MEDIATED REPRESENTATIONS OF LATINOS
AND THE UNITED STATES-MEXICO BORDER IN THE MEDIA

by

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DEDICATION

I would like to thank my husband and my family for their help and support.

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ABSTRACT

Media is used to shape the identity of a nation. It serves as a vehicle to reassure and reaffirm the dominant group’s perspective and ideals in order to maintain the status quo. The media has its greatest influence on people who do not have a frame of reference to help them interpret what they see. People who have not had direct contact with the subject being presented may believe that what they are viewing is an accurate depiction.

Latinos are often misrepresented on television and various other media and are a minority faced with constant character distortion. The stereotyping of Latinos has changed very little since the 1970’s when it was first called to the attention of the United States House and Senate. This is due in part to the nation’s media outlets, especially film and television, which are still the main visual vehicles that perpetuate these stereotypes. This dissertation examines mediated representations of Latinos and the United States-Mexico border in films, produced in Hollywood and Mexico City, as well as U.S. network newscasts.
INTRODUCTION

My dissertation will show that the stereotyping of Latinos has changed very little since the 1970’s when it was first called to the attention of the United States House and Senate. This is due in part to the nation’s media outlets, especially film and television, which are still the main visual vehicles that perpetuate stereotypes. Media outlets are used to shape the identity of the United States. The media is a vehicle to reassure and reaffirm the dominant group’s perspective and ideals in order to maintain the majority’s frame of reference. This dissertation examines the mediated representations of Latinos and the U.S.-Mexico border in films, produced in Hollywood and Mexico City, as well as U.S. network newscasts.

The year 1970 is notable because the United States House and Senate held hearings regarding the representation of Latinos in the media. The hearings were brought on as a result of Chicano groups in Los Angeles, Washington D.C., and San Antonio who initiated protests against advertisers, television networks, and the film industry. Chicano groups charged them with disseminating derogatory stereotypes against Mexican Americans, Mexicans, and other Latino groups.

The United States - Mexico border region has many faces and has been depicted in many ways: pathway to a better life, death route, drug crossing, criminal haven and last but not least, as the ultimate getaway as viewed by the dominant group (Anglo elite). The U.S. – Mexico border has also been
portrayed, in the popular discourse, as in a state of siege. As suggested by the titles of journalistic reports, found in national newspapers and national newscasts, such as: “Losing control of the borders”, “Invasion from Mexico: It just keeps growing”, “Mexico urged to tighten border; Problems of security, corruption and crime surround flow of migrants”, “Migrant smugglers traffic in terror”, and “Patriots on the Borderline; Toting Guns, Cameras and Mighty Convictions, Small Bands of Americans are patrolling the Southwest in Search of Illegal Immigrants”. According to Charles Ramírez Berg in Latino Images in Film (2002), the border is represented as a battleground where “the Border Patrol strives to defend the nation by upholding its border integrity against the swelling tide of illegal Mexican aliens” (200).

The way in which the border is depicted to consumers of the media on both sides of the border is important because this region is critical to the two economic powers on either side. Mexico and the United States both rely on the border for agriculture, trade, and jobs. In fact, the impact reaches beyond the border region far into both bordering countries; it reaches the national level of each side where decisions are made.

The media is important for both personal identity and for collective cultural identity. Every time the TV is turned on or a new film premiers, a new cultural product is being taught to the collective community. A 1977 report by the United States Commission on Civil Rights, entitled “Window Dressing on the Set: Women and Minorities in Television” makes the following observation about the role of television in molding public opinion:
Television does more than simply entertain or provide news about major events of the day. It confers status on those individuals and groups it selects for placement in the public eye, telling the viewer who and what is important to know about. Those who are made visible through television become worthy of attention and concern; those whom television ignores remain invisible.

Both film and television teach and these media have yet to cover the many facets of the Latino community. The stereotypes presented on network newscasts are produced at the national level but they trickle down to the local level as well. The group of people making decisions, which impact millions of viewers, have a preconceived notion of what the border and its residents should look like. The aforementioned decision makers and the general public have been inculcated with stereotypical images of the border for generations. This in effect trickles down from the national network level to the local level because of the relationship that exists between national headquarters and its affiliates. Network news stories are usually produced in New York and then sent out to affiliates across the country. When local affiliates air these stories they are filled with what the producers and others at the national level believe are the “images” of the border. News stories rarely focus on Latino culture, business or non-criminal related issues. The media tends to cover tragic stories, such as border deaths, much more often and there is rarely an in depth look at the reasons behind the
tragedy. The focus of the story is usually the number of dead. This narrow focus also applies to film. Producers and directors from both Hollywood and the news media search for the same stereotypical images of the border to incorporate in their stories due to a preconceived notion of what it should look like. Preconceived stereotypes and the lack of minority representation at the national level play a key role in the decision making process.

**KERNER COMMISSION REPORT**

The “Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders” (1968), also known as the Kerner Report, is notable because of its findings. According to Chon Noriega in *Shot in America: Television, the State, and the Rise of Chicano Cinema* (2000), the Kerner Report:

…Identified the media as a contributing factor in the race related riots of the 1960’s. The report stated that the media failed to communicate the urgency of race relations and ghetto problems to the nation as a whole, and that failure stemmed from the fact that television is almost totally white in both appearance and attitude.

(29)

The Kerner Report linked the prevalent and problematic stereotypes to employment within its related industries. According to Noriega, the critique of the media by the Kerner Report “acknowledged the central function of mass communication within modern society as well as the need for state intervention, while skirting the regulatory limits of free speech within the free market” (29).

The Kerner report argued a link between social inequities, civil disorder and
mass communication, but its critique was limited to surface issues within the basic infrastructures: stereotypes and employment. The activists objected to media depictions of Mexicans as “stupid, shiftless, dirty, immoral, and lackey bandito types”. Noriega notes that, “by early 1970, the protests were also directed against the Academy Awards, industry guilds and television stations while the Department of Justice – after public hearings by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission – negotiated an equal employment plan signed by 72 movie and television production companies” (29). Those that signed pledged to offer more opportunities for minorities but they failed.

BORDERS

Where a rich, industrialized economy borders on an underdeveloped nation, labor exploitation and worker immigration are bound to occur. I will show how these principles are played out along the U.S.-Mexico border – an area of prolonged historical conflict and constant migration, and an area with a unique culture, society and multi-ethnic interaction. It is the combining of the cultures on either side of the border that has created the border’s own popular culture, perceptions and stereotypes. This is the situation that the border region between the United States and Mexico has experienced over the past century. A century that has witnessed dynamic capital growth north of the border and increased emigration from the south. The influx of immigrants from Latin America each year has a significant impact on both economies.

Jorge Bustamante in “Identidad, Cultural Nacional y Frontera” (1988) states that border society is an abstract concept compounded by ideas about the
sovereignty of nation-states, the intensification of commerce and social
discourse, and strategies of cultural representation. Cultural processes, which
may be opaque and elusive elsewhere, become clear at the border. According to
Bustamante, “the border offers a stark context of cultural difference, social
inequality and ever-present reminders of governmental power to limit individual
opportunity by ascribing national identity” (18). The dominant group assigns little
social value to certain sectors of the population and these limits are also depicted
on television and in film.

The border, by definition, highlights the difference between U.S. citizens
and Mexican “others.” When Mexicans enter the bounded U.S. space, they
become categorized as “immigrants”. They become the “other”. The commerce
along the United States-Mexico border attains a higher level of importance on
both sides of the border than the idea of opening a dialogue about the identities
of its people. On the other hand, an international border is also an environment
of opportunity. Companies use national differences in labor and environmental
regulations to pursue their advantage. The United States-Mexico border is no
exception, as exemplified by the maquiladoras, the border assembly plants
owned and operated by foreign companies inside Mexican territory. Like many
border societies, the United States-Mexico border thrives on difference. People
and institutions settle there to exploit niches in its environment.

The United States-Mexico border, like other borders, has been subject to
change over a period of approximately one hundred and fifty years. The Mexican
American community appeared as a minority within the United States as a direct
result of the acquisition of half of Mexico’s national territory by the U.S. through the U.S. – Mexico War, 1846-1848. When the United States took over the land, the Mexican population was given the choice to relocate south of the new border, or remain on the native lands accepting U.S. sovereignty. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, signed in 1848, was intended to end the hostilities between the two nations and was also supposed to guaranteed to those Mexicans who chose to stay, all the rights of citizens of the United States according to the principles of the Constitution. Even though many promises were made, few were delivered to the first generation of Mexicans residing in the newly acquired lands. The Gadsden Purchase in 1853 marked the end of continental expansion of North American and completed the United States – Mexico border as it is known today. The Gadsden Purchase clarified international boundaries that the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo left unclear. The purchased strip of land added 29,649 square miles to the United States, including what is now southern Arizona and New Mexico.

This dissertation is not an exhaustive study of film and newscasts. It is simply one aspect of a very complex issue. There are some films and television reports that depict the Latino community in a positive light. However, this examination focuses on the majority of media representations of Latinos that continue to perpetuate negative stereotypes. Against this challenging background, and in consideration of the large number of Latinos residing on the U.S. side of the border, I will examine how Latinos – particularly those of Mexican
descent – are represented and underrepresented in film and television, both in front and behind the camera.

CHAPTER ONE:
GORDON ALLPORT

Gordon Allport’s research on stereotypes indicates that stereotypes are not just frames of mind but beliefs. Stereotypes have a power that affects both the “in” group and “out” group. The “out” group, those that are not part of the majority, becomes “them” and the “in” group, those that are in fact part of the majority, is automatically “us”. Therefore, “they” or “them” are always incomplete and imperfect. According to Allport, “once formed, stereotypes cause their possessor to view future evidence in terms of the available categories” (31). This leads to the placement of what they associate as “us” in a positive light and “them” in the negative.

Latinos do the same to members of their own group who do not fit their ideals; these members are viewed and treated as “others” as is the case with Mexicans residing in Mexico and their view of border residents. Allport believes that class distinctions within a group are the result of trying to free or separate oneself from the problems the group as a whole suffers. These stereotypes play out on the evening news and in Mexican films as well.

Self-perceptions play a powerful role in the development of Latino youth. I will examine the mediated representations of Latinos as criminals, servants, illegal border crossers (among other stereotypes of the same nature) and their effect on the Latino community, especially children.
CHARLES RAMÍREZ BERG

In *Latino Images in Film*, Ramírez Berg, states that stereotyping occurs when there are two factors present, the first one is ethnocentrism, the view of things in which one’s own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled or rated with reference to it. The second factor is prejudice: judging others as infinitely inferior based on the difference determined by “us” and “them”. According to Ramírez Berg, prejudice holds that “they” are inherently not as good (clean, civilized, righteous, religious, intelligent, trustworthy, respectful of life, decent, hardworking, honorable, etc…) as we are because they are different from us (in the foods they eat, their religion, skin color, language, nationality etc) (20). Judging the others as inherently inferior is a key feature of prejudicial thinking, and it’s the most troubling one in that it indicates that they cannot change.

Stereotypes are used to create boundaries and to construct the identity of the nation. The image of the nation is formed by the group with the most power thus creating an image according to their own ideals, and ignoring the “others”. But the “other” must be incorporated in order to grow as a nation.

NOAM CHOMSKY

According to Noam Chomsky in *Manufacturing Consent* (2002), “the media is a system for communicating messages and symbols to the general populace. It is their function to amuse, entertain, and inform, and to inculcate individuals with the values, beliefs, and codes of behavior that will integrate them into the institutional structures of the larger society” (1). The larger society
expects certain images of the border and its residents. The media continues to provide those stereotypical images.

Chomsky also points out the difference between “worthy” and “unworthy” victims. Immigrant deaths are an important example of this theory. Immigrant deaths are considered “unworthy” victims because the victims are usually from countries considered friendly by the United States. People abused in enemy states are considered “worthy” victims and receive more in depth coverage by the media. The network newscasts in the United States, when covering a story on border crossings, focus on the number of immigrants that have died crossing the border or the number of people caught at the border. These newscasts do not usually mention details of the victims; they do not mention specific reasons for the crossing or try to explain their dire economic situation. These details are omitted for two reasons, time constraints and the fact that Mexico is neither an enemy state nor a state that supports politics that would be deemed a risk for the United States. Since Mexico is considered a friend to the U.S., border deaths are not given much attention by the press or the government. It should also be noted that strong competition between the networks for advertisers plays a key role. Most advertisers believe that news of day stories will increase the number of viewers much more than investigative reports.

MAS’UD ZAVARZADEH

Seeing Films Politically (1991) by Mas’Ud Zavarzadeh will be applied to the films examined in this dissertation. Zavarzadeh analyzes films and posits that even the most seemingly “innocent” films are sites of ideological investment.
He believes films reproduce the ideological discourses needed to maintain the status quo. Films are not just aesthetic spaces but political spaces that contest or naturalize/reinforce the existing social order. Zavarzadeh believes that viewing films is more than just an entertaining way to spend a couple of hours; films pass information on to viewers. He writes, “it is a “knowledge” lesson through which the subject is “taught” how to be…a “good subject” and is placed in its position in social relation (class)” (16). The “knowledge” lesson is presented in such a manner that it appears natural to the viewer, this natural appearance allows the continuation of the dominant social arrangement and secures the current power relation. Films are often regarded as interpretations of reality but they do not report the world, films produce the world. “Reality” is constructed each time a film is produced. The constructed “reality” is presented as natural in order to reinforce the existing power relations.

CHAPTER TWO:

In 2002, the UCLA study “Ready for Primetime” concluded, “minorities are even more underrepresented in key behind-the-scenes creative and decision-making positions than they are on the television screen” (2002: 3). Many analysts are concerned that the dearth of minority executives, producers, directors and screenwriters is fueling the tendency to ignore or misrepresent ethnic groups. The NAACP’s 2000 survey of Hollywood and Beverly Hills screenwriters found that only 7 percent of the 839 respondents were members of minority groups. They, too, concluded that the lack of multicultural movie writers and producers also affects how minorities are portrayed on the big screen. In
2002, The Screen Actor’s Guild released figures showing that only 22.1 percent of all roles in 2001 went to performers of color (Latinos being considered part of this group) – a drop from the 2000 figure of 22.9 percent. According to the Director’s Guild, ethnic minorities are similarly underrepresented in the Guild itself, where they make up only 19 percent of the union’s membership, and in the Hollywood Director’s Guild, with only an 8 percent minority membership (2002: 20). The National Association of Latino Independent Producers (NALIP) was created in 1999 by a group of Latino producers, academics and media activists to address the professional needs of Latino/Latina independent producers. This organization is very important because it supports Latino projects and helps young producers navigate the waters of the film industry.

Hollywood has longstanding storytelling conventions and included in that history is the stereotyping of Latinos. According to Ramírez Berg the hero is usually portrayed as a white, handsome, upper middle class, heterosexual, Protestant, Anglo-Saxon male. The narrative of the film will revolve around this character and the typical Hollywood production must examine how superior he is to his surroundings by presenting the other characters as inferior in varying ways and degrees. In order to inflate the virtues of the protagonist, the other characters are of cultural, ethnic, racial, and class backgrounds different from the hero’s and are generally assigned minor roles such as: villains, sidekicks, temptresses, the “other” man. Their main function is to provide opportunities for the protagonist to display his absolute moral, physical, and intellectual preeminence. This is seen in several Hollywood films such as: Romancing the

In the second section of this chapter, I will examine two specific examples from the Hollywood film industry: The Border (1982), directed by Tony Richardson and Traffic (2000), directed by Steven Soderberg.

The Border is a film about a U.S. border patrol guard, Charlie, who is disenchanted with his work. He and his wife, Marcy, move to El Paso so they can enjoy a higher standard of living. After relocating, Charlie is appalled by the level of corruption and bribery of the area’s guards, which includes running illegal aliens across the border to work as farmhands. He initially opts not to become involved but eventually does in order to pay off debts. Charlie takes an interest in a young Latina named María, regarding her as an emblem of the purity. When her baby is kidnapped and sold, Charlie decides to get involved. This film depicts the border as a lawless and crime-ridden place and it presents Mexico and the border as a dusty trail full of outlaws and fugitives.

Traffic features four separate storylines, which are tied together by the movement of drugs. The first image you see is disconcerting and tense. It is titled “Mexico, 20 miles southeast of Tijuana” and is set in a seared white desert and shot in grainy video stock. Two Tijuana cops, Javier and his partner Manolo, stop and seize a truckload of drugs, then head off down a long and dusty road back to town. They are then forced to surrender the truck to the local authority, General Salazar. Traffic focuses on the corruption of Mexican officials and its
police officers. Its images are grainy and concentrate on the poor sections of Tijuana, where the main characters live. The first images of Mexico projected to the public are immediately loaded with stereotypes: hot, dirty and poor. As these two films illustrate, the movies produced in Hollywood about the border focus on predictable storylines where stereotypes are played out over and over. Stereotypes are played out repeatedly in Hollywood films due in part to the under-representation of minorities in the industry. The issues of racism, lack of capital and lack of control over minority images are alive and well in Hollywood.

“Symbolic Reality Bites: Women and Racial/Ethnic Minorities in Modern Film”, a 2000 study by Sarah Eschholz of the 50 top-grossing films released in 1996 revealed that 65 percent of the most prominent actors in the films were male, 80 percent were white. In 1996, 85 percent of the writers, 93 percent of the directors and 84 percent of the producers in the Hollywood film industry were white males. This is especially significant in light of the accelerating growth of minorities in America, particularly Latinos, shown in the last U.S. census.

In this chapter I will examine the reasons for the negative depiction (in film) of the United States-Mexico border and its residents. I will also analyze how Hollywood studio films, through their narratives and resolutions, reinforce the prevailing or dominant ideology. This chapter does not include films such as Lone Star (John Sayles, 1996), My Family/Mi Familia (Gregory Nava, 1995), Real Women Have Curves (Patricia Cardoso, 2002), and The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada (Tommy Lee Jones, 2005), which have been recognized as quality films with strong Latino characters. The aforementioned films are not
included in this examination because they were produced by small or independent film companies. The focus of this dissertation is limited to big budget Hollywood productions that reach large audiences and have extensive distribution.

CHAPTER THREE:

I will also examine Mexican films and how they contribute to the production of stereotypes. During the seventies the State controlled cinema in Mexico started to decline, mainly caused by an inert bureaucratic industry and it was during that time that a new private cinematographic industry arose. According to Carl Mora in *Mexican Cinema* (1982), “Rodolfo Echeverría proposed a “Plan for the Restructuring of the Mexican Film Industry”. Within a few years the private industry appropriated the Mexican market. This new industry focused on producing low cost films in a short amount of time and with little focus on quality” (114). The end of the seventies was dominated by this cinema and by a new cinematic phenomenon, the "cabrito western", films shot on and about the border. These films used the American “Western” as a guide but with contemporary themes such as drug trafficking and undocumented workers. Films such as the 1976 *La Banda Del Carro Rojo* (The Red Car Gang) by Rubén Galindo and the 1980 *Pistoleros Famosos* (Famous Gunfighters) by José Loza Martínez managed to fill the movie theaters in Mexico. These films use stereotypes that are familiar to U.S. audiences, that of the Mexican bandit, the sexy Latina, the drug runner and the drug kingpin. These negative depictions reach a large audience and create a negative frame of reference about Mexicans
and the border itself. These films are also viewed by Mexicans residing in
Mexico and contribute to the reinforcement of negative attitudes toward
emigrants. The aforementioned films feature the lives of drug dealers as being
larger than life. The main characters are presented as “generous bandits” men
that are loved by the people. These films help perpetuate and reinforce negative
stereotypes on both sides of the border.

Since 1922, Mexican cinema has produced over 100 narrative features on
the border, border crossing, and border culture. The migratory experience is
consistently portrayed negatively. The main characters always return to Mexico,
none of the protagonists ever choose to stay permanently in the United States,
those who do desire only to return to Mexico. The second section of this chapter
will focus on three Mexican films: Mojados (1977) by Alejandro Galindo, Raíces
de sangre (1976) by Jesús Treviño and Maria Novaro’s, El jardín del edén
(1994). Mexican films help perpetuate the standard and dominant perception of
border society through the stereotyping of border residents, particularly those of
Mexican origin. These films, while entertaining, do not accurately portray the
border crisis, nor do these films delve into the complexity of the border situation.

Mojados features Jorge Rivero as a lone undocumented worker; this
movie is an action packed vehicle with low production value. The plot concerns a
group of Mexican migrant workers who, unable to secure employment of any kind
in Mexico, decide to cross the border into the United States in search of
economic opportunities. They plan their crossing at night and are successful in
their attempt to reach the United States. Feeling secure, the group continues on
its way, not knowing that the U.S. Border Patrol lies in wait for them. Suddenly, when they are in sight, the Border Patrol opens fire without any warning or attempt at apprehension. The whole group falls and all are left for dead. But the hero of the story, Juan García (Jorge Rivero), escapes after being severely wounded. He manages to get to a nearby town where he is befriended by sympathetic Chicanos. A Mexican lawyer enters the picture and tries to find out who is responsible for the atrocities. As the story unfolds, we learn of the underworld connection of certain officers of the U.S. Border Patrol involved in the traffic, control, and placement of undocumented workers. García infiltrates the ring, learns how they work and who is involved.

