

Identifying and Understanding Latino Stereotypes as Portrayed in Film

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Overview

This unit was designed to aid Spanish 1 students in grades 9-12 in the breaking down of stereotypes they have about Latinos living in the United States. The unit takes them from identifying the stereotypes they have about Latinos, to understanding why they have those stereotypes, and attempts to break down the stereotypes and create a new view of Latinos for the students. Film is the primary source of my students' awareness of Latinos and thus the source of the stereotypes they have about them. Therefore, in this unit, I use film as the medium for bringing to light the creation and purpose of perpetuation of stereotypes about Latinos and minorities in general in American society. The unit contains a series of activities meant to fulfill the objective of reinventing the image of Latin Americans in the minds of my students.

Rationale

Throughout history stereotypes of various ethnic groups have formed in the minds of citizens of the United States. These stereotypes serve different purposes depending on the group using the stereotype and the group being defined by it. A stereotype can be defined as many different things. One meaning of the word was used by Walter Lippman in 1922 and is defined as a necessary psychological tool used by all people for contextualizing information from their environment, when defined this way, a stereotype remains value neutral. Another way of defining stereotype, which is more commonly used in today's society is as a prejudice; a way of judging others as innately inferior based on traits such as skin color, language, religion, and basic cultural differences. This way of "bad" stereotyping was described by Arthur Miller in his work Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Stereotyping, this meaning of stereotypes will be the basis for this unit. (Ramirez-Berg 14)

In the media, stereotypes are assigned by a dominant group as a way of projecting negative images of other groups to anyone who is exposed to that particular media outlet, whether they are members of the dominant group or of any marginalized group. This phenomenon is discussed by Charles Ramirez-Berg in his book, Latino Images in Film and is explained by the following quotation. "...clearly the mass media is the dominant's media and routinely reflects dominant attitudes. Furthermore, mass media reaches the widest audience. Where mass media is concerned...stereotypes generally go one way: from the

dominant to the disenfranchised in the margins.” (Ramirez-Berg 21) These stereotypes stem from basic cultural differences between the two groups and become part of a society’s belief structure through personification in radio, television, and movies. As noted by Ramirez-Berg, “The images (of Latinos) in American film exist not in a vacuum but as part of a larger discourse on Otherness in the United States...Beyond their existence as mental constructs or film images, stereotypes are part of a social conversation that reveals the mainstream’s attitudes about others.” (Ramirez-Berg 4) Thus, the negative images of others, in this case, Latinos, portrayed in film do not exist solely in film, but in the consciousness of the population of the United States in general.

The use of the negative stereotyping of minority groups by a dominant group, in the case of the United States, Anglos, is done to maintain a societal status quo. In order to continue perpetuating the image of the Anglo American as dominant and powerful, negative stereotypes have been assigned to all minority groups and perpetuated based on cultural differences. Richard Dyer discusses this theory in “Stereotyping.” He states that stereotyping is the way that a dominant group tries “to fashion the whole of society according to their own world view, value-system, sensibility and ideology.” (qtd. In Ramirez-Berg 22) Ramirez-Berg uses the term “illegal alien” as an example of the way Anglos dominate Latinos. The connotation of the term gives the immediate feeling that Latinos are all criminal as opposed to being productive participants in society. (Ramirez-Berg 22) Thus, by continuing to show Latinos in a negative light in mass media, the view in society remains negative and they remain dominated by Anglos.

