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Hispanic Stereotypes in Contemporary Film

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Hispanic Stereotypes in Contemporary Film

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By

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Under the mentorship of Dra. Leticia McGrath

ABSTRACT

Stereotypes are present even in the most popular films. Groups of people are often misrepresented in a way that is entertaining, but not necessarily truthful, causing viewers to have a narrow, often incorrect, view of a particular culture or people. This research serves as an analysis of selected contemporary American films that feature a Hispanic character or cultural element. My aim is twofold: first, to shed light on the stereotypes surrounding Hispanics and the excessive appearance of these stereotypical representations in popular U.S. films, and second, to promote open-mindedness by educating others on the cultural diversity of Spanish speakers, especially those groups that are present in the United States.

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> "For the most part we do not first see, and then define, we define first and then see. In the great blooming, buzzing confusion of the outer world we pick out what our culture has already defined for us, and we tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture."
>
> –Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion*

INTRODUCTION

Nearly everyone has been stereotyped or stereotyped another person. It is in our nature, as humans, to make assumptions or generalizations based on little knowledge. It is our way of making sense of the world in a way that is easy and simple to understand, despite the world's tendency to be just the opposite (Berg, "Stereotyping" 287). While many stereotypes are commonly said as jokes in conversation or used as humor in films or shows, they can promote negative attitudes with continued usage. The purpose of this research is to discuss the stereotypes assigned to Hispanics and their predictable place in contemporary film, primarily focusing on films from the 2000s to the present day. These mainstream beliefs are patterned and consistent, thus influencing our view of this minority group, perhaps subconsciously or without real action, particularly affecting children at a young age. Hispanics are often shown as criminals leading drug rings or stealing cars, as exotic sexpots and oversexualized characters, as clowns used as the butt of every joke, as servants in various domestic service roles, or even as immigrants entering the United States, most likely illegally. This thesis serves as an analysis of the current stereotypes regarding Hispanics in

contemporary films and how this impacts the way Hispanics are perceived in today's society in the United States.

WHAT ARE STEREOTYPES?

One of the earliest definitions of the term "stereotype" comes from Walter Lippmann, who broadly describes stereotypes as "a picture in our heads" in his 1922 novel *Public Opinion*, (4). He develops the idea of stereotypes as a juxtaposition of ideas: the imagined world versus the world as it was. He later states, "Inevitably our opinions cover a bigger space, a longer reach of time, a greater number of things than we can directly observe" (79). According to Lippmann, stereotypes help us to fill in the blanks of understanding the world. Additional publications by Daniel Katz & Kenneth W. Braly and J.P. Guilford in the early 1930s sought to determine the ideas surrounding racial preferences and prejudices, particularly those of college students. These studies revealed that there was a consensus in the U.S. of those races that were regarded with respect and others that were discounted. J.P. Guilford, in his 1931 study entitled "Racial Preferences of a Thousand American University Students," found that the discounted races were those of which participants had little knowledge (185). These studies confirm the idea that we make assumptions based on what we have heard indirectly or have assumed based on little knowledge. If we apply these findings to the ways in which we consume media, particularly film, audiences may gravitate toward information or images seen on the "big screen" because of their lack of knowledge or interaction with whom or what is being presented.

Sometimes, we, as humans, rely on this indirect information more than objective facts or observations.

These early influential studies of stereotypes still have relevance in today's society and the assumptions that we have of other groups of people. Stereotypes, at their core, are oversimplifications. These ideas are predetermined actions, behaviors, or images assigned to different groups as a way to establish differences among people. In his 2011 book, *Film and Stereotype: A Challenge for Cinema and Theory*, Jörg Schwinitz analyzes stereotypes through a sociological and psychological lens:

> Stereotypes are standardized conceptions of people, primarily based on an individual's belonging to a category (usually race, nation, professional role, social class, or gender) or the possession of characteristic traits symbolizing one of these categories. (4)

While these attitudes can take on a negative connotation, stereotypes, or these categories previously mentioned, are harmless until they are believed. The main issue revolves around the assumptions and perceptions made based upon the theoretical stereotypes about groups of people. Berg states, "Because they [stereotypes] are perceived to be real, and do not exist merely as abstract concepts or cognitive categories, they are endowed with great power" ("Stereotyping" 288). Once believed to be facts, people not only assume uniformity in a group, they expect it.

HISPANICS IN THE UNITED STATES

This research concerns the mainstream stereotypes and some common misconceptions of Hispanics in the United States. It is impossible to address this topic without first acknowledging that the terms used to describe the racialized ethnicity of Hispanics have been, and continue to be, the subject of much debate. While there is a plethora of terms used to describe the Hispanic minority (both with positive and negative connotations), the terms "Latinos" and "Hispanics" remain the most popular and most neutral commonly used terms. Often, people use these terms interchangeably, possibly using what they have heard without knowing their actual definitions; this phenomenon follows the previously mentioned trend regarding stereotypes in which people rely on what they may have seen or heard without real regard for the truth. Each term is slightly different in its definition, describing ethnicity, not race. For the purposes of this study, I intend to use the following definitions as described by Dr. Nicki Lisa Cole, who is a freelance journalist on the topics of race, gender, and human behavior. In her article titled "The Difference Between Hispanic and Latino," Cole defines the term "Hispanic" as "people who speak Spanish or who are descended from Spanish speaking lineage;" whereas "Latino" is limited to "a person [who] is from or descended from people from Latin America." Overall, the term "Hispanic" is tied more closely to the Spanish language, and "Latino" (coming from the Spanish word *latinoamericano*) is greatly based on geographical location. The biggest difference is that "Latino" includes people from Brazil, although they do not speak Spanish, and excludes people from Spain because of their location in Europe. For the purposes of this thesis, I will be using the term

"Hispanic" (and "Hispanic American"), as my primary focus is on the communities associated more closely to the Spanish language and the diverse cultures associated with it. Despite this, the term "Latino" is used within quotes of this paper due to the more extensive research conducted under the scope of Latinos, and the lack thereof concerning Hispanics.

The demographics of the Hispanic population are commonly misconceived, and statistics are exaggerated in the mainstream media. According to data collected on the Hispanic population by the United States Census Bureau, Hispanics make up 17.8% of the total U.S. Population as of the most current study conducted in 2016. While Hispanics constitute the largest minority group, they account for less than a quarter of the U.S. population. This idea of a greater Hispanic population, shown in figure 1, may be conceived based on the semi-drastic rise in population since 1960 when Hispanics only accounted for 3.5% of the total U.S. population ("Facts on U.S. Latinos, 2015"). The composition of the

Hispanics are a rising share of the U.S. population

% of total population
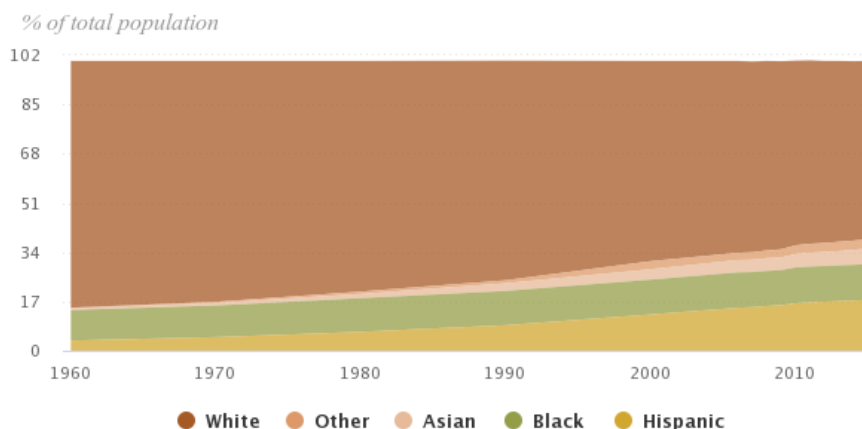
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Figure 1 Graph supplied by Pew Research Center, "Facts on U.S. Latinos, 2015"

United States is changing due to multiple factors such as greater ease of relocation, globalization, and immigration. However, most people attribute this change in population composition solely to immigration. As you can see in figure 2, the Hispanic population is more recently sustained by U.S.-born people, rather than those born outside of the United States. Due to our current political climate, Hispanics, particularly Hispanic immigrants, are scrutinized on a daily basis, while in reality the Hispanic immigrant population is significantly less than that of U.S.-born Hispanic Americans.

Sources of Hispanic population growth, by decade

In millions
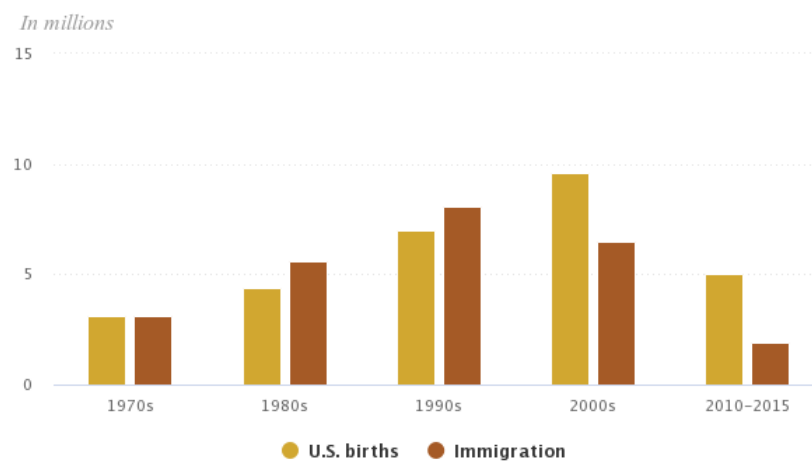
Notes: U.S. births and immigrations reflect additions to the U.S. Hispanic population. Deaths and emigration not shown.

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Figure 2 Graph supplied by Pew Research Center, "Facts on U.S. Latinos, 2015."

Finally, there is another great concern facing Hispanics and Hispanic Americans today. In the United States, there is a high tendency for non-Hispanic people to ignorantly label all Hispanics as Mexicans. At first glance, one might think this is due to the close proximity of the two countries that share a common border. It could also be attributed to Mexico's frequent appearance in

contemporary film, as discussed later in greater detail. There is statistical research showing that Mexicans do make up more than half of all Hispanics in America, according to Pew Research Center ("Facts on U.S. Latinos, 2015"). As indicated in figure 3 (shown below), while Mexicans constitute a large majority of Hispanics, there is far greater diversity in the Hispanic population, most notably those of Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Central America (and this is just within the United States). As discussed earlier, the terms Hispanic and Latino describe a person's ethnicity (i.e. culture). However, because these terms encompass a large number of countries and cultures, it is difficult to determine what "Hispanic culture" is because it is so diverse. Moreover, if all Hispanics are misconceived to be Mexicans, they are again limited by the culture that accompanies such terms. This phenomenon of Mexican labelling is discussed later in this thesis as a result of further analysis of the selected films in this study.
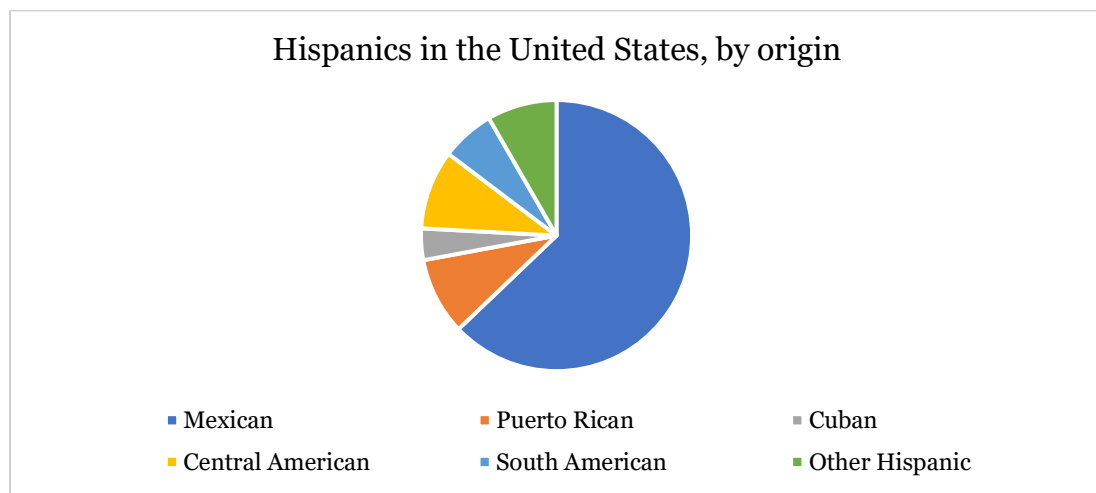

Figure 3 Data supplied from United States Census Bureau, "The Hispanic Population in the United States, 2016."

POPULAR HISPANIC STEREOTYPES

Despite the limited roles portrayed by Hispanics in film, several common stereotypes have transcended decades, persisting on-screen, yet in different contexts during each decade. These stereotypes can still be seen today in contemporary U.S. films despite the changing composition of the U.S. population. Numerous scholars have defined the stereotypes that Hispanics tend to fill in popular films, each taking their unique stance on how Hispanics are presented on-screen. Charles Ramírez Berg who, in his 1990 article "Stereotyping in films in general and of the Hispanic in particular," sets the scene by outlining the primary six Hispanic stereotypes in gendered pairs: El Bandito and the Halfbreed Harlot, the Male Buffoon and the Female Clown, and the Latin Lover and the Dark Lady (294-296). As for Barbara Wolff, she believes there to be only two common representations of Hispanics in film. In her 2005 article titled "Hispanic Hollywood: More roles, but more of the same," Wolff states "And the roles they [Hispanics] get typically portray the same fatigued and fatiguing stereotypes: Latinas as exotic, sexually hot, passionate 'spitfires,' for example or language-mangling comic relief." Frances Negrón-Muntaner and Nadra Kareem Nittle have similar ideas of the stereotypes portrayed by Hispanics including those above mentioned as well as two new images of the Maid and the Immigrant. The universality of the Hispanic stereotypical images seen on-screen is demonstrated by the aforementioned studies, which all analyze similar, if not the same images in film.