*Raíces de sangre* is set on both sides of the border with a fragmented, nonlinear narrative structure. On the Mexican side of the border the film focuses on the working conditions of Mexican workers at a U.S. owned maquiladora and on the love story of Lupe Carrillo (Roxana Bonilla-Giannini) and Carlos Rivera (Richard Yñíguez). The actual plot focuses on Carlos a Chicano lawyer who after completing a law degree at Harvard returns to his home to work at the community center, El Barrio Unido. The main task of this organization is to organize workers on both sides of the border against the powerful and oppressive maquiladoras (border assembly plants), which are keeping the workers divided and exploiting them. The Barrio Unido members are led by Carlos’s best friend, Juan Vallejo (Pepe Sarna). Their initial attempts at forming a strong labor union among both Mexican and Chicano workers are met with
harassment and violence. Carlos is ultimately jolted into community responsibility after his best friend is murdered.

*El jardín del Edén* is set in Tijuana on the border with the United States where entry to the “promised land” is closed by a steel wall 20 km long. This film is set in the present day and is about three women whose lives loosely interweave. Jane (Renée Coleman) is an Anglo in search of the exotic; Serena (Gabriela Roel) has just lost her husband and is now having to manage on her own with her three children; Elizabeth (Rosario Sagrav) is a Chicana artist struggling with her identity. The women become linked by Felipe (Bruno Bichir), a man who gets caught by the Border Patrol while trying to cross the border. Jane tries to help him get into the United States by smuggling him across the border with Julián, whom she believes is his brother but is actually Serena’s son. The story then revolves around the border crossing, Serena’s search for Julián, and Elizabeth’s search for her identity.

**CHAPTER FOUR:**

For my fourth chapter I will examine the misrepresentation of Latinos on network newscasts in the United States. According to a study conducted by the National Association of Hispanic Journalists (NAHJ), “Network Brownout: 2003”, which researched the sum of stories that aired on the three major networks, ABC, CBS and NBC as well as CNN. According to the NAHJ study, “the total number of stories aired during 2002 was approximately 16,000. Of those 16,000 only 120 dealt with Latino related issues” (2003: 6). The stories analyzed portrayed Latinos as kidnappers, reckless drivers, plane highjackers, child
molesters, drug smugglers, gang members and rape offenders. The spectrum of Latino crime reported in the study was negative and vast. These stereotypes are perpetuated even though Latino stories are given little airtime, especially when the percentage of crime driven stories is so high.

The representations seen on newscasts help create and perpetuate stereotypes because they reach a very large audience. When viewers do not have a direct frame of reference about what is being presented to them, they can absorb the media’s representation and make it their own. The fact that more often than not this is not a deliberate attempt on the part of the newscasts to discredit Latinos does nothing to minimize the damage.

In my examination of this coverage I will show how the poor depiction of Latinos and the U.S. – Mexico Border on television newscasts is a matter of inculcated stereotypes and behaviors and also a matter of broadcast time constraints and a preference for big stories.

CONCLUSION:

In the United States, the cultural diversity of television and film texts is not balanced and does not match the cultural diversity of the U.S. population. The reasons for this are many, including the commercial nature of the industry, the costs of high-tech production and the socio-economic marginalization of many ethnic minority groups. In the conclusion I will summarize my findings and look to the continuing evolution of the depiction of Latinos and the United States - Mexico border in film and television. I will also discuss areas that would benefit from further investigation.
CHAPTER ONE: THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

In this chapter I will examine the work of three well-known authors, Gordon Allport, Charles Ramírez-Berg and Noam Chomsky. The focus will be mediated stereotypes, the media as a tool to inculcate the viewer, the representation of the “other” in film and television, as well as self-stereotyping and its effect on the Latino community. I chose to include Gordon Allport’s *The Nature of Prejudice* (1956) because I believe his findings on stereotypes and their effects on communities can be applied to film and television. I included Charles Ramírez Berg’s work, *Latino Images in Film* (2002), because his research on stereotypes as more that just film images reveal the mainstream’s attitude towards the “other”. I chose Noam Chomsky’s text *Manufactured Consent* (1988), because his research on how the media can serve as a tool for the dominant group to maintain the status quo applies to both film and television. Allport, Ramírez-Berg and Chomsky’s work shed light on mediated stereotypes and why the media has yet to fully pay attention to the largest minority group in the United States. Another critical work, which will be applied to the films examined in Chapters 2, 3, and briefly in Chapter 4, is Mas’Ud Zavarzadeh’s *Seeing Films Politically* (1991), which analyzes films as sites of ideological investment. Stuart Hall’s work *Encoding, Decoding* (1980), Alberto Sandoval-Sánchez’s, “José, can you see?: Latinos on and off Broadway” (1992), and Nestor García Canclini, primarily *Culturas Híbridas: Estrategias para entrar y
salir de la modernidad (1990), also apply to film and television and will be analyzed briefly at the end of the chapter.

**A. GORDON ALLPORT**  
**Stereotypes as Beliefs and the Impact on the Latino Community:**

Gordon Allport’s research on stereotypes, as I will elaborate, can be applied to film and television because the beliefs the dominant group shares about the “out” group or “other” manifest themselves in negative depictions of the “other” in both film and television. Mediated stereotypes affect the perception of the “other” and place them in a position of disadvantage. This has a very negative effect on Latino youth because they have very few positive Latino role models with whom they can identify.

Allport’s research indicates that stereotypes are not just frames of mind but beliefs. Stereotypes have a power that affects both, as he described them, the “in” group and “out” group. The “out” group, those that are not part of the majority, immediately become “them”, those that are different from us. The “in” group, those that are in fact part of the majority automatically become “us”, the dominant group. Therefore, “they” or “them” are always incomplete and imperfect. According to Allport “once formed stereotypes cause their possessor to view future evidence in terms of the available categories” (31). This leads to placement of what they associate as “us” in a positive light and “them” in a negative light.
This phenomenon can be seen on a national level. It can serve to create a sense of nation and unity against all that is different. Geoffrey Bennington in an essay titled, “Postal Politics and the Institution of the Nation” (1990) states the following: “…narration attempts, interminably to constitute identity against difference inside against outside and in the assumed superiority of inside over outside prepares against invasion and for “enlightened” colonialism” (132). This happens inside both the “in” group and the “out” group. People create bonds by uniting against the “other”.

Hierarchies also exist within groups. For example, Mexicans from urban areas consider those from rural areas to be less cultured and less sophisticated. Even though they are members of the same national group they do not fit certain ideals and are therefore viewed and treated as “others”. Allport believes that class distinctions within a group are the result of trying to free or separate oneself from the problems the group as a whole suffers. These stereotypes play out on the evening news and in Mexican films as well. Self-perceptions play a powerful role in the development of Latino youth. Mediated representations of Latinos, like the ones seen on television and film, as criminals, servants and as illegal border crossers (among other stereotypes of the same nature) have had a powerful effect on Latino youth and their self-image. The 2003 study, “Fall Colors: Primetime Diversity Report” found the following:

As one of our culture’s primary storytellers, television provides stories and images that help shape the worldviews of millions of people. When certain groups are privileged and others are excluded it sends a message –
especially to young viewers – that these groups are valued differently by society. This, in turn, can affect how viewers feel about themselves and others.

(2003:3)

They are also damaging because they give viewers a false sense of who Latinos are and what transpires in the border region.

Allport states that, “ethnic prejudice is an antipathy based upon a faulty and inflexible generalization. It may be felt or expressed. It may be directed toward a group as a whole or toward an individual because he is a member of that group” (9). Thus the effect is to place the person or object of prejudice in a place of disadvantage. This disadvantage does not stem from the actions of this person or thing but instead from the outside in a double process of determining what is excluded from the “we” and how the “we” is constituted. This form of prejudice leads to the creation of “in” groups and “out” groups.

As a general definition, an “in” group is any cluster of people that can use the term “we” with the same significance. Hostility toward “out” groups helps strengthen the “in” group’s sense of belonging. This is due to the basic importance of survival and self esteem. In order for a group to survive each member must adhere to similar beliefs and standards. Allport writes “the in group’s preferences must be his preference, its enemies his enemies” (40). Groups tend to develop partisanship and ethnocentrism in respect to “in” groups. It is clear that the familiar is preferred. Allport gives this example, “Seven year old children in one town were asked, which is better, the children in this town or
in Smithfield (a neighboring town)? Almost all of the children responded, “the children in this town.” When asked why, the children usually replied, “I don’t know the kids in Smithfield” (42). Anything that is regarded as different or alien is somehow inferior, less than, or bad.

Every line, fence, or boundary marks off an inside from an outside. Therefore an “in” group always implies the existence of some corresponding “out” group. That “out” group is anything or anyone that threatens an “in” group or any “in” group member whether it is factual or created.

According to the French biologist, Felix le Dantec, (as quoted in Allport) “every social unit from the family to the nation can exist only by virtue of having some common enemy.” (9). Fighting against a common enemy creates and reaffirms who is part of the ‘in” group. This can be seen in several places from local high schools all the way up through governments and countries. For example, school spirit is at its highest when there is an athletic contest where there is a school rivalry. It can also manifest on a larger scale. National pride and unity reached a high point in the United States after the September 11th attacks. Civil and official government discourses helped to unify the nation. These discourses were then disseminated by the media to achieve the aforementioned unification. A nation is never as unified as when its own territory is attacked. There were American flags placed in front yards, commercial buildings, hanging out of windows in high-rise buildings, and draped over cars and on people’s backs. These symbols tie an individual to a group and send a message that they agree and respect the “in” group. An example of this was
visible in New York City after the aforementioned attacks. Some “out” group members appropriated traditional U.S. signs and icons in order to survive. Many of the city’s immigrant cab drivers placed U.S. flags and other symbols on their vehicles to signal to customers that they were against the attacks and also to avoid being attacked by members of the “in” group, white Americans. The cabbies feared being attacked since visible differences imply real differences such as skin color, speech or accent, dress, food habits, names.

Visible differences are a factor for exclusion from the “in” group. Allport states:

Every event has certain marks that serve as a cue to ring the category of prejudgment into action. When we see a red-breasted bird, we say to ourselves “robin”. When we see a crazily swaying automobile, we think, “drunken driver”, and act accordingly. A person with dark brown skin will activate whatever concept of Negro is dominant in our mind.

(21)

Latinos in the United States are portrayed by the mainstream media as outsiders, as “others” because they purportedly have visible differences. The ability to identify a Latino based on physical attributes allows the dominant group to place them in the “out” group. Latinos have been imagined/depicted as racialized subjects that can be immediately identified, when in fact, “Latino” as an identity category is a socially and culturally constructed ethnic category. This is due in part because mass media serves to protect the mainstream identity of the United States and maintain the status quo. Whether this is done consciously or not, the
decision makers in the media are members of the “in” group. According to the Fall 2003 “Neiman Report”, nearly nine out of ten newsroom professionals in the United States are white and most of them are white males. These decision makers choose which stories are covered, which in turn affect the depiction of Latinos in the news by the stories they choose to cover. The dominant group (Anglo elite) wants to maintain the status quo; they want to remain in control. Since the decision makers are usually members of the “in” group (Anglo elite), they make decisions based on what their group will be able to relate to. The “in” group sees others as different and will portray them as such. The established pattern has been that the news stories which are covered about the border and Latinos usually depict Latinos as undocumented immigrants, criminals and cheap labor and the border as a place of extreme desperation. According to a study conducted by the National Association of Hispanic Journalists, “Network Brownout Report 2005”:

Immigration was a central theme in much of the networks’ coverage, regardless of story topic. Most immigration stories focused on undocumented immigration. Many showed images of unidentified groups of undocumented immigrants crossing the border illegally or being arrested by the U.S. Border Patrol.

(2005:4)

While it is true that the border can indeed be a place of extreme desperation that is but one facet of a multifaceted area.
The film industry also falls into the same narrow coverage of the Latino community. Cortés notes the following:

In short, movies teach. The celluloid curriculum teaches about a myriad of topics, including race, ethnicity, culture, and nationality. The degree to which feature films actually create intercultural perceptions and stereotypes can be debated. Beyond debate is the fact that, whether intentionally or not, they contribute to intercultural, interracial, and interethnic understanding and misunderstanding.

(75)

This misunderstanding also affects Latino youth since most of the images they see about their ethnic group are negative. Young Latinos are not able to relate to characters on television or in films and this has a detrimental effect on their self perception. A study conducted by Children Now, a non-profit group which monitors the effect of television on children, found the following, “Latino characters were more likely to appear on real life shows such as *Cops* and *America’s Most Wanted*, often as criminals, than on situation comedies. They were also more likely to hold low-status jobs than were members of other racial groups” (2003:14).

The work of Dr. Mary Goodman on children in her 1946 study, “Evidence Concerning the Genesis of Interracial Attitudes” and her 1952 study “Race Awareness in Young Children” are both very important and insightful because they shed light on the affects of stereotypes on children. As well as more recent studies conducted by Arlene Davila and discussed in her essay “Talking Back:
Goodman’s research found that children develop sentiments about interracial awareness and their own ethnic background at an early age. These sentiments usually occur through the influence of the society they live in. Goodman posits:

Negro children ask more questions about racial differences; they may fondle the hair of a white child; they are often rejective toward Negro dolls. When given a white and Negro doll to play with, they almost uniformly prefer the white doll; many slap the Negro doll and call it dirty or ugly. As a rule, they are more rejective of Negro dolls than are white children. They tend to behave self-consciously when tested for racial awareness.

(626)

The awareness was evident because more than half the children identified themselves with dolls that matched their own race. The fact that both black and white children perceived the white dolls as prettier goes to demonstrate that the children were aware of the implications of race and had been socialized to associate beauty with notions of whiteness.

One of the subjects of the study is a young African American boy named Bobby who is shown two dolls, one brown and one white, and then asked which doll was most like him when he was a baby. According to Goodman, “Bobby’s eyes moved from brown to white; he hesitates, squirms, glances at us sidewise – and points to the white doll. Bobby’s perceptions relevant to race, feeble and sporadic though they are, have some personal meaning – some ego reference”
The ego reference, the study points out, applies to the influence that the “in” group has on children.

More recent studies such as Davila’s show that this form of internalized racism is one of the primary means by which ethnic minority groups have perpetuated and in fact reaffirmed oppression by the dominant group. Davila spent a year researching the making of Latino advertisements for Spanish television. In doing so she was able to hold focus group discussions with Latino youths to explore self perceptions. Davila writes:

During their discussions of the media, participants would consistently draw on their perception of their place and that of others within these existing hierarchies while simultaneously expressing and communicating particularized identities along the lines of race, class, or ethnicity using the same conventions of Latinidad disseminated by the Spanish and Latino oriented media.

The dominant group teaches the aforementioned hierarchy. Davila’s findings are similar to those of Goodman; beauty is associated with that which the dominant group finds beautiful. Davila posits:

Commercial representations were actively used by participants to assert their own and others’ place of belonging…the irony is that all of these insidious distinctions deployed by participants to differentiate among themselves falls short of challenging—and in fact re-inscribe—the
preeminence of whiteness and of the “non-ethnic” as the abiding reference against which one of them is rendered suspect.

(35)

Children want to belong to a group and if the only positive roles depicted in the media are that of members of the “in” group, then most children will want to be part of that group and may possibly shun their own group or consider them and themselves as lesser. This again demonstrates society’s role in internalized racism.

Allport’s research of how stereotypes are created and how they can become beliefs is helpful in understanding how easily they can be passed on from person to person and from one form of media to another. Ramírez Berg’s research will help to identify several of the stereotypes applied to the Latino community and why they remain in use.

B. CHARLES RAMÍREZ BERG
Categorizing the “Other” and Self-Stereotyping:

Charles Ramírez Berg in *Latino Images in Film* examines the defining and persistent images and portrayal of Latinos in film and television. For more than a century, stereotypes such as the *bandido*, the harlot, the male buffoon, the female clown, the Latin lover, and the dark lady have been shown to the public in many forms such as theatre, television and film. Ramírez Berg analyzes Latino representations in Hollywood and also the reasons for their continued use. His conceptualization of stereotypes is based in part on Allport’s analysis.
Stereotyping occurs naturally in order to distinguish between many things but when factors such as ethnocentrism and prejudice play a role, stereotypes become vehicles for negative and positive connotations. Ramírez Berg posits:

It is important to accumulate experiences and be able to distinguish a door from a window, a male from a female, a snake from a twig. And if we all create categories, then we are all, potentially at least, in a position to take the next step and imbue those categories with value laden, that is, positive or negative connotations.

(14)

It is the negative generalizations that give rise to negative stereotyping. The act of making judgments and assigning negative qualities to individuals or groups is detrimental. Ramírez Berg explains the process of “bad” stereotyping and its key components:

One is ethnocentrism, classically defined as the view of things in which one’s own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled or rated with reference to it…The second necessary ingredient that transforms neutral categorization into a discriminatory practice is prejudice: judging others as innately inferior based on ethnocentrically determined difference…Judging the other as inherently inferior is a key feature of prejudicial thinking, and its most troubling one in that it indicates the intransigent view that they cannot change.

(15)
Stereotypes fix negative ideas in people’s minds and that is a key factor in the creation of the “other”. It serves to identify that which is different from the “in” group and therefore of less value. Stereotypes are a small part that represent the whole, and they serve to flatten, homogenize, and generalize individuals within a group.

Sterotyping also occurs to maintain power structures. Stereotypes operate to justify and support the mainstream (Anglo elite). The normalization of stereotypical images through constant repetition function to show, reinforce, and educate viewers on the reasons why the dominant group is in power and should remain in power. For Ramírez Berg, the repetition of stereotypes leads to a belief that the image is in fact correct. Mediated stereotyping in television news generally goes in one direction, from the majority to the disenfranchised and the marginalized. Stereotypes do not just derogatorily depict the other. They also indicate a preferred power relation. This is one way the dominant “in” group convinces itself, its members and the “other” that they, according to Ramírez Berg, are “morally superior, more civilized, and in all ways finer than the “other”, and therefore ought “naturally” to be in control. And stereotypes illustrate why they, the subordinate “out” group, based on their obvious inferiority, ought not, indeed could not, control anything” (22). Stereotyping is a subtle way the “in” group maintains its dominance over the “out” group. For example, the term/stereotype of “illegl alien” provides a negative idea about Latinos. According to Ramírez Berg the term illegal alien, “offers a baseline understanding of Latino immigrants as criminals (rather than as people who have
migrated here for a complex set of historical, political, and economic reasons, some of which involve U.S. business interest)” (23). This negative portrayal justifies the actions of the dominant group.

In order to maintain the status quo, the “other” must be identified in order to join forces against it and bind the “in” group. The “in” group needs to construct an identity that protects it from all that is different. The assumed superiority of the inside defends against an “invasion” from the outside. This can be applied to a nation’s media and those who control it. The image of a nation is formed by the group with the most power; thereby creating an image according to their own ideals, ignoring the “others” and their point of view. But the “other” must be incorporated in order to grow as a nation. Homi Bhabha in Nation and Narration (1990) states:

National consciousness, which is not nationalism, is the only thing that will give us an international dimension. The other is never outside or beyond us; it emerges forcefully within cultural discourse, when we think we speak most intimately and indigenously between ourselves.

(4)

Stereotypes of Latinos take center stage during prime time news coverage when the border is depicted as the “wild west” or as a conduit for illegal immigrants and drugs. The 2005 NAHJ study found the following:

Immigration, particularly undocumented immigration, defined news coverage of Latinos in 2004. Many stories focused on the effort to curb undocumented immigration. Images of undocumented immigrants
crossing the U.S.-Mexico border was a common visual in most stories. Undocumented immigrants were portrayed as invaders threatening our nation’s well-being.

(2005:12)

These negative representations of the border as an area that is being invaded are magnified by media coverage.

Recent reports of the Minutemen Militia on the Arizona–Mexico border have continued to feed the media. This group of civilian border watchers inspired multiple headlines in 2005. An article published in the Tucson Citizen on April 2, 2005 with the caption, “Minutemen Patrols Start This Weekend” led to various segments on television news about the subject. For example “Lou Dobbs Tonight” on April 12, 2005 covered the patrols and interviewed several of the minutemen. The same story was covered on ABC “World News Tonight” on April 4th, 2005 with the following headline, “And along the border of Mexico, the men who say if the government won't keep the illegals out, they will. Are they citizen soldiers or vigilantes?” The aforementioned story garnered local media attention before being picked up by the networks. Once it was picked up national newscasts the “Minutemen” story turned into a national debate.

