



BEING
LATINX
IN
HOLLYWOOD

Monique Jones

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COLOR

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MAIDS, LOVERS, AND CRIMINALS: LATINX ROLES IN HOLLYWOOD

Latinx representation in Hollywood is something that seems to be suspiciously under the radar, even though it's highly important, as the Latinx identity is one that is diverse and multifaceted.

Despite characters like Sofia Vergara's Gloria in ABC's *Modern Family* and the casts of Lifetime's *Devious Maids* and TNT's *Queen of the South* existing in the media, there's still more that needs to be done in Hollywood, such as focusing more on darker-skinned tones, racial diversity, and whitewashing. For every Gloria onscreen, there's only one April Sexton, Yaya DaCosta's Afro-Brazilian role on NBC's *Chicago Med*, or Carla Espinosa, Judy Reyes' proud Dominican character on NBC's *Scrubs*. Even the roles like Vergara's role—which is a “sexy Latina” stereotype—need work in order to exist outside of the stereotypes that have been wrongly attached to Latinx characters and actors.

Two of the latest instances of Hollywood's failure at Latinx representation are X-Men Sunspot and Dr. Cecilia Reyes. The Afro-Latinx characters, which will be part of the new X-Men film *The New Mutants*, will be played by Henry Zaga and Alice Braga. Zaga is Brazilian, but he isn't black or biracial, which removes much of the context from Sunspot's character, as his characterization stems from the racial issues he's had to face as a biracial Afro-Brazilian. Alternatively, Braga is Afro-Latina, but being light-skinned, she's



Sofia Vergara in *Modern Family*. (Bob D'Amico/ABC)

able to exhibit a privilege that the original, darker-skinned actress up for the role, Rosario Dawson, can't. Again, it takes an important piece away from a character that is not just Puerto Rican, but defined by her place in the African Diaspora.

Throughout 2017, I spoke with several Latinx creators about how they feel about Hollywood's Latinx representation and what can be done to make it better.

Latinx actors, like many POC actors, are offered less than their fair share of meaningful roles. When they are offered roles, they're often racist.

“When Latinx actors do get roles, I feel they're oftentimes stereotypes,” wrote Desiree Rodriguez, Editorial

Assistant for Lion Forge sci-fi comic book *Catalyst Prime* and writer for *Women on Comics* and *The Nerds of Color*, in an email interview. “The Spicy Latina, the Buffoon, the Tough Chick Who Dies, the Sexual Exotic Fantasy, the Drug Dealer, the Gangster, and so on.

“...What I find frustrating is when Latinx actors do get roles, it’s a struggle and they are locked into stereotypes,” said Rodriguez. “I’m a huge fan of Diego Luna, but the first role I saw him in he played a Cuban – when he is Mexican – man who was basically the exotic fantasy for the white female lead in *Dirty Dancing: Havana Nights*. This isn’t even getting into how Afro-Latinxs, Asian-Latinxs, and other mixed raced Latinxs are barred from roles because they don’t fit Hollywood’s pre-packaged idea of what being Latinx looks like.”

“I think currently, while we are seeing more visibility, the current roles that are offered or available to Latinos are the role of a servant position, like a maid or something that falls in line with the stereotypes people have about Latinos, like maybe a sidekick or a criminal,” said Janel Martinez, founder and editor-in-chief of *Ain’t I Latina*, a site celebrating Afro-Latinas and Afro-Latinx culture.

“For example, in *Orange is the New Black*, a lot of people were hyped about the fact that there was a great representation of Latinas in the actual show, which is awesome, but when you look on the flipside of that, this is a show about women in jail,” she said. “Also, *Devious Maids*, [co-produced by Eva Longoria], it’s a full cast of Latinas, two of them identifying as Afro-Latina, and they were maids. I think people are seeing the visibility, people are excited to be able to say if you’re watching the show, you’re seeing our representation...but I think it’s still in a very limited scope. I find that it’s not just a Carrie Bradshaw or just someone who happens to be a Latina but maybe they’re the magazine editor in the movie. Their identity, while it’s important, isn’t in line with stereotypes and then manifested in the character that they essentially embody.”