For the purpose of this study I have chosen to analyze the following Hispanic stereotypes as they are presented in contemporary film:

1. The Criminal

2. The Sexpot

3. The Clown

4. The Servant

5. The Immigrant

The Criminal. Quite possibly the most infamous stereotype of Hispanics on-screen, the category of the Criminal encompasses several terms described by scholars. Berg describes "El Bandito" as the "Mexican bandit" who is "treacherous, shifty, and dishonest" and can be seen in roles such as a drug runner, rebel leaders, corrupt dictators, or inner-city youth gang members ("Stereotyping" 294). This stereotype dates back to the earliest appearance of Hispanics on-screen in American silent film (circa 1900), according to Allen L. Woll, typically in Westerns, characterized by Mexican bandits and their violent tendencies (7). The genre of Western films portrayed, most commonly, conflicts developing near the U.S.-Mexico border, where the clear image of the Mexican outlaw can be observed. Camilla Fojas, in her chapter entitled "Mixed Race Frontiers: Border Westerns and the Limits of 'America,'" states:

> On the side of will are the Anglo "hardy pioneers" and the hardworking
> Texan ranchers, and on the side of fate are all the racialized and foreign
> characters who exhibit degenerate traits and a lack of control. The former

are heroes and nationalists who are to be celebrated, and the latter are

outlaws who must be corralled, exiled, or extinguished. (50)

The character of the Mexican bandit or outlaw was soon dubbed "the Greaser,"

however still retaining his violent and murderous nature, even more than the

normal villain, Woll claims (8). The stereotype of "El Bandito" is also described as

a criminal by Frances Negrón-Muntaner, specifically as "blue-collar criminals,

involving theft of goods and cash, kidnapping, the manufacture and sale of drug,

and physical violence" ("The Gang's Not All Here" 107). Nadra Kareem Nittle also

comments on this image, calling it "Thug Life," emphasizing that Hispanics are

seen as "thugs, drug dealers, and gangbangers" in her 2019 article entitled "Five

Common Latino Stereotypes in Television and Film." Also, according to the 2012

report entitled, "The Impact of Media Stereotypes on Opinions and Attitudes

Towards Latinos," 71% of people reported seeing Latinos as criminals "very often"

or "sometimes" in television and film, followed by gardeners (64%) and maids

(61%), discussed later in the Servant section (Barreto et al. 4).

As a female equivalent to "El Bandito," Berg offers the "Halfbreed Harlot"

who is "lusty and hot-tempered" and deceives many a man with her tricks, most

likely working as a prostitute ("Stereotyping" 295). Most notably, actress Dolores

Del Río embodies this role in many early roles. These two representations of

Hispanics create a negative image of Hispanics and easily allow people to carry

these attitudes in everyday life, discriminating against people because of what

they see in films. Arielle L. Akines, in her Master's thesis entitled "Hispanic

Representations on Media Platforms: Perspectives and stereotypes in the Meme,

Television, Film, and on Youtube," eloquently states, "Consistent with

promiscuous Latinas, 'Thug Life' is a stereotype that is particularly dangerous because it depicts all Hispanics uniformly as rebels to the law and further perpetuates the idea that they should be feared, avoided and ultimately are not deserving of equal treatment under the law" (23-24). This stereotype is primarily characterized by violence and a threatening nature on-screen.

The Sexpot. Another principal image of Hispanics in film is that of the Sexpot, who can be either male or female, and is most often only regarded for his/her appearance. Clara E. Rodríguez, in her book *Heroes, Lovers, and Others: The Story of Latinos in Hollywood,* finds that these images (what she calls the "Latin lover" and the "Latina spitfire") "have persisted throughout all eras in film" (2). The "Latin Lover" is a seductive man known for his masculinity, "suavity and sensuality, tenderness and sexual danger" (Berg, "Stereotyping" 296). This image is most closely associated with actors such as Ricardo Montalbán, Fernando Lamas, Gilbert Roland, Charlie Sheen, and Antonio Banderas. Also mentioned by Nittle is the image of "Latin Lovers" who are "incredibly suave, sexy, and skilled in the sheets." Similarly, Berg paints the "Dark Lady" as a female counterpart to the "Latin Lover" to be a "mysterious, virginal, inscrutable, aristocratic" woman who is seductive and alluring because of these qualities ("Stereotyping" 296). Nittle calls these female characters "Sexpots" for their sexy appearances, referencing actresses Eva Longoria and Sofia Vergara for their frequent castings as these women. Similarly, Barbara Wolff describes this image with the words, "exotic, sexually hot, passionate 'spitfires,'" embodied by actresses in early film such as Lupe Velez, the original "Mexican Spitfire" (shown in figure 4 below),

Carmen Miranda, the "Brazilian Bombshell," Maria Montez and more recently, Salma Hayek, Eva Mendez, and Jennifer Lopez.[1]

Figure 4 Film poster for "Mexican Spitfire" starring Lupe Velez courtesy of listal.com

Negrón-Muntaner describes what Berg calls the "Latin Lover" and the "Dark Lady" simply as sexual objects shown on-screen ("The Gang's Not All Here" 107). As the name suggests, this image is all about the sexual allure of the characters and little else. Interestingly enough, Berg describes the "Latin Lover" and the "Dark Lady" as positive images of Hispanics seen on the big screen, in comparison to the four other negative stereotypes he mentions. However, while these two images do evoke a positive response from viewers, the focus on physicality degrades Hispanics at the same time. Akins says, "These stereotypes ['Sexpots' and 'Latin Lovers'] reduce the individual's cultural identification to

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[1] It is important to note the evolution of the term "spitfire." First being employed after Lupe Velez' popular role in the "Mexican Spitfire" film series (comprising of 8 films), in which she was "clever, funny, married, and never had sex with strangers," then it changed to the more contemporary definition in the sense of "marginalized characters who never got the guy and were often hypersexual and occasionally violent and vulgar" (Rodríguez 172).

pure physicality," reinforcing the false-importance assigned to appearance (22). Although seemingly positive images of sexuality and desire, these roles neglect to acknowledge anything else about these characters, and by extension, these actors. For example, actors Ricardo Montalbán and Fernando Lamas are remembered as "Latin Lovers," despite their extensive and varied appearances. Also famous in spite of the industry trying to label her solely as a "Latin bombshell" is Rita Moreno, who was the first Latina to have won all four entertainment awards (Oscar, Tony, Emmy, and Grammy) (Rodríguez 119). This stereotypical image of the Sexpot pigeonholes characters and actors alike based solely on physicality.

The Clown. This category, although not as popular in contemporary film, was a common image of Hispanics in earlier film. This label is now most associated with characters as a secondary label or component of their character. Offered by Berg is the comedic couple that he termed, The "Male Buffoon" and the "Female Clown," who are included for comic relief and as "targets of ridicule" while being characterized by their "simple-mindedness," "failure to master standard English," and "childish regression into emotionality" (295). Negrón-Muntaner and Barbara Wolff also comment on the idea of Hispanic characters providing comic relief as one of the few roles Hispanics take on. Hadley-Garcia mentions actors like Cantiflas and Desi Arnaz; Arnaz who embodied this image in several films after "screen birth" in 1940 and in the hit TV show, *I Love Lucy* (1951) (Hadley-Garcia 83). Hadley-Garcia also references Carmen Miranda, who can be seen playing ridiculous roles and once called "a looney-Latin figure of fun," making her an example of the "Female Clown" (111). More recently, one can see this image as

played by George Lopez in some of his many comedic roles. According to these scholars, the purpose of these comedic characters is to add a light-heartedness quality on-screen. However, Jorge J. Barrueto claims that ethnic humor, and narratives that contain it, are a means to express superiority (122). He states that the goal of including ethnic humor or making fun of a group, in this case Hispanics, is "to emphasize racial and cultural dissimilarities and to infantilize Hispanics," thus creating a less threatening, different image of others (121). This perspective is quite different from the others mentioned above, suggesting a harsher reality concerning the intent of including a character who embodies the Clown. Both interpretations speak to the lowly, ridiculed character, often filled by a Hispanic actor.

The Servant. This category, seen in more recent U.S. films, describes primarily women in their role of serving others; however, there are some men that exemplify this role as well. Becoming more prominent after the publication of Berg's article, Nittle and Negrón-Muntaner mention "Domestic servants" and "All Maids all the Time" in their works. The role of "the Maid" has changed over the years; while it used to be dominated by African American actresses, it is now occupied by Hispanic actresses (Negrón-Muntaner, "The Gang's Not All Here" 107). "The Maid" is an image of working-class women (most often trying to provide for their children) by becoming domestic servants for the rich, most often, white people. Other roles of the Servant include, gardeners, secretaries, cooks, bellhops, and other subordinate roles. This image, more so than the others, promotes the idea of "us vs. them" that is described by Berg in his book,

Latino Images in Film: Stereotypes, Subversion, and Resistance. He says, "the outgroup ('Them') is compared to the standard defined by the in-group ('Us'). By this measure, and not surprisingly, 'They' are always incomplete and imperfect" (14). These characters serve others in a way that promotes an inequality among them and a difference in treatment.

The Immigrant. The category of the Immigrant, like that of the Servant, is newly analyzed, relatively speaking, in the existing studies regarding Hispanic stereotypes in film, appearing after the publication of Berg's article in 1990, although it has been portrayed on-screen for decades by minorities. This image represents the idea of the "alien," popularly portrayed in the 1960s and 70s, and the sense of not belonging (Rodríguez 164). This representation of the Immigrant is widely shown in contemporary film depicting Hispanics that are new to the U.S. who have heavy accents or might not even speak English (Nittle). Akines also comments on the idea of language proficiency in her thesis stating that heritage and nationality do not determine one's ability to speak a certain language (31). These characters are most often disregarded in situations for their assumed illegality or inability to assimilate to the U.S. culture.

HISPANIC REPRESENTATION THROUGHOUT HISTORY

Hispanics have been portrayed in American film as early as the 1890s in silent films up to present day films of all genres, primarily taking on stereotypical roles and/or in a way that does not accurately describe the specific background of the actor or character. In early film, Hispanics were seen as part of one general group, "Latins," without specificity to nationality nor to the corresponding

cultures. [2] Consumers of U.S. media did not get a chance to see the diversity that is a quintessential quality of the Hispanic ethnicity that is composed of various different nationalities and cultures.

In popular U.S. film, Hispanics can be seen as early as just before the turn of the 20th century. Hispanics can be found in silent films where there were no language barriers and actors were not ridiculed for their accents or limited use of English (Rodríguez 56). Allen L. Woll describes in his book, *The Latin Image in American Film,* Hispanics first played Mexican bandits and greasers in early films, typically Western films, as the murderous villains (8). Not long after, the start of the Mexican revolution (circa 1910) increased tensions between Americans and Mexicans on-screen, providing the perfect excuse to increase the violence in films (10-11). This image of the criminal, although still popular today, primarily occupied the screen from 1894 to 1928, says Woll (6). Clara E. Rodríguez says also that the largely male image of the Latin lover was in fashion during this early period (25). But these were not the only images portrayed by Hispanics; George Hadley-Garcia states, in his book *Hispanic Hollywood,* "Nor were the Roaring '20s male-fixated, for they saw the debuts and rise of Dolores Del Río and Lupe Velez, the most successful Mexican actresses ever to work in Hollywood" (27). Velez is described as the "Mexican spitfire" and "hot tamale," providing viewers with a different image of Hispanics (30-31). Hadley-Garcia states, "Foreigners in general were in great demand during a decade [1920s] which saw the maturation of moving pictures and an unprecedented influx of

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[2] It is important to note that throughout much of history, Hispanics fell under the category of "Latin," which included Italians, Spaniards, speakers of Portuguese and Latin Americans (Rodríguez 21).

immigrants" (27). Despite how Hispanics were portrayed, U.S. viewers were eager to see them on-screen. Clara E. Rodríguez states that "The early period was very likely the most generous of times for Latinos in film; many Latinos appeared in these early films, and they appealed to a wide audience" (2). This period of time features Hispanics most frequently, in comparison to other decades, or even today, when representation is lacking. Still, with their frequent appearance came frequent stereotypical portrayals of Hispanics.

In the next coming years, tensions over the representation, specifically that of Mexicans, in film continued: "By 1919, the Mexican government had had enough, and formally complained about Hollywood's deliberate focus on the 'worst conditions they could find'" (Hadley-Garcia 39). He continues to state that Mexico also warned against filming locations across the border if the image did not change. Mexico officially banned films in 1922, followed by Panama in 1923, as well as other Latin American countries forming protests in their own ways (Rodríguez 29). These countries refused to allow the promotion or showing of films from the U.S. that presented Hispanics in negative, offensive manner, permitting only those with better Hispanic images. This became a challenge for film studios, as Woll comments that "Hollywood, however, appeared at a loss, as though unable to depict a Mexican in any other occupation than bandit or lazy peasant" (30). Consequently, the representation of Hispanics temporarily decreased; Woll even attributes the use of "whitewashing" to this period of censorship (35). But this period did not last for long, as the breakthrough of sound in the 1930s soon revolutionized the cinema industry, introducing "talkies," distinct from that of their silent film cousins, which arrived with a

resurgence of Hispanic representation. Rodríguez says that "The enormous popularity of all things Mexican between 1920 and 1935 also contributed to the possibilities for Latin stardom" (25-26). However, she contends that, "In the movies, this vogue of all things Mexican was understood and defined by Hollywood as all things Mexican, Spanish, and Latin—with few distinctions made among them," offering examples of Spanish combs, lace mantillas, and styles of flamenco and toreadors (26). Hispanics were desired for their exoticism and, more importantly, their beauty; their exact nationalities or cultures were less important, which introduces a theme of ethnic ambiguity, discussed later in this paper. Hadley-Garcia indicates that "Stereotypes were not gone by the 1930s, but they were less frequent and less vicious" because of the continued backlash from Hispanic countries (60). Continued censorship in the 1930s gave rise to a more comedic and frivolous female character, in place of an oversexualized, prostitute character (Hadley-Garcia 61).

Next came the 1940s, a time of war and tension, during which an important policy was utilized, called the Good Neighbor Policy. Woll says "Roosevelt thus attempted to resurrect the 'Good Neighbor Policy' which has been ignored in the 1930s..." (54). Hadley Garcia explains that this policy "sought to open up Latin markets for American culture and products (as the war cut off European markets) and to pull Latin America more firmly into the U.S.' sphere of influence" (81). In true American capitalist form, Hollywood made it a priority to more accurately depict Hispanics, when Latin American business was imperative to the success of the U.S. economy. Rodríguez then says, "the studios and government paid greater attention to complaints by Latin American countries

about negative depictions in Hollywood films" (83). The Production Code

Administration (PCA) was already in place (established in the early 1930s to limit

the images of scandal and sex on-screen) to help transform and reform the

images concerning Hispanics on-screen (Rodríguez 81-82). The Good Neighbor

Policy resulted in the resurgence of Hispanics on-screen, particularly bringing

cultural aspects like music into the films (Rodríguez 81). While initially a positive

aspect in American film, Woll says that audiences quickly began to associate

"Latins" with their music and "gave Latin artists an increased sensuality" thus

again giving rise to the stereotype of "Latin Lover" (63). Despite this, Woll

maintains that "Films began to differentiate between varying South American

locales, allowing views to spend a *Weekend in Havana* (20th, 1941), or *Midnight

in Mexico* (RKO, 1948), or travel *Down Argentine Way* (20th, 1940)" (53-54).

This allowed for American viewers to comprehend the varying cultures among

the Hispanic countries, whether that was effectively done in these cases, or not.

However, Hollywood did take steps to eradicate misrepresentations by opening

up an International Information Center, which according to Hadley-Garcia, was

created in order "to help writers, directors and producers in obviating negative

and misleading portrayals before a film was made," (88). Hadley-Garcia also

offers another opinion saying that the co-production of films between U.S. and

Latin American studios could have contributed to the sudden appearance of

authenticity on-screen (89). Woll goes so far as to say that "Hollywood's attitude

toward the Latin countries suddenly bordered on reverence," offering examples

of films like, *Juarez*, that portrayed a nineteenth-century president as an equal to

Abraham Lincoln (60). During this period of reverence, Woll says that the

stereotype of "ignorant peasant" was forgotten, presenting working characters who spoke English with but a hint of a Hispanic accent, as well as those from various backgrounds (62).

