, 1972), 18–19; Juan Felipe Herrera, "Riffs on Mission District Raza Writers," in James Brook, Chris Carlsson, and Nancy J. Peters, eds., *Reclaiming San Francisco: History, Politics, Culture* (San Francisco, 1998), 217–30; Roderick Anthony Hernandez, "Pocho-Che and the Tropicalization of American Poetics," Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 2001; Tomás Sandoval, "The Making of San Francisco's Latino Identity, 1945–1970," Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2002; and Jason Ferreira, "All the Power to the People: A Comparative History of Third World Radicalism in San Francisco, 1968–1977," Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, in progress. A brief historical overview of Latinos can be found in the sociological study by Cecilia Menjivar, *Fragmented Ties: Salvadoran Immigrant Networks in America* (Berkeley, 2000).

²³Reyes interview, tape 2. Rodrigo's name did not appear in the *Bay Area Reporter* classified ad.

²⁴The original press release dated October 15, 1975, and in the possession of Diane Felix included the phrase "Pa' 'delante," which literally translates as "Moving Forward!"

not confine themselves to predominantly Latino neighborhoods in the city. Knowing that gay Latinos visited all gay social areas, including the Castro, Polk Street, and the Tenderloin, the organizers cast a net wide enough to attract a sizeable crowd. Their flyer for this second meeting announced an organization still in formation and without a name.

Anyway, we decided to have a meeting in San Francisco. And for two weeks we would come up from San Jose. We got this flyer. We leafleted the Castro, the Polk, all these bars in the Mission—El Intimo. And we had a meeting at the SIR [Society for Individual Rights] Center, which was on Sixth Street at the time. And we had something like maybe 50 or 60 people show up. And that night people vote[d] to form an organization. And I suggested “Gay Latinos Unidos,” and my slogan was, “Like glue we stick together.” Rodrigo came up with “GALA,” and GALA won the vote. I remember Rodrigo saying, “I like GALA ‘cause it says ‘gayla.’”²⁵

It is this larger second meeting in San Francisco, attended by women as well as men, that most participants associate with the founding of GALA.

One of the women to respond to the announcement of the San Francisco meeting was Diane Felix, who encountered for the first time a public invitation to link her gay and Chicana identities. As she explains in the epigraph opening this essay, the published notice prompted her to consider a new life in “the free city” with other *Raza*.

They were having a meeting here in San Francisco, so I came. And after that first meeting I said, shit man, I’m staying. I’m not going back. . . . I came with a bunch of girls [laughter], car full of girls. We came down here to check it out. So we went back that night and I told my lover, “You know, I really wanna move there, this is what I need, I have to do this, and I’m going with or without you” [laughter].

[And what did she say?]

“Well, I’ll be packed” [laughter].²⁶

Although Diane was the only one of the group of women from San Jose who attended that San Francisco meeting to make this commitment to GALA, her involvement was pivotal.

Diane had already experienced some difficulties in her life as a Chicana lesbian. Local, national, and international events in the late 1960s and early 1970s had catapulted Diane into activism and heightened her sense of ethnic consciousness. Events she considers formative were the antiwar protests, especially the Chicano Moratorium; the Los Angeles Police Department’s murder of Mexican American journalist Ruben Salazar on

²⁵Barragán interview. SIR was a homophile organization in San Francisco that existed between 1964 and 1978. See Stryker and Van Buskirk, 43–51.

²⁶Felix interview.

August 29, 1970, an event that took place in the midst of the Chicano Moratorium;²⁷ Latin American solidarity movements with Chile, Cuba, and Central America; the labor protests spearheaded by the United Farm Workers (UFW); and the struggles to create ethnic studies classes and departments at regional college campuses. However, the gay liberation movements in New York, San Francisco, and elsewhere do not appear in her narratives of her political development.

Nonetheless, Diane did face obstacles and perplexities as a lesbian within the Chicano movement. While supporting the UFW's grape boycotts in the Bay Area and Los Angeles, she was surprised to discover that not all Latinos shared her political views. Often ridiculed in public by fellow Chicanos who did not care about the grape boycotts, she began to understand that they were not automatic allies in what she perceived as common political struggles. The contradictions she saw while working for the UFW took on an added personal note when Diane decided to be public about her sexuality. Although actively involved in San Jose's Chicano theater movement, trying to make the struggles of the UFW visible through that medium, she did not find a supportive community there when she announced that she was a lesbian.²⁸ Facing hostility in her political and cultural work, she found a special meaning in the ad in the *Bay Area Reporter*:

In San Jose when I came out, it was all *Raza* that turned against me, even though I was in *teatro* [theater]. I was real popular. The minute I came out it was my own *Raza* that threw me out 'cause I was queer. . . . It was always this contradiction for me: Why are they [whites] more liberal? Why couldn't my people be this liberal? Strange dynamics . . . you're caught in the middle; it was very painful. All the activism for me was painful because the minute I came out, it was like I wasn't worthy to work anymore in the movement. And so I *stopped*. So, okay, well, if that's how you feel about it, fine. So when I saw that gay *Raza* wanted to organize, for me that was like, *poom!* Man, there it is—that's *my* place.²⁹

The Gay Latino Alliance became a new home for many women and men looking for a "place" within the politics and cultures of the San Francisco Bay Area.

²⁷For a historical analysis of Ruben Salazar, see Mario T. García, ed., and Ruben Salazar, *Barrio Correspondent: Selected Writings, 1955–1970* (Berkeley, 1995).

²⁸A useful historical discussion of the relationship between the Chicano movement and Chicano theater production and their gender politics is Jorge A. Huerta, *Chicano Drama: Performance, Society, and Myth* (Cambridge, 2000).

²⁹Felix interview.

