

# Esperanza's Work In The Westside —



¿El Porqué? This Is Why!



La Gloria with its rooftop dance floor.

## Why is historic preservation in working class communities important?

—by Antonia Castañeda, PhD

We must understand, appreciate, and honor the history, culture, and structures of the Westside, whose largely Mexican American/Mexican working class community has labored mightily to make San Antonio the city it is today. Recognizing the historic cultural & social importance of working class communities begins to rectify long-lived exclusion of Westside history and culture from the public story and discourse of San Antonio. That is, what is not included in history books, or in historical preservation work of most cities, including San Antonio, is the history of low income, poor, and working class neighborhoods and people. It is the history of gente trabajadora, of gente México Americana y Mexicana, our parents, grandparents, and great-great grandparents whose labor built, and continues to build, San Antonio. While the city and state preserve homes and businesses of the rich and powerful, the homes, businesses, entertainment centers, and other structures of working class families and communities are demolished, torn-down under the guise of “dangerous struc-

tures,” or under an unexamined notion of “progress” and “economic development” that denies the importance of working class history and culture, and that refuses to consider another approach to economic development, one that accounts for and honors the history and culture of a people.

When we tear down structures that have meaning to a people who struggled to build them, whether that struggle was due to racial segregation and red-lining in real estate, as was the case in San Antonio, or whether they built it because they wanted a particular store in their neighborhood, we erase the stories, the memories, the history of a people, of a community, of a city. In doing so, we deny the future; we deny our children

and descendants, their legacy. We deny them their understanding to who they are, and their pride in being of that space, that community, that city. In my view, there is little that is more cruel or inhuman that we can do to children than to deny them their history because it leaves them without a foundation, sin raíces, sin nada.



Community protestors at the demolition. Remember La Gloria April 4, 1928 to April 1, 2002.