Soon came the 1950s, a post-war period, where Hollywood experienced a time of blacklisting and controversy; quite simply put by Hadley-Garcia, "Ethnic was out, until the 1970s, and 'whitebread' was in" (124). Woll adds "As soon as the war ended and former film markets reopened, Hollywood lost interest in its Good Neighbor Policy and abandoned the Latin American extravaganzas of the wartime period" (87). Rodríguez comments on this period, claiming, "The choices for Latino actors were generally limited: They could either Europeanize their images (by discarding any ethnic references) or play up the stereotypes" (111). Ironically during this period of scarce representation, history was made when José Ferrer became the first Hispanic actor to win an Oscar in 1950 for "Best Actor" in *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1950) (Hadley-Garcia 126). Despite these common trends, there were some important productions that were made in this time. Ricardo Montalbán starred in two Hispanic social problem films: *Right Cross* (1950) and *My Man and I* (1952), both which reminded audiences of the humanity of Hispanics (Hadley-Garcia 129). Put quite simply by Rodríguez, "the 1950s was neither the best of times nor the worst" for Latinos; she continues to say, "It was an era in which seeds were planted for the violent, lower-class, criminal image that would blossom more fully in the next decade" (145). The anticlimactic 50s made room for the more violent 1960s with an emphasis on "others" such as Hispanics.

The image of "the Greaser" made a return to the screen with the resurgence of Western films in the 1960s, despite the continual improvement of the portrayal of Hispanics in U.S. film (Woll 107). Rodríguez agrees that while Latinos were represented more frequently with the resumption of Western films, "these films tended to ignore Latino history and Latin American perspectives" (154). Accompanying this is the renewed theme of violence surrounding Hispanics in film, effectively reversing the work done in the previous decades. The 1960s, according to Hadley-Garcia, also were a time of historic inaccuracy: "The '60s began and ended with two contrasting but strictly non-Hispanic views of that historic symbol of Mexican-American divisiveness, the Alamo" (161). Hadley-Garcia again references the idea of the "whitebread" phenomenon, which is still around in the 1960s, in that "Other Hispanic stars had to leave Hollywood for Europe, to continue in lead roles at a time when Hollywood increasingly stressed 'whitebread' personalities," favoring heartthrobs like Elvis over a Hispanic actor like Ricardo Montalbán (165). Going from the 1930s and 40s film, filled with Hispanic influence, to times like these of "whitebread" suggests the idea of people being "in/out of fashion" and the dehumanizing nature of Hollywood. In support of this, Clara E. Rodríguez states that the 1960s and 70s "were the worst of times, in terms of the quality of Latino characterizations" (2).

The 1970s arrived and Hispanics, with similar stereotypes, returned to the big screen, but to "the small screen" as Hadley-Garcia calls television (198). Instead of the spotlight being on film during this period, it was on TV. Hadley-Garcia continues to say, "The small screen carried on the tradition of preferential casting of non-Hispanic performers in Hispanic parts, with the result that a few

such actors, incarnating the few TV Latinos, represented 'the invisible minority' to Middle America" (198). Although not by much, Hadley-Garcia says that the 1970s were a better time for Hispanic actors than the 1960s (205). The theme of violence was still present in 1970s film, but the landscape was changing from the U.S. Mexican border to the urban barrio. Rodríguez says:

> Urban 'bandito' characters—drug lords, dope dealers, and junkies—set against inner-city backdrops prevailed, and the seeds of the violent, lower-class criminal image blossomed in the seventies, when the crime and the violence associated with them escalated. (169)

With themes of criminality on-screen, "a few new Hispanic actors began to appear on the scene in the early seventies—Hector Elizondo, Cheech Marin, Raul Julia, Edward James Olmos—but their careers would not take off until the following decades," according to Rodríguez (152). Because of these renewed issues in Hispanic representation, Ricardo Montalbán contributed to the fight for rightful representation of Hispanics both on and off camera. He, along with a few others, created the *Nosotros Foundation* in 1970 "to improve the image of Hispanics on the screen" (Woll 111). The foundation tried to fight against the phenomenon of typecasting that many actors like Montalbán faced (and are still facing) in Hollywood. Rodríguez adds, "the group asked for no favors, simply that actors of Spanish-speaking origin be considered for acting opportunities" (179). Unfortunately, as a result of this foundation, Montalbán received backlash and was not offered roles for several year after, says Rodríguez (179).

Discussing screen morality, Hadley-Garcia claims that the situation was improved during the decade, possibly because of foundations such as *Nosotros* or

actors speaking up more readily. He says, "On the up side, Mexican revolutionaries were generally depicted as good guys, even if occasionally corrupt—a far cry from the standard policy of silent and early talkies" (Hadley-Garcia 217). The industry had come a long way in its depiction of Hispanics, but this period seems to be one of, at least some, positivity in bettering their image. For example, "Mexican Americans succeeded in eliminating several demeaning characters from mass-culture, including such icons as Jose Jimenez, Chiquita Banana, and the Frito Bandito," each of whom were symbols of misrepresentation and common Hispanic stereotypes (Rodríguez 178). Despite this small win for Hispanics, Hadley-Garcia concludes later by saying that, "All too often, Mexico and Hispanics were still synonymous with violence" (219). It seems that no matter what Hispanics do, they are still stereotypically associated with banditry and violence. What is worse is that, as Rodríguez asserts, "the problems with the depiction of Latin America and Latinos were missed by many moviegoers" (161). The inaccuracies and typecasting continued through this era but had become the norm that people did not even notice the problems on-screen.

The 1980s revert back to a time that favors non-ethnic actors, while also grappling with the growing population of Hispanic American actors "who look, sound and act like everyone else," says Hadley-Garcia (224). The lines were now blurred, but Hispanic Americans were still passed over in favor of other actors. Also, Hadley-Garcia claims that few movies were "Hispanic-themed" in the first half of the 1980s, however an increasing number of new movies were being set in Latin America because of recent situations in certain countries; these films

discussed the issues faced at the U.S.-Mexican border, the overthrow of a corrupt Chilean leader, as well as other issues in Guatemala and El Salvador (235). He says that while the quality remained the same in 1980s film, the quantity did not change, much like our current situation (229). Rodríguez states, "More Latino-themed films, characters, and stars appeared than had in the past, though Latinos were few and far between in big-budget films" (191). Occasionally, there are, Rodríguez continues, "background character[s], who generally conformed to a stock, stick-figure stereotype" (191). In seeing how Hispanics were treated and shown in Hollywood over the past century, our current situation is better than what it has been for the greater part of history; it is, however, nowhere near where it should be to compensate for the dramatic growth in the U.S. Hispanic population. Hadley-Garcia puts it simply, "Hispanic Hollywood has come far indeed. With far yet to go" (252). One can clearly see that the same images are repeated on-screen with little to no variation: the criminal, the sexpot, the clown, the servant, and the immigrant.

The 1990s saw much of the same stereotypes and renewed issues of typecasting; however, they also saw new Latino filmmakers, such as Joseph B. Vasquez and Robert Rodríguez (Rodríguez 199). With increasingly new up-and-coming filmmakers of Hispanic and Latino heritage, the films are reflecting the changes in the U.S., starting with who is making the films. Rodríguez says, "These filmmakers and their films are part of the ongoing redefinition and expansion of American culture" (199). Towards the end of the 1990s, says Rodríguez, "Latina stars became hot again. Latinas who had had modest careers during the 1980s saw their careers accelerate" (211). Thus, we entered into another era of change,

with a renewed interest in Hispanic actors. Stars such as Jennifer Lopez, Salma Hayek, Penelope Cruz, and Cameron Diaz all made their debuts in U.S. films in the 1990s while new stars such as Michelle Rodriguez, Rosario Dawson, Eva Mendes, and Wilmer Valderrama just began to emerge (Rodríguez 212). It seems during this time, a "Latinization" took place in the U.S., as Rodríguez calls it, with Hispanic influence coming from all sides, music, fashion, food, etc., finally acknowledging the growing Hispanic population in the U.S. (213). Salma Hayek comments on the increasing number of Latinos on-screen saying:

> They finally understand in this film industry, which is entirely defined by money, how many Latinos live in the United States, 32 million potential customers, a minority that is growing rapidly and above all it's enthusiastic about movies. That's why, all of a sudden, we see Latinos on-screen. Talent has only little to do with that. (qtd. in Rodríguez 219-220)

Hayek, because of her experience as an actress and a producer, discusses the elephant in the room, referencing the industry's main objective to earn money, not to represent Hispanics in the most accurate light. During this period, many more actors and actresses spoke out against typecasting than in previous eras, some even convincing directors to change roles to be less stereotypical. Because this era has presented this "Latin craze," as Rodríguez calls it, she ponders the question if this is just a fad or if "it signals a new era, a less segmented, more diverse America that acknowledges its present and past history of hybridization" (245). For the sake of Hispanics everywhere, I hope it is the latter.
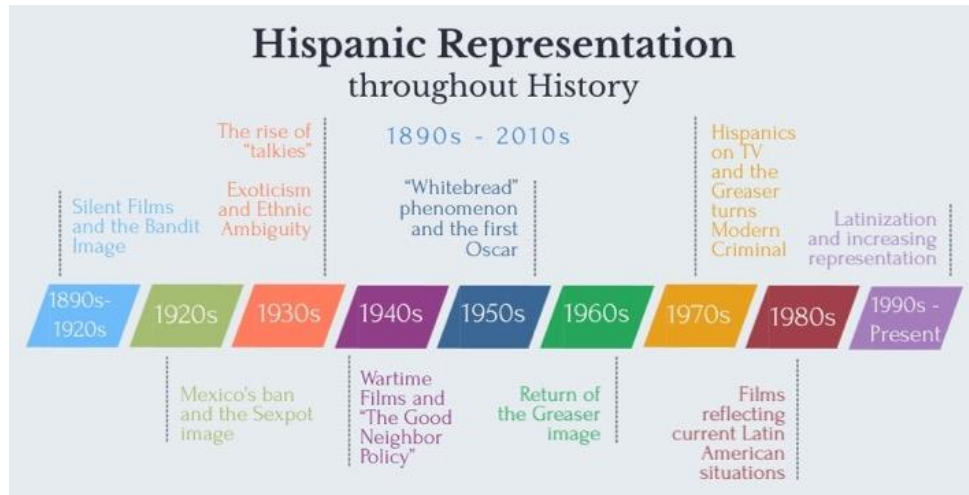
Figure 5 Hispanic Representation Infographic created by Pressler, 2019

A lot of actors have begun to speak out on the lack of representation, as well as the poor representation of Hispanics in film. While on Univision TV network, Ricardo Montalbán said:

> At first, for a long time, screen Hispanics were bandits or lovers. Then we were ignored. Today we are underrepresented, and often misrepresented, but due to our increasing numbers, we are ignored less and less... (qtd. in Hadley-Garcia 13)

Despite this hopeful quote and the changing population of the United States since the first appearance of Hispanics in popular U.S. film, the representation of Hispanics, while better, has not changed proportionally. Figure 5 shows the progression of representation of Hispanics on-screen throughout the last century. As discussed in a report, by Frances Negrón-Muntaner, the representation of Hispanics has increased over time; however, per capita, it is the same or lower than in previous decades ("The Latino Media Gap" 2). Unfortunately, the situation has not changed drastically, in that consumers of U.S. film do not

correctly see Hispanics nor the diversity among the various Hispanic cultures, not then, and not now.

FILM ANALYSIS

This analysis serves to consider how Hispanics are portrayed in contemporary film, using a limited sample of six selected contemporary films from the United States, which all feature a Hispanic character or aspect of a Hispanic culture at the forefront of the film. Selected films were released within the past twenty years in order to provide an analysis that provides current attitudes concerning Hispanics in America. Each film demonstrates at least one of the stereotypical images described above pertaining to Hispanics.[3]

Methodology. I watched the films intently and evaluated them based on their usage or promotion of stereotypes surrounding Hispanics today. The films were accessed from various streaming sites such as Netflix or Amazon Prime, from local library resources, as well as from personal copies purchased by myself or my mentor. In order to form an objective analysis, I consulted other forms of publications including movie reviews, journal articles, newspaper/magazine articles, interviews published online, and other forms of published film critique. These supplemental publications add objectivity to this seemingly objective process of analysis. The two-stage analysis of the films contain the following elements: characters in plot and actor portrayal in demonstrating any of the stereotypes described as well as motivation for film creation and overall theme

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[3] Brief synopses of the films are included for reference in the Appendix.

("feel") of the film in how they impacted audiences. Characters were analyzed based on appearance and overall presentation, their language and accent used, their profession or career as shown in the film (or lack thereof), their actions and consequential reactions from other characters, and finally, their general purpose in the film or why they were shown in the plot. Apart from this, actors portraying these characters were analyzed in their role to effectively play the part by determining their nationality, their accuracy in speaking with an accent (if applicable), and their overall authenticity. Next, motivation for the creation of the film assesses why the film was created and focuses on what the director wanted viewers to see. This form of analysis investigates to what extent the stereotypes are used for humor or if there was malicious intention. Additionally, the overall reactions and response of the viewers is considered in this category. Finally, the overall theme and feel of the film takes the analysis one step further to determine if what the director intended was achieved. This portion of the analysis deals with how the stereotypes enhanced or degraded the film, and how the audience perceived the stereotypes.

Film Analysis. In analyzing the six selected films, the aforementioned images of Hispanics can be seen in characters on-screen embodying the stereotypical images above or as combinations of several images. Additionally, some films hint at themes suggested by the five primary stereotypical roles filled by Hispanics in film. There are some films that fight these stereotypes or present them in an ironic manner as to make fun of the popular stereotypes associated with Hispanics. Each film analyzed in this study exemplifies at least one stereotypical

image of a Hispanic or Latino character. Aside from the stereotypes portrayed on screen, intent of the films and response to the films are also considered in this section. Figure 6 depicts the stereotypes observed in each of the selected films in this study, which will be discussed in greater detail below.

Films by Stereotype	The Criminal	The Sexpot	The Clown	The Servant	The Immigrant
Casa de mi Padre (2012)	✕	✕	✕	✕	
Coco (2017)	✕				
Gringo (2018)	✕		✕	✕	
Maid in Manhattan (2002)		✕		✕	
Nacho Libre (2006)		✕	✕	✕	
Spanglish (2004)		✕		✕	✕

Figure 6 Table of stereotypical images by film created by Pressler, 2019

THE CRIMINAL

A popular image of Hispanics in film is that of the Criminal, which can be found in three of the six films analyzed in this study. Hispanic characters presented as criminals can be seen most clearly in the films *Casa de mi Padre* (2012), *Gringo* (2018), and *Coco* (2017). These criminals we primarily see today on-screen are drug lords and corrupt businessmen who are not afraid to kill anyone in their way, which is exactly what is seen in *Casa de mi Padre* and *Gringo*. However, not all of the criminals seen in these films fit this mold. For example, the criminal seen in *Coco* is more subtle in his role, gaining the trust of others before committing his crimes. In any case, this character does commit some form of a

crime to fall in line with this stereotype and eventual presumed nature of Hispanics.

