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## Que Ondee Sola - May 2008

Xavier Luis Burgos

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# Ambiente del Paseo



"Más Color, Más Poder"

QUE ONDEE SOLA

MAY 2008 VOL. 36 NO. 3



## XAVIER "XAVI" LUIS BURGOS

Inserting the rightful place of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Boricuas and Latinas/os in the historical narratives of our communities and in the white, male-dominated "gay community" is a constant challenge. Not only do we have to battle homophobia and transphobia in our socio-economically marginalized communities of color, but patriarchy, racism, and ignorance among our fellow LGBT people. Nonetheless, they are efforts in search for our humanization and are part of the quest for a more truthful, diverse, and complicated telling of our experiences within more generally known histories. The telling of history can never be just about dates and names, but the recreation of vivid, complex events that offers justice to those who lived it and produced it. Whether it is LGBT Boricuas and Latinas/os struggling for the rights of undocumented immigrants in the U.S., the fight against HIV/AIDS in Puerto Rico, the birth of the Gay Rights

Movement, or the Paseo Boricua Renaissance in Humboldt Park, we have been witnesses, participants, and leaders of pivotal moments in social justice and cultural and national affirmation. Like many times before, *Que Ondee Sola* has taken up the lead in covering such stories in the hope that we can reshape the telling of history.



*The photograph, taken by José Rivera, is of the statue of Puerto Rican national leader Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos in La Casita de Don Pedro on Paseo Boricua during the first fundraiser of the LGBT group, Ambiente del Paseo.*

## *“¡Más Color, Más Poder!”*

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**Editor-in-Chief & Designer**  
Xavier “Xavi” Luis Burgos

## **Staff Writers/Artists**

Myra Rodríguez  
Janeida Rivera  
Sophia López  
Eric López  
Michael Reyes Benavides  
Marcuz Erazo  
Ketty Mercedes Burgos

## **Guest Writers:**

Jonathan Rosa  
Armando Hernández

## **Que Ondee Sola**

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We appreciate and encourage suggestions and contributions.

Contact *Que Ondee Sola*  
5500 N. St. Louis Chicago, IL 60625  
**Room E-041**  
(773) 442-4583  
[queondeesola@hotmail.com](mailto:queondeesola@hotmail.com)

## **Misión**

*Que Ondee Sola* was established in 1972 and remains the oldest Puerto Rican & Latina/o university student publication in the U.S. Our mission is to provide the NEIU community with a relevant and engaging publication that deals with student issues with a focus on Puerto Ricans and Latinas/os, our communities, and our *patrias*.

*Que Ondee Sola* continues to affirm the right of Puerto Rican self-determination, freedom for all Puerto Rican political prisoners, and support for a truly participatory democracy.



# "Más Color, Más Poder"

## A LGBTQ initiative

JONATHAN ROSA

## in Humboldt Park



On Saturday, May 24, Ambiente del Paseo held a BBQ fundraiser to launch its new campaign, "Más Color, Más Poder." Ambiente is a newly formed collective recently launched by the Puerto Rican Cultural Center as one of Humboldt Park's first LGBTQ organizations. The "Más Color, Más Poder" campaign seeks to raise awareness about and combat homophobia and transphobia in the Humboldt Park community. The May 24 Fundraiser, held at La Casita de Don Pedro and dedicated to the memory of *Que Ondee Sola* writer Eric A. Rice, was a huge success.

Nearly 100 attendees of all ages enjoyed the food, music, performances by contestants in the 2008 Cacica Pageant, raffles, and statements by prominent community members and other officials. José E. Lopez, Executive Director of the Juan Antonio Corretjer Puerto Rican Cultural Center, explained the historic na-

ture of this event to the audience. While the Puerto Rican Cultural Center has a long history of supporting LGBTQ issues, homophobia and transphobia are continuing problems in the Humboldt Park community. The fact that this event was held outdoors at La Casita and attended by people of all ages, including many families, demonstrates the community support that Ambiente enjoys.

In her comments to the audience, Lourdes Lugo, Principal of Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos High School, spoke about the negative effects of homophobia and transphobia on the young people with whom she works. LGBTQ students are oftentimes the most likely to be rejected by their families and thus highly susceptible to dropping out. Rick García, Political Director of Equality Illinois, celebrated the event's success and reminded the audience of the passing of the non-discrimination bill in 2005, which prohibits discrimination in housing, employment, and public accommodations in the state of Illinois. The "Más Color, Más Poder" campaign will continue throughout 2008.

*For more information about Ambiente del Paseo, contact Janeida Rivera at the Puerto Rican Cultural Center:  
Phone: 773.342.8023  
Email: janeidar@prcc-chgo.org.*

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# Star Gay

HUÁSCAR ROBLES CARRASQUILLO



Una boda bajo las estrellas. Eso es lo que hubiéramos presenciado si Sulu se hubiese casado con Mr. Spock en el Starship Enterprise durante la serie Star Trek. Pero no. Tuvo que esperar a que el estado de California permitiera las uniones del mismo sexo.

Claro que ahora Sulu es George Takei de 71 años y con quien se casa es con su pareja por 21 años, Brad Altman, luego de que la Corte Suprema de ese estado decidiera que la prohibición de matrimonios entre parejas del mismo sexo es una práctica inconstitucional.

Y en otro universo no muy lejano, Mariela, hija de Raúl Castro presidió la demostración del Día Mundial en Contra de la Homofobia en Cuba. Líderes gubernamentales y activistas se solidarizaron en contra de la homofobia, participando en paneles y presentaciones de libros. Hasta pasaron "Brokeback Mountain" en la televisión del gobierno.

Claro está. Es la patria que vio nacer a José Lezama Lima, Reinaldo Arenas y Virgilio Piñera, iconoclastas, poetas, homosexuales sin pelos en la lengua cuando la lengua, la poesía y la prosa eran condenadas por el estado.

Es irónico pensar que mientras el universo inexorablemente se mueve hacia la igualdad social, en Puerto Rico tenemos 99 excusas para seguir vivi-

endo en la Edad Media. ¿Cómo es que la Legislatura demora en adelantar la creación de una sociedad igualitaria?