LATINO OR GAY?: DEFINING MEMBERSHIP AND
CHALLENGING ESSENTIALISM

GALA was one of the first gay Latino organizations to gain national visibility. In a well-known article published in the nationally distributed *Nuestro* magazine and republished in San Francisco's *Coming Up!* Rodrigo Reyes explained GALA's history and detailed the activism of openly gay members of the city's Latino community. In a dramatic opening, he discussed the difficulty of bringing the topic of homosexuality to the Latino table:

Homosexual. The word alone elicits responses that range from nervous giggles to physical violence. For Latina lesbians and Latino gays, growing up and maintaining an existence in Latino communities has been a painful process, often endured in silence and isolation. "The love that dares not speak its name," as the Victorians called it, dares even less to speak it *en español*. But even in *la comunidad*, times have changed. A group of gay and lesbian San Franciscans, deciding to organize for their right to a place in the community, formed GALA, The Gay Latino(a) Alliance in November of 1975.³⁰

From its foundational meeting, GALA developed an organizational culture that combined social and political activities. What might appear to have been simply the fusing of two social experiences (being Latino and gay or Latina and lesbian) became, in fact, an ongoing exploration of self and community. The collective vision involved a simultaneous engagement with race, sexuality, and culture, as the words of one brochure explain: "GALA was founded in 1975 in San Francisco as a response to a need for an organization that would struggle for the rights of lesbian and gay latinos. We saw many latinos driven into a Gay subculture where they were victimized by racism, sexism, and cultural alienation. We saw the consequences of seeking validation in an environment that is basically foreign to our culture: alienation from one's family, from one's community, from one's self."³¹ GALA was tied to the evolving Third World and Latino

³⁰Rodrigo Reyes, "Latino Gays: Coming out and Coming Home," *Coming Up!* (December 1981): 3, italics in original. All quotes are from the *Coming Up!* edition. The article first appeared in *Nuestro* magazine (April 1981): 42–45, 64. Although the *Nuestro* edition was also in English, a brief summary of the article appeared in Spanish on page 44. Three useful introductions to gay male history and cultures in Mexico are Ian Lumsden, *Homosexuality, Society and the State in Mexico* (Mexico City, 1991); Annick Prieur, *Mema's House, Mexico City: On Transvestites, Queens, and Machos* (Chicago, 1998); and Héctor Carrillo, *The Night Is Young: Sexuality in Mexico in the Time of AIDS* (Chicago, 2002).

³¹GALA's dark red bilingual brochure, dated approximately 1980. It is unclear whether GALA or individuals in the organization deliberately chose not to capitalize the term "Latina" or "Latino" in their official documents, customarily not done in Spanish. As a



Figure 2. Gay Latino Alliance flyer for the first anniversary dance on November 20, 1976, at the Gay Center on Page Street. Courtesy of Carlos Díaz Todd.

political ideologies of the late seventies, which meant emphasizing racial and ethnic ties in gay and Latino public forums: in the Gay Freedom Day parade, during Cinco de Mayo, and at Carnaval festivals. Behind the organization's red and yellow banner usually came large, colorful flags of Latin American nations, cultural symbols alongside overtly political positions: "Gay Latinos Against Somoza," "Support Affirmative Action," "End Racism," "Puerto Rico Libre," "E.R.A. Now!"³² While calling attention to social struggles elsewhere, GALA also highlighted local conditions in the Latino community (Fig. 2, 3).

To fulfill its goals, right at the beginning GALA members established several committees: a social committee, a bylaws committee, a political committee, and a coordinating committee. Members could gravitate to

result, I have not indicated places where a presumed error could simply have been a deliberate linguistic practice.

³²Various photographs, Archivo Rodrigo Reyes.



Figure 3. Gay Latino Alliance marching down Market Street in the 1977 San Francisco Gay Freedom Day parade. Courtesy of Archivos Rodrigo Reyes and Luis Alberto de la Garza C.

the committee of their choice. The officers and most active members attended regular biweekly business meetings; a much larger group, numbering in the hundreds and not regularly involved in the business of the organization, attended GALA's parties. While GALA's public statements called for political change locally and internationally, it was the prominent live salsa *orquestas* or bands that kept hundreds of women's and men's bodies dancing in nighttime merriment. Politics and dancing mutually supported one another; the funds GALA raised through the dances and other social events underwrote political activism. After raising hundreds of dollars, GALA typically donated the money to local *casas* (aid organizations) that supported grassroots political efforts in Central America and to local Latino agencies working in the Mission District (Fig. 4, 5).

Such direct fiscal support of community-based efforts in the Mission earned GALA visibility and legitimacy. The newspaper *El Tecolote*, for example, returned the favor of GALA's financial contributions by profiling its activities, thereby introducing the broader, politically aware Latino community in San Francisco to GALA's purposes. The first article of a two-part series appeared in June 1976, the same year that GALA first participated in the Gay Freedom Day parade.³³ The series invoked some of the central

³³"Understanding the Gay Latino Experience: Part I," *El Tecolote* 6, no. 9 (June 1976): 3.



Figure 4. Gay Latino Alliance flyer for the second anniversary dance on November 19, 1977, at the Gay Center. Courtesy of Carlos Díaz Todd.

political issues of the day—Third World liberation, *Raza* consciousness, the eradication of sexism, gay liberation—and invited readers to stop by GALA’s offices at the Gay Community Center on Page Street. No individual GALA member’s name appeared as author of this first article, which was a sweeping social critique; nor did the report mention the names of any members. But in the second article about the organization, “Diana” (Diane Felix) wrote about her experiences as a gay (not lesbian) Chicana. Diane’s testimony laid out GALA’s main goals: *Raza* consciousness, self-determination, and mutual support.

The hardest and most rewarding experience I felt in dealing with my Gayness is the acceptance of *familia*. It’s a very sensitive subject, especially in the Latino culture when the daughter, who is expected to leave only after her wedding, decides to leave because of her Gayness. . . . My gayness is very important to me, but my *Raza* consciousness tends to come first. So I feel the strong need for community to wipe away the ugliness and fear our *gente* [people] have towards homosexuality. At the same time more openness would help others who are confronted with it, be it someone in the family, your neighbor or even yourself.³⁴

³⁴“Understanding the Gay Latino: Part II,” *El Tecolote* 6, no. 10 (July 1976): 9. The alternating capitalization of “Gayness” is in the original.