  Casa de mi Padre (2012), which presents the most stereotypical roles of all the films analyzed, has a largely Hispanic cast, with a fairly obvious exception of Will Farrell, the main protagonist, as well as a few others. In this film, the images of criminals are portrayed by famous Hispanic actors Diego Luna, as Ferrell's brother, Raúl, and Gael García Bernal, as "La Onza," a well-known drug lord. As it is revealed in the film, Raúl is also involved in the drug business. They both shoot, murder, and conduct illegal business, painting these Mexican characters as violent, shady, and deceitful. Within the first ten minutes of the film, La Onza shoots a man dead in the head (00:06:10). This violent image is a priority in this proclaimed parody of *telenovelas* and establishes a negative attitude of Mexicans rather quickly. La Onza is the epitome of what Berg describes as one form of "El Bandito:" "He is slicker, of course, and he has traded in his black hat for a white suit, his tired horse for a glitzy car, but he still ruthlessly pursues his vulgar cravings— for money, power, and sexual pleasure— and routinely employs vicious and illegal means to obtain them" (*Latino* 68). La Onza is seen with a lot of luxuries—fancy cars, jewelry, big mansion, suits embroidered with his logo, etc.—along with the greed of having all of the drug business in the area. In a later scene, Raúl and Armando (played by Will Farrell) are in a bar, and Armando confronts Raúl about his alleged drug business. Armando asks Raúl if he is in the drug business to which Raúl replies, "*Hombre, tengo mis negocios en México, Armando. ¿Qué más te da a ti?*" implying that Mexico's main business involves

drugs (00:25:30).[4] The Criminal image is again marked by violence in two more specific scenes, first, in the attempted marriage of Raúl and Sonia (who is described in greater detail below, for her image as the Sexpot), which is interrupted by gunmen hired by La Onza who arrive and shoot the majority of the guests (00:43:33). Next, in a later scene, the violent image is renewed in the rescuing of Sonia, who is being held captive by La Onza, by Armando and Raúl that leads to a shoot-out, that results in the killing of everyone except Sonia and Armando (01:07:07). The image of the Criminal in *Casa de mi Padre* (2012) is characterized primarily by violence and murderous tendencies, as well as a strong connection to drugs and money, all while establishing this sense of normalcy among Mexicans.

     Casa de mi Padre, according to *Netflix,* falls under the genres of "Western," "Comedy," and "Satire." The film is meant to be a parody of *telenovelas,* with their melodrama, forbidden love, deceit, and overall perceived embellishment of themes. *New York Times* movie reviewer Manohla Dargis describes the film, saying, "the men are brave, the women beautiful, the villains venal, the passions inflamed, the prose empurpled, the sunsets honeyed, and the dangers as numerous as the clichés" ("Grind"). Akines contributes a similar sentiment: "The film [*Casa*] employs overdramatized Spanish accents, violence, and especially the criminal Hispanic. It depicts the Mexican cowboy as overly masculine and clumsy, ranch-hands as lazy, and Hispanic women as whores" (34). It is important to note, however, that the stereotypes in this film, as well as

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[4] According to the film's English subtitles, the original quote in Spanish translates to "I am in business in Mexico, Armando. What's the difference?"

other comedies, are not necessarily meant to be offensive, but in some cases are considered representative of Hispanics or Latinos. Dargis supports this claim: "'Casa de Mi Padre' demands that you not take it seriously, and for the most part that's easy to do" ("Grind"). Another review, this time from the *Hollywood Reporter*, calls the film, "an over-extended 'SNL' skit" as actor Will Ferrell, director Matt Piedmont, and screenwriter Andrew Steele are all SNL alumni (McCarthy). Another aspect of the film to be considered is the fact that the entire film is in Spanish, except for one scene where a note from the director scrolls across the screen. In an interview, Will Ferrell notes that neither he, nor Piedmont, nor Steele speak Spanish, so the script was written in English and translated to Spanish (Goodsell). In another interview with Gael García Bernal, he notes that "the translation was unreadable" and called it "really bad" (Gopalan). Nonetheless, they persevered. Ferrell comments in his interview that he felt that he needed to learn how to speak Spanish in order to appear in this film. He says, "So I knew that if I was gonna do this I had to at least sound as authentic as I could...So I tirelessly worked with a translator for about six weeks out from shooting..." (Goodsell). It is clear that Ferrell worked hard to ensure that he spoke with a decent accent and sounded like a Spanish speaker. García Bernal even says that in the film he speaks well (Gopalan). The *Hollywood Reporter* review finds Ferrell's Spanish adds to the humor of the film: "[Ferrell's] perfectly fluent but over-enunciated, American-accented Spanish adds to the amusement" (McCarthy). Ferrell's Spanish is meant to sound good to those who do not speak Spanish, but to those who do, he sounds like a *gringo* (apparently with the exception of Gael García Bernal). Ultimately, the film is meant to be bad; Ferrell

even says so himself, "The other character, the other kind of personality in the movie, is that it's just bad. It's a bad movie…" (Goodsell). The movie was created as a spoof and presents these stereotypes as a humor mechanism; however, they still create a lasting impact on viewers and must be analyzed all the same.

This image of the criminal is also present in the film, *Gringo* (2018), most notably showing the unsatisfied, famous drug lord in Mexico and how the events unfold when the pharmaceutical company attempts to cease business with him. The main drug lord, named "The Black Panther" (*El Pantera Negra* in Spanish) or Señor Juan Miguel Villegas (played by Carlos Corona) is first mentioned in the film at 00:18:45 when Sanchez, the plant manager in Mexico, tries to explain the situation to Co-Presidents, Richard Rusk (played by Joel Edgerton) and Elaine Markinson (played by Charlize Theron). The following exchange takes place:

> RICHARD: We're going to have some people coming down here and they're going to look things over. And we want to make sure that everything's…in order.
>
> SANCHEZ: I understand, but Señor Villegas is expecting his usual shipment. The Black Panther is not someone to mess with.
>
> RICHARD: You can't scare me with tales of the big, bad cartels. All right? I know how things work.
>
> SANCHEZ: Not in Mexico. (00:18:38)

This encounter clearly illustrates the stereotypical idea of drug cartels in Mexico. Sanchez's last line emphasizes the connection between the illegal drug business and Mexico. A bit later in the film, we see The Black Panther in his "lair," pictured in figure 7, which alludes to other miscellaneous popular Hispanic stereotypes:

soccer is on the TV and all the men are related in some way (00:26:34). His large

house is comparable to La Onza's house from *Casa de mi Padre,* with similar

furnishings and overall extravagance. The exchange between Sanchez and The

Black Panther, in which he explains that the sale of the pills will not continue, is

not as amicable as the one previously described and results in a threat to murder

Sanchez, but instead settles on just having his toe cut off (00:29:20). The toe

reappears on-screen later in the film when it is sent to Elaine's office to show just

the kind of business that the Black Panther does (01:04:35). In a later scene, The

Black Panther commits his first murder on-screen, shooting one of the young

men who ran the hotel and having one of his henchmen kill the other (01:28:10).

Figure 7 Criminal character, Juan Miguel Villegas ("El Pantera Negra") in Gringo (2018)

The Black Panther is portrayed to be the biggest "boss" in Mexico and in each

scene in which he appears he demonstrates his violent nature and "dirty"

business, much like that of La Onza in *Casa*. Other Hispanic characters are not

exactly pictured as criminals but do demonstrate criminal behavior, such as the

two young men who run the motel, as well as the assistant to the plant manager,

Roberto Vega, throughout the film.

It is also interesting to note that there are other criminals in the film, *Gringo*, only they are not Hispanic. The roles are reversed in that Richard and Elaine, the co-presidents are the ones who are lying and cheating, while the undercover DEA agent, Angel Valverde (also known as Victor Cruz), turns out to be a good guy, trying to bust them all.[5] This turn of events emphasizes the director's vision in showing "dirty" American business. Additionally, Richard's brother, Mitch, is not as moral as he leads people to believe, after almost trying to kill Harold for financial reasons, nor is the young man from the guitar shop who is enticed by the monetary reward of a drug deal. Although this film is riddled with stereotypes, it also presents us with the *gringos*, if you will, labeled with the same stereotypes, thus reminding the audience that Hispanics are not the only criminals. Even the main protagonist, Harold, who is a "good" person has to kill others to save his own life. This film makes us question what makes a "good" person actually "good." While on the surface, this film plays on the stereotypical image of a *narcotraficante*, much like Raúl and La Onza in *Casa*; it also encourages the audience to consider others, besides Hispanics, as criminals. The ending of the film is accompanied by a song with the repeated verse, "I don't want to be a criminal," once again highlighting the main theme of criminality in the film (01:40:00). It seems that justice is served for everyone except Elaine, who is promoted, filling the role of President of the pharmaceutical company, under new ownership.

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[5] DEA signifies Drug Enforcement Administration, a U.S. federal agency.

Gringo takes place in Mexico and the stereotypes are fairly obvious. *Hollywood Reporter* journalist John DeFore says, "Or perhaps that should read 'in Mexico,' as the cliché-friendly fictional land seen here contains not a single citizen who can be trusted, from hotel clerks up to the requisite tyrannical drug lord." Because this quote appears as the second sentence of his review, one can assume that the attitudes surrounding Mexico and Mexicans are palpably received by audiences. DeFore calls the Black Panther (also known as Juan Miguel Villegas) "our kingpin," making the role seem to be commonplace, commenting in this instance on this film's version of the character. Despite DeFore's spot-on conclusion about how Mexico is presented, he neglects to talk any further on the issue in the film; he points out the film is rampant with stereotypes but fails to discuss any of them, other than "our kingpin." He seems unimpressed by the film, but not because of the stereotypes presented. Another reviewer, Chris Hewitt, also neglects to comment on the issue of Mexican representation. However, unlike DeFore, Hewitt enjoys the film as it is "pushing the politically incorrect envelope with barely contained glee." Here, Hewitt excuses the stereotypes and presentation of Mexico for the sake of humor. However, when hearing from the director and lead actor, brothers Nash and Joel Edgerton, we find out that the film was not supposed to present Mexico negatively. In an interview with *CineMovie*, Nash Edgerton (director) says, "We love Mexico...My aim was not to disappoint my Mexican friends." The director indicates that his goal was to present the dirty American businessman. Although this may have been his intent, I fail to see how that is translated on-screen. While the American co-presidents of the pharmaceutical company prioritize making a

profit no matter the cost, the Mexican drug lord's violent tendencies and greed seem worse in comparison. Both sides are guilty of crimes, however, those of the Black Panther are more severe. Later, Nash talks about a magazine headline featured in the film ("Should Mexico put up a wall to keep out the bad influence?") which he claims further confirms the good intention he had for the film. He says, "I thought it was important to say something along those lines of how ridiculous the idea of putting borders up is," being mindful of the current political situation. While he tried to convey the innocence of Mexicans in the film, one cannot help but notice the use of blatant stereotypical images, primarily the criminal discussed in this section.

The image of the Criminal is presented again in *Coco* (2017) in a more subtle context with character Ernesto de la Cruz, first presented as a hero but is discovered to be a thief and a murderer by the end of the film. The integrity of Ernesto de la Cruz' character, a perceived local hero, is not questioned until much later in the film when it is discovered that he poisoned his best friend in order to steal his songs and gain fame (01:07:10). Just one minute later, he attempted to keep his great-great-grandson in the afterlife, which would have effectively taken away his life in the real world (01:08:34). In the last twenty minutes of the movie, Ernesto de la Cruz tries again to stop Miguel from returning to the real world and Miguel by throwing him off the side of a tall building (only to be saved by a spirit guide) (01:25:31). However, thanks to Miguel's relatives, De la Cruz' reputation was revealed to the audience. Pleasantly, the theme of drugs or drug-related crimes are noticeably missing, instead picturing murdering and stealing. It is a slight improvement from the criminal images present in *Casa* and *Gringo*, but

regardless, the criminality still exists. It is important to also consider the idea that even when all of the characters are Hispanic, the idea of the criminal still makes an appearance. However, this idea has limitations because most film plots require a villain to keep the audience intrigued and in the case of *Coco,* this is De la Cruz' character. While this film presents a lot of positive images (and even some stereotypes) about Hispanics, specifically Mexicans in this case, there are still negative representations.

Coco comes from non-Hispanic Pixar writer and director Lee Unkrich, who began working on the project in 2011 (Ugwu). In a film review, praising the film for its accuracy it is revealed that Unkrich was concerned about the film being scrutinized because of his lack of *latinidad*. In his *New York Times* review titled "How Pixar Made Sure 'Coco' Was Culturally Conscious," Reggie Ugwu writes, "He [Unkrich] worried that he would be accused of cultural appropriation and see himself condemned to a Hollywood hall of shame for filmmakers charged with abusing ethnic folklore out of ignorance or prejudice." In speaking with him on the phone, Ugwu writes that he did not want to "lapse into cliché or stereotype." However, that was not the case. Based on the general consensus of reviews along with that of my own, I feel that the film presents Hispanics, and in this case Mexicans, in a positive light. But this film did not just happen to be great, there was a lot of work that contributed to its relatability and authenticity. Ugwu writes, "Instead he [Unkrich] relied on several research trips to Mexico and the personal stories of Latino team members, which helped ground his fantasy realm with specific geographic and sociological roots," along with the help of some "outside Latino cultural consultants." Director Unkrich sought out the help

of his colleagues, as well as outside assistance to make sure the film conveyed sincerity and the truth. Kiko Martinez writes, expressing gratitude for the representation, saying, "*Coco* proves why that representation should never be an option again if studios hope to capture authenticity in its storytelling." This film proves that films can convey a sheer sense of authenticity and that minority groups can successfully be represented on-screen without all of the stereotypes. Another film critic, Meiko Gavia, comments also on the steps taken to boost credibility: "[Disney] hired Mexican-American cartoonist and critic Lalo Alcarez as a consultant" and "the studio hired a Mexican-American lead writer and co-director, and also hired at least three Mexican descendant cultural consultants and an all Latinx lyrics team." *Coco* was created by a team with a wealth of knowledge about Hispanic culture, and that is why it was a success with not only white audiences but also Hispanic and Latino audiences. Gavia, while a fan of the film, does point out a negative aspect of the film, which is the lack of indigenous or Afro-Latino representation in the film. While this is a valid concern that needs to be addressed, the overall idea of increased representation for Hispanics is a step in the right direction. After all, *Coco* is Pixar's 19th film and is the first to feature a minority character in the lead role (Ugwu). Although it does not represent all Latinos, it is opening the door on a once closed-door issue. Although this film does present one stereotypical image of the criminal, the film overall shows Hispanics in a positive and authentic manner.