American mass media uses a variety of cinematic conventions in order to portray minorities in a negative light. The framing, mise-en-scène, camera movement, camera angles, music, sound effects, costuming, makeup, set design, scripting, acting conventions, and lighting all contribute to the feeling a film creates. In that respect they all contribute to creating stereotypes that the dominant group wants to perpetuate about minorities. Where framing is concerned; the dominant character, usually an Anglo male is the center of interest in a film. Thus, he occupies the center one-third of the frame and minor characters are used to fill out the sides of the shot. Mise-en-scène or staging of a scene is another way cinematographers perpetuate stereotypes. Scenes are staged to portray minorities as being removed from traditional society and acting in savage ways while dominant characters are able to remain calm and collected under pressure. Camera movement and camera angles aid the connotation of a scene by shooting scenes from the dominant character’s point of view rather than the point of view of a minority character. Music and sound effects are used to create feeling in movies. Movies are not only visually stimulating, but they appeal to other senses as well, by having a viewer associate a visual with particular sounds; the impact of a scene is much more forceful. In movies

costuming is important because people associate certain colors with personality traits and behaviors. Protagonists usually wear lighter colors while antagonists wear dark ones. Thus in film Anglo people usually wear light colors while minorities wear dark colors. In the past makeup played a different role than it does today, when white actors played both protagonist Anglos and antagonist minorities, makeup was used to darken the skin of Anglo actors to make them look Hispanic or of another ethnicity. Now, minorities often play parts written for them and make up is used to enhance certain traits associated with minority appearance; for example a visible tattoo or scar. Set design is important in creating stereotypes, because when depicting where minorities live, a set is usually designed to look like the ghetto. Scripting is of the utmost importance for media perpetuation of stereotypes; lines which indicate “intelligence, rationality, or wit,” always go to the dominant character. (Ramirez-Berg 51) Whereas lines that indicate negative personality traits are assigned to characters from minority backgrounds. Acting conventions are important because both villains and heroes behave in predictable ways, ways that contribute to a negative image of minorities and a positive image of a dominant race. Even the lighting of the scene plays a role on creating stereotypes in that it effects how we perceive particular characters; dark and shadowy or overly sweaty, this effects how an audience perceives certain characters and thus particular groups of people. Although it appears in a subconscious manner to the viewer, cinematic conventions are purposely put into film in order to portray society’s minority groups negatively and the dominant group positively. These aspects of filmmaking create an unsettling feeling of minority groups that becomes part of society’s consciousness. (Ramirez-Berg 38-56)

Because society’s dominant group usually deems so many of the minority group’s traits to be negative it would be impossible to personify all of the traits in one character. However, since the stereotypes are put into human form in the movies, negative traits are mixed among several stereotypical characters meant to define the entire Out-group being represented. Ramirez Berg has broken down the Latino stereotypes into six characters commonly seen in American film: el bandido (the bandit), the harlot, the male buffoon, the female clown, the Latin lover, and the dark Lady. These six characters in some manner contain all of the negative traits that the dominant society believes Latinos possess. Because negative stereotypes of Latinos are portrayed over and over in the media, in the United States we have come to think of Latinos as being defined by several unflattering characteristics clarified in the work of Stuart Fischhoff. We have come to define the following as synonymous with Latin Americans anti-social/criminal behavior, laziness, idiocy, promiscuousness, and helplessness.(Fischhoff 39)

I have been a teacher at Oliver High School in Pittsburgh's north side for four years. Oliver High School is a predominantly minority and low income school. Eighty percent of the students at Oliver are African American, the rest of the school is 18% Caucasian and 2% are Hispanic, Hispanic-American, or Asian-American. The students with whom I have come into contact over the past four years do not have much interaction with people from backgrounds other than their own, and also do not possess knowledge of cultures other than their own. With the exception of movies many of the students I have taught have no understanding of the Latin American community. However, as the racial make-up of Pittsburgh changes, it will become increasingly important for the students at Oliver to have some basic understanding of Latino culture, and how it is both similar and different to their own.

At the beginning of every school year, I provide each student with a multicultural survey so that I can better assess what they know about native Spanish speakers both in the United States and abroad, and also get an understanding for the preconceived notions they have about the Latino community based on previous Spanish classes or their experiences outside of school. Every year what I find from my students is that most of what they "know" about the Latino community is predicated upon what they see on television or in movies.

