

## **Gore'd in the Bush: Democracy, Music, and Disconnect in the Millennial United States**

**Margaret E. Dorsey**  
Indiana University

*Live music political events thrived during the year 2000 as marketers praised their ability to animate “ethnic” publics. I analyze one such effort, jointly hosted by the Democratic National Committee and the Hidalgo County Democratic Party, with contradictory assessments on its function and capacity. In this article, I show how central the segmentation of national and local politics are to these contrasting visions democracy. The local-national disconnect underscores the operation of a model of democracy as consumer choice and its implications for democratic participation. [democracy, marketing, Mexicana/o, music, pachanga, political ethnography, United States]*

On Saturday, 14 October 2000, the Democratic National Committee and the Hidalgo County Democratic Party staged a live music event ten miles north of the Mexican border in McAllen, Texas. Various media marketers from Al Gore's campaign who organized the event called it a success, explaining, for example, that over 1,000 people were in attendance.<sup>1</sup> The Democratic National Committee's Hispanic marketing team lauded their own ability to transform the live event into a publicity vehicle and send television feeds nationally, marketing to “Hispanics” in the “battleground states” of Michigan, Ohio, and Florida. The images featured celebrity musicians and politicians asking people to vote and to vote Gore-Lieberman. Local political specialists, on the other hand, described the event as an “ill-fated” failure, noting the behavior of participants and the small attendance, 300 people.

These contrasting assessments of a political event encompass distinct assumptions about democracy. The former perspective emphasizes the ability of an event to generate numbers and circulate ethnic brands. These media managers were themselves under pressure as “Hispanic” marketers for the Democratic National Committee to induce identification from a larger Hispanic

population. Local participants, on the other hand, expected the event to draw from their tradition of political pachangas<sup>2</sup>--social gatherings featuring music. In Hidalgo County, pachangas work in the political context by playing on remembered connections to the early days of political mobilization as well as by borrowing from the forms of a transnational public culture. For them, a grass-roots style democratic politics through music emerges. The production of democracy--both a grass-roots style and a consumerist model-- is a complex process, marked by distinct approaches and assessments. In this article, I use the Democratic National Committee's live music event to analyze the virtual disconnect between local politics and national politics.

Local commentators evaluated the live music event within a political culture where music and pachangas have accrued a charged significance across generations of protest and change. South Texas has long been associated with musical and political innovation (Foley 1988; García 1989; Marquez 1993; and Orozco 1992). Border ballads, for instance, flourished as social and political counterstatements to dominant Anglo narratives, and many forms of music evolved--corridos (Paredes 1994), conjunto (Peña 1985), and Tejano (Peña 1999) along with social and political shifts. For the past 150 years, people living along the Lower Rio Grande Valley have been composing and singing ballads praising bandits, raiders, and ordinary men who "each with his pistol defended his right" (in Paredes 32). These folk songs burgeoned during a time when both propertied and impoverished Mexicana/os were disenfranchised by the U.S. legal system. "The Mexican was 'victimized by the law'" and "old landholding families found their titles in jeopardy and if they did not lose in the courts they lost to their American lawyers" (Webb in Paredes 31). State agents played a central role in easing the path for Anglos to roll over Mexicana/os. The Texas Rangers, for instance, upheld and enforced the "lawless law" that reigned in the mid-

nineteenth century, terrorizing border Mexicans. As a consequence, the Mexican border community became more willing to glorify the role of bandits and other lawbreakers. Such rebels became folk heroes defending the rights of upright Mexican/o citizens. Paredes presents the song “El Corrido de Gregorio Cortez” as a basic model through which to understand the corrido as a musical genre. He argues that this border-conflict ballad arose in conditions common to the production of folk balladry: isolation and a patriarchal, traditional way of life. At the same time, a democratic spirit pervaded these communities (242).

An element that made the songs of this region distinct was the Texas Revolution of 1836 and its annexation by Texas from Mexico in 1848. With the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the new Mexican border was drawn, and “the bitterness resulting from the events that occurred between 1836 and 1848 provided the basis for a century of conflict” (243). While the winners drew the border and wrote the official history of these events, rendering border warfare a thing of the past, the losers composed and sang songs expressing their resistance to the status quo, interpreting the political situation as one of enduring struggle. Singers praised individuals like Gregorio Cortez and his skirmishes with law enforcers (especially Texas Rangers, known in the local vernacular as “rinches”). These songs often transformed lackluster events into herculean and memorable acts of dramatic protest.

Corridos and their attendant message of cultural resistance continued circulating well into the mid-twentieth century--around the same time pachangas came into prominence. In South Texas, I found that people expressed fond and moving memories of moments when music, drink, dance, and politicians shared the same stage. Many residents recounted the pivotal role of

American G.I. Forum founder Dr. Héctor García in forging cross-cultural coalitions with key players in the Democratic Party at a time when few activists dared to do so. During John F. Kennedy's close presidential campaign, García orchestrated the special ¡Viva Kennedy! campaign, which distributed and played corridos at events throughout South Texas.<sup>3</sup> I learned that ¡Viva Kennedy! used music and attracted many first-time Mexicana/o voters--people who continue to be highly active in party politics.

More recently, corrido ballads of conflict have become stock songs in the repertoire of Texas-Mexican conjunto bands (Peña 1985:149), who play a style of music that emerged in agricultural fields around the 1930s. A basic Texas-Mexican conjunto usually features a bajo-sexto guitar, an accordion, and a vocalist. Manuel Peña, an ethnomusicologist and anthropologist of the Lower Rio Grande Valley's conjunto music, considers the conjunto genre of music an expression of a working-class consciousness and aesthetic. This form of music remains popular, particularly at political pachangas, and the power of the conjunto to elicit voters' participation and create identification with an individual's struggle against the dominant system has not been lost on regional Mexicana/o politicians in more recent times. In 1996, Democrat Victor Morales, the first Mexicano to run for the U.S. Senate in Texas, circulated across Texas in a little white pick up truck playing hybrid conjunto-corridos (Montoya and Padilla 1996) composed for his campaign. Substantial numbers of Hispanic voters turned out at the polls. In this election, 50 percent of registered Hispanic voters voted (opposed to 5 percent nationwide); of these, 81 percent voted for Morales (Attlesey 1996). His campaign played music and attracted many Mexicana/os who do not normally vote. More recently, in a 2000 Democratic political primary

campaign in Hidalgo County, the corrido-like “Campaign Music for Judge Aparicio” (Garza 2000) attracted many citizens out of their homes and into politics to talk with the candidate and vote.