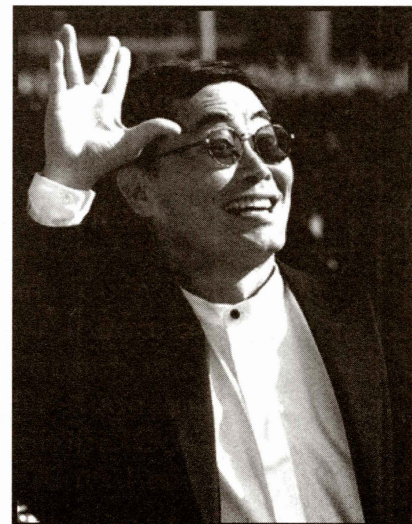
El chistecito en el "closet" es '¿que pa qué le van a dar el "break" a los homosexuales y lesbianas a casarse, para que haya más divorcios?' Pues sí, porque casarse y divorciarse es un derecho de todo el que paga impuestos.

Lo peor es que del universo de Sulus en Puerto Rico sólo una minoría abre la boca, la otra se queda en casa bebiendo, bailando y viviendo en la inopia.

Dejan al pobre abogado de Yale solito en las vistas públicas. Pues mira, un Sulu más pa' la lista.

Apunta mi nombre.

*El autor es crítico cultural y periodista.*



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# Paseo Boricua Pageant 2008

## A Historic Celebration in El Barrio

JUAN CALDERÓN

The Juan Antonio Corretjer Puerto Rican Cultural Center and *Vida/SIDA* hosted its second annual Paseo Boricua pageant. The Pageant, which was dedicated to Bartolo Hernández de Jesús, aims to develop transgendered role models within our community and demand that the Puerto Rican/ Latina/o transgender population has a voice and is respected. Only this way can our community begin to address the rampant issues of homophobia and transphobia.

On May 31, Humboldt Park residents and people from throughout the Chicagoland area, attended an event that challenges our community to re-think its paradigm of human sexuality. According to PRCC executive director, José López, "Human sexuality cannot be defined by masculinity or femininity: its profoundly human and spiritual dimensions must ultimately define it."

Paseo Boricua's very own "Latin Soul" hosted the Pageant. Each of the contestants represented a town in Puerto Rico. Contestants invested a great deal of time towards community service and a research project focused on different aspects of Puerto Rican culture. Contestants included Nena de Castro (Arecibo), Matty Rosado (Utuaedo), Shadiamond (Vieques), and Perscilla Figueroa (Lares).

Throughout the event, the crowd was delighted by several special performances.



The first was Reina Valentino, a transgendered woman and former employee of *Vida/SIDA*. Last year's queen, our first Paseo Boricua Cacica "Jade," performed the last number of her reign of 2007-2008. She is one of the first transgendered persons to challenge homopho-

Que Ondeo Solo



bia and transphobia in our community. In preparation for this year's Pageant, Jade served as a commendable mentor to each contestant, sharing her experiences and challenges as Paseo Boricua Cacica. *Nuestro Tambó*, a local *bomba y plena* group, was also present and excited the crowd with its rhythmic sound.

Additionally, pageant organizers recognized Ms. Kety, one of the first transgendered Latina/o activists in Chicago. She was visibly touched when crowned honorary queen of the pageant.

One of the most significant moments came when Mikey Sánchez, the current president of *La Casa Puertorriqueña*, joined the Puerto Rican Cultural Center and *Vida/SIDA* to make a historic stand and challenge homophobia and transphobia in the Puerto Rican community. On behalf of the Casa, Sánchez announced that pageant contestants and members of the LG-BTQ youth group, *Ambiente del Paseo*, were invited to participate in the official Downtown parade and perform during the *Fiestas Patronales*. This is quite a historic development because it will mark the first time transgender female im-

personators will perform in the festival.

Sánchez has taken a bold and courageous step by being the first president to open the doors of *La Casa* to the transgender residents. His actions and deeds speak of a leader who is not afraid to take a stand, not only, against homophobia and transphobia, but also in defense of an individual's human right to represent and express



themselves as they have defined and not how society has defined. It is the epitome of Doña Consuelo Corretjer's vision and that which has been practiced for over 35 years by the Puerto Rican Cultural Center and *Vida/SIDA* – "Live and Help to Live"

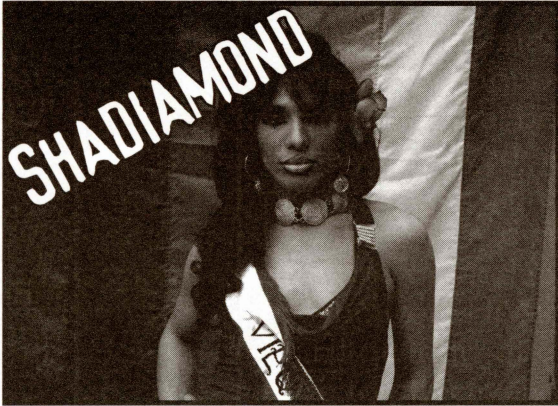
The event concluded with judges tallying their scores of each of the contestants. In the end Matty Rosado was crowned as the 2008-2009 Cacica (Queen) of Paseo Boricua and Nena de Castro as Princess.

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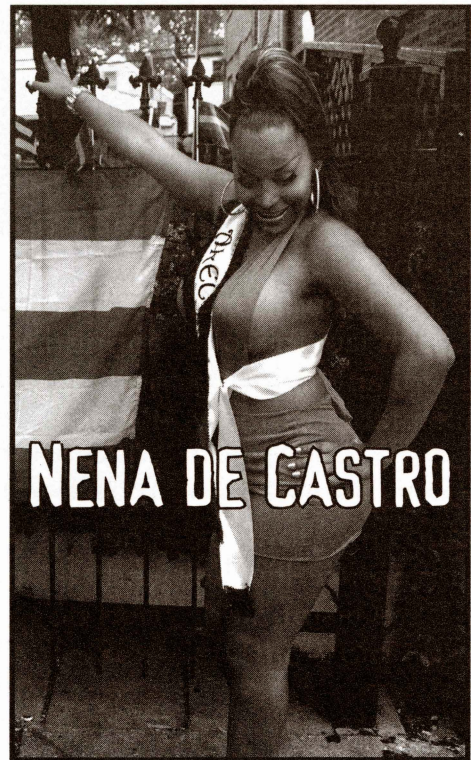
# 2nd Annual Paseo Boricua Cacica Pageant 2008

ARMANDO HERNÁNDEZ



"My name is Shadiamond and I am 23-years-old. I was born and raised in a small town in México called Tejaro in Michoacán. I moved from my homeland to Chicago in search for a better life. To me Paseo Boricua lives by a famous quote 'It takes a community to raise a child.' As a candidate of the crown, I am willing to give my support and devotion to the community."