The discovery of drug tunnels along the border also inspires a flurry of coverage. On January 26, 2006 ABC “World News Tonight” led with the following headline, “Border chaos. Drugs and immigrants streaming into the US through secret tunnels. After 9/11, why is security so lax?” On the same evening, NBC “Nightly News” had the following headline, “Drug tunnel running length of 12
football fields from Mexico to California discovered”. Negative depictions of Latino immigrants and the border occur not just in English language media but Spanish language as well.

Spanish language television newscasts in the United States also perpetuate stereotypes by presenting the border in a fashion similar to English language newscasts. The Spanish stations tend to focus on the survivors but the similarity to English language newscasts is in the images used to tell the story. Stereotypes are also used to report stories in the Spanish language media. Univisión led their November 17, 2003 newscast with the following headline, “Viaje a la muerte: Sobrevivientes de la Peor Tragedia en la Historia Reciente de la Inmigración Recuerdan los Momentos más Terribles de su Odisea”, or “Deadly Journey: Survivors of one of the worst immigrant tragedies in recent history recall the most frightening moments of their journey”. This story featured images similar to those used in the English media, dusty trails, desperate faces, etc…On January 30, 2006, Univisión had the following headline, “La marihuana al final del túnel” or “The marijuana at the end of the tunnel”, referring to the cross border tunnel found by the DEA in California. The border is seen as a crime-ridden area that, even though part of the border is in Mexico, lacks a level of culture common to the rest of the country. However, the border has more facets than the common representation as a port of entry for criminal activity. The use of these mediated stereotypes is common in both television and film. Ramírez Berg in Latino Images in Film examines the function of stereotypes in film.
Ramírez Berg discusses the Mexican *bandido* and other stereotypes in Hollywood films and how recognition, differentiation and devaluation are key functions of the cinematic stereotype. The look of the *bandido* in early 20th century Hollywood films makes him easily identifiable as the villain, the dark look, and the sneer. All of these stereotypes fail to convey background information. Ramírez Berg posits:

Most of the men that dressed like this were not bandits, they were rebel soldiers who fought in Mexico’s Revolutionary War of 1910-1920…in the Mexican experience, these were the good guys who fought against the despotic dictator…As a sort of shorthand, stereotypes necessarily preclude such background information. Instead, stereotyping creates such facile abbreviations that, by virtue of their regular repetition, create their own history.

(18)

The danger with this type of stereotyping is that people with little exposure to the “other” group will see these images as normal and natural and eventually the mediated history can replace the actual lived history. One of the dangers with stereotypes is that they are false to history, but they conform to the tradition of movie making. Over time stereotypes become normalized and “natural” which implies that viewers expect to see certain stereotypes in film. Ramírez Berg posits, “we expect el *bandido* to appear in a Western set…and when he does, we expect him to be villainous and to act in predictably despicable, and inhumane ways” (19). A commonly used stereotype such as *el bandido*, which comes from
Hollywood film representations from the early 20th century, lives on through more "modern" representations such as the “drug lord” and “gang member”. The modern day *bandido* can be seen in films such as *Desperado* (Richard Rodríguez, 1995), *Scarface* (Brian De Palma, 1983), and *Traffic* (Steven Soderbergh, 2000).

Hollywood studio films are the dominant’s cinema. These large studios such as Paramount, Universal, Warner, and MGM circulate and positively represent the “in” group through narratives, resolution and characterization. This is the dominant ideology that maintains the “in” group in a position of power. Media broadcasts the “in” group image indiscriminately, to “in” group and “out” group members alike. Most viewers may not believe everything they see on the big screen but if they see the film they see the stereotype. The mediated stereotype operates by gathering a multitude of negative traits, and assembling them into a single image. For example; the *bandido*, the gang member, the drug lord, and the harlot are images that are played out over and over again in a variety of films. These stereotypes serve to make the “other”, in this case Latinos, appear anti-establishment, criminal and therefore, a threat to U.S. ideology. Ramírez Berg states the following:

Stereotyping is derived from and embedded in the classical Hollywood cinema’s narrative paradigm, the system of film conventions derived by early filmmakers to tell their visual stories clearly and efficiently…As a purely industrial practice, then, stereotypes are maintained because of their valued narrative economy…they require little or no introduction or
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explanation…they are an extremely cheap and cost effective means of
telling a movie story.

(42)

Even if stereotypes are cost effective, these negative depictions stay with
viewers who have very little reference about the “other” and can then be turned
into beliefs. Hollywood films have also used stereotypes to represent the
geographical border into an escape route for people running from the authorities.
The aforementioned representation can be seen in films such as The Getaway
(Roger Donaldson, 1994) and Against All Odds (Taylor Hackford, 1998) are
examples of films that portray the border as an escape route. The representation
of the U.S.-Mexico border as an escape route, among others, will be discussed in
depth in Chapter 2. Mediated stereotypes of Latinos and the border have a
damaging effect on the Latino population and especially Latino youth.
Destructive behaviors such as self-loathing, participation in the perpetuation of
negative stereotypes, distancing from the Spanish language, and despising all
things Latino are just some of the damaging effects.

The research conducted in the area of self-perception by Goodman and
Allport is critical because it analyzes the effects of the “in” group. Also critical is
the work of Steven Asher and Vernon Allen who investigated racial preference in
children. In order to determine young children’s racial attitudes, a study
Preference and Social Comparison Processes” discusses the effect of self-
stereotyping. Researchers presented youngsters with a black doll and a white
doll and asked them questions about which were nice and which were bad. It was noted that most of the young white children picked the white doll as looking nice and the black doll as looking bad. Black children presented with the dolls also labeled the black doll as not nice but bad. Allen and Asher found that, “whites reject and negatively evaluate blacks, and that blacks reject and negatively evaluate themselves” (160). Vicki Mayer’s study of Mexican American youth in San Antonio Producing Dreams, Consuming Youth (2003), examines the way the media portrays Mexican Americans and how these images play a role in the construction of identity. Mayer writes:

Lacking the power to represent themselves in most spheres of their lives, Mexican American children and teenagers look to media they do not produce for “communities of resemblance” with other Americans. Film, radio, and televisual forms mediate cultural identities to Mexican Americans that they can accept and contest…

(xv)

Mayer notes that the Mexican American youths she interviewed found that their cultural identities could not be separated from mass media products. According to Mayer, “Mexican American young people used global texts to define who they were in relation to their friends, family, and community…Music, films, and television programs mediated relationships” (119). Through the aforementioned global texts, the youth’s reinforced bonds and hierarchies of their own.

The identification or desire to identify with a group other than one’s own is something racialized children are exposed to thru the media; the positive role
models available to children on the small and large screen are mostly Anglo. According to Children Now, “one-third of whites (32%)…were employed in high status, professional occupations such as physician, attorney, judge, journalist or elected official. However, only 11% of Latinos held similar occupations” (2005:8).

According to the aforementioned study, 40 percent of young people in the United States are members of ethnic minority groups and most of them are aged 19 and under. There is however very little for them to look up to, on television, in the form of positive representations. The “Fall Colors” study states:

Much of the racial diversity youth see every day – in school, at sporting events, at the doctor’s office – is not visible on prime time, when they are most likely to be watching television…these disparities between real life and the prime time world have important ramifications for young people. As one of our culture’s primary storytellers, television provides stories that help shape the worldviews of millions of people. When certain groups are privileged and others are excluded it sends a message – especially to young viewers – that these groups are valued differently by society. This in turn can affect how viewers feel about themselves and others.

(2005:1)

Ramírez Berg’s examination of the categorization of the “other” and how that categorization can be used to maintain a power structure agrees with Chomsky’s analysis presented in Manufacturing Consent. The aforementioned work examines some of the motives behind the perpetuation of stereotypes and how they are used to maintain the status quo.
C. NOAM CHOMSKY

Media as a Vehicle to Maintain the Status Quo:

In *Manufacturing Consent*, Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman analyze the workings of the media and how it is used as a vehicle to maintain the status quo and its effects on the “out” group. Their findings can be applied to television and film because both of these media are controlled by the “in” group (Anglo elite) and both media strive, whether consciously or unconsciously, to maintain the status quo. According to Chomsky “the media is a system for communicating messages and symbols to the general populace. It is their function to amuse, entertain, and inform, and to inculcate individuals with the values, beliefs, and codes of behavior that will integrate them into the institutional structures of the larger society” (1). In order to maintain the status quo the “in” group expects certain stereotypical images of the border and its residents in order to justify them as outsiders and continue to categorize them as the “other”. Stereotypical images used in stories about Latino immigration and crime help to reinforce the position of the “in” group. They do so by sending out a message that all that is different is not as worthy and cannot hold a higher position in society. The media continues to provide stereotypical images by covering mostly negative stories about the Latino community and Hollywood studios do the same by casting Latino characters in mostly negative roles. The 2005 NAHJ study found that:

From 1995 to 2004, the networks aired an estimated 140,000 stories. Of those, only 1,201 stories, or 0.85%, were about Latinos. Immigration and crime have been the dominant topics for Latino stories over the past 10
48

years. Out of 1,201 stories, these two topics have accounted for 36 percent of coverage.

(2005: 3)

The repetition of stereotypical images by the media reinforces the status quo.

Chomsky posits:

…a propaganda model suggests that the societal purpose of the media is to inculcate and defend the economic, social, and political agenda of privileged groups that dominate the domestic society and the state. The media serve this purpose in many ways: through selection of topics, distribution of concerns, framing of issues, filtering of information, emphasis and tone, and by keeping debate within the bounds of acceptable premises.

(298)

Borrowing from Allport’s language (to examine Chomsky’s ideas), Chomsky discusses the value assigned to stories that affect or threaten the “in” group and the value assigned to stories that do not pose an immediate threat to the “in” group or their ideology. He believes the value of a story can be determined by its victims. They will be classified as either worthy or unworthy victims depending on where they are from. Chomsky states:

A propaganda system will consistently portray people abused in enemy states as worthy victims, whereas those treated with equal or greater severity by its own government or clients will be unworthy. The evidence
of worth may be read from the extent and character of attention and indignation.

(37)

Chomsky goes on to give the following example of a Polish priest, Jerzey Popieluszko, murdered by the Polish police in October of 1984 as well as the coverage by the media of priests murdered within the U.S. sphere of influence (those countries considered “friendly” by the U.S.). Chomsky writes, “in our model, Popieluszko, murdered in an enemy state, will be a worthy victim, whereas priests murdered in our client states in Latin America will be unworthy” (52). The governments of Latin America are considered friendly to the United States therefore they are not questioned. Government officials are not pressed for information nor are they held responsible by the United States. During the Cold War, anything and everything that happened in that sphere was questioned and investigated. This was done because those governments posed a threat to U.S. power, ideology and status quo.

Chomsky’s description of worthy and unworthy victims holds today. Immigrant deaths are an important example of unworthy victims. The evening network newscasts in both the United States and Mexico, when covering a story on border crossings, focus on the number of immigrants that have died crossing the border or the number of people caught at the border. Newscasts on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border do not usually mention details of the victims. Specific reasons for the crossing are usually left out. These victims simply become numbers. Since Mexico is considered a friend to the U.S., border
deaths are not given much attention by the press or the government. They are reported but they are not usually investigated in depth and only make the headlines when the numbers are high.

It should also be noted that competition between the networks for advertisers plays a key role in story selection. For advertisers, the idea is to attract viewers. Most advertisers believe that news of day stories will increase the number of viewers much more than investigative reports. According to the Administration and Cost of Elections Project (ACE), "television viewership is regularly monitored by advertisers and by broadcasters. Ratings (or indices establishing viewership patterns and numbers) are used to determine when to place advertisements and the cost of these" (2004). Investigative reports tend to have low ratings. While advertising plays a role, it is important to note that in depth stories about border crossers do not receive more attention or more in depth analysis because of the media’s tendency to maintain the established power relation. These stories are given very little attention because the victims are part of the “out” group, they form part of the “other”.

According to the 2005 NAHJ study, the stories about Latinos and Latino issues made up less than one percent of all nightly news coverage. The aforementioned study found that “in 2004, out of an estimated 16,000 news stories that aired on ABC, CBS, NBC and CNN evening newscasts, a scant 115 stories, or .72 percent, focused centrally and exclusively on Latinos or Latino related issues” (2005:6). The subjects covered by the evening news were also quite limited. The same study found the following:
Immigration made up more than one third of all stories, with 40. Human interest stories finished a distant second 14 stories followed by homeland security, 12 stories and elections and politics 10 stories. The dominant topic, immigration, focused on undocumented immigration.

(2005:7)

There was also very little time dedicated to Latino stories. According the same 2005 NAHJ study, “airing shorter stories is problematic because it produces a ripple effect in the quality of coverage. Less time is devoted to story development. Fewer sources and perspectives are explored. Fewer Latinos are seen or heard” (2005:8). Undocumented immigration dominated and defined the news coverage of Latinos in 2004. Many of the stories focused on the effort of the US government and vigilante group’s intent to curb immigration. These stories analyzed had images of undocumented immigrants crossing the U.S. border. Undocumented immigrants were depicted as invaders threatening the United States. The limited scope of stories about Latinos leaves viewers with a negative idea about the Latino community.

Many changes have taken place in the newsrooms over the years and as Chomsky notes in the introduction to Take the Rich off Welfare (1996):

The major media are large corporations, owned by and interlinked with even larger conglomerates. Like other corporations, they sell a product to a market. The market is advertisers - that is, other businesses. The product is audiences, [and] for the elite media, [they're] relatively
privileged audiences. So we have major corporations selling fairly wealthy and privileged audiences to other businesses. Not surprisingly, the picture of the world presented reflects the narrow and biased interests and values of the sellers, the buyers and the product.

(iii)

Network newscasts no longer function as they once did. According to Journalism.org’s “State of the News Media 2005” report:

In the 1990s, cable news networks replaced network television for many Americans as the primary source for breaking news, just as in the 1960s television supplanted newspapers. In the new millennium, a broadband-enabled, always-on Internet threatens to usurp those cable news networks. The recent tsunami disaster, The New York Times noted, marked the first time significant numbers of Americans turned to blogs for breaking news.

(2005)

Due to the change in viewing styles, the emphasis is on headlines, quick attention grabbing shots and less time to develop a story. The story has to look and feel a certain way because that is what the public expects. The story must also appeal to the largest audience possible, to the demographic that watches the show. It should also try to appeal to and recruit new viewers. The reality is that the news is driven by sponsorship and ratings. The aforementioned
elements are what keep the show on the air, pay the talent, keep the organization running 24 hours a day and ultimately pay newsroom salaries.

D. MAS’UD ZAVARZADEH
Films as Ideological Investments:

In Seeing Films Politically, Zavarzadeh analyzes films and posits that even the most seemingly “innocent” films are sites of ideological investment. He believes that the act of watching films is a political act, more than an experience of pleasure; it is a lesson where the viewer is taught and placed in his/her position in society. Zavarzadeh believes films reproduce the ideological discourses needed to maintain the status quo. Films are not just aesthetic spaces but political spaces that contest or naturalize/reinforce the existing social order. According to Zavarzadeh the aforementioned reinforcement happens in the filmic space he calls the “tale”. He writes:

…the tale: the way that a film offers a narrative…The film exerts its greatest cultural impact through its tale. By means of its tale the film naturalizes the limits of ideology, and then, by appealing to the commonsensical “obviousness” it has produced, the film instructs the audience on how to make sense of the global reality of the culture – how to fit together the details of reality to compose a coherent model of relations and coherence through which an all encompassing picture of the real emerges. Within the frame of that picture, the viewer situates herself in the world her culture allows her to inhabit.
The “tale” serves to situate a person in his/her particular social class. The “tale”, according to Zavarzadeh, is produced by the dominant ideology and naturalizes this ideology by presenting it as a given, as obvious.

Films are often regarded as interpretations of reality but they do not report the world, films produce the world. “Reality” is constructed each time a film is produced. The constructed “reality” is presented as natural in order to reinforce the existing power relations. Zavarzadeh posits:

…reality is “constructed” by a society’s political, economic, theoretical, and ideological practices (including signifying activities such as film making and film watching). Ideology participates in the construction of cultural reality by providing a (seemingly) coherent and integrated view of life and a sustained theory of reality for members of a culture, thus making them available to a battery of “obvious” answers that give the historically contingent world a look of naturalness and permanence. By representing the historical as natural, ideology facilitates the perpetuation of the dominant social arrangements and thus guarantees the continuation of the ruling asymmetrical power relations…

Zavarzadeh goes on to note the importance of suppressing the productive role of film in constituting the “real”. This relationship must be hidden in order to further
the political and economic interest of the dominant group. According to Zavarzadeh, “through such suppression the alliance of dominant interests (the hegemonic class, gender, and race groups), whose values and ideas constitute the cognitive environment of a society, manages to represent its interested view of reality as the real itself and thus endow it with inevitability” (95). Domination is obscured in films, and other cultural texts, in order to legitimize the dominant ideology as natural and maintain the status quo.

E. ADDITIONAL RESEARCH ON MEDIATED STEREOTYPES

As mentioned in the beginning of the chapter there are other critical works, which will be examined briefly: Stuart Hall, Alberto Sandoval Sánchez, and Néstor García Canclini.

According to Hall in his work Encoding/Decoding, encoding occurs when the media takes information and ideas and puts them into linguistic and visual codes. These coded texts are designed to, according to Hall, "enforce, win plausibility for and command as legitimate a decoding of the event within the limit of dominant definitions in which it has been connotatively signified" (134).

Decoding occurs when a reader and or spectator begins to form ideas about the text. An important aspect of the decoding process is conscious and unconscious identification with certain symbols or events occurring within a text. This means that a text, a book or a movie, is not simply passively accepted by the audience. There is an element of activity involved. The person negotiates the meaning of the text. The meaning depends on the cultural background of the person and
that background can explain how some readers accept a reading of a text while others reject it. This aspect is very important when dealing with mediated stereotypes and why some readers accept the negative image as true while others reject it.

Sandoval Sanchez’s work, “José, can you see?: Latinos on and off Broadway”, applies to the roles of Latinos specifically in theatre but it can also be applied to films since the focus of the work is typecasting and how it happens. Sandoval Sánchez divides his book into two theater-like parts. "Act One: A Critical Reading of Latino/a Representations on Broadway," looks at the careers of two Latino cultural icons, Carmen Miranda and Desi Arnaz, who were both hailed and criticized for their performances. "Act Two: Latino/a Self-Representations in Theatrical Productions," takes a closer look at contemporary theater, specifically AIDS theater, US Latina playwriting, and the construction of bilingual and bicultural identities. Sandoval Sánchez argues that Arnaz and Miranda created images of the Latino community on Broadway that contributed "significantly to the contemporary stereotypical characterizations of U.S. Latino/as". Sandoval Sánchez also analyzes the then-prevailing attitudes toward Latin America and their effect on America's expectations of Latino/as. Noting that mediated stereotypes helped create Anglo models of the Latin “other”, he points to the common views during the 1920s of Latin America as a feminized and sexualized other. Citing other historical markers such as Franklin D. Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy and the emergence of film, Sandoval Sánchez stresses that the success of Arnaz and Miranda was partly a product of an
American society that had been prepared to accept the two stars’ representations of the Latino community as truth.

García Canclini’s, *Culturales Híbridas: Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad*. This text analyzes the influence of the media on Latin American societies and culture. García Canclini illustrates a critical image of Mexican society well on its way to a global century in which the U.S. market is more important than the Mexican. According to García Canclini, postmodern societies are in a transformation process and have lost touch with what is best for them. In looking to the United States as something to emulate, what happens when the images they are buying into have negative depictions of the Latino community? Negative depictions of Latinos in the media play a strong role in the formation of self-identity. Especially in Latin American cultures that admire the United States and are beginning to value a foreign position, that of the United States, more than their own.