Similar to the corrido, the pachanga emerged within a context of political struggle and transformed along with socio-political changes. It came into use after World War II, when Mexicana/os returned to the United States after fighting for freedom and democracy abroad, only to find a Jim Crow social and political system that excluded them. Prepared to fight for their citizenship at home, individuals held pachangas out in the country, in a not so publicly known or prominent space. This choice of location makes more sense when one recalls Texas’ history of violent treatment of Mexicana/os resistant to Anglo order during and before the Jim Crow. This and its attendant form of pachanga, as a special zone in the country where Mexicana/o culture could and can be embraced, traced, and taken pleasure in, today is a real and symbolic site of political resistance and indexes an almost, if not, heroic attitude—a stance of defiant pride against Anglo political, cultural, and economic dominance. Pachangas became more common cultural events during and after Johnson and Kennedy’s 1960 election, which brought a Texan and a Catholic into the national limelight. Their election marked a partial fruition of a hard struggle for Mexicana/os to influence national U.S. politics. Pachangas again shifted into a dance hall-style event when women publicly began demanding political recognition.<sup>4</sup> Held in a dance hall in town, rather than on a ranch, this new form is an invitation-only event. While the requests can be highly public, many of them are mailed to homes or relayed in person. Be it the recent transition of women into public life, the civil rights movement, or a longer history of protest, for residents

of Hidalgo County in 2000 both the music and the pachanga event itself can inspire remembered connections to moments of grass-roots political mobilization.

For national marketers, however, the event amasses significance in relation to its ability to generate numbers and target images for a niche “ethnic” market of television viewers. Ideas of using live music events to animate blocks of ethnic consumers, central to this perspective, mimic models extolled by transnational marketers.

National and transnational marketers herald live music event marketing because they believe it creates “passion” and brand loyalty among ethnic buyers. Experienced corporate marketers use this tool well. “Ethnic marketing” is in its formative phases, and trade journals detail the strategies of successful “ethnic marketing” campaigns. Literature on marketing to ethnically defined groups emphasizes the role of music in affective advertising campaigns. In these campaigns, advertisers focus attention on “ethnic markets,” “live events,” and “brand promotion” as methods of selling products and retaining sales within unspecified “Hispanic” communities.

Parallel to national political marketers’s emphasis on voter turnout, corporate marketers consider what they label “Hispanics” an ideal target group because they have a “combined annual buying power of \$228 billion” (Wells 1996). As one marketer explains, they are “younger, brand loyal, and have strong family values” (Skirloff in Edenkamp and Khermouch 1996). In 1997, the top fifty advertising companies spent \$393 million targeting this market (Minority Markets Alert 1998: 6 in Zate 1997). They also recognize that under the Hispanic umbrella, buyers within distinct culture groups--Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and Mexican Americans, to mention but a

few--are acutely sensitive to language use. Therefore, ethnic marketers target groups speaking different Spanish dialects in culturally specific ways. They have seized on the role of live music events for this purpose. More important, marketers attribute the high rates of success at live music events to the mood in which they put potential purchasers. For instance, Helegson (in Fitzgerald 1999: 3) explains: "Consumers are more malleable . . . They're relaxed, in a setting where they're open to new ideas." In 1998, marketing with music grew 20 percent, and marketers expect music to continue drawing the most sponsorship (Fitzgerald 1999: 3)

Ethnic marketers herald live music events marketing because they believe the personal contact involved inspires greater brand loyalty, and brands, as Schmitt and Simonson (1997: 58) say, are "the hens that lay the golden eggs." According to a writer in *Advertising Age*, "Music is stealing the show as marketers realize its power to inspire loyalty and passion among ethnic groups" (Fitzgerald 1997). Exactly how a live music event creates brand loyalty is unclear; however, what is clear is that marketers believe in brands' manifold abilities to attract and retain consumers: brands enhance name recognition (Freeman 1999). Brand markings index an individual's lifestyle, affiliations, and identity (Aacker 1996; Schmitt and Simonson). According to branding guru Kapferer, they "imply a feeling relationship" (1998: 4). Such assumptions about the function of a live music event to arouse and affect consumers in culturally specific ways seem to be shared by national political marketers.

My analysis of the Democratic National Committee's live music event in McAllen, Texas uses contrasting commentaries of success and failure on politics to explore the centrality of local-national segmentation to perspectives on democracy and the significance of this rift for

democratic participation. To understand the relationship between politics and performance, I find it useful to adopt an understanding of *democracy* starting from locally emergent events, rather than beginning with established models and rigid regulations.<sup>5</sup> This study starts from a shared premise in a growing body of literature on democracy and ethnography, (e.g., Apter 1999; Coronil 1997; Greenhouse 1998; and Paley 2001a; 2001b) seeks to understand what “democracy” means as produced in specific economic, social, and cultural contexts. Similar to Paley in her recent study, I am interested in the “marketing of democracy” (2001a: 117) based in “a logic of gauging, targeting, and creating desire among voters similar to that which commercial marketing directs toward consumers (O’Shaughnessy 1990: 4).” But where I differ from Paley’s work is that I am less concerned with marketing “the idea of democracy” (117) and how actors “define democracy” (3) and more with the production and effervescence of democracy, that is, the successes and failures of democracies as they emerge. This point of convergence is where my study is not merely applying a discourse-centered ethnographic approach to the meaning and use of democracy but a performance-centered one (Bauman 1993: 3; Gilroy 1993: 200).<sup>6</sup> In the case of Hidalgo County, for example, organizers’ crafting of democracy often begins with how kinship and memory work: pachangas work in the political context by playing on remembered connections to the early days of political mobilization. High among these are the heady times of John F. Kennedy’s and Lyndon B. Johnson’s national election. Such ethnographically emergent issues are allied to which styles of democracy survive and thrive, which ones are rearticulated, commented upon, channeled and *elided*. All of these are *mediated* by music, and as such music has a centripetal relation to understanding why certain forms of democracy persist and others do

not.