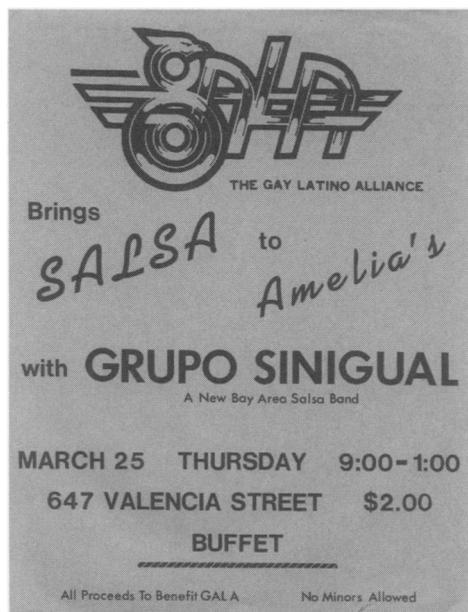


Figure 5. GALA flyer for a fund-raiser at the lesbian bar Amelia's, circa 1978. Courtesy of Carlos Díaz Todd.

One of the enduring challenges for GALA members was the public negotiation between Latino and gay communities. These communities occupied somewhat different spaces in the city: the Latino community was centered in the Mission District, the gay community in the Castro District, although it had spread into other neighborhoods, including the Mission itself. GALA was rooted in the Mission, where many of its members lived and socialized. A great deal of its work took place in Mission locations such as the American Indian Center on Valencia Street. Members of GALA openly resented the anti-Latino stereotypes that were voiced by some white gays; as one man put it, “It’s a question of race. The racism in the broader community is in the gay community, too. We could all tell you of incidents of racism—the vulgar jokes about Cubans, such as when somebody asks if a person has his houseboy yet. There are those references to ‘taco belles’ and to the young people in the Mission as ‘thuglettes.’”³⁵ While certainly Latino, GALA was also unmistakably “gay”—participating in the Gay Freedom Day parades, working at the Gay Center, and advertising its social events in the gay press (Fig. 6).

³⁵“An Interview with the Gay Latino Alliance,” *San Francisco Sentinel*, November 26, 1980: 5.



Figure 6. GALA's fund-raiser at the American Indian Center, circa 1978. Courtesy of Archivos Rodrigo Reyes and Luis Alberto de la Garza C.

Potential conflicts between *Raza* consciousness and gay solidarity came to the forefront for GALA members when San Francisco instituted district elections for its Board of Supervisors.³⁶ The November 1977 election featured the first district-based political races, designed to make supervisors more accountable to their neighborhood constituencies. For supervisor of District 6, which encompassed the Mission District, many gay community leaders supported the white lesbian candidate, Carol Silver. In a typical endorsement, the gay *San Francisco Sentinel* insisted that Silver could best represent the interests of the heavily Latino district: "Of all the candidates in District 6, Silver is probably the most able to view the problems of her complex constituency in a practical manner."³⁷ But the members of

³⁶Analyses of district elections and their relationship to local politics are subjects in Richard Edward DeLeon, *Left Coast City: Progressive Politics in San Francisco, 1975–1991* (Lawrence, 1992), and Chester Hartman, *The Transformation of San Francisco* (Totowa, N.J., 1984).

³⁷"Sentinel Endorses," *San Francisco Sentinel*, November 3, 1977: 10–11. The *San Francisco Sentinel* also endorsed the straight Latino incumbent Robert Gonzalez for District 7,

GALA did not agree and endorsed the “straight” Latino, Gary Borvice. In doing so, GALA affirmed its position as a *Latino* organization.

On October 29, 1977, GALA hosted a forum for candidates running for district supervisor. Held at the People’s Cultural Center on Valencia Street, the forum was endorsed by several of the city’s Mexican American political organizations, gay teachers, human rights advocates, and women’s groups. GALA used the district election and the conflicts it brought to the surface to critique white gays’ perceptions of Latino masculinity and gender:

[W]e would like to make reference to a smear campaign being conducted in District six that would pit latinos against gays. This seamy tactic has also been injected with the macho myth, that latinos equals macho equals anti gay. At this point we find it necessary to correct this misjudgment of our people. It is a cold hard fact that all cultures have attitudes of male supremacy. We strongly object to being singled out as macho types. Since when is it permissible for white gays to be “butch” but latinos cannot be machos and latinas machas? It seems clear that whites just don’t understand the concept or meaning of the word macho.³⁸

After clarifying the position from which it spoke as a Latino organization, GALA expressed its resentment that gay whites were imposing political values and ideas on the predominantly Latino Mission District with their election endorsements. Responding to the increasing presence of whites in the Mission, GALA supported Borvice’s pledge to prevent it from becoming another Castro or Polk Street. In the process, GALA outlined an opposition between these male-centered urban spaces and what it saw as the *familia*-based Mission.³⁹ Throughout the campaign, GALA maintained its stance as a group of gay Latinos and Latinas who focused first on their own racial/ethnic constituency.

GALA’s strategy did not win universal acceptance. In a letter to the *Sentinel*, one angry San Franciscan, “Tahara,” accused GALA of being “factionary”; its political analysis smacked of “heavier, holier-than-thou, radical dialogue.”⁴⁰ Challenging GALA’s “protection” of what it painted as an essentially Latino Mission District, “Tahara” suggested that, as a gay organization, GALA should think more carefully about its endorsements. While acknowledging that not all gay Latinos and lesbian Latinas endorsed Borvice, GALA attacked Latino “sellouts” who supported Silver. In so

covering Potrero Hill, Hunters Point, and the Bayview. Surprising Latinos, gays and lesbians, and most everyone else, Gonzalez introduced comprehensive gay rights legislation a few weeks before the election.

³⁸“Gary Borvice for Supervisor—District 6,” flyer, October 1977.

³⁹GALA, “GALA on District 6 Race,” *San Francisco Sentinel*, October 20, 1977: 5, capitalization in original.

⁴⁰Tahara, “A Response to GALA Letter,” *San Francisco Sentinel*, November 3, 1977: 5.

doing, GALA presented itself as a public arbiter of which gay Latino could legitimately speak on behalf of the Mission.