“Typically, I see lots of immigrant, day laborers and criminal roles going to Latinx actors,” wrote Gerry Maravilla, Head of Crowdfunding at Seed and Spark and writer-director of *Cross*, in an email interview. “I think this comes from often lack of interaction on behalf of writers and filmmakers with Latinx people in the real world. As such, they rely on what they’ve

already seen in films or what they see from the vantage point of their more insulated experience.”

“By ‘insulated,’ I don’t mean that they live secluded or antisocial lives, but rather the lives they lead don’t actually include Latinx people in any meaningful way,” he said. “Instead, they see the Latinx peoples working in roles like day laborers or think about Latinx gang culture because of its coverage in the media.”

“I think the most important thing to remember about stereotypes is how detrimental they are to Latinx actors who are trying to be cast in roles that are meaningful [as well as] to creators and consumers as a whole,” said Kimberly Hoyos, filmmaker and creator of *The Light Leaks*, a website designed to support, educate and empower female and gender non-conforming filmmakers. “As a Latina creator, I’m not going to write a character that I wouldn’t personally maybe want to act as. I wouldn’t create someone who is my ethnicity that doesn’t represent something larger as a whole. As a consumer growing up, that’s what I would see, maids and...anything that was oversexualized or overcriminalized. I think that in part pushed me to be a creator so I would be in charge of what was being produced.”

Amy Novondo, singer and actor, said that several people she knows are frustrated with the lack of quality roles.

“[Hollywood] thinks of that over-dramatized telenovela atmosphere and [they think that] Latinos are only capable of that kind of acting their minds,” she said. “I know a couple of Latinos who are really mad about this because we barely get a chance to get into the audition room and when we do, we’re stereotyped right out of the box. It’s like, come on—I want a little more than that.”

Why have these stereotypes stayed around, and why have they kept their power? The answers lie in the pervasiveness of media itself, wrote Rodriguez.

“Media has a lot of power. The images we see, coupled with the words we read or we hear imprint on us however subtly,” she wrote. “It’s something of an irony that the Latin Lover trope can be attributed to Rudolph Valentino’s – a white Italian man – performance in 1921’s *The Sheik*, while stereotypes like *The Domestic* – where Latinx characters are gardeners, maids, etc – are perpetrated by popular, well known Latinx actors like Jennifer Lopez. And in Lopez’s case, we have an instance where Hollywood shows how deeply entrenched it is with its discomfort and ignorance

dealing with the Latinx identity.”

Rodriguez references *The Wedding Planner* and *Maid in Manhattan*, which exhibit Lopez in two roles that reinforce racial and ethnic hierarchies.

“In *The Wedding Planner*, Lopez plays an Italian woman who is, for all intents and purposes, highly successful and comfortably well off. In *Maid in Manhattan*, Lopez plays a Latina woman who works as a maid in an expensive hotel, just scraping by as a single mom, and only finds success after she falls in love with a white man,” she wrote. “This creates a distorted image. As an Italian woman, Lopez’s character is an independent and successful career woman who eventually finds love. As a Latina woman, Lopez’s character is a single mom (enforcing the idea that Latino men are absentee fathers/bad family men), working as a maid until a rich white man “saves” her; then and only then does she find success.”

“This is, perhaps, a cynical viewing of what are two separate, and admittedly tropey romantic comedies. But again, media has power. Consciously or not, there’s a negative message to be had in the fact that Lopez’s Latina identity was erased in favor of an Italian one in *The Wedding Planner*,” she wrote. “By erasing our Latinx identities in favor of white ones, either by erasing the very existence of our Latinx identities or whitewashing them with white actors, media contributes to misinformation about what being Latinx is. Who we are as a collective culture and people – which is highly diverse and layered. Yet these stereotypes are upheld by this continued enforcement of ignorance and whitewashing.”

“[Stereotyping is] very, very detrimental and limiting because when you think of Latin America, we’re talking about over 20 countries and yes, we’re talking about Spanish [as a language] there are other languages [as well]...so I will say that when it comes down to not just representation, but inclusion in Hollywood, a person has to be invested in learning about the culture because there’s so many different moving parts,” said Martinez. “You can be Latino, Latina, Latinx, but you can be black, you can be Asian, you can be white and Latino. There has to be a great understanding of the culture.”