The data on which I base my analysis were gathered in the course of an ethnographic study conducted in several periods over four years, from 1998-2001. My main sources of data consist of transcriptions of tape-recorded performances, archival materials, first hand interviews, and observations of approximately 100 live events attended during the year 2000 presidential political campaign. Between August 2000 and January 2001, I lived in Edinburg, Texas while conducting fieldwork across Hidalgo County. Edinburg is a city located near the geographic center of Hidalgo County and is the seat of county government. Hidalgo County is located on the eastern portion of the Texas-Mexican border, approximately fifty miles from the Gulf of Mexico. The county is large, spanning sixty miles from south to north and fifty-five miles east-west. In the cities, small towns, and countryside across Hidalgo County, I conducted fieldwork at pachangas.<sup>7</sup> I attended pachangas ranging in size from 10 to 6,500 people and in production price from \$500 to \$150,000. I gathered data at sixty-six “political pachangas”--a term that, generally speaking, refers to events explicitly hosted for political candidates or those sponsored by the Democratic or Republican Parties. The consultants I talked to were primarily Mexicana/o<sup>8</sup> and ranged in age from 21 to 80. They worked for state and county governments, at national and multinational corporations, as journalists, for the Democratic National Committee, at advertising agencies, for local political candidates, and as concerned citizens. In my fieldwork, I not only observed South Texans rearticulating the meaning and use of this event form, but I also had access to the agents who manufacture and coordinate global campaigns and imagery. I was

fortunate to meet with them at the historical moment when they themselves were figuring out new “ethnic” and “target” marketing strategies. The men and women with whom I met--whether at pachangas, in their homes, or in their offices,--in response to hearing my project described as a study of the relationship between music, politics, and marketing, often smiled warmly and responded that I was in the correct place to study the meeting of the three (music, politics and marketing). In this article, I draw heavily from longtime Democratic Party activist Mike Sinder’s cogent explanation of what happened at the Democratic Party event. He echoed the opinions expressed by other cultural political specialists with whom I discussed this live music event. While from a conversation with Sinder, this interview voices sentiments expressed by other borderlanders uncomfortable with going “on the record” critiquing party-sponsored live music political events. For this reason, I quote at length from our taped conversation on the role of pachangas in animating politics.

### **Democracy and Channeling**

As sociologist Paul Gilroy explains in his performance approach to democracy, music and rituals “enshrine” democratic moments that work through practical activity--language, gesture, desires--that cannot be reduced to a “fixed essence” nor “reinvented by the will and whim of aesthetes, symbolists and language gamers” (1993: 79,102). This statement of Gilroy’s feasibly could be directed toward other scholarly responses to the effects of the mass media and mass-mediated forms of communication on local democracy. Such calls propose institutionalizing a concept of *the* political public sphere (e.g., Habermas 1991: 448) relying upon a codified model of democracy. To not consider the Democratic National Committee’s event and appraisals of it as

consequential political manifestations is to deny the relevance of democracy to the majority of participants and render its attendants' statements mute. In such approaches, if mentioned, performance, antiphony, and improvisation are actions to be controlled and subject to legally binding rules, especially those forms outside of rational debate (449). In that proposition, scholars assume, for instance, that interlocutors will follow a rule of impartiality: questions transcend one's own short-term personal preferences and interests (i.e., actors transcend economic interests for the political). A task which appears increasingly difficult when actors often apply marketing models to politics. This insistence on regulating, as Chantal Mouffe (1999) explains, falters not only along the central practical considerations Gilroy highlights but also along theoretical ones. Habermas' model is inconsistent in that it ignores the central role of *identification* (that reaching consensus also relies on the substance of obligation based in shared understanding) in any production of democratic discourse. Sinder's commentary on the organization and reception of the event repeatedly highlights this point. In fact, taking up Habermas' model can be seen to do more to exclude communication and its role in constituting democracy, instead being used as a tool to divide and exclude interlocutors (see I. M. Young 1996). In the present article, Gilroy's concept of democracy provides a broad context through which to interpret the emergence of political forums that simultaneously considers the contingencies and qualities that make everyday enactments of democracy meaningful for audiences and producers. It is about political norms in South Texas and in Tennessee--Gore's base camp--as these interact together and with larger discourses and cultural logics that place distinct values on Mexicana/o identity and class as forms of power. Is, for instance,

empowerment only esteemed as consumer choice? By understanding democracy as locally performed and emergent, organized by local, regional, and national actors in South Texas, I begin to explain why an active grass-roots style and a more passive transnational style of democracy whither and flourish.

Relevant to an explanation of contrasting assessments of the success and failure of a live spectacle is the concept of channeling. Joel Kuipers' (1998) sociolinguistic analysis focuses on aural forms of communication and suggests that long-term shifts in political communication have moved toward constricting channels of democratic participation. "Spectatorship" refers to this process, but because the metaphor of spectacle implies a visual component, I draw from Kuipers and use the term to refer to both visual and aural *channeling* of social gatherings. Channeling plays on and with the senses by attaching messages to the sensation of relaxation, convivial talk, dancing, regional foods, sexual allure, etc., and in this attachment produces a shared sense of identification between two people. This can occur at political, corporate, or family pachangas in Hidalgo County. Particularly interesting at pachangas is the *inability* of local Republican Party candidates--and also a few Democrats--to channel in contrast to transnational marketers, for instance those working for Budweiser, in employing their many marketing tools--from the glitzy Budgirls to prominent folksy bands--seizing on a kind of "reverse" channel borrowing the notion of a community of identity for the purposes of selling products to an "ethnic market." Reverse marketing works fairly well for beer marketers in some contexts, but it does not work so well for politics--at least not according to local assessments of the Democratic National Committee's work.

