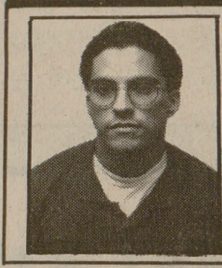


Film trends focusing on Mexican-Americans

I was recently asked, as a representative of the Committee for the Awareness of Mexican-American Culture, to write up a review on a contemporary Chicano film (e.g., "Milagro Beanfield War" or "Stand and Deliver"), and initially, I felt this to be simply a matter of expressing my thoughts on the current trend of films focusing on Mexican-Americans. What evolved in the process, however, was an accumulation of antipathy towards current criticisms of Chicano film.

I happened to be merely reviewing critics perceptions of films such as "Milagro Beanfield War," when I discovered a surprising plethora of negative reaction (I'm not implying that "Milagro" is a superlative film, by any means; I myself have some problems with its overall rhythm.) The fact was that critics were not condemning "Milagro" for its cinematic awkwardness as much as they were expressing their own tendencies of xenophobia.

One particular critic labeled "Milagro" a populist enterprise with deified protagonists—the landowners. Is this preachiness? It would be had the film not been based on historical/political truths. The fact is, though, that all these critics who have been quick to label these Chicano films as sanctimonious have been just as quick to ignore the history of the people of New Mexico. For behind the rich characters of the film, behind the beautiful land we see as so pleasantly endeared by the Mexicans, lies a dialectical work examining all the wrongs inflicted upon the Mexicans of



Robert Villarreal
Guest Columnist

the United States since the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848.

This film is based upon the fight of Chicano activists in the 1960's concerning a national park which was rightfully the property of the Mexicans. A Chicano named Reyes Tijerina had proven this through the acquisition of a land title signed by the Spanish government, but the United States decreed a statute of limitations on the issue and forced Tijerina's hand. So he set about to the national park along with several of his compañeros and abducted two forest rangers. His ransom for the rangers was the legal acknowledgment by the state of New Mexico that, indeed, this park was the rightful property of the Mexicans. Tijerina was eventually arrested and this spawned a series of ghostlike attacks upon the establishment, all of which is humorously presented in both the novel and screenplay of "Milagro."

Nevertheless, critics refuse to read into the history of oppression aimed at the Mexicans living in the United States since 1848. This is reflected in their

El Cinema moderno se Enfoca los Mexico-Americanos

Hace poco me pidieron, como un representante de CAMAC (Committee for the Awareness of Mexican-American Culture), que escribiera una reseña sobre el cine chicano contemporáneo (Por ejemplo "Milagro Beanfield War" o "Stand and Deliver") y, al principio, creí que se trataba simplemente de expresar mis opiniones sobre la tendencia actual de las películas que tratan de los mexicoamericanos. Lo que surgió en el proceso, sin embargo, fue una acumulación de antipatía hacia la crítica actual del cine chicano.

Sucedió que yo estaba leyendo opiniones de críticos sobre películas como "Milagro Beanfield War," cuando descubrí un número sorprendente elevado de reacciones negativas (no quiero decir que "Milagro" sea un film extraordinario, ni mucho menos; yo mismo tengo algunas desavenencias con el ritmo en su conjunto). La verdad es que los críticos no condenan "Milagro" por sus faltas cinematográficas sino que estaban expresando sus propias actitudes de xenofobia.

Un crítico en particular calificó "Milagro" de empresa populista con protagonistas divinizados — los

mexicanos — y protagonistas exagerados — los terratenientes. ¿Constituye esto demagogia? Lo sería de no haber estado basada la película en verdades históricas y políticas. La verdad es, no obstante, que todos estos críticos que con toda velocidad han calificado estas películas chicanas de santimonias, se han apresurado igualmente a ignorar la historia de las gentes de Nuevo México. Pues por detrás de los complejos personajes de la película, detrás de la tierra preciosa que vemos tan cariñosamente adorada por los mexicanos, yace una labor dialéctica que examina todas las injusticias perpetuadas contra los mexicanos de los Estados Unidos desde la firma del tratado de Guadalupe Hidalgo en 1848.

Esta película estaba basada en la lucha de activistas chicanos en la década de los sesenta por causa de un parque nacional que era pro derecho propiedad de los mexicanos. Un chicano llamado Tijerina lo había probado mediante la obtención de un título de propiedad firmado por el gobierno español, pero los Estados Unidos decretaron un estatuto de limitaciones respecto al asunto y obligaron a Tijerina a ceder. Por lo

que él se encaminó al parque nacional junto con varios de sus compañeros sequestró a dos de los guardabosques. Su rescate por los guardas era la admisión por parte del estado de Nuevo México de que, efectivamente, el parque era por derecho propiedad de los mexicanos. Tijerina fue arrestado y esto provocó una serie de ataques fantasmáticos al establecimiento todo lo cual es presentado con humor tanto en la novela como en el guión de "Milagro."

