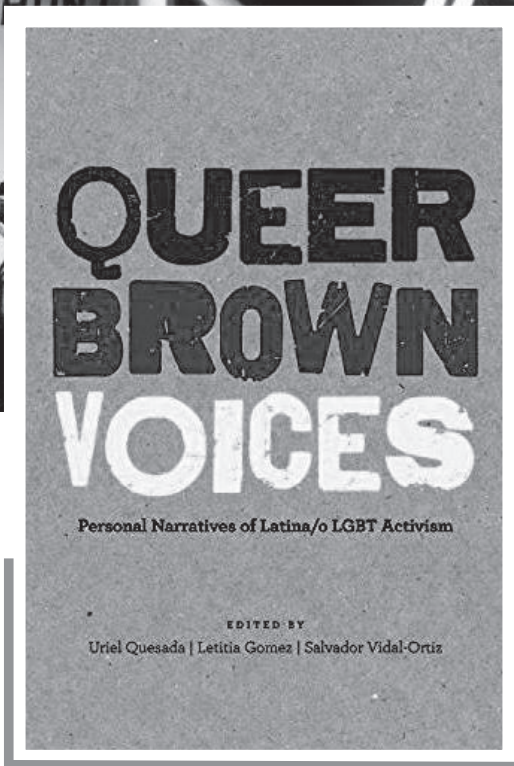
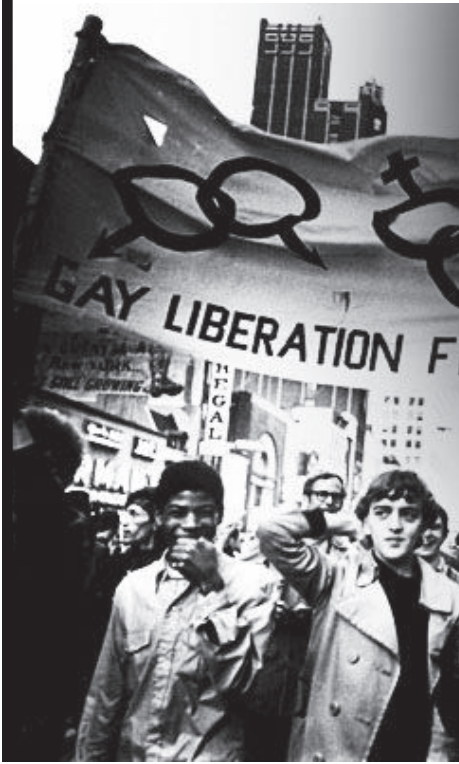


NEW BOOK "QUEER BROWN VOICES" WRITES A MORE INCLUSIVE HISTORY OF LGBT ACTIVISM



by **Xatherin Gonzalez**

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In new collection *Queer Brown Voices*, artist and activist Luz Guerra describes what it means to “call someone out their name.” In the Lower East Side during the 1960s and 1970s, calling someone out their name was an insult and erasure of their experience encountering colonization. For example, calling someone who was Puerto Rican “Spanish,” overlooked that the Spanish invaded indigenous people on la isla, or that many Latina/os in La Loisada, New York City, came from Caribbean African diasporas. In her essay, Luz talks about the limitations of “Latina/o” and “LGBT,” two categories that filter identity through monolithic narratives.

Queer Brown Voices is filled with insights like these. Edited by activist Letitia Gomez and scholars Salvador

Vidal-Ortiz and Uriel Quesada, the collection out this month from University of Texas Press ruptures the dominant views of LGBT activism in the United States and Puerto Rico. As each contributor notes, few historical accounts recognize the contributions of Latina/os in the struggle for LGBT equality. All too often, the histories of queer and trans people of color are whitewashed for

mass appeal. Just this summer, the trailer for the new film *Stonewall* prompted thousands of people to sign a petition calling for a boycott of the film because its story of the Stonewall uprising in New York seems to portray one white man leading the protests, when in fact it was actually initiated by transgender women of color. Whitewashing erases the contributions and struggles of people of color, and it carries over into the focuses of mainstream activist groups. The largest LGBT-rights organizations in the country—like the Human Rights Coalition—have been criticized for focusing