## **The Live Music Event**

One week before early voting<sup>9</sup> began, the Democratic National Committee and the Hidalgo County Democratic Party staged a live music event that had many elements to produce an enticing and exciting rally. It featured the well-known Tejano band Little Joe y La Familia at Archer Park in downtown McAllen. This event showcased political personalities prominent on the national, state, and local levels. Following Little Joe's musical performance, *nationally* known political figures Henry Cisneros (president of Univision and former secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development), Dolores Huerta (United Farm Worker cofounder), and U.S. Congressman Rubén Hinojosa addressed the audience. Prominent *statewide* Democratic speakers included Texas Democratic Party Chair Molly Beth Malcolm and Gary Mauro, prominent *regional* Democrats like Cameron County Judge Gilberto Hinojosa, popular *local* Judge Fernando Mancias and local judicial candidates Aida Salinas-Flores and Letty Lopez.

The Democrats went further than having a live music event and speeches by known political activists. This moment of celebrity was also a fundraiser. Simultaneous with Little Joe's free outdoor performance, the Democrats hosted a benefit across the street and upstairs in the elegant Renaissance Hotel, charging \$500 per person to attend. According to Democratic County Chair Bobby Guerra, they raised \$75,000 from this event. Guests informed me that they sipped champagne, nibbled hors-d'œuvres, and had the opportunity to speak personally with invited speakers. Between Little Joe's performance and the speeches, the well-dressed guests left the air-conditioned hotel and made their way to the guarded and shaded "V.I.P." section

reserved in Archer Park. The fundraiser and Little Joe y La Familia charged citizens of Hidalgo County in distinct ways. But attendees of both events had more reason to be excited about this pachanga: everyone had been reading, hearing, and seeing coverage of Joe Lieberman's visit to McAllen and a colonia--a poor, rural, unincorporated development--in La Joya the preceding day.

On Friday Lieberman toured Hidalgo County, making the Democratic Party highly visible on the front page, televised news, and as a topic on radio shows. Lieberman spent Thursday night in McAllen, and on Friday morning he and the national press corps toured a colonia in rural La Joya. They visited with residents of three homes; they also dined at President Bill Clinton's favorite Mexican restaurant, La Casa del Taco, in McAllen.

Despite the local press surrounding Lieberman, Henry Cisneros, Dolores Huerta, the fundraiser, and Little Joe y La Familia's performance, the live music event attracted few South Texans. I counted 365 people at the event, and more than half of the attendees left long before the speeches finished. Barely enough people attended to describe Archer Park as spotted with spectators.

South Texans also expressed their lack of interest in the event by exiting before the speeches concluded. Leaving early made an acute statement about the event's inability to generate and sustain attention. Out of the many events I attended during the 2000 election, this was the first time I observed such behavior. Adherents to the Democratic Party in South Texas have a strong sense of etiquette, which includes respectfully listening to and, at appropriate moments, praising speeches. Then and only after the speeches end do people seem to feel at liberty to leave, when they frequently and politely exit in mass.<sup>10</sup> This timely and meaningful

movement of people punctuated the low turnout and fizzled enthusiasm this political event came to signify to local political marketers and those present. For Gore's team, this aspect of participants' behavior was not an issue. They cited the presence of over 1,000 residents and praised their own ability to transmit images of political icons such as Dolores Huerta to television screens in select spots across the United States.

### **Pre-segmentation and Segmentation**

Such radically divergent evaluations by local and national political marketers of live events appear to be new, reflecting a recent change toward local-national political segmentation. At the planning sessions on the morning of the event and at the event itself local political specialist Mike Sinder observed and consulted with members of the DNC media marketing team. I spoke with Sinder at the spectacle, but in a lengthy conversation five days after the event, he described their production as "ill-fated". In our taped discussion at his office, he elaborated on that theme, recalling previous events coordinated by members of the DNC in Hidalgo County in which a severe disconnect between local and national event organizers did *not* exist:

Everytime *The Function* was going on, I have been involved in it since 1980. This is the first time we had a *The Function* without heavy end supervision from outside. I don't mean heavy-handed in a nasty fashion.

I mean they came in and said, "OK. We are going to do radio. This is what we're gonna do. What stations do you recommend?"

And they saw to it that it got done.

They said, "We're going to do leafleting."

*They* prepared the leaflet. *They* did this, and would rely on us to assist them, rather than take the lead.(Personal communication, McAllen, Texas, October 19, 2000)

From radio advertisements to flyers, as Sinder explained, the old DNC demonstrated a keen

interest in drawing a local crowd and coordinating with local political organizers to achieve this end.

Sinder continues to brighten this new line dividing national and local politics by comparing this event coordination to those in the lackluster and moribund election campaigns of Mondale and Dukakis:

MS: I am used to dealing with guys who we'd sit in bar and chat, and they'd talk about, you know, how they blocked off a street in New York to get the traffic to flow into where their rally was so they'd automatically have a crowd. You know guys that think like that and have experience doing that.

MD: They're savvy.

MS: We didn't have anybody like that here.

MD: . . . I did speak with some of the other people down with the Gore team, and they are very inexperienced. . . . it doesn't seem like he had a lot experience around this kind of politics. All of the people they brought down were Hispanic men, young Hispanic men.

MS: . . . They were all from the Hispanic portion of the DNC. I can remember in '84, I can't remember the guy's name. I remember he was a Puerto Rican. He was the guy that came down with Mondale, and we had 2,000 people on a weekday afternoon, for a primary event for *Mondale* in Donna City square. [He] spoke from the steps of City Hall in Donna.

That guy, he was the one talking about diverting the street in New York City, he could understand those kinds of things. He came down. He did a lot of dictating, and we did a lot of dictating to him. But basically, he knew what he was doing.

With Dukakis in '88, they sent guys, didn't send Hispanic guys down. But they sent guys down that were experienced with crowd building. They knew what they were doing because that is what they had done. They had worked in outreach or voter I.D. and all of these other areas. They had worked in crowd building for events.

I remember we used Palmer Pavilion, which is a horrible place, but it was the only place we could come up with. And he came up with the idea of borrowing a giant flag that flies over one of the automobile dealerships . . . because that could cut the room in half so that we could fill it up easier.

MD: Yeah.

MS: He knew what he was doing. . . . Some of it was the kind of things I did.

