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## **MexArtist as Resistance Against Media Representation of Latinxs in the U.S.**

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MEXARTIVIST AS RESISTANCE AGAINST MEDIA  
REPRESENTATION OF LATINXS IN  
THE UNITED STATES

A Thesis

by

JOSÉ GARCÍA GILLING

Submitted to the Graduate College of  
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
MASTER OF ARTS IN INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

December 2020

Major Subject: Mexican American Studies



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REPRESENTATION OF LATINXS IN  
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December 2020



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## ABSTRACT

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This thesis uses an epistemological approach and more of a qualitative focus rather than quantitative measures to analyze the situation of representation, lack thereof and (mis)representation of Latinxs in Hollywood films. I center my efforts of dissecting representation of Latinxs in U.S. films around more recent productions of Hollywood films. Through analyzing stereotypes, participation and representation in Hollywood, I pose the questions: does typecasting exist because of the stereotypes cemented in the industry? Is the participation of Latinxs in the production of films diminishing or growing? Will the issue of representation be solved by simply showing the “reality” of Latinxs on film? Or is it a matter of balancing between sensible content creation and a conscious execution of the form? My research and exploration of the subject has led me not only to find several answers and propositions by other authors and myself, but it has also inspired me to take concrete action. MexArtivist is an art and social action media group that I created to produce content focused on the Latinx, Chicanx, Mexican American, and Mexican experience. My hopes are that this research will inform the audience and reader, and that MexArtivist will be the tangible culmination of my research but the beginning of a bettering of Latinx representation in the United States.





## DEDICATION

Esta tesis es para las personas que necesitan escuchar que sus experiencias son importantes, incluso más importantes que un libro de texto. Es para las personas que no se sienten ni de aquí, ni de allá. Es para las personas que *sí* se sienten de aquí y de allá. Es para las personas que se encuentran entre mundos. Es para las personas a las que les han dicho que no pueden hablar el idioma que quieren. Es para las personas a las que les han hecho sentirse o ellas mismas se han sentido avergonzadas de su piel, de su acento o de su origen. Es para las personas que rompen con el monolito de qué es ser Latinx. Es para las personas que se adueñan y enorgullecen de qué es ser Latinx. Es para artistas que representan con orgullo nuestras historias y para artistas que no lo hacen también. Es para escritores Latinxs que han tenido que escribir un personaje Latinx ofensivo porque necesitan pagar la renta. También es para escritores que han pasado hambre porque se niegan a escribir personajes ofensivos a Latinxs. Es para las actrices que quieren interpretar otros papeles aparte de maid o mamacita. Es para los actores que quieren interpretar otros papeles aparte de gang members y jardineros. Este trabajo es dedicado también a las personas que trabajan en los jardines y en las casas de otras personas para sobrevivir. Es para lxs inmigrantes de Estados Unidos, para que encuentren algo de paz en este país donde el sueño americano sólo existe porque nosotrxs lo construimos. Va dedicado a mi familia, de sangre y no, que también es parte de todo esto.

Si pudiste leer esto, te dedico este escrito.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## CHAPTER I

### MY FRAME BY FRAME

“The point is, art never stopped a war and never got anybody a job. That was never its function. Art cannot change events. But it can change people. It can affect people so that they are changed... because people are changed by art – enriched, ennobled, encouraged – they then act in a way that may affect the course of events... by the way they vote, they behave, the way they think.”

–Leonard Bernstein, interview in L.A. Times (1972)

*Idea #1111* (2013) tells the story of a man who “sells” ideas to troubled people in exchange for personal and irreplaceable objects with the help of a magical box. This was the first short film I had ever directed with a full-on crew and a sizable budget, so the most important thing for me was to finish the film and not become overwhelmed by the entire experience. We wrapped up production, worked for hours in the editing room, and sent it to several film festivals around the world.

I’ve been making films ever since.

A short time before that, I had approached one of my film professors, who also happened to be the director of the local film festival. I asked for his advice as to how to get more involved in the film industry. The movies I was watching at the time, were based largely on a few online top ten lists and on the five-star review system, so my professor started giving me his own



suggestions. While I was gobbling up films from all over the world and across the decades, I also started working at the Monterrey International Film Festival from 2009 to 2016. During those years, my world expanded, and I found a new way of experiencing films that would undeniably influence my own work as a filmmaker. At some point while immersing myself into watching all kinds of movies, I became fascinated with horror, fantasy, sci-fi and all their subgenres. Thus, my second short film, *The Fairest of Them All* (2015), told the story of a woman who would excrete her envy through black tears that fall drop by drop, forming a revengeful fish-scorpion monster. And even though I truly enjoyed making horror and fantasy films, and still do, I felt that these stories were lacking *something*. They didn't resonate with me, not entirely, nor did I feel that they were personal enough.

I was born in Tampico, a city in the state of Tamaulipas in México. Shortly after, my family and I moved to College Station, Texas and then back to Tampico, then back to Texas and then over to Monterrey, México. After living nearly twenty years in Monterrey, I moved to the Texas Rio Grande Valley (RGV) to pursue my MFA in Creative Writing with a focus in Screenwriting. When I heard that my screenwriting professor had worked as a writer in shows like *The Twilight Zone* (1959) and *Star Trek* (1987), I began to get pretty excited. I figured that this might be an opportunity to truly find myself in my stories.

I took up a job at school, did well in my classes, and met new people. One of my classmates, a published writer who also happened to be working in films, suggested that I apply for the Certificate in Mexican American Studies. At the time, I had only taken one class related to Ethnic Studies, so I decided to give MAS a chance. What followed was a series of nurturing and revealing, albeit bizarre and confusing discoveries that would inevitably lead to me writing this paper. I signed up for as many MAS courses as possible. Even when there were no options

available in the semester, I'd still try to apply my new *conocimiento* into other courses. The more I learned about anything and everything related to MAS, the more I wanted to implement it into everything in my life. Mexican American Studies led me to read the same articles but with a new set of eyes, to pay more attention to the way people speak, and speak up against toxic behaviors that before were irrelevant to me. Many ways of thinking that were set and fixed in my world, began to evolve into a healthier shape. All of these experiences helped me realize that what I was missing in the films I was making had more to do with the content, not the form. The *form* of a film, in very simple terms, can be described as *how* the film is made. It's the coating, it's the sounds and images fused into endless combinations and possibilities. The *content* is the seed of the film, the spark that starts the fire and the ground on which the movie is built. This is, of course, a simplistic and binary way of describing what filmmaking is, but the idea remains that form and content are connected to create a whole. I realized that the *how* of my work needed to be a reflection of the *what* and the *why*.

I kept thinking that Latinxs have so many stories to tell, so why do we have to *dig them up* in order to hear and see them in the United States? This led me to think about *what* stories were being told and *who* was telling them. After some time, I started asking myself more questions: what was the *industry's* take on the how, what, why and who? Were Latinxs' voices being heard and honored? Were Latinxs being considered for a variety of roles outside of maids and criminals? Is there such a thing as a negative or positive, right or wrong representation? Is there *anything* we can do and *how* can we fix the lack of and misrepresentation of Latinxs in mainstream, commercial U.S. cinema? Is there anything *I* can do?

During my MFA, I traveled and documented the Texas border from the RGV to El Paso, I attended and presented at a few academic conferences, I devoured Chicana films, stories,

poetry, and art in general. I soon came to realize that many of these *artists* were forced to become the creators of what they felt was missing in our world. For me it was obvious that I had the facultad to make it happen on my own, so I created MexArtist, a media collective that focuses on creating content that honors the presence, stories and images of Latinx, Chicanx and Mexican American experiences. There are many media groups in the United States that have been taking up the task of sharing our cultura and educating the audience about Latinx life. I will elaborate further towards the end of the essay, but the scope of MexArtist centers on telling our stories through and by means of artistic productions. At the time of writing this essay, MexArtist has built a persona and content but has not yet been formally released into the public sphere. The other half of this thesis exists in the form of audiovisual and visual content that I have created as part of MexArtist, which will be readily available to the public for free. The purpose of these pages is to continue the conversation on the matters of misrepresentation and lack of representation of Latinxs in media and Hollywood. However, the most important matter is that this text becomes superfluous compared to what actions, in the form of art, can do. I truly believe there *is* something we can *all* do, so first I open up the conversation as to *why* we should.

### **Un Poco De Raza P'al Ivory Tower**

When I was a toddler my parents took me to Disneyland, but first they decided we go visit our Uncle Alfred, a Black Cuban immigrant who was a distant cousin of my mamá's dad, my abuelo David. I remember little to nothing of that visit, nor do I recall most of the trip to the amusement parks in California. I would not step foot in California until a good thirty years later, when attending a conference in San Francisco. A professor from the University of Texas El Paso had invited me to present in a panel about border films. Being Latinx films and representation

my focus, I was thrilled to share and talk about things I felt mattered. The number of empty chairs was not unexpected, but I was excited for the conversations to come, the ideas to be shared and the actions to be taken after the conference. I was fairly disappointed mostly at the latter, even after I encouraged the handful of attendees to truly consider how important it is for us to engage into social matters outside of academia, after the conferences are done, when words can only get us so far. This disheartening moment ignited what's at the end of this essay, but we'll get to that later.

I was comforted by the march we attended shortly after the conference, then by a few hours of indulging in my touristy guilty pleasures. When I got back home to El Valle, I had a sour aftertaste of the academic agenda. Mexican American Studies allowed me to participate in relevant conversations without sacrificing the essence of what I felt was important. This came mainly because MAS has a tradition of valuing one's own experience as a means of both challenging established knowledge and paradigms while at the same time creating new knowledge. This is a constant theme that Chicanx authors such as Gloria Anzaldúa<sup>1</sup> and others use in their writings. Rosa Linda Fregoso also says that dialogues and conversations are just as important as more traditional academic articles in terms of communicating ideas, producing criticism<sup>2</sup>. As we say, *las historias de la abuela son tan importantes como los libros de texto*. I guess one could say that the length of this paper takes a somewhat epistemological approach and that there are more qualitative features than quantitative measures used to analyze the situation of representation, lack thereof and (mis)representation of Latinxs in Hollywood films. But instead of taking more time explaining a methodology that doesn't need methodology, I prefer to use

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<sup>1</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *This Bridge We Call Home*, (2013), 541.

<sup>2</sup> Rosa Linda Fregoso, *The Bronze Screen*, (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2007), xiii-xxiii.

these pages to express what really concerns me through the lens of my own experience and vivencias.

## CHAPTER II

### HOLLYWOOD'S MANIFEST DESTINY

“To change the system, Hollywood must reevaluate how it measures merit and stop positing diversity and brilliance as mutually exclusive... Colorblind excuses such as a lack of talent of color or market preferences no longer ring true”

–Nancy Wang Yuen

If I'm honest, I don't remember much about the first time I watched *Jurassic Park* (1993). I don't remember how old I was when I saw it, nor do I remember if we rented the VHS at home or if we went to the theater. What I do remember is how I felt the first time I watched it: I was *stupefied* at the fact that I could see *dinosaurs* on the screen looking so real and so alive. That got me thinking about the words *unlimited* and *creation*, and I started to realize that films could be about making those two happen in the same sentence. The truth is that these bigger-than-life movies had such a big impact on me that I decided I wanted to become a film director. However, this thesis is not about the reasons why filmmakers venture into making movies, it's about the impact the film industry has on its audience.