Aside from these characters presented as criminals in these films, there are some characters who are not presented as full-fledged criminals, but rather demonstrate criminalized behavior. Characters such as Miguel (*Coco*), Marisa

Ventura (*Maid in Manhattan*), and Nacho (*Nacho Libre*) are all caught doing something wrong. Miguel, whose family forbids him to partake in any form of music, steals a guitar from his thought-to-be great-great grandfather's mausoleum. He not only disobeys his family's wishes, but also steals a beloved relic. Marisa is also caught stealing, but in her case, clothes and identities. While cleaning a guest's room, she tries on clothes and then lies when she is mistaken for the owner of the clothes. Instead of admitting the truth, she falls into a web of lies that ends up costing her the job. Finally, Nacho is seen rejecting his life at the monastery/orphanage to live the life of a *luchador*, sneaking out and lying about where he was. Although, this is not technically an illegal crime, he violates the expectations set by the church and commits an ungodly act. Although these characters are not presented as criminals by trade, their reputations are tarnished by their criminalized behavior.

<center>THE SEXPOT</center>

The Sexpot, much like the image of the Criminal, is commonly "assigned" to Hispanic characters in film and TV. While previously mentioned that this image can take on either a male or female form, it is most commonly seen in female characters. Of the films analyzed in this study, all of the Sexpots observed are women. This is also supported by the report "Inclusivity or Invisibility?" which finds that sexualization of a female character in the media is much more common than of a male character, regardless of ethnicity (Smith et al. 2-3). Smith et al. claim that 28.6% of women in film are "shown in sexually revealing clothing" and 27.5% of women are "shown with partial or full nudity" (3). Of the movies

<center>43</center>

analyzed here, *Casa de mi Padre* (2012) most clearly presents the Sexpot, showing women as "sexual objects," just as Negrón-Muntaner describes the term ("The Gang's Not All Here" 107). However, *Maid in Manhattan* (2002), *Spanglish* (2004), and *Nacho Libre* (2006) all have female characters who are presented as semi-sexpots, women who, while garnering the attention of men (arguably unintentionally), are recognized as having other redeeming qualities. *Casa* shows multiple women as being overly sexualized and desirable, whereas *Maid in Manhattan* and *Spanglish* both present the main characters as beautifully attractive women who sometimes receive special treatment because of their beauty. The latter image is not exactly that of *the Sexpot*, but hints at the idea. Additionally, one female character in *Nacho Libre* reflects the semi-sexpot image in a similar sense as the women in *Maid in Manhattan* and *Spanglish*. The women in these three films are not oversexualized in the fact that they wear revealing clothing or that they are perceived to be promiscuous; instead, these women are depicted to stand out as more desirable than their white female counterparts. It could be that this is the reincarnated image of the Sexpot, altered to fit today's society, which centers more on the idea of being objects of desire rather than blatant sexual objects.

In the film *Casa*, all of the women are presented as sexual creatures, but most notably is Raúl's girlfriend, Señorita Sonia López. Sonia is introduced within the first ten minutes of the film and is shown off in front of several male characters, including Armando, his friends, and his father, all practically drooling over her appearance. She walks toward the men as "música sensual" plays in the background and the camera pans over her whole body, emphasizing her curves

and tanned skin (00:09:13).[6] She is the first, and one of few women to speak in the film, other than one of the maids and Armando's mother in a flashback. Sonia is always seen wearing revealing dresses and a flower in her hair, to emphasize her femininity and sexuality. She is the object of desire to all men but primarily to both brothers, Armando and Raúl; her arrival causes the brothers to compete for her affection. Toward the end of the film, Armando sleeps with Sonia, who he finds wearing just a bridal negligee trying to drown herself (00:55:38). Both Sonia and Armando are shown on-screen partially nude. However, it is surprising that Sonia's body is not completely revealed during the sex scene because of her continued sexualized appearance throughout the film. Regardless, her oversexualized form throughout the film represents the image of the Sexpot, praising beauty above all else.

The film also shows women in lesser roles in this light, as beautiful objects to behold. Armando's mother is shown only in a flashback, wearing a revealing dress and is later remembered as "*La mujer más bella de todo México*" (00:48:32).[7] She is not remembered for anything else but her beauty. Having a greater physical presence throughout the film, the maids are all dressed in short stereotypical "French maid" outfits that show off their slim figures. Only one of the maids, named Esmerelda, has lines in the film which are simple words, "*Señor*" and "*De nada*" at the beginning of the film (00:10:08). Her presence, like that of the other maids in the film, is merely physical. However, even she is

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[6] The subtitles read "[música sensual]" which directly translates to "sensual music" in English, roughly comprising of a bass guitar, saxophone, and drums.
[7] According to the film's English subtitles, the original quote in Spanish translates to "The most beautiful woman in all of Mexico."

jealous of Sonia's beauty and her ability to attract the attention of the other males. Similarly, there are many women who are dressed only in bikinis at La Onza's house, who serve no purpose other than to be in the shot and look sexy. There is not one woman in the film, *Casa*, that does not embody the Sexpot stereotype.

Moving on to the films *Maid in Manhattan (2002)* and *Spanglish (2004)*, the main characters Marisa (played by actress Jennifer Lopez) and Flor (played by Paz Vega), respectively, are portrayed as beautiful women, and as mentioned earlier, semi-sexpots. Although they do not wear revealing clothes, they are still objects of desire for men. In both cases, the men abandon their current situations to be with these new, beautifully exotic women. In *Maid,* Marisa is seen as a gorgeous woman who is stifled by her uniform, going practically unnoticed when donning it. However, she changes her clothes into a more elegant outfit (shown below in figure 8) and all of a sudden, the attention is on her and who the outfit makes her become. It is as if the uniform camouflages her beauty. Later in the

Figure 8 Marisa arrives at the event looking elegantly beautiful in Maid in Manhattan (2002)

film, Marisa is invited by Chris Marshall to go to an event with him and she is shown arriving is all of her beauty (with the help of some of her friends from the

hotel) in a stunning dress, presented as elegantly beautiful instead of cheaply sexual (01:11:25). Although she is shown wearing a dress with a lot of cleavage showing, she is presented in an elegant fashion. Throughout the rest of the film, Marisa is an object of beauty and desire like Sonia is in *Casa*, however not in the same way. Sonia is presented in revealing dresses with a flower in her hair while Marisa is shown in a uniform or casual clothes. Both characters are beautiful and desired by men, however they are shown in drastically different wardrobes and thus have different images.

The film *Maid* is widely studied by many scholars and journalists for its stereotypical presentation of Hispanic characters. In Jorge J. Barrueto's book, *The Hispanic image in Hollywood: a postcolonial approach*, he discusses the phenomenon of "Otherness" in that Marisa, the main protagonist, is presented as a contrasting character to the rest of the white characters (51). Barrueto says that Marisa is "the prototypical Hispanic woman: working class, black hair, long earrings and an untrustworthy ex" (52). She is presented as the complete opposite of her love interest Chris Marshall, who he says is "white, rich, and from the Eastern social establishment" (53). Besides the obvious dichotomy of the two characters, Barrueto delves into the idea of exoticism and how it is seen on-screen: "The exotic's sexual power, observed today in the American media obsession with Jennifer Lopez's body, which incidentally embodies the demographic fears associated with Hispanic mothers, points to society's historical fantasies about the dark-skinned women" (58). As you can see, Lopez's beauty, and by extension that of Marisa, is evident in the film and is used to undermine her ability to care for her son and do her job. She is the object of

desire for the white character of Chris Marshall. In my research, I noticed several

film reviews that fail to mention anything about the Hispanic stereotypes present

in the film, which could be a result of the theme of ethnic ambiguity in the film

(discussed in greater detail later in this paper). Since it is never directly stated

that Marisa is Hispanic, there are nearly no comments on this aspect. However,

in one film review by *Slant Magazine*, Ed Gonzalez says:

> *Maid in Manhattan* is considerably less offensive than one might expect if
>
> only because the film's debasement rituals are employed with equal
>
> opportunity. If the white people seen here are thoroughly disgusting
>
> (they're Republicans, thieves, loudmouths, racists, etc.) then the Latin folk
>
> take their oppression in stride.

Gonzalez is not wrong in his claims that the film is not excessively offensive, as

the film only perpetuates two images, both portrayed by Jennifer Lopez's

character. Nonetheless, there still is some stereotypical content that makes the

film problematic. However, being one of few reviews I could find with some sort

of comment about the representation of the Hispanic culture, the opinion is

limited. It is also interesting to note that this review calls Marisa Puerto Rican,

when it is never stated the film; this identity is assumed from the heritage of

actress Jennifer Lopez (Gonzalez). Another article about the film, also from *Slate*

Magazine comes from Michael Agger. He points out that, "The movie,

unsurprisingly, also treads recklessly over the race divide. There's a sharp, funny

moment when Ralph Fiennes describes Jennifer Lopez as "'5 feet 6 inch,

Mediterranean looking,' but that's about it." Marisa's ethnic identity is never

stated, but the divide is palpable. Agger also reveals a little bit about the creation

of the film, something that was not excessively publicized. He tells the audience that John Hughes actually wrote the story under the title "The Chambermaid" but "it never got off the ground" and was eventually rewritten for Jennifer Lopez (Agger).[8] While *Maid* is a good story of family and social mobility, it is so obviously centered upon the stereotype of the Servant. The film was meant to make a statement, but in practice made the wrong one.

In *Spanglish*, the main character Flor is a single mother who works several jobs but is still presented as a naturally beautiful woman. In the first ten minutes of the film, Deborah, the rich white woman in search of a maid, tells Flor that she is gorgeous two times upon meeting her (00:07:43). Flor is dressed femininely but not in a manner that is completely focused on her looks, similar to the situation of Marisa in *Maid*. Deborah later comments on her beauty in a more eccentric way upon meeting her daughter. Deborah says, "Oh, God, you could make a fortune at surrogate pregnancy," implying how Flor's beauty is emphasized again in her daughter's beauty (00:48:51). It is an inappropriate comment that again emphasizes Flor's beauty above all else. However, others cannot help but notice her beauty regardless of what she wears, primarily those in the new family for which she is working because she is different and new. John (played by Adam Sandler) also admires Flor's beauty, but only after he realizes his marriage is falling apart. He looks longingly after Flor on a drunken night as her hair blows in the wind on the beach (01:22:05). Again, Flor and John "hang out" (as he calls it) and the friendly atmosphere has shifted, his shirt is

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[8] This information was also confirmed by IMDb.com.

unbuttoned a bit further and Flor's hair is let down. Not long after, John says to her, "It's just you are drop-dead, crazy gorgeous," after complimenting her on her looks just before (01:48:04). He appreciates her for her looks but also for what she does for his family, in taking care of them. In the next minute, they are kissing and talking about their flirtation, but ultimately it remains just that, a flirtation. While Flor's appearance attracts the attention of John Clasky, their fleeting flirtation does not continue because of the impracticality of their situation. Others also notice Flor's beauty throughout the film, when Flor and her daughter Cristina go out to a restaurant. The both of them are dressed up; Flor is wearing a slightly revealing dress and it does not go unnoticed. Two men notice her when they walk into the restaurant and offer to buy her a drink (00:12:50). Even when out with her daughter, Flor is desired by men in public. Flor is perceived to be desirable and sexy, even though her wardrobe is not the most revealing.

  Spanglish was commented on frequently in the media upon its release, like *Maid,* in its presentation of a major minority driven stereotype of the Servant. In an interview, the director of the film, James L. Brooks, explains that he did a lot of research on Flor's character before and during filming. He comments that he was committed to the research, "Sitting around tables, sitting at my home, gathering women, hearing great lines, seeing women with their children, having the kids translate, talking to them about that experience." He continues to say, "Maybe hundreds of women, notebooks filled with transcripts. Almost 90% of them in Spanish which I don't speak, with somebody translating for me." He tried to get a sense for the young, single mother, trying to support her

child. While he never specifically says that he spoke with Hispanic women, it is implied by the nature of the character and his mentioning of Spanish. He talks about the use of Spanish in the film again, when asked about subtitles. Brooks was vehemently against subtitles: "If I had to have put subtitles on this picture, I would have known forever that I failed in everything I wanted to achieve in this picture." Brooks says this because the film, like the name suggests, is about a mix of languages and cultures. The film demands that you find a way to relate to the story of family and growing up whilst experiencing this confusion, something that Flor experiences regularly. Film critic Richard Propes chimes in on *Spanglish,* saying, "Brooks does a wonderful job of incorporating Hispanic culture into this film, including the use of the Spanish language, without ever losing the audience." Perhaps, also Brooks was worried about losing his audience; however, the film should not be limited to Spanish speakers or English speakers. The story is one of a family, which everyone can relate to, even in some small way, regardless of language. In his review, however, Propes does discuss the stereotypes present in the film. He mentions the obvious stereotype of Flor and her beauty; however, he also mentions this same quality for Flor's daughter, Cristina, which is something I did not consider. Both women attract the attention of members of the Clasky family; for Flor, it is John (the father) and as for Cristina, it is Deborah (the mother) who favors Cristina over her own daughter (Propes). Overall, Propes finds that while he became invested in the characters, he was disappointed by the stereotypes and the unresolved ending.

Nacho Libre (2006) also features a female character that is desired but cannot be considered a Sexpot, but rather a semi-Sexpot, because she fails to be

shown as an over-sexualized being, not to mention the fact that she is a nun. Sister Encarnación (played by Ana de la Reguera) is first shown with the camera zooming in on her as all of the school boys stare at her (00:05:16). She is dressed in her religious habit, which is not revealing and yet she is admired by the young boys and men alike for her femininity. The men act differently around Sister Encarnación, fixing their hair, inviting her to their quarters, giving her better food, etc. because of their enchantment with her beauty. Later in the film, Ignacio (played by Jack Black) reveals that he has feelings for Sister Encarnación but acknowledges he cannot act upon them (00:36:49). Ignacio considers Sister Encarnación a beautiful woman that he has feelings for, despite her holy status. While no sexual acts or notions are committed during the film, the audience can glean the fact that Sister Encarnación is an object of desire for the men of the orphanage.

All of the women mentioned that fall under *the Sexpot* image were regarded primarily for their beauty throughout each film. Their desirable qualities make them objects to conquer rather than characters to respect. The main aspect of the Sexpot stereotypical image, as Akines says, "…reduce[s] the individual's cultural identification to pure physicality" (22). The women are admired for their beauty while their other qualities pale in comparison.

THE CLOWN

Next, the image of the Clown, although not extensively described in the literature, is commonly seen on-screen in the selected contemporary films. Of the films analyzed, three films present characters considered Clowns, but the image is

most clearly in the main protagonists of *Casa* and *Nacho Libre*. Not quite as obviously presented, we also see the image of the Clown in *Gringo*, played by two brothers in minor roles in the film. Each of these characters provide some comedic aspect to the film or are targets of ridicule because of their personalities, their actions and/or their dialogue.

