



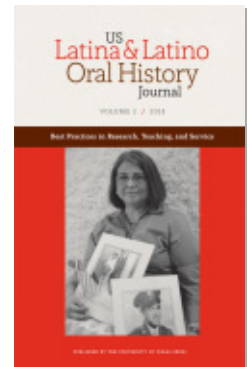
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*Queer Brown Voices: Personal Narratives of Latina/o LGBT
Activism* ed. by Uriel Quesada, Letitia Gomez, and Salvador
Vidal Ortiz (review)

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York City. Scholars should note it during today's divisive political scenario, as it is an exemplary work reflecting on how interracial collaboration could contribute to sociocultural developments and improved living conditions.

Queer Brown Voices: Personal Narratives of Latina/o LGBT Activism

edited by Uriel Quesada, Letitia Gomez, and Salvador Vidal Ortiz

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REVIEWED BY LISA CRUCES

The prevailing assumption that the struggle for equality by the LGBTQ community was a united and uniform one is dispelled by the fourteen narratives included in *Queer Brown Voices: Personal Narratives of Latina/o LGBT Activism*. Edited by Uriel Quesada, an academic, Letitia Gomez, an organizer and activist, and Salvador Vidal-Ortiz, another academic, *Queer Brown Voices* brings together personal essays, *testimonios* (first-person accounts), and edited oral histories focused on the United States and Puerto Rico in the 1980s and 1990s, considered by many in the LGBTQ community to have been “la época de oro” (Uriel Quesada 2015, ix). Contributors to the anthology come from various geographic locations, but the book emphasizes their respective activism, lived experiences, and contributions in the United States and Puerto Rico. Steered by an intersectional framework, Quesada, Gomez, and Vidal-Ortiz elevate the voices of lesbians and gay men to present the complex inner strife and schisms that existed in both the LGBTQ and the Latina/o communities in the United States throughout the later part of the twentieth century. Female contributors such as Luz Guerra, Laura M. Esquivel, Mona Noriega, and Gloria A. Ramirez, among others, articulate the internal struggles of queer individuals managing multiple identities: woman, daughter, mother, and activist in the context of the 1980s and 1990s when a still-mysterious epidemic later to be identified as HIV/AIDS began to sweep the country. In their own words and voices, female and male contributors address the layers of oppression experienced by gay, lesbian, and trans individuals living in the United States who also happened to be Latina/o. The respective authors, each in his or her own way, express feelings of invisibility and of being a minority within a minority, not fitting into the larger LGBTQ agenda of the times as a result of the complex realities they faced as Latina/os, such as immigration status, socioeconomic

status, sexism, and cultural ties. A prevailing theme throughout each chapter is the authors' struggle to be their complete selves.

For example, Dennis Medina, a South Texas-born activist and founder of the Gay and Lesbian Hispanic Unidos (GLHU) in Houston, and later the National Latino/a Lesbian and Gay Organization (LLEGÓ), recounts the racist and sexist tactics of the predominately white male gay community of Houston to exclude Latina/os from gay bars in the gay-friendly enclave of the Montrose. Often policies of no open-toed shoes were disproportionately enforced, with the intention of excluding women or Latina/os. Another practice was requiring two to three forms of ID to be granted entrance. Other accounts such as that of Puerto Rican Moisés Agosto-Rosario illuminates the difficulties and exclusion of Latina/os in the early years of AIDS treatment and medical care. HIV-positive himself, Agosto-Rosario recounts the lack of funding allocations and culturally competent resources available to HIV-positive Latina/os, as well as his trajectory as a leader in health care and patient advocacy for Latina/os.

Queer Brown Voices is a much-needed primer on the complex history of Latina/o queer people. Each chapter is presented as either an edited oral history or autobiography and chronicles one individual's experience: their early lives, coming out, and participation in creating social change. Though not trained as oral historians, the editors do an exceptional job crafting a text accessible to a broad audience, both academic and nonacademic. The editors intentionally commit to a storytelling approach for presenting the personal narratives and oral histories. Though acknowledging and accepting of some instances of contradiction, the editors also corroborated oral histories using archival records. It is also important to note that Quesada, Gomez, and Vidal-Ortiz took it upon themselves to do what many archives and historians have failed to do: preserve the stories of the diverse LGBTQ communities and the multifaceted implications of the AIDS crisis across America. Not until recently did archives and historians begin collecting and examining the history of LGBTQ movements and the actors in it. As contributor José Gutiérrez in his personal essay titled "We Must Preserve Our Latina/o LGBT History" states: "Even though, in some moments in time, we were not organized, it did not mean we did not exist. We were at Stonewall; we were in San Francisco before Stonewall. But we lack documentation of our presence as LGBT Latina/os." Unfortunately, many stories and archives will never be recovered due to the devastation of the AIDS epidemic, an important fact recognized by the editors and contributors. Documenting this era and participants in it is also made difficult due to the stigma and censorship associated with the material history (documents, posters, newsletters, photographs, and ephemera) of gays, lesbians, and queer-identifying people. Forced to live in the shadows, it is not a surprise but a tragedy that LGBTQ communities have largely been omitted from the cultural record. Combining archival research and oral history methodology, *Queer*

Brown Voices attempts to fill this void in the canon of dominant LGBTQ history and beautifully constructs a constellation of lived experiences with the tools of oral history and the tradition of *testimonio*.