

## ***¡Aquí Estamos!/We're Here!: Boston's LGBT Latina/o History***

- 1800 Cuban and Puerto Rican *tabaqueros* work in Boston in the 19th century as shop owners, factory, or farm workers. The South End Latino community is largely a bachelor society.
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- 1917 President Woodrow Wilson imposes US citizenship on Puerto Ricans to increase the pool of inductees for World War I.
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- 1945 The US government encourages the migration of Puerto Ricans to the US after World War II. In an effort to re-domesticate women who had joined the workforce during the war, Puerto Rican laborers were sought after to take their place.
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- 1959 Dictator Fulgencio Batista flees Cuba as Fidel Castro takes power, leading to mass emigration to the US.
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- 1961 Supported by the CIA, 1,300 exiled Cubans invade the Bay of Pigs.
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- 1965 US invasion of Santo Domingo marks the beginning of a massive migration to the US.
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- 1965 Members of the Boston Demophil Center join demonstrators at the United Nations building in NY to picket against Cuba's persecution of homosexuals.
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- 1969 Puerto Rican gay men, lesbians, and transvestites were central to the 1969 Stonewall rebellion in New York, marking the modern gay rights movement.
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- 1972 The Massachusetts Commissioner of Public Welfare appoints Orlando Del Valle as the Liaison to the Latino community. As Liaison, he serves on the boards of La Alianza Hispana, HOPE, Travelers Aid Society, and the Puerto Rican Entering and Settling Services (PRESS).
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- 1974 The first gay and lesbian organization in Puerto Rico, Comunidad Orgullo Gay (COG, Gay Pride Community) is formed on the Island with significant support from hundreds of gay men and lesbians in the metropolitan areas. The group's central issue is the repeal of the sodomy laws in the New Penal Code under consideration by the legislature. It remains the most visible organization in Puerto Rico.
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- 1977 In Boston, under the leadership of Efrain Barradas, the Accion Socialista Pro Education Gay (ASPEG; Socialist Action for Gay Education) was formed with the

primary goal of developing a "gay platform" that would be accepted by the Puerto Rican Socialist Party (PSP). The resolution, adopted in 1978, called for the PSP to strenuously condemn all acts of persecution and discrimination based on sexual preference of individuals.

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1977 Loeb Theater director Vincente Castro is catalyst for a gay artistic movement in the Latino community. In addition to producing plays of short stories by Latino writers, the group brings a Luis Rafael Sanchez production to Boston.

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1978 A group of Latinos begin meeting informally in the home of José de Jesús in 1978. Prior to the Pride march that year, they formed El Comité de Homosexuales y Lesbianas de Boston (El Comité) to build unity and provide direction to Boston's Latino gay men and lesbians. As part of the group's outreach to the larger Latino community, they appeared on the television program *De Todo Un Poco*.

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1979 La Triba, Boston's first women's percussion group perform at the State House at an abortion rally and other public events and demonstrations.

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1979 The First Third World Lesbian and Gay Conference is held in Washington, DC in conjunction with the First March on Washington.

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1980 Holly Woodlawn, a Puerto Rican drag queen, a member of Andy Warhol's circle, travels from New York to perform at benefits and parties at the popular nightclub, Metro and in Provincetown.

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1980 Latino and black lesbian and gay listeners to public radio station WBUR picket to protest changes in programming which eliminate Gay Way, Elder Reviews, The Struggle (a black public affairs program). Other programs such as Con Salsa, a bilingual cultural program, are scheduled to be shortened.

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1980 Attendees at the annual convention of the National Lawyer's Guild in Boston vote to study how gay and lesbian Cuban refugees can be defended against discrimination by the US Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS).

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1980 About 125,000 Cubans flee to the US from the Port of Mariel. In its first focused political work, El Comité forms the Boston Area Coalition for Cuban Aid and Resettlement (BACCAR). The group raises funding to establish La Casa Amarilla (the Yellow House), the first gay halfway house in the US to aid and resettle lesbian and gay Marielitos. Working with the Metropolitan Community Church, Dignity, Integrity, and *Gay Community News*, El Comité seeks sponsorship, homes, jobs, and cultural and language support.