Latinos are the largest ethnic minority in the United States and even though the networks are aware of this fact very little progress has been made on both the network news small screen and the Hollywood big screen. Large Hollywood studios continue to produce films with stereotypical Latino characters and network news has not adjusted the focus of its coverage of the Latino community. Even though the country is undergoing a historic demographic shift, television and film viewers have learned very little about the Latino community beyond the mediated stereotypes that are played and repeated constantly. Stereotypes leave viewers with the idea and image that Latinos are a problem
population, that they are people living on the fringes of U.S. society and that they rarely make, if at all, any positive contributions to society. These negative depictions affect the Latino community in many ways. Stereotypes limit the ability of young Latinos to identify with positive role models on television. Goodman’s research, as previously examined, illustrates the damage of self-stereotyping on children. Allport’s research on stereotypes as beliefs and how they function in society explains how powerful stereotypes can be. Chomsky posits stereotypes as vehicles to maintain the status quo and how the media serves this purpose. Stereotypes of a group of people can affect the way society views them, and change society’s expectations of them. With enough exposure to a stereotype, society may come to view it as a reality rather than a chosen representation.
CHAPTER TWO: FILM IN THE UNITED STATES

Hollywood Films and Mediated Representations of Latinos and the United States – Mexico Border:

In this chapter I will examine the mediated representations of Latinos and the United States – Mexico border in Hollywood films. I will also analyze how the lack of Latinos both in front and behind the camera contributes to the negative depiction of Latinos. The theories of Noam Chomsky, Charles Ramírez Berg and Gordon Allport will be analyzed to explain why stereotypes still exist in Hollywood films, how they function, and how they affect the Latino community. Also included in this chapter is Mas’ud Zavarzadeh’s Seeing Films Politically (1991) which examines films as political spaces that naturalize the status quo. Andrew Wood “How would you like an El Camino? U.S. Perceptions of Mexico in Two Recent Hollywood Films” (2001) analyzes the representation of Mexico and Mexicans in films, and how they are portrayed in the context of U.S.-Mexico relations. Critical works by Rosa Linda Fregoso The Bronze Screen (1999), Christine List’s Chicano Images: Refiguring Ethnicity in Mainstream Film (1996), Gary Keller’s Chicano Cinema (1985), and Jack Beckham’s essay “Border Policy/Border Cinema: placing Touch of Evil, The Border, and Traffic in the American Imagination” (2005) are also included in this chapter. Several films will be examined. While there are a few films that do present Latinos and the U.S.-Mexico border in a positive light my focus is on the majority of Hollywood films,
which rely on stereotypes to depict Latino characters and the border. *Scarface* (Brian De Palma, 1983), *Man on Fire* (Tony Scott, 2004), *Against all Odds* (Taylor Hackford, 1984), and *Blood In Blood Out* (Taylor Hackford, 1993) among others will be briefly examined. The first section of this chapter will focus on the lack of minorities in the Hollywood film industry and the aforementioned films.

The second section will focus specifically on two films, *The Border* (Tony Richardson, 1982) and *Traffic* (Steven Soderbergh, 2000).

**A. BACKGROUND:**

In 2002 the UCLA study “Ready for Primetime” concluded that ethnic "minorities are even more underrepresented in key behind-the-scenes creative and decision-making positions than they are on the television screen” (2002:3). Many analysts are concerned that the dearth of minority executives, producers, directors and screenwriters is fueling the tendency to ignore or misrepresent ethnic groups. The NAACP’s 2000 survey, “Out of Focus”, of Hollywood and Beverly Hills screenwriters found that only 7 percent of the 839 respondents were members of ethnic minority groups. The study concluded that the lack of diversity among movie writers and producers also directly affects how minorities are portrayed on the big screen. In 2000, The Screen Actor’s Guild (SAG) in conjunction with the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute (TRPI) released “Still Missing: Latinos In and Out of Hollywood” which noted that only 22.1 percent of all roles in 2000 went to performers of color (Latinos being considered part of this group) – a drop from the 1999 figure in the study also released by SAG/TRPI “Missing in Action: Latinos In and Out of Hollywood” (1999) of 22.9 percent. According to
the Director’s Guild, ethnic minorities are similarly underrepresented in the Guild itself, where they make up only 19 percent of the union’s membership, and in the Director’s Guild (DGA), with only an 8 percent minority membership (DGA: 2002). These numbers include all ethnic minorities and what can be inferred is that the actual number of Latinos involved in front of or behind the camera is much smaller. In 1999 a group of Latino producers and academics concerned with these issues formed the National Association of Latino Independent Producers (NALIP). NALIP was created in order to counter under-representation, address the professional needs of Latino/Latina independent producers, and to cultivate Latino talent behind the lens. The development of Latino talent is crucial in order to create alternative group images.

In the 2000 Census, Latinos accounted for one out of nine Americans. By 2020 one in six Americans will be of Latin American origin. The SAG/TRPI 2000 study “Still Missing: Latinos in and out of Hollywood” found the following:

With this surge in population comes enormous buying power. National Latino buying power in 1998 was $404 billion annually, making the U.S. Latino consumer market among the top 20 largest consumers markets in the world…Latino families spend about 4 percent of their after tax income on entertainment.

(2000:1)

According to the same TRPI/SAG study “In 1998 Latinos spent $73.27 per family per year on admissions (movies, theatre, opera, and ballet), compared with $49.19 per family for blacks and $97.36 for non Hispanic whites” (2000:2). The
significant spending power of the Latino community and the much discussed population boom has not caused Hollywood to take a closer look at the makeup of the film industry, Latino's still remain one of the most under-represented ethnic minority groups in film and television.

There is a noticeable lack of Latinos on the screen. The Screen Actors Guild (SAG) reported in 2000 that, “Latino actors represented just 4.3 percent of SAG members in 1999…Latino directors, similarly, represented only 2.3 percent of all directors…Latinos rarely occupy more than 2 percent of the available jobs in the film and television industry” (2000). The SAG study shows that Latinos are hard to find both in front and behind the camera. When Latinos are featured in films the majority of the roles are stereotypical representations. Latino actors in Hollywood were surveyed and asked specific questions about stereotypes and casting. The 1999 SAG/TRPI study, “Missing in Action: Latinos In and Out of Hollywood” asked respondents if they agreed with the following statement, “Latinos must fit a particular stereotype in order to be cast as Latinos. Latinos who do not fit the stereotype do not receive Latino roles” (1999:5). The aforementioned study found that more than half of the respondents agreed with the statement and that they felt they had been rejected for roles where they did not meet the Latino stereotype wanted for certain roles. Latino looks have become narrow and have been depicted negatively. The Latino looks preferred by Hollywood do not reflect the reality of Latinos. They reflect commercial considerations, inculcated prejudices, and the lack of understanding/familiarity of the Latino community by Hollywood producers, casting agents, and directors.
Stereotypical roles are limiting and affect the Latino community in many ways. As previously examined, Allport’s research on stereotypes can be applied to film because the beliefs the dominant group (Anglo elite) shares about the “out” group or “other” manifest themselves in negative depictions of the “other” in both film and television. Mediated stereotypes affect the perception of the “other” and place them in a position of disadvantage. Allport’s research indicates that stereotypes are not just frames of mind but beliefs. Stereotypes have a power that affects both, as he described them, the “in” group and “out” group. The “out” group, those that are not part of the majority, immediately become “them”, those that are different from us. The “in” group, those that are in fact part of the majority automatically become “us”, the dominant group. Therefore, “they” or “them” are always incomplete and imperfect. Once formed, “stereotypes cause their possessor to view future evidence in terms of the available categories, thus leading to placement of what they associate as “us” in a positive light and “them” in a negative light” (31). Stereotypes are turned into inculcated beliefs due to their constant repetition. Constant repetition, of stereotypes in film, ensures that they will be passed on to a large audience along with the ideology of the Anglo elite. Zavarzadeh argues that the empirical, in this case film, is not a real reflection of reality but a product of the dominant ideology. He believes that seemingly innocent films which are considered entertainment are sites of ideological investment. Zavarzadeh posits:

The unchecked domination of ideology limits historical possibilities and produces a world in response to the needs of the dominant class, the
privileged gender and the hegemonic race in a society; consequently it subjugates all other needs.

(1)

Films are chosen, financed, and produced under the terms of the dominant group ideology. Films also reproduce, according to Zavarzadeh, the ideological discourses needed to establish and make the existing social order appear natural.

Movies teach and the repetition of stereotypes in film is damaging to the Latino community. Carlos Cortés in “Who is Maria? What is Juan? Dilemmas of Analyzing the Chicano Image in U.S. Films” (1992) states the following:

…the media serve as pervasive, relentless, lifelong educators. This includes not only the nonfiction media, which purport to present facts and analysis, but also the so called entertainment media, which have a major impact in shaping beliefs, attitudes, values, perceptions, and knowledge and influencing decisions and action.

(75)

The repetition of stereotypes reinforces, validates, and perpetuates them. The more these stereotypes are used in film the more the viewer begins to accept them as true. Negative depictions of Latinos, besides perpetuating stereotypes, also help to maintain the status quo.

Chomsky’s findings, as examined previously, regarding the media as a vehicle to maintain the status quo, can be applied to film because the Hollywood
film industry is controlled and managed by members of the “in” group (Anglo elite). The film industry hegemony strives, whether consciously or unconsciously, to maintain the status quo. In order to do so the “in” group expects certain images of the border and its residents in order to continue treating them or justifying the treatment of them as the “out/other” group. The justification of mistreatment follows what Frances Aparicio and Susana Chávez examine in their book (which is based on Edward Said's *Orientalism*) *Tropicalizations: Transcultural Representations of Latinidad* (1997). Aparicio and Chávez Silverman posit, “to *tropicalize*, as we define it, means to trope, to imbue a particular space, geography, group, or nation with a set of traits, images, and values. To tropicalize from a privileged first world location is undoubtedly a hegemonic move” (8). They imply that Latinos are not believed or represented as having potential for economic, political, or cultural agency. *Tropicalizations* serve to produce negative images of the Latino community in order to reinforce the ideology of the dominant group.

George Comstock, *Television: What’s On, Who’s Watching, and What it Means* (1999), focuses on television but I believe his findings on the reinforcement of stereotypes is applicable to film as well. Comstock writes:

…television is a powerful reinforcer of the status quo. The ostensible mechanisms are the effects of its portrayals on public expectations and perceptions. Television portrayals and particularly violent drama are said to assign roles of authority
power, success, failure, dependence, and vulnerability in a manner that matches the real life social hierarchy, thereby strengthening that hierarchy by increasing its acknowledgement among the public and by failing to provide positive images from members of social categories occupying a subservient position. Content analyses of television drama support the contention that portrayals reflect normative status.

Comstock’s quote states that TV dramas reflect (match) a reality, I do not agree with that portion of his statement. What is crucial in the aforementioned statement is the fact that television portrayals can reinforce the status quo and that those stereotypes become incorporated in the viewers perceptions and expectations. The incorporation of these stereotypes into a normative status legitimizes the status quo. Zavarzadeh’s work suggests that this is done by the way a film offers a narrative, this “tale” as termed by Zavarzadeh instructs the viewer how to make sense of what the viewer is observing.

Movies and other entertainment media constantly repeat and legitimize racial, ethnic, and social hierarchies. By repeatedly depicting Latinos in a limited sphere of action, the media contributes to the shaping and reinforcement of viewer reception. If the viewer does not have a frame of reference this mediated stereotype can then easily become a reality for the viewer. One of the dangers with stereotypes is that they begin, over time, to become part of what the viewer
expects and believes to be accurate. Cortés posits, “movies provide information about race, ethnicity, culture, and foreignness. People cannot be at all places at all times, nor can they travel into the past. Therefore, they must rely on mediating forms of communication, the mass media and such other sources as books—to engage today’s world as well as to explore the past” (80). People with little knowledge about the Latino community can easily believe the negative depictions featured in films with Latino characters.

Hollywood studio films consistently feature Latinos in minor roles, often as maids, janitors, drug lords or gang members rather than featuring them in lead roles portraying upper or middle class citizens. I am not arguing for this type of representation over other positive Latino roles, but it would be beneficial to make available a large range of roles that can be played by Latinos. According to Fregoso, "Latinos in television and film are often used as background to offset other main characters. At best, they come off as uneducated and underpaid citizens of ridicule and at worst, they are depicted as immoral, lazy, or even criminals” (xvii). Negative depictions can have serious effect on Latino youth if they self stereotype according to the characters depicted in films. Self stereotyping can limit potential, stifle self development, and can turn into a self fulfilling prophecy. As noted by Vicki Mayer in her book Producing Dreams, Consuming Youth (2003):

In my experiences in working with Mexican American adolescents, mass media helped youth stake out identities as not only members of their communities but also as certain kinds of members reaffirming two
decades of media audience studies that show people interpret media to express their nationality, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, and age.

(xv)

The youths surveyed by Mayer were constantly reminded by the media that they were not like the majority of the faces they watched on television or in films. The difference was apparent economically and racially. Some of the children classified themselves as Americans but poor. The inclusion of the term poor in the self identification shows that the child is placing him or herself in a social hierarchy. By doing so the child is applying the dominant ideology taught to him/her through various media. The child is in fact helping to maintain the status quo.

According to the study “Fall Colors 2003-04” (2005) conducted by Children Now, a non-profit group which studies the effects of television on children, found that 61% of minority young people report that when kids their same age are in the news, they are involved in crime, drugs, or violence, and children of all races agree that people of color are portrayed more negatively than whites. The aforementioned study posits:

This can contribute to negative self-esteem and other social problems among these children. It may even create a self-fulfilling prophecy because these Latin children may conform to the destructive images they have been assigned due to their lack of self worth. Children are aware of what they are watching, they absorb these images, and it affects their perception of themselves and of their world.
The study also indicates that Latino children were aware that non-Latino white characters play most of the professional roles such as doctors, secretaries, managers, and police officers, while ethnic minorities are often shown as busboys, gardeners, and other low status characters. Children Now also found that, “these children tend to associate positive characteristics such as wealth, education, and high academic achievement with white characters on television, and negative characteristics such as criminal behavior, laziness, apathy, and low socio-economic status with characters of color” (2005:14). Non-Latino children also need to be exposed to these images as well to prevent them from forming an inaccurate picture of Latinos, especially if they have limited firsthand exposure to Latino culture.

The repetition of stereotypes, as previously discussed, can lead people who do not have a frame of reference to believe the stereotype depicted on the screen. According to Allport, stereotypes can become beliefs because they “have the slippery propensity of accommodating themselves somehow to the negative attitude which is much harder to change…Thus the belief system has a way of slithering around to justify the more permanent attitude” (13).

Zavarzadeh’s ideas agree with Allport’s theory that stereotypes can become beliefs, but Zavarzadeh goes further and states that as the viewer takes in these ideas he/she is also placed in a particular social class. According to Zavarzadeh:

Films are not enclosed constructs…but are instances of cultural acts in terms of which the viewer negotiates his way through the realities of daily
practices—all of which are organized...to confirm the dominant social
relations...The “tale” of the film...constitutes the individual as a “free
person”...but in actuality situates him as belonging to a particular social
class.

Hollywood has a longstanding storytelling history and included in that is
the stereotyping of Latinos. The hero in Hollywood films is usually portrayed as a
white, middle aged, upper middle class, heterosexual, Protestant, white male.
The hero favored by Hollywood is featured in several films, these are just a few
eamples, such as:  
  Patriot Games (Phillip Noyce, 1992),  
  Falling Down (Joel Schumacher, 1993),  
  Clear and Present Danger (Phillip Noyce, 1994),  
and  
  Air Force One (Wolfgang Petersen, 1997).  In the aforementioned films, the narrative
revolves around the hero, his surroundings and other characters are presented
as inferior in order to highlight the virtues of the protagonist. The other
characters are usually of a different ethnic background than the hero. These
characters function only to make the protagonist appear morally, physically and
intellectually superior. For example,  
  Clear and Present Danger uses this
technique.  Harrison Ford, the quintessential U.S. hero, plays Jack Ryan, a CIA
analyst.  Ryan becomes involved in a war fought by the U.S. government against
a Colombian drug cartel.  Ryan goes into Colombia to rescue U.S. covert forces
and ends up in a confrontation with the Colombian drug cartel. After many shoot
outs and other larger than life scenes such as Ryan running on rooftops to make
it onto a helicopter, he exposes the truth and defeats the cartel.  Ryan is pictured
as the epitome of moral and intellectual superiority. Ramírez Berg notes that the
standard message in these films is one of maintaining the status quo:

The status quo posited in these movies as the best of all worlds is one that
is safe, peaceful, and prosperous. But it is also one that is white, upper
middle class, Protestant, English speaking, one that conforms to Anglo
norms of beauty, health, intelligence, and so forth. This WASP way of life
is asserted as a norm worth fighting for, as what must be regained if the
film is to deliver its happy ending. In such a scheme, not just Latinos but
all people of color represent an inherent threat to the status quo simply
because they are markedly different from the established WASP norm.

(67)

Jack Ryan is responsible for saving and maintaining the “WASP” way of life.
Ryan must battle evil (in this case Columbian drug lords) to maintain the status
quo because, as previously stated, it is the norm worth fighting for.

In order to continue producing films that feature the aforementioned U.S.
hero and place him in situations where he will triumph, the association between
Latinos and violence is becoming more common. This association reinforces
viewer beliefs that the Latino community is violent and corrupt. Rodríguez posits:

The now long-standing and growing association in the media of
particularly Latino images with violence is becoming ever more obvious.
This association began with the early bandidos of the silent screen; took
voice in the westerns of the subsequent period; moved to urban settings in
the 1960’s and 1970’s with images of juvenile delinquents; and continues in the 1980’s and 1990’s with gangs, criminals, and drug lords.

(180)

The strong association between Latinos and crime is featured in the following films, *Scarface, Blood In Blood Out, Mi Vida Loca* (Allison Anders, 1993), *Carlito’s Way* (Brian De Palma, 1983), and *Man on Fire*. Violent images of the Latino community played out in big budget films such as *Scarface, and Carlito’s Way* help reinforce the position of the Anglo elite by sending out a message that all that is different is not as worthy and cannot hold a positive position in society. The lead characters featured in both films are Latino criminals who cannot redeem themselves and ultimately die at the end.

*Scarface*, for example, a film about a Cuban refugee, Tony Montana (Al Pacino), whose only goal is to make money in the United States by dealing drugs. Rodríguez posits, “In this film it is hard to identify a single positive Latino character and practically everyone “deservedly” dies at the end” (181). The characters and stereotypes are over the top, the use of violence and profanity is so excessive that the film’s director Brian De Palma placed a disclaimer at the end of the film stating that not all members of the Cuban community were violent criminals and that they had in fact made many contributions to American society. By making this statement De Palma acknowledges the power of films and how they can reinforce and perpetuate negative stereotypes.

Yet another example of Latinos as violent criminals can be seen in *Man on Fire*. John Creasy (Denzel Washington), a former CIA assassin drifts into Mexico...
to visit an old friend and fellow ex-agent Rayburn (Christopher Walken). Rayburn
fixes him up with a job as bodyguard to 9-year-old Pita Ramos (Dakota Fanning),
the daughter of a Mexican industrialist Samuel (Marc Anthony) and his American
wife, Lisa (Radha Mitchell). The family hires Creasy to prevent their daughter
from being abducted. This film is set in Mexico and presents all of the Mexican
characters as criminals, corrupt cops, or domestic help. The heroes of the story
are Creasy, a washed up ex counterterrorism agent and Manzano (Giancarlo
Giannini), a former Italian Interpol officer. There are no prominent positive Latino
roles or messages in this film. Creasy finds himself in Mexico surrounded by
only corrupt and violent Mexicans. Once Pita is abducted Creasy vows to find
her and destroy those that kidnapped her. Creasy is featured as the only one
who can save her. This film implies that even an alcoholic and washed up ex
counterterrorism agent can triumph and redeem himself because deep down he
still has his U.S. values. The one prominent Latino in the film, Samuel, Pita’s
father is also a criminal because he is involved in her kidnapping. Samuel set up
Pita’s kidnapping in order to profit. The negative stereotypes depicted in this film
reinforce the belief held by many in the United States that Mexico and its people
are lawless. According to The Hollywood Reporter “The portrait of the country
and its citizens is about as bleak as any studio picture ever made, essentially
portraying Mexico as a cesspool of crime and corruption reaching upward into
the social elite” (2005). The stereotypes used in the film are not necessarily
Mexican stereotypes; they are Latino stereotypes held by Hollywood. Hollywood
does not differentiate between Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela or any other Latin American country.

The location of the films does not matter; they could have been shot in any Latin American country or in any run down neighborhood in Los Angeles or Miami. Hollywood simply moves the stereotypes from one space to another. All of the aforementioned films were fielded by network media's interest in these stories. The drug trade, Latino gangs, and the rapidly rising rates of kidnappings in Latin America have been popular topics on network newscasts.

Ramírez Berg in his essay “Stereotyping in Films in General and of the Hispanic in Particular” (1997) published in Latin Looks states:

There are few-very, very few-non-stereotypical portrayals of Hispanics in Hollywood cinema. Before Zoot Suit (1981), La Bamba (1987), and Stand and Deliver (1988)—all films with Hispanics in key creative positions—it is difficult to find examples of Hispanic characters in mainstream Hollywood cinema who are complex and self-determining.

(104)

Positive Latino characters are few and far in between when Latinos do not play roles in creative positions behind the camera. Most Hollywood representations of Latinos are done through stereotypes that reinforce the existing hegemony.