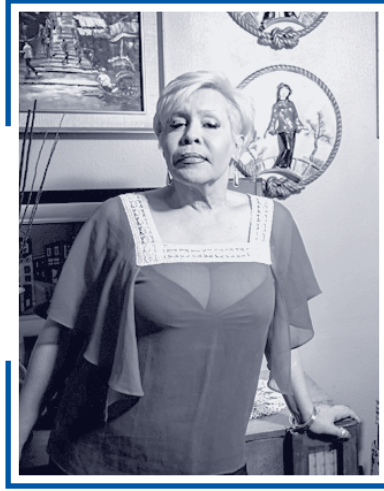
JUST THIS SUMMER, THE TRAILER FOR THE NEW FILM STONEWALL PROMPTED THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE TO SIGN A PETITION CALLING FOR A BOYCOTT OF THE FILM BECAUSE ITS STORY OF THE STONEWALL UPRISING IN NEW YORK SEEMS TO PORTRAY ONE WHITE MAN LEADING THE PROTESTS, WHEN IN FACT IT WAS ACTUALLY INITIATED BY TRANSGENDER WOMEN OF COLOR.

more on white, middle-class issues such as adoption rights and marriage equality, instead of issues like the disproportionate number of queer and trans people of color encountering state violence. In our pop culture and in our politics, people of color are placed at the fringes of grand narratives; their needs either absent or singular.

In the tradition of oral history and first-person narratives, such as the feminist classic *This Bridge Called My Back*, the editors of *Queer Brown Voices* sought to avoid Eurocentric methods of documenting history. Instead, they opt for a fragmented archive, rooted in the decolonization and feminist movements of the 1960s. Through this approach, *Queer Brown Voices* queers the way we view history: the stories of change are through nonlinear and subjective perspectives, rather than through a canonical retelling that aims to be “objective.” Best of all, the text is accessible to everyday readers—the collection doesn’t ascribe to scholarly jargon or overly complicated queer theory. Instead, it relies on autobiographical stories, each one exploring history from childhood, “coming out,” cultural reconnection, and finally, adulthood. The collection includes essays from several luminaries who have devoted their lives to working for the rights of people who are often overlooked or purposely shut out even within queer communities.

Gomez, Vidal-Ortiz, and Quesada are transparent about their methodology, explaining their approach to select, translate, transcribe, and organize the book’s sixteen voices. In the preface and introduction, they address the problematic language throughout the essays. For example, there are words translated from Spanish into English that come across as misogynistic or transphobic. Personally, I found it tricky to accept these editorial decisions, since the majority of the narratives are told by cisgender Latina/os. There are many voices left out—I would have liked to hear more from indigenous people, undocumented queer activists, and transgender Latinas. This absence is partially because the book

focuses on the establishment of local, regional, and national organizations which tie all of these activists within the same national network. However, Uriel Quesada addresses these issues in his conclusion: “We are in debt to the pioneers of the previous three decades, but also to the activists of the twenty-first century.”



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ADELA VÁSQUEZ (THE ONLY TRANS LATINA WRITER IN THE COLLECTION) CHRONICLES GOING FROM CUBA TO SAN FRANCISCO, ARRIVING IN THE UNITED STATES AFTER THE 1980 MARIEL BOATLIFT.

Many of these pioneers are women of color, such as Luz Guerra, who helped establish major organizations such as the Austin Latina/o Lesbian and Gay Organization (ALLGO) and the National Latina/o Lesbian and Gay organization (LLEGÓ). Layers of oppression, within the “queer” and “brown” umbrellas, inspired them to work within local networks—and across international borders. Adela Vásquez (the only trans Latina writer in the collection) chronicles going from Cuba to San Francisco, arriving in the United States after the 1980 Mariel Boatlift. Seeing the lack of trans Latina representation in California’s HIV/AIDS movements, she decided to become an activist. In her essay, Laura Esquivel, considered La Madre of the LGBT movement, discusses growing up in Southern California’s



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juvenile justice system. She says, “I was highly gifted, which, in its own way, contributed to my feeling of not belonging anywhere. Not from South Pasadena, not from East L.A. Not Mexican, not white. Ni de aquí, ni de allá.”