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- 1980 A coalition of Latino and North American gay men and lesbians under the leadership of El Comité, form the Boston Area Coalition for Cuban Aid and Resettlement (BACCAR). The group receives funding from the National Council of Churches and other local sources for La Casa Amarilla, the first gay halfway house in the US for Cuban refugees relocated from Miami.
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- 1981 Elena De La Ville begins a documentary photo project at Bodyworks Gym. Images from the series are shown at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Caracas. Elena was one of five Venezuelan artists selected for the exhibit; the five American artists were Robert Mapplethorpe, Annie Leibowitz, Bruce Weber, Herb Ritts, and Arnold Newman.
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- 1982 Lourdes Rodríguez is elected Vice President. In 1984 she becomes the second female president in the history of the 13-year-old Boston chapter of Dignity, a gay and lesbian Catholic support group. Her response to the Archbishop's stand against passage of the gay rights legislation prompts him to name an ad hoc committee to study homosexuality.
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- 1983 Efrain Barradas authors a critical review of *Gays Under the Cuban Revolution*, by Alan Young. The review is published in the Cuban magazine *Areyto*.
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- 1984 Bay Windows publishes David Brudnoy's review of the film *Improper Conduct*, a film about homosexuals in Cuba under Fidel Castro.
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- 1985 The Immigration and Naturalization Service assures lesbian and gay organizations that Cuban refugees entering the US will not be excluded for being gay contrary to laws that mandate return of openly gay refugees. The National Gay Task Force vows to challenge the immigration law.
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- 1985 AIDS begins to take its toll on Boston's Latino community. The epidemic galvanizes Latino gay men and lesbians to come together, be visible, and continue to develop their leadership roles.
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- 1985 Approximately 100 people protest repression of the Puerto Rican independence movement and the August 30 arrest of 14 independence activists in Puerto Rico. The demonstration, in front of the JFK federal building in Boston, falls on the anniversary of the Puerto Rican revolt against the Spanish colonial government.
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- 1985 *Positive Images: A Portrait of Gay America*, by photographer Stephen Stewart, includes a photo of Hortensia Amaro and her brother Armando. Armando later dies

of AIDS and Hortensia founds Latino Health Institute.

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1985 Issue of *The Guide* features an article on Boston's gay Latinos and Latino gay culture written by Armando Gaitán, one of the founders of El Comité.

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1985 At a demonstration that draws 2,500 people to protest US bombing of El Salvador, the United Fruit Company (now Theater Offensive), entertain and educate their audience with camp and drag that make the connection between Central America and gay and lesbian struggles.

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1985 Boston lesbians join with religious organizations and anti-interventionist activists Pledge of Resistance and New England Central America Network (NECAN) to resist escalation of US intervention in Central America.

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1985 Operation Open Door, is designed to document and put an end to race discrimination in Boston gay bars. Organizers will establish a hotline to gather data on incidents of racist carding policies in area bars, and will organize boycotts and pickets of bars that continue to discriminate. This is a joint project of the Black Men's Association, El Comité, Black & White Men Together, and Ann Maguire, liaison to the gay community in the Flynn administration. GLAD will provide legal support.

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1985 In one of the city's rare bilingual gay and lesbian demonstrations, 15 people picket Governor Michael Dukakis with both English and Spanish placards, during the official opening ceremonies of Puerto Rico Week in 1985. The action in front of the State House is sponsored jointly by El Comité and the Dukakis Watch Task Force of the Gay and Lesbian Defense Committee (GLAD) to protest the governor's stand on foster care.

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1985 Massachusetts College of Art is the site for the First Night of Solidarity organized by Amigas Latinas en Accion pro Salud, Casa El Salvador Farabundo Marti, City Life, Reproductive Rights National Network of Boston (R2N2), Black and White Men together of Boston, *Gay Community News*, and the National Lawyers Guild. Endorsers include Transafrica, El Comité, and the Black Men's Association.

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1986 Massachusetts Gay and Lesbian Political Alliance officers for 1986 include Ari Gonzales and Terri Ortiz.

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1986 *Doña Herlinda and Her Son*, Mexico's first openly gay film, opens at the Copley theater.

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- 1986 LESLA (Lesbianas Latina) forms. Their statement of purpose reads: "We are a group of Latina lesbians who are committed to supporting each other through our biweekly meetings. We come with a variety of experience, needs, and expectations. Our common bond is our culture. Together we share our experiences and our lives as Lesbians. Our meetings focus on what is needed by the group and what is happening in our lives."
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- 1986 After a year-long battle with Cuban authorities, Mel King, with friends and members of AIDS Action, and Oficina Hispana, helps a mother obtain a visa to visit her son in Boston two days before he dies of AIDS.
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- 1986 Jorge Hernández, nationally recognized housing expert responsible for the Villa Victoria community in Boston's South End, dies of AIDS. Jorge was highly respected for his intellect, political skills, and leadership. Massachusetts political and religious leaders and community activists turn out for his memorial service.
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- 1987 Juanita Ramos edited the first Latina lesbian anthology, *Compañeras: Latina Lesbians (An Anthology)*. Julia Pérez, Puerto Rican activist and parent, who currently runs an empowerment and leadership program for young girls of color in the Cambridge school system, is interviewed.
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- 1987 Latino/a Lesbian & Gay Organization (LLEGO) is established during the National March on Washington for Gay and Lesbian Rights to build a national network of Latino/a lesbians and gay men. LLEGO is founded to educate and sensitize its members as well as the Latino and non-Latino communities on issues related to homophobia, sexism and discrimination.
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- 1987 Latino Health Network (now Latino Health Institute) is established as a community-based professional organization to coordinate research issues and access to healthcare for Boston's Latino community. Organizers, including Hortensia Amaro, place HIV/AIDS and women's health as top priorities. It is now New England's premier Latino public health organization.
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- 1987 Ana Ortiz, member of the Boston Lesbian and Gay Political Alliance and researcher at the Boston Sickle Cell Center, receives the John F. Kennedy Award for Academic Excellence at the University of Massachusetts Boston.
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- 1987 Enriqu  Oliver, Cuban-born filmmaker, presented his senior project *Family Album* at Emerson College.
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- 1987 United Fruit Company produces the Hunks of Nicaragua Calendar with the