One day in class, my students and I were discussing what *conquista* meant by analyzing John Gast's painting, "American Progress" (1872)<sup>3</sup>. The picture can be regarded as an allegory for westward expansion, i.e. Manifest Destiny. In the painting, a woman in a white robe towers

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<sup>3</sup> Figure 3.1

over a plain field while settlers maneuver wagons and railroads cut across the land. On the left of the painting, Native Americans and native wildlife race away from what could be described as the artistic representation of the United States' progress. One of my students then says, "The lady in the painting, she looks like the one in the Columbia Pictures logo<sup>4</sup>". Many have probably seen it, the "Torch Lady"<sup>5</sup> holding up a flame while we dolly back<sup>6</sup> to get the full view of the Columbia Pictures studio logo. Surely it was a coincidence, but I couldn't help but imagine that the creation of the Columbia Pictures logo was a product of an "American Progress" state of mind in Hollywood. In a way, the Columbia Pictures' Torch Lady is an unconscious embodiment of a notion formed by paintings like John Gast's, which in turn was likely motivated or at least influenced by the oppressive ideals of Manifest Destiny. At times, it seems that Hollywood embodies a very similar persona. Even though the next few paragraphs inform the nature of my interest in filmmaking, they are centered on criticizing the abrasive grip that U.S. cinema, mainly Hollywood, has on its viewers' minds and lives.

There are, in fact, some authors that recognize the overpowering effect that the films of the U.S., mainly Hollywood films, have on national perception of Latinxs since the early days of cinema in the United States. Jorge Barrueto goes as far as recognizing how D.W. Griffith, one of Hollywood's most prominent and admired early filmmakers, depicts Mexicans as un-American and the "embodiment of the dangerous ethnic Other" in his 1910 film *In Old California*<sup>7</sup>. Frank Javier Berúmen García goes even further by bringing into light a short film called *Pedro Esquivel and Dionecio González: Mexican Duel* from 1894<sup>8</sup>. García Berúmen describes that this

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<sup>4</sup> Figure 3.2

<sup>5</sup> The Columbia Pictures current logo was inspired by a series of photographs taken by Kathy Anderson of model Jennifer Joseph in 1992.

<sup>6</sup> Film production camera movement where the tripod-mounted camera "rolls" back on tracks.

<sup>7</sup> Barrueto, Jorge J. *The Hispanic Image in Hollywood: A Postcolonial Approach*. New York: Peter Lang, 2014.

<sup>8</sup> García Berúmen, Frank Javier. *Latino Image Makers in Hollywood: Performers, Filmmakers and Films Since the 1960s*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2014.

short film “froze in time forever the violence-prone, crime-oriented Mexican with a pronounced inability to control his primitive passions”<sup>9</sup>. The cinema of the United States has such an awe-inspiring repertoire, and it seems nearly impossible to truly cover the vast majority of films that have shaped the Latinx image throughout U.S. film history. This is why, as much as it is important to clarify that some aspects of Hollywood have been a virus that has survived the ages, I aim to center my efforts of dissecting representation of Latinxs in U.S. films around more recent productions of Hollywood films since. However, we should not overlook the fact that lack of and (mis)representation have occurred since before the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Even though this section will focus on analyzing Hollywood’s influence in the industry, there are several other states responsible of producing commercially successful movies in the United States<sup>10</sup>. Nonetheless, Hollywood has often been regarded by many as the central hub of the movie industry in the United States, and is the main source of influence in terms of the Latinx image on film by many scholars. David R. Maciel (1990) examines border films thoroughly from both sides of the dividing line, but when speaking of U.S. movies, he focuses mainly on border films produced in Hollywood and considers them to be guilty of grossly stereotyping Mexicans<sup>11</sup>. On the matter of typecasting, Mary C. Beltrán argues that Hollywood has had its way with assigning ethnic and racial minorities to limited roles and focused on monetizing Latinxs through negative and positive stereotypical associations<sup>12</sup>. René Antrop-González (2002) questions Hollywood’s hegemony in terms of defining the Latinx image,

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibíd*, 11.

<sup>10</sup> New York has a more than competitive production rate, and Georgia frequently occupies the number one position in terms of production quantity. States like Texas, Pennsylvania, Illinois, and Florida have been on the rise in recent years as well.

<sup>11</sup> David R. Maciel, *El Norte: The U.S.-Mexican Border in Contemporary Cinema*, (San Diego: San Diego State U., 1990), 3.

<sup>12</sup> Mary C. Beltrán, *Latina/o Stars in U.S. Eyes: The Making and Meanings of Film and Tv Stardom*, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 9.



particularly referring to the utilization of the Puerto Rican image in Hollywood films<sup>13</sup>. Actress, activist, director and producer Eva Longoria co-wrote an article with Dr. Stacy L. Smith, a professor at the University of Southern California related to matters of diversity and representation in Hollywood. In the piece published in *Time Magazine*, Longoria and Smith argue that Hollywood has long been ignoring the issue of Latinx representation on the silver screen, pointing out that the industry has a history of erasing and failing to humanize Latinxs<sup>14</sup>.

Furthermore, the box office domination that the United States has in most of the world perpetuates the dissemination of movies that portray harmful and stereotypical images of dozens of racial and ethnic groups across the globe. A rather comprehensive study done by UNESCO<sup>15</sup>, shows that in 2017, Latin American audience members attended mostly U.S. movies as opposed to the underwhelming turnout for their own country's films. Argentina possessed the highest number of national film attendance with 7,111,650 admissions to Argentinean movies. In the same study, the admissions for U.S. films was 47,715,041 tickets sold, a whopping 76% of all ticket admissions (market share). While Argentina had a ratio of U.S. to national audience market share of 76% : 11%, countries like Brazil (83% : 9%), México (88% : 7%), and Venezuela (92% : 3%) had an even lower attendance regarding nationally produced films. Other Latin American countries such as Colombia (89%), Perú (72%), Dominican Republic (46%), and Costa Rica (23%), all had their audiences attend a majority of U.S. movies, and virtually no attendance to nationally produced films.

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<sup>13</sup> René Antrop-González, "Chapter Eight: Semiotic Representations of Puerto Ricans in Hollywood Cinema: I Don't Like It Like That." *Counterpoints*, Vol. 176, Transmediation in the Classroom: A Semiotics-Based Media Literacy Framework (2002), 101-111.

<sup>14</sup> Eva Longoria Baston & Stacey Smith, "Latinos Must Be Better Represented in Hollywood Movies." *Time*. Time, August 27, 2019. <https://time.com/5662739/latino-hollywood-representation/>.

<sup>15</sup> UIS. Feature films: Exhibition - Admissions & gross box office (GBO). Accessed December 11, 2019. <http://data.uis.unesco.org/index.aspx?queryid=59>.

In Europe, even though the supremacy of United States cinema is less overpowering than in Latin America, it still has a hold on a great number of countries. For instance, in 2017 the market share of U.S. to national films in France was 49% : 37%, in Poland 55% : 23%, in the UK of Great Britain and Northern Ireland 58% : 37%, in Denmark 61% : 21%, in Germany 64% : 24%, in Italy 65% : 18%, in Spain 67% : 17%, in Netherlands 75% : 12%, and in Belgium the ratio was 76% : 8%. Similarly, countries such as Canada and Australia (86% : 4%) fall under the same incidences and only a few countries, such as China, are the exception of this presiding phenomena. Let's also consider that the United States is ground zero for some of the most active distribution companies in the world, it has the biggest worldwide box office revenue, and produces the second most feature films per year by any other country, topped only by India. The irony of this situation, especially for Latin America, is that at times the United States film industry garners millions of dollars at the expense of portraying the Other in undignified and demeaning roles. Moreover, this directly affects People of Color in the United States who must interact in a society that is largely influenced by these movies that are nurtured by worldwide box office success. A success, in part, fueled by Latinx folks.

A study done by the National Hispanic Media Coalition and implemented by Latino Decisions, found that "Entertainment and news media have a strong influence on non-Latino opinions about immigrants and Latinos<sup>16</sup>". The study also found three major trends: (1) news and entertainment media have a strong influence on Non-Latinx perceptions about Latinxs and immigrants; (2) most people attribute a mix of both positive and negative stereotypes to Latinxs and immigrants; and that (3) media portrayals of Latinxs and immigrants can diminish or exacerbate stereotypically negative opinions about them. While audiences may enter a movie

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<sup>16</sup> Matt A. Barreto, Sylvia Manzano, and Gary Segura. "The Impact of Media Stereotypes on Opinions and Attitudes Towards Latinos" National Hispanic Media Coalition. Latino Decisions. September 2012.

theater with their own preestablished prejudices, it is also safe to say that the images on screen can be responsible of either confirming these biases or even establish new ones. In an interview, Otto Santa Ana, professor of Chicana Studies at UCLA, says that “we don’t understand the world, it turns out, in terms of logic and mathematics because we are not computers. We understand the world in terms of imagery”<sup>17</sup>. The overall impact of media, particularly cinema, has been explored by several scholars in the past. Other authors have established that media representation provides clues regarding the sociopolitical status of certain groups and the relationships among themselves<sup>18</sup>, and that movies mold and influence the opinions, tastes, languages, clothing, behavior, and even the physical appearance of its audience<sup>19</sup>. In his anecdotal introduction of his seminal work, Charles Ramírez Berg speaks of how his students were immediately able to access a vivid description of the bandido without any mention of a specific film, actor, or scene<sup>20</sup>.

In this section I’ve shown that Hollywood’s preponderant visual rhetoric undeniably shapes the audiences’ perceptions of Latinxs not only in the United States but around the world as well. Considering that nearly one out of every five people in the U.S. identifies as Hispanic/Latinx<sup>21</sup>, one would think that there is a wide-variety of roles offered to Latinxs in movies and that their participation is abundant in Hollywood productions, especially considering that most Latinxs who live in the United States reside in California, but one would be mistaken.

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<sup>17</sup> Miguel Picker & Chyng Sun. *Latinos Beyond Reel: Challenging a Media Stereotype*. The Media Education Foundation, 2004. DVD.

<sup>18</sup> Beltrán, *Latino/a Stars*, 2.

<sup>19</sup> Maciel, *El Norte*, 3.

<sup>20</sup> Charles Ramírez Berg, *Latino Images in Film: Stereotypes, Subversion, Resistance*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 1.

<sup>21</sup> Luis Noe-Bustamante and Antonio Flores. “Facts on Latinos in America.” Pew Research Center's Hispanic Trends Project. Pew Research Center. Accessed December 11, 2019. <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/fact-sheet/latinos-in-the-u-s-fact-sheet/>.

A main reason for this just might lie, fundamentally, in the creation and continuation of stereotypes perpetuated by the media.

### CHAPTER III

#### STEREOTYPES, “REALITY”, AND REPRESENTATION

“While these popular stereotypes cast Latino women and men in somewhat different roles, they share one thing in common. They all position Latinos as foreign, as ‘other’, and even as inferior.”

–*Latinos Beyond Reel* (2012)

The New York Times published an essay in 1981 describing how Latinxs are systematically portrayed in degrading roles, and that Hollywood would emphasize these stereotypes and purposely ignored the positive contributions that Latinx have had in culture and life in the United States<sup>22</sup>. Although some forty years have passed, actors and actresses are still experiencing very similar issues in present times. James Lipton welcomed Mexican actress Salma Hayek in 2004 in his acclaimed interview show *Inside the Actors Studio* (1994 – present). At the end of the show, the host usually opens the floor for questions made by the students of the Actors Studio Drama School at Pace University, which comprise the majority of the audience members at the studio. In one of the questions, a first year acting student named Kara Webster asks Salma if she’d ever found her accent to be an issue as an actress. Salma responds with a very composed yet justifiably upset tone: “Are you kidding me? You were wondering? Every time it was a part for a woman that had any kind of education or was smart or any kind of social

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<sup>22</sup> Allen Woll, “How Hollywood Has Portrayed Hispanics.” The New York Times. The New York Times, March 1, 1981. <https://www.nytimes.com/1981/03/01/movies/how-hollywood-has-portrayed-hispanics.html>.

responsibility, like a good job, ‘She's Mexican. Nobody's gonna believe it!’”<sup>23</sup>. Salma Hayek’s venture through Hollywood vividly reflects the categorizations that several Latinx actors and actresses have faced since the early stages of filmmaking. So, does typecasting exist because of the stereotypes cemented in the industry? Is the participation of Latinxs in the production of films diminishing or growing? Will the issue of representation be solved by simply showing the “reality” of Latinxs on film? Or is it a matter of balancing between sensible content creation and a conscious execution of the form? We can start to answer these questions by first exploring the predominant stereotypes in Hollywood.

