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**TOWARDS INTEREST CONVERGENCE: COALITION
BUILDING REQUIRES CONNECTION WITHIN AS
WELL AS WITHOUT**

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The subject of this resolution is coalition building. Some of the obstacles to coalition building are illustrated in a story about how the effects of racism preclude connection in the Latino-Mexican-American community. The story is also about racism and homophobia within the Mexican-American community, but primarily it is about a failure in connection in the Latino community per se. This is a good place to start, because groups have to be able to connect together and move on together in order to coordinate and start reaching out to other groups as well.

This is a boxing story. There was a superlightweight title fight between Oscar de la Hoya and Julio Cesar Chavez last year. In late 1996, after the beatings in Riverside and the Prop. 187 protests, I started to hear murmurings in the Latino community about how Oscar de la Hoya was out to take the title from Julio Cesar Chavez, who was at that time the Mexican champion. It became clear that many Mexicans and Mexican-Americans in Los Angeles were extremely defensive at the idea of De la Hoya taking Chavez's title. De la Hoya is Mexican-American from Los Angeles. Cesar Chavez is native Mexican and still lives in Mexico.

In preparation for writing an essay about the upcoming fight and the take on it from the Latino boxing community in East Los Angeles, I started visiting a boxing gym in East Los Angeles called "Super Box." Super Box was full of lightweight and welterweight Latino contenders who had very interesting views on race, boxing, and de la Hoya. For one, they all hated de la Hoya. They called him a "pretty boy" and a "sell-out," and said he fought like a little girl.

They also talked about how race and ethnicity inform boxing style. There is a White style of boxing, called the "classic" style of boxing, that is defensive. There is also a Mexican way to box, which is toe to toe style of taking a lot of hits and being unafraid to take punches in the face. De la Hoya boxes White; he's defensive. Chavez is an "in your face" fighter who is not afraid to take a punch.

Disturbingly, I also learned from the manager of Super Box that there is a Black way to box. When the manager was explaining to me how de la Hoya is a "classic" boxer, I asked him, "Like Muhammed Ali?" I figured there could be no more classic boxer; Ali is a boxing icon. But the manager told me, "Oh, no. Ali is a Black fighter and Black fighters, they're really slick and they jive around a lot. And de la Hoya—he would never jive." What really struck me in this conversation was that de la Hoya seems to get

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a lot more brown when you put him next to an African-American fighter. But the bottom line is that de la Hoya boxes White.

In addition to race and ethnicity, sexuality and homophobia play roles in the boxing community. For example, the nickname fighters commonly called de la Hoya was "pretty boy," with all its homophobic baggage. The boxers called him that because de la Hoya is defensive and he tries to avoid being hit in the face during a fight. I was also told that he boxes like a "little girl" and I thought that was funny because I'm a girl and small; what's wrong with that? Not surprisingly, Chavez was the overwhelming favorite to win the fight.

In June, the fight was televised live in the Sports Arena, an amphitheater in downtown Los Angeles. The place was filled with brown people and was really fun. I loved it; I was having a great time. Everybody was Latino, everybody was really on fire, and I was all for de la Hoya. The anti-de la Hoya sentiment was starting to wear me down. He is not a Mexican, but rather a Los Angeles Mexican-American like me. Because of that, to me he is a hero: he is a boxer and he is Mexican-American. Mexican-Americans should all be in love with de la Hoya. I could not understand why the Latinos in Los Angeles did not feel the same way. The talk about de la Hoya was also reminding me of some of the uncomfortable racial labeling I had experienced before in the Mexican-American community. For example, racial labeling included being called "coconut" and being called "pocho," which is a pejorative term for somebody who's too White. This was really starting to get to me and I was all for de la Hoya winning.

The fight was displayed on a huge 16 foot wide screen. I sat down with my husband to watch the undercard fights. Johnny Tapia, a Mexican welterweight with a big "Virgin" tattooed on his chest, was making a meatball out of another fighter and the crowd was going wild. Then, in a heavyweight fight, a 303 pound heavy weight named Butterbean was giving punishment to a 200 pound heavyweight. In between these undercard fights, pictures would flash on the screen showing live footage of Chavez and de la Hoya getting ready for the fight in their rooms. Whenever a picture of Chavez showed up, the crowd went crazy; they would scream, they would wave their Mexican flags, and some were crying. On the other hand, whenever a picture of de la Hoya was shown, the response was exactly the opposite; there were boos and hisses, people were screaming curses, and people were throwing things at the screen.

When the main fight began, Chavez came in arrayed in Mexican colors. The crowd went wild. Then de la Hoya ran in wearing a robe made of spliced Mexican and American flags. Each man's anthem was played. When the Mexican anthem was played for Chavez, everybody stood up: they all sang the anthem, creating a wonderfully poetic moment, and then sat down. When the American anthem was played, everyone started booing and bringing out Mexican flags. I sat there thinking, "I don't really understand. . . I understand what's happening, but this is really taking me by surprise." Moreover, de la Hoya did not sing the words to the anthem.

After the bell rang, the fighters came out of their corners and the crowd went wild. De la Hoya reigned with his classic so-called White style of boxing; because he was very defensive, he did not get hit in the face. He was really giving it to Chavez, but was not getting hit. Chavez, on the other hand, was getting hit all over the place; he was getting killed. He had gone in there like a slob with an old wound, which got opened up very quickly after the fight commenced. He started bleeding almost immediately. The bell rang, they went back to their corners, and then Coors Light card-girls wiggled around. There were two sets of card girls: an Anglo set in white bathing suits and a Latina set in chili red bathing suits. They came out one after the other and everybody screamed, threw things at them, and made some faces.

In the 4th round, the fight was called because Chavez was all cut up, bleeding too much, and finished. None of the Chavez fans were hollering anymore. Instead, all 10 of the de la Hoya fans were standing up and yelling and screaming. De la Hoya smiled so much he looked like a homecoming queen. It was a wonderful moment. In any event, everyone picked up the trash, became subdued, and filed out. I was very excited that de la Hoya had won, but when I got outside I looked around and saw how depressed everyone looked. I understood it, but I did not expect that kind of reaction. That was when I realized that I had been responding to the idea that de la Hoya had been the underdog. Everyone had been in favor of Chavez; de la Hoya has the hyphen, his hometown hates him, etc. But what I actually realized at that moment is that Chavez had always been the underdog and everyone in the Latino community had known that. He was on his last legs, he is Mexican, and de la Hoya represents America.

At this point, my own exuberance started to die down. As I was walking back to our car, everyone was extremely quiet; no one was saying anything, but a couple of people were honking their horns. Then the man behind me said, "Don't forget Chavez." That was the moment at which I wished for the first time that Chavez had won and I realized what this had meant to the Latino community.

The reason this story is important for coalition building is because we must first acknowledge the fragility of our own communities, while we think about building bridges with other groups. English-only laws and immigration laws create an atmosphere where Latinos have to find some symbols to determine who is in and who is out, so we can get a grip on who it is we are trying to fight. Now what winds up happening is that the community itself cannot be an integrated whole. This poses a tremendous problem for coalition building, because it is hard to reach out to others when you are not strong yourself.

In addition, the disturbing strains of racism and homophobia that I saw, although certainly attributable to malice on the individual's part, are informed by the feeling of being under siege: people who do not conform to the idea of "Latino-ness" have to be made into derogatory subjects in one way or another. This is a very self-destructive type of thing. To be able to come

together as one whole and reach out to others will only amount to an act of faith. I have no other descriptions other than that general statement, which is my 10 minute resolution.