The simultaneous expression of a gay or lesbian identity and *Raza* consciousness was a political balancing act. An interview with three GALA members on the occasion of the organization's fifth anniversary reflected these multifaceted identities. The interview took place in a symbolic location, an apartment overlooking Dolores Park, which in later years would become an intersecting zone for gays and Latinos in the Mission. The park illustrated the changing class and racial demographics of San Francisco, especially the increasing presence of white gays in the Mission.

In the interview, the men explained that a key strategy for GALA had been intense involvement in the Latino community. Ricardo Galvan suggested that GALA's solidarity with community-wide issues gained it legitimacy among Latinos:

It was really difficult to establish a base in the Mission community, because even though they considered us Latins, they still had that barrier because we were gay, queens, fags, whatever they want to call us. It was through our community work, through liberation struggles that we participated in with various Latin groups in the Mission, that GALA has gained a tremendous amount of respect. Especially now with the issues that have come up around violence, around immigration, many of the nongay members of the community are coming to GALA asking what can be done.⁴¹

GALA's involvement in nongay causes convinced many in the Latino community that GALA "belonged." It is important to note, however, that while heterosexual Latinos might decide that GALA "belonged" to the community, they nevertheless retained the privilege of doing so.⁴² GALA's acceptance as a legitimate Latino organization had a certain dimension of conditionality.

GALA's participation in events perceived to be "Latino" in turn prompted Latino organizations to consider supporting gay causes. The relationships often became symbiotic, with mutual endorsement in political marches. The third GALA member interviewed in the *Sentinel*, who withheld his identity and is referred to only as "C," explained the differences he saw between GALA's work in the Latino community and its work on gay-specific causes:

El Comité [Salvadoreño] [the Salvadoran Committee] invited us to march with them in a parade, we marched as an open contingent with

⁴¹"An Interview with the Gay Latino Alliance," *Sentinel*, November 26, 1980: 5. The article mistakenly identifies Barragán as "Barranga." The *San Francisco Sentinel* renamed itself the *Sentinel* in the late 1970s.

⁴²I thank Ian Lekus for pushing me to think more carefully about this relationship between privilege and acceptance.

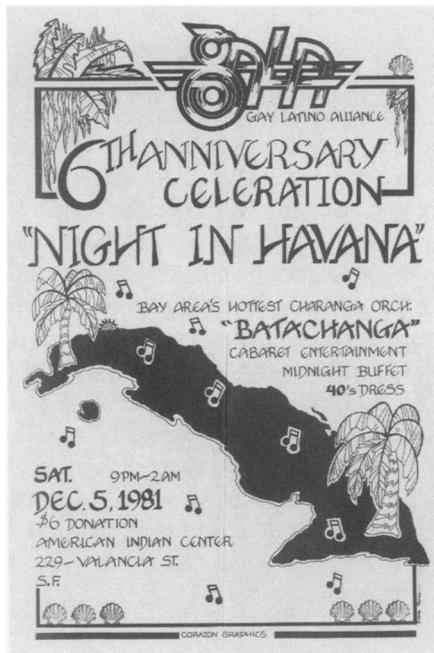


Figure 7. Flyer for GALA’s sixth anniversary celebration, “Night in Havana,” December 5, 1981. Courtesy of Carlos Díaz Todd.

a GALA banner, and we were real close when the police attacked. I was arrested along with groups of El Salvadoreans, so GALA was seen as part of the struggle all along. Because of that experience, they called us the night before the gay parade and said, “You’ve supported us; we’d like to support you.” They came with their banner to the march, and they stayed and partied with us late into the night. At this point, I feel GALA has better relations with our own community than people with our sexual preference. I think this is the first time there has been an article about us in the gay press, but years ago *El Tecolote* ran a series of articles [two] on us. They accept our ads for dances. We don’t feel the gay, white community has really attempted to listen to us.⁴³

“C’s” narrative points to the conditionality of the heterosexual Latino community’s relationship to gays. While GALA seemed to have found more acceptance in Latino San Francisco and less in gay San Francisco, those

⁴³“An Interview with the Gay Latino Alliance.” “C’s” rendition of *El Comité Salvadoreño’s* public support for GALA in the gay pride parade may not have been as accurate or at least as ideal as it was presented in the interview. For an alternative account, see the oral history of Lucrecia, “Me Siento Marginada [I Feel Marginalized],” in Juanita Ramos, ed., *Compañeras: Latina Lesbians* (New York, 1994), 229–31.

Latinos accepting GALA appear to have differentiated them from white gays. To what degree these Latinos saw only the Latino side of GALA but not its members' gayness remains an important question to consider. Framed differently, perhaps GALA's Latino-ness made its gayness less central, even a nonissue for straight Latinos. Such selective acceptance, of course, would have run counter to GALA's vision and goal: to challenge the conceptual and political oppositions between gay and Latino identities and histories, especially in their own racial/ethnic community.

An explosive exchange of ideas in the city's gay newspapers forced GALA members to think through their relationships with the Latino and gay communities in more detail. The cause of this heated debate was innocent enough: GALA's sixth anniversary celebration. Like so many other GALA events, this one was planned as a dance, with a live salsa band. In keeping with the cultural roots of the music, the party was christened "Night in Havana." Advertisements for the events appeared in gay, Latino, and gay Latino circles (Fig. 7). The critical response to the party's theme provoked a major public dialogue around racial, cultural, and sexual politics.

The person who sparked the debate was Tim Speck, a gay white man living in the Mission. In a letter to *Coming Up!* he explained that he liked living in the Latino district, finding it to be exotic and sexually charged although dangerous.