As a teacher who spends a lot of time traveling back and forth between Mexico and the U.S., I believe it is important to provide the young people in my Spanish classes with an alternative view of Latin culture and Latin Americans. I hope that through this unit my students will come to see Hispanic-Americans as more than dirty, lazy, poor, and undereducated people holding down poor jobs and acting in an overly sexual manner; but rather, as productive citizens with a rich culture. I would also like for my students to be able to recognize the stereotypes, where they stem from, and understand that the stereotypes are just that, stereotypes. Education is the key factor in the breaking down of societal stereotypes and, unfortunately, in my opinion Pittsburgh is still a fairly segregated city. Our students do not interact to a high degree with people from cultures outside of their own. In addition I do not feel that the schools or teachers in general do enough to educate students about other cultures or groups with whom students do not have contact. Therefore, I would like to use this as an opportunity to teach students about a culture that exists in most large cities in the United States, but is just becoming an important part of Pittsburgh's population.

This unit will be written for Oliver High School students taking Spanish level one and who are in grades 9-12. The unit will be completed over a month long period at the beginning of first semester in order to provide students with an understanding of why it is important to study Spanish at the high school level. This unit will involve using clips from several movies and documentaries both by

and about Latinos in the United States. The unit will also span aspects of several curriculums including: World Language, Math, Social Studies and English. I plan to incorporate math and social studies in a group project that will have students graph the population of several major cities by ethnicity, compare and contrast the Hispanic populations of those cities on another graph, and create maps of the United States, locating those cities and indicating using some form of coding the amount of Hispanic people living in that area. I plan to incorporate the English curriculum by having students complete several writing pieces before and after the project culminating in a piece comparing their views of Hispanic-Americans both before and after the unit.

Objectives

The primary objectives of this unit include: having students identify the stereotypes they have about Latin Americans, explore where these stereotypes come from, describe how the stereotypes are perpetuated through American Film, and to redefine for themselves and their peers the image of Latinos as it should be portrayed in society or in a school context at the very least. In addition to the primary objectives that I would like to reach through this project, there are secondary objectives that also must be reached in order to reach the primary objectives. These objectives are interdisciplinary in nature and include elements from the English, Social Studies and Math curriculums. These objective include the writing of coherent essays on topics relating to the various aspects of this unit, identifying major US cities on a map and indicating what percentage of the population of these cities is made up by Latin Americans, and how this affects the culture of each city individually. Due to the nature of the curriculum unit and the objectives described above the unit addresses a number of content standards for the Pittsburgh Public Schools in several disciplines. They are described below:

Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening

1. All students use effective research and information management skills, including locating primary and secondary sources of information with traditional and emerging library technologies.
2. All students read and use a variety of methods to make sense of various kinds of complex texts.
3. All students respond orally and in writing to information and ideas gained by reading narrative texts and use the information and ideas to make decisions and solve problems.

4. All students write for a variety of purposes, including to narrate, inform, and persuade in all subject areas.
5. All students analyze and make critical judgments about all forms of communication, separating fact from opinion, recognizing propaganda, stereotypes and statements of bias, recognizing inconsistencies, and judging the validity of evidence.
6. All students exchange information orally, including understanding and giving spoken instructions, asking and answering questions appropriately, and promoting effective group communications.
7. All students listen to and understand complex oral messages and identify their purpose, structure, and use.
8. All students compose and make oral presentations for each academic area of study that are designed to persuade, inform, or describe.

Mathematics

1. All students use numbers, number systems and equivalent forms (including numbers, words, objects, and graphics) to represent theoretical and practical situations.
2. All students compute, measure and estimate to solve theoretical and practical problems, using appropriate tools, including modern technology such as calculators and computers.
6. All students evaluate, infer and draw appropriate conclusions from charts, tables, and graphs, showing the relationships between data and real-world situations.