“...I think the work that is needed to really depict a Latino hasn’t been done and I think, specifically, when it comes to the representation, a lot of times they don’t even specify the nationality of the Latino [character].



Dascha Polanco in *Orange is the New Black* (Netflix)



Jennifer Lopez and Tyler Posey in *Maid in Manhattan* (Columbia/TriStar)

...[Viewers] don’t even know if this person is Ecuadorian or Puerto Rican or if they’re from Honduras or Nicaragua or wherever because whoever wrote the role[.]”

Martinez also talked about how the different languages, slang words, and other cultural identifiers that make up Latin America aren’t taken seriously as characterization tools.

“When we see the portrayals on our screen, those things are not necessarily taken into account,” she said. “I don’t think there’s a strong grasp on what it means to be Latino, either Latino in America or Latino abroad.”

Hoyos said that stereotypes are at their most insidious when people don’t even recognize them as such.

“I think the most dangerous thing about stereotypes is that to the untrained eye, they’re not seen as anything negative...To the average viewer, if they see one crime movie with Latinx as they gang members or the thugs, they may not even call that movie racist,” she said. “They might be like, ‘Oh, other movies do that.’ It becomes a normalized thing, and I think that’s why need to educate ourselves as a whole. I think a lot

of that goes to correcting others when we see problematic media as a whole.”

Maravilla echoes this point by examining the news’ portrayal of Latinx Americans.

“I think these stereotypes originate from a similar place as the kind of roles that go to Latinx actors. They come from an isolated or insulated experience from Latinx people that prevents them from seeing or understanding them as complex, three-dimensional people,” he wrote. “When you look at other films, Latinx people are often criminals, immigrants, blue-collar people, and when they look at news coverage, this is also typically our depiction.”

“As filmmakers try to balance telling an engaging and affective story, it’s easy to get caught up in the mechanics of making a narrative work at a story level, he wrote. “Because their focus or interest isn’t necessarily on accurate cultural representation, they rely on stereotypes to satisfy their story needs, but end up not fully realizing (and in some cases just not caring) about the harm these stereotypes are doing.”



Rudolph Valentino using the "Latin Lover" stereotype in both *The Sheik*, opposite Agnes Ayres, and as Don Alzono Castro in *A Sainted Devil*, opposite Nita Naldi.



Judy Reyes has played a maid, as pictured with Susan Lucci, in *Devious Maids* (Lifetime), but thankfully, she's an actress who has also been able to play more complex roles such as Nurs Carla Espinosa in *Scrubs* (NBC) and Quiet Ann in *Claws* (TNT)

WHITEWASHING AND BROWNFACE IN HOLLYWOOD

While Latinx actors have to face getting cast in stereotypical roles, they are also fighting against the Hollywood practice of whitewashing. Usually, the whitewashed roles are the ones with the most meaning.

“The irony...is there have been good, to even brilliant Latinx characters, but oftentimes, they aren’t played by Latinx actors,” said Rodriguez.

“Take, for example, the case of *Scarface*, a classic film about a Cuban-American drug lord played by white Italian-American actor Al Pacino. Or, more recently, the case of Lorenzo Henrie or Floriana Lima who both have a history of playing Latinx characters in television. Henrie’s character on *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* is Gabe Reyes, the disabled younger brother of Ghost Rider Robbie Reyes. There’s already a disproportionate lack of showcasing disabled characters of color in our media, and when there is such a character (as in a non-white character), they’re played by a white actor? Or Maggie Sawyer on *Supergirl*, which is justifiably getting a lot of praise for their storyline featuring Alex and Maggie’s romance. Yet Maggie was promoted as a Latina character by showrunners and producers, is a well-crafted character, but played by a white Italian-American woman [Floriana Lima].

One of the most famous movies that feature Latinx characters, *West Side Story*, has a majority white cast in brown face. The main heroine, Puerto Rican Maria, is played by a white woman, Natalie Wood.”