statement, "The United Fruit Company is part of a growing movement against US intervention in Central America."

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1989 Cesar Chavez, President of the United Farmworkers of America, appears with The Flirtations, a gay a capella group from New York, at a benefit for the United Farmworkers of America and for the Fenway Community Health Center. Chavez urges union members to attend this pivotal event in relations between gay and lesbian union members and the labor movement, sponsored by the Gay and Lesbian Labor Activist Network (GALLAN).

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1989 In a headline reading "¡Que viva los gays!," *Gay Community News* gives front page coverage to the first successful openly gay contingent to march in the New York Puerto Rican Day parade. The article notes that in 1979 a group attempting to join the parade was driven off by physical harassment and verbal abuse.

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1989 Club Antorcha (initially Latinos Unidos) is founded from a focus group and survey conducted by Orlando Del Valle on Latino gay men's health sponsored by Latino Health Institute. It provides a social network to develop the extended family bond, and expand the visibility of Latino gay men in Boston. The motto of Club Antorcha is "Illuminating Our History, Lighting the Present, A Beacon Into the Future." Its founders include Orlando Del Valle, Wilfredo Escobar, Fernando Miranda, and William Vélez. José de Jesús, co-founder of El Comité, Jarrett Barrios, and Yuri Orellana are original members. The group ends in 1992.

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1990 The Paradise gay bar in Cambridge initiates Boston's first Latino Night (or Noche Latina) with popular disc jockey, Conrado Cardenas. The event soon moves to Chaps and is greatly amplified by empresario Alvaro Ortiz, discover and promoter of Vicky. Latino night becomes a significant AIDS education vehicle for Latino gay men.

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1993 Theater Offensive produces *Deep in the Crotch of My Latino Psyche* by Luis Alfaro, Beto Raiza, and Monica Palacio.

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1993 Latina Lesbians United Never Apart (LLUNA) begins meeting at the offices of MASCOSH and HOPE. In the two years of its existence, it organizes events for Pride, Columbus Day, and International Women's Day. Two hundred people attend the LLUNA Halloween dance in Jamaica Plain.

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1993 Lizbeth Melendez, activist and labor organizer, is one of the New England coordinators of the 1993 March on Washington.

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- 1993 Oz Mondejar, Cuban entrepreneur and advocate for the Mass. Governor's Commission for Employment of People with Disabilities, opens Mucho Gusto Cafe and Collectibles. He is the author of the unpublished children's book, *The Boy With His Hands in His Pockets*.
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- 1994 World's First Lesbian and Gay Latino Theater series, *Spic Out: Latino Lesbian and Gay Theater*, produced by Abe Rybeck and the Theater Offensive, brings a new queer Latino performance scene to Boston. Plays and performances written by Beto Araiza, Carmelita Tropicana, Enrique Oliver, Senel Paz, Marga Gomez, Paul Bonin-Rodriguez are featured.
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- 1995 *Spic Out*, Theater Offensive's Latino theater festival, is featured on the WGBH show *La Plaza*. In this show, *La Plaza* explores the individual experiences of the artists and presents excerpts from each performance.
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- 1995 Lourdes Rodriguez-Noques, therapist and former President of Dignity, co-edits *Out In The Workplace* with Richard Rasi.
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- 1995 Theater Offensive's theater series includes a workshop by Leo Cabranes-Grant and Liz Nania on Building Bisexual Culture, and by Areté on Creating Queer Latino Theater.
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- 1996 WGBH's *La Plaza* presents *Boston, Wednesday night... The Night That I Met Vicky*. Wednesday nights are when Boston's Latina/o gay and lesbian community comes together at a disco known as Chaps. This show interviews Vicky and others about Latina/o night at Chaps.
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- 1996 Theater Offensive presents *Motherlands* by Brenda Cotto, Noelia Ortiz, Leo Cabranes-Grant, Tina D'Elia and Ophelia Navarro based on a story by Brenda Cotto and Noelia Ortiz as part of their theater series.
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- 1996 Luiz Villalona-Perez files a petition in Massachusetts for political asylum from the Dominican Republic on the grounds that he would be imprisoned or killed there for his homosexuality. He is backed by human rights groups.
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- 1997 In *Latino Voices*, a national Latino survey, respondents were asked to rank who they disliked the most among groups including the Communist Party, Nazis, the Klan, Black Muslims, English-only, and Athiests. Mexicans and Cubans ranked gays and lesbians fourth most disliked and Puerto Ricans ranked them third most disliked.