I live in the Mission. Why? Because I got sick of living in neighborhoods filled with anglos and people "of color" who act like anglos. One of the greatest joys in my life is to walk through my neighborhood and be in the middle of such stunningly beautiful latino people, and hear their marvelous language. The only problem is that I have to be back in my room before dark, when the teenagers come out with lead pipes, knives and guns. But that's OK. In these times, it is to be understood.⁴⁴

Speck's fear of gang violence did not keep him from seeking same-sex pleasure with the neighborhood's Latinos. He was particularly attracted by *Esta Noche*, the first openly gay Latino bar, located on Sixteenth Street. With the opportunities afforded by this new bar, he explained, the district's "understandable" threats seemed to be a risk worth taking: "When *Esta Noche* opened a few blocks away from where I live, I thought, 'Fabulous, now I can socialize with latino gays, listen to their wonderful music, and hopefully have sex with them, all in an atmosphere more human than the anglo gay lifestyle.' Was this naïve? Yes. Even when I had the stamina to

⁴⁴Tim Speck, "Come Prepared," *Coming Up!* (January 1982): 4–5. It is unclear from context alone whether the noncapitalization of the term "Anglo," like "Latino," was deliberate in either this newspaper or most gay periodicals of the time. My noncapitalization of this and other terms describing national and/or ethnic origins follows the original.

go through all the cultural checkpoint-charlies that separate latinos and anglos, all I found was the same old crap with a latin-american flavor.”⁴⁵ For Speck, a glaring example of the “same old crap” was the blatant hypocrisy of a theme party, run by progressives, entitled “Night in Havana.” The theme challenged GALA’s leftist credentials:

To celebrate its sixth anniversary, GALA has a dance: “The theme, a Night in Havana calls for appropriate dress—40s formal—so come prepared.” Huh? Havana in the 40s? Think about it. Batista, the CIA, the Mafia, U.S. Corporations, an island playground for rich north americans and their rich cuban friends, all dressed in those fabulous clothes and dancing the night away in a Havana nightclub; while the rest of Cuba is illiterate in economic slavery, homeless, suffering from easily curable diseases, starving, and dying. *Viva La Raza!*?!⁴⁶

Mocking GALA’s position as a Latino organization, Speck questioned the organization’s use of the term *La Raza* as a cultural and political cry, seeing it as nothing more than a nationalist and racist slogan. How could “Viva la Raza!” not be racist, Speck asked, in its call for ethnic power?

GALA’s and others’ responses to Speck were swift and varied. Polling its most active members to discuss Speck’s commentary, GALA replied thoroughly, touching on every point raised in this most scathing critique of the organization. GALA opened its letter by dissecting his scenario of fear in the after-dark Mission District: “So Tim Speck is hidden away in his room at night behind locked doors, while Latino youth go prowling about the city armed with lead pipes, bricks and baseball bats. Unlike him, GALA can be found in the community where we belong. His generalization of our youth as violent marauders is an affront to all latinos. We acknowledge the upsurge of violence in the SF community, but to lay blame completely on latino youths is totally unfounded and blatantly racist.”⁴⁷ GALA’s letter went on to draw attention to the importance of gay Latino public spaces like *Esta Noche* where language and music marked cultural boundaries for including rather than excluding others. It denounced Speck’s exoticizing of Latinos, not perceiving his comments to reflect honest admiration:

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid. Years earlier a forum that Carlos Díaz Todd coordinated for GALA to discuss his travel to Cuba with the Venceremos Brigade also brought internal controversy to GALA, with many of its members criticizing Cuba’s treatment of gays and thus not finding Todd’s discussion useful for GALA’s work. An excellent discussion of the homophobia within the Venceremos Brigade, its refusal to address “the gay question” in Cuba’s revolution at the time, and the challenges these dynamics brought to solidarity work between gay and straight leftists supporting the island is Ian Lekus’s chapter, “Queer Harvests,” in “Queer and Present Dangers: Homosexuality and American Antiwar Activism during the Vietnam Era,” Ph.D. diss., Duke University, in progress.

⁴⁷GALA, “GALA: In the Community,” *Coming Up!* (February 1982): 4.

The patronizing way [Speck] spoke of us as “stunningly beautiful latino people” and our “marvelous language” is insulting and demeaning. From this arrogant way of viewing us, no wonder he found it difficult relating to us as latinos at Esta Noche and GALA functions. Gay anglos who approached us in an honest and open way have always been welcome at GALA events. During our last six years of existence we have earnestly tried to provide a non-exploitative culturally supportive environment. Our record of successful salsa dances and fund-raisers for gay causes as well as latino struggles speaks for itself. Where in SF outside of Esta Noche can we go as gay latinos to hear our music and speak our mother tongue?⁴⁸

To Speck’s main critique, that they were celebrating a grossly exploitative period in Cuban history, GALA’s response was that such a litmus test for determining the “appropriateness” of cultural celebration involving Latin American traditions was hypocritical if not altogether unrealistic: “‘A Night in Havana’ was chosen to coincide with the Afro-Latino music played by *Batachanga* and was developed in Cuba in the 40’s. So what’s wrong with GALA celebrating six years of struggle with ‘Night in Havana.’ The FBI, CIA, The Mafia, U.S. multinational corporations and illiteracy in Latin America existed then as well as today. CLOSE DOWN THE BARS! STOP ALL PARTYING! CANCEL GAY FREEDOM DAY PARADE!”⁴⁹ In addition, GALA corrected Speck’s understanding of the concept of *La Raza*. GALA denied his equation of it to ethnocentric displays of white power and provided a theory of racial formations in the Americas:

[Speck’s] literal translation of the term LA RAZA exposes his ignorance of us as a people and our heritage. LA RAZA, EL PUEBLO means the People. ¡*Tonto!* [Dummy!] And yes, it’s not acceptable for white people to raise clenched fists in white supremacy like the KKK, NAZIS, and Republican Party. Our cultural pride as Indo-Afro-Latino people should *never* be confused with white racism. . . . We hope the Anglo gay community sees through [Speck’s] racist attitudes and joins us in combating the ever-presence of violence in SF as well as the ugly reality of racism that divides us.⁵⁰

One final comment emphasized the importance of “family” for GALA members and reaffirmed GALA’s priority in placing itself and its work within Latino San Francisco: “You suggest our second ailment [after the Catholic Church] is the family; on the contrary, it is our source of strength. At the core of GALA’s philosophy is not to alienate our selves from our

⁴⁸Ibid., brackets in original.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Ibid., italics and capitalization in original.

families and community but to help them come to understand our gayness in a latino context.”⁵¹

The ensuing public discussion of Tim Speck’s letter clearly laid out the intersections of racial and sexual politics in San Francisco. While *Coming Up!* printed responses that originated from various constituencies in the city, it acknowledged GALA’s need to defend its stance. The public discussions following GALA’s “Night in Havana” also spoke to the changing Mission District as more and more whites (gay or not) moved into the district—for more sunshine, for more affordable rentals, and for the “pleasures of culture.” These pleasures, as Speck himself identified, could involve a casual stroll to the one and only space for gay Latinos, *Esta Noche*. Here gay Latinos could seek each other, but they might also find whites like Speck seeking cross-racial encounters. In this neighborhood context, GALA and many of its supporters were especially protective of what they felt they could call their own.