Arts and Humanities

2. All students evaluate and respond critically to works from the visual and performing arts and literature of various individuals and cultures, showing that they understand important features of the works.
3. All students relate various works from the visual and performing arts and literature to the historical and cultural context within which they were created.

Citizenship

1. All students demonstrate an understanding of major events, cultures, groups, and individuals in the historical development of Pennsylvania, the United States and other nations, and describe the patterns of historical development.
2. All students demonstrate understanding of themes and patterns of geography, know the location of major bodies of water, land masses and nations, and describe the relationships between geography and historical, economic, and cultural development.

Strategies

This unit will involve a variety of classroom strategies. Discussion, group work, and project based learning will all be used throughout the unit. Discussion will be used to help students make sense of the input they are receiving in regards to stereotypes and other cultural information. It will be employed as a mechanism for students to indicate what they already know and what they feel about each topic covered and then for them to indicate what they learned and how their perceptions have changed or how they have not changed after each lesson. Group work will be employed at several stages in the unit. Students will assist each other with various assignments related to this unit. Project based learning will be used so that students will be able to teach their peers about the geography of the United States and the Hispanic culture evident in major cities.

Classroom Activities

The first activity that will take place will be a cultural survey. This survey will be the basis for my judgment of the students' predisposed knowledge surrounding Hispanic culture. The survey asks questions about students' knowledge of the Spanish speaking world and about the world in general. It asks for students' opinions of Hispanics and about people they associate with Spain and Latin America. It is a gauge of where they are at the beginning of the unit and will also gauge how far they have come by the end of the unit. The multi-cultural survey will be both the first activity and the last activity recorded in a journal that the students will maintain during the completion of this unit.

Multi-Cultural Survey

Answer all of the following questions to the best of your ability. Remember, opinion questions have no right or wrong answer.

1. What is the capital of Spain:
 - a. Barcelona
 - b. Seville
 - c. Madrid
 - d. Caracas
2. Name two capital cities in Latin America
3. Name two countries that border Spain.
4. What regions in North America are Spanish speaking or have Spanish heritage.
5. Approximately how many native Spanish-speakers live in the U.S.A?
 - a. more than 20,000,000
 - b. between 10 and 15 million
 - c. fewer than 1,000,000
6. Which continent does not have a Spanish-speaking country?
 - a. Africa
 - b. North America
 - c. Asia
7. Name two famous Spanish or Latin American personalities.
8. Name two commercial products that you associate with Spain or Latin America.
9. Which Spanish-speaking country lies right on the equator?
 - a. Peru
 - b. Mexico
 - c. Ecuador
 - d. Spain
10. Write down three words that come to your mind when you think about Hispanic people.

After the survey will come a series of map activities followed by a map test. Through my years at Oliver, I have found that my students come to high school with little knowledge of geography. The first map activity will be locating all of the continents and the coloring of continents with Spanish speaking countries. The second activity will be to label a map of Europe and highlight Spain and its capital, Madrid. After students complete these activities there will be a map quiz

dealing with the world map and the European map. After the quiz I plan to introduce maps of North and South America. Students will label the countries and the capitals. They will color in the Spanish speaking countries. The final map project will be locating and naming all fifty states in the United States and the capitals of the states. Students will be responsible for highlighting certain states as they will be the focus of the following project.

World Map Activity

Name _____

Date _____

Directions: Step 1: Label the six continents pictured: Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, North America, and South America.

Step 2: Color: Europe blue, North America yellow, South America green, and Africa purple.