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- 1997 Rafael Campo, a physician and poet, teaches at Harvard Medical School and practices medicine at the Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston. He is the author of *The Other Man Was Me* (1993 National Poetry Series winner), *The Poetry of Healing*, and *What The Body Told*. He receives a Guggenheim Fellowship for 1997-1998.
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- 1997 Theater Offensive presents *In Mortality*, written by Leo Cabranes-Grant and directed by Antonio Ocampo Guzman; and *Chicas 2000* by Carmalita Tropicana as part of their theater series. Cabranes is a playwright and professor at Wheaton College and is working on a trilogy of plays that will be called *The Boston-Rican Trio*, of which *In Mortality* is the first.
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- 1997 Tina D'Elia, activist, performance artist, and poet, is known for her Latina lesbian feminist Groucho Marx persona.
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- 1998 Jarrett Barrios, a Cuban American attorney and graduate of Harvard University and Georgetown Law School, wins the 1998 Democratic Primary for State Representative in the 28th Middlesex District in Cambridge with 88% of the vote. Barrios becomes the second Latino and the only openly gay man ever elected to the Massachusetts Legislature. Barrios appointed Julia Perez and Orlando Del Valle as community liaisons.
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- 1998 "Páginas Omitidas: The Gay and Lesbian Presence," by University of Massachusetts-Boston professor, Luis Aponte-Parés, is published in *The Puerto Rican Movement: Voices from the Diaspora*. The article focuses on the Puerto Rican and Latino lesbian and gay presence in New York.
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- 1998 The History Project produces the first exhibit to focus on the Latino LGBT community. *¡Aquí Estamos!/We're Here!: Images of Boston's Latino Lesbian and Gay Community* hangs at Northeastern University Student Center for LGBT History Month.
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- 1998 The Theater Offensive presents *Politicized Body* by Luis Alfaro as part of their theater series.
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- 1998 The *Boston Globe* runs a feature article: "Coming Out In Spanish: Freightened with machismo and rigid gender roles Latino culture puts up barriers to gays' acceptance and self-acceptance. Gay people in Massachusetts say it is especially so here." Hortensia Amaro, social scientist at Boston University; Lourdes Rodriguez, psychotherapist; Orlando Del Valle, former director of Latino Health

Institute and founder of Club Antorcha; Jarrett Barrios, State Representative; Lillian Gonzales, CPA; Vivian Carlo, professor at Lesley College; Ray Pifferrer, diversity consultant, and others are interviewed.

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- 1998 Vicky, Boston's most recognized Latino drag performer produces the first Miss Gay Latina Bombshell contest. It is held at the Jorgé Hernandez Community Center at Villa Victoria in the South End, making it the first Latino gay sponsored event at the Center. Contestants include Boston's Avian Waters, Coco Lopez, and Amanda.
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- 1998 Mangó con Pique is a social/cultural group of young Latinos dedicated to the empowerment of the Latino gay community, their relatives and supporters. Its mission is to incorporate Latino and gay identities through homophobia education and cultural celebration.
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- 1998 Vicky sponsors a party at Buddies that coincides with the 100th anniversary of the invasion of Puerto Rico by the US on August 25, 1898.
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- 1998 La Gran Charito, drag performer in Boston since the 1980s, is hostess of the Cambridge Cable TV show *Sin Censura*.
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- 1998 *Women in Love: Portraits of Lesbian Mothers and Their Families* features an interview with Antonieta Gimeno and her daughters.
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- 1998 Luis Aponte-Parés and Orlando Del Valle are appointed to the Latino and LGBT advisory boards of a nationally funded grant administered by Northeastern University Archives to document Boston's Latino, African American, Chinese and lesbian and gay communities.
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- 1999 As a professor of Latino literature at the University of Massachusetts for 25 years, Efrain Barradas writes essays and criticism of Latino literature and poetry, popular culture, and gay issues. His current work focuses on machisimo as a camp phenomenon.

***Would you like to contribute to this timeline of Boston's LGBT Latina/o history? Any questions or comments about this timeline?  
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