

Latino/Hispanic Heroes of the LGBT Community

Included in this document are several biographies of LGBT heroes of Latino/Hispanic heritage. There is also a timeline of LGBT Latino/Hispanic history in the United States.

PURPOSE

to learn from the diverse stories of extraordinary Latino/Hispanic people who have made significant contributions to American life and culture.

ACTIVITY

Read the 9 portraits and examine the details of the story. Then generate discussion about the heroes.

Some potential themes to explore, with discussion questions:

DIVERSITY

- Why does GLSEN celebrate Latino/Hispanic history month?
- Does the list of heroes reflect the diversity of the community/population being celebrated during the month?
- Are there similarities between the heroes? What themes, qualities or traits do you notice?

HEROIC QUALITIES

- Why do you think each individual is selected as a hero?
- What makes a person a hero?
- Do any of the heroes surprise you? Why or why not?

RACE/ETHNICITY

- How do you think the hero's ethnicity or race impact their story?
- How might being an LGBT person who is also Latino/Hispanic change their understanding of their identity?

INSPIRATION

- There are three quotations included with the heroes, what do you think each of these quotations is saying?
- Are there any common themes in the quotations?
- How do the quotations relate to the hero's story? Their LGBT, Latino/Hispanic or professional identity?

INTERSECTIONALITY

- Can you think of places where you feel you're only able to bring one of your identities? (example: your Latino/Hispanic identity but not your LGBT identity or your LGBT identity but not your Latino/Hispanic identity)
- Where are these spaces? Are any of these places in our school?
- What do you think we can do to ensure that in these spaces individuals are able to bring all their identities?

LGBT Heroes of Latino/Hispanic Community

Orlando Cruz



Orlando Cruz is a professional boxer, originally from Puerto Rico. Orlando, whose nickname is “The Phenomenon,” started boxing at the age of 7, in order to gain discipline and to stop fighting his bullies on the street. He trained for many years as a fighter and in 2000 he joined the Puerto Rican team competing in the Sydney Olympics. He began boxing professionally in December of that same year in a bout in Puerto Rico, which he won. For the next nine years, Orlando remained undefeated. He is currently ranked #4 by the World Boxing Organization in the featherweight category. In 2012, he officially came out as a gay man, making him one of the few professional athletes to come out while still actively involved in his sport. After doing so, he wore a kilt with the Puerto Rican and rainbow flag in his next match, in order to show his pride for his two communities. Orlando has noted that coming out has helped him to feel more free and to become a better boxer.

Sylvia Rivera



Sylvia Rivera was a Venezuelan/Puerto Rican American transgender activist. Most commonly known as one of the inciters of the monumental Stonewall Riots in New York City, she was also a founding member of both the Gay Liberation Front and later the Gay Activists Alliance also in New York City. Along with her friend, Marsha Johnson, an African American trans woman activist, she also helped found STAR, a group dedicated to helping homeless trans youth. In addition to being one of the first trans youth shelters STAR was also one of the first political organizations for transgender rights in the world. Today the Sylvia Rivera Law Project (SRLP) is named in her honor. SRLP is a non-profit organization that engages in policy work and provides trainings and free legal services for transgender, intersex, and gender non-conforming low-income people of color.

Alex Sanchez



Alex Sanchez is a writer of young adult novels of German and Cuban ancestry. Born in Mexico City, he moved to the US at the age of five. In college, he wrote his first children’s book and went on to receive a masters degree in guidance and counseling from Old Dominion University. He studied writing at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, MA. After obtaining his masters, he worked with youth and families both domestically and internationally for ten years. While doing this work, he began to formulate his first novel. *Rainbow Boys*, the beginning of a trilogy, was released in 2001 and was named “Best Book for Young Adults,” by the American Library Association. Since that time he has written almost a book per year, including: *So Hard to Say* (2004), which won a Lambda Literary Award and *Bait* (2009), which won both the Florida Book Award Gold Medal for Young Adult Fiction and the Tomás Rivera Mexican-American Children’s Book Award. Alex also received the Outstanding Mid-Career Novelists’ Prize from the Lambda Literary Foundation in 2011.

“I believe in the gay power, I believe in us getting our rights, or else I would not be out there fighting for our rights. ”

— Sylvia Rivera

Cherríe Moraga



Cherríe Moraga is a Chicana playwright, poet, activist, and educator. Born in California, she received her bachelor's degree from Immaculate Heart College in LA and her master's from San Francisco State University. Cherríe has been an Artist in Residence at Stanford University's Department of Drama for over a decade and in the Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity. She has taught creative writing and dramatic arts at several universities across the US. Cherríe has worked to increase opportunities for women of color writers by helping to start the Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press and the anthology, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. She has published many essays, poems, stories and plays about the Chicana lesbian experience. She has received various awards and grants to acknowledge her talent, including a TCG Theatre Artist Residency Grant, the NEA's Theatre Playwright's Fellowship, two Funds for New American Plays Awards, USA Rockefeller Fellowship, a creative Work Fund Award, Gerbode-Hewlett Foundation Grant, and a grant from the US Artists Foundation.