THE SEXES AND GENDERS OF GALA: THE END OF A LIMITED ALLIANCE

Ultimately, some of the conflicts that had been present in GALA from its inception brought an end to the organization. One of the most difficult problems was also part of its strength, the prospect of “cosexual” membership. Rodrigo Reyes boasted of this aspect of GALA, citing the opinions of some of the women in the organization to bolster his point.

GALA’s membership has always been cosexual, unlike most gay organizations. Diana [*sic*], also one of the original founders, thinks this is important. “Our *Raza*,” she says, “has been divided for too long, and if we do not work together we’ll never succeed in the struggle for our liberation, for the liberation of all of us. Of course,” she points out, “the oppression for lesbians is different from that experienced by Latino gay men; we are women, we are lesbians, so we get it from three directions.”⁵²

Diane and a second Latina lesbian pointed to the difficulties they had navigating as both lesbians and Latinas seeking to remain part of the Latino community:

“But if we do not work with our natural allies, our brothers *de corazón y de raza* [from the heart and of the community], who are we going to work with?” Another member, Rita, feels that working within the organization fills several needs in her life. “GALA has given me the opportunity to build solidarity with other gay women, to give and receive support from them and to serve my community. It has also been rewarding to work as a GALA member with non-gay women

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Reyes, “Latino Gays,” 3.

and to see them discover that as a Latina, a working woman and as a single parent, I am not all that different from them.”⁵³

The testimony of Diane and Rita reveals the potential of an organization in which women shared concerns with men. But their words also point to the difficulties they had feeling entirely at home within the organization.

When women like Diane Felix arrived at GALA’s organizational meeting in San Francisco, the founders hoped to expand their membership to include women. While Diane and several others stuck it out in what was a predominantly male and masculinist space, the informal attitudes and practices of some of the men did not make it easy for them. The establishment of the bar *Esta Noche*, which competed with GALA in sponsoring community social events, served to marginalize women even more. In the end, these tensions fragmented GALA and dissolved many of the social and political relationships that existed between lesbian women and gay men in the Latino community.

According to Jesús Barragán, women were not part of the initial plan to create the organization and were not deliberately recruited. Social spaces were designed instead to make men feel comfortable: “GALA had thrown all these dances, basically for *men*. And yes women went, but I remember the first GALA dance . . . some idiot shows gay porno on the walls during the dance and of course some of the women complained.”⁵⁴ It was three women in particular, Alí Marerro, Matú Feliciano, and Diane Felix—three butch Latinas—who put the “co” in GALA’s limited cosexual identity.⁵⁵ In her interview, Diane Felix recalled the tension she felt. At the first meeting she attended, “most of the men were very welcoming, very happy. It wasn’t until like later on, like the third, fourth meeting that some people had approached me and told me, ‘You know, I’m really sorry you came back, because I wanted to be just around Latino men, I didn’t want to be dealing with women.’ I said well, too bad [laughter]. Sorry you feel that way. Once you get to know me you’ll love me [laughter]. And we fought all through the eight years. I wouldn’t leave and they wouldn’t leave.”⁵⁶ Diane fought to ensure that the men in the organization respected her position. By forming a Women’s Caucus early on and officially changing its name from Gay Latino Alliance to Gay Latina/Latino Alliance, GALA did not completely ignore women’s issues. However, it did not name “lesbians” explicitly, using instead the term “gay” to refer to both women and men. This is significant, because at the time lesbian-feminism made it a point to name lesbians as a gender, sexual, social, cultural, and political

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Barragán interview.

⁵⁵As of this writing I have not been able to interview Matú or Alí.

⁵⁶Felix interview.

category.⁵⁷ But as the organization's history and naming strategies show, in GALA the Latina lesbian was invisible. Also invisible was the bisexual. Although it was a sexual practice among many women and some men who considered themselves gay, bisexuality too did not figure into GALA's politics, discourse, or programming.⁵⁸

In addition to holding parties and raising funds, GALA issued statements outlining its stance on issues of the period, including sexism. As a 1978 informational flyer put it:

Our struggle for full rights takes on the issue of sexism as well. If the idea of male superiority is a legitimate concept, when in fact it is dependent on the repression of women, clearly then, there is something wrong with the relationships which formulate such repressive concepts. Thus, through analysis of these concepts, GALA continues to struggle for full rights. What we would like to emphasize at this point is our concern with the "Macho Bandwagon" that has been adopted by white gays. We wonder, "Do you really know what you're talking about?" This is a cultural issue which is also related to the social, economic and the political. As many *Raza* has stated: "Sure we want cultural changes and adjustments, but that is *la Raza's* decision, for too often society tells us that our culture is a negative thing." GALA well realizes that male chauvenism [*sic*] exists in all cultures, and not just the "Latino-Macho" culture which many white gays believe to be the case.⁵⁹

Under the rubric of advocating "full rights," GALA's statement highlighted sexism and male superiority but not directly in relation to women. Instead, it emphasized whites' racial and cultural stereotypes of Latino *men* as the prototypical chauvinism without addressing male supremacy and its impact on women. GALA's reference to the "Macho Bandwagon" was to a white gay male phenomenon, one manifested in the blue-jean and leather clone cultures of the Castro, Polk, and South of Market.⁶⁰

⁵⁷Useful historical context to understand lesbian-feminism in the 1970s is Nan Hunter, "Contextualizing the Sexuality Debates: A Chronology," in Lisa Duggan and Nan D. Hunter, *Sex Wars: Sexual Dissent and Political Culture* (New York, 1995). An analysis of lesbian identities, labels, and "roles" in the 1970s, based on extensive interviews with women in San Francisco, is Arlene Stein, *Sex and Sensibility: Stories of a Lesbian Generation* (Berkeley, 1997).