Novondo also mentions *Supergirl* character Maggie



Al Pacino in *Scarface* (Universal)

Sawyer as a prominent example of whitewashing.

“I think personally, the role in that ethnicity or race should stay in that ethnicity or race,” she said. “I wouldn’t want a Hispanic person playing an Asian person because they could pass off as Asian, like how they’re doing right now on *Supergirl* –Maggie on *Supergirl* is not Hispanic, she’s Italian, but she passes off as Hispanic. There are plenty of actors, you have to keep looking and give them a chance.”

On the flip side of whitewashing is the practice of brownface, which was put into effect in the film *The 33*, a dramatic retelling of the rescue of 33 Chilean miners. Even though the film starred Antonio Banderas as the box-office draw, the film also starred Juliette Binoche,

Gabriel Byrne, Naomi Scott and Bob Gunton in major roles, with most of them in brownface.

“Brown face is ultimately unacceptable and disrespectful. Hollywood often takes chances on several unknown white actors that they try establish careers for,” wrote Maravilla. “There is a wealth of talent in all underrepresented communities, they just have to make a conscious effort to find them.”

“Brownface is hurtful. I’m not sure how one can say it isn’t without lacking any sort of empathy for the affected parties,” wrote Rodriguez. *West Side Story* is one of my favorite musicals, and it’s a musical that is very dear to my family because it’s about Puerto Ricans dealing – in part – with racism in New York. But my heart hurts when I know every time I watch that a majority of the Puerto Ricans characters are played by white actors in makeup. Hollywood, and mainstream audiences, just need to have empathy. It isn’t a personal attack to say Lima, or other white Italian actors shouldn’t play Latinx characters no more than is it a personal attack to say that Scarlett Johansson shouldn’t play Japanese character Makoto Kusanagi in *Ghost in the Shell*, or that Emma Stone shouldn’t have played a Hawaiian woman in *Ahola*, or

Johnny Depp playing Native American character Tonto [in *The Lone Ranger*], and so on and so forth.”

“I think in short, there’s no need to even have brownface or blackface...[I]you wanted to have someone with browner skin, then you need to just cast someone with brown skin. To me, it’s quite simple,” said Martinez. “If you are going to have someone who, visually, you want to look a certain way in the film, this is what the casting process is for. Just cast someone that embodies what you’re looking for.”

Martinez uses Zoe Saldana as Nina Simone in *Nina* as an example. Even though Saldana is part of the African Diaspora, she was still miscast as Simone, a darker-skinned African-American woman with broader features than Saldana’s. When it came to Saldana being cast as Simone, colorism came into play.

“While I don’t think she was a great person for the role, even a brown Afro Latina such as a herself, they [the team behind *Nina*] felt that it was important to create a wider nose for her and darken her skin,” said Martinez. “Where I think it was problematic in the discussion is that her identity was coming into play or being critiqued, because she is a black woman, but she does not look like Nina Simone.”



George Chakiris (center), flanked by Jay Norman and Eddie Verso in *West Side Story* (MGM)



Zoe Saldana as Nina Simone (Suzanne Tenner, Nina Productions LLC)

Martinez also said that Saldana’s experiences also aren’t the same as Simone’s in terms of the socio-political contexts Simone had to deal with in terms of her skintone, her confidence in her blackness, and her experiences as a black southern woman.

“I think they could have cast an actress that could better relate to Nina. ...I will say that at the end of the day, it’s about casting someone who fits that character,” she said. “I think it’s really damaging and harmful to have a misrepresentation of people. Because, for example, I think about the next generation because I know I experienced this—not seeing myself in film or my favorite shows and how that left me to [ask if] Afro-Latinas even be actresses. I couldn’t even see myself in that position because it wasn’t available for me to see.”

“...There’s a large percentage of young Latinos who don’t see themselves represented and that’s harmful because they can be the next content creators but may not necessarily feel like they can be that because they don’t see it,” she said. “They might not even see the importance of their own lives, and I know that sounds extreme, but it’s truthful because you are oftentimes, especially at a younger age, validated by what you see on TV and if you don’t see yourself you might think your existence doesn’t matter.”