Nena de Castro is a 27-year-old woman, coming from a poor family in Latin America. She became a strong individual who overcame not only being accepted as a transsexual but as an immigrant. She was forced to drop out of High School due to extreme harassment by her principle who was not supportive of her. She is a mentor hoping to reach young transsexuals in support of their dreams.

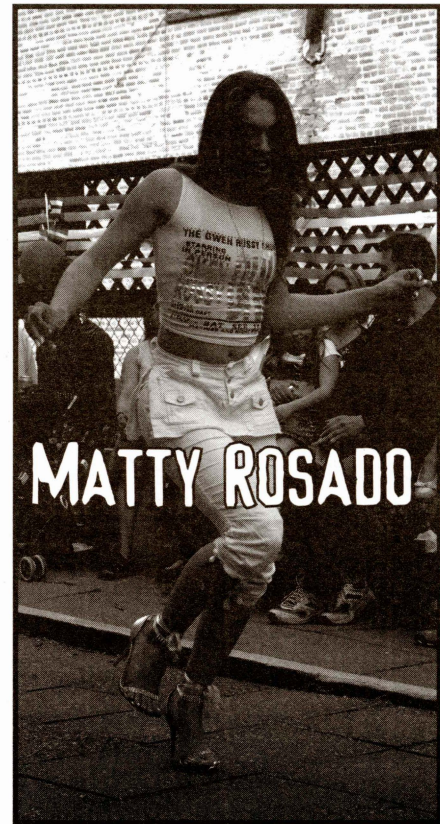






Perscella Figueroa, 20, grew up in a typical working class family, born and raised on 26th Street and Paulina. "I started transitioning [to a woman] when I was about 12 years old," she mentioned. "It just hit me! That without a doubt this is who I am and what I feel. Discrimination didn't affect Perscella until reaching High School but it wasn't only the students that showed their hatred but also the teaching staff. It took four years for Perscella to leave her surroundings and that's when she moved to Paseo Boricua 3 years ago. Living here she never felt so much acceptance while soaking in so much culture. "I want to give Paseo Boricua the same opportunity it gave me," she stated. That opportunity was a second chance not only on her education but also for a better life.

Matty Rosado, 21 was born and raised in Humboldt Park, growing-up near Kedzie and North Avenue. Her family is originally from Utuado, Puerto Rico. "I entered the pageant because I want to counter transphobia and homophobia in Humboldt Park. I want people to be open-minded about gay people."





# Slogans and Silences

JONATHAN ROSA

A few days ago I was having a telephone conversation with my mother about some of the upcoming LGBTQ Latin@ events that I am helping to organize. She is always interested in learning about these initiatives and keeping up to date on the identity lingo. After I came out to her three years ago, it took her some time to transition from referring to me as a "homosexual" to "gay." When she described me as a homosexual (with the best of intentions), I felt like a scientific specimen. Similarly, as a White Canadian woman who married a Puerto Rican man, she had to learn how to conceptualize ethnoracial categories that her racial privilege might have otherwise allowed her to ignore. She is now sensitive to contexts in which "Hispanic," "Spanish," "Puerto Rican," and "Latina/o" have highly disparate connotative qualities. What is interesting to me about these categorical differences (e.g., "Spanish" vs. "Hispanic" vs. "Puerto Rican" vs. "Latina/o" and "Homosexual" vs. "Gay" vs. "LGBTQ") is that they highlight the tensions between inclusion and particularity. That is, how might we conceptualize these identities so as to achieve maximal inclusion without ignoring the particular experiences of individuals who are grouped under such categorical umbrellas?

During the aforementioned conversation with my mother, I rattled off the letters "LGBTQ" without thinking twice.

She asked me to slow down and explain each letter. As I began to unpack this acronym with her, I started to think about the ways in which LGBTQ has the dangerous potential to operate merely as a catch-phrase, a commercial slogan. There is certainly a great deal to be gained from situating lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/transsexual, and queer/questioning alongside one another within a broader conceptual framework for understanding sexuality. The problem is that the LGBTQ community has its own internal system of privileges and marginalizations – stresses and silences. There is a certain false equivalence suggested by LGBTQ, as though lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered/transsexual, and queer/questioning people were all similarly stigmatized by normative sexual policies, practices, institutions, and ideologies. Yet, many gay, lesbian, bisexual, and queer/questioning people are blind to the privileges they hold as compared to many transgender/transsexual people. This is just one of many structures of sexual privilege. By continually drawing attention to and calling into question the legitimacy of these types of privileges, we will better equip ourselves to challenge the deleterious effects of normative sexuality.

This past fall, Sebastián Jose Colón-Otero, a Puerto Rican trans activist and community organizer, provided the keynote address at the "Fuertes Palabras"



conference at the Center on Halsted. After the conference, Colón-Otero toured Paseo Boricua and learned about some of the community initiatives taking place in Humboldt Park. Colón-Otero challenged us to think about sexual privilege in new ways. He suggested that trans issues are often overlooked within LGBTQ initiatives. Many trans people do not enjoy taken-for-granted privilege of using a public bathroom. Colón-Otero has also spearheaded efforts to ease the process of changing one's name. The conversion of fundamental aspects of life, such as using the bathroom and having a name, into privileges that are unequally distributed based on gender and sexuality, is a testament to the work that must be done to identify these limitations and frame them as human rights issues.

Note that this system of privileges and silences is not unique to LGBTQ issues. Just this past weekend, I overheard a striking interaction between a man and a woman in the checkout line of a general store. He explained to her that, although he has dark skin and most people think he is African American, he is in fact Cuban and Indian (as in the South Asian country). The brown-skinned woman, who identified herself as Puerto Rican, laughed out loud at his description of himself. The possibility that he was Cuban was just plain silly to her. This is despite the fact that his phenotype is utterly common in Cuba. This man's identity is unthinkable within the contemporary regime of ethnoracial thought. The great irony is that this brown-skinned Puerto Rican woman, clearly imagines herself entirely outside of Blackness. The prob-

lem is that this woman's ideas are by no means exceptional. Many of the students whom I have taught at the elementary, high school, and university levels have a hard time imagining that ethnoracial categories are not nearly as straightforward as their everyday usages might suggest. These routinized understandings of race and ethnicity are linked to a broader cultural formation that silences countless historical relationships and contemporary systems of privilege alike. In as much as categories such as Black and Latina/o are understood as mutually exclusive, countless lives, histories, and experiences are relegated to a subterranean status – constantly shaping the social world from beneath the realm of consciousness and critical examination.