In *Casa* and *Nacho*, the main protagonists are ridiculed on a daily basis and underappreciated by those around them. Armando (*Casa de mi Padre*) is constantly compared to his brother, who is more attractive, more independent, has a beautiful girlfriend, and the list continues. In a *New York Times* review of *Casa*, author Dargis takes note of this, claiming, "Papá Alvarez (played by Pedro Armendáriz Jr.) overtly favors Raúl, calling Armando all kinds of *estúpido*" ("The Grind House of My Father"). Even so, it seems more blatant to me in watching the film that Armando is the outcast of the family. Armando is severely underestimated and serves as the butt of several jokes throughout the film. For example, in the first few minutes of the film, Armando is speaking with his father and his father calls him *tonto* and tells him he takes after his mother in not being *listo* (00:07:57).[9] Soon after, Armando's brother Raúl arrives and he is the center of attention. His father says, favoring Raúl, "*Finalmente, ¡el más inteligente regresó! ¡Eres el hijo que siempre he amado, chinga!*" (00:08:45).[10] Armando is neglected in favor of his brother and is treated as though he is incapable of doing anything to the caliber that Raúl does. He is continually ridiculed for never having been with a woman, but in the end runs away with Raúl's girlfriend,

[9] *Tonto* translates to silly and *listo* translates to intelligent or smart.
[10] According to the film's English subtitles, the original quote in Spanish translates to "Finally, the most intelligent son has arrived! You are the son I have always loved!"

Sonia. Much like described in the literature, he is the source of ridicule. Will Ferrell's portrayal of Armando, which obviously is not authentic, in fitting with the overall "feel" of the movie contributes to how the audience regards Armando. The New York Times review states, "The sincerity of his [Will Ferrell's] performance makes Armando seem foolish and therefore funnier, at least when he has enough good material" (Dargis, "Grind"). Armando is meant to be a joke and Will Ferrell's performance convinces the audience of such.

Similarly, in *Nacho*, the character Nacho is severely underappreciated as both the cook for the orphanage and a wrestler. Nacho's behavior is discounted inside and outside of the wrestling ring. The other "brothers" use him to prepare all of the meals but do not give him any money to buy fresh ingredients (00:14:18). He also has mentioned that they neglect to give him any "priestly duties" (00:06:43). Barrueto finds that Nacho cannot fill either of his roles successfully: "He [Nacho] is, in reality, an incompetent priest and a terrible cook" (140). Nacho shows his incompetence as a priest when pursues wrestling, which is seen as a sin. Nacho devotes a large portion of his time to trying to become a wrestler in which his ridiculous nature is emphasized with the training sequence. Barrueto concisely describes Nacho's foolishness: "He steals stockings, challenges a bull and plays with cow patties, melons, arrows and a hornets' nest" (141). This all takes places in the film as he tries to toughen himself up for the ring (00:20:30). Much like Armando, Nacho's efforts are discounted, and he is viewed as, quite literally, a joke. Nacho's reputation is hurt by his appearance in the ring; as you can see in figure 9, he looks ridiculous because of his low-budget costume and plump figure. Nacho is presented in multiple fights in which he is beaten up

time and time again, until the final fight where his eccentric moves win him the match. Both men are underestimated and underappreciated throughout the majority of the films until the end when they miraculously come out on top. Despite Armando and Nacho's triumphs, they are still remembered as the ridiculous clowns they are.

Figure 9 Nacho shown in the ring with his less-than-official uniform

It is important to consider the authenticity of these two Hispanic clown characters, Armando and Nacho (Ignacio). Both are played by well-known American comedians Will Ferrell and Jack Black (neither of whom are of Hispanic descent). The objectives of these characters were to be humorous and ridiculous, as they are presented in the films, and thus fall under the Clown stereotype represented by Hispanics in film. However, because of their celebrity it is probable that the audience is familiar with these famous actors and acknowledges that the humor is just that, humor. However, it is possible that some audiences may not consider this fact and may take these character portrayals for fact, for example, impressionable children who may not recognize these actors or the obvious stereotypes.

Nacho has a similar feel as *Casa,* as it was made in an overly-ridiculous manner meant to make viewers laugh. In an article about the film, Ilan Stavans writes, "She [Julia Pistor, producer] was afraid the depiction of Hispanic culture would come out as insensitive, misconstrued, and exploitive. She confessed that no one on the production team knew much about Latinos." (111). In my opinion, her fears were realized by the production. Much like in *Casa*, I believe it is clear that the plot is not the most realistic, however, had there been some Hispanic representation on the production team the issues may have been resolved. While adults may realize the obvious satirical qualities, its main audience of children, being a Nickelodeon film, most likely will not. Director Jared Hess is the creator of the film *Napoleon Dynamite,* which has the same "feel" to the film, taking on a theme of awkwardness throughout. Stavans calls *Nacho,* "authentic in its inauthenticity" and "an unsuccessful attempt at being off beat" because of its typecasting, even pigeonholing of Hispanics (112,114). Stavans outright says *Nacho* "mocks Latinos" (114). Stavans also mentions a phenomenon of "*rascuachismo"* that he finds prevalent in the film, which is "the quality of apparent bad taste in popular Mexican artifacts that are infused with subversive power" (115). I believe this quality is the epitome of the film, placing the emphasis on *lucha libre* and religion, when those are just clichéd images associated with Mexican culture. Despite all of this, Stavans approves of the film and finds it comedic. He subscribes to the idea of the film being bad: "The film is excellent at being bad" (115). *New York Times* reviewer Manohla Dargis also finds the film to be likeable because of its absurdity. He comments on Black's performance and the film overall: "Mr. Black delivers those lines with the lilting singsong you hear

in Mexican or, rather, Mexican-accented English, but, like everything else in the film, both the accent and the delivery are strategically out of the realm of the real" ("Tender"). Dargis finds the film to be inaccurate but so much so that it is not even a depiction of real life, as he says, "out of the realm of the real." Despite all that, much like Stavans, Dargis finds the film to be enjoyable: "To be honest, it's the sweetness here that kills. If the whole thing weren't so gloriously nonsensical it just might make you cry" ("Tender"). These critics find *Nacho* to be endearing in spite of how Mexico is presented by the excuse of humor; however, Jorge J. Barrueto disagrees, calling it a work of cultural appropriation. Although his view is more critical, he denies the excuse of humor and comments on the film's poor qualities. He says, "The film implies that Hollywood knows Mexico better than Mexicans do; it appropriates and manipulates Mexican cultural phenomena to stress the cultural differences between the two countries [U.S. and Mexico] while stressing northern superiority" (140). To me, this interpretation of the film is more fitting for the content presented on-screen.

The images of the Clown can also be observed in *Gringo* with the two motel keepers. The two men, Ronaldo and Ernesto, are brothers who are running the motel and from their first appearance are joking around. When they first meet Harold, the main protagonist, they charge him one hundred dollars more than the actual cost of the room and agree to split the extra money (00:32:54). Next, they help Harold appear to be kidnapped by yelling nonsensical Spanish while Harold calls Richard and Elaine (00:38:10). All the while, Ronaldo is listening and telling his brother what Harold is saying. They are sneaky and cheeky, providing a sense of humor to the film while portraying Hispanics as

jokers. Ultimately, the brothers fall to their demise with an obnoxious comment to The Black Panther (*El Pantera Negra* in Spanish). When responding to a question from the boss about the Beatles, Ernesto responds, "*Sí, sí me gustaban. Pues, ya, ya crecí*" (01:27:58).[11] With this comment, both of the brothers were shot within seconds. They were shown as smart-alecks and ultimately, it costs them their lives. These characters are shown as young men who are presented to provide a bit of humor to the relatively serious issues of kidnapping and extorsion presented in the film. Unlike Armando and Nacho, these characters are not severely ridiculed in their actions. However, all four characters are discounted, and others fail to acknowledge their potential.

<center>THE SERVANT</center>

The image of the Servant is observed the most frequently in the selected films analyzed in this study, as it can be seen in five of the six selected films. It is most obvious in *Maid in Manhattan, Spanglish,* and *Casa de mi Padre*. In *Maid*, as the title suggests, the main character, Marisa Ventura (played by Jennifer Lopez), works as a hotel housekeeper to support her son, Ty. Marisa works in the service industry and is treated as such, expected to make the lives of others easier for a price. She is first asked by white, rich guest Caroline to get her stockings, prefacing the question with "I know this isn't your job, and I'd never normally ask but…" (00:14:50). Marisa responds that it is usually done by the concierge, but the guest insists and manipulates her into doing the task despite the fact that it is

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[11] According to the film's English subtitles, the original quote in Spanish translates to "Yeah, I liked them [the Beatles] but then I grew up."

not in her job description (00:15:12). Marisa is manipulated because of her inferior position as a maid. Marisa is again discounted because of her uniform when she goes to retrieve the stockings, being ignored by another woman in the service industry just minutes later (00:16:23). This interaction emphasizes the stigma surrounding being a maid, that even another woman in the service industry will neglect to help her. One must ask the question if it is because she is a maid or she is Hispanic, or both. The question is sort of answered when the woman speaks into the phone, lowering her voice to say, "a maid," expressing her discountenance of Marisa simply because of her uniform and the status it represents (00:15:43). It is possible that her non-white appearance may have also contributed to this. As the film continues, the same rich, white woman guest staying in the Park Suite reappears, calling Marisa by the name Maria instead, not bothering to learn her real name (00:52:43). Marisa continues to be disrespected and judged because of her job title. In the same sequence, the following exchange takes place:

> CAROLINE: You are so good. Thank God. You should be a personal
>   assistant.
>
> FRIEND: She's a maid.
>
> CAROLINE: So are they with better titles.
>
> MARISA: Actually, I'm up for a position… (00:52:58)

The neglect and lack of respect Marisa receives because of her job as a maid is truly disheartening. Peers and guests judge her and treat her poorly because she is a maid, but that is her job, not her lifestyle. Marisa is again discriminated against based on her appearance as the guest's friend says, "She barely speaks

English," assuming from her appearance and uniform that not only is Marisa Hispanic, but also that she does not speak English (00:53:27). There is this assumption that she is inferior to others based upon her job. Marisa, after being fired, says it herself, "Half the time I am some stereotype that they're making fun of and the other half of the time I am just invisible" (01:24:56). Her mistreatment is so palpable and widespread that she even recognizes it and lives with it, unwilling or unable to find another job.

Not only is there a lack of respect shown in *Maid,* but there is also a theme of "us vs. them," as previously mentioned from Charles Ramírez Berg's book. Marisa's friend and fellow maid prompts her to try on the expensive outfit and says to her, "Come on, feel how the other half feels" suggesting that they are of a lower class than the hotel guests (00:26:26). This twist of fate acts as a catalyst for the plot of the film as Marisa pretends to be something, someone, she is not. Later in the film, Marisa's other maid friends try to make her snap out of her desire for Chris: "You are from two different worlds" (01:06:56). This quote emphasizes the distinction between the guests and the maids again. Rodríguez discusses this social divide when talking about *Maid*:

> Like other Cinderella-type movies, it [*Maid in Manhattan*] projects the possibility that people at the bottom of the social ladder (the Latina character Lopez plays, a single mom, and her multiracial support group of maids) could scale the gaps in relative wealth so evident during this time. (228)

This film is considered, as Rodríguez mentions, a "Cinderella-type movie" that is based on the idea of a difference in social class, thus confirming the intent to show lower class people as compared to those in a higher class.

Similar to Marisa in *Maid*, Flor from *Spanglish* is a classic example of the stereotypical image of the Servant, again showing this idea of "us vs. them." Flor interviews for a job as a maid for a rich, white family of Los Angeles in order to support her daughter, Cristina, much like Marisa in *Maid,* and receives the job with little to no questions. She begins to care for the family and their house but is continually confused due to the language barrier and different cultural perspective. There is a distinct difference between their lifestyles and social classes throughout the film. Just like the situation of Marisa, Flor experiences first-hand the idea of "us vs. them," serving a white, rich family just as Marisa was serving rich, white guests. From her first day, she is confronted with the task of making coffee as she looks dauntingly at an intricate, expensive, complicated coffee maker (00:16:05). She is presented with unfamiliarity throughout her time with the Claskys. Later, Flor is shocked when Mrs. Clasky consciously buys clothes for her daughter, Bernice, that are too small in hopes of encouraging her to lose weight. Flor tries to rectify the situation by altering the clothes to make Bernice feel better (00:31:13). While Flor often engages in tasks that help the family such as this one, it is interesting to note that she rarely engages in the traditional tasks normally assigned to maids, such as cooking or cleaning. Akines agrees that Flor is not completely defined by her chosen profession as a maid: "...Flor's beginnings are not what define her, and neither will they limit her future" (21). Flor works as a maid with a purpose: to provide for her daughter,

which is effectively completed throughout the film. Despite this, Flor is perceived by the Claskys, particularly Mrs. Clasky, as someone who cannot afford certain things and persuades her to move with the family to the summer house and enroll her daughter in the same private school as the Clasky children. There is an overwhelming sense of pity that occurs as if the Claskys needs to help Flor and her daughter because she works for them, reinforcing the motif of "us vs. them." However, Flor is not the only Hispanic character shown in the film in the role of a servant. There is a helper in John Clasky's restaurant, Alex, who is Hispanic and speaks with a noticeable accent. On his first day, he is ridiculed by the other chefs in the kitchen for not standing in the best place (00:19:49). The other chefs are harsh, expecting him to know what to do, even though he is new to the job. Alex reappears later in the film to help Flor and her daughter move their stuff to the summer house, reemphasizing his role as a helper to John and his family (00:48:27). In *Spanglish*, the audience perceives these servant characters as subservient to rich, white upper-class people with the emphasis on the differences between them, as seen in *Maid* as well.

In the next film, *Casa,* the maid characters are prevalent as well, and while they provide a bit of a different perspective, they still convey the overall idea of being a servant. In this film we see early in the film a line of maids (pictured below in figure 10), all dressed in classic French maid costumes (00:08:55). Like the maids in *Maid* and *Spanglish*, these women are employed by the rich, upper class creating this divide amongst them. However, these maids do not take on a definitive role like Marisa and Flor, as only one maid has lines, which in total does not account for more than a few words. The purpose of these maids is to

emphasize the wealth and superiority of the family in providing these subservient roles, while also fulfilling the stereotype of the Sexpot in casting beautiful women.

Figure 10 Maids that work for the Alvarez family, wealthy ranchers in Casa de mi Padre (2012)

In two other films we see Hispanic characters in servant roles other than maids, and also featuring men rather than women. One must consider Nacho from *Nacho* as well as Angel from *Gringo,* as they both serve others in their professions. Nacho reveals that he is forced to cook stew for the boys and fellow priests at the orphanage (00:14:18). He took on this role from a young age and has become tired of his role as cook because he is not provided with any support nor funds to buy fresh ingredients. Nacho is unique from the other servant characters in this section in that he is of the same social class as the other priests, and of a higher social class than the young boys he is serving. Despite this difference, he is still belittled by the other priests for his lackluster stew-cooking skills, just like the other servants. His brothers call him "useless" and insult his stew, saying "it has no flavor, no spices" (00:15:52). Sister Encarnación even scolds him on occasion for abandoning his duty to feed the children later in the film (00:59:10). Nacho's job of serving the children is met with judgement from others on his ability to do so.