No obstante, los críticos se niegan a ver la historia de la opresión de que han sido objeto los mexicanos que viven en los Estados Unidos desde 1848. Esto se refleja en sus críticas de los diálogos en español, de la cultura mexicana y de las caricaturas de los anglos. Con todo, "Milagro" es un ejemplo de una voluntad de desafiar el etnocentrismo de nuestro tiempo; esta disposición se ve representada en otras películas como "Zoot Suit" (Luis Valdez) y "Stand and Deliver". Las películas chicanas no se proponen crear imágenes del odio anglosajón, sólo les concierne la búsqueda de justicia social.

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criticisms of the Spanish dialogues, the Mexican culture and Anglo caricatures. Still, "Milagro" is a reflection of a willingness to defy the ethnocentricity

of our times, and this is a willingness portrayed in films such as "Zoot Suit" (Luis Valdez) and "Stand and Deliver." Chicano films are not aimed at forming

images of Anglo hate; they are merely concerned with seeking social justice. *Robert Villarreal is a junior philosophy major.*

'Melting Plot' conceals inequalities

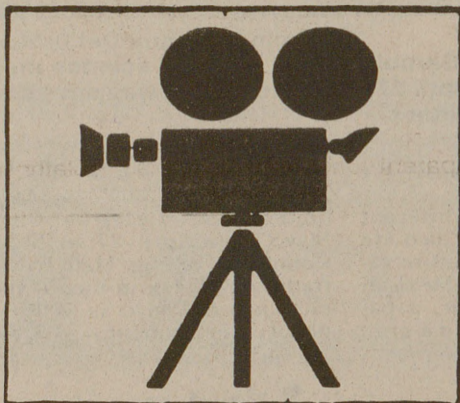
In Spike Lee's 1989 controversial film "Do the Right Thing," the domino effect of racial injustice and social inequities leads to racial violence in the streets and, consequently, a society is left sunk in a mire of moral ambiguity. In return for his realistic and courageous sketch of racial pathos in the U.S., Lee was awarded with a big blank nothing from the Academy Awards.

Meanwhile, "Driving Miss Daisy," a coffetable approach to racism, walked away with best picture.

What does this tell us about the sentiment of multiculturalism in the United States today? It tells us that the racial epidemic has been far from quarantined.

"Do The Right Thing" challenged our society through a revolutionary standpoint, by implying that institutional surgery is a necessary procedure in dealing with the cancer of racism. "Driving Miss Daisy" dealt with racism from a more benign perspective — have a black man drive you around for 30 years and then learn the errors of your racial ways.

The juxtaposition of these two films



reveals to us the nature of today's political language.

Why do we need affirmative action? Why do we need more money for our impoverished school districts? Why do these minorities continue to segregate themselves? What American Indian? Let's just all accept each other and dispose of all these racial and ethnic labels and concentrate on the human race.

This is the language of today when it comes to the racial dilemma, and this multiculturalism is, ostensibly, just another form of the Melting Plot.

The Melting Plot began when the U.S. government first had to deal with the arrival of ethnic immigrants upon its shores. Immigrant group after immigrant group soon became exposed to the idea of melting into the mold of the American value system and, thus, the Melting Plot was well on its way to being institutionalized.

The real truth of the Melting Plot is greed; the very same greed which

justified the belief that the American Indian should melt beyond recognition, that the African-American should melt in the cotton fields, and that the Chicano should melt in the mines and ranches. Today, these groups are still melting, in the inner-city ghettos, on the reservations, and in the barrios.

So every Fourth of July, we celebrate the success of the Melting Plot and pay tribute to the Statue of Liberty, which holds up that beacon of light for all newcomers to see. Only, the Blacks never saw the Statue of Liberty — merely chains, and the American-Indian and Chicanos saw only wars waged under the banner of Manifest Destiny.

Therein lies the beauty of the Melting Plot. It conceals its own devices by proposing that all peoples of this land are given the same dream and opportunity. If you fail, it's your fault, no one else's. Blaming the victim thus becomes the substitute for blaming the Melting Plot.

But remember that the barrio, the ghetto, the reservation, are, in essence, American values since it was American ideology that shaped them.

Our society has survived because it has adopted the policy of addressing changing problems. We must continue to pursue this adaptation by not failing to ignore the problems of the disadvantaged. We must seek to create political, educational, medical, and economic equity, but institutional change is a contingent part of this remedy. And that, Miss Daisy, is what doing the right thing is all about.