In Palmer Pavilion, we set up tables and chairs so that it would look full if we got to 200 people. We were expecting 500 people. So we had a crew of kids hired to set up so that in a rush they could run in and set up more tables and chairs because of this fantastically large crowd that we were not expecting, even though we were. But we made

the plan to do it all that way. It turned out that we had a much bigger crowd than we ever expected.

All of those things were planned.

In contrast to this kind of approach that reflects thoughtful preparation by both local and national producers for a range of scenarios at an event, the supervisor of the DNC team appeared unprepared--or perhaps even disinclined--to lead the organization of the local event; for instance, he hardly knew where to set the stage, much less take into account a small turnout or a basic fact of South Texas life--the extreme heat. More specifically, Little Joe y La Familia and the speeches lasted for almost three hours, and they did not set up bleachers or make arrangements for non-V.I.P. people to sit. This arrangement would have been bearable if they had put the stage in a place where people could sit in the grass under shade trees. Instead, the stage was set in front of the only concrete and unshaded zone of the park; which during the heat of the day does not invite people to come closer.

The DNC people placed the bleachers far from the stage, in the shade provided by the gazebo, and cordoned them off for the V.I.P.s, who primarily came from the fundraiser. The guards ensured that only the right people entered the bleacher zone. Bleachers, like tables and chairs, can be instrumental in directing crowd flow, and Sinder explains how they were not used strategically to build a crowd:

I had wanted to use the bleachers flanking the stage. Well, if you use the bleachers flanking the stage, you have created a small area. Well, we didn't have anything flanking the stage so it was wide open on both sides. You saw how people were stretched out on both sides. . . . You can enclose it and always open it up. But if it starts out open, you can't close it up. Reasonably, you can't. It is easy to open it up. It's hard to close it up. . . . I always put the V.I.P.s in front because you're sure to fill the V.I.P. section. He put the V.I.P.s in back.

At the 2000 event, the DNC's concern with dividing publics, rather than with how to build them at the event itself, clearly suggests the lack of engagement of the local-national people and the segmentation of ethnic marketing. Actually, the disconnect occurred to such an extent that at times Sinder sometimes slipped, momentarily literalizing the lack of engagement between local-national coordinators. At one point, he said: "Yeah. They [DNC] did not have an advance team down here."

The DNC marketing team's differing assessment of the event also can be understood through their exclusive focus on projecting an image to an ethnically branded public, rather than directing it to Hidalgo County's distinct political culture. To be more specific, Democratic workers did not advertise the pachanga in ways that reached the majority of the Democratic constituency in Hidalgo County. Many residents do not read,<sup>11</sup> thus aural communicative forms--radio, television, word of mouth, sound car--are the most effective ways to reach and generate interest about a live music event. Sinder explains:

I would like to have seen a sound car working that morning which probably would have been playing music by "Little Joe" very loudly with a voice over telling people to come to the rally at three o'clock or that there would be "Little Joe" at three o'clock. The only other advertising that I know of done is newspaper advertising, which at that type of rally I think is very frivolous. It may've served other purposes, but in terms of generating the audience they were looking for . . . it did no work at all.

According to Sinder, this lack of aural advertisement resulted from a lack of supervision from the

DNC and a lack of experience coming from the workers affiliated with the DNC in the Hidalgo County Democratic Party.

For the sake of brevity, I will list three other ways in which a demonstrated lack of sensitivity to local political culture by Democratic National Committee marketers underscores the centrality of local-national segmentation to perspectives on democracy. I then will skip to an extreme, albeit telling, final instantiation of political disconnect.

(1) *Their advertising strategy lacked “splash”*. Sinder explained how “splash” works:

The third component that was supposedly in effect was the leafleting. And probably if it would have been effective, people [would] have it in their hands when they get there. But since they didn’t see any there, then the handouts were not effective. . . .

Someone would look at it and be interested in reading what it says.

And so, in big letters, “COME SEE LITTLE JOE!” “COME SEE HENRY CISNEROS!” [raising voice in exclamation] whatever you think the hook is. That’s what you splash with. That flyer looked like an institutional invitation. You know everything was nice and in order. . . . No splash, no hook. It was just an announcement. Their leaflets looked like an institutional invitation “nice and in order”, not loud with color and other features to attract readers.

(2) *The translation into Spanish was poor*. The organizers produced double-sided leaflets, one side in Spanish and the other in English. He literally translated from English to Spanish. As a consequence, the Spanish side read in an awkward fashion.

(3) *They selected a non-traditional pachanga day and time, Saturday at 3:00*. Saturday is not a popular day for pachangas, and three o’clock in the afternoon is not a good time of day. People work at this time, and 3 p.m. is almost the hottest time of day in this region.<sup>12</sup> Sinder explains that Sunday is a superior day for pachangas--because it is traditional and because the Saturday time period cuts out two significant demographic

chunks: Older citizens are not likely to come on Saturday, especially without busing from the “old folks’ centers”; and younger citizens are probably not able to come because they are working.

Gore’s marketing team also shows that its level of segmentation moved beyond their ability to (not) link with local culture. A poignant marker of the move toward fragmentation in national politics manifests in the DNC Hispanic marketing team’s disconnect from other branches *within* the Democratic National Committee itself. With a little bit of coordination between Gore’s Hispanic team from the DNC and Lieberman’s people, according to Sinder, this lackluster event could have been an electrifying rally held on Thursday night.<sup>13</sup> But the staff for Gore and Lieberman did not coordinate, and in an ironic twist, it took the intervention of a *local* advertising agent for Gore’s people to realize the problem:

MD: So is the only reason why they had it at that time was because of “Little Joe,” or did some people actually think that Saturday was a better day?

MS: Well, number one: I think they [DNC] thought Saturday was a good day. Number two: it couldn’t be later in the day because of “Little Joe’s” schedule.

They [DNC] initially, we are not supposed to know this, but they were trying to do Lieberman here at the same time. They didn’t realize that Lieberman couldn’t commit on Saturday. Because it wasn’t Lieberman’s people planning it, it was a different part of the DNC that’s not familiar with Jewish rules. Lieberman doesn’t travel on Saturday; they didn’t realize that.