Aside from his role as a servant to the children, Nacho is also a servant of God. Being a man of the cloth, Nacho lives his life serving the Lord in his priestly duties. In the beginning of the film, he is asked to visit a sick man and to pray for his recovery (00:06:38). He says aloud, presumably to God, "Holy Father, please receive this man to your kingdom" in serving God and contributing his efforts to help others (00:08:15). As the film continues, Nacho chooses to wrestle, despite its "ungodliness." He struggles to keep a balance of wrestling but also serving God in helping the orphans. Later, he reflects on his choices and asks God for guidance saying:

> Precious Father, why have you given me this desire to wrestle and then made me such a stinky warrior? Have I focused too much on my boots, and on my fame, and my stretchy pants? Wait a second, maybe you want me to fight and give everything I win to the little ones who have nothing so they can have better food and a better life. Yeah, maybe that. Okay, if I win tonight at the Battle Jam, I will know that you blessed my mission and that you want me to be a wrestling servant of you. (01:22:22)

Nacho cannot choose between serving God and becoming a wrestler and settles on this compromise of being a "wrestling servant." Nacho knows the "right" thing to do is to stop wrestling, but he loves it so much that he tries to justify it and make it seem less sinful. However, shortly after he is discovered as a wrestler, his role in serving God is revoked. The above quote also serves as another reminder of the Clown image that Nacho portrays when he references his boots, his fame, and, of course, his stretchy pants. In the end, Nacho does return as a "Man of

God," however, he is still belittled in both roles as a servant and is treated poorly for his decisions.

Angel from *Gringo* fits more of a traditional servant role as a personal assistant and trip organizer for the associates from the pharmaceutical company. The audience first sees Angel waiting at the airport to take Richard, Elaine, and Howard to the plant. While Howard treats Angel with respect, brings him food from the U.S., and attempts to use a translating app to keep Angel in the loop, Richard and Elaine look at Angel as if they are above him. Richard even mocks the idea of knowing Spanish, citing the Taco Bell slogan, "Yo quiero Taco Bell" (00:15:45). In their first encounter there is an unmistakable atmosphere of difference of class and the air of superiority, again mirroring the idea of "us vs. them." Later in the film, Angel is the recipient of more culturally insensitive discourse, this time coming from Elaine when she says to Angel, "No wait-o for dipshit-o...*Andale*," whilst tapping on the car, prompting their departure (00:31:10). In this comment, the audience assumes she is attempting to speak Spanish, having just said nearly the same phrase to Richard, this time simply with the o's. Angel, stoic and seemingly unaffected, carries on with his work and goes to search for Harold. All the while, Angel speaks little English and with a heavy accent. It is never once assumed that he can speak or understand English proficiently enough to understand what is going on. Richard, Elaine, and even Harold do not bother to consider the idea that Angel can understand, assuming that he is simply not able.

Not only does Angel serve Richard, Elaine, and Howard, but he also is working for the Black Panther (*El Pantera Negra*), the infamous drug lord of

65

Mexico. The Black Panther calls for Angel and abruptly asks him where the boss of the company is (referring to Harold) (00:33:43). This is when the audience begins to understand the corruption and underhandedness that the film is trying to convey, as described in a previous section about the Criminal. The audience sees Angel working for multiple people with conflicting objectives, but he is treated poorly by all because he is merely seen as a pawn and a servant. Unexpectedly, Angel reveals that in addition to working for the Black Panther and Promethium (the pharmaceutical company), he is in fact, an undercover DEA agent who works for the U.S. Federal Government (01:32:32). Angel, also known as Victor Cruz, is continually discounted throughout the film because of his lowly status as an assistant, when in reality he is a bilingual, highly intelligent, triple agent. He helps Harold survive and allows him to flee, all while serving justice by turning in Richard and the Black Panther. Victor Cruz, also known as Angel, is a clever character, and in effect, reverses the stereotype presented. He is aware of the mistreatment he will receive as a servant and thus uses it as a vantage point to manipulate those who manipulated him while also serving justice.

<div align="center">THE IMMIGRANT</div>

The analysis of the Immigrant stereotype in the films selected for this study is limited by the fact that three of the six films are entirely set in Mexico, and the topic of immigrants is not central to the plot. While the issue of immigration is briefly mentioned in *Coco,* the film *Spanglish* presents a Hispanic character as an immigrant as the main protagonist, Flor (played by Paz Vega). *Spanglish* begins with scenes of Flor and her daughter Cristina in Mexico and shortly after their

less-than-legal voyage to the United States (shown in figure 11). Cristina illustrates their illegal arrival to the United States without directly saying it: "Our transportation into the United States was economy class" (00:02:56). Flor and her daughter stay with a relative and live in a Hispanic neighborhood of Los Angeles, which Cristina described as 48% Hispanic at the time (00:03:20). While they move to the United States, they are still surrounded by Hispanic culture and the Spanish language, rendering English and assimilation

Figure 11 Flor and her daughter, Cristina illegally entering the U.S. in Spanglish (2004)

unnecessary. However, as Cristina gets older and needs looking after, Flor seeks employment as a maid and enters into a new world, outside of their "Hispanic bubble." Her cousin accompanies her on a job interview to translate for her because she does not speak any English. Flor is presented as a happy-go-lucky foreigner observing everything around her, but she is still confused because of the language barrier. Fortunately, she is not presented as a person unwilling to learn English, and ultimately, she does pay for a service to learn English later in the film. She is, however, shown as not wanting to assimilate to U.S. culture, not

stepping outside of the sphere of Hispanic influence in Los Angeles for years. Nonetheless, in the beginning of the film no steps are taken by either her or the Clasky family to bridge the language gap. On her first day of work, the following exchange takes place when John Clasky is surprised to find Flor in the house:

> FLOR: Hi.
>
> JOHN: I didn't know Deb found somebody. You, uh, work here? You're
>
> gonna help out with the house and kids?
>
> FLOR: *Solo español.*[12]
>
> JOHN: You work here, and you don't speak any English at all?
>
> FLOR: (shrugs) (00:18:35)

Her inability to speak English portrays her in a negative light and allows the audience to assume that other Hispanics and Hispanic Americans cannot speak English. As the film progresses, she learns some words, but she still speaks with a thick accent. She enlists the services of her daughter Cristina as a translator to speaks with the Claskys from time to time. In one instance, Flor asks her daughter Christina how to say something in English, as a result of an incident at work at the Clasky's house (00:29:55). This theme develops throughout the film, and by the middle of the film, Flor buys tapes and books to learn English (01:07:24). However, one cannot ignore the fact that the Claskys still make no effort to learn any Spanish, despite Flor's later attempts to assimilate and to learn ways to communicate with them. Flor, while presented initially as a foreigner

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[12] According to the film's English subtitles, the original quote in Spanish translates to "Only Spanish."

non-English speaker, reverses the stereotype in some ways by working hard to bridge the gap between herself and her employer.

     Coco does not have a specific character that demonstrates attributes assigned to Immigrant characters, however, the issue of immigration is at the forefront of the film. In *Coco,* the theme of immigration arises because Héctor cannot enter the living world on *Día de los Muertos* because his picture is not posted on an *ofrenda* (alter in English) (00:26:40). At the point of entry to the living world, the characters who allow people to pass through are dressed officially like TSA agents at an airport, reinforcing the idea of immigration and getting the approval to enter another country, or in this case, the world of the living.[13] He tries to sneak in by using disguises but proves to be unsuccessful until Miguel comes around and eventually helps him in being remembered and thus able to travel to the world of the living. Also, Héctor is dressed in a disheveled manner and is generally presented in poor condition throughout the whole film. While he does not exactly fill the role of the Immigrant, the theme of immigration is present in the film, and not in a positive way. Immigration in this film is presented by a man trying to sneak by the guards, which in today's political climate is a hot topic.

RESULTING IMPACT

The above stereotypical images found in contemporary film are the main causes for concern, as they directly affect the audiences and their perceptions of specific groups of people. While the intent of creating these films with such conventional

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[13] TSA signifies Transportation Security Administration, a U.S. federal agency.

images has already been discussed, one must consider how these films' images are affecting audiences, primarily the younger generation, as well as to consider what message is being relayed on-screen. Aside from the above images, additional trends have been found in analyzing the above films, such as an obsession with Mexico and a sense of ethnic ambiguity, which both affect how audiences perceive the world. These themes and images being translated on screen have a sense of power based on how people react.

Obsession with Mexico. Of the six films analyzed in this study, five films feature Mexico and Mexican or Mexican American characters at the forefront of the films. While the films *Nacho, Casa,* and *Coco* are entirely set in Mexico, showing off the Mexican landscape, the films *Spanglish,* and *Gringo* allude to Mexico frequently and have at least one scene there. All of the five films mentioned here feature at least one principal Mexican or Mexican American character. Despite the fact that films like *Coco* and even *Spanglish* (to some extent) present Mexico and Mexicans (and Mexican Americans) in a positive light, the emphasis placed on Mexico creates a bias toward this Hispanic country over the others and their unique cultures. In exclusively portraying Mexico, the five films, among others, seem to perpetuate the idea that Hispanics are only from Mexico or that the words Hispanic and Mexican are synonymous, but this is not the case. As discussed earlier, while Mexicans do constitute the majority of Hispanics in the United States, there is still some variation with Hispanics coming from other Spanish-speaking countries (United States Census Bureau "The Hispanic Population in the United States: 2016"). These films, with their promotion of

Mexico, are indirectly perpetuating the idea that Hispanics are solely Mexican. For argument's sake, if we assume that audiences are getting their information solely from contemporary films, there would be reason to believe that the only relevant Hispanics are Mexicans. While this may not be what happens in practice, one must consider the effect of presenting Mexico as the token Hispanic influence.

Maid, the one film that does not make any reference to Mexico, is unique in that it does not make any specific Hispanic references; the audience is forced to assume that the main protagonist Marisa is Hispanic based on factors such as the actor portrayal of Jennifer Lopez, her name, the accented speech of her mother in the film, and the stereotypical image of being a maid. This film, along with others that present similar situations are discussed in greater detail in the section below.

Ethnic Ambiguity. The idea of ethnic ambiguity is discussed fairly frequently by film critics and scholars alike, who primarily focus on the fact that many characters' ethnicities may not be clearly defined in film or that there is a lack of authenticity concerning certain characters. This is a trend that has appeared for as long as Hispanics have been on-screen, which affected early Hispanic actors and actresses such as Rita Hayworth, Anthony Quinn, Raquel Welch, as well as actors and actresses today like Jennifer Lopez, Cameron Diaz, and Gael García Bernal. Another famous actress who experienced this was Dolores Del Río, who comments on the subject of ethnic ambiguity: "...Spanish-speaking actors in Hollywood fell into two categories. If light-skinned, they could play any

nationality, including American. Dark-skinned actors were fated to play servants or appear as villains" (qtd. in Hadley-Garcia 29). The issue of ethnic ambiguity has existed in the film industry for a long time, with the focus on an actor's physical appearance without regard for their origin or ethnicity.

The film *Maid* most clearly demonstrates this phenomenon because the ethnicity of the main character, Marisa Ventura, is never clearly established. There are subtle cues that suggest that she is Hispanic or Latino, but the audience never discovers which country she or her family is from. There is one point in the film when Marisa's ethnicity is questioned when Chris Marshall's assistant, Jerry, is confused by her last name. The following exchange takes place:

JERRY: This is my card, alright. What's your last name, honey?

TY: (answering for his mom) Ventura. What's yours?

JERRY: Spanish?

TY: Jerry Spanish?

JERRY: No, Siegel. [laughs] We have to go. (01:02:33)

In this scene, Jerry receives an incredulous look from Marisa because of his insensitive and uneducated comment. Jerry seems shocked that their last name could suggest Hispanic heritage and passes judgement. Jerry uses the term "Spanish" in referring to Marisa and her son, which is defined by coming from or having heritage from Spain. It is clear from the look she gave him, Marisa is not Spanish, nor does she want to be described as such, especially not by him. Clearly, Marisa's ethnicity was not deemed as important or essential to the storyline as the audience assumes her Hispanic-ness from the clues provided (her name, her mother's accent, her job, actor choice). Thus, Jennifer Lopez's

portrayal of Ventura cannot be contested because the audience is not given any

information on the character's ethnic identity. She does not speak with an accent

nor does she demonstrate any preference toward another culture, other than that

of the United States because of the setting and country of origin of the film.

Ventura's mother does, in fact speak with a slight accent, giving us a clue to

Ventura's Hispanic heritage. From what we are shown and led to believe about

Ventura's identity, Lopez is an ideal actress, born and raised in The Bronx to

Puerto Rican parents (Rodríguez 221). In his review, Agger did suggest that the

role of Marisa was written for Lopez, so we can assume that both women are

Puerto Rican Americans. However, viewers who did not know this about the film

are essentially left in the dark. My aim here is not to pigeonhole Hispanic actors

in the sense that they have to be identified as Hispanic or Latino on-screen, but

rather quite the opposite; I am in favor of increased representation on screen. I

am simply highlighting the fact that Ventura is not given a clear ethnic identity in

the film, which forces the audience to assume one referencing the popular

Hispanic stereotypes and stereotypical qualities, as well as the image of actress

Jennifer Lopez. However, it could also lead to a misconception of the character,

and thus actress Jennifer Lopez.

Other films analyzed here feature a sense of ethnic ambiguity but not in

the same sense of that in *Maid,* rather in the sense of authenticity. In the films

Nacho and *Casa,* there is a blatant inauthenticity at the forefront of the films,

both featuring a well-known American comedian as the main protagonists, who

are supposed to be Mexican. These films, as previously discussed, are meant to

satirize and overdramatize aspects of the Hispanic culture: *telenovelas* in the case

of *Casa* and *lucha libre* in the case of *Nacho*. From the start, these films are perpetuating stereotypes by emphasizing certain aspects of society that Americans seem to already associate with Hispanic culture, or in the case of these two films, Mexican culture. However, the selection of Will Ferrell (*Casa*) and Jack Black (*Nacho*) causes the films to be considered just plain inaccurate. While some audiences will acknowledge the ridiculousness from the start of the films and retain nothing from the film as fact, some audiences, especially children, do not have that luxury and may take what they see on-screen as fact. While these films are meant to use these stereotypes as humor, the films read as offensive works of cultural appropriation.

Not quite as severely inaccurate, the film *Spanglish* creates a sense of ambiguity in that the actor Paz Vega's identity did not match that of the character. Paz Vega, a Spaniard, plays Flor in the film, who is a Mexican. Not only is Flor a Mexican woman, her Mexican identity and status as an immigrant is at the forefront of the film. While the sense of Hispanic influence is still present in the film, one must wonder why the director would not or could not cast a Mexican actress to represent a character of corresponding descendance to be more inclusive in representing ethnic groups. Alternatively, speaking to the idea that contemporary U.S. films are dominated by Mexican influence, why not change plots to include Hispanics other than Mexicans to be more diversified? Had there been films accurately describing Hispanics other than Mexicans, actresses like Vega may have felt more connected with the roles and the audiences more educated on the cultural variation.

