

**An edge story of
“Mexican” on Tejano gentrification in the
U.S. of A... more specifically ATX**

by Andrés M. Garza

I found myself walking after work thru the streets of downtown Austin, business downtown. Not east downtown.

Though, I do work in east downtown at a sushi bar.

Sushi & gentrification is a whole other topic, though it informs this conversation I'm about to have.

During my hour long breaks at work, I mandated myself to read “The Gentrification of the Mind” by Sarah Schulman.

She walks us through the process of erasure not only of physical spaces but how it begins to erase in the collective minds & people, communities, scenes, movements are forgotten. Replaced by homogenous whiteness. It is a beautiful, heartbreaking memoir and I encourage you look into it & read it.

In the walk after work, I head to the bus station, but that day, I saw a bar across the street, a pink neon sign. Written on the walls was, MEZCALERIA. I like mezcal, I research Mexican food, I am intrigued. I go toward the generic pink neon. I am one to fall for that generic trap. It's called :::

“Las Perlas” a mezcaleria by 213 Hospitality Group, an L.A. based company helmed by Cedd Moses, son of artist Ed Moses. I order a cocktail from a specials menu that was in partnership with Spirited Coalition for Change, where one of my dollars went towards “a mission to help stop the rising numbers of homeless women and children in the respective communities of each participating bar”

I guess I should get to the point, there is another bar in Austin by the name, “La Perla”. It is in east downtown, east 6th street.

The heart where gentrification is socially perceived, though the heart, I would argue, is in each business hit by this wave.

AUSTIN RESTAURANT OPENINGS

Inside Las Perlas, Downtown Austin's New Mezcal Haven

Take a tour of the new bar from the Los Angeles team behind Seven Grand

by [Nadia Chaudhury](#) | Sep 11, 2017, 2:00pm CDT

Photography by [Courtney Pierce](#)

...in this article:

The downtown mezcal bar is hosting an [opening party](#) on Thursday, September 14. Its nightly hours are from 5 p.m. to 2 a.m. Nightly happy hour runs until 8 p.m. with \$5 cocktails and \$3 beers. [Las Perlas](#) isn't to be confused with [Tejano bar La Perla on East 6th Street](#).

clicked Tejano bar :

13. La Perla



1512 E 6th St
Austin, TX 78702

(512) 477-0167

This East Side cantina is holding its own amid the swell of gentrification. Come with cash and an appetite for beer.

Reading that already felt icky. & yes, discomfort is only the step of recognizing gentrification, but discomfort is not proactive to this erasure.

The cocktail was good, behind the bar was this taco vendor with some incredible suadero tacos too, a local guy with a 2 person business. The mezcals are, I hope, ethically sourced, but I have had loads of trouble in researching the chain of Mexican spirit sourcing. One comment that I will keep in circulation, is from my friend whose family works in mezcal production:

“Los campesinos siempre quedan chingados”

“The farmers always end up getting fucked”

“La Perla,” the Tejano bar, the one not with the pink neon sign, dates back as the 1930’s and is referred to as ‘East Austin’s last cantina’. There is a short documentary that attempts to “capture the stories of the patrons who have made La Perla a unique gathering place for an older generation”².

I find many articles about “La Perla”, giving it credit for surviving, acknowledging how cheap their drinks are, for providing a gathering space for a community that still remains alive.

Filmmakers preserve legacy of East Sixth Street bar La Perla



Enchilada and barbecue benefits are a big part of cantina culture, Del Bosque said. Over the years, La Perla’s customers have come together to raise money for everything from medical expenses for neighbors to school supplies for students. “That’s how we’ve all grown up around here,” Costilla said.

These days, while a crowd of regulars usually gather during the day at La Perla, newcomers tend to wander inside in the evenings. “After a while you will see them all sit together laughing or telling stories about the neighborhood,” Costilla said. “You want to keep up with the changes, but maintain what you have — the feel of it.”

There are many interlinked ways to think of ethics. We have here a problem of class and culture. “La Perla” cantina is a Tejano byproduct with an established history and showcase of community building. They buy and sell Bud Light, Dos XX, cheap local and imported beers and wine, nothing fancy, nothing rare. They also have a history of sexual harassment, towing scams, and anti-whiteness according to Yelp reviews. Make of that what you will.

At the end of this, I just think of how many times I walked past this place. Austin is not my home base, but I have walked through this city attempting to be aware, to give what I can. I, at the same time, am detached of this community. I wonder how long it will be until people refer to “La Perla” or “Las Perlas” as one and the same, and this one physical building is erased. Erased in the public homogenous mind, and will they then open another white-owned bar in this Tejano space? Charging triple the prices while the regular patrons receive the same income.

What does it mean to introduce white people to Mexican drinks and culture? Why do you want to do that? At whose expense does it come from and who does it benefit?

We should ask ourselves often,
for the communities we inhabit and migrate to,
for the cultures and classes we belong to or don't,
for the things and people we care about.

.....~~~~~

Andrés.

10/17/2019