They called a local ad agency to assist with the visit, and they said “Lieberman.” And, he said, “Well Lieberman won’t be able to come.”

[DNC representative] “What do you mean?” [Sinder inserts laughter into his commentary highlighting the absurdity of the entire episode.]

[Ad man] Lieberman doesn’t travel on Saturdays.”

[DNC representative] “Oh, we didn’t know that.”

MD: Right. No idea?

MS: They had no clue. So, I think that was originally the plan that there was a hole in his schedule that day; and unbeknownst to them, the hole in his schedule that day was intentional. [Laughter] . . .

We would've been much better advised if we would've had done it on Thursday night while he was here. It would have worked out perfect if we would have had done a rally on Thursday night, same location, everything the same but on Thursday night and then tour the colonias on Saturday [he meant Friday], and we'd have had a crowd there.

MD: And the reason why you say Thursday night is better is because of Lieberman?

MS: Because he was here. Certainly having Lieberman would have been a bigger draw, I think, than Henry [Cisneros], and the number of people that showed up at the park thinking that Lieberman was going to be there was just astounding.

In addition to demonstrating how segmented their ethnic strategy was, particularly since Lieberman's Sabbath observance was a national issue, this story of Gore's ethnic marketing team is amazing in-itself.

An issue parallel to a lack of engagement between event coordinators is that of different ends. This DNC spectacle did not attract many South Texans nor did it sustain their engagement, but the Democratic National Committee's Hispanic media marketing team did transform the live event into a publicity vehicle and sent television feeds nationally, marketing to "Hispanic" citizens in the "battleground states" of Michigan, Ohio, and Florida. The messages broadcast to their niche market at these crucial sites emphasized connections and loyalty. In their attempt to channel voters, they featured speeches that afternoon at the rally which stressed communicating with *family* to vote Gore-Lieberman.

Sinder's recollection of political events and the significance of understanding local political culture highlights the specificity of those situations that allowed people to gather. It did not produce new voting publics in South Texas in part because it lacked intertextuality--it did not invoke the traditional pachanga. Moreover, the situation of contrasting evaluations of a single event can be attributed, to a certain degree, to disconnect between national and local politics as

well as to the recent application by consultants for the Democratic National Committee to a philosophy of segmentation, based in live music event branding, terms linking two categories that, studies of democracy and the public sphere, for the most part have tried to either ignore or keep separate.

Given their disinclination toward tapping a grass-roots tradition of political activism and focus on the bottom line and media feeds, they appear to have been “enshrining” their own consumerist model of democracy. It encompasses potential--to borrow the notion of a community of identity for the purposes of selling products--that most transnational marketers intellectually understand. Central to this idea is learning how to segment. The DNC proves that, for national marketers, participation thins to almost nothing. A consumer-choice vision of democracy, like transnational marketing, makes a different use of ethnic identity, constructing it as a segment of market share. Here, they elide the rich of history of Mexicano/a protest against discrimination based in calibrations of gender, color, and class embedded within the ethnic markers--those of music and live music events in the borderlands. But, as an ethnic branding in national politics, the DNC’s projection of ethnic identity is distinct. Considering this shift toward a consumer choice model, how different are the implications for democratic participation?

One might choose one product over another but the participation is nil. Even when actors do arrive, ready to participate, coordinators do not seem inclined to transform the audience. In addition, following the arguments of scholars of globalization (Z. Bauman 1998) and those of niche marketing, what does it mean for democracy--for citizen state relations--to be reduced to narrowing niches of consumerism. As Bauman, Sunstien and others suggest, will this in fact lead

society into to ever tightening cascades of balkanized buyers, only using participants as a tool to represent a simulacra of political activism?

My purpose has been to demonstrate the local-national political disconnect through an ethnographically grounded discussion of differing assessments of a live music event, providing an explanation for these constructions, and in the process, explaining why an active grass-roots style and a more passive transnational style of democracy thrive and languish. Residents of Hidalgo County produce political pachangas according to local convention; one established in relation to previous experiences with national political organizers--but during the year 2000 presidential political campaign, they contended with a new set of rules as enacted and embodied in the Democratic National Committee's Hispanic marketing team, constructed according to niche marketing and influenced by discourses and trends within that arena, particularly that of segmentation. As they arrange the conditions for locally produced live music events and their national projection, ethnic marketers for the Democratic national committee musically mediate distinct political publics, simultaneously dissolving one and constituting another, ignoring a rich history of political organization and valorizing the projection of iconized ethnic circulators. In contrast, local participants recognized the grass roots event for what it was and responded accordingly; many did not attend, and others departed early. In fact, local political specialists heavily criticized the organization of the event and turned the Lieberman tale into a representation of the inability of Al Gore and his staff to understand politics--particularly grass roots politics--in their complexity: latching on to local customs; reinforcing the significance of their campaign to people in a direct, unmediated fashion; and channeling social gatherings. I will close with the words of a staffer who pithily characterized the situation when speaking of Gore and his candidacy. This fellow lamented: "He just doesn't have rhythm."

## Notes

---

1. The local newspaper reported 750 people. Julie Bisbee in *The McAllen Monitor*, October 15, 2000.

2. "Pachanga" is a term whose meaning is polysemic and contested, and I base my usage of it in historical, linguistic, and ethnographic research. Typically, "pachanga" refers to a gathering of close friends and family that incorporates music, food, and drink. For instance, Limón (1989; 1994) sets his work around a type of pachanga typical in South Texas featuring a group of men in the countryside barbecuing meat and drinking beer. This discussion focuses on the pachanga more narrowly defined as such a gathering that serves a political function in South Texas.

Little has been written on the political pachanga in South Texas, and this perhaps is the case because many consultants consider it a taboo topic for commentary. At least in my

---

fieldwork, moments when people spoke spontaneously about the pachanga were rare, and often consultants happy to talk at length in an informed manner about many elements of South Texas culture became cautious at the mention of “pachanga” in the context of politics. They would quickly scan the room to see if anyone could hear our conversation, and then became hesitant and often silent. Others would discuss the topic, but only under conditions of anonymity, and some went so far as to request that I not tape-record or take written notes of our conversation. Many consultants hesitate to speak about political pachangas--especially the politics of organizing them and what occurs at them--for two reasons: they perceive the topic as physically dangerous to discuss, most likely because of Hidalgo County’s tradition of mixing physical force with politics; and they consider pachangas to be aligned with buying and selling votes and attendant illegal practices considered corrupting acts.