⁵⁸Personal references to bisexuality as an "emerging" phenomenon in the mid-1970s are in Jim Brogan, *Jack and Jim: A Personal Journal of the '70s* (Bolinis, Calif., 1982), 94.

⁵⁹GALA, informational flyer, "No one is free until we are all free," 1978, italics in original.

⁶⁰An analysis of white gay clone cultures in New York's Greenwich Village, based on research in the late 1970s, is Martin P. Levine, edited and with an introduction by Michael S. Kimmel, *Gay Macho: The Life and Death of the Homosexual Clone* (New York, 1998). See

One GALA member, self-described “Latino-faggot” Micael Tapia, found it “imperative to criticize the racist and flagrant misuse of the term *machismo*. *Machismo* is not in itself a cultural ethic for Latinos, but more so a product of imperialism and colonialism. I am alarmed when I hear white people refer to sexist behavior as ‘How Macho!’ or when a white man refers to his sexism as macho behavior.”⁶¹ In this analysis, white men’s treatment of gay Latinos was a gendered and racialized move to police them (and themselves). This same-sex policing through gender and racial codes and stereotypes rested on heteronormative, homophobic stances ultimately misogynistic in their contempt for nonmasculine (gay) men.

GALA’s public discussions of gender, sex, and culture rarely addressed the everyday problems faced by women. Magdalena, who regularly attended GALA’s social functions and occasionally its business meetings (she was one of the few women seen in photographs of the group during Gay Freedom Day parades), pointed out the difficulties confronted by Latinas in the organization. For women who had already encountered sexism in the broader community, experiencing similar dynamics of exclusion in GALA was especially frustrating:

The majority of the members were *men*. And there were only a few women at that time that would attend the meetings. And I think in part, even though those few that did attend, it felt like a constant battle with the *hermanos* [brothers] so to speak, over just how they would refer to us, or how they would take our *views* or whatever it was. I mean, sometimes it was like, oh God, you gotta be *kidding!* You know, perspectives that might have been, you thought were a non-issue in the general community, and it’s like, oh, now you’re coming back into the Latino community and getting this all over again from the *men!* So there was this duality in perspectives and I think it made it really *frustrating* for a lot of women to participate in GALA. And I think that was one factor for why a lot of women didn’t get involved.⁶²

Because few women were involved in the central business of GALA, the battles against individual and organizational sexist practices continued to the end. Except for Diane Felix’s brief autobiographical commentary in *El*

also Tom Wolfe, “The Sexed-up, Doped-up, Hedonistic Heaven of the Boom-Boom ’70s,” *Life* 2 (December 1979): 103–14. A useful discussion of male gender and patriarchy is Renato Rosaldo, “Notes toward a Critique of Patriarchy from a Male Position,” *Anthropological Quarterly* (1992): 81–86.

⁶¹See Micael Tapia, “Machismo, Class, and National Oppression,” *Brother: A Forum for Men against Sexism*, nos. 14–15 (summer 1976): 20.

⁶²Magdalena, audiotaped interview by the author, February 5, 2001, San Francisco, California.

Tecolote, no public statement placed Latina lesbians at the center of the organization.⁶³

Magdalena believes that women's problems were not solely related to the attitudes and behavior of the men in GALA. Men generally—including Latinos—were clearly the most visible and the most privileged in the sexual and cultural experimentations of the era:

Given the time period, and looking at issues of sexuality during those early years, the men had certain *freedoms*, and so they were out there exploring their sexuality in a way that I think women didn't have *permission* up to that point, or not at that level. And it wasn't *just* that all these men are just like so *macho* and a pain in the whatever—it wasn't *just* that. I think it was just [that] there were disparities in the percentage in our population, of the women that were out versus the *men* that were out.⁶⁴

Although the men in GALA did not always make women feel welcome, the urban experience in the 1970s of living and socializing in San Francisco, where thousands of gay men could play nightly and daily without much restraint, helped isolate women even further. Dozens of bath houses, bars, dance clubs, and other social and sexual spaces gave men ample opportunity to meet one another, even though some of these spots were difficult for Latinos and other men of color to enter. In this larger gendered context, GALA could have been an alternative for Latina lesbians without alternative spaces in which to socialize. However, since it did not create that ideal space for them, most Latinas simply refused to make GALA their social or political home.

No single factor led to GALA's demise. However, its members cited several interrelated phenomena that contributed to its end: burnout; discord between several Puerto Rican and Chicano men; shifting priorities for some of its key members; the never-resolved conflicts between the men and the women; and, most importantly in the recollections of some, the opening in 1979 of the gay Latino bar *Esta Noche*.

⁶³The lack of public discourse about Latina lesbians in GALA at this time does not mean that they were not organizing, creating their own social spaces, and writing about their lives, often in coalitions with other women of color and white women. A great deal of this historical record remained in the literary productions of small presses and found visibility and audiences on Valencia Street's feminist and lesbian cultures, especially in the influential *Old Wives' Tales* bookstore. Two important feminist journals to which Latina and Chicana lesbians contributed were *Sinister Wisdom* and *Conditions*. For more on Latina lesbians in the Bay Area, see Rosales; Cora; Moraga and Anzaldúa, eds.; Carla Trujillo, *Chicana Lesbians: The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About* (Berkeley, 1991); Ramos, ed.; Anzaldúa, *Borderlands, La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco, 1987); and AnaLouise Keating, ed., *Gloria E. Anzaldúa: Interviews, Entrevistas* (New York, 2000).

⁶⁴Magdalena interview.