### **Mamitas, Huevones, Payasos y Cabrones**

For nearly two months, I took up a filmmaker’s workshop in the secluded town of San Antonio de los Baños in Cuba. The school, Escuela Internacional de Cine y Televisión (EICTV), is one of the checkpoints for several Latinx filmmakers looking to better their knowledge and skill in the various aspects of filmmaking. One of the conveniences was that students could do a course for as short as a week, then take the hour trip to Havana and enjoy the touring if they would so wish to do so. EICTV is known also for the impressive repertoire of guest speakers, including Francis Ford Coppola and Abbas Kiarostami, among others. The main appeal of the school, at least for me, was the detachment the place had from the rest of the world. I mean this not only because it was quite literally in the middle of nowhere, but also because it was so far from any kind of film education I had acquired up until that time –whether I was educating myself on cinema or in a classroom setting. I felt liberated and clear of mind. The school has fantastically limited Internet, so that forced me to truly interact not just with the people there, but

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<sup>23</sup> *Inside the Actors Studio*. “Salma Hayek”. Season 11, Episode 9. December. 2004. In the Moment Productions Ltd.

also with my surroundings and my self. The workshop I participated in during those nearly two months was a collaborative seminar of sorts. I would have to perform the roles of director, producer, art director, boom operator, and camera assistant and rotate in those roles with my six other classmates, mainly people from Colombia, Brazil and México, but also one or two from Honduras, Spain, and Venezuela. One simple lesson stood out the most from my time there. It was from one of my professors when he was explaining script requirements, specifically when he was referring to the characters we created: “Un hombre en una silla de ruedas no es un personaje. Un hombre en una silla de ruedas que es un hijo de \*\*\*\* es un personaje” (“*A man in a wheelchair is not a character. A man in a wheelchair who’s a son of a \*\*\*\* is a character*”). Although in retrospect I disagree with his choice of insulting the wheelchair man’s mother, I understood his point. Character development consists of giving them more than one trait, something that makes them complex and layered. The defining characteristic of a stereotype is the repeated simplification of traits assigned to a group or person by another, most of the times, dominant group or person. As Bhabha says, this usually is done in a very conscious way by the colonizer to reiterate dominance over the colonized<sup>24</sup>.

There are a few authors how have touched upon the matter of Latinx stereotypes. Barrueto (2014) writes a very comprehensive study about the typical roles assigned to Latinx actors and actresses but goes further as to include territories and how they are exoticized as lands of mystery and lack of civilization<sup>25</sup>. Miguel Picker and Chyng Sun do a similar and very comprehensive analysis of the Latinx image in documentary form with *Latinos Beyond the Reel: Challenging a Media Stereotype* (2012). In the film, the directors interview a myriad of actors, actresses, directors, producers, academics, and critics to touch on the patent issue of modern

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<sup>24</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, “The Other Question”. *Screen*, 24.6. 1983. 18-36.

<sup>25</sup> Barrueto, *The Hispanic Image*.

representation. Another very wide-ranging study lies in the authoring of Emily M. Pressler and her thesis *Hispanic Stereotypes in Contemporary Film* (2019). This study stands as one of the most complete and modern examples of the still present classifications of stereotypes of Latinxs in U.S. cinema. Although I would argue on her choice (and Barreto's) to use the term "Hispanic" instead of "Latinxs", I believe that her approach is one of the most wide-ranging taxonomies of stereotypes in the field.

It would be repetitive to create a *new* taxonomy given the fact that there are so many authors that have already taken up the task<sup>26</sup>. What I present in Table 1.1 is a somewhat all-inclusive list of the named stereotypes in some of the literature that I've researched from these aforementioned authors. Each stereotype includes examples of the simplified quality of the character along with a movie example of my selection. I've grouped certain characters into categories, like the bandit, the villain, the drug lord, the criminal, and others into the category of the violent Latinx. Other categories and characters (i.e. uneducated Latinx dropout, the unintelligent English Language Learner, Latinx gold digger, and the Latinx day laborer) have not been included in this list because it has been a little more difficult to find films related to these stereotypes that fit the considerations described at the beginning of this paper.

One is certainly able to find several more stereotypes abundantly in television shows and on Video on Demand, nonetheless, we are focusing on the films of Hollywood. The previous list presents several examples from as early as 1911 simply because many of these stereotypes (i.e. bandit, Latin Lover, Mexican spitfire, the lazy Mexican, the uncivilized native, etc.) have not necessarily faded out, but have rather undergone a metamorphosis of sorts in the U.S. film industry. The films on this list are but a sampling. The stereotype categories are also bound to

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<sup>26</sup> Barreto (2014), Beltrán (2009), García Berúmen (2014), Lesser (2014), Pressler (2019), Ramírez Berg (2002), Barreto, Manzano, & Segura (2012), et al.



change with the passing of time. Past stereotypes have evolved into modern formations of clichéd characters but maintain the underlying intention of othering Latinx culture as undesirables. Another consideration is that these films do not necessarily belong to a single category. In movies such as *Bad Boys II*, Latinx characters fit into several of these tropes such as gang members, drug lords, criminals, comic reliefs, unintelligent, and more. *Fun with Dick and Jane* picks the stereotypes of maids, immigrants and day laborers for comical effect. *Chasing Papi* sexualizes both men and women, adds some spitfire señoritas, and just a dash of unintelligent sexpots who are literally chasing Papi.

Ed Harris, Eva Longoria and Michael Peña headline the border film *Frontera* (2014) about an immigrant Mexican man, Miguel (Peña), who is falsely accused of killing the wife of Roy (Harris), a rancher on the U.S. side of the border. Although the Mexican characters of Peña and Longoria are developed and we understand the push factors of Miguel and his wife, we are mainly shown their characters in peril and despair. Comparatively, Roy rises to the occasion and we see his moral trip from protecting the White teenagers responsible for the accident, to finding redemption and humanity in bonding with Miguel. Additionally, Roy is constantly depicted as the savior and the moral man who rescues, more than once, a passive, powerless Miguel. The film failed to recuperate any of the box office revenue and then sat quietly in the Netflix black hole of programming fillers. The production involved little to no Latinxs, including the director, writers, and producers, who were all non-Latinxs. Would this had been different if there would have been Latinxs involved as decision makers? Would it had represented Latinxs differently? Would it have been a commercial success? We don't know and that's the point. There have been several cases which I will explore later on, where films about, by, and for Latinxs have had commercial success and have taken considerations in matter of representation.

I do not believe there is a simple solution to the matter of representation of POC on film. It would be unfair to say that the intention of these previously mentioned filmmakers is to intentionally harm the Latinx image. In fact, there is an unmeasurable set of reasons and decisions behind the finished product that we see on screen. Mario Barrera<sup>27</sup> explains that many authors have limited contributions in their analyses because they lack the knowledge involving the intricacies of film production: “Until film scholars resolve to understand films from the perspectives of filmmakers, and to take into account real world constraints, they will continue to engage in misinterpretations and in unrealistic, unbalanced prescriptions for the types of Latino films they would like to see”<sup>28</sup>. I completely agree with Barrera’s statement and have concluded in a sense that the problem of Latinx representation in Hollywood films is *lack of representation* and *misrepresentation*. So once more, we refer to Shohat and Stam: “The question, quite literally, is less of the color of the face in the image than of the actual or figurative social voice or discourse speaking ‘through’ the image”.<sup>29</sup> In a way, the *how* is just as important as the *what* when telling stories on film. Therefore, it is important to denote what the filmmakers in this abovementioned list fail at is more in terms of (mis)representation of the Latinx community and not a failure to depict our “reality”.

### **The “Reality” of Representation**

Latinxs have been overwhelmingly shown as one-dimensional, flat, amoral characters and have also been subject to continuous objectification, degradation, belittlement and

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<sup>27</sup> Mario Barrera, “Missing the Myth: What Gets Left out of Latino Film Analysis”, *Perspectives in Mexican American Studies*, 6, (1997), pp. 168-194.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

<sup>29</sup> Ella Shohat and Robert Stam. “Stereotype, Realism and the Struggle Over Representation.” *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, May 2014, 178–219.

vilification throughout the history of U.S. cinema. As noted, many scholars have contested the manner of portraying Latinxs on the silver screen as unrealistic, arguing that these stereotypes show Latinx communities in a negative light<sup>30</sup>. Even though this seems like a concept that is readily understandable and apparently obvious, others propose that the matter of realism should not be the focus of the study of stereotypes. Some authors (Lesser, 2014; Antrop-González, 2002) declare that focusing on the idea that stereotypes are detrimental, further damage the image of Latinxs, since they reinforce categorizations<sup>31</sup>. On the matter of a film representing “reality”, Shohat and Stam (1997) state that: “An obsession with ‘realism’ casts the question as simply one of ‘errors’ and ‘distortions’, as if ‘truth’ of a community were unproblematic, transparent and easily accessible, and ‘lies’ about that community easily unmasked”<sup>32</sup>. I, myself, have been asked many times about Mexican cartel and drug-trafficking movies. “Don’t they show México as it is?”, “Does this not happen in México?”. My answer is never simple and short.

Some events that Hollywood movies have tossed onto the silver screen about México are, in fact, happening. The issue here is: imagine watching a 120-minute-long movie, and only ten of those minutes are dedicated to showing Latinxs on screen. Now imagine that out of those ten minutes, eight or so are dedicated to showing Latinxs as villains, gangbangers, prostitutes, hypersexualized mannequins, and buffoons. What do you think the audience, especially the non-Latinx audience, will leave thinking about the Latinx community? For this, think of movies like *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1948), *Scarface* (1983), *Sicario* (2015), *The Three Amigos* (1986), *Bad Boys II* (2003), *Training Day* (2001), *Man on Fire* (2004) or any of the countless

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<sup>30</sup> Staudt (2014), Maciel (1983), Barrueto (2014), García Berúmen (2014), Beltrán (2009), Ramírez-Berg (2002), Barreto, Manzano, and Segura (2012), Martínez-Zalce (2016)

<sup>31</sup> Antrop-González (2002), Lesser (2014).

<sup>32</sup> Shohat and Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, 178.

other movies that specifically focus on showing Latinxs as one-dimensional ruthless criminals. Most of these aforementioned movies include elements of Mexican and Latinx culture that happen within said society, but these films include Latinxs for more than ten minutes in roles that depict them as one or more of the harmful stereotypes (i.e. villains, sexpots, buffoons, etc.) With this consideration, we can now see why misinformed people come out of any of these movies thinking that Latinx men and women are like this “in real life”.

On the other hand, reality, as Shohat and Stam tell us, is not immediately achievable and that goes for both ends. It would be difficult to have a crime thriller film without showing some of the violence inherent in it, but take a look at *Blood In, Blood Out* (1993). In the film, we are riddled with the devastating “politics” of East Los gangs. There’s blood, knives, guns, drugs, alcohol but that’s not all the movie’s about. There are great moments of brotherhood between the three main characters and an inspiring final scene with the movie telling us that it’s a long journey, but it’s possible to find redemption if you stay true to what you believe in, and that you can count on familia. Luis Valdez’s *Zoot Suit* (1981) has been frequently revised as a justified exploration of Latinx violence, since it spawns from a necessity of protest against the Sleepy Lagoon murder trials and the Zoot Suit riots. The film shows characters’ motivations, along with the protagonist’s internal struggle between himself and his inner Pachuco, played by Edward James Olmos. For a more recent example, refer to the film *End of Watch* (2012), where Latinxs are the ringleaders of the violence inherent in the story. Nonetheless, there is a key difference that has to do with attention to character development. For the film, actors Jake Gyllenhaal and Michael Peña spent five months riding with LAPD to get to know the true lives of the Los Angeles police life, even witnessing a murder scene<sup>33</sup>. This wasn’t the only particularity that

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<sup>33</sup> “Jake Gyllenhaal Rode With The LAPD For Five Months.” Team Coco. Accessed December 12, 2019. <https://teamcoco.com/video/jake-gyllenhaal-rode-with-lapd-for-five-months>.

director David Ayer focused on. Repeatedly, the actors mention how the center of the movie is not the police story, but the brotherly bond between two guys who happen to be cops. In the film we see a quinceañera, familial bonding, a solid friendship between an Anglo and a Latino, but most importantly a whole variety of layers within the Latinx community including family and unity. This lends us to believe that it *is* possible to tell stories that reflect certain realities but, as I mentioned previously, the way the story is told has a huge influence on the audience.