The danger of employing such a loaded term as pachanga is that it will be met by some South Texans with dismay. By tracing the evolution of the political pachanga and including dance hall-style and corporate pachangas within this category, I risk upsetting some of my more traditional-minded interlocutors in Hidalgo County, who favor limiting this label to the men-in-the-countryside form. Among other reasons, the frequent and continued use of the term to describe political dance hall events persuaded me to call such permutations of it “pachangas.” Despite this possible criticism and other limitations inherent to chronicling an element central to the articulation of local culture and social cohesion, I hope South Texans leave this article with the feeling that it presents a reasonable account of music, politics, markets, and pachangas.

3. See Pycior (1997) for an in-depth discussion of the ¡Viva Kennedy! Campaign.

4. An anonymous consultant (personal communication, December 2000) labeled 1973 as the year in which this occurred.

5. For discussions of a few different models of democracy, see I.M. Young (1993, 1996) on communicative, Frazer and Lacey (1993) on communitarian; Barber (1984), Bohman (1995), Cohen (1989), Fishkin (1991), Habermas (1991, 1995), Spragens (1990), and Sunstein (1988, 2001) on deliberative; and Eisenstein (1994) on radicalized in a context of racialized patriarchy.

6. These approaches to discourse (see Bauman and Briggs 1990) share a concern with the role of power in producing subjugation (Foucault 1980), and in this sense, have shared concerns with other studies of democracy (Gordon 1991; Mitchell 1991; Rose 1996) and detailed ethnographies of democracies as centrally concerned with controlling populations in neoliberal contexts (Nelson 1999; Schild 1998).

7. While the vast majority of events were located inside Hidalgo County, I attended approximately ten events in other parts of South Texas (Cameron, Duval and Nueces Counties).

---

8. “Tejano,” “Mexicano,” “Hispanic,” “Chicano,” “Mexican American,” or “citizen of the United States of America” are all labels residents of Hidalgo County use to describe themselves. Local residents rarely use the term “Latino” to describe themselves; hence the use of “Latino” often marks the speaker as an outsider or as speaking in the idiom of an outsider. Most residents of Hidalgo County recognize that the choice of label is a political act, and selection varies from person to person and equally often with setting. I decided to use the term “Mexicana/o” throughout the majority of the text because it appears to be used and accepted by many residents of Hidalgo County with the least amount of dismay. My usage of “Mexicana/o” refers to individuals and families with linguistic, cultural, or familial ties to Mexico.

9. The frequency and timing of Hidalgo County’s pachangas shifted in response to early voting, a recently introduced element into Texas’s political landscape. Early voting refers to an extended period of time before election day that is open to all registered voters to vote. In 2000, it lasted for almost two weeks, from Saturday, October 21, through Friday, November 3. I attended approximately thirty pachangas in this time period. Hidalgo County opened early voting “substations” in twelve spots. Early voting is a way in which Democrats attempt to make voting in Hidalgo County more accessible.

10. I purposely draw metaphors from behavior surrounding the Catholic mass because these actions and their socialization are intertextual. Most South Texans are practicing Catholics—they were raised in the Catholic Church and/or attended Catholic schools. This exodus parallels that of adherents receiving communion and the final blessing.

11. Across Hidalgo County, less than half of the population graduated from high school (U.S. Census Bureau 1990), with 40 percent of this group having less than a 9<sup>th</sup>-grade education. Approximately 46 percent of its population operates at a level of literacy in which they can sign their name but cannot locate an intersection on a street map or enter background information on a social security card application (Reder 1998: 4).

12. I documented the temperature at 88 degrees, without a humidity index.

13. As I learned at Letty Lopez’s and Ernie Aliseda’s live music political events, Thursday night--while not ideal--is a good night for live music events.

## References Cited

Aacker, David.

1996 *Building Strong Brands*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Apter, Andrew

1999 IBB=419: Nigerian Democracy and the Politics of Illusion. *In Civil Society and the Political Imagination in Africa: Critical Perspectives*. John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Attlesey, Sam.

1996 Texas and Southwest Texas Politics, '96 Election Noted For Emergence of Hispanic Bloc. *Dallas Morning News*, November 17: 42A.

Barber, Benjamin

1984 *Strong Democracy*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Bauman, Richard and Charles Briggs.

1990 Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life. *Annual Review of Anthropology*. Pp. 59-88.

1992 Genre, Intertextuality, and Social Power. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 2(2): 131-72.

Bauman, Richard

1993 *Story, Performance, and Event: Contextual Studies of Oral Narrative*. Cambridge Studies in Oral and Literate Culture. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bauman, Zygmunt.

1998 *Globalization: The Human Consequences*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Bisbee, Julie

2000 *The McAllen Monitor*. B1. Sunday, October 15.

Bohman, James

1995 Democracy and Cultural Pluralism. *In Political Theory* 23, no. 2: 253-79.

Coronil, Fernando

1997 *The Magical State: Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Cohen, Joshua

1989 Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy. *In The Good Polity*. Alan Hamlin and Philip Petit, ed. pp. 17-34. London: Blackwell.

Edenkamp, Becky, and Gerry Khermouch

1996 Why Major Marketers Are Latin Lovers. *Brandweek*, August 5: 34, 32.

Eisenstein, Zillah

1994 *The Color of Gender: Reimagining Democracy*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Fishkin, James

1991 *Deliberative Democracy*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Foley, Douglas

1998 *From Peones to Politicos: Class and Ethnicity in a South Texas Town, 1900-1987*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

FitzGerald, Kate

1997 Music Event Marketing Can Prove the Best Catalyst. *Advertising Age*, 68: 46.

1999 Issuers Refine Focus on Events, Audiences. *Card Marketing*, April 3: 4.

Foucault, Michel

1980 *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-77*. Colin Gordon, ed. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham and Kate Soper, trans. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Frazer, Elizabeth and Nicola Lacey

1993 *The Politics of Community: A Feminist Critique of the Liberal-Communitarian Debate*. New York: harvester/Wheatsheaf.