Robert Villarreal is a junior philosophy major.

Minority groups must unite

Throughout this year, you have been exposed to opinions on a variety of racial issues. Accusations were made by opposing viewpoints, arguing that certain action be taken.

Yet both sides became too involved in pointing out each other's faults. Never was it mentioned that concessions must be made by both sides in order to reach a solution.

There is too much of a reliance on the perceived ethnic "brotherhood." Minority organizations allege that they are working against each other, and instead should work together. They see this as discouraging and disappointing. But why SHOULD these organizations work together? People will be attracted to the most effective leadership, not simply because they are all minorities. I see nothing wrong with this competition or conflict.

Minorities make too many decisions based solely on race. Texas A&M has recently created a variety of positions dealing with diversity and multiculturalism. It is not imperative that the person holding the position be a minority. Also, minority groups tend to vote in blocks when a minority is running for public office, claiming "it is time" that a minority get elected. If this continues, minorities will never gain any credibility. Minorities cannot make certain demands, while continuing to do exactly what they opposing.

Perhaps the most difficult thing I have had to deal with in working with minority student organizations is the overemphasis on racism. Granted it is serious enough to warrant close



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examination, it seems unnecessary to create paranoia. Awareness is a good defense. But harping on it over and over only creates cynicism. I try to find every other possible explanation for someone's actions before I label them as racist.

This overemphasis also tends to make minorities overly sensitive. It makes it extremely difficult to get people to sit at a table to discuss racial issues when emotion overwhelms reason. Instead, minorities should take an educational standpoint, seizing every opportunity to inform and educate.

In conclusion, both sides should not wait for the other side to come to them. Both should come to the bargaining table. This semester, student leaders have been mentioning diversity and multiculturalism as concerns of theirs. Whether this was politically motivated or not remains to be seen. But this should not prevent minorities from approaching them. Minorities should take them up on their offers, and then it will be seen if their rhetoric was sincere or merely lip-service.

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The Cinco de Mayo special section is created to celebrate and inform others about Hispanic heritage and is a project of Texas A&M's Hispanic Journalists Association.

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Hispanics under-represented on television

Hispanics are at a disadvantage in broadcast media.

There are few Hispanics in media jobs compared to their size in the population, and there is little programming for Hispanics.

For example, Hispanics represent only about two percent of the reporters on national newscasts and all of the anchors are Anglo males.

Although national representation for Hispanics is low, Houston newscasts are an exception. Houston stations actually have a higher percentage of minorities on television than their percentage in the city population.

While Hispanics represent only 17 percent of Houston's population, about half of the news anchors and ten percent of the reporters on Houston television stations are Hispanics. Higher minority percentages on Houston broadcasts are likely due to the higher concentrations of minorities in the city.

The higher percentages of Hispanics on local newscasts also show the willingness of local broadcasters to hire minorities.



Julia Jones
Guest Columnist

Houston is also one of few cities that has three television stations that broadcast in Spanish, affiliates of Univision, Telemundo and Galavisión, the major Spanish-language networks. The unusually high number of Spanish-language stations gives Hispanics an added advantage in finding media jobs. Although other local stations provide some programming for Hispanics, it is limited. Hispanics are likely to find it easier to get a job at a Spanish-language station.

The audience for these Hispanic stations is large. According to a Feb. 26

article in the Houston Chronicle, the audience includes a constant stream of immigrants wanting to learn about this country's products and programs, and those who want to maintain their tradition and culture.

A small portion of viewers, including some Anglos, are those trying to improve or maintain their ability to speak Spanish.

Tim Crosby, general manager of Channel 49 KTFH-TV in Houston, the Galavisión affiliate, believes Hispanics are under-represented in some areas because people don't realize how large the population is.

Crosby says that after the 1990 Census results come out, people will be surprised, and minorities will have a lot more influence. By the turn of the century, Crosby expects Hispanics to be the largest minority population in the United States.

Education is another factor. Minorities may be excluded from jobs because they don't have the education to compete, Crosby said.

He feels that the demand for

Hispanics will help them. The Federal Communications Commission requires stations to hire minorities, and Crosby says that Hispanics have less competition when a station needs to meet its minority quota.

Demand is regional. In areas with large Hispanic populations, such as California and Texas, Hispanics are greater demand because broadcasters feel that they will appeal to viewers.

In national programming, however, news, entertainment and advertising still tend to promote the Anglo image.

Spanish-language broadcasting in the United States is growing as recognition of the size and importance of the Hispanic market increases, but Hispanics still have better employment opportunities in local broadcast markets, such as Houston.

Changes are coming slowly for Hispanics in the media, but it's a *nuevo mundo* out there.

Julia Jones is a senior journalism major.