Homi Bhabha rejects the idea of deconstructing the ideas of colonial discourse because this tends to enable its effectiveness. Instead, Bhabha proposes to recognize the concept as an ambivalent notion so that we can understand its limitations and therefore criticize it.

Additionally, Bhabha does point out that there *is* something that can be done: “What does need to be questioned, however, is the *mode of representation of otherness*”<sup>34</sup>. Like we said before, it’s a matter of considering altogether the *what* is being shown as much as *how* it’s being made. Thus, we return to *form vs. content*. In filmmaking, the decision makers are, consequently, the image makers. So, who are they really?

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<sup>34</sup> Bhabha, *The Question*, 19.

CHAPTER IV  
DIRECTORS, WRITERS AND  
PRODUCERS: PUPPETEERS OF THE FILM INDUSTRY

"I am an eye. A mechanical eye. I am the machine that reveals the world to you as only the machine can see it. I am now free of human immobility (...) freed from the boundaries of time and space, I co-ordinate any and all points of the universe, wherever I want them to be. My way leads towards the creation of a fresh perception of the world. Thus I explain in a new way the world unknown to you."

–Dziga Vertov, *Kino-Eye Manifesto* (1923)

Dziga Vertov is considered one of the fathers of the montage theory in film. He was a Russian filmmaker who in the 1920's instituted, among many other things, the concept of "kino pravda" ("film truth") which later derived in the forms of "cinéma vérité" and "direct cinema"<sup>35</sup>. The overall idea was to show the world as it is, one image after another. I was introduced to the *Kino-Eye Manifesto* via John Berger (1972)<sup>36</sup>, it taught me the conceptual power of the camera and the active responsibility of the filmmaker. In a certain way, we can connect Derrida's concept of "différance" to the theory of montage ascribed by Vertov in the manner in which "the signified concept is never present in and of itself, in a sufficient presence that would refer only to

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<sup>35</sup> Michelson, Annette, and Kevin O'brien. *Kino-Eye : The Writings of Dziga Vertov*. Berkeley Univ. Of California Press [20]08, 1984.

<sup>36</sup> John Berger, Sven Blomberg, Chris Fox, Michael Dibb, and Richard Hollis. *Ways of Seeing*, (London: Penguin, 2008), 17.

itself (...) every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts”.<sup>37</sup> Mi papá would repeat to me José Ortega y Gasset’s phrase “yo soy yo y mis circunstancias”<sup>38</sup> (“I am myself and my circumstances”) when I was younger, it made more and more sense as I grew older. In trying to find more of a sense of purpose in the films that I make, I came across the value of my own life experiences as a key element for creation. The stories by themselves were one thing, but the stories intertwined with my own life stories created “a world unknown to you”. It is this power to create worlds and semi-permanent images that is and has been handed over to people who only imagine certain marginalized ethnic groups as alienated Others. The biggest players in the creation of a film usually come down to the director, the producer, and the writer. Other roles in moviemaking like the director of photography, production designer and the editor are largely important to creation and have huge influence in the final product as well, but more often than not, their contribution or ideas go through either a director or producer, sometimes a writer. I was told once that directors can be either dictatorial or democratic. I’ve always leaned on the experience and talent of my crew and cast, and still, there are few places where I’ve felt more assertive than on a film set. Different people on and off the set are motivated by different things. My screenwriting professor, David Carren, would often say that U.S. films in a sense, would focus on power. Hollywood at times seems to be a Rocky Balboa who has no interest in explaining Ivan Drago’s background. As long as Rocky wins, we can all raise our arms and feel like we also are victorious, right? We don’t know, truly. We’re never truly shown Drago’s circumstances, who Drago is other than a mean-spirited, cold Russian tank. Same happens with Latinxs shown on screen in many of these Hollywood features.

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<sup>37</sup> Derrida, Jacques Derrida *Différance* translated by Alan Bass, *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 3-27.

<sup>38</sup> Ortega y Gasset, José. *Obras Completas*, Vol. I. Ed. Taurus/Fundación José Ortega y Gasset, Madrid, 2004, p. 757.

There have been fortunate exceptions, especially in recent years, where Latinxs have stepped up to the plate in Hollywood and turned heads. None of these situations is more notable recently than the triple play by the Tres Compadres: Alejandro González Iñárritu, Alfonso Cuarón, and, one of my personal heroes, Guillermo Del Toro. The subsequent Academy Award wins spur a variety of opinions as to the current state of Hollywood's diversity and inclusion. Progress in this matter has been called out by movements like #OscarsSoWhite<sup>39</sup>. Actor John Leguizamo recently called to boycott the Emmys due to lack of representation of people of color, and some studies have shown that we are far from achieving equal representation in front of and behind camera<sup>40</sup>. Like many social issues in the United States, the accomplishments of a few have shadowed the experiences of the masses. In their article in Time Magazine, writer, director, producer and actress Eva Longoria and Dr. Stacy Smith (2019), professor of USC and founder of the Annenberg Inclusion Initiative, talk about how Hollywood has failed enormously in the matters of representation, highlighting lack of and misrepresentation as the key factors. Longoria and Smith touch on the matter by saying "while it's easy to think that because four of the last five Academy Award-winning Best Directors were Latino the problem is solved, that is not the reality"<sup>41</sup>. Olivia Cole approaches a similar concept but through the misconceptions of films involving the Black community. In her article, Cole criticizes how, even though films like *12 Years a Slave* (2013) help shine a light on the United States' history of overt racism, it serves as comfort to White people who think that the situation is without any issues of racism, which is an evidently flawed idea. These notions are reinforced by the fact that moviemakers with power

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<sup>39</sup> The social media hashtag became popular after managing editor of BroadwayBlack.com, April Reign, launched it as part of a broader social movement (NPR, <https://www.npr.org/2016/01/25/464244160/a-conversation-with-the-creator-of-oscarssowhite>).

<sup>40</sup> Matt A. Barreto, Sylvia Manzano, and Gary Segura (2012), Stacy Smith, Marc Choueiti, Ariana Case, Katherine Pieper, Hannah Clark, Karla Hernandez and Jacqueline Martinez (2019).

<sup>41</sup> Longoria & Smith (2019).



continue to make decisions without these considerations. If seen in a simplistic manner, films can be viewed as a creation of those behind camera and in front.

In their article, Longoria and Smith consider a 2019 study<sup>42</sup> which concludes that (1) the prevalence of Latino leading actors is vastly out of step with U.S. population, (2) that erasure, not inclusion, is the norm for Latinos on screen, (3) that poor, isolated, criminal: Latino stereotypes in film<sup>43</sup>, and (4) that Hollywood employs few Latino content creators behind the camera. According to one study<sup>44</sup>, the big, heavy numbers are that in the past decade, only 4.5% of speaking roles have been Latinxs, and only 3% of these have been leading roles. Behind cameras, the scene isn't any better. In the past decade and out of these 1,200 top-grossing films, only one out of the 1,335 directors were Latina. In the same decade, from 2007 through 2018, there were only 28 individual Latino directors (roughly 4%), with only 29% of those being U.S. filmmakers. Producers faced a similar sentence, since only 3% of the producers were Latinx.

### **When Chingonxs Get a Camera**

*Real Women Have Curves* (Josefina Lopez, 1987), is a stage play that later became a film by the same name in 2012 starring America Ferrara, Lupe Ontiveros, and George Lopez. The story talks about Ana (Ferrara), a teenager who dreams of going to college but is inevitably bound to work at her sister's sewing factory thanks to the ruling of her overbearing mother Carmen (Ontiveros). Eventually, Ana defies her mother and the norms embedded in her Mexican American community and stands up for herself and her ambitions. It's a sweet East

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<sup>42</sup> Stacy Smith, Marc Choueiti, Ariana Case, Katherine Pieper, Hannah Clark, Karla Hernandez and Jacqueline Martinez, "Latinos in Film: Erasure On Screen & Behind the Camera Across 1,200 Popular Movies". USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative. National Association of Latino Independent Producers. Wise Entertainment. August 2019. <http://assets.uscannenberg.org/docs/aii-study-latinos-in-film-2019.pdf>.

<sup>43</sup> This is referring specifically to the limited variety of roles offered to Latinxs.

<sup>44</sup> Stacy Smith, et al. (2019)

L.A. story that works wonders on stage and renders marvelously on the big screen thanks to director Patricia Cardoso who worked with an adapted screenplay by George LaVoo and Josefina Lopez herself.

Even though America Ferrara delivers an outstanding and lovable performance as Ana, I will focus attention on Lupe Ontiveros who plays Carmen, Ana's mother. Ontiveros mentioned that she had played the role of a maid over one-hundred fifty times<sup>45</sup>, which is hardly disputable after reading her credits on IMDb, where one can barely see a role such as a doctor or even an RHD Veteran<sup>46</sup>. The directors and producers (a considerable proportion of them were Latinx) saw past that and offered Ontiveros the role as the hot-headed, stubborn, conservative Mexican mother. Josefina Lopez understands what stereotypes truly are and how damaging they can be and states "I think what is so insulting about stereotypes is that you rob people of their humanity. You only present one dimension"<sup>47</sup>. *Real Women Have Curves* (2012) grossed \$5,853,194 domestic sales and \$7,777,790 U.S. dollars in the worldwide box office<sup>48</sup>. This puts the film well over its \$3,000,000 estimated budget.

Films like *Real Women Have Curves* and other similar Latinx inspired stories show what Latinxs are capable of doing given the opportunity. Another comical drama that returned on its investment and did well with audiences was Eugenio Derbez's *Instructions Not Included* (2015), which intended to mix Derbez's distinctive humor with a little bit of sweetness. This and many other films show that Latinx films do not have to be set to topics and themes typically associated to Latinxs. Robert Rodriguez's *Spy Kids* (2001), although it didn't make profit in the box office,

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<sup>45</sup> Ana M. Benedetti, "Lupe Ontiveros Played A Maid 150 Times, Wanted To Break Free Of The Stereotype (VIDEO)", Huffington Post [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/lupe-ontiveros-maid\\_n\\_3480416](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/lupe-ontiveros-maid_n_3480416), June 21<sup>st</sup>, 2013.

<sup>46</sup> Resources for Human Development Veteran.

<sup>47</sup> Picker and Sun, *Latinos Beyond Reel*, 2004.

<sup>48</sup> Box Office Mojo, <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/release/rl292390401/weekend/>.

had a huge impact in the Latinx community, inspiring several of us to take on the challenge of writing different stories. Charles Ramírez Berg says in an interview that “Those kids could be any ethnicity, any nationality. Robert Rodriguez, who directed and wrote the film, decides to make the kids Mexican-American, and their last name is Cortez (a homage to Gregorio Cortez)”. Rodriguez would later go on to direct *Machete* (2010), a hyper-violent Mexploitation<sup>49</sup> film about a former Mexican federal seeking revenge in the United States. At first glance, one would think that the film perpetuates the stereotype of the Violent Latinx. Seen again and under the considerations of film production as Barrera suggested, one can see why the film was made in the manner that it was. *Machete* is admittedly a nod to exploitation movies, which are “a type of cinema, often cheaply produced, that is designed to create a fast profit by referring to, or exploiting, contemporary cultural anxieties”<sup>50</sup>. The character of Machete first appeared in Rodriguez’s other film *Desperado* (1995) then on *Spy Kids*. The recurring role of Machete played throughout different movies, ended in its own franchise that now also includes *Machete Kills* (2013) and an upcoming *Machete Kills in Space*. Interestingly enough, when *Machete* came out it wasn’t meant for more than a nod to 70’s exploitation action films, according to Rodriguez. However, the political issues at the time rendered the movie as a call to action against hegemonic and draconian immigration laws. This is not to say that there should be caution when addressing countercultural images and their effects on society in general, including the POC that the exploitation film subgenre is trying to empower. Wright talks about the negative nature of blaxploitation films by saying that albeit it’s social education, youth can be led to believe that behavior in certain movies could be acceptably imitable and this may perpetuate negative

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<sup>49</sup> This term was brought up by Robert Rodriguez and Danny Trejo in an interview with Jake Hamilton

<sup>50</sup> Mathijs, Ernest. “Introduction.” *Oxford Bibliographies*, 2011. DOI: 10.1093/OBO/9780199791286-0096

stereotypes<sup>51</sup>. So it's safe to say, that proceeding with caution is a must if we are to avoid perpetuating the same harmful tropes that we are up against.