Freeman, Laurie

1999 Great Outdoors Gains Meaning for Card Marketers. *Card Marketing*, June 3:6.

García, Mario

1989 *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology, and Identity, 1930-1960*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Gilroy, Paul.

1993 *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Gordon, Colin

1991 Governmental Rationality: An Introduction. *In The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller, eds. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Greenhouse, Carol J and Davydd J. Greenwood

- 1998 Introduction: The Ethnography of Democracy and Difference. *In* Democracy and Ethnography: Constructing Identities in Multicultural Liberal States. Carol J. Greenhouse, ed. Pp. 1-26. Albany: State University of New York.

Habermas, Jürgen

- 1991 Further Reflections on the Public Sphere. *In* Habermas and the Public Sphere. Craig Calhoun, ed. Thomas Burger, trans. Pp. 421-61. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- 1995 Reconciliation through the Public Use of Reason: Remarks on John Rawls's Political Liberalism. *In* The Journal of Philosophy. XXCII:3.

Kapferer, Jean-Noël

- 1994 Strategic Brand Management: New Approaches to Creating and Evaluation Brand Equity. New York: Free Press.

Marquez, Benjamin

- 1993 LULAC: The Evolution of a Mexican American Political Organization. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Nelson, Diane

- 1999 A finger in the Wound: Body Politics in Quincentennial Guatemala. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kuipers Joel.

- 1998 Language, Identity, and Marginality in Indonesia: The Changing Nature of Ritual Speech on the Island of Sumba. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Limón, Jose E.

- 1989 Carne, Carnales and the Carnavalesque: Bakhtinian Batos, Disorder and Narrative Discourse. *American Ethnologist*. 16: 471-86.
- 1994 Dancing with the Devil: Society and Cultural Poetics in Mexican-American south Texas. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Mitchell, Timothy.

- 1991 The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and Their Critics. *American Political Science Review* 85 (1): 78-96.

Mouffe, Chantal

- 1999 Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism. *Social Research* 66: 745-58.

Orozco, Cynthia

- 1992 The Origins of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement in Texas with an Analysis of Women's Political Participation in a Gendered Context, 1910-1929. Dissertation. UCLA.

O'Shaughnessy, Nicholas J

1990 The Phenomenon of Political Marketing. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Paley, Julia

2001a Marketing Democracy: Power and Social Movements in Post-Dictatorship Chile.

Berkeley: University of California Press.

2001b Making Democracy Count: Opinion Polls and Market Surveys in the Chilean Political Transition. *Cultural Anthropology* 16 (2):135-64.

Paredes, Américo.

[1958]1994 With His Pistol in His Hand: A Border Ballad and Its Hero. Austin: University of Texas Press.

[1971]1993 The United States, Mexico, and *Machismo*. In *Folklore and Culture on the Texas-Mexican Border*. Richard Bauman, ed. Pp.215-234. Austin: Center for Mexican American Studies, University of Texas Press.

1976 A Texas-Mexican Cancionero. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

[1978]1993 The Problem of Identity in a Changing Culture: Popular Expressions of Culture Conflict along the Lower Rio Grande Border. In *Folklore and Culture on the Texas-Mexican Border*. Richard Bauman, ed. Austin: Center for Mexican American Studies University of Texas.

[1987]1993 The Undying Love of "El Indio" Córdova: *Décimas* and Oral History in a Border Family. In *Folklore and Culture on the Texas-Mexican Border*. Richard Bauman, ed. Austin: Center for Mexican American Studies University of Texas.

Pycior, Julie Leininger

1997 LBJ and Mexican Americans: the Paradox of Power. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Peña, Manuel

1985 The Texas-Mexican Conjunto: History of a Working-Class Music. Austin: University of Texas Press.

1999 *Musica Tejana: The Cultural Economy of Artistic Transformation*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press.

Reder, Stephen

1998 The State of Literacy in America: Estimates at the Local, State, and National Levels. Washington, DC: National Institute for Literacy.

Rose, Nikolas

1996 Governing 'Advanced' Liberal Democracies. In *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-liberalism and Rationalities of Government*. Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne, and Nikolas Rose, eds. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Schild, Veronica

- 1998 New Subjects of Rights? Women's Movements and the Construction of Citizenship in 'New Democracies.' *In Cultures of Politics, Politics of Cultures: Re-visioning Latin American Social Movements.* Sonia Alvarez, Evelina Dagnino and Arturo Escobar, eds. Boulder: Westview Press.

Schmitt, Bernd and Alex Simonson

- 1997 *Marketing Aesthetics: The Strategic Management of Brands, Identity, and Image.* New York: Free Press.

Spragens, Thomas

- 1990 *Reason and Democracy.* Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

Sunstein, Cass

- 1988 Beyond the Republican Revival. *In Yale Law Journal* 97: 1539-90.  
2001 republic.com. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

U.S. Bureau of the Census

- 1990 DP-2. Social Characteristics: 1990. *From 1990 Census of Population and Housing, Summary Tape File 3.* [Http://factfinder.census.gov/](http://factfinder.census.gov/)

Wells, Melanie

- 1996 U.S. Advertisers Slowly Learn to Speak Spanish. *USA Today*, March 21:1B.

Young, Iris Marion

- 1993 *Justice and Communicative Democracy.* *In Radical Philosophy: Tradition, Counter-Tradition, Politics.* Roger S. Gottlieb, ed. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.  
1996 *Communication and the Other: Beyond Deliberative Democracy.* *In Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political.* Seyla Benhabib, ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Zate, Maria

- 1997 *Opening the Big Wallets.* *Hispanic Business*, December.

## **Discography**

Garza, Cecilio

- 2000 *Campaign Music for Judge Aparicio.*

Montoya, Alfredo and Tony Padilla

- 1996 *El Corrido de: Victor Morales—Para el Senado de Texas—.* *In Corridos Politicos.*