These examples of power and privilege should challenge us to examine the ways in which silences that lurk beneath the broader cultural purview continually reproduce relations of marginalization and stigmatization. By subjecting umbrella categories such as LGBTQ and Latina/o to careful analysis, we can develop strategies for the achievement of solidarity and the recognition of particularity. Such an effort would work to anchor the everyday usage of these categorical slogans in the histories of struggle out of which they emerged, while simultaneously challenging the silences that were characteristic of those struggles.

*The author is a PhD Candidate in Linguistic and Sociocultural Anthropology at the University of Chicago. He is teaching Sociology 104 Schools and Society this fall at NEIU*

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# LGBT Contingent

## Rallies on May Day

SOPHIA LÓPEZ

A visible queer presence participated in this year's May Day rally. Organizations like Amigas Latinas, Orgullo En Acción, the Association of Latin Men for Action, and the Gay Liberation Network had issued a call for LGBT communities to join the immigration rights march.

Members of Northeastern Illinois University's GLBT club, Alpha Psi Lambda, and others gathered under Rainbow Flags. The university has a sizeable population of undocumented students and the issue of comprehensive immigration reform plays center stage in many of their lives.

Officials estimated the crowd at around 15,000 but some activists say it was much larger. Still, the numbers are fewer than the May Day march last year. The rash of deportations and rallies in the aftermath of previous marches has instilled a climate of fear for the undocumented. This year's march had a larger youth presence. Many are the children of immigrants who had marched in previous years.

The LGBTQ presence consisted largely of non-immigrants. Although queers had been a part of previous

May Day immigration rallies, this was the first time queer groups had issued a call-out to organize under rainbow flags. Some marched with groups like the March 10 Movement, while others marched under the official queer block.

The primary issue for queer immigrants is the estimated 36,000 same-sex bi-national couples, where one is a U.S. citizen and the other is a foreign national. Such couples are split apart after a partner's immigration visa expires or are deported. Efforts are being spent trying to pass a federal law that would allow a gay or lesbian U.S. citizen to sponsor their partner for legal residency. Currently, only heterosexual couples are allowed this privilege.

LGBT activists have felt unwelcome in





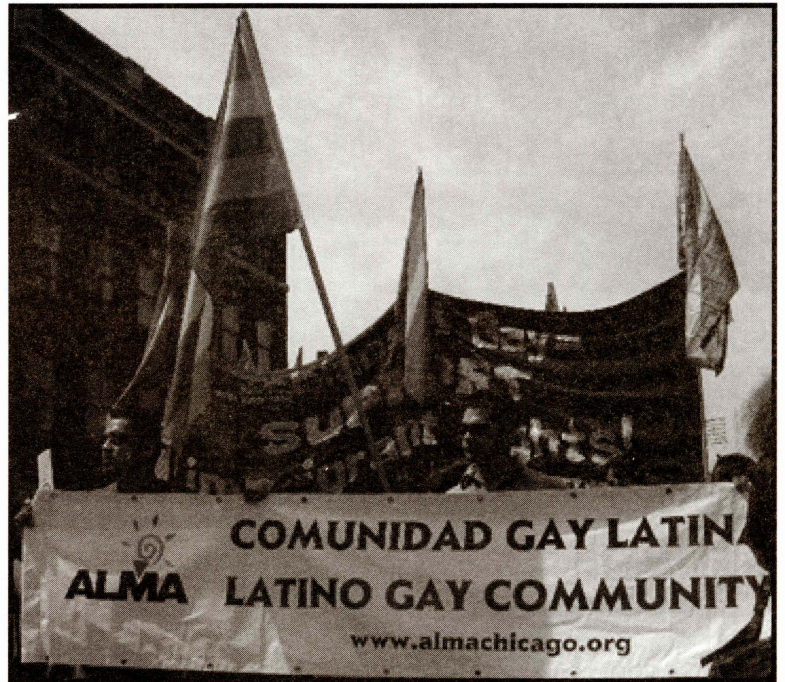
previous May Day marches. They have felt ostracized by mainstream immigration rights groups. Last December, local activists launched a Global Gays Initiative to highlight immigration concerns unique to their community. They also want to provide legal services and other kinds of assistance to gays and lesbians.

The Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights has begun dialogue with these activists. Joshua Hoyt, the organization's director, said, "We are learning about the issues in the LGBT community and want to make sure that our immigration laws are humane for those communities and respect their basic human dignity as well." The main argument for immigration reform is based on an appeal to traditional family values, and this complicates how mainstream organizations fight for gay and lesbian rights.

The "Uniting American Families Act" would end the specific form of discrimination that bi-national same-sex couples face, but none of the presidential candidates are supporting it. Indeed, comprehensive immigration reform is not a priority for any of the presidential candidates. Activist Andy Thayer, from Gay Liberation Network, notes that Barack Obama has appropriated the immigration slogan "Sí, se puede," but is simultaneously supporting building a fence on the southern border. "That is crass opportunism at its worst," he says.

LGBT activists are also working to de-

feat a plan proposed by the Department of Homeland Security which would make regulations for HIV-related immigration cases. It would require foreigners to prove they have private health insurance and carry all their anti-retroviral medication necessary during their stay in the U.S. There is currently a 20-year ban that keeps HIV-positive immigrants from entering the U.S. unless they prove they are not a public health



risk or a drain on the nation's resources.