The historiography of white gay and lesbian community formation has consistently documented the importance of bars as a social space. Rochella Thorpe, exploring African American lesbian nightlife in Detroit, has noted that such public spaces must be analyzed carefully with respect to their own exclusionary practices, particularly around race and class divisions.⁶⁵ As yet, little has been said about the role of these establishments in the destruction of grassroots organizations such as GALA.⁶⁶ As GALA members recalled, the white Castro bar culture typically enforced its own rules to keep people of color and women outside. Consequently, the opening in 1979 of the gay Latino bar *Esta Noche* was welcomed because of the new opportunities it afforded gay Latino men to socialize in the Mission. However, *Esta Noche* soon undermined GALA's social and political fund-raising efforts and put its men and women members in direct conflict with one another.

Although Rodrigo Reyes's "incredible experience" of finding himself among gay Latinos in a Los Angeles bar had prompted him to organize GALA, the birth of a similar social space in the Mission District had a devastating impact. The venture was the brainchild of one of GALA's members, who sold his house to purchase a bar, which he and his partners ran with enormous profit. Yet by cutting into the central financial and social nexus of GALA, its fund-raising dances, the newly established *Esta Noche* brought to the surface conflicting gender relations that had been part of GALA since its inception. In Diane Felix's recollection, the attitudes of the owners and managers and also the non-gay-identified clientele made women feel uncomfortable:

We [in GALA] always gave our money away, and then as soon as *Esta Noche* opened up, we promoted that as our gay Latino bar. And that's when I dropped out, that's when the sexism really came into play. Because he [the owner] had hired women bartenders, and we would have meetings and we would tell them, there's a lot of straight Latino men coming in and they're harassing the women, they're harassing the lesbians. [He'd say,] "Well, this isn't a political organization, we don't want to hear that anymore, this is a business, this is a bar."

⁶⁵Rochella Thorpe, "A House Where Queers Go?: African-American Lesbian Nightlife in Detroit, 1940–1975," in Ellen Lewin, ed., *Inventing Lesbian Cultures in America* (Boston, 1996), 40–61. The classic study for understanding the foundational role of bars in the making of lesbian communities is Kennedy and Davis.

⁶⁶As Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy has pointed out to me, bars have played different roles in the making of lesbian and gay communities historically. Working-class lesbian bars in Buffalo in the 1940s, for example, played a role different from the one played by gay male bars in San Francisco's Castro District in the 1990s, where social class is a less explicit marker for membership. Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy, personal communication, June 27, 2001.

Everything turned, everything changed. And I said, fuck this, I ain't dealing with this, not at this level.⁶⁷

The gravitational shift from GALA, a political, cultural, and social space for men and women, to *Esta Noche*, a commercial space for male-centered entertainment, forced the women and some of the men to reevaluate what type of community they wanted to create. According to Magdalena, although they knew that *Esta Noche* was not going to be a place for Latina lesbians, the women had hoped that it would be an alternative place to meet as Latinas and Latinos. It would take Latina lesbians several years to create a monthly dancing space of their own in which to socialize and build their own networks.⁶⁸ But gay Latino men benefited tremendously from what *Esta Noche* had started in 1979. Soon afterward, several other bars opened their doors on the same block of Sixteenth Street, and one of them, *La India Bonita*, staged successful shows by transgender artists that continued into the mid-1990s. "Gay Latino San Francisco," whose public image had been represented by GALA since 1975, became notoriously associated with the short commercial district created by *Esta Noche* and its followers in the Mission District.

CONCLUSION

Gay Latinos and lesbian Latinas were part of the large queer migrations into and around the San Francisco Bay Area in the late 1960s and 1970s. In the midst of countercultural and social protest movements, they were part of the intersecting social and political cultures in the Bay Area. Some individuals already knew each other informally, but the Gay Latino Alliance brought them together formally and tapped into their talents, skills, and social networks. GALA did not possess the same meaning for all those involved in it, but it was certainly an organized effort to shape cultural, racial, sexual, and political community among Latina lesbians and gay Latinos.

GALA hoped to intersect the gay and Latino identities that were reflective of its members' lives. When Rodrigo Reyes's phrase "Chicano and gay" first appeared in the *Bay Area Reporter*, the terms appeared simply to name two social markers for potential organization members to recognize simultaneously. But in 1975 San Francisco it was no easy feat to challenge essentialist identity politics around "gay"—constructed as white—and "Chicano/Latino"—constructed as heterosexual. The seemingly oppositional meanings of these terms left little room for conjunction without disturbing their respective essentialist constructions. For these reasons,

⁶⁷Felix interview.

⁶⁸Diane Felix took the initiative to found the monthly club *Colors* in 1986, running it successfully until the late 1990s.

the people who joined the Gay Latino Alliance had to engage in complicated struggles over the meaning and politics of race, culture, gender, and sexual desire. Challenging racism and homophobia simultaneously, GALA did not divorce its sexual politics from its cultural roots or its critique of white gay racism from its challenge to Latino homophobia. GALA's claims to space and rights as Latinos and Latinas in white gay San Francisco and as lesbians and gays in Latino San Francisco meant that its struggle for identity was constant and multidimensional.

What contributed to GALA's fame was its success socially—through dances and fund-raisers—and politically—through support of causes in the Mission, San Francisco, and the wider world.⁶⁹ GALA's members challenged the mainstream white gay and lesbian community, most visibly predominant in the Castro District and elsewhere in the city but also increasingly present in the gay politics and social scene of the Mission District. They also challenged the broad Latino community in the Mission District, making themselves present and vocal as *lesbian* and *gay* Latinas and Latinos. GALA members linked the Latino community in San Francisco to those in several Latin American countries and to the political visions and struggles they shared. They were also part of the ideological and political currents that created a vibrant oppositional culture in the San Francisco Bay Area of the 1970s. In their organization, the men and women of GALA experimented culturally, politically, and sexually with their bodies and minds. The result of the efforts of people like Diane Felix, Jesús Barragán, Rodrigo Reyes, and Manuel Hernández Valadéz was GALA's hybrid culture, in which members reformulated the meanings of both “lesbian/gay” and “Latina/Latino.” In the process, they not only named but also made a community.

⁶⁹Writing about Rodrigo Reyes days after his death, Valentín Aguirre described GALA as “[c]ombining political activism and social celebration . . . [coming] together from self-determination” (“Rodrigo Reyes: A Legend in His Time,” *San Francisco Sentinel*, January 23, 1992: 16).