It is not only Latinos who are constantly depicted negatively through stereotypes; the border is also depicted negatively. The United States – Mexico
border has been a topic of contemporary film for decades in both fiction and non-fiction films. It has been depicted using a formula with largely U.S.-originated stereotypes; crime ridden, excessively violent, and dominated by the drug trade. The border is also depicted as an escape route; a boundary where the law ends or a place where the law does not apply to Anglos. Films such as: The Chase (Adam Rifkin, 1994), Blue Streak (Les Mayfield, 1999), and The Getaway (Roger Donaldson, 1994) depict the border as a lawless destination. Ramírez Berg believes Anglo characters must have an explicit reason for crossing the border:

In most Hollywood movies about the Mexican border, the underlying assumption is that Americans must be compelled to cross the boundary line – why else would they opt to leave their perfect life in the USA? People in the movies don’t just go to Mexico, they have to be pushed into going there.

Hollywood’s “Mexi-go assumption”, that Americans must be coerced into entering Mexico, means that in the movies there must always be an explicit reason for a character’s heading for Mexico.

(199)

Characters heading for Mexico are usually running from the law. For example in Against all Odds, Terry Brogan (Jeff Bridges), an aging football player, takes a job from a questionable friend to track down his girlfriend, Jessie (Rachel Ward), who has runaway to Mexico. Terry goes to Mexico, finds her and
falls in love with her. The movie then continues with Terry and Jesse fleeing from the authorities and from her ex boyfriend. Mexico is the backdrop for the two main characters as they run from the law. This film’s use of Mexico as a destination for people running from the law implies that Mexican law can be out run and if and when the law does catch up to them it does not apply because of their privileged position as Anglos. The Getaway is another story of ill-fated romance on the run. Doc McCoy (Alex Baldwin) is released from a Mexican prison with the help of gangster, Jack Benyon (James Woods), who wants Doc's help in the hold-up of a racetrack. The robbery is successful, but a guard is murdered. Doc also finds out that Carol (Kim Basinger), his girlfriend, has had an affair with Benyon. Carol shoots Benyon and the two flee to Mexico and freedom, yet again turning Mexico into the ultimate getaway. These films infer that the law or the application of the law stops at the border. According to Ali Behdad in his essay “INS and outs: Producing Delinquency at the Border” (1998):

The U.S.-Mexico border has been portrayed in the popular discourse as in a state of siege. As suggested by the titles of such Journalistic reports as “Losing Control of the Borders” or “Invasion from Mexico: It Just Keeps Growing”,

The border is represented as a battleground where the Border Patrol strives to defend the nation by upholding its “Border Integrity” against “The swelling tide of illegal
Mexican aliens”.

(109)

These stereotypes serve to make the “other”, in this case Latinos, appear anti establishment and therefore, a threat to U.S. ideology. For example the 1993 film, Blood In Blood Out, was centered on Latino gang life both in and outside of the prison system. While there were some Anglo inmates in the film, every character of color was depicted as a criminal and only Anglo characters were featured in positive roles. The movie follows the lives of three young Mexican American males, Miklo (Damian Chapa), Paco (Benjamin Bratt), and Cruz (Jesse Borrego). Miklo ends up in jail, Paco gets out of the barrio by joining the Marines and Cruz becomes a drug addict. Their lives are played out amid street fights and drive by shootings. It can be inferred from this film that the only way to get out of the barrio is to join the Marines. By joining the armed forces Latinos no longer appear anti establishment and their ideology does not threaten that of the dominant group in the United States. The aforementioned film suggests that one way a Latino can “re-pledged” his allegiance to the United States is by becoming a member of the armed forces.

Another set of stereotypes can be seen in the film, Fools Rush In, (Andy Tennant, 1997). The main character, Isabel (Salma Hayek), comes from a large and very traditional Mexican family. Isabel has a one night stand with Alex (Mathew Perry) and becomes pregnant. The character of Isabel combines two of Ramírez Berg’s stereotype classifications, the “Dark Lady” and the “Harlot”. According to Ramírez Berg, “Since the harlot is a slave to her passions, her
conduct is simplistically attributed to her inherent nymphomania...she is basically a sex machine innately lusting for a white male” (71). Isabel is the “Harlot” because she had a one night stand with Alex but she then becomes the “Dark Lady”, a woman Alex cannot get out of his mind. Alex, and his friends joke about the culture and at one point Alex comes home to find his house painted in bright colors and decorated with a large crucifix. The stereotypes depicted in both of these films stay with viewers who have very little reference about the “other” and these same stereotypes can then turn into beliefs. Cortés posits, “If a depiction coincides with already held beliefs, it tends to reinforce them...if a movie portrays an ethnic group or nation about which the viewer knows little or has no deep feelings, that information is most likely to become part of the viewer’s personal intercultural encyclopedia” (90). The other stereotype visible in this film is the “family values” that Isabel holds dear. Family values make her “worthy” and or “acceptable” to the Anglo elite.

Hollywood has a long history of negative stereotyping and has the ability to generate popular myths. According to List, “as such, American cinema has, for years, worked its magic to manipulate popular opinion, machinating to fortify racial stereotypes, prejudice, jingoism, and hegemonic control--especially during times of political change” (21). Films have a purpose, they are not simply entertainment. David Maciel in El Norte: The U.S.-Mexican Border in Contemporary Cinema (1990) states "films are more than just amusement, for movies act as a rich source of informal education and ideas. As such, their content is never free of value judgments or ideological or political biases" (3).
Value judgments, ideological biases, and political biases found in U.S. produced films have consistently worked to establish and strengthen the “differences” between Anglos and the “other”, and can be witnessed in U.S.-produced cinema of the U.S.-Mexico border.

Cinema of the U.S.-Mexico border created in the United States has repeatedly attempted to reduce the vagueness of the border region by placing a higher value on Anglo inhabitants and their beliefs than those of Mexican inhabitants. Wood examines this phenomenon:

For nearly two hundred years, Mexico and the United States have viewed each other with suspicion...many in the United States acted on the belief that Mexicans were mustachioed machos if not banditos--a people, in other words, not to be trusted. Accordingly, media forces--initially newspapers and now cinema--have generally only added to the bad blood between the two countries through continued stereotypic portrayals and skewed ideological constructs.

(756)

Film is used to shape a nation and its identity. As previously examined, the media serve as a vehicle for communicating messages and symbols to the general public. Entertainment is one way the media inculcates individuals with beliefs deemed necessary (by the dominant group) to become part of society. This phenomenon can be applied to several of the films previously mentioned in
this chapter but I will focus on two specific examples from the Hollywood film industry: The Border, and Traffic.

B. THE BORDER AND TRAFFIC:

The Border is a film about a U.S. border patrol guard, Charlie (Jack Nicholson), who is disenchanted with his work. He and his wife, Marcy (Valerie Perrine), move to El Paso from Los Angeles so they can enjoy a higher standard of living. After relocating from the Los Angeles Border Patrol, Charlie is appalled by the level of corruption and bribery of the officers in El Paso. Border Patrol agents in El Paso are involved in running illegal aliens across the border to work as farmhands. The beginning of The Border makes clear distinctions between the ruggedly pastoral Mexico, seen in the opening sequence and subsequent montage showing María's (Elpidia Carrillo) trek north, and the urbanized and modern United States. The shots of Mexico feature rugged, undeveloped landscapes populated by, mostly, indigenous characters. The shots of Mexico feature only poor and depressed areas. The border scenes are shot with film stock that make it appear washed out and a bit grainy. The border zone is depicted as dusty, desolate, desperate and is reminiscent of the Wild West featured in many Westerns. The border wall is used as an establishing shot in the scene that shows Charlie's first day on the job with Hooker (Stacey Pickren). Charlie learns about the abundant corruption among the agents right away. He initially opts not to become involved in the corruption but eventually does in order to pay off debts. The majority of Latino characters in this film are undocumented workers and the scenes that feature
them are stereotypical depictions of border crossings, apprehensions, and images of desperate faces trying to make it across the border. There is one Latino criminal who embodies several stereotypes held about Latinos and the border. Manuel (Mike Gomez), is a successful bordello owner. Manuel's bordello, aptly named “El Paraiso” (Paradise), is the quintessential stereotype of lawless and hedonistic Mexico. The bordello offers the stereotypically dispensed vices once visitors cross the border: cerveza, tequila, whiskey, and women. María ends up working at the bordello after her child is abducted. The stereotypical depiction of the Mexican bordello on the border features Latinos as vice peddlers. Charlie (in true U.S. hero form) ends up rescuing María from the bordello. He tries to bring her to the U.S. but she is captured and returns to Mexico. Charlie redeems himself at the end of the film (for being a corrupt agent) by locating and returning María’s child. Even though the film does not vilify Mexico and Mexicans it does depict them only as poor, uneducated and desperate. The viewer is left with the impression that Mexico as a whole is populated only by poor uneducated people who are simply waiting for their chance to cross the border.

The Border depicts the U.S. – Mexico border as a lawless and crime ridden zone. Both The Border and Traffic highlight lawlessness and present Mexico and the border as a dusty trail full of outlaws and fugitives. Keller suggests that the film focuses on what he calls the “indocumentado phenomenon” and states that Hollywood films dealing with this phenomenon have never risen above the mediocre. Richard Lacayo in his review of The
Border published in the National Catholic Reporter (1982) suggests, "Mexicans in 'The Border' appear mostly as a wretched swarm in a crouch position, ever ready for that clandestine dash into Texas" (9). The "other" is clearly defined in this film. The purpose of classifying them as "others" is to maintain the ideology of the Anglo elite. According to Ramírez Berg, "the stereotypical definition of Others, therefore, has powerful ideological consequences, simultaneously marginalizing Them and establishing and maintaining an explicit Us-Them boundary" (22). Identifying the "other" also serves to immediately classify them as less than and unworthy. This has also been done with the geo-political border.

Like The Border, Traffic establishes a clear delineation between the United States and Mexico. Rural Mexico is presented in the opening scene and then the movie moves to the more industrialized United States. Beckham notes the following:

More than a split between the pastoral and technologic separates the two countries in Traffic, which uses a banner in the opening shot to announce the filmic location as Mexico, twenty miles southeast of Tijuana. The film is grainy and has a decidedly yellow (the more romantic call it sepia) tone.

The audience is then introduced to two state police officers, Javier Rodriguez (Benicio Del Toro) and Manolo Sanchez (Jacob Vargas), who are speaking Spanish. Later in the day Javier and Manolo capture some drug runners and
soon afterwards they end up crossing paths with the corrupt General Salazar (Tomas Milian). Javier and Manolo are forced to surrender the truck to Salazar. After the handover the location shifts to Columbus, Ohio. Once in Columbus, the grainyness and erratic camera movements are removed and the film is saturated with rich blue tones. Soderbergh’s use of texture and colored filters is very effective as it serves to alert the audience to what he sees as the differences between the United States, with its rich colors, and Mexico’s sickly yellow landscape. The wealth and perfection of the United States is featured in rich hues with stable shots. Mexican corruption is visually depicted in frantic handheld shots, grainy footage and yellow tones. The “other” is identified in this film via camera filters and the use of rural versus urban depictions.

Steven Soderbergh continues the use of the filter to yellow all of Mexico. Critics such as Richard Porton and Catherine Benamou have noted this technique as problematic. Porton writes the following in his review of Traffic published in Cineaste (2001):

[Soderbergh] shot the Mexican sections "through a tobacco filter" and then over-exposed the film to imbue these vignettes with an oversaturated look. Mexico, therefore, becomes a mirage-like, evanescent realm, where life is cheap and morality is infinitely expendable.

(42)

Latin American specialist Benamou (as quoted in Porton) observes that the movie "posits an historical and moral hierarchy between the postmodern United
States--which has to retrieve its moral foundations and family values--and premodern Mexico, which has presumably never been able to draw the line between the law and lawlessness" (42). Benamou's observation is important because it implies that Mexico's lawlessness is directly linked to the decay of the family and American values in the United States. This sense of lawlessness is seen throughout the film. During the opening scene, the audience is introduced to smugglers who are blatantly subverting the law as well as to corrupt federal authorities. Mexican corruption becomes part of the story early on when two American tourists ask for Javier's help in finding their stolen car. Javier explains to the couple how they will have to pay local police to make their car reappear. These scenes shot in grainy stock and with a filter imply to the viewer that Mexico is lawless.

Wood explains that by "beginning with the yellow camera filters. Soderbergh insinuates that nearly all Mexicans are somehow involved in the drug trade" (761). The yellowing of the shots in Mexico is used to implicate both the people and the land as criminals. The yellow filter is used as a visual trigger to alert the audience that the film is moving from one space to another. Wood goes on to note that "from the highest echelons of power to the street dealers and sidemen. Soderbergh's portrayal of life across the border establishes Mexico (and by extension, all of Latin America) as the fountain of evil that is the drug trade" (760). Even though the films does show the effects of supply and demand, everytime the drug czar, Judge Robert Wakefield's (Michael Douglas) daughter uses drugs the subsequent scene shows a raid on
the Mexican side of the border or some form of pressure being placed on the Mexican government. Soderburg’s film highlights only the negative, for example, his constant use of shots of ramshackle houses in Tijuana serve to reinforce the stereotype that the majority of Mexicans are poor and uneducated. The film implies that Mexico has been taken over by corruption and drugs. The film also implies that if the United States continues consuming drugs it could end up in a similar situation. Through its depiction of Mexico and Mexicans, the film not only perpetuates negative stereotypes but reinforces what the Anglo elite believe to be true about the U.S. – Mexico border; that there is no law in Mexico. While the film does deal with the severity of the drug problem, Traffic is also quick to identify Mexico as the source of corruption. According to Wood, “while taking great care to factor in the complicated U.S. side of the drug equation, Soderbergh’s film nevertheless portrays Mexico as an exoticized landscape that represents the source of drugs and corruption” (758). The negative depiction of Latinos and the border in this film help to maintain the status quo by depicting them as criminals and corruptors of the American way of life.

In conclusion, stereotypes are played out repeatedly in Hollywood films due to inculcated stereotypes and the under-representation of minorities in the industry. The issues of racism, lack of capital and lack of control over ethnic minority images are still active in Hollywood. “Symbolic Reality Bites: Women and Racial/Ethnic Minorities in Modern Film”, a 2000 study conducted by Sarah Eschholz, Jana Bufkin, and Jenny Long of the 50 top-grossing films released in
1996 revealed that 65 percent of the most prominent actors in the films were male, 80 percent were white. These numbers become less surprising when the study reveals that there are few minorities laboring on the other side of the camera. Eschholz, Bufkin and Long note the following, “In 1996, 85 percent of the writers, 93 percent of the directors and 84 percent of the producers in the Hollywood film industry were white males” (313). This is especially significant in light of the accelerating growth of minorities in America, particularly Latinos, shown in the last U.S. census. The negative depiction in film of the United States-Mexico border and its residents has become commonplace because Hollywood studio films are the dominant group’s cinema. They represent the Anglo elite and through their narratives and resolutions films typically endorse the prevailing or dominant ideology. Reality is constructed in films for the purpose of reinforcing the identity of the nation and maintaining the status quo. The camera (borrowing from Zavarzadeh) does not capture “the real”; instead it captures the “natural” world of the dominant ideology and then educates viewers in that ideology. As previously discussed, movies teach, they form a very public textbook. Evidence clearly demonstrates that feature films have contributed to stereotyping, as well as to positive or negative self-concept. It is important to understand how media affect popular opinion, and the effects of the media on the Latino culture and those who are not part of the ‘in’ group.
CHAPTER THREE

Mediated Representations of Chicanos, Mexicans, and the Border in Films Produced in Mexico:

In this chapter, I will examine films produced in Mexico and their depiction of Chicanos, Mexicans and the U.S. – Mexico border. In the first section of the chapter I will present background on the Mexican film industry and I will also analyze how the static portrayal of the border and the Mexican and Chicano community living in the United States depicted in Mexican films serves to reinforce and fix stereotypes. The theories of Charles Ramírez Berg, Noam Chomsky and Gordon Allport will be applied in this chapter. Also included is Mas’ud Zavarzadeh’s Seeing Films Politically (1991), which analyzes the viewing of films as lessons of “knowledge” where dominant group ideology is taught. David Maciel’s article, “Visions of the Other Mexico: Chicanos and Undocumented Workers in Mexican Cinema” (1985) examines the history of the two groups in films produced in Mexico. Gary Keller’s Chicano Cinema (1985) provides an extensive overview of Chicano Cinema as well as his opening paper “The Image of the Chicano in Mexican, United States, and Chicano Cinema: an Overview”. Chon Noriega’s Chicanos and Film(1992), Carl Mora’s Mexican Cinema(1982), Charles Tatum’s Chicano Popular Culture(2001), Clara Rodríguez Latin Looks(1997), Andrea Noble’s “Yéndose por la tangente” (2001), and Claire Fox’s The Fence and the River (1999), a study on representations of the U.S. – Mexico border in the media, are also included in this chapter.
The following films will be examined in the second section of the chapter: *Mojados* (Alejandro Galindo, 1977), *Raíces de sangre* (Jesús Treviño, 1977), and *El jardín del edén* (María Novaro, 1994). In the introduction to *Chicanos and Film*, Noriega states the following: “our representation for the most part has been limited to the commercial film and television industries of Hollywood and Mexico” (xxiii). The views of Hollywood and Mexico are different and each one is laden with mediated representations that function to fix negative stereotypes and reinforce the dominant ideology. In the previous chapter, I examined the depictions of Latinos and the border in Hollywood films and, in this chapter, I will analyze the views presented in Mexican films.

**A. BACKGROUND:**

Cinema has been instrumental for Mexico in depicting the Mexican community’s views towards Mexicans residing in the United States. A number of films have been produced on this specific theme since 1922. According to Noriega,

> Although these films vary in structure, ideological constructs, artistic worth, style, and narration, they nonetheless encompass the following characteristics…

(1) All of these productions have strong didactic messages, the most common being that if you emigrate to the United States only heartache, disappointment, and oppression await you. (2) Related to the previous point is that most of these films end in tragedy. The migratory experiences are consistently portrayed negatively. The main characters always return to Mexico and none of the principals ever
chooses to stay permanently in the United States; and those
Mexicans/Chicanos who do reside north of the Río Bravo often speak of a
return to their native country. (3) Mexican cinematic preoccupation with
this theme responds to internal issues, cycles of Mexican emigration to the
United States and to foreign policy.

(94)

Mexican governmental and societal concerns with the Chicano and
Mexican community in the United States have a long history. Maciel notes the
following in his article “Chicanos and Undocumented Workers”:

Mexican attitudes toward Chicanos in the 19th century were for the most
part positive, sympathetic, and nationalistic. The situation unfortunately
began to change with the advent of the new century. In the late 19th
century Mexican workers in significant numbers began to emigrate to the
U.S. Southwest in search of better economic opportunities.

(71)

Mexican emigration intensified dramatically during the Mexican Revolution of
1910. The economic and social situation in Mexico was dire and the country had
few jobs to offer. It became an economic necessity for Mexicans to search for
jobs elsewhere. The Mexicans that stayed in Mexico developed bitter feelings for
those who left. Maciel posits:

As more people left Mexico and settled in the United States, the
resentment among Mexicans grew. These feelings were compounded by
the fact that when Mexican tourists traveled to the United States and
encountered first and second generation Chicanos, the stereotype of the latter was reinforced because the majority of Chicanos did not speak their kind of Spanish.

(71)

Maciel then goes on to note, “The term pocho came into use among Mexicans to denote Chicanos”(71). This derogatory term is used to demean those in the Chicano and Mexican community considered assimilated. The belief among many Mexicans residing in Mexico is that Chicanos are ashamed of their origins or that they are “Americanized” in some form or another and have been corrupted by the United States. These negative terms and views of the Chicano and Mexican community in the United States by Mexicans residing in Mexico also function to maintain a power structure. The words of the Mexican poet Octavio Paz in El laberinto de la soledad published in 1950 (translation is from1961) states the feelings of many Mexicans (residing in Mexico) towards Chicanos:

When I arrived in the United States, I lived for a while in Los Angeles, a city inhabited by over a million persons of Mexican origin…They have lived in the city for many years, wearing the same clothes and speaking the same language as the other inhabitants, and they feel ashamed of their own origin; yet no one would mistake them for authentic North Americans…

(12)
Even though Paz is examining the *Pachuco* the same statement can be used to talk about second, third and fourth generation Mexicans and Chicanos in the United States and the ways in which they are influenced. This view of Chicanos by the Mexican community in Mexico became fixed. Allport’s research indicates, that stereotypes are not just frames of mind but that they are beliefs. For most Mexicans in Mexico, Chicanos residing in the United States denied their Mexican heritage and the Spanish language. The Mexican community in Mexico also believed that Chicanos were descendants of a lower class of citizen. As previously discussed in Chapter One, stereotypes can also exist within groups. For example, Mexicans from urban areas consider those from rural areas to be less cultured and less sophisticated. Even though they are members of the same group they do not fit certain ideals and are therefore viewed and treated as “others”. According to Allport, “class distinctions within groups is often a result of trying to free oneself from responsibilities for the handicap which the group as a whole suffers” (152). This is a form of internalized racism; groups classify their own members from within in and place them in certain categories. The Mexican community as noted by Maciel “believed that only the unskilled, the illiterate, and the poor emigrated to the United States…More important for Mexicans in influencing public opinion and shaping images and beliefs than popular literature and quasi scholarly publications on Chicanos was the cinema” (72). In order to maintain the status quo the “in” group expects certain images of the border and its residents in order to continue to categorize them as the “other”. As previously
examined, Chomsky believes that the purpose of the media is to inculcate and defend the agenda of privileged groups that dominate society and the state.