Hoyos said that while there is big budget pull with certain actors, Hollywood should constantly be on the lookout for new talent, particularly new talent from marginalized communities.

“...[T]here’s obvious merit in bringing in new talent because that director could be the next person who discovers the next [big] actor. I think that’s...something that’s very important,” she said. “Even in my Latino community, there’s a weird emphasis on how dark you are or how light you are or where you’re from. I really feel like that’s an issue that translates to the screen as

well. Even though it’s women of color, it’s much more valuable in media to be light skinned than dark skinned.”

“Hollywood’s limitations continue to promote and perpetuate the same tired narratives that speak to a lack of diversity and lack of understanding to Latinx people and the Latinx experience,” wrote Maravilla. “I feel that there is little attempt to try and challenge these perceptions and typical representations because the filmmakers and scripts that get the greenlight aren’t actively interested in the Latinx experience or are told that films with this kind of nuance won’t get financing.”

“It becomes a self-perpetuating example of “what came first, the chicken or the egg?” type of situation in which financiers do not want to take a risk on something that hasn’t been done before, but then no precedent is created in which financiers can learn that a film featuring a wide range and cultures of Latinx people can make money,” he wrote. “Additionally, this problem extends outside of Hollywood. Film and television in Mexico and many other Latin American nations also favor more European or Anglo looking Latinx actors.”

“It’s frustrating,” wrote Rodriguez. “I understand my privilege as a light-skinned afro-Boricua woman. I have to— otherwise I contribute to the continued problems of colorism in both the Latinx community and within a larger worldwide context. By favoring women who look like me, you erase the multitude of men, women, and non-binary Latinx individuals who don’t look like me. It’s important that media reflects the actual reality of the Latinx community, which includes a wide range of races, and even religious identities.”

“By ignoring those parts of our community, media creates a distorted image of our culture, which allows the continued whitewashing of our community, ignorance regarding our identities, and contributes to a lack of empathy of our struggles,” she wrote. “It also, I personally feel, encourages some individuals within the Latinx community to reject their indigenous or black ancestry in favor of whiteness. This can, and has, further contributed to the alienation of Afro and Indigenous Latinxs within our community.”

Rodriguez wrote that one way to start combating whitewashing and lighter-skinned privilege is “by simply showcasing what actual Latinxs look like.”

“Gina Torres is a proud Afro-Cuban American woman who, as far as I know, never gotten a chance to play a Latina woman on screen. She’s even gone on record stating how Hollywood wants their Latinas to look Italian,” she wrote. “If the producers of *Supergirl* wanted a Latina woman to play Maggie Sawyer, why not cast one? How many people know Meagan Good is part Puerto Rican? Or that Harry Shum Jr. identifies as Latino? Or that Alexis Bledel is Latina? Meagan good is Afro-Latina, Harry Shum Jr. is Asian-Latino, Alexis Bledel is a white Latina. But we don’t see this type of diversity reflected back on screen. It’s very one-sided, one-note, and done in a specific way that spreads ignorance and misinformation on the Latinx community. It is complicated, but we’re a community worth learning about, respecting, and feeling empathy for.”

“People need to have empathy for marginalized groups and our discrimination and erasure in media. Media has power. Media can, has, and will continue to impact how we think about things, including people, cultures, race, and ethnic identities,” she wrote. “If a marginalized group is only shown through a specific lens, one that showcases that group in a stereotypical – and typically negative – light that also erases individuals within that community, you contribute to that groups overall discrimination. All by breeding ignorance, and spreading misinformation that creates bias and preconceived notions about the marginalized group in question. Which of course can lead to real world discrimination and practices.”



Juliette Binoche in *The 33* (Beatrice Aguirre, Half Circle LLC)

THE GOOD AND BAD OF HOLLYWOOD'S LATINX REPRESENTATION

Hollywood's lack of proper Latinx representation has had negative social, emotional effects on Latinx viewers.

Growing up, Rodriguez said she “internalized a lot of racist views and ideals” from the media she consumed.