Last year, the death of Victoria Arellano brought to light the problem of inadequate medical treatment in deportation facilities, especially for HIV-positive immigrants. She was an HIV-positive undocumented transgendered woman who died of complications of AIDS because she was denied access to medication. The U.S. is one

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# Finding My Identity as a

MYRA RODRÍGUEZ

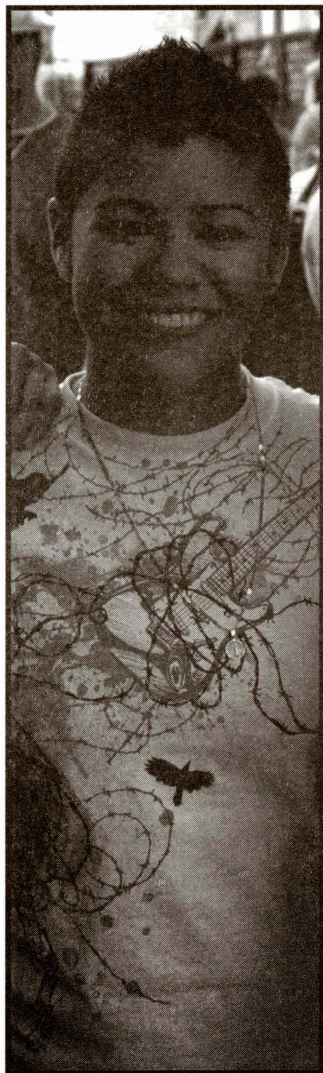
# Latina Lesbian

"To survive under goodgirlism, a woman undergoes a major displacement or disconnection inside her own self" (Dávila 64). It was very clear to me what role I was expected to play as a young Latina growing up in a Puerto Rican/Guatemalan household. My

struggle within the household involved the patriarchal structure that was stitched into the very clothes I wore, the soap I used to wash dishes, and the way I learned to present myself to family and friends. The rules were never written down for me but I knew them well. My mother established herself in the life of domesticity and child rearing, even though I always knew there were dreams underlying her exterior contentment. My

father worked as a mechanic for long hours to bring home the bacon. I recall memories of having a tool belt toy set and wanting to be like my father, a mechanic. My mother would respond, "Boys do that. Don't you want to be a teacher or a nurse?" I realized then that I would have to hide my desires from my family and friends because what I wanted didn't fit into what a girl should want. Everyday the role I should play was reinforced in my life - from *novelas* (Spanish-language soap operas), to my interactions with my father and boys, to having my mother dictate my behavior - there were countless lessons that taught me not to be myself. I became isolated and made my time productive through schoolwork. I felt a large disconnect from my parents, my friends, and my own self. I was expected to conform by wearing tight clothes, doing my hair, and trying to be attracted to boys. These were the things that I hated the most, but had to do. Ultimately, I was being taught to suppress my desires and embody everyone else's delusions of what my life should be. My life took a turn when I began acknowledging my attraction to women. Finding my true identity would become one of the most difficult things for me.

I was isolated in sex education classes,



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being too fearful to ask, "How does it work for lesbians?" Our class discussions were framed around the assumption that all people are heterosexual. I began to internalize the sexism, homophobia, and gender roles. I truly believed that I was socially deviant because I was different. I wanted to wear men's clothes, sit with my legs open, play sports, kiss a girl, have a job that could be dangerous and get me dirty, and have my voice count in discussions. Yet, I learned that all the things I wanted were not feasible to me. I believed that I would be punished if I did not change my ways.

After confessing to my mother that I was a lesbian she responded, "Are you not afraid of God?" I glance at pictures that document my presence within the church. My Baptism, my Communion, and my *Quinceañera* were moments that I believed were lies. I had no place within the church because homosexuality is a sin. I recall praying at night to be able to change and be normal. When that didn't work I turned away from God. "Religion, based on the tradition of patriarchal control and sexual, emotional, and psychological repression, has historically been a dual means of hope for a better afterlife and social control in the present one" (Trujillo 425). I soon learned that my culture's religion sanctioned misogyny, racism, patriarchy, and sexism. Women in the Bible were voiceless and men were in the spotlight. Women were invisible, which is still a problem to this day. Coming to the realization that my religion would offer no kind of solution for what

I thought was my illness, I fell further into isolation, alcohol, and self-hatred.

These were my experiences growing up as a young Puerto Rican lesbian. It was a long process of discovering an identity that I was socialized to suppress. I reached a point in my life where escapism was my only option. To venture out, drink, and go clubbin' were things I believed I had to do because I was a lesbian. The feeling of not being sufficiently human was present everyday. In addition to my sexuality, I also had to deal with what it meant to be a woman of color. I had to ask myself, why are things the way they are in our society and who is benefiting? Since birth we are dressed in cute pink outfits with pretty bows, our hair tied in perfectly made pigtails. Expected to be sweet and gentle, never playing rough because we can break easily, we are given dolls instead. Entering the teenage years we are taught to be good girls and save ourselves until marriage, assuming that we will fall in love with a man, get married, have children, and be good housewives. This is what is expected of young Latina girls who grow up to be Latina women. What happens when we do not fit into any of the categories with which our families and communities present us? As a Latina woman who identifies as a lesbian, I interrupt the order of a traditional way of living within a Latina/o community. Male dominance, religion, gender roles, sexism and all other expectations that Latina/o families and communities have for women, disrupt a Latina lesbian's existence.

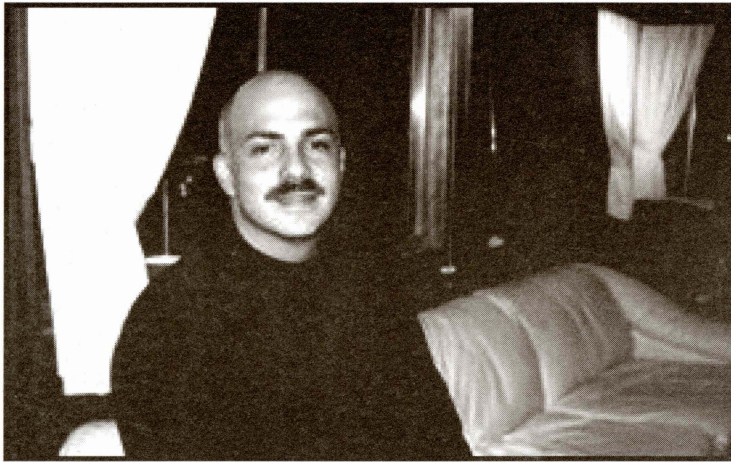
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# Strengthening the Spirit

## Rafael Otero Rivera leads the fight

DEMETRIO ROLDÁN **against HIV in Puerto Rico**



Rafael Otero-Rivera is a man whose strength and dedication are truly inspirational. His work and leadership in the field of HIV prevention and services for those who are HIV+ have benefited and helped thousands of people in his homeland of Puerto Rico. He has worked with many agencies, including his present position as the vice president for the Fundación SIDA de Puerto Rico.

Currently living in Bayamón, Puerto Rico, 39-year-old Rafael organizes public policy around HIV prevention in Puerto Rico's LGBT community as well as the general community. He is also on the National Community Prevention Planning Group (CPG), a group dedicated to the prevention of HIV in Puerto Rico.

Rafael came out at the tender age of 18, which was very young at the time.