Giving Latinxs a shot at fully participating in front and behind the camera may be a coin toss for certain people in Hollywood, but it is a coin that needs to be tossed, nonetheless. I've refrained from mentioning bigger names in Hollywood that have had enormous contributions to the industry because they don't necessarily improve the scene. Michael Peña has steadily made a name for himself, but we usually don't hear the part where he had to sleep in a van due to lack of auditions for Latino characters<sup>52</sup>. We've seen Zoe Saldana establish herself as a queen of the action, sci-fi and fantasy genres thanks to her leading roles in movies like *Avatar* (2009), *Star Trek* (2009), *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014), and *Avengers: Endgame* (2019). Once again, what we don't see is her self-awareness of being a Latina amidst a sea of white roles and characters: "I look at the films I love so much, like the beautiful Jane Austen adaptations, but someone like me doesn't exist in those narratives—at least not in a way that I would want to be a part of (...) it makes me sad. I think about how someone like me would have been treated"<sup>53</sup>.

When speaking about representation in these films, we need to look at the underlying factors behind the production of the movie, so maybe next time when we catch a movie that involves the Latinx experience or Latinx creators it might be worth asking ourselves: who made it? How much budget was appointed to the movie? Was there a Latinx writer, director or producer? Are there Latinx characters portrayed by Latinx actors? Is the story one I can relate to as a Latinx? If I am non-Latinx, does this movie teach me something new about the Latinx

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<sup>51</sup> Wright, Joshua K. (2014)

<sup>52</sup> DP/30. "DP/30: End of Watch, Actor Michael Peña." YouTube. DP/30: The Oral History of Hollywood, December 2012. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mk9Hlhv2tmg>.

<sup>53</sup> Eliana Dockterman. "Zoe Saldana: 'I Feel Lonely' As the Only Woman on Set." Time. Time, January 5, 2017. <https://time.com/4623411/zoe-saldana-battling-racism-sexism/>.

community? When the films aren't about the Latinx experience, consider this: how many Latinxs are involved in the making of it? Are there any Latinx speaking roles? Do the Latinx characters in the films seem to be flat and one-dimensional stereotypes? To reiterate, I propose that we always analyze *how* the film was made as much as *what* the film is about. Latinxs make up around 20% of the movie ticket purchases at cinemas. Audiences have the power to shift an industry, but the filmmakers have the opportunity to do so as well.

### **We MexiCan Make a Difference**

I had a roommate with whom I would get into ardent discussions about film ever so often. We definitely had different tastes for the most part, but in general I recall our conversations as being respectful and entertaining. One of them led to him and another friend asking me if I would consider a White actor to play a Latinx role if the producers were to give me a more than sufficient amount to make the movie I wanted. Without hesitating or lingering, I said no. At some point I knew they were just busting my chops, asking why I wouldn't want Brad Pitt to play a Latino. Then they came up with a new strategy to convince me by showing me the benefits of "giving in". My friends said that it would be unwise to pass on this (*very* hypothetical) opportunity because once this movie (again, hypothetical movie) made millions, *then* I could do the movie I wanted. For a split second I flirted with the idea but then I remembered *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006), and how Guillermo Del Toro had turned down offers to make the movie in English, even when they offered him twice as much money for the film's budget<sup>54</sup>. Of course, he later went on to make several productions in the U.S. and made millions.

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<sup>54</sup> Rene Rodriguez, "Director Keeps Hollywood out of 'Pan's Labyrinth.'" The Seattle Times. The Seattle Times Company, January 12, 2007. <https://www.seattletimes.com/entertainment/director-keeps-hollywood-out-of-pans-labyrinth/>.

As a Mexican filmmaker, it's inspiring to read about how Guillermo Del Toro did not let Hollywood dictate the terms for the film.

In order to deal with the industry's intransigent behavior, we need to take deeper breaths and try to understand why Hollywood seems so unwilling to change but more than that find ways of actively bettering the situation. One of the main issues is that this lack of representation and misrepresentation of Latinxs in Hollywood films affects the perceptions of the general audiences in the United States, as confirmed by a 2019 study created by three high-end institutions<sup>55</sup>. However, the study has a relatively unseen silver lining. Very few texts mentioned in this essay end with a concrete proposal as to how to eradicate or at least start to turn the tides regarding Latinx representation. Nonetheless, the study *Latinos in Film* does propose solutions in three areas: betterment in terms of casting, improving behind the camera participation, and increasing investment and incentives. In the concluding paragraphs of the study, the authors propose solutions for the improvement of Latinxs' overall roles in films:

- Cast Latinxs in smaller roles that don't affect the plot significantly but open up the way for more Latinx actors and actresses so that they gain experience so that they can make their way for bigger and better projects.
- Build the pipeline for Latinxs behind the camera by offering more preparation (e.g. workshops, incubators, grants, etc.) to ensure a more diverse repertoire of the Latinx culture on film.
- The participation of investors is crucial in the support of Latinx shorts and features, as well as inclusion in the creation of branded content and the active consideration of directing more tax incentives towards Latinx content creators.

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<sup>55</sup> USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative, National Association of Latino Independent Producers (NALIP), and Wise Entertainment.

When it comes to improving the matter of representation, there are concrete and simple solutions that involve actions for filmmakers in front and behind the cameras. Aside from the ones discussed by the particular study mentioned above, I believe that two major considerations must take place: (1) Latinxs should participate more in films in front of and behind camera, regardless of the subject matter of the film, and (2) when the film *does* relate to the Latinx experience, the filmmakers (i.e. producers, directors, writers, actors, actresses, etc.) should focus on truly immersing themselves in the experience and understanding the perspective of the characters in the story being told. It is still possible for non-Latinxs to tell our stories in dignifying ways, like in *Blood In, Blood Out* and *End of Watch*. However, the first consideration requires that Latinx filmmakers should be given more opportunities to tell our own stories over non-Latinx filmmakers. It seems subjective, but at the same time it truly is nothing but a matter of humanity, sensibility, and common sense. If these two considerations are taken into account, then a third will result in the eradication of harmful stereotypes that depict Latinxs as one-dimensional, simplistic caricatures and Hollywood might come to the realization that it is possible to be reborn as an industry that captures the awe of millions of people around the world, but now with a sense of dignified filmmaking.

CHAPTER V  
MEXARTIVIST AS RESISTENCIA

Eye gaze the World  
filled with wound-healing  
Brown silver screens,  
engraved in concrete golden stars.

Eye gaze the World  
bursting with quetzal-colored,  
moon-howling penachos and not  
silky, flavorless red capes.

Eye gaze the World  
heavy-hearted by tales of  
Virgenes or Putas, and  
reborn in Chingona wombs.<sup>56</sup>

MexArtist is an art and social action media group that I created to produce content focused on the Latinx, Chicanx, Mexican American, and Mexican experience. By this, I mean that everything shown through the MexArtist platforms evolves around our culture and who we are. Art activism has a considerable history which I will not explore in depth in this essay, but it is enough to see activism as a “convergence, a hybrid of artistic production and activism that

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<sup>56</sup> “Stars and Volcanoes”, excerpt, self-authored.



embraces their symbiotic relationship for transformational purposes”<sup>57</sup>. Thus, MexArtist centers on transforming, (re)shaping, (re)claiming, and (re)defining the image of Latinxs, Chicanxs, Mexican Americans, and Mexicans in the United States. Most of the people who have contributed so far to MexArtist are from this ethnic identity and/or cultural heritage and are from or reside in the Rio Grande Valley of Tejas. The main purpose of MexArtist is the creation of content in the form of short documentaries, narrative films, interviews, poetry readings, music videos, essays, poems, a podcast, workshops, and social events. For the future, we are working on projects dedicated to community engagement through workshops, contests, and pláticas.

### **Community Engagement Projects**

The community engagement aspect of MexArtist follows the idea that art must not remain static in its own space but serve a greater purpose for the sake of social equality and equity for Latinxs and Chicanxs. Through inclusive workshops, creative work contests, and pláticas from local speakers, MexArtist will focus on engaging with the Rio Grande Valley community at first, then we will share these experiences through our online platforms such as our website (Figures 1 and Figure 2), YouTube (Figure 3), Facebook (Figure 4), and Instagram.

### **Workshops**

Workshops are meant to engage with the community and do not require any prior experience to participate. The following are workshops that will be offered:

*Writing to Heal*. Directed to writers at any level interested in venting through the cathartic exercise of writing. Any format of writing, any genre.

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<sup>57</sup> Rhoades, Mindi (2012) LGBTQ Youth + Video Activism: Arts-Based Critical Civic Praxis

*Mi Cultura en Pintura.* A series of classes for beginner through professional painters who wish to express their cultura through painting.

*Retratos del Valle.* Beginner through expert photographers will travel with the instructor throughout the Valley to capture the essence of the RGV. Pictures can be taken with professional cameras or with cellphones.

*Community Mural.* The group will organize to create a mural on a wall from a public space in the Valley. No professional experience required.

*El Valle Through My Eyes.* Writing workshop for youth writers to express their lived experiences, their cultura and how they identify with the Valley through their eyes.

### **Contests**

The contests are meant to invite artists to express and share their work while providing a platform built around a contest. The contests are focused on two forms of art that I'm familiar with: film and poetry. Both are informed by their respective art forms but have the element of activism.

*Poetry contest.* Entries will be submitted via Submittable and will be open to residents of the Rio Grande Valley. The topic will be reserved to experiences and issues regarding social justice in the Rio Grande Valley. There is no limit in terms of length or style as long as it maintains to a form of poetry.

*Film contest.* The guidelines are shown below with initial instructions that read: "The short films submitted here will be considered as part one of the competition. The second stage requires contestants provide a document that proposes a solution to a social issue in the Rio

Grande Valley. We hope that with this competition, artists will realize the need for action through art, and that our pueblo will realize what activism can achieve.”

### **Film Contest Guidelines**

1. The 1st MexArtist Pueblo Short Film + Social Action Competition is limited to residents of the Rio Grande Valley including Cameron, Starr, and Hidalgo County.
2. The competition will consist of two parts:
  1. Short Film Competition
  2. Social Action Plan
3. Short Films submitted should be between one (1) and five (5) minutes including credits and must have been completed after January 2018 and finished before the submission deadline.
4. Short Films may be of any genre and topic but must be tied with the Social Action Plan from the second part of the competition. For example, if the Social Action Plan is regarding pollution, the Short Film’s topic should be about pollution.
5. The Social Action Plan must be submitted together with the Short Film in a PDF document through the appointed channels. The Social Action Plan must include:
  1. Title of the Social Action Plan
  2. Names of the Artists and/or Producers in charge of the plan
  3. Outline of the social issue (150-300 words)
  4. Proposal of actions to improve the social issue (1-2 pages)
  5. Resources needed and resources owned (300-500 words)
  6. Budget for Social Action Plan (Note: must not exceed \$2,000)

6. Short Films and Social Action Plans must be submitted by TBD before 11:59 PM through Film Freeway. There will be no exceptions.
7. There will be a total of five (5) finalists which will be selected by the MexArtist and the STXIFF teams and notified by TBD.
8. The selected projects will be presented on TBD at the Edinburg Municipal Auditorium. Artists and/or Producers must attend the event in order to not be disqualified.
9. The single winner of the competition will be announced on that same day and shall receive \$2,000 in funds to complete the Social Action Plan under the supervision of the MexArtist team. The Social Action Plan must be completed within ninety (90) days from the day of delivery of funds.
10. The Jury will be comprised of a select group of three (3) individuals who will decide on the single winner. The Jury's decision is final.
11. Any other matter not noted on these guidelines will be determined by the MexArtist team. For all other inquiries, please email us at [hola@mexartist.com](mailto:hola@mexartist.com).