“It warps your world view. I didn't want to be like my ‘ghetto’ relatives. Not when my white step-family was so much more seemingly classy, and right. Spanish was something maids and land workers spoke, so I didn't have interest in speaking it, and my mother was reluctant to teach it to me because growing up with Spanish as her first language made life difficult for her and her family,” she wrote.

“Poor representations can lead to harmful internalized ideals about your community and a lot of internal self-hatred for one's racial and ethnic identity. It takes time and effort to unlearn those beliefs and behaviors. To begin to take pride in your identity as a non-white person,” she wrote. “And once you do it's not easy, because ‘easy’ is taking scraps from those in power. It was easier to be a colorblind teenager because my majority white town was colorblind. Staying with the status quo was a form of protection, and the media only enforced that image by showcasing Latinxs – in my case – in a negative light.”

Rodriguez said three movies that “greatly impacted” her view of being Latina as a child was Lopez' *Maid in Manhattan*, *The Wedding Planner*, and the film that made Lopez a movie star, *Selena*.

“In *Maid in Manhattan*, she's a maid who only finds success after finding love with a white man. In *The*

Wedding Planner, the rejection of her Latina identity provided her with success. In *Selena*, while a great biopic on the real life Selena Quintanilla, she dies. The two times I grew up seeing Lopez play a Latina woman, she's a maid, or she was murdered,” she said, adding a reference to another film that impacted her, *West Side Story*. “In *West Side Story*, a film my Mamita would say ‘was about us,’ the only Latina character played by an actual Latina actress, Anita, ends up alone after her lover is murdered and is sexually assaulted. She's the best character in the entire film, but she has the most tragic ending of all the characters.”

Hoyos highlighted that poor representation limits Latinx and non-Latinx viewers from experiencing the richness and diversity of Latin America.

“Latino, Spanish, and Hispanic [the definitions are] very blurred and used interchangeably when they're very different geographically and culturally and obviously ethnically,” said Hoyos. “I feel like when Hollywood picks Latina, they're thinking the dark hair, thick accent, light-skin...or the central or South American, Mexican sort-of type. Those are the two defaults. I think that whatever that is just a blatant lack of information and just lack of research as a whole.”

Martinez also talked about how bad stereotypes and a lack of Latinx representation only harm Latinx and non-Latinx people in more ways than just in the media.



Jennifer Lopez in *Selena*
(Warner Bros.)

“...[W]hat is currently being shown... is harmful because a white person may come up to someone who visibly looks Latino to them and say, ‘Oh hey, ese.’ This [Latino] person is not Mexican or this person doesn’t even use that word,” she said. “It comes down to how other people are interacting with Latinos because they might see it in a certain way and think it’s appropriate, but that’s not just the case. There needs to be a greater representation, starting with the writers’ room. I know there are [diversity and representation] programs, but there needs to be more work done on that end.”

However, there is some positive momentum happening in terms of better roles for Latinx actors, as well as a better focus on fixing Hollywood’s internal issues.

“It’s extremely isolating and alienating to grow up and not see yourself accurately represented in media if you’re even represented at all. It makes you feel like a spectator to your own culture and world and that your role/voice matters less,” wrote Maravilla. “While I have spent time thinking about it and have definitely always noticed the lack of representation, I don’t think I quite understood how powerful it was even for myself until somewhat recently. My eyes welled up with tears when I saw the trailers for *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* and saw Oscar Isaac in the cockpit of an X-Wing. I had spent so much of my childhood riding a bike pretending that I was an X-wing pilot despite none of them being Latinx, and now, not only was there one, but the consensus was that he was daring, dashing, handsome and brave.”

“I really have to give Disney and Lucasfilm credit in pushing the kind of roles Latinx actors are

considered for. Both Oscar Isaac and Diego Luna were cast as dashing pilots with leadership skills and smart senses of humor,” he wrote. “Growing up, I enjoyed watching Robert Rodriguez’s *El Mariachi* trilogy with my dad. It was a cowboy type action story in the vein of the Sergio Leone/Clint Eastwood films, but the Mexicans in these films were the heroes instead of just the villains. I wish those films had done more to break some of the other stereotypes that are depicted, but I still look back on those memories with my dad fondly.”