"But even when I was in the closet, I tried to dismantle it!" he says. Rafael was lucky enough to have full support from his family after he came out. "After coming out to my parents, they became my life," he says. "They supported me because they knew that I had found my identity and that I knew who I was. But it wasn't easy. My family was very religious and my dad was a captain in the National Guard, so both of those issues made it difficult for me to come out. We had psychologist and psychiatrist appointments, but in reality, even though I attended, I knew it wasn't for me. It was more for my family who needed to deal with the fact that they had a gay son."

In the 20 years since he has come out, Rafael says he has witnessed many positive changes for Puerto Rico's gay community. "When I first came out, there were very few gay places that existed. Most people in Puerto Rico were very 'macho.' That has softened over the years with America's influence, though we continue to be somewhat 'macho.' In years past, there were no streets where we could walk and hold a partner's hand, but now there are some areas where you can, and it doesn't matter to other people.



Before, when they called us names on the street, we had to hide. Now we respond. We've realized that we have a space and a right to be who we are."

Rafael continues, "I think all of these changes have come because of HIV. It has helped us to strengthen our community emotionally and educationally. We have learned that if we don't defend ourselves, no one else will—no one else will speak up for us."

HIV certainly changed Rafael's life. After he was diagnosed as HIV-positive 11 years ago, he became inspired to get closely involved with the issue. He explains, "When I first found out I was HIV+, I dealt with my own personal issues, but I also saw a need for all those in the country who were HIV+ and gay. I felt that I, as an HIV+ individual, could use my experience to effectively spread the prevention message to the community in general."

Though Rafael says the HIV situation in Puerto Rico has improved, the problem is far from being resolved. Rafael explains, "The biggest problem (with regards to HIV) is with drug abuse through injection because many people are sharing needles. There is one organization that has begun to offer needle exchanges and that has been successful. As for the gay community, the numbers aren't as high. A bigger problem is actually among young people—both straight and gay. They seem to feel as if they don't need prevention. It's almost as if they are saying to the older people, 'You had the opportunity to practice unsafe sex, and now I want that opportunity. too.'"

Rafael is very concerned for the youth. His advice to young gay individuals is, "To strengthen yourselves emotionally because even though we've moved forward, it continues to be a difficult process to be a young gay person—especially coming out. They need to focus on education. In Puerto Rico, if you don't have an educational background, you don't have the capacity to succeed in life. It's easy for the community to ostracize you. This occurs regardless of orientation. I'd say young people need to defend their space because the older vanguard movement is not there. They need to pick up where we left off."

And for those out there who are HIV+, or who have just been diagnosed with HIV, Rafael encourages them to find a community of support in order to build strength. "First, an individual must strengthen himself emotionally," he says. "Through my own experience as an HIV+ individual, I understand that. It's necessary to be compliant with medications to strengthen one's immune system. One needs to develop a support network. I feel it is important for people to participate in support groups—I was in one for three years. Support groups help you grow and strengthen all aspects of a person's life—not just dealing with HIV. The support group I was involved with was great. We went to Costa Rica to run a facilitator's training. We also produced and wrote a play based on our experiences and lives so that we could share our experiences with other gay HIV+ individuals and their families. These activities strengthen the spirit and the will to survive."

Que Ondeé Sola



# 'Mother of the Nation,' Poet and Lesbian?

## Gabriela Mistral of Chile Re-Examined

LARRY ROHTER, NEW YORK TIMES, JUNE 4, 2003

Nearly a half-century after Gabriela Mistral's death, her presence can still be felt almost everywhere in Chile. There is probably no town in this country that does not have a street, square or school named for her, the first Latin American to win the Nobel Prize for literature, and her poems and essays have long been part of the school curriculum.

But "the mother of the nation," as Mistral is often called here because of her poems for and about children, is now the focus of a controversy that is forcing a re-examination of her life and work. The recent publication of her private journals shows that she had a love-hate relationship with Chile, while a biography and a film project argue that part of her ambivalence stemmed from what is described as her lesbianism.

"Mistral is a legend and a myth," Jaime Quezada, the scholar who edited "Blessed Be My Tongue," a 290-page selection from her journals, said in an interview here. "She is part of our national patrimony, and everyone thinks that they know her. But the paradox is that only now are we beginning to have a direct and truthful relationship with her work."

An even greater paradox is that most of Mistral's six books of poetry were published abroad before appearing here,

where they received mixed reviews. In the newly issued journals and notebooks, she wonders why "nobody in Chile likes me," in contrast with Pablo Neruda, a younger poet and future Nobel laureate whose work she had championed. She repeatedly expresses exasperation with the conservatism and indifference of Chilean society.

"Chile has no brains or common sense yet, it has no maturity," she wrote in one typical entry. "I pray for it."

Born Lucila Godoy Alcayaga in 1889, Mistral began writing as a child and took her pen name from a French poet when her first collection, "Death Sonnets," was published in 1914. At first she earned a precarious living as a teacher, transferring from one remote rural school to another. Later she became headmistress of a prestigious private girls' school here in the capital.

"I lived in isolation from an illiterate society whose daughters I educated and which disdained me as badly dressed and badly coiffed," she complains in one journal entry.

Mistral left Chile in 1922 and in a sense never returned, even after the awarding of the Nobel in 1945 finally brought her acclaim at home. After working in



Mexico in a government educational reform program, she joined the Chilean diplomatic service, spending the rest of her career as a consul in Spain, Italy, Portugal, Brazil, Mexico and the United States, visiting Chile only three times. She died on Long Island in 1957.

Since her death, Mistral's image has been remade and manipulated, especially during the military dictatorship of Gen. Augusto Pinochet, which went so far as to put her face on the currency's highest denomination note at that time. In the 1970's and 80's, she was packaged as a symbol of social order and submission to authority, "a uterus birthing children for the motherland" in the memorable phrase of the writer Diamela Eltit.

"After the 1973 coup, Mistral and her religiosity were used against Neruda and his atheism," said Luis Vargas Saavedra, a leading Mistral scholar and a professor of Latin American literature at the Catholic University of Chile. "Any time an official representation of Chilean culture was needed, it was Mistral and not Neruda to whom they turned."

Since the return of democracy in 1990, Mistral and Neruda have enjoyed roughly equal official status here. But to a generation of young Chilean readers she seems a fusty spinster, the antithesis of the eternally hip and contemporary Neruda, whose poems have recently been set to music by pop, rap and heavy metal groups and issued on a best-selling CD called "The Mariner on Land."