Mary Beltrán discusses this idea of ethnic ambiguity at length in her article "Mixed Race in Latinowood" and later in her book, *Latina/o Stars in U.S. Eyes*. Beltrán says in her article, "stars of partial Latino descent often did not admit to or heavily publicize it prior to the 1990s, the decade in which mixed race births boomed in this country [the U.S.]" ("Mixed" 251). While here I primarily analyze the ethnic ambiguity on-screen, Beltrán comments on it for the actors in their everyday lives. She claims that in some cases, actors have neglected to share their *latinidad* when looking for work, in fear of the typecasting and/or discrimination they would face. Rodríguez cites actress Cameron Diaz as a perfect example of this, whose blond hair and blue-eyed image trumps her Hispanic last name; Diaz achieved success without being labeled as a "Hispanic/Latina actress" (Rodríguez 230). Beltrán continues to examine the phenomenon of ethnic ambiguity in her book claiming that there are increased "ethnic roles," which could be filled by actors of essentially any ethnicity that have the same "look." These characters could be Latino, but they could also be "Filipino, Samoan, half-African American, or Asian, or simply light-skinned 'ethnic' types," which, as the term suggest, creates this ambiguity surrounding these characters (*Latina/o* 159). She adds another interesting thought about how some may see this as an opportunity for increased Hispanic representation, but she says, "it is important to examine what happens to Latina/o representation in the process" (159). Although Hispanics may gain roles in films, the message and objective of increasing Hispanic representation is lost. Ethnic ambiguity is not generally a positive thing, it goes back to the phenomenon described by Berg, of "us vs. them" in that the out-group is not even worth defining.

Future Generations. The issues that this research has revealed must be considered regarding the impact on future generations. The obsession with Mexico, the use of conventional Hispanic stereotypes, and the blatant ethnic ambiguities in these and many other films, have a profound effect on young, impressionable children. When considering children, there are two sides to consider, that children will watch these films and feel the need to fill these stereotypes or will grow up to believe these stereotypes, and in some cases, both. As a general trend, children tend to be heavily affected by media and what they see. While a lot of research has been done on the impact that television has on its viewers, little work has been done to determine the effect of watching films. Research conducted about television viewing supports the idea that it affects how one views the world and promotes the belief of stereotypes and other ideas presented on-screen. Qingwen Dong and Arthur Phillip Murillo, in their article "The Impact of Television Viewing on Young Adults' Stereotypes Towards Hispanic Americans," cite several theories that support the development or perpetuation of stereotypes as a result of watching TV. The most relevant theories are "social cognitive theory" and "cultivation theory," which both support the idea that audiences model the ideas, values, behaviors, beliefs, and stereotypes observed on TV (37). They found in their study, using these theories that in fact, "the more individuals depended on television for their understanding of other races such as Hispanic Americans, the more likely they tended to develop negative stereotypes towards Hispanic Americans" (40). Applying these same theories to films, one can assume that the same result will occur. Because viewers do not watch movies quite as frequently or consistently as they may watch

television, films' influence on viewers will be less dominant, but nonetheless, prevalent. As previously mentioned, stereotypes fill in the blanks of understanding, and for children there are a lot more blanks as they are growing up and understanding the world they live in. While children and young adults have exposure to all of the films referenced in this study, there are two films that specifically appeal to children: *Nacho* and *Coco*. While *Coco* was nearly free from stereotypes and presented primarily positive images of Hispanics on-screen, *Nacho* shows a Mexican priest sneaking out to be a wrestler, which does not present Mexicans or Hispanics in a positive light. There is also the issue of inauthenticity with actor Jack Black playing a Mexican character. *Nacho* is rampant with stereotypes that young children feel the need to either fill and/or remember. Hispanic children may feel that they need to assume the identities of Hispanic characters depicted on-screen, whereas white children may assume all Hispanics are like the characters they see on-screen. Being that these children will grow up and go on to dictate what happens in society, they should be educated, culturally aware and not be reliant on popular stereotypes, starting at a young age.

FINDING SOLUTIONS

While the main objective of this research was not to provide solutions to the issue we are currently facing with stereotyping, there are two key points that have stood out to ameliorate the situation: increased representation on- and off-screen as well as a greater sense of cultural awareness and education. Due to the nature

of what can be found in contemporary film and how it is affecting audiences of all ages around the world, we must take steps to improve what is being produced.

Increased Representation. Much of the information provided speaks to the amount and quality of Hispanic representation that can be seen on-screen. As mentioned in the previous section, U.S. contemporary film seems to favor Mexico when presenting anything or anyone Hispanic, as if it is the default Hispanic country. Mexico is just one of over 20 Hispanic countries, all which have their own culture, traditions, and perspective, which is what should be shown on screen, rather than always reverting to Mexico. In representing other cultures besides that of Mexico, it will help widen the scope of understanding of Hispanic cultures, and thus contribute to the second initiative detailed below to become more culturally aware and educated. If you look back to figure 3, you can see that, just within the U.S. there is a variation with Hispanics, which is noticeably missing on-screen. Diversified representation on-screen would also allow actors of all ethnicities to be represented, and accurately, on-screen to inspire and empower audiences, oftentimes of the same ethnicity. A quote from John Leguizamo, reflecting on his childhood lacking the presence of Latinos in the media, relates back the impact that films have on young children. He says:

> When I was a kid, I never saw any Hispanics on television. And because you never see anything, you start to wonder, God, maybe as a people we can't do it…. I want Latin people to leave with a sense of pride, saying that no matter how down we are, we can overcome anything. (qtd. in Rodríguez 241)

As described in the previous section, children are impressionable and believe what they see, or rather don't see. Representation, or the lack thereof, makes a lasting impression on all viewers. And, according to a report conducted by the Motion Picture Association of America, Hispanics are showing up to the theaters to see the films, only to be misrepresented or missing from the screen altogether. The report states that Hispanics/Latinos "reported the highest annual attendance per capita in 2017, going to the movies an average of 4.5 times in the year" ("2017 THEME Report" 20). Hispanics, while not well represented on-screen are still coming to watch these films in the theaters. One can only imagine how much more frequently they would go to the movies if they saw themselves better represented. It is also important to note that these films have a lasting impact on viewers, continuing to be referenced and remembered long after they leave the theaters. Hispanics constitute a sizeable portion of the U.S. population and they deserve to be represented on-screen to encourage diversity and awareness.

While on-screen representation should be increased, one must also consider the representation behind the scenes. The film industry in the United States also needs more Hispanics in roles such as film directors, producers, and screenwriters in order to bring a greater sense of authenticity to contemporary film. There have been several related reports investigating the lack of Hispanic representation behind the scenes. Most notably in the 2014 report entitled "The Latino Media Gap," Frances Negrón-Muntaner finds:

> In top ten movies [in the 2010 to 2013 period], Latinos accounted for 2.3% of directors, 2.2% of producers, and 6% of writers. Even more dramatic, no

Latinos currently serve as studio heads, network presidents, CEOs, or owners. (3)

With little representation behind the camera, how is there to be hope for representation on-camera? Another report, conducted in 2016 by Staci L. Smith, Marc Choueiti, and Katherine Pieper investigates just that, the relationship between representation on- and off-screen. They claim that "the percentage of on-screen underrepresented characters increases 17.5% when an underrepresented director is at the helm of a scripted episode or film" (10). The graph they included in their report can be seen as figure 12, demonstrating the gap in representation based on the ethnicity of the director.
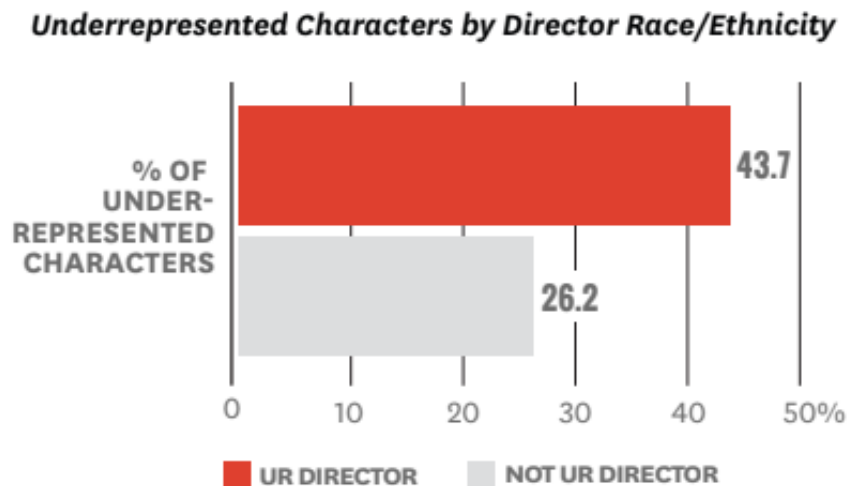
Underrepresented Characters by Director Race/Ethnicity

Figure 12 Chart created and supplied by Smith et al. "Inclusion or Invisibility?"

Several Hispanic actors and actresses have taken steps to increase representation behind the camera, directing and producing films to ensure that Hispanics are being well represented. Clara E. Rodríguez, in detailing the careers of several actors and actresses, reveals that big names in acting have succeeded at this endeavor such as, Desi Arnaz, Andy Garcia, Rosie Perez, Salma Hayek, Jennifer Lopez, and many others. Rodríguez also makes the statement that

increased off-screen representation, a trend that flourished in the 1990s for Hispanics among filmmakers, helps to provide a better picture on-screen. Rodríguez says "These [Latino] filmmakers would begin to resurrect, reconstruct and reclaim history" (194). She explains, "These departures from traditional Hollywood stories were significant, for they began to show different images of Latinos and thereby inspired audiences to question the traditional images projected in Hollywood films" (Rodríguez 194). Among these filmmakers, Rodríguez mentions Luis Valdez, Jesús Salvador Treviño, Jacobo Morales, Gregory Nava, and Moctesuma Esparza who made waves in the film (and television) industry (194-196). Hollywood needs more filmmakers like these Hispanics listed above. More recently, we see that while the situation still needs some updating, there are times of triumph for current Hispanic filmmakers and actors. For example, the 91st Academy Awards Ceremony (the Oscars), which took place on February 24, 2019, was a great time for Hispanics and Hispanic Americans. Spanish was spoken intermittently throughout the program and awards were won for films featuring Hispanic actors and filmmakers alike. Jordan Moreau comments about the presence of the Hispanic culture at the award show in his article: "Never before has so much Spanish been heard on the Oscars stage." Audiences are finally noticing a shift in culture and influence in the United States with the abundance of speaking Spanish on stage. This shift was also signaled by the awards won that night by Hispanic filmmakers, in particular. Alfonso Cuarón won "Best Director" for his film *Roma* (2019), making his win "the fifth in the past six years for Mexican directors," says Moreau. The rise in popularity of Hispanic filmmakers is a step in the right direction for ameliorating

the image of Hispanics in contemporary film. The image will hopefully begin to change with filmmakers like Cuarón who acknowledge the poor representation and advocate for such change. Cuarón said while at the Oscars, "Some progress has been made but definitely Hispanic-Americans—especially Chicanos—are badly represented still" (qtd. in Moreau). It is evident that the Oscars are becoming more and more inclusive, focusing on rewarding people for excellence in film, regardless of ethnicity. I am optimistic that this trend will also translate into everyday life while becoming more and more common on-screen.

Cultural Awareness. Because of the images being broadcasted in contemporary film in the United States, audiences must seek information from other sources to become knowledgeable about the world. We know that there are various forms of mass media that affect people's attitudes and beliefs besides film, such as television, internet sites such as YouTube, radio, etc.; however, it does impact how audiences view culture and people. The United States, in particular, is known for having an egocentric view with little emphasis on the other 190+ countries that exist. All forms of media should be expressing credible, accurate information about other countries and their cultures, so that people can be aware of their surroundings. The responsibility does not fall solely on the media but is also a task for people to research and gain awareness. As previously mentioned, stereotypes serve to fill in the blanks of understanding; perhaps, if there were less "blanks" people would not be so reliant on stereotypes they see in films and hear from others.

CONCLUSION

Stereotyping is a natural behavior that our minds use to understand the world. These "pictures in our heads," as Walter Lippman once called them, are harmless in nature as mental generalizations; however, the prejudices and the actions taken as a result of these stereotypes, especially as portrayed in contemporary American film, can become harmful and even offensive. It is unfortunate that the minority groups who find themselves the victims of stereotyping in their everyday lives see the same attitudes in popular media such as film. For decades Hispanics have been wrongfully portrayed and even ignored because of their ethnicity. It is my contention that the five stereotypical images of Hispanics mentioned in this study (those of the Criminal, the Sexpot, the Clown, the Servant, and the Immigrant) foster negative ideas about this group and further condemn them to these degrading roles. Due to the little representation of Hispanics (and other minority groups) on-screen, inaccuracies are in abundance. These inaccuracies have a strong impact on audiences, primarily young people and their growing understanding of the world. Hopefully, with greater representation, on- and off-screen, cultural awareness will increase, and these stereotypes will become a thing of the past.

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Appendix

Each of the selected films will be described briefly for reference:

CASA DE MI PADRE (2012)

Casa de mi Padre, set in Mexico serves as a parody of *telenovelas*, telling the story of two brothers and their encountered issues with one of Mexico's most feared drug lords. The film features themes of forbidden love, criminality, and strong sense of family while also featuring overdramatized scenes typical of *telenovelas*.

COCO (2017)

Coco, set in Mexico, follows a young boy on a journey to find out the truth about his family. He inadvertently travels to the "Land of the Dead" and searches for his thought-to-be great-great-grandfather, who turns out to be a liar and a murderer. In his travels he realizes the importance of family and in remembering the past, all whilst pursuing his dreams.

GRINGO (2018)

A pharmaceutical company's desperate decision to sell product to drug cartels in Mexico (where their factory is located) leads to several violent events involving murder, extortion, kidnapping, and threats from a well-known drug lord. *Gringo* presents Mexico as a place of corruption, violence, and danger, with the U.S. not too far behind.

MAID IN MANHATTAN (2002)

Maid in Manhattan tells the story of a young single mother who works as a maid to support her son. One day, she is mistaken for a guest of the hotel and begins an affair with a well-known politician staying at the hotel. The story provides insight on the discrepancy between social classes and the treatment people receive in each position.

NACHO LIBRE (2006)

Set in Mexico, *Nacho Libre* is a film about a disgruntled monk, Nacho, who decides to abandon his life and job at the orphanage to become a famous wrestler (in *lucha libre*). Although Nacho knows that wrestling is a sin, he continues to pursue his dream while still helping the children and ultimately achieves success doing both.

SPANGLISH (2004)

Spanglish is the story of a Mexican woman, who moves to the United States to provide her daughter a better life, obtaining a job as a maid. The film outlines the issues encountered along the way, especially those having to do with the language barrier and cultural perspectives.