Novondo also mentioned the *Star Wars* franchise as a place with positive Latinx characters.

“*Rogue One* with Diego Luna—that movie was so diverse and they got that right,” she said, also mentioning Gina Rodriguez’s performance on the CW’s *Jane the Virgin*. “With Gina Rodriguez, she’s setting a platform for us and opening up doors that weren’t open before. This year alone, I had two auditions for CW shows and I have a lot of that to thank to Gina Rodriguez. [they’re more open]. We’re getting there little by little, but we need to be louder about it.”

Rodriguez chimed in on the *Star Wars* and *Jane the Virgin* love as well as positive representations in other mediums.

“Renee Montoya is an excellent Latina comic book character who’s also a lesbian. One of the few available for queer Latinx youth in terms of media. *Jane the Virgin* has its problems, but overall showcases a generational Latinx family in a complex and layered light,” she wrote. “Tyler Posey gets to play hero on MTV’s *Teen Wolf*, and even though the

show has questionable quality being able to see a Latino character be the hero is powerful. Similarly, with seeing Gabriel Luna playing the complex anti-hero of Robbie Reyes on *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* [and] *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* and *Rogue One* feature two separate Latino actors – Oscar Isaac, and Diego Luna – in high profile roles completely outside of stereotypes in a high science fiction fantasy setting. Which is an extreme rarity.”

Martinez referenced diversity programs at major networks like NBC, ABC, and CBS, as well as grassroots movements like The Black Latina Movement created by actress Crystal Roman. “She was constantly going for roles and she was facing some of the issues we’re talking about today,” she said, adding that The Black Latina Movement has created several plays that tour around the country.

“As far as effective representation, *Celia*—a lot of people have been telling me, ‘Why haven’t you watched this?’” she said, referencing Telemundo’s show dramatizing the life of internationally-known Cuban singer Celia Cruz. “To be honest, that’s as close as I’ve seen it as far as effective representation and also [Jeimy Osorio, who plays a younger Cruz], was the first black Latina actor to be on a major Latina-focused magazine, *Vanidades*...and that was definitely due to the work she was doing on *Celia*.”



Oscar Isaac in *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (Lucasfilm/Disney)

However, there are definitely still large areas of improvement. One area has been highlighted by the Disney-Pixar film *Coco*, which focuses on Mexico and Dia de Los Muertos. Novondo wishes the company—and other studios in Hollywood—would expand their focus.

“It’s nice that Latinos are being included in media... but it’d be nicer if [studios would] include other places—South America, Central America, etc.—we’re not all Mexican,” she said.

I definitely think there’s been a lot of movement...but I haven’t been seeing any concrete steps,” said Hoyos. “I know the BAFTAs...unveiled a new [rubric] in terms of the types of films they’ll be accepting for award approval, and that’s just pushing for diverse creators both on screen and also off. I think that’s something great that’s going on in the UK, but in terms of Americans, I’m not seeing huge waves except for hashtags, like #OscarsSoWhite, which I think is incredible, but it’s also difficult because [while] those are all [great] efforts, there also needs to be a lot of systematic change. That’s not in any way to demean on-the-ground change, like grassroots change.”



Jeimy Osorio in *Celia* (Juan Manuel Garcia/Telemundo)

The fact that progress is slow is something that is frustrating to Latinx viewers and actors alike.

“While I appreciate films that work to showcase the immigrant experience and shine a light on working class first generation immigrants, it’s taken so long for it to move past that,” wrote Maravilla. “I wish there was more urgency and that progress would happen faster. Latinx people living in this country continue to face discrimination and the ability to not only showcase us, but also humanize and accurately represent us would do some much good in a time in which people in power continue to demonize us.”

“We’re getting more discussion on it which is always a good thing. Discussion can lead to education, and education can lead to misinformation being corrected.

When misinformation is corrected, ignorance can be cured. It’s a process, but one that has to start,” wrote Rodriguez. “The conversation can’t happen if we refuse to have it by locking out or ignoring Latinx voices. Non-Latinxs have to listen to us, our commentary, our problems, and learn about our community. That’s how the conversation can start and the learning process can begin.”