Mistral's admirers argue that she remains relegated to that status because even today the official curriculum stresses the poems she wrote for and about children, many with echoes of lullabies or nursery rhymes. Her more complex, dense or disturbing poems are largely left out, as are her political essays, in which she often takes internationalist and feminist positions that were unusual for their time.

"The worst enemy of Gabriela Mistral in Chile has been the Ministry of Education and the teachers' union," Dr. Vargas Saavedra said.

Despite her close identification with



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motherhood and children, especially those who were indigenous or disenfranchised, Mistral never married or had children. Throughout her life she was trailed by rumors that she was a lesbian, and one passage in the journals reveals her resentment at that.

"About Chile, the less said the better," she wrote. "They've even hung this silly lesbianism on me, which wounds me in a way that I can't even put into words. Have you ever seen so big a falsehood?"

But in "A Queer Mother for the Nation: The State and Gabriela Mistral" (University of Minnesota Press) Licia Fiol-Matta, an assistant professor of Spanish and Latin American Cultures at Barnard College, argues that "Mistral was a closet lesbian" and that her posthumous "consecration as a celibate, saintly, suffering heterosexual national icon" is at odds with the reality of her life and work.

"Although hard documentation of her sexuality simply does not exist, it is quite possible that Mistral's exile was in part sexual," Dr. Fiol-Matta said. "Certainly, the assumption of the schoolteacher's image resonated with her need for self-protection when she was in Chile."

The appearance of the Fiol-Matta book comes as a Chilean director-screenwriter team based in Mexico have announced plans to make a movie of Mistral's life in which her American secretary is to be portrayed as her lover. "Gabriela Mistral was completely and totally a lesbian and spoke and wrote from that vantage point," the screenwriter, Francisco Casas, a former member of a gay arts collective here, said.

But the project has been heavily criticized in Chile. The government arts agency has turned down a request for financing, and a mayor in Mistral's home area in the Elqui Valley has warned that he will do everything to prevent the filmmakers from shooting there. "We are not going to permit them to attack one of Chile's greatest cultural references," the mayor, Lorenzo Torres, said.

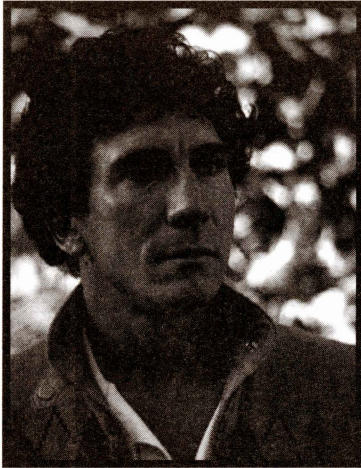
Volodia Teitelboim, the Chilean author of the biography on which the screenplay is partly based, has also complained about the movie, saying he "could find no proof" of Mistral's lesbianism. He described the film as an attempt to "besmirch the memory of a great Chilean and Latin American woman."

When asked about the dispute, Dr. Vargas Saavedra said: "You cannot say that Mistral is a lesbian writer. In all of her work, there is not a single text in which she presents herself as such."

As if to undermine the claims that Mistral was a lesbian, the love letters she exchanged with a married male poet while a young woman are to be published here later this year. But at the same time, the literary detectives are hard at work in their search for new material that can clarify the question of Mistral's sexual orientation and the impact it may have had on her poetry.

"That one reference in the journals was the first and only time I found a reflection on or complaint about this issue of lesbianism," said Dr. Quezada, who is also a director of the Gabriela Mistral Foundation. "But there are a lot of letters still out there."





*Reinaldo Arenas was born in Holguín, Cuba in 1943, raised by his mother, grandparents, and many aunts in a small, straw-thatched home. He would migrate to La Habana as a teenager and witnessed the Cuban Revolution of 1959. Facing persecution as an openly gay writer, he would write many books, plays, and poetry detailing his experiences. Some of his most notable works are Singing from the Well, Before Night Falls and Color of Summer. He died in New York City in 1990.*

al poeta enamorado de la luna,  
no tuvo más fortuna que el espanto;  
y fue suficiente pues como no era un santo  
sabía que la vida es riesgo o abstinencia,  
que toda gran ambición es gran demencia  
y que el más sordido horror tiene su encanto.  
Vivió para vivir que es ver la muerte  
como algo cotidiano a la que apostamos  
un cuerpo espléndido o toda nuestra suerte.  
Supo que lo mejor es aquello que dejamos  
-precisamente porque nos marchamos-.  
Todo lo cotidiano resulta aborrecible,  
sólo hay un lugar para vivir, el imposible.  
Conoció la prisión, el ostracismo,  
el exilio, las múltiples ofensas  
típicas de la vileza humana;  
pero siempre lo escoltó cierto estoicismo  
que le ayudó a caminar por cuerdas tensas  
o a disfrutar del esplendor de la mañana.  
Y cuando ya se bamboleaba surgía una ventana  
por la cual se lanzaba al infinito.  
No quiso ceremonia, discurso, duelo o grito,  
ni un túmulo de arena donde reposase el esqueleto  
(ni después de muerto quiso vivir quieto).  
Ordenó que sus cenizas fueran lanzadas al mar  
donde habrán de fluir constantemente.  
No ha perdido la costumbre de soñar:  
espera que en sus aguas se zambulla algún adolescente.

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# The Stonewall Riots

PAMELA SKILLINGS

## New York's Stonewall is a Landmark in Gay History

The Stonewall is an unassuming little bar in Manhattan's West Village that has become a true landmark in gay history. More than 35 years ago, the New York gay community rose up here in a riot that sparked the modern gay rights movement.

It looked like it was over. But the next night, the crowd returned, even larger than the night before. For two hours, protesters rioted in the street outside of the Stonewall Inn until the police sent a riot-control squad to disperse the crowd.

### THE STONEWALL RIOTS

In the summer of 1969, the New York gay activist movement was born when a group of gay New Yorkers made a stand against raiding police officers at The Stonewall Inn, a popular gay bar in the Village. In those days, gay bars were regularly raided by the police. But on June 27, 1969, the patrons of The Stonewall Inn had had enough.

As the police raided the bar, a crowd of four hundred patrons gathered on the street outside and watched the officers arrest the bartender, the doorman, and a few drag queens.

The crowd, which eventually grew to an estimated 2000 strong, was fed up.