Zavarzadeh agrees with Chomsky on this point. Zavarzadeh believes that films are not simply aesthetic spaces but that they are also political spaces that "contest or naturalize the primacy of those subjectivities necessary to the status quo and suppress or privilege oppositional ones (5). This implies that films are not constructed from the inside. Films are affected by the outside; politics and economics play a role in the production of films. Films are constructed according to the ideology of the dominant group. Zavarzadeh goes on to state: "what are often regarded to be the film’s "own terms" are in fact the dominant ideology’s "own terms", which are protected in the guise of an aesthetic philosophy" (7).

Since films are the products of the dominants ideology characters are presented in ways that secure the position of the dominant group. Zavarzadeh posits: "all modes of films, in different ways, resecure the subject positions needed for reproducing the existing social relations" (13). Viewing films is more than just an entertaining way to spend a couple of hours; films pass information on to viewers. According to Zavarzadeh, “it is a “knowledge” lesson through which the subject is “taught” how to be…a “good subject” and is placed in its position in social relation (class)” (16). The “knowledge” lesson is presented in such a manner that it appears natural to the viewer, this natural appearance allows the continuation of the dominant social arrangement and secures the current power relation.
The 1940’s and 1950’s marked the golden age of Mexican films. A large number of classic films were produced during those years such as: María Candelaria (Emilio Fernández, 1944), Flor Silvestre (Emilio Fernández, 1943), Enamorada (Emilio Fernández, 1946), Nosotros los pobres (Ismael Rodríguez, 1947). Maciel attributes the decline to the same factors that led to the success of the Mexican cinema. He states:

Producers and directors relied on stars to attract audiences. Plot and quality became secondary. The bank which funded films encouraged only scripts that in its estimation would be assured of commercial success. Films became static and repetitive and could no longer compete with the ever-increasing influence of Hollywood. Audiences turned to United States and European movies for entertainment.

(74)

The Mexican film industry, after the Golden Age period came to an end, entered into a crisis.

The Mexican film industry fell into a crisis during the 1960’s due to social and political upheaval. Censorship and political turmoil, which culminated in the student massacre of 1968, sent the film industry into a deep decline as well as the scant economic investment during this period. It was not until the administration of Luis Echeverría in 1970 that the cinema would receive some interest and support. During the seventies, a private film industry arose and within a few years it appropriated the Mexican market. According to Mora, “This new industry focused on producing low cost films in a short amount of time and
with little focus on quality” (114). The end of the seventies was dominated by this type of cinema and by a new cinematic phenomenon, the "cabrito western", films shot on and about the border. These films used the American “Western” as a guide but with contemporary themes such as drug trafficking and undocumented workers. Films like La Banda Del Carro Rojo (1976) (The Red Car Gang) by Rubén Galindo and Pistoleros Famosos (1980) (Famous Gunfighters) by José Loza Martínez managed to fill the movie theaters in Mexico and Lola la Trailera (1983) (Lola the Trucker) by Raúl Fernández was a huge success. This film featured Lola (Rosa Gloria Chagoyan), a woman who becomes a truck driver in order to keep from losing her murdered father’s truck. Lola falls in love with an undercover officer and together they fight drug dealers. In the midst of all of the action is a mobile brothel, an 18-wheeler that converts into a sleazy nightclub. According to Mora, “Lola la Trailera merged the fichera movies with the action genre, usually cops versus drug dealers. In fact it spelled the end of the former and the beginning of the latter, reflecting the expansion of the drug traffic in Mexico” (159). This fichera (brothel/cabaret comedy) and action combination film was extremely successful at the box office. Mora goes on to state that:

With wooden acting, atrocious dialogue, amateurish photography, and spotty direction, the film nonetheless was a box-office success in both Mexico and the United States: it made $3.5 million ($2.5 million in the United States and $1 million in Mexico) profit on an investment of $150,000 – a powerful rationale to continue making churros for the Southwest U.S. Spanish speaking market.
This *churro* (B-movie at best) was so successful it led to two more films featuring Lola.

Films that present the lives of drug dealers are very popular at the box office. Films such as *Contrabando y traición* (*Contraband and Betrayal*) (Arturo Martínez, 1976), *La hija del contrabando* (*Contraband's Daughter*) (Fernando Osés, 1977), *Lamberto Quintero* (Mario Hernández, 1987) feature main characters that are drug dealers but who are loved by the people because they are presented as “generous bandits”. While successful, these films help perpetuate the stereotypes seen in film and television on both sides of the border by reinforcing and repeating negative images. These films use stereotypes that are familiar to U.S. audiences, that of the Mexican bandit, the sexy Latina, the drug runner and the drug kingpin. These negative depictions influence a large audience, since they were distributed in Mexico, Central America, South America, and in small theatres in the United States, thus creating a negative frame of reference about Mexicans and the border itself. As discussed in Chapter One, negative depictions serve to establish and maintain us-them boundaries by identifying the “other”.

The Chicano movement in the United States was another subject considered profitable by Mexican filmmakers in the 1970’s. Mexican American and Chicano characters had occasionally appeared in Mexican films in secondary roles. There were very few films with Chicano characters in lead roles. Alejandro Galindo was one of the first Mexican directors to deal at length
with the problems faced by Chicanos, with his filmEspaldas mojadas(1953). Few other filmmakers showed interest in this topic; according to Mora, “there was the traditional Mexican disdain for pochos and the very real danger that a movie devoted entirely to Mexican Americans would not be successful in Mexico” (137). Most films focused on the plight of the undocumented worker and banks in Mexico were hesitant to fund films that were not certain to make money. Alex Saragoza notes the following in “Cinematic Orphans: Mexican Immigrants in the United States since 1950” (1992):

Most of the recent films made in Mexico convey a simplistic message: crossing the border to the United States spells eventual doom…very few Chicano or Mexican movies focus on the period beyond the short time span surrounding the crossing of the border. By reducing the immigrant experience to the tumultuous, jarring and painful episode of entry into the United States, both Chicano and Mexican filmmakers nourish their respective cinematic conventions…virtually all films dealing with immigration center on the illegal, the mojado, the wetback, the undocumented, the sin papeles—despite the large number of immigrants that enter the United States legally…this simplistic framework contradicts history and the present experience of Mexicans in the United States.

(122)

This type of film avoids taking a serious look at the situation of Chicanos and Mexicans (in the U.S.) beyond the border crossing and they do not address the issues faced by second and third generation residents. According to Tatum,
“The Mexican movie industry has also made several recent films about the border: La ilegal (The Illegal Woman), Carta verde (Green Card), Mojados (Wetbacks), and De sangre chicana (Of Chicano Blood); but like their Hollywood counterparts, these films seem designed to appeal to the emotions of a mass audience and generally avoid serious consideration of the complexity of border problems and issues” (65). The lack of exploration into border issues by Mexican film productions has led to a static portrayal of the border.

Movies have an important social function. Films are not just entertainment; their messages and themes have a profound impact on viewers. Films reach a large audience and can impact viewers on many levels. According to Erwin Panofsky in his essay “Style and the Medium in Motion Pictures” (1959): “Whether we like it or not, it is the movies that mold more than any other single force, the opinions, taste, the language, the dress, the behavior, and even the physical appearance of a public comprising 60 per cent of the population of the earth” (16). Films influence viewers in several ways, as stated by Panofsky, but films also influence and are influenced by governments and other institutions trying to maintain the status quo. Incorporating the dominant ideology in a way that makes it appear “natural” does this. The dominant ideology can be incorporated into films via framing, staging, camera movement, camera angles, and of course scripting. This “natural” incorporation of the dominant ideology creates new stereotypes or reinforces stereotypes already held by the viewers.
Stereotypes are dangerous because they have the ability to become fixed. They can easily be turned into beliefs. As previously discussed in Chapter one, Ramírez Berg notes the following about stereotypes:

They are false to history, but conform to another historical tradition—namely, the history of movies and movie stereotyping. They begin, over time, to become part of the narrative form itself-anticipated, typical…we expect el bandido to appear in a Western set…and when he does, we expect him to be villainous and to act in predictably despicable, and inhumane ways.  

(19)

The viewer expects to see these stereotypes played out in films but may also expect them in everyday life as well.

The movies which focused on Chicanos, discussed thus far, were produced during the Echeverría administration, but there were important precursory films that incorporated aspects of the Chicano experience in their plots. The films of “Tin Tan” (Germán Valdés) dealt with the Chicano and introduced Chicano culture in Mexico. Maciel notes the following, “Valdés, a native of Ciudad Juárez and a product of the border environment, developed Norteño Chicano popular expressions into his comedic trademark. Beginning in 1946, a new comedic figure, the pocho, was introduced for the first time to the Mexican public through the cinema” (77). These films did well at the box office but they served to reinforce negative stereotypes of Chicanos by Mexicans residing in Mexico. Valdész’s use of both Spanish and English were one negative
factor in the eyes of the Mexican community. Another factor was his mode of
dress, the zoot suit, considered by the Mexican community as a sign of
assimilation. The staging was also important in the fixing of this stereotype. By
placing “Tin Tan” in situations where he would stand out and be ridiculed by
dominant group members, the message given to the audience is that Pachucos
are to be treated as second-class citizens. The representation of the Chicano by
Valdés helped to fixed the stereotype already held by Mexicans residing in
Mexico.

Mexican cinema focused on the Chicano experience during the 1970’s. Many
commercial movies focusing on Chicanos were filmed and shown in
Mexico and the United States. The Chicano themes in Mexican movies,
however, faded towards the end of the Echeverría administration in 1976.
According to Maciel, “This was to be expected, given the generally poor quality of
the films made, their limited distribution within Mexico, and the lack of response
from Mexican audiences which resulted in severe monetary loss for the films”
(81). The monetary loss played a big role in the lack of interest in funding
Chicano themed films.

Films and filmmakers function as teachers and can reinforce or change
stereotypes. Carlos Cortés in his article “Chicanas in Film: History of an Image”
(1985) notes the following:

The process of filmic image creation involves three basic components –
filmmaking, film content, and film impact. Considered within an
educational framework, filmmakers function as teachers (intentionally or
unintentionally), films serve as their resulting textbooks (effective or ineffective), and viewers are the learners (consciously or unconsciously). Filmmakers create films with Chicana, Mexicana, and Hispana characters...whether or not the filmmakers intended to contribute to the creation of a Chicana image. While not always consciously, some viewers will learn about Chicana from these so-called entertainment films, and this learning may help create, reinforce, weaken, or eradicate their image of the Chicana.

Even though Cortés focuses on the Chicana image it can be applied to that of any character that is not part of the dominant group (Anglo elite). As Allport’s work has shown, stereotyping is one way the “in” group maintains its dominance over the “out” group. The “out” group consists of those who do not belong to the dominant group. Stereotypes, once they are believed affect both the “in” group and the “out” group by, as stated by Allport, “causing their possessor to view future evidence in terms of the available categories” (13).

Mexican cinema has produced over 100 films about the border, border crossing and border culture. The migratory experience is consistently portrayed negatively. In this next section I will focus on three Mexican films: Mojados, Raíces de Sangre, and El Jardín del Edén. These Mexican produced films help perpetuate the standard and dominant perception of border society through the stereotyping of border residents, particularly those of Mexican origin. These films do not accurately portray the border crisis, nor do these films delve into the
complexity of the border situation. According to María Herrera Sobek in her book *The Bracero Experience: Elite Lore Versus Folklore*, “Mexican narratives about migrants since the Depression era have tended to prefer Chicanos as scapegoats over Anglos” (36). Three Mexican productions will be examined in the following section.

B. **MOJADOS, RAÍCES DE SANGRE, and EL JARDÍN DEL EDÉN:**

*Mojados* features Jorge Rivero as Juan García, a migrant worker. This is an action-packed film with low production value, similar to the hundreds of emigration movies produced in Mexico since the mid 1970’s. This production, according to Fox, is “unlike Galindo’s previous film *Espaldas mojadas* (1953), is representative of the new wave of films without any regard to plot or character development” (115). The plot focuses on a group of Mexican migrant workers who decide to cross the border into the United States in search of work. They cross at night and reach the United States safely. They feel confident so they continue their journey, not knowing that the U.S. Border Patrol is waiting for them. Once they are in sight, the Border Patrol opens fire without any warning. The group is hit and they are left for dead. The hero of the story, Juan García, escapes after being severely wounded. He manages to get to a nearby town where he receives help from Chicanos. After he recuperates several people try to help him find those responsible. As the story unfolds, we learn that some members of the U.S. Border Patrol are involved in a criminal ring. Juan infiltrates the ring, learns how they work and who is involved. An elaborate scheme is implemented and after a shoot out, all the major criminals are either killed or
captured. At the end of the film the audience discovers that Juan is really an undercover Mexican agent who is out to expose the injustices suffered by migrant workers. As Juan is returning to Mexico he is killed by a sniper. The movie ends with the image of Juan’s car smashed into a tree. The staging of the last scene is important because it “naturally” implies that only pain and suffering is to be found in the U.S. Juan is trying to get back to Mexico but he can’t because he meets his death in a country that does not appreciate him. The film tries to reassert Mexican cultural authority by implying that even though people may leave Mexico in search of jobs, they will not be complete until they return to their home in one way or another. Zavarzadeh posits “the relations between the center and margin are always represented in such a manner that, by the end of the film, the threat from the adversarial discourses of the margin are contained and the center emerges, reasserting its cultural authority” (170). This film reinforces official Mexican policy towards emigrants. It has an unbelievable plot, the characters are not developed, and appears to have been produced only for exploitative and commercial purposes.

*Mojados* features excessive violence and sex. The factors within Mexico that are partially responsible for emigration are completely ignored. The dominant group ideology (official Mexican policy) is at the core of the script and the structural socioeconomic problems, political questions, or limitations of the social policies of Mexico are never shown. According to Maciel:

The impact of these movies on Chicanos and *indocumentados* cannot be minimized. Because of their wide distribution and showing in Mexico, the
United States and elsewhere, the images, ideology, and characterizations of Mexican emigration to the United States were exposed to a grossly exaggerated and simplistic portrayal. Instead of providing a more critical, informative, and sympathetic view of Mexicans in the United States, the public was subjected to stereotypes, official rhetoric, gratuitous sex, and violence with no artistic or social value. Produced, written and directed with different proposes, the films could have been important social statements.

Most films produced in Mexico during the 70’s followed the same type of storyline because they were successful at the box office; most productions paid little, if any, interest to artistic or social values.

Raíces de sangre opens with a grisly scene. A truck abandoned off a lonely highway. Its doors are locked and it’s loaded with illegal men and women left to die by suffocation. The staging of the opening shot immediately sets up the idea that only pain and suffering is to be encountered in the United States by undocumented workers, as previously discussed in the analysis of Mojados. The film is set on both sides of the border and has a fragmented, nonlinear narrative structure. On the Mexican side of the border the film focuses on the working conditions of Mexican workers at a U.S. owned maquiladora (border assembly plant) and on the love story of Lupe Carrillo (Roxana Bonilla-Giannini) and Carlos Rivera (Richard Yñíguez). Carlos is a Chicano lawyer who after completing a law degree at Harvard returns to his home to work at the community center, El
Barrio Unido. The main task of this organization is to organize workers on both sides of the border against the powerful and oppressive maquiladoras that are exploiting the workers and keeping them divided. The Barrio Unido members are led by Juan Vallejo (Pepe Sarna) a close friend of Carlos. Their initial attempts at forming a strong labor union among both Mexican and Chicano workers are met with harassment and violence. Carlos is ultimately jolted into community responsibility after Juan is murdered. After many confrontations and after falling in love with Lupe, Carlos discovers his values and goals. He realizes his place is at home helping his community and loved ones instead of the law office in San Francisco where he worked before. Nothing is resolved at the end of the film. The same state of affairs dominates the beginning and the end. According to Tatum, “In Raíces de sangre, Mexicans who come to the United States experience exploitation, suffering, and even death; in traditional Hollywood border films, Mexicans find financial security and happiness in the United States” (64). This film does something different from other films produced during the same time and about the same subject, it undermines and critiques the dominant culture’s terms for Mexican immigrants, “illegal aliens”. The film presents some of the inequities faced by Chicanos and Mexicans on both sides of the border but it does not go much further.

This movie was the first time a Chicano director wrote and directed a Mexican funded film. As Maciel has noted, “it was the first time that Chicano and Mexican actors worked side by side on such a large scale film effort” (80). Since this film was released at the end of the Echeverría administration, it received
poor distribution within Mexico and was not successful at the box office. While the collaboration was a move in the right direction the film itself presented too many themes and lacked clear direction. According to Alejandro Morales in his article “Expanding Meaning of Chicano Cinema” (1985), “Raíces de sangre attempts to say too much and in doing so becomes a quagmire of themes, many of which are never developed and many of which are introduced for no logical reason…what the film projects is a confusing vision of life on the Mexican-United States border” (128). Although the film is at times confusing, it does not simply project official Mexican policy, it also presents the injustices faced by many Mexicans who work in the maquiladoras along the border.

El Jardín del edén is set in Tijuana on the border with the U.S. where the United States and Mexico are separated by a steel wall 20 km long. This film is set in the present day and is about three women whose lives loosely interweave. Jane (Renée Coleman) is an Anglo in search of the exotic; Serena (Gabriela Roel) has just lost her husband and is now having to manage on her own with her three children; Elizabeth (Rosario Sagrav) is a Chicana artist struggling with her identity. The women become linked by Felipe (Bruno Bichir), who gets caught and deported while trying to cross the border. Jane tries to help him get into the United States by smuggling him across the border with Julián, whom she believes is his brother but is actually Serena’s son. The story then revolves around the border crossing and Serena’s search for Julián.
The use of the border in this film establishes binary oppositions. The characters of Jane and Felipe fall into these oppositions typical of films shot on or about the border. According to Noble:

If “el jardín del edén” for Felipe exists north of the border in the form of modernity rooted in employment, Jane, as his mirror inverse, crosses the border in search of an exotic and primitive “garden of eden”. In fact, the Felipe/Jane dyad, and the quest narratives associated with each character are underpinned by a series of binary oppositions including: man/woman; blond/brown; south/north; poor/rich; work/pleasure and so on.

(195)

Jane is presented as the character that is able to cross the border with ease. As discussed in Chapter Two, Ramírez Berg believes that an underlying assumption in Hollywood produced films about the Mexican border Anglo characters must have an explicit reason for crossing into Mexico. That in fact, Anglo characters must be coerced into entering Mexico, they must have and explicit reason for entering. Jane’s reason for entering Mexico is that she is searching for the “exotic”. She may not be running from the law, as depicted in many U.S. produced films, but she does see Mexico as an escape. Felipe is the quintessential Mexican migrant who tries to cross the border and fails. Felipe views the other side of the fence as the place where his dreams will come true. The border is presented as a marker of absolute difference between two countries and two cultures. According to Noble, “the border as an overwhelming physical and visually potent presence punctuates the whole film…whereby the
border constantly reinstates itself into the viewer’s field of vision as a fixed, immutable line” (196). People cannot change in this depiction of the border. The characters are confined to play out the roles assigned to them as well as the border itself. The border as a space cannot change; it will continue to separate Mexico from the United States.

As discussed in Chapter one, Chomsky finds that the media serve the interests of those who finance and control them. These financiers and controllers have an agenda that they want to advance. These depictions serve to advance the agenda of the dominant group by maintaining the status quo. According to Maciel, genre films “contribute to the perpetuation of the status quo” (153). Felipe and Jane’s binary relationship conform to the conventions of the border movie genre.

This film features characters searching for their identity but does so through stereotyping. As is the case with Jane’s friend Liz, a Chicana who has arrived in Tijuana to curate an art exhibit and search for her identity. Fox notes:

She weeps while viewing a video depicting a therapy session in which a Chicana comes to terms with the fact that she has repressed her indigenous identity in favor of a cultural self-identification as “white”. Through Liz’s encounter with indigenous imagery, an older nationalist version of *mexicanidad* reveals itself, recalling a tradition in Mexican popular culture that deems Chicanos/as to be culturally inauthentic until they return to the mother country and learn proper Spanish.
The idea of having to return to one’s “roots” to find one’s identity is typical of Mexican film productions featuring Chicanos. The film also incorporates mediated representations by not subtitling the indigenous language. Fox goes on to note that, “one troubling aspect of the “nature versus culture” dichotomy…is the manner in which transnational migratory circuits of indigenous peoples seem to fall on the “nature” side of the balance…rather than being presented also as a cultural phenomenon” (10). The lack of subtitles reinforces the enigmatic quality applied to indigenous people.