In *Queer Brown Voices*, many of these women discuss existing within this borderland of identity, through various cultures and races—an experience Gloria Anzaldúa describes as the “Mestiza Consciousness.” For many women, activism occurred beyond state borders. For example, Chicana activist Gloria A. Ramírez describes this in her essay “The Queer Roots of the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center.”

QUEER BROWN VOICES,

A READING AND PLÁTICA ON SATURDAY, OCTOBER 10 AT 7 PM AT THE ESPERANZA CENTER

will feature queer latina/o activists who contributed testimonios to Queer Brown Voices:

Letitia Gomez, editor & contributor, *No te rajes-Don't Back Down! Daring to Be Out and Visible*



In 2009 I was inspired to collaborate with Salvador Vidal-Ortiz and Uriel Quesada on this book, primarily as a way to satisfy my personal need to document the period of LGBT Latina/o activism that I experienced in the 1980s and 1990s, la época de oro...

Our goal is to provide the reader—and especially the young LGBT Latina/o—with knowledge about the history of Latina/o LGBT activism in the last three decades of the twentieth century. Our expectation of students, scholars, and historians is that they see an opportunity to build upon our work and to contribute further to the body of evidence of LGBT latina/o activism and its positive impact on the larger LGBT latina/o community.

—Excerpt from her preface to Queer Brown Voices

Jesús Cháirez

*From the Closet to
LGBT Radio Host in
Dallas*



Luz Guerra

*Dancing at the
Crossroads: Mulata,
Mestiza, Macha,
Mujer*



Dennis Medina

*We Are a Part of
the History of Texas
That You Must Not
Exclude!*



**Gloria A.
Ramírez**

*The Queer Roots
of the Esperanza
Peace and Justice
Center*



Brad Veloz

*A South Texas
Activist in
Washington, D.C.,
Houston, and San
Antonio*



**Dulce Benavides,
facilitator**

formerly of San
Antonio was co-chair
of SALGA currently
in Washington, D.C.



**Mike Rodríguez,
facilitator**

a former activist in
San Antonio with
SALGA and the
Esperanza.



Motivated by the U.S. occupation of Central and South America, San Antonio's Esperanza Center functioned as a hub to bring together Latina lesbians, many who were single mothers, and organized resistance to U.S. imperialism in Operation Desert Storm and the invasion of Panama. Their teach-ins, art exhibitions, and cultural programs received disapproval from many white gay men and conservative right-wing groups alike. This account provides a glimpse of an intentional space for women of color and illuminates ways that white gay men have systematically worked to defund and shutdown queer women of color activists—stories of racism within queer communities that don't often get told.

"EVEN THOUGH, IN SOME MOMENTS IN TIME, WE WERE NOT ORGANIZED, IT DID NOT MEAN THAT WE DID NOT EXIST."

José Gutiérrez, founder of the Latina/o GLBT History Project, stresses the importance of Latina/o LGBT

preservation, drawing inspiration from his encounter with Sylvia Rivera during the Stonewall riots. "Our Latina/o LGBT communities have been in the United States for years," he concludes. "Even though, in some moments in time, we were not organized, it did not mean that we did not exist." He thanks many of the "anonymous heroes" who were faded-out through history. Many of these heroes are documented today through the work of young people of color and people presently active in the movement.

As editor Quesada points out, Queer Brown Voices is a "pioneering step toward a more comprehensive and inclusive history of activism, organizations... we the editors cannot claim that the entire job is done." And it's true—I want this book to be just one on a bookshelf of works documenting queer Latina/o histories. The book gazes back against heteronormative Eurocentrism, but more voices should be brought to the center and supersede gay/lesbian and Latina/o binaries. It is a major leap to disrupt and decolonize a history that is still being written.