Something about that night ignited years of anger at the way police treated gay people. Chants of "Gay Power!" echoed in the streets. Soon, beer bottles and trash cans were flying.

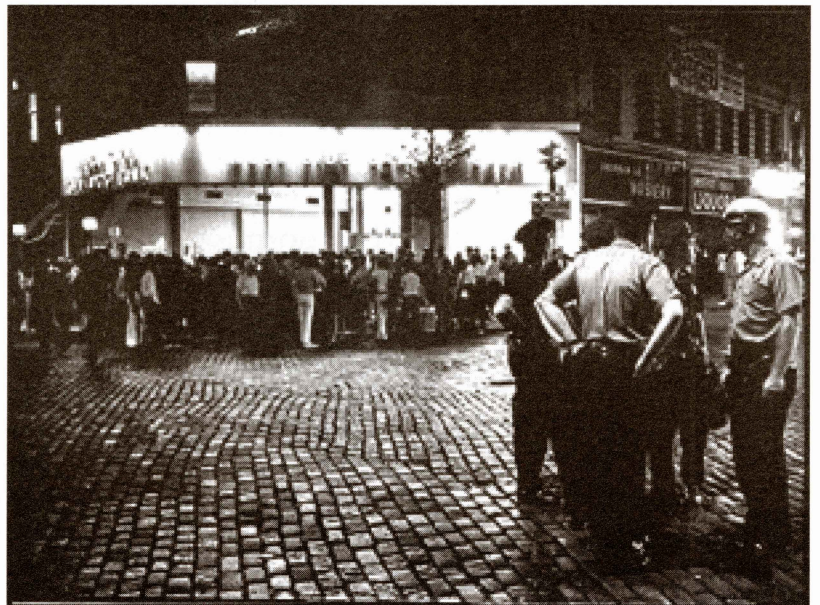
Police reinforcements arrived and beat the crowd away.

On the first night alone, 13 people were arrested and four police officers were injured. At least two rioters were said to be severely beaten by the police and many more sustained injuries.

The following Wednesday, approximately 1000 protesters returned to continue the protest and march on Christopher Street. A movement had begun.

### THE STONEWALL LEGACY

Stonewall turned out to be a pivotal moment in the gay rights movement. It

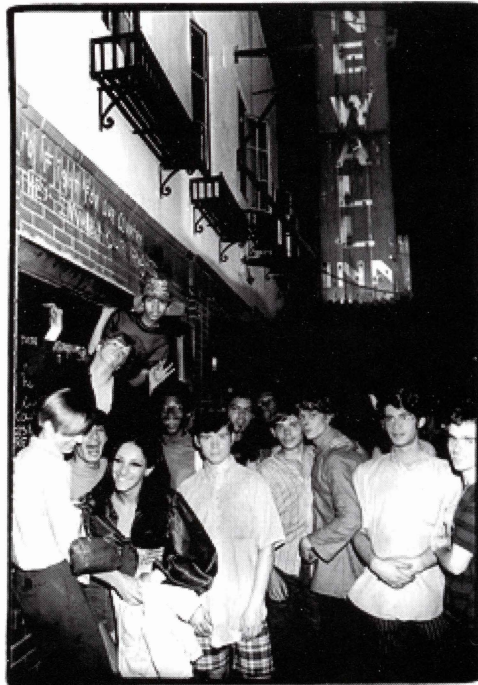




united the gay community in New York in the fight against discrimination. The following year, a march was organized in commemoration of the Stonewall Riots and between 5,000 and 10,000 men and women attended the march.

In honor of Stonewall, many gay pride celebrations around the world are held during the month of June, including New York City's Pride Week.

Today, the Stonewall bar is once again a favorite gay night spot in New York City. Occupying part of the original Stonewall Inn, the bar hosts plenty of locals and out-of-towners aiming to pay tribute to a gay New York landmark.



### Continued from page 13

of 13 countries that forbid HIV-positive people from immigrating to the country.

Activists are looking for solidarity among queers and immigrants. Knowing that oftentimes the queer community is white-dominated, they stress the importance of having a greater number of queer immigrant leaders. They also know the importance of affirming both a Latino and queer identity. Multiple systems of oppression exist and this movement, activists say, carries a "multi-issue agenda."

Tricky for LGBT activists is participating in a movement with groups that carry conservative views when it comes to sexual orientation, including the Catholic Church. Still, they say that true comprehensive immigration reform includes the rights of LGBT people. Activists argue that it is in the direct interest of LGBT people to

demand asylum laws so that gays fleeing oppression can find a safe haven in the United States. Moreover, both LGBT and undocumented immigrants have been targets of hate and discrimination.

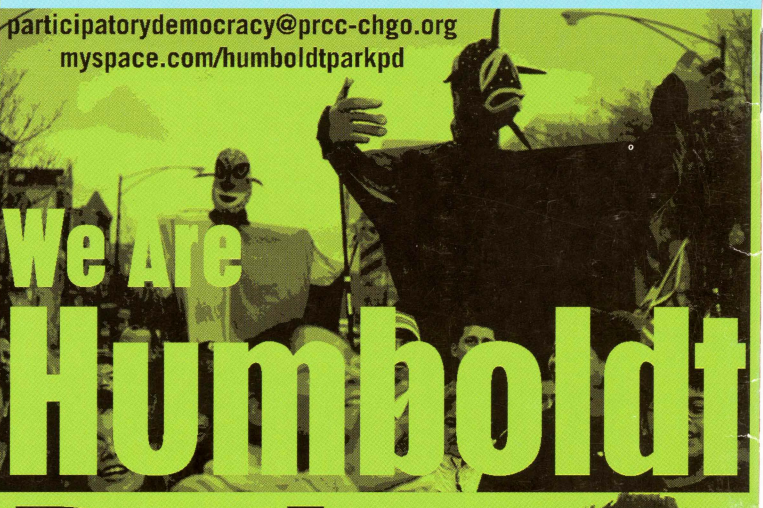
Activists note that many who label undocumented immigrants as "illegal" miss the point. They ask if the laws themselves are moral. They ask people to remember the morality of Jim Crow laws as well as the legality of sodomy laws. These activists caution taking labels at face value and point to the importance of supporting reforms that champion human equality.

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participatorydemocracy@prcc-chgo.org  
myspace.com/humboldtsparkpd

participatorydemocracy@prcc-chgo.org  
myspace.com/humboldtsparkpd



**We Are  
Humboldt  
Park**

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**¡NO SE  
VENDE!**

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