The last scene begins with a long shot of a deserted beach in late afternoon. The camera then reveals two familiar icons: a green Border Patrol vehicle and a part of the steel fence that separates San Diego from Tijuana. On the Mexican side of the border, a band plays music, families and children are everywhere, and there are people playing on the shore. The camera then stops behind two men looking at the ocean. Fox notes the following:

The final shot of the movie reveals what they had been looking at—school of dolphins in the distance swimming northward. This final scene does not stigmatize south to north border crossing as national betrayal, a common theme in a certain, and older tradition of Mexico City—based popular culture. Instead, it contrasts the artificiality of the fence and Border Patrol to natural migration patterns.

(11)

The staging of this shot is important because on the Mexican side of the border the focus is on families and on the U.S. side of the border the viewer sees a
vehicle that belongs to the Border Patrol. This image adheres to official Mexican policy, featured in Mexican produced films of the 1970’s, the idea that Mexico is family/home and the U.S. represents only suffering for emigrants.

Mexican cinema has displayed a constant, static, portrayal of the Chicano and Mexican community in the United States. From its first production in 1922, *El hombre sin patria* (Miguel Contreras Torres), to current productions, they all develop around a limited number of themes. Maciel in his article “Pochos and Other Extremes in the Mexican Cinema” finds that films about the border experience carry the same message: only suffering awaits you on the other side. Maciel writes:

Rather than bring to the screen thoughtful and, well researched, and well-written scripts that would examine the experiences of their compatriots in the United States, these films responded to Mexican internal concerns and popular attitudes. In the end, the viewer learns much more about Mexico’s attitudes and policies toward its emigrants, or even the historical condition of the country at the time of the making of the production, than about the emigrants themselves.

(110)

Another theme listed by Maciel is the defense of Chicanos and Mexicans by figures that are larger than life. Maciel goes on to note, “loosely based on historical accounts, certain of these motion pictures incorporate nationalism with a sense of outrage over the tragedy of the American territorial conquest, with cinematic heroes that rose against Anglo oppression” (110). The seventies
produced an interesting theme, not included in Maciel’s list, which also proved to be a hit at the box office; that of the benevolent drug lord. These films were popular but ultimately very damaging to the perception of the Chicano and Mexican community. According to Maciel, “it becomes apparent that the Chicano or Mexican in the United States was not well served by the narrative cinema of Mexico…these productions followed and hardened Mexican stereotypes and broad generalizations about Chicanos and braceros more than contributing to a more sensitive and complex understanding of the “other Mexico” (111).

In conclusion, the impact of these movies on Chicanos and Mexicans is powerful. These films reach a large audience and carry negative depictions that can reinforce and fix stereotypes in viewers without a frame of reference. As previously stated, films teach and the negative depictions of Chicanos and Mexicans in films produced in Mexico contribute to stereotyping. The purpose of these films is to depict the “other”, in this case Mexicans who have moved to the United States, in a lesser position. By doing so, these films endorse the dominant group ideology and help to maintain the status quo through stereotyping.
CHAPTER FOUR: U.S. NETWORK NEWSCASTS

United States Network Newscasts: Mediated Stereotypes and Inculcated Views of Latinos:

In this chapter I will analyze the inculcated views of Latinos in U.S. television newscasts, and how the media helps perpetuate stereotypes by exposing television viewers repetitively to negative depictions of the Latino community. I will also examine how television has become a powerful cultural activity and why it plays such a significant role in forming public opinion. The theories of Charles Ramírez-Berg, Noam Chomsky, and Gordon Allport, which were analyzed in depth in Chapter One, will be applied to the material presented in this chapter. Also included in this chapter is Clara Rodríguez’s book Latin Looks (1997), which analyzes the stereotypical Latino look. David Croteau, and William Hoynes By Invitation Only (1994) explores why the media excludes coverage of certain themes. Douglas Kellner’s “Television, Myth and Ritual” (1982), examines how dominant social orders are glorified in society. Mas'ud Zavarzadeh’s Seeing Films Politically (1991) explores “domination” and the way it is obscured in texts of culture. Raymond Williams, Herbert Schiller, and Manuel Castells are also included. Studies from the National Association of Hispanic Journalists, Pew Hispanic Center, the Center for Trade Policy Studies, and the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute as well as reports presented to the Senate Judiciary Committee by Douglas Massey, and the CRS Report for Congress by
Blas Nuñez-Neto are included in this chapter. The studies breakdown the number of hours dedicated to coverage of Latino themes on network television.

According to the National Association of Hispanic Journalists “Network Brownout Report 2005”, “Latinos in the United States numbered 22.3 million in 1990 but in 2005 comprised 40.4 million, a 58 percent increase” (2005:3). The U.S. Census Bureau’s “The Hispanic population Census 2000 Brief” estimates that by 2050, Latinos will number 102.5 million and comprise 24.4 percent of the country’s population (2000:2). Even though the number is large the Latino community continues to be covered through a narrow prism. Latinos have been repeatedly misrepresented on television newscasts, inaccurately forming and influencing opinions and perceptions of this group. In my review of this coverage, I will show how the poor depiction of Latinos on television newscasts is a matter of inculcated stereotypes, broadcast time constraints, and a preference for big stories. The mainstream’s, (those who are in power, the dominant group), narrow interest in that which is categorized as the “other” contributes to this as well. In doing so, I hope to contribute to a broader understanding of the reasons behind the negative depiction.

All media such as: print, film, television, and electronic, play a significant role in forming public opinion. Many hours are spent watching television, reading the newspaper, or logging onto the Internet each day. By doing so readers and viewers form perceptions of the world and their immediate surroundings. Perceptions are also formed on how each person, group, and culture relates to the world. Viewers rely on the media to provide them with exposure to many
things in an attempt to experience culture beyond their immediate environment. This can be detrimental, however, and can perpetuate a vicious cycle of stereotypes if the media does not accurately reflect the reality of the U.S. Latino population by covering both positive and negative stories. Historically, most mainstream U.S. English language media vehicles such as television, radio, film, newspapers, and magazines have either underrepresented or (for the most part) misrepresented the Latino community. As discussed in Chapter One, the lack of positive Latino role models on television has very serious effects on the Latino community due to the powerful cultural space occupied by television. According to Nielsen Media Research, Latino households spend on average seventeen hours per week watching television (Nielsen: 2005). Latino children spend an average of 7 hours per week watching television (Nielsen: 2005). With so many hours spent in front of the television, it is clear that television plays a key role in Latino households. Children Now, a non-profit group, which studies the effects of television on children, published “Fall Colors”, a study that found the following:

Children across all races associate positive characteristics more with the White characters they see on television and negative characteristics more with the minority characters. Children think that White characters on entertainment television programs are most likely to be shown in a positive way while Latino characters are most likely to be negatively portrayed.

(2003: 8)

There have been many studies done on adults and stereotypes but only children studies have been included in this chapter.
In the United States television has come to be a dominant social activity taking up a disproportionate amount of people’s time over other activities. According to Nielsen Media Research American households watch an average of thirteen hours of television per week (Nielsen: 2005). Kellner believes television functions as a modern conveyer of both cultural myths and cultural mythologies. Kellner considers the myths of society as being the bearers of social ideology regardless of the medium of distribution, which work to articulate and resolve social contradictions within society. He states:

Many of today’s myths, told through television shows and genres, idealize youth, hipness, sexuality and new roles for womanhood while at the same time preserving traditional families and relationships, perceived middle class values and cultural authorities. These myths are attempting to reconcile the strands of modern collective cultural identities with new generational and group identities and values. Mythologies on the other hand do not deal with social contradictions. Mythologies function to glorify and naturalize the dominant social order.

(42)

Chomsky agrees with Kellner that the media can be used as a vehicle to maintain the status quo. As the mythologies Kellner mentions are played out on television, it is the dominant group that is being seen over and over again in the positive roles, the positions of power and as heroes. These roles serve to glorify
the dominant group and more importantly to naturalize them as leaders. The media serves as a tool for the dominant group (Anglo elite) to maintain the status quo by not presenting minorities in these positive and coveted roles. The dominant group is able to control these depictions because they control the media.

The control of ideology by the dominant group produces an environment that responds to the needs of the dominant group, and subsequently ignores all other groups. Zavarzadeh discusses film in his text but his analysis can also be applied to newscasts. He posits:

…the spectator is situated by the framing ideology (not the film itself) in the specific viewing position—subjectivity—that renders its discourses inevitable and invisible at the same time. The film naturalizes this viewing position as the given, the obvious, and the only proper position for the spectator. All modes of film, in different ways, resecure the subject positions needed for reproducing the existing social relations.

(13)

This can be applied to newscasts because the viewer is absorbing the information and can take the representations as a given and natural way to view the subject presented. At the same time the status quo is being reinforced in the presentation and in the viewers perception.

Williams describes television as an important medium for social myth and mythology, making it a very significant cultural space. Once song, dance and
theater were the principal media for conveying myths, now film, music and television are the dominant media and they are the dominants media. Williams terms this shift, "mobile privatization: the process of the privatization of the domestic sphere and the development of advanced communication and transportation technologies which works to allow experiences and consumption of public information and culture within the isolated, private home" (42). Williams considers the real power of television as located in its ability to offer a vast "visual mobility" to audiences. Despite whatever constraining social, political, or economic confines people have to deal with in their daily lives, television provides experiences of fantasylands, wealth, and exotic cultures, as well as national and regional information.

Since the 1970s, critics such as Herbert Schiller have argued that, as modern carriers of social myths and mythologies, the principal effect of the media is to construct or frame viewer's perceptions of social reality. Schiller posits "America's media managers create, refine, and preside over the circulation of images and information which determine our beliefs and attitudes and, ultimately, our behavior..." (172). Schiller maintains that there are five myths that structure news media content in the United States: “(1) the myth of individualism and personal choice, (2) the myth of neutrality of social and political institutions, (3) the myth of unchanging human nature (competitive, greedy, violent, etc.), (4) the myth of the absence of social conflict, and (5) the myth of modern pluralism: that a diversity of viewpoints and information channels are accessible to all” (173). As people are routinely exposed to media, they come to accept these myths, and
other more specific framings of reality, as the way things really are. This occurs when the media, television and film, available to consumers are produced by the dominant group for the dominant group. For some (particularly marginalized) groups, however, the culture and reality presented in the mainstream media are too alien and not representative of local realities. Ramírez Berg’s work on mediated stereotypes can be applied here.

A mediated stereotype, then, operates by gathering a specific set of negative traits and assembling them into a particular image. But the list of negative traits ascribed to the Other by an “in” group is usually much longer than a single mediated stereotype can bear. Interestingly, because they take concrete human form, mediated stereotypes have their stereotypical limits—seldom can one stereotype be assigned all of the negative traits attributed to the “out” group at large. To handle this, these traits are parceled out among a handful of mediated stereotypes who together are meant to represent the Other.

(39)

For marginalized groups many cultural spaces are dominated by the products of another culture. Ramírez Berg posits that personal identity construction for minoritized subjects involves the recognition that one’s social and cultural groups are devalued in society. Thus, collective identification is built upon the group’s psychological, cultural, and social resistance against oppression both real and imagined. Ramírez Berg notes the following, “the
normalization of stereotypical images through repetition...can now be seen to have an important ideological function: to demonstrate why the “in” group is in power, why the “out” group is not and why things need to stay just as they are” (22). Maintaining the status quo is a key factor in the repetition of stereotypes but there can be many reasons for the existence of “in” groups and “out” groups.

According to Allport, “the presence of a threatening common enemy will cement the in group sense of any organized aggregate of people. A family will grow cohesive in the face of adversity, and a nation is never so unified as in a time of war...Because of their basic importance to our own survival, we tend to develop a partisanship and ethnocentrism in respect to our in groups” (42). Castells believes that most members of a dominant society share a collective legitimizing identity that is part of their individual personal identities and is constructed upon the values, culture, and social institutions of the dominant society. The ethnocentrism and collective identity Allport and Castells mention play out on a daily basis on national newscasts because the stories reflect the ideology of the dominant group (Anglo elite) and the depictions are controlled by them as well.

In recent years, Latinos have gained more exposure on U.S. network news; however they are usually depicted in relation to a reduced number of social issues including welfare, illegal immigration, or criminal activity. Most of the coverage centers on the U.S.-Mexico border where immigrants continue to cross illegally in search of jobs. While the number of illegal entrants is high, and
immigration is an important story to U.S. residents, there are other stories about the Latino community that should be covered. There are many stories along the border that do not have to do with immigration or crime. Douglas Massey, a Professor of Sociology at Princeton University, in his testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee stated the following:

After Canada, Mexico is the United States largest trading partner.

We share a border of almost 2,000 miles with Mexico, and trade that totals $286 billion a year. The movement of goods and services is accompanied by the movement of people. In 2004 some 175,000 legal immigrants arrived from Mexico, along with 3.8 million visitors for pleasure, 433,000 business visitors, 118,000 temporary workers, 25,000 intra-company transferees, 29,000 students and exchange visitors, and 6,200 traders and investors. U.S. foreign direct investment in Mexico totals $62 billion annually.

The media has focused its efforts almost exclusively on immigration, both legal and illegal. According to the 2005 NAHJ report, “one out of every three Latino stories (34.7 percent) was about immigration in 2004. More than one hour of coverage was devoted to the topic, making up almost a third (31.6 percent) of the total time (three hours 25 minutes) devoted to Latino stories” (2005:6). This narrow scope leaves out the positive contributions of the Latino community in the United States and presents only the negative stories that arise along the border.
There is much more to cover along the almost two thousand mile area that is the U.S. – Mexico border than just immigration.

When coverage is limited to only negative aspects of the border, it contributes to certain perceptions of the Latino population as a whole. As discussed in Chapter One, Allport’s research on prejudice finds that prejudice can be, “a feeling, favorable or unfavorable, toward a person or thing, prior to, or not based on actual experience...Overcategorization is perhaps the commonest trick of the human mind. Given a thimbleful of facts we rush to make generalizations as large as a tub” (8). The extended generalizations without actual experience that Allport mentions continue today. Limited coverage of a topic produces misrepresentations and when applied to the Latino community, it produces a skewed picture of Latinos as a "problem population" in the eyes of mainstream society. In addition, Latino youth are typically portrayed in news stories as drug dealers or users, gang members, teen mothers, and high school dropouts. According to Building Blocks for Youth, “Crime news is where all youth are most likely to be seen on TV news, but youth of color appear in crime news more often than White youth--52% and 35%, respectively. White youth were present more often in health or education stories (13%) than were youth of color (2%)” (“Off Balance: Youth, Race and Crime”). The depiction of Anglo teens covers both the positive and the negative. This is characteristic of a media belonging to the dominant group, those in control, as it reflects the dominant groups’ attitudes. The limited exposure of Latinos by network news is
compounded by the fact that these newscasts reach a very large audience, twenty nine point three million in 2003 according to Nielsen Media Research.

With almost thirty million viewers watching network newscasts every night, stereotypes go one way: from the dominant group to the minority. The creation of stereotypes in the media functions to maintain the status quo by clearly identifying the “other”: those that are not part of the majority, those that should not be in control. Ramírez Berg, as discussed in Chapter One, believes human beings stereotype in order to:

- justify various forms of collective action, and to preserve positive intergroup distinctiveness, the tendency to differentiate the in group positively from the out group…The collective subconscious (the dominant ideology) produced these images of the Latino Other in order to symbolically mask what they represented—namely, threats to that ideology on a number of levels: social, political, economical, psychosexual, racial.

(31)

Inculcated views of Latinos and the desire to maintain the status quo and minimize threats to the dominant ideology go back to the early days of western expansion.

Contemporary depictions of Latinos in a negative light can be seen in the early 1800’s during western expansion. The Monroe Doctrine of 1823 and Manifest Destiny during the 1840’s inspired aggressive expansion into the west. In James Monroe’s message to Congress on December 2, 1823, he informed
Europe “that the American continents were no longer open to European colonization”, and that any effort to extend European political influence into the New World would be considered by the United States "as dangerous to our peace and safety." According to May, “the United States would not interfere in European wars or internal affairs, and expected Europe to stay out of American affairs” (39). Monroe’s declaration provided precedent and support for Manifest Destiny.

Manifest Destiny, a phrase used by leaders and politicians in the 1840’s to explain continental expansion by the United States, revitalized a sense of "mission" or national destiny for many Anglos. Sam Haynes a professor of history at University of Texas at Arlington states that, “The people of the United States felt it was their mission to extend their freedom to others by imparting their idealism and belief in democratic institutions to those who were capable of self-government” (42). Native American people and those of non-European origin were considered incapable of self-government. They were established as incapable by the Anglos and perceived as the “other”.

While the United States put into motion a quest for expansion, Mexico faced different circumstances as a newly independent country. Anglo settlers arrived in the areas of Mexico that are now California, Texas and most of the southwest, and took/colonized the land that belonged to the Native Americans and Mexicans who were already there. Many Anglos were contemptuous of both the Mexicans and the Native Americans. According to Edmunds, “The settlers viewed Mexicans as ignorant, indolent and conniving” (“From Revolution to
Reconstruction”). The U.S. government told settlers were told to watch out for Mexican bandits and that there was plenty of land for them to take because the Mexicans were too lazy to work it themselves. May states the following: Manifest Destiny gave filibusters a racialist and missionary rationale to justify their conquests and attempted subjugation of native peoples…Manifest Destiny had sprouted a sequence of derivative teachings, regularly disseminated through the expansionist press, the most salient of which was the notion that Anglo Saxons had a mission to regenerate peoples deemed as inferior, and to bring progress, Protestantism, and capitalistic enterprise to backwards, anarchic regions.

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A painting by John Gast titled “Columbia” is used by Edmunds to describe the attitudes of the settlers, “There is an early American painting from the mid 19th century of the angel Columbia floating across the plains. This painting is divided into light (good) and darkness (evil), the dark section of the painting has wild animals and Native Americans while the section with the golden light has settlers moving into these wild lands bringing civilization into the area” (“Native American Displacement Amid U.S. Expansion”). The use of light and darkness/good and evil in this painting reflects the dominant ideology at the time of its creation, similar to the network newscasts today which reflect the ideology of the dominant group. Edmunds goes on to say, “In this painting, Native American people are portrayed along with the animals and the darkness. They have to be removed before Columbia can bring the prosperity promised to the
United States. It’s an interesting portrayal and, I think, very symbolic of the thinking of many Americans during the mid-19th century” (“Native American Displacement amid U.S. Expansion”). Mexicans were also removed from their land and considered racially inferior “others”.

The negative depiction of Mexicans and those of non Anglo descent furthered the goals of the United States and also served to rationalize their actions. Negative depictions helped to strengthen the idea behind Manifest Destiny that only Anglos were destined to control and thereby reap the vast benefits of the continents natural resources. According to Ramírez Berg, “In order to rationalize the expansionist goals laid out by the Monroe Doctrine and Manifest Destiny, Latinos - whether U.S. citizens, or newly arrived from their own countries-needed to be shown as lesser beings. Stereotyping of Latinos, therefore, has been and continues to be part of an American imperialistic discourse about who should rule the hemisphere” (5). The negative depiction of Mexicans was used as a tool to justify the actions of the settlers in areas where Manifest Destiny encouraged the taking of land from Mexico and Mexican landowners, and then exploiting the displaced and vulnerable population as cheap and expendable labor. Latinos continue to be represented as racially inferior “others” in national newscasts. The narrow scope of Latino stories in newscasts perpetuate these negative depictions, but there are other factors that need to be considered, principally the little amount of time given to each story.

Network news is focused on airing the most important news story of the day; dedicating on average one minute thirty seconds per story in a twenty three
minute newscast (after commercial time is deducted from the 30 minutes allotted to a news program). The problem with the time constraint is that the focus must be on the images of the day, for example on May 14, 2003 a graphic on ABC NEWS read “Deadly Traffic”. That day, approximately 40 undocumented immigrants jumped out of the back of a parked truck, authorities immediately made a horrible discovery, 18 immigrants were found dead on the floor of the truck including a young boy found clutched in the arms of a man believed to be his father. The broadcast focused on these graphic images instead of dedicating the allotted time to explain the details of the crossing and the economic reasons that prompted the crossing. CBS NEWS opened their broadcast with the following text on the same day, Eighteen illegal immigrants die after having been locked inside a sweltering trailer”, NBC NEWS opened with “Immigrants die in locked truck in Texas” for their nightly newscast. Again, all three networks focused only on the single event and the tragic images surrounding the story. News stories like this one will focus on and use the imagery available from the scene, “establishing shots” of the trailer, blurred shots of the bodies and also images of other related events in recent months. The edited piece will also use “establishing shots” of the border, dusty trails, sun flares to depict intense heat and the shuffling of sweaty bodies along a never-ending desert trail. These images are chosen because they are dramatic and will visually entice the viewer. They are blended seamlessly with the images of the day to tell the immediate story.
News producers want the image to speak, and they need to captivate the audience’s attention. With the pressure of captivating the audience, producers and editors use images the public will easily identify and thereby perpetuate stereotypes. Ramírez Berg posits:

As a purely industrial practice, then, stereotypes are maintained because of their valued narrative economy…they require little or no introduction or explanation, and because they are so quickly and completely comprehended as signs, stereotypes are an extremely cheap and cost-effective means of telling a movie story.