“I can say there’s been progress, but progress doesn’t mean there isn’t more track left to run,” she wrote. “We’re making strides but the race isn’t over yet, not by a long shot. Not when both Tyler Garcia Posey, and Oscar Isaac Hernandez had to drop their Latinx surnames or last names in order not to get type cast. Or when we still have white actors getting Latinx roles, or we’re only portraying white, or white passing Latinx characters in our media. We’ve made progress, but there’s still progress left to be made.”



Rita Moreno (center), flanked by Suzie Kaye, Yvonne Wilder in *West Side Story* (MGM)



EPILOGUE: WHY YOU MUST TAKE LATINX REPRESENTATION SERIOUSLY

“For those who think there isn’t an issue with Latinx representation in the media, what would you say to them?”

Rodriguez: Have empathy. If you’re not Latinx, you may not know or fully understand the marginalized we feel as a community. That’s okay, no one goes into the world knowing everything about everyone or fully understanding the complexities of race vs ethnicity, or the complexities of the Latinx community as a whole. I’m still learning. It’s a process. It takes time and effort.

Make the effort. Make the effort to care about us as a community, to feel empathy for our frustrations with how the media portrays us. The fact that Hollywood would rather cast white actors to play us then cast us to tell our own stories. Support our work and projects. Listen to us when we discuss our marginalization and discrimination. Stand with us when we fight for the betterment of our media presentation.

It’s not an easy task, people are going to mess up, no one is perfect. But I don’t believe in perfection. I believe in empathy first and foremost. The wiliness to listen and learn can go a long way. But if you don’t have empathy for us, you won’t be willing to listen. You may not agree with everything we say, and that can be fine, but at least listen. We’re here, and we deserve to be listened to.

Novondo: I’d say, “Honey, look around—do you see anyone other than you around here?” We’re lacking in every department of diversity.

We’re lacking in black, we’re lacking in Asian, we’re lacking in any kind of diversity other than white. There should be more inclusion. If you don’t see that, you’re part of the problem.

Martinez: A part of me wants to say “Where have you been?” but I’ll be honest, a lot of times, when you’re in a specific group is when you realize it yourself versus someone else because they just aren’t part of that specific demographic, but I would say to them while you may not necessarily see it as a problem, I would ask that you definitely take a look at some of the films that you’re watching or shows that you’re watching and really take an honest and open look at the Latinos you’re encountering through these shows and films, if you even encounter any at all, then let’s have a larger conversation.

Latinos are among the least represented in speaking roles, according to a study by the Annenberg School of Communication and Journalism. I think some people do need to see the numbers so that may help them get a perspective of what we’re talking about... [O]nly 5.3 percent [of speaking roles] were Latino. When you have numbers like that, there’s a clear issue. That’s being chipped away at, but we definitely have a long, long way to go.



Yaya DaCosta and Brian Tee in *Chicago Med* (Elizabeth Sisson/NBC)

Maravilla: I would ask them to really think about their resistance to people saying that they don't feel accurately represented and why they feel that. I'd ask them if they have the same reaction when medical professionals complain about the depiction of their jobs in media, or when historical dramas make flagrant errors. Would they push back on doctors or people who lived through that particular historical period? I'd also ask them about any time in their life they felt invisible to the world and asked about the times in their life that they felt alone. Was there ever a film that lifted them up? A TV show that made them feel better? And did the people who were in that film or who made that TV show, did they look like them?

Hoyos: I would honestly say that I think it's just a privilege that a lot of people don't have to think about that sort of thing, and it's something that I think they should educate themselves on and look at beyond themselves and instead look at how Latinos were treated in this last election, for example, or just historically have been treated in this country and around the world. With media, the biggest thing that people who are not in the media don't understand is that media...overflows in everyday life and serves as the basis for how we treat ourselves and others and how we see ourselves and others. To look at a one-dimensional [representation] of any racial or ethnic or sexual orientation or any marginalized group is to look at a non-dynamic, false vision of them.♦

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