### **MexArtist General Content Overview**

We have acquired the website [www.mexartist.com](http://www.mexartist.com), and we've set up a Facebook page, Instagram account and a YouTube channel. There is some content that's uploaded on the YouTube channel and by extension the website, but most of it is not yet available publicly. . The content created in MexArtist is divided into: (1) media content, (2) informational blog posts and creative written content, and (3) a podcast.

## Media content

Currently, most of the finished content has been written, filmed/recorded, edited, and shared by me. At times I've received support from a few people close to me and a couple of times I've hired a video production service. The media content evolves around the creation of videos and is the largest part of the content in MexArtist. Creating content through video allows for broader access and wider diffusion, especially when making use of social media and video streaming platforms such as YouTube and Vimeo, which is where the video content will be shared. Videos are grouped into web shows to focus the content of the videos and establish a certain sense of order and structure. The progress in the creation of these web shows vary from one show to another. Some of these have already enough content filmed, but not edited. Others have been fully edited and uploaded, but not shared. Then, there are a few shows that are, at this point, merely conceptual. I have added screenshots to some of the episodes of the web shows in APPENDIX B: WEB SHOWS.

*Hoy Presentamos* is a show that focuses on community events from the political and academic, to the cultural and artistic. We have a variety of videos that will be presented as part of this specific show. The episodes ready for the launch include:

- i. Día de Muertos at PSJA Memorial High School
- ii. Give MAS a Chance: Implementing Mexican American Studies in Texas Schools
- iii. Mujer RGV Event (pending edit)
- iv. Teachers Who Care at Audie Murphy Middle School
- v. USMCA Conference at UTRGV (pending edit)
- vi. Voces del Valle

*Mural on Screen* is intended to be the segment of content that's dedicated to the more artistic content (e.g. short films, video essays, music videos, etc.). These are the shorts and videos for the launch:

- i. Ballet Nepantla: Entre Cortinas, short documentary (pending main edit)
- ii. The Canción Cannibal Cabaret, music video
- iii. Gloria Anzaldúa in the RGV, short documentary (preproduction)
- iv. Mecha Corta, narrative short film (pending edit)
- v. Seven Continents, narrative short film (preproduction)
- vi. Border Flesh, narrative concept short film (preproduction)
- vii. Border Flesh, narrative feature film (preproduction)

*Puente Poetry* is one of the shows that is very personal for me. I discovered poetry (and that I enjoyed writing it) while in my MFA program and became acquainted with several amazing poets. I was fortunate enough to collaborate with several on videos. These are the videos for the launch:

- i. Anzaldúan Poets at Sal Del Rey and more
- ii. Buell High School Reading (pending edit)
- iii. Carrizo Comecrudo event (pending edit)
- iv. Love Letter to the 956, video poem
- v. Poets Against Walls Series (pending edit)
- vi. Canción Cannibal Cabaret McAllen (pending edit)
- vii. Other poetry readings

*This Is Not a Taco* is the show that is probably the closest to my entire research regarding stereotypes, representation, misconceptions and perceptions of the Latinxs community.

The show is intended to consist of 5-minute episodes narrated with a voice over and motion graphics. The tone is more comical but overall critical. Even though this show is still conceptual,

I've come up with the first five episodes and their respective topics:

- i. Hollywood stereotypes (preproduction)
- ii. The border (preproduction)
- iii. Cinco de Mayo (preproduction)
- iv. Día de Muertos (preproduction)
- v. Tacos (preproduction)

*Valle Profundo* is the first show that the MexArtist team came up with. I began to talk about this concept with my classmate Ben and we decided to make the first episode about his band. The concept of this show is to have very casual interviews (the first episode consists of an interview while driving with the band) with RGV artists and film them performing in their favorite place in the Valley. The episodes considered for the launch are:

- i. The Venns, music band (pending edit)
- ii. Amalia Ortiz, poet (pending edit)
- iii. Tattoo artist (preproduction)
- iv. Opera Singer (preproduction)
- v. Painter, visual artista or dancer (preproduction)

All of these web shows are meant to inspire a change and propose a different perspective of the Latinx, Mexican American and Chicanx communities. I've argued throughout this essay that our culture is either misrepresented or underrepresented, and often times both. Furthermore, I believe that action must be taken to remedy, reshape and reclaim our own image in order to counteract the damaging stereotypes that Hollywood and several other media outlets have created. I am not

saying that what we intend to do here will completely eradicate the issue at hand, but the video content of MexArtist is a direct response to this detrimental production of the reductive portrayal of our communities in the United States. However, MexArtist does not solely rely on multimedia visual representations vis-a-vi video productions.

### **MexArtist Blog**

A blog allows us to share information with the public who visit the blog itself or go to the website. Although blogs might not be as popular as they once were, they do also allow us to share more than opinion essays and information about our activity. The blog will be used for announcements and creative work as well. This means that we intend to share flyers, posters, one-pagers and more with information about casting calls, calls to action, concerts, crowdfunding events, conferences, workshops, cultural and artistic events and everything that involves art and the community. We'll also curate a number of poems, graphic designs, short stories, non-fiction work, comics, and more as long as they lineup with MexArtist's vision and mission. The video content might be shared at times but not frequently.

### **MexArtist Podcast**

The podcast would serve to reach another audience that is in closer contact with *Valle Profundo*. The topics of the podcast would represent the ideology of MexArtist but would focus on engaging with the community and community artists who are at the intersection of art and activism in our Rio Grande Valley. As an additional benefit, and since each episode would be around fifteen minutes, we would record the audio for the podcast but would also create video for the YouTube channel. Matando dos pájaros de un tiro. Several groups and channels double-



down on their distribution this way, and I see it fit and relatively simple to do the same. We have only thought of three episodes so far, they are described below.

- i. Artivism in the RGV with guest artist.
- ii. The role of art in public schools.
- iii. The role of art in politics.

Admittedly, these are very rough proposals and they need to be elaborated more, but the idea is to connect these topics with the surroundings of the Rio Grande Valley and its residents and artists.

### **Programming and Distribution of Content**

The intended time to begin publishing and openly promoting MexArtist, its content and its mission would be before the end of the year 2020. Most of the content will be programmed for automatic publication. We have enough content to publish at least two videos per week for six months, which should give us enough time to find funding and produce more content. Most of the content is atemporal, meaning that we will not focus on creating news or other content that is relevant only if published within a specific time frame. Should MexArtist become consistent in its production of video or other content, then the rate, themes and topics of our programming would change. To reach that point, I turn to talking about funding and the near future of MexArtist. The one-stop place to find all the content or at least a weblink that leads to it will be on the website [www.mexartist.com](http://www.mexartist.com). However, most of the new content will be posted through the social media platforms and YouTube. Instagram might be one of the main sources of diffusion, thanks to the simpleness of use and the tools that it offers, including IGTV (Instagram TV). Additionally, through Instagram we'll be able to not only focus on sharing the video

content, but also sharing announcements of events, images, and other visual components of MexArtist. Facebook will also help to communicate the activity of MexArtist and share its content, but in a less frequent manner. Regardless, the main source of upload for video content will happen through YouTube. The sharing on Facebook and on the website will be uploaded through MexArtist's YouTube channel, then embedded on the website and shared on Facebook or through email if needed. I had considered uploading videos to Vimeo as well, but this streaming service will be better utilized for the film and artistic productions such as documentaries, music videos, and narrative films.

There have been many media groups that do something similar to what MexArtist does. Flama, Mitú, Remezcla, Latino Rebels, and Pero Like are groups that have been out there for a while and have a considerable following. Out of those, Flama is the only group which is no longer active due to Univision's decision to shut down the editorial branch. As for the other media groups, their content is as varied as it is relevant and impactful. Many of these groups alternate their content and topics, mainly switching from heartwarming and compassionate stories to parodies and cultural videos. They inform about Latinx culture, they share the important conversations and do so in a light-hearted mood and with a serious intention. Some of them have lost a bit of their initial popularity but those who remain, have not slowed down their drive and ambition for creating and sharing our experiences. While the aforementioned groups have a more national outreach, there are local and state groups that are or have made headway in mimicking this format of content creation. Valley Native was a relatively successful group that promoted tons of RGV events and happenings. Currently, the group is not very active and has limited much of its online presence to sharing content that is a bit more generic. Nonetheless, their influence and the momentum they had at their peak was a very welcome breath of fresh air

for the Rio Grande Valley's media community. Another group from South Texas is Craft Cultura, which is composed by a Mexican American Studies graduate, Misael Ramirez, has had a significant participation in sharing the Latinx experience through videos, events and more. Cases like Neta RGV, Valley Native and Flama might be an example of how these media groups need plenty of support, financial and otherwise, or they will have to eventually shut down. MexArtist is not exempt from this either. What we've created so far could feed content for our intended channels of distribution for a few months and if funding is acquired somehow through grants or sponsors, we might be able to keep it a while longer. However, I know that MexArtist needs full attention in order to fully function and continue for a prolonged time. For now, I would be happy if it remained in the online atmosphere (and maybe beyond) for a few months. It would be enough to leave a legacy of why it's so important to not only write and talk about how things need to change. I would be reenergized to continue to create endless art for the sake of what I believe in as a Latino, as a Mexicano, as a Chicano in the United States.

You know when they ask you what's your first memory ever? Was it at your friend's birthday party? Was it going to the beach with your family? Was it your mother laughing at something you did? Was it when you fell on your face as a toddler? I honestly can't remember mine. I do remember being a kid and watching that scene in *Jurassic Park* where archaeologist Dr. Grant sees the brontosaurus for the first time. I was so jealous of him, but I imagine that he and I were making the same face while admiring the digital dino. Nevertheless, I can only imagine what would've happened if I had been dumbfounded by another movie. Would I have been an engineer if I had seen *Star Wars* that day instead? Would my passion be marine biology

if my parents had taken me to see *Jaws*? Would I have become a dutiful historian if I'd seen *Schindler's List* on the TV at home? Honestly, I'll never know. So, at least for now, I'm just thankful it was dinosaurs that made me amaze at the possibility of creation.

The responsibility of the artistic creation is often taken for granted and social consciousness repeatedly sacrificed in Hollywood for the sake of entertainment. What's more, Latinxs have been subtly and overtly cast aside on the silver screen. Think about how many movie superheroes look like you. Consider how many movie lawyers, movie doctors, movie astronauts, movie teachers, movie presidents and movie police officers look like you. Someone made a very conscious decision to create what's on the screen in the very specific manner in which it's being shown. And still, most days I get excited at the possibility of creation. I do not take for granted the luxury of limitless creation that we have as human beings. MexArtist is more than a content creation platform for me, it's a sort of compass in case I forget why I do what I do. MexArtist is a reminder that I can create limitlessly through who I am and render resistance in the process. As I write these final pages, I find myself munching on a pan de muerto, drinking coffee from my taza veracruzana floreada and feeling extremely grateful for the opportunities I've had these past five years.