Rose Troche



Rose Troche is an award winning artist, who has written, directed, and produced several films and for television. Born in Chicago in a large Puerto Rican Family, she grew up in the suburbs, where she worked at a movie theater and became interested in movie making. She attended the University of Illinois at Chicago for her BA and as a graduate film student. In 1994, she released *Go Fish*, an independent film based on a girl-meets-girl story, which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival. The film received high praise and was picked up to be released as a feature film. She has since produced and directed several more films, including *Bedrooms and Hallways*, which won the Audience Award at the London Film Festival and *The Safety of Objects*, which won best feature at the Deuville Film Festival. In 2004, Rose entered the world of television with the pilot episode of *The L Word*. Throughout its six seasons, she directed, wrote and produced several episodes. Rose has also directed episodes of *Ugly Betty* and *Six Feet Under*. Rose is currently working on a new film and teaching film studies in New York City.

José Julio Sarria



José Julio Sarria is a political activist, performer, and archivist. José was born to Colombian and Nicaraguan parents and raised in San Francisco. Even at a young age, José dressed in girls' clothing and often attended events as a girl. José joined the military and served during World War II, where he was eventually discharged with the rank of Staff Sergeant. He returned to San Francisco, where he began to perform at the Black Cat, singing arias, performing in drag, and was dubbed "The Nightingale of Montgomery Street." He was active in fighting against police raids and harassment. In the early '60s, he helped found the League for Civil Education, which provided support for gay men arrested in raids. In 1961, José ran for the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, as an openly gay man, one of the first openly LGBT people in the world to run for political office. Although he lost, he received 6,000 votes and showed the potential for political power from a unified LGBT community. José also helped create the Tavern Guild, Society for Individual Rights, and the Imperial Court System, one of the largest and longest lasting LGBT charitable organizations in the world for which he served as Empress José I for 43 years. José has been celebrated for his lifetime of advocacy and the advancement of the LGBT movement, he had a section of 16th St in the Castro named after him, has a plaque in front of the Harvey Milk Library, and received the San Francisco LGBT Pride Celebration Committee's Lifetime Achievement Grand Marshal Award in 2005.

“The only way that the gay community at that time could become forceful was to become political. I don't care what people say, even one vote will make a difference. If enough people scream, it will make a difference.”

— José Julio Sarria

Dr. Robert Garcia



Dr. Robert Garcia is an educator, city council member and Vice Mayor of Long Beach, CA. Born in Peru, he moved with his mother to the US at the age of 5. He received a BA in communications from California State University, Long Beach, a master's at the University of Southern California, and an EdD from Long Beach State. He has taught communications courses at various colleges in California. In 2007, Robert started a website, called Long Beach Post, which reported on local events and the following year started the North Pine Neighborhood Alliance. Both of these acts helped launch his political career. In 2009, he was elected as councilman for the First District. Three years later he was elected as Vice Mayor, the first Latino, and the youngest person to do so in history. During his time on the council, Robert has been known for sponsoring progressive legislation, including an Equal Benefits Ordinance, supporting labor unions, and education and government reform. He also founded the first Latin-American Parade in Long Beach. He has been honored by several social and media outlets, including The Advocate as one of the 40 under 40, Instinct Magazine as a Leading Man, Long Beach Magazine as one of the "Most Innovative Minds," and on CNN's "Latino in America."

Laura Esquivel



Laura Esquivel is a lifelong activist and one of the co-founders of Latino(a) Lesbian and Gay Organization (LLEGÓ). For over 25 years, she has been fighting and raising awareness about discrimination, as an advocate for immigration and labor reform, and a promoter of strategy to support the LGBT and Latino communities. In 1984, Laura became the president of the Gay and Lesbian Latinos Unidos, the first female to do so. During her time there, she helped found other national Latino lesbian and gay organizations, which is how she earned the nickname "La Madre" of the Latino LGBT movement. In 1987, she participated in the Second National March on Washington for Lesbians and Gays. Laura has worked as an adjunct professor at various colleges, as a campaign manager and political strategist, as the Director of Public Policy and Government Relations for LLEGÓ, as the Director of Research and Issues Marketing for People for the American Way, and as Senior Vice President for Political Affairs at the Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund. She also had her own consulting practice. Laura has played an important role in bridging the Latino and LGBT communities together and affecting policy change to support both. To honor her lifetime of work, she was included in Adelante Magazine as one of the most influential LGBT Latinos in the US.

Ruben Gonzales



Ruben Gonzales is the first openly LGBT person to serve on the management team of the National Council of La Raza (NCLR). Ruben Gonzales is the Deputy Vice President for Resource Development at NCLR, which is the nation's largest organization advocating for Latino civil rights. Gonzales was a driving force behind La Raza's endorsement of marriage equality in 2012, the first time the organization had explicitly endorsed an LGBT cause. "I think sometimes there is an assumption with Latinos that there are not LGBT people in the community," says Gonzales, who worked with the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, Urban Assembly, and GLAAD before joining La Raza. "But there's millions of us, and we're strong and we're loved. You don't have to sacrifice being Latino or being LGBT to be part of both communities."

"You can't wait around for other people to take your interests into account. You have to start it yourselves. If you're not at the table, you're probably on the menu."

– Laura Esquivel