Stereotypes are also a time efficient way of telling a news story. The shots that are picked speak to what the producer believes is the “look” and “feel” of the border. The images that are selected are based on the producers’ preconceived ideas of the border and time constraints. The images are of that which he or she is familiar with. These are the shots that producers have seen over and over again on newscasts and films and that they believe convey the “true” feel of the border and of the people. Stereotypical images can become familiar to the point that they eventually seem normal, even natural. These shots are primarily dark images, people running across the border, night scope video, close up shots of desperate faces, feet shuffling in the dirt, sweaty faces, and long slow pans of the desert. If the script is only allotted one minute and thirty seconds in the newscast, the reporter will focus on the news of the day and the producer will use shots that he/she believes conveys an accurate image of the border. What
happened, where it happened, when it happened and how many times has this happened before? These are the questions normally handled in the piece.

One question that is not usually answered in such a short piece is why it happened. This is due in part because when the newscast goes on the air with a breaking news story they will not have all of the facts, the reports and details arrive later. Reporters and producers can only report the details they have up to the time the story airs. The specific details of the victim’s situation are difficult to cover in a short piece. It is not possible to do an in depth investigative piece in one minute and thirty seconds. With little time given to each story imagery becomes crucial.

The “open” of a news broadcast is a very important point for the program. The open consists of the first 45-55 seconds of the show when the broadcast is laid out for the viewer. Most of the stories that will air during the show will be “teased”/previewed during the “open”. It is at this point that a viewer can and will decide whether to continue watching. It is important to capture/seduce the audience since the number of viewers will determine the ratings and ratings are vital to all shows. “Teases” that air before each commercial are also important to make sure viewers will stay tuned during commercial break. This is unfortunately the reality of television newscasts; ratings have become the focus of many newsrooms. Ratings pay the salaries of the newsroom employees and according to Journalism.org and their report “The State of the News Media”, the media can generate nearly two hundred million dollars in revenue and tens of millions in profit. “In 2003 NBC “Nightly News” generated 161.9 million, ABC “World News
Tonight” generated 148.8, and CBS “Evening News” generated 135.8 (“State of the News Media”). For both the “open” and the “teases” it is possible to include only 1-3 images, each usually no longer than 3 seconds. It is during the “open” and the “teases” that the most enticing video images are used in order to capture the audience. These shots are usually used two to three times in the same broadcast, once during the “open”, once during the “teases” and then finally in the actual edited piece. The viewer may not be able to remember the exact content of the story but he/she will remember the look and feel of the border and its people presented to them through the aired images. These images can then be easily turned into a reality of the border and its people. The viewer sees these shots so often that it is possible to believe that these images are representative of the culture and the space as a whole. When people do not have direct experience with the culture represented or they do not have some other frame of reference the images seen on television can serve as and can become a reality.

When the story is not about illegal border crossings but NAFTA or other non-criminal border related topics, Mexicans on the U.S. side of the border are most often personified as poor people living in horrible conditions. According to the NAHJ “Network Brownout 2003”, “A disproportionate number of stories establish Latinos living within the confines of extremely poor neighborhoods and enclaves. Barrios from throughout the United States continue to be one of the best ways for the networks to establish the Latino community” (2003:12). Rarely are people of the middle class or upper middle class seen in any of these stories.
English language networks in the United States do not often cover stories relating to Mexican culture or business but when they do there is a tendency to use pictures that the public will immediately identify. These pictures/racialized images include people that “appear” Latino even though there is great diversity in the physical attributes of the Latino population. Usually the “Latino look” is believed to be someone with dark skin and hair with indigenous features. Rodríguez states the following in her book Latin Looks:

…We find other factors that contribute to the “Latin look”, for example, Spanish usage, accented English, occupation, education, residence, relationship to Anglos, self-identification, and identification by others…Latin looks are to a considerable extent determined by political, economic, and historical contexts, and the images are often at variance with current and past Latino realities.

(1)

The “identification by others” mentioned in her quote is very important. The pressure to include stereotypical images exists because for many viewers that stereotype is the Latino they are familiar with. The average network newscast viewer, according to Nielsen Media Research, is in his or her late fifties and resides in the Midwest. This viewer will have preconceived notions of his/her own. The networks believe the viewer should be able to instantly relate to the images and should not be expected to understand or required to relate to images he/she is not familiar with. This is not because the networks believe the viewer is incapable of relating but because they want an instant relation to the image on
the screen. Therefore the media is relies on the traditional, stereotypical, visual image. The inclusion of non-stereotypical Latinos in stories can be met with questions and doubts as to whether the audience will understand the story. There is little opportunity to present the viewer with different images of Latinos due to the small number of Latino-oriented stories that “make air”.

A study conducted by the National Association of Hispanic Journalists, “Network Brownout: 2005” researched the sum of stories that aired on the three major networks, ABC, CBS and NBC as well as CNN, and found that “Latino stories make up less than one percent of all stories that appeared on network newscasts. The total number of Latino stories aired during 2004 was approximately 115 out of a total of 16,000 stories…Half of all Latino stories (58 out of 115) did not feature an interview with a Latino” (2005: 6). The networks aired approximately 728 hours of news during their prime time broadcasts and Latino related stories accounted for only 5.68 hours or 0.78 percent, of the total airtime. “Of that, crime, terrorism and illegal immigration accounted for 66 percent of stories about Latinos that aired” (2004: 5). According to the same NAHJ study, the stories analyzed portrayed Latinos as kidnappers, reckless drivers, plane highjackers, child molesters, drug smugglers, gang members, rapists and illegal border crossers. The spectrum of Latino crime as reported in the study was negative and vast. Due to the media’s role in the cultivation of social perceptions, there is reason to be concerned about the tendency for Latinos to be presented in media roles that define them as violent criminals. Despite the fact that Latinos are given little attention in mainstream English
language media, the stereotypes are perpetuated and reinforced as a result of the repetitive selection of negatively oriented stories. This is clear when the percentage of crime and immigration driven stories is so high.

The 2003 NAHJ study found that television networks portrayed Latino immigrants as a threat to the social and economic fabric of U.S. society. The same study points out that there was also an escalation of the negative depiction of immigrants. “The stories included images of immigrants trying to cross a swamp to come to the United States, to a tunnel used by drug smugglers and illegal immigrants to enter the country illegally” (2003: 12). These stories fail to provide the viewers with a greater understanding of the causes of illegal immigration. When these images are used the public sees the goal but it does not understand the reasons for the border crossing. It is a problem that will continue due to the appetite for headline grabbing stories and time constraints.

It is very difficult to air a story that focuses on the reasons behind the crossing when the priority is to cover the news of day. One of the pressures a producer deals with is time constraints. Producers have to get the news out clearly in a script that runs approximately one minute thirty seconds. Discussing the economic factors or giving a more in depth view of immigration is simply not possible in such a short amount of time. It is, however, possible to include graphics in the edited piece that offer added information. Graphics can be included as long as they are folded into the time frame allotted for the story. Newscasts are usually packed with so much information that edits are made to
the story up to a few minutes before air. It is very difficult to incorporate in depth information in a short news piece.

The same NAHJ study from 2003 also documented the “network practice of showing Latinos as brown masses or herds walking down crowded streets. This shot often takes place in the context of a Latino neighborhood or barrio. It is commonly accompanied by the colorful presence of Spanish language advertising” (2003: 13). These shots of a large number of people walking on the street or “compression shots” (as they are called in the newsroom) are used for all races. These shots are used when talking about issues that affect a large group of people. In my experience, these shots are not meant to imply that all Latinos live in barrios or in large urban centers. It is simply an image that is used when talking about general issues. For example, in a story about a disease that strikes primarily women, the viewer will see a picture with lots of women in the background, not focusing on any one person in order to avoid implying that any one of those people suffer from the disease. This is also the case when talking about an issue related to teenagers. The shots used will be of several teens together, whether outside or inside a mall or other large venue. The shots serve to establish general issues facing a group of people. One of the facts that this study does not take into account is the misuse and overuse of these shots. These “compression shots” are used so often to cover so many subjects that they hold little meaning.

Also discussed in the aforementioned study was the “Ghettoization” of Latinos. Ghettoization is the depiction of Latinos in extremely poor settings and
backgrounds. These are shots of Latinos living in poverty and filth, children that look uncared for, and if the story is in a city the images will be of gang activity or of a barrio. This happens because of the limited ethnic makeup of the newsroom. There is a lack of understanding of cultures other than that of the majority and it is carried throughout the broadcast, from story selection, to writing, to actual shot selection. The same 2003 NAHJ study found that the following is a trend in the portrayal of Latinos by the networks, “The stories that air on network newscasts are related to crime and illegal immigration in the Latino community, these stories tend to happen in barrios and on desolate stretches of the border. The problem is the lack of stories that cover Latinos in everyday life, the success stories and the business stories” (2003: 7).

The mainstream English language media does not often cover the Latino community. This is due in part to a lack of understanding of Latino culture and also the idea that the viewer will not relate to the story. Newsrooms across the country believe that viewers are interested in stories they can relate to. These are stories about people like themselves, not about those with a different background or experience. According to Croteau and Hoynes:

News media coverage, in fact, does not reflect some objective reality “out there” in the “real” world. Instead, news is the result of a social process through which media personnel make decisions about what is newsworthy and what is not, about who is important and who is not, about what views are to be included in debates and what views can be dismissed. None of these decisions can be totally objective ones. Instead, rarely articulated
assumptions underlie the approach the news media takes in making such decisions.

The limited scope of stories serves to maintain the status quo whether it is done consciously or not. By continuing to cover the Latino community in terms of illegal immigration and criminal activities, viewers are not able to form other impressions of Latinos. Ramírez Berg states the following:

Media stereotyping establishes the terms by which the Other can be known and situates the Other within dominant discourse. The stereotypical definition of Others, therefore, has powerful ideological consequences, simultaneously marginalizing Them and establishing and maintaining an explicit Us -Them boundary.

The fear of losing viewers and of covering a culture they know very little about keeps most newscasts from covering stories that could possibly change the “Us -Them” boundaries. These stereotypes can be diminished by the inclusion of more non-criminal and non-immigration stories about the Latino community such as business, research and human-interest stories.

There was one positive trend noted in the NAHJ study from 2004 and that is the small increase of news stories highlighting the contributions that Latinos are making to society. Most of these types of stories focused on the sacrifices made by Latino soldiers in the war. The number of stories increased from 3 in
2003 to 15 in 2004. The aforementioned study found that “There was also a drop in the number of crime stories from 47 in 2002 to 27 stories in 2003” (2004: 3). While these stories focus on the contributions Latino soldiers are making, they are strictly war related and not a broad representation of the positive contributions of the Latino community as a whole.

A 1998 Tomás Rivera Policy Institute study “National Survey of Latino TV Viewers” found that Latinos are eight times more likely to see themselves portrayed in the news as illegal immigrants, drug runners, or gang members than in positive roles such as medical doctors, elected officials or teachers. News plays a critical role in influencing decision-makers as they form their images of the world. If Latinos are portrayed in mostly negative roles they appear, to those with a limited frame of reference, as a problem population that contribute little to society. This carries into the portrayal of Latinos in network newscasts.

The NAHJ 2004 study found that coverage of Latinos in the news carried a subtle but powerful undertone. “According to the networks, Latinos are poor and live in worse conditions than most people in the country. Latinos continue to be depicted as living in ghetto like communities, run down neighborhoods, and overall poor conditions” (2004:12). Some participants in the NAHJ poll thought that the stories were not intentionally biased but reflected a lack of understanding of Latino society. This lack of understanding can be attributed to the make up of newsrooms across the country. According to the Fall 2003 Neiman Report, nearly nine out of ten newsroom professionals in the United States are white and most of them are white males. Newsrooms at the national level are mostly made
up of people from the same backgrounds, therefore, the same ideas and inculcated stereotypes circulate. According to Dyer, through stereotyping the dominant group tries, “to fashion the whole of society according to their own world view, value system, sensibility and ideology” (24). Other opinions are not taken into account easily, since that would require stepping outside their frame of reference.

In the 2004 study “Changing Channels and Crisscrossing Cultures: Survey of Latinos on the News Media” by the Pew Hispanic Center, Latinos expressed considerable concern that the English language media fosters a negative image of their communities among English speaking non-Latino Americans. The study reported the following:

The fact that 44% of Latinos believe that the English language media are doing damage to their image is a significant complaint. This concern is highest among those Latinos who have the greatest exposures to these media, the segment that gets all its news in English. The negative views are stronger in the native born population, 46%, than the foreign born, 43%. The findings very clearly demonstrate that exposure to the English language media greatly heightens this concern as 51% of the English only category takes the negative view.

(2004:9)

The aforementioned study indicates that Latinos of all generations are very concerned about the accuracy of coverage of the Latino community and that story selection is also a major concern. The Pew study reported that:
Among those who said that the English language media contributes to a negative image of Latinos, substantial majorities cited too much emphasis on undocumented immigration and criminal activity like drug trafficking. Native born Latinos were especially concerned about the lack of coverage of Latino economic accomplishments and insufficient recognition of Latino political and community leaders.

(2004:10)

The 2005 NAHJ study made similar findings. The NAHJ reported that immigration was a central theme in much of the networks’ coverage of Latinos. One out of every three Latino stories (34.7 percent) was about immigration in 2004. More than one hour of coverage was devoted to the topic, making up almost a third (31.6 percent) of the total time (three hours 25 minutes) devoted to Latino stories. This has been the case for the past ten years. The 2005 study reported the following, “From 1995 to 2004, the networks aired and estimated 140,000 stories. Of those, only 1,201 stories were about Latinos…Immigration and crime have been the dominant topics for Latino stories over the past 10 years. Out of 1,201 stories, these two topics have accounted for 36 percent of coverage” (2005: 8). Immigration is an important story but there are many layers to the coverage of immigration. Network news has covered the same layer for years, the number of immigrants trying to cross the border, the number of immigrants that are apprehended, and the government’s efforts to curb illegal immigration. Immigration has been viewed and mostly covered as an economic threat to the United States. The media has inadequately covered the largest
minority group in the country. The 2005 study posits the following “The networks’ coverage is inadequate because Latinos are portrayed within a limited framework that fails to address a range of issues affecting the community” (2005:7). The influence of the media is very powerful but much more so when it reaches those without a frame of reference where mediated views can be easily passed on.

In conclusion, television is a powerful cultural activity and it plays a key role in forming public opinion. Inculcated views of Latinos in U.S. television newscasts help perpetuate stereotypes by exposing television viewers repetitively to negative depictions of the Latino community. The studies and authors presented in this chapter have highlighted the negative impact that stereotypes have on Latinos, especially Latino youth. It is clear that the country is undergoing an historic demographic shift; yet, media coverage has failed to explain this change and its impact on society.
CONCLUSION

The media has its greatest influence on people when they do not have a frame of reference to help them interpret what they see. The media supplies a mediated view and people who have not had direct contact with the topic being presented can believe that what they are viewing is an accurate depiction. Latinos are often misrepresented on television and various other media and are a minority faced with constant character distortion. The negative images seen on television not only encourage young people in the Latino community to form negative images of themselves and their peers, but they also feed destructive stereotypes which can lead to negative self representations. This dissertation examined the consequences of these stereotypes and their effect on the Latino community.

Chapter One, the media as a tool to inculcate the viewer, representations of the “other” in film and television, as well as self-stereotyping and its effect on the Latino community were examined. The theories of Gordon Allport, Charles Ramírez Berg, Noam Chomsky and Mas'Ud Zavarzadeh were used to analyze the aforementioned subjects. Allport posits that stereotypes are not just frames of mind but beliefs. These beliefs manifest themselves in negative depictions of the “other” in both film and television. As evidenced in the studies cited in this chapter, this has a very negative effect on Latino youth because it leaves them with very few positive Latino role models with whom they can identify. Ramírez Berg examines the functions of stereotypes in film and the categorization of the
“other”. People with little or no frame of reference will see these images as natural and eventually, mediated history can replace the actual lived history. Chomsky examines the motives behind the perpetuation of stereotypes and how they are used to maintain the status quo. Negative depictions of Latinos in the media reinforce the dominant ideology that all that is different is not as worthy and cannot hold an elevated position in society. Zavarzadeh posits that even the most seemingly innocent films are sites of ideological investment. Viewing films is a political act not just an act of pleasure. Films are lessons where the viewer is taught his/her place in society. The dominant ideology is obscured in these cultural texts in order to legitimize it as natural and thereby maintain the status quo.

Chapter Two, mediated representations of Latinos and the U.S. – Mexico Border in U.S. produced films were examined as well as the effect of under representation of Latinos both in front and behind the camera. By applying Allport, Ramírez Berg, Chomsky, and Zavarzadeh’s theories to the films discussed in this chapter it is clear that the stereotypes used in Hollywood productions serve to reinforce the dominant ideology. The film industry hegemony strives, whether consciously or unconsciously, to maintain the status quo. In order to do so the dominant group (Anglo elite) expects certain images (stereotypes) of the border and its residents in order to continue treating them or justifying the treatment of them as the “other”. Through their narratives and resolutions, most films produced in the United States endorse the dominant ideology.
Chapter Three, films produced in Mexico and their depiction of Chicanos, Mexicans and the U.S. – Mexico Border were examined. Mexican cinema has produced a constant, static portrayal of the Chicano and Mexican community in the United States. The impact of these movies on Chicanos and Mexicans is powerful. These films reach a large audience and carry negative depictions that can reinforce and fix stereotypes in viewers who have little or no other frame of reference. The purpose of these films is to depict the “other”, in this case Mexicans who have moved to the United States, in a position of disadvantage. This is done by constructing films that advance the dominant ideology. According to Zavarzadeh, film teaches viewers how to be “good” subjects and places the viewer in his/her social position. The dominant ideology in films is made to appear natural in order to legitimize the continuation of the dominant social arrangement and secure the current power relation.

Chapter Four, inculcated views of Latinos in U.S. national television newscasts, the importance of television as a cultural activity and its role in forming public opinion were examined. In the hours spent watching television and reading the newspaper, readers and viewers form perceptions of the world and their immediate surroundings. Viewers rely on the media to provide them with exposure in an attempt to experience culture beyond their immediate environment. This relationship can be detrimental and perpetuate a vicious cycle of stereotypes if the media does not accurately reflect the reality of the United States Latino population. When coverage is limited to only negative aspects of a
community or a geopolitical space, such as the U.S. – Mexico border, it contributes to damaging perceptions of that population as a whole.

**Further Study:**

This dissertation is not an exhaustive study of film and newscasts. The newscasts examined are limited to English and Spanish language U.S. network news. The content of local U.S. newscasts and Mexican local and national newscasts was not examined. Specific studies of these media would be beneficial to fully understand the functions and effects of negative Latino representations on television news. The chapters on film in this dissertation examined films produced in the U.S. and Mexico separately. More studies comparing the representations of Latinos produced in both countries are needed including an analysis of the producers, directors, writers and other creative positions that factor prominently in character selection and character portrayal in films on both sides of the border.

One area of particular interest for my own studies is U.S. network newscasts and their representations of Mexicans and Mexican Americans. This topic needs to be studied from representation to reception. A focus group of Mexican and Mexican American youth would be of particular interest to discuss the characterization of Latinos portrayed in newscasts. This combined with audience studies would help to further understand how those being depicted view these representations. Another area of interest is the ownership of Spanish language networks by English language corporations such as the
Telemundo/NBC partnership and how these relationships affect the Latino community both in the United States and Latin America.

The United States is undergoing an historic demographic shift; but the media has failed to reflect this change and its impact on society. Latinos now make up one of every seven U.S. residents, according to a 2005 U.S. Census Bureau Report. The media’s narrow scope of coverage of the Latino community depicts Latinos as a problem people living on the fringes of U.S. society. The media has not covered the Latino community thoroughly and has failed to educate its viewers about a community that in a few of decades will make up twenty-five percent of the U.S. population. With constant exposure to stereotypes, society will continue to view these representations as natural.
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