Escribo estas últimas palabras esperando que pueda en cinco años leer esto con la misma satisfacción que siento hoy con lo que he logrado. Me queda mucho por hacer, pero hay tiempo y dirección, dos cosas que antes daba por sentado. Es difícil poner en palabras cómo me siento a la hora de crear, ni es sencillo explicar qué es lo que hay que hacer para enaltecer nuestra cultura y re apoderarnos de imágenes que se nos han robado por ciegos y tiranos. En este escrito hice mi mejor esfuerzo, pero lo más emocionante es que tengo el privilegio de tener una voz y tengo la dicha de estar consciente de mi posición. No hay vuelta atrás, no puedo flaquear. Mi compromiso

es con el cambio, sutil o drástico, por medio del arte. Nadie puede quitarme mi pluma, nadie puede cerrarme los ojos. Hasta que los ciegos y tiranos dejen de simplificar mis raíces y monetizar con nuestra cultura, seguiré en mi rol de astilla, de púa filosa como la de la frontera. Espero poder compartir mis imágenes con mentes tercas, con almas rotas, con ojos cansados, con corazones encendidos y personas todas.

### **“We Don’t Need No Stinkin’ Badges!”, Remake**

In 1948 John Huston directed the film *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* which recovered more than its \$3 million budget spent on production and has rave reviews from sites like Metacritic and Rotten Tomatoes. In the Western-thriller, Mexican actor Alfonso Bedoya plays the role of Gold Hat and Hollywood legend Humphrey Bogart plays Fred C. Dobbs. The logline on the Internet Movie Database reads:

*“Two Americans searching for work in Mexico convince an old prospector to help them mine for gold in the Sierra Madre Mountains.”<sup>58</sup>*

At some point, Bogart’s character encounters Gold Hat, the leader of a local bandit gang in the area disguised as “mountain police”. In their initial confrontation, Fred Dobbs asks Gold Hat to show his badge to prove that they are in fact the federales. Gold Hat responds:

EXT. SIERRA MADRE – DAY

*Passport? We ain’t got no passport.*

*We don’t need no passports*

*I don’t have to show you any stinking passports*

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<sup>58</sup> *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*. Directed by John Huston, performances by Humphrey Bogart, Walter Huston and Tim Holt, Warner Brothers, 1948.

Gold Hat doesn't say *passport*.

Gold Hat says *badges*.

Maybe Alfonso Bedoya took the role

Because of the screens America stole

It wasn't only Bogart searching for

Gold in the Sierra Madre

American producers hunted

Treasure in *Mexican*

Gold(en Age) sierras

EXT. BORDER RANCH – DAY

Camera shot of an

Immigrant shot for trespassing into

A White man's lot.

So what does

Hollywood want us to see?

I guess Brown is also chroma key.

Question: This land of the free,

*How* does it show Mexicans on screen?

Answer: does it?

INT. OFFICE – EVENING

To properly wash your film

Do your laundry in White

For Zapata, make the skin light  
Marlon Brando seems right  
Get Natalie Wood to say *buenas noches*  
In West side stories, love wins  
For the role of Anglo Zorro  
Get Anthony Hopkins  
Supply Pacino with a machine gun  
Violent Latinos are always fun  
Or so says the NRA.  
Cause who's to say  
Latinas are more than just a maid?  
Lupe Ontiveros played over a hundred of 'em  
Don't worry, she got paid.  
H'bout that gangbanger, Hector?  
What movie was he in?  
Oh, yeah. That's right.  
It was Noel Gugliemi in all of them.

INT. STUDIO - NIGHT

Two men sit behind a table. Our hero, Salma, walks in.

“Hi, my name is Salma.”

“Hi, *Selma*, what part are you auditioning for?”

“Naturally for

the maid

the hot Latina  
the prostitute  
the spit-fire lady  
the immigrant mother.”

“The role is yours.”

“Hi, my name is Gael.”

“Hi, *Gale*, what part are you auditioning for?”

“Naturally for

the gangbanger  
the gardener  
the fieldworker  
the immigrant  
the drug lord  
the lazy Mexican.”

“The role is yours.”

The casting director whispers to the producer:

“When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best”

Yeah... Cuarón, Iñárritu and Del Toro

Are losers

Cause they don’t

Make films of

Violent bandits grabbing



Hypersexualized mamacitas  
by the pussy.

EXT. SOME PLACE IN THE BORDER – DAWN

All we got is

Burning Brown-made celluloid

Sparked with spit-fire

Chingona dialogue of

Fuck your Gold and palms

My heroes reduced to

Comic-relief ant men

*Fire* ant men

Get your extreme close up

of scene 3A, take two

many times

we'll cross the border

of the frame

so track your shot

and zoom in on my badge:

Acción. ACCIÓN. ¡ACCIÓN!

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## APPENDIX A

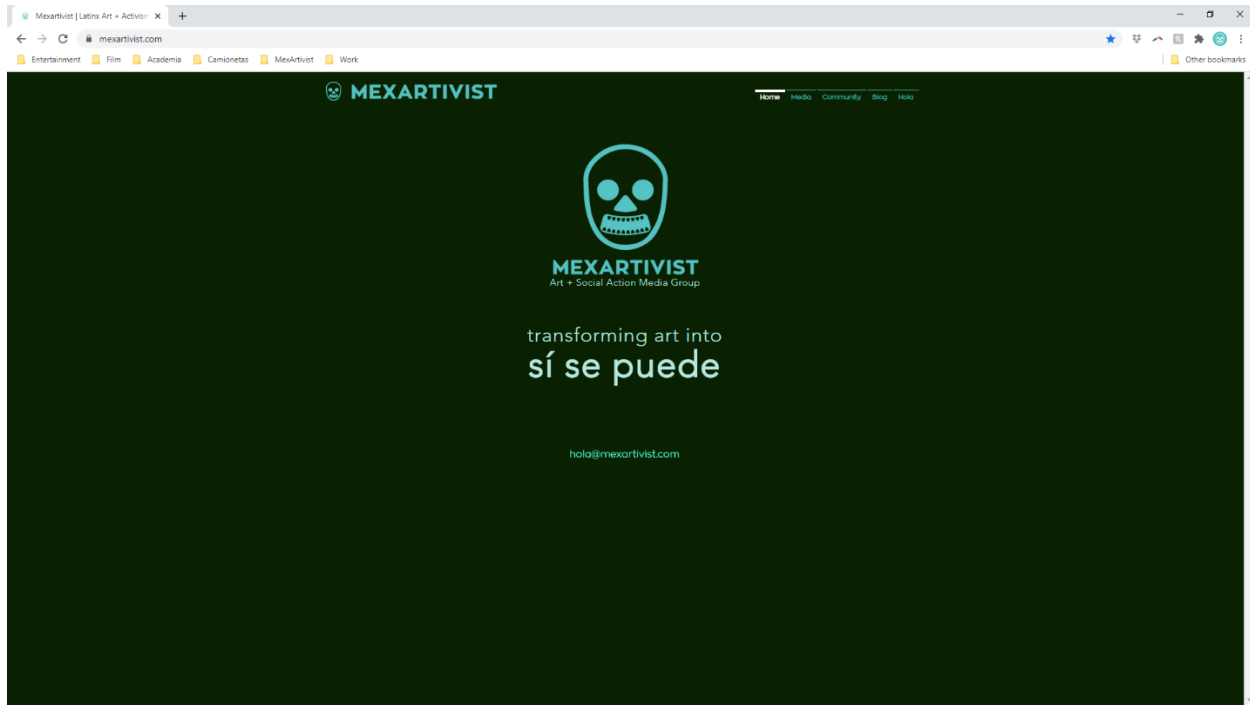


Figure 1.1 MexArtivist website, home page.

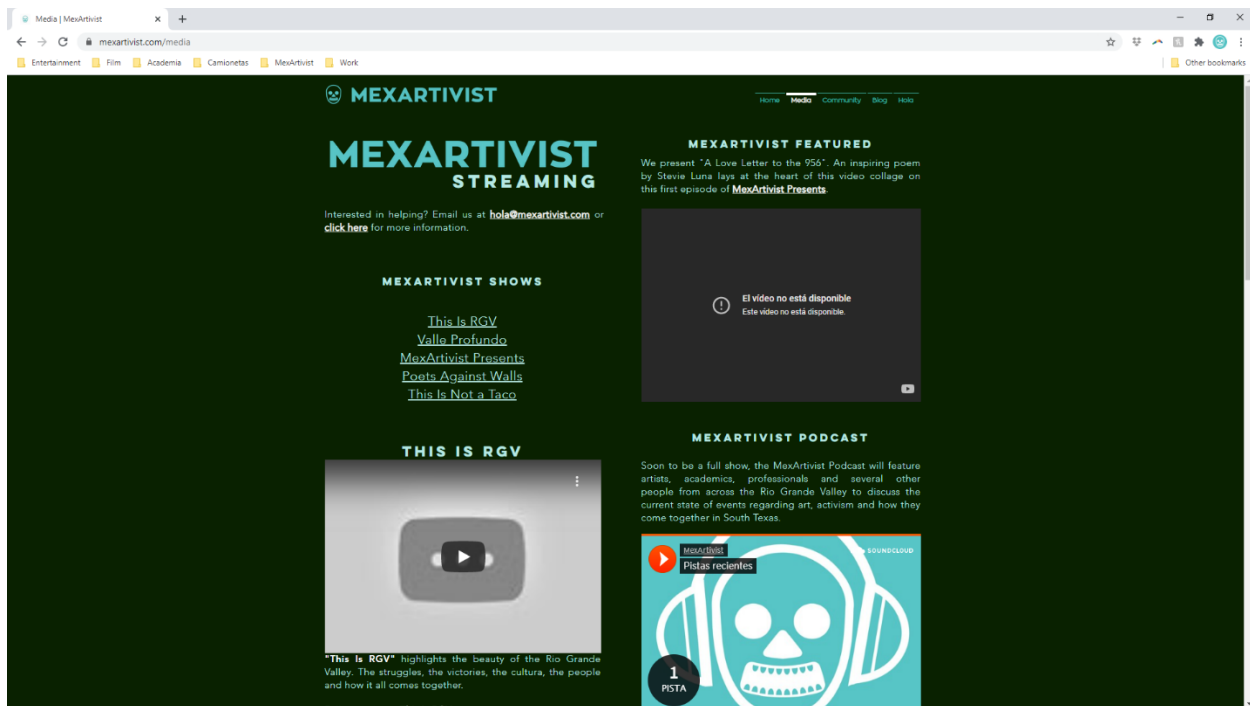


Figure 1.2 MexArtivist website, shows.



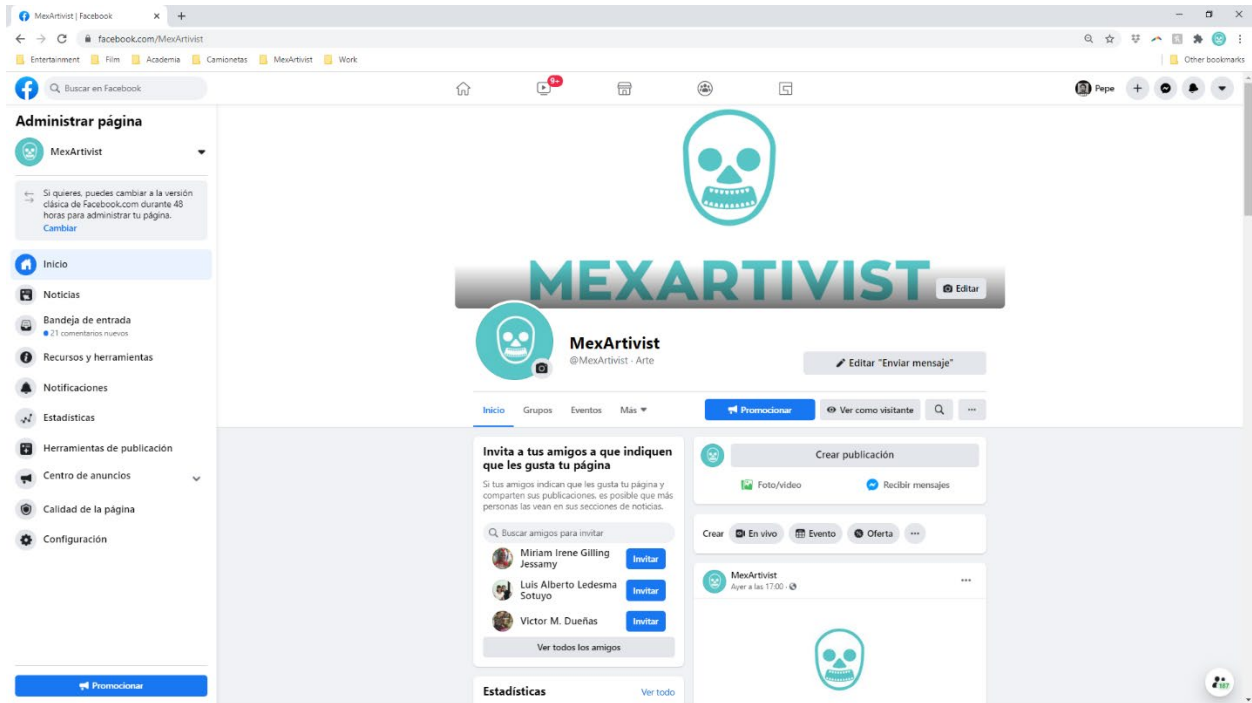


Figure 1.3 MexArtist Facebook page.

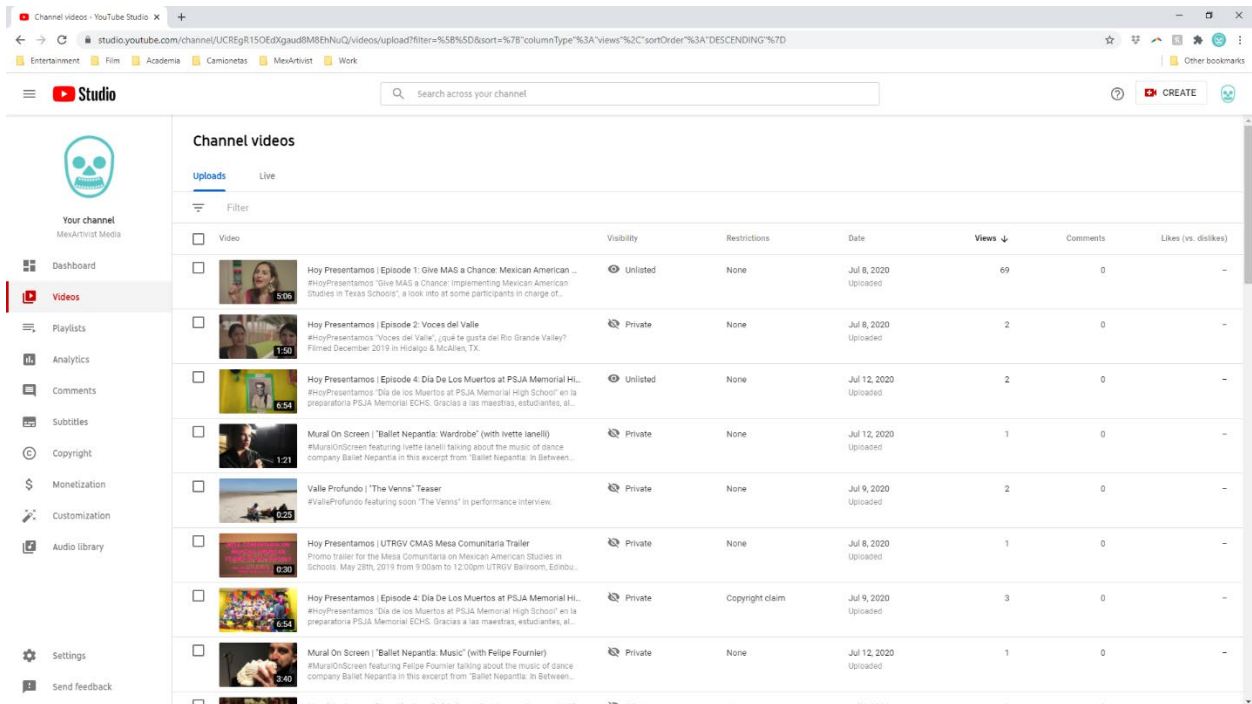


Figure 1.4 MexArtist YouTube channel, Channel videos.

## APPENDIX B



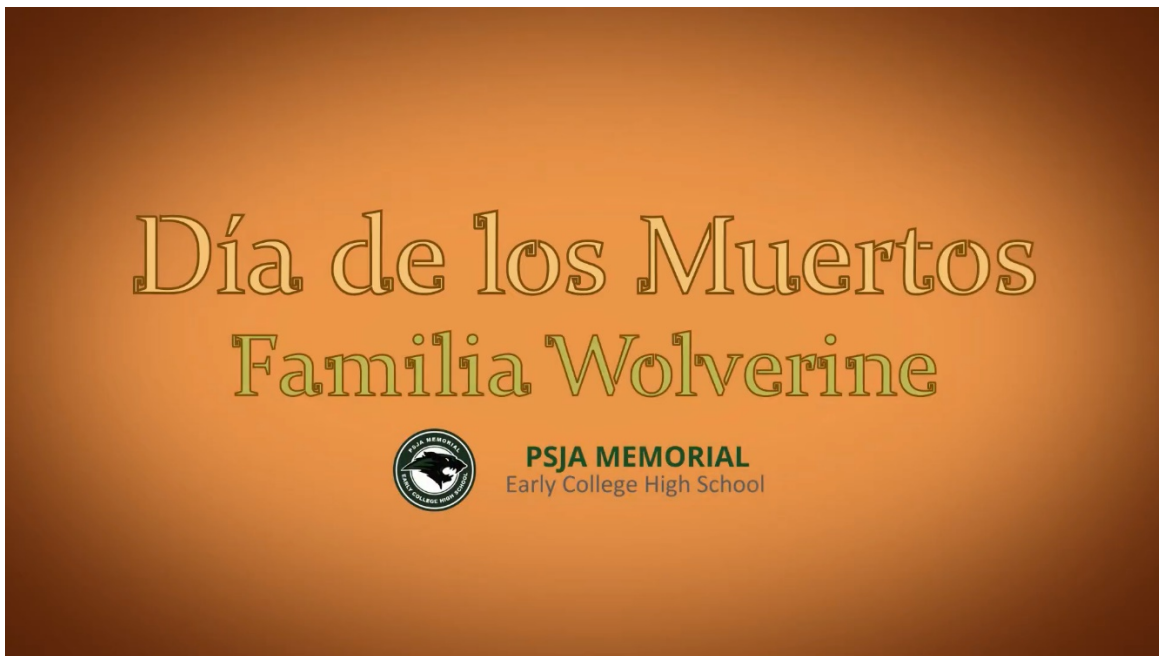
*Figure 2.1* Día de Muertos at PSJA Memorial High School, video (screenshot #1)



*Figure 2.2* Día de Muertos at PSJA Memorial High School, video (screenshot #2)



*Figure 2.3* Día de Muertos at PSJA Memorial High School, video (screenshot #3)



*Figure 2.4* Día de Muertos at PSJA Memorial High School, video (screenshot #4)



*Figure 2.5 Give MAS a Chance, video (screenshot #1)*



*Figure 2.6 Give MAS a Chance, video (screenshot #2)*



*Figure 2.7 Give MAS a Chance, video (screenshot #3)*



*Figure 2.8 Give MAS a Chance, video (screenshot #4)*



*Figure 2.9* Ballet Nepantla: Entre Cortinas, short documentary (screenshot #1)



*Figure 2.10* Ballet Nepantla: Entre Cortinas, short documentary (screenshot #2)



*Figure 2.11* Ballet Nepantla: Entre Cortinas, short documentary (screenshot #3)



*Figure 2.12* Ballet Nepantla: Entre Cortinas, short documentary (screenshot #4)





*Figure 2.13* The Canción Cannibal Cabaret, music video (screenshot #1)



*Figure 2.14* The Canción Cannibal Cabaret, music video (screenshot #2)



*Figure 2.15* The Canción Cannibal Cabaret, music video (screenshot #1)



*Figure 2.16* The Canción Cannibal Cabaret, music video (screenshot #4)



*Figure 2.17* Mecha corta, short film (screenshot #1)



*Figure 2.18* Mecha corta, short film (screenshot #2)



*Figure 2.19* Mecha corta, short film (screenshot #3)



*Figure 2.20* Mecha corta, short film (screenshot #4)



*Figure 2.21 Love Letter to the 956, video poem (screenshot #1)*



*Figure 2.22 Buell High School Reading, video (screenshot #1)*



Figure 2.23 Carrizo Comecrudo Reading, video (screenshot #1)



Figure 2.24 Anzaldúan Poets at Sal Del Rey, video (screenshot #1)



*Figure 2.25 Valle Profundo: Amalia Ortiz, video (screenshot #1)*



*Figure 2.26 Valle Profundo: Amalia Ortiz, video (screenshot #2)*



*Figure 2.27 Valle Profundo: Amalia Ortiz, video (screenshot #3)*



*Figure 2.28 Valle Profundo: Amalia Ortiz, video (screenshot #4)*





Figure 2.29 Valle Profundo: The Venns, video (screenshot #1)



Figure 2.30 Valle Profundo: The Venns, video (screenshot #2)



*Figure 2.31* Valle Profundo: The Venns, video (screenshot #3)



*Figure 2.32* Valle Profundo: The Venns, video (screenshot #4)

## APPENDIX C



*Figure 3.1* "American Progress" by John Gast (1873).



*Figure 3.2* On the left, the final rendering of the Columbia Pictures logo. On the right, model Jenny Joseph poses for photographer Kathy Anderson.

## APPENDIX D

<b>Common Stereotypes in Hollywood Films</b>		
<b>Stereotype Category</b>	<b>Character</b>	<b>Movie Example</b>
Violent Latinx	Bandit / Villain	<i>Treasure of Sierra Madre</i> (1948)
Violent Latinx	Gang member	<i>Training Day</i> (2001)
Violent Latinx	Criminal	<i>Sicario</i> (2015)
Violent Latinx	Drug Lord / Dealer / Cartel	<i>Bad Boys II</i> (2003)
Violent Latinx	Uncivilized native*	<i>Apocalypto</i> (2006)
Hypersexualized Latinx	Sexpot Latina	<i>Chasing Papi</i> (2003)
Hypersexualized Latinx	Prostitute / Exotic dancer	<i>Wild, Wild West</i> (1999)
Hypersexualized Latinx	Latin Lover	<i>Latin Lovers</i> (1953)
Poor Latinx	Low income	<i>Giant</i> (1956)
Lazy Latinx	Lazy Mexican	<i>Tony the Greaser</i> (1911)
Immigrant Latinx	Undocumented / Trafficking	<i>Fun with Dick and Jane</i> (2005)
Working Latinx	Maid	<i>Maid in Manhattan</i> (2002)
Working Latinx	Nanny/Maid	<i>Spanglish</i> (2004)
Working Latinx	Gardener	<i>The Hot Chick</i> (2002)
Buffoon Latinx	Comic relief	<i>Ant-Man</i> (2015)
Buffoon Latinx	Spitfire woman	<i>Mexican Spitfire</i> (1940)
Uneducated Latinx	Unintelligent	<i>Napoleon Dynamite</i> (2004)
Uneducated Latinx	Uncivilized native*	<i>The Road to El Dorado</i> (2000)

*Table 1.1* Common stereotypes in Hollywood films.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

José David García Gilling was born in Tampico, México and graduated from his bachelor's in Communication at Universidad de Monterrey in Monterrey, México. He also completed his Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing and he earned his most recent degree, Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies in Mexican American Studies, from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley in December 2020. He also has a certificate in Mexican American Studies, has taken several workshops and seminars in filmmaking.

He has over ten years of working in the film and television industry and has written and directed several short films, two of which have been selected at film festivals in over a dozen countries. He is currently the Chair and Director of Programming of the South Texas International Film Festival and worked at the Monterrey International Film Festival for seven years, among other cultural and film-related events. Additionally, he has presented at numerous academic conferences and taught first-year college rhetoric and composition, and Introduction Mexican American Studies.

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