United States Map Activity

Name _____

Date _____

Directions: On the following map locate the following states by coloring them the colors indicated below: California and Maryland- red, New York – orange, Texas – yellow, Florida – green, Pennsylvania – blue, Illinois – purple, New Mexico and Washington D.C. – pink, New Jersey – brown, Arizona – black, Then fill in the capitals of each state in space provided below.



picture from www.abcteach.com

State

Capital

The next activity in the unit is a group project. The purpose of the group project will be to investigate major cities in the United States with large Hispanic populations. Students will break up into groups of 3-4 students. Each group will be assigned a major city: Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia, Washington D.C., Chicago, Houston, Miami, Trenton or Pittsburgh. Through graphing and other methods they will express the total population of the city and the number of Hispanics in the city, the group will state what percentage of the total population of the city is represented by Hispanics. They will identify which country most of the Latinos in the city come from and some of the customs that characterize the people from that nation. For example they will identify major foods, religious beliefs and holidays. They will also discuss major industries in the city and how these industries are affected by the Hispanic population if at all. These projects will be presented in poster form to the class accompanied by a short speech explaining the information. This project will require about three days of research in the school library using various texts and internet sources. In order to compile the information two days of classroom time will be allotted and the presentations will take two days.

After students have a general idea of where Latinos live and where they come from they can begin the work on stereotypes. I plan to have students begin to understand stereotypes by listing five ethnic groups on the board: African American, Anglo American, Latino, Middle Eastern, and Asian. I will have students brainstorm stereotypes for each of the groups. In their journal they will have to answer the following questions: Can they identify at least two positive stereotypes for each ethnic group? Are the positive stereotypes that they came up with 100% positive? After students complete this assignment they will write a personal definition of the word stereotype. Then one student will look up the word stereotype in The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, and they will write the actual definition along with their definition. The word stereotype is defined as: "1. A metal printing plate cast from a matrix that is molded from a raised printing surface, such as type. 2. A conventional, formulaic, and usually oversimplified conception, opinion, or belief. 3. A person, group, event, or issue considered to typify or conform to an unvarying pattern or manner, lacking any individuality."(Morris stereomicroscope-stevedore) Then each of the definitions will be discussed for clarification. In the journal students will write which definition(s) of stereotype they think we are using in class and why. They will also compare and contrast the actual definition of stereotype to their personal definition of the word.

The next activity will introduce the six stereotypical Latino figures commonly shown in American film. Only the name of each figure will be written on the board. Students will identify characteristics for each of these figures based on movies they have seen. Next actual characteristics for these figures will be

presented to the class and together we will compare and contrast our lists with the actual characteristics as presented by Ramirez-Berg.

We will then get into the cinematic conventions used by the film industry in order to maintain these stereotypical images. Students will be broken up into groups of 3-4 students. Each group will be assigned one of the cinematic conventions as described in the rationale: The framing, mise-en-scène, camera movement, camera angles, music, sound effects, costuming, makeup, set design, scripting, acting conventions, or lighting. They will summarize what Ramirez-Berg wrote about the convention in conjunction with the movie, Falling Down. As a class we will watch the scene from the film described in this activity, and each group will take note of the cinematic convention assigned to them as described by Ramirez-Berg. Each group will then present to the class their summarized information and explain how the scene reflects what Ramirez-Berg had written.

Students will then watch a series of film clips that depict Latin Americans in a negative light. These clips will come from the movies: Mi Vida Loca, Cheech and Chong: The Next Movie, I Like It Like That, and Colors. They will look at specific scenes from the movies in which cinematic conventions are used to portray Latinos in a negative manner. Each group will watch the scene and describe if and how their convention was used in the scene. As a class we will discuss the overall use of these conventions to create an image and how they see Latinos after watching the movies. In their journals students will write how they feel about Latinos, how movies may or may not have effected their opinion and if and how their understanding of their opinion or their opinion has changed after receiving the information about the perpetuation of stereotypes through film.

Students will then watch the film Real Women Have Curves, a newer movie that portrays Latinos in a more positive light. Students in their groups will watch to see if the same cinematic conventions are still present in this film. They will then write a journal piece comparing and contrasting this film with one of the other films in terms of the portrayals of Latinos.

Finally students will read a series of articles about Latinos in the United States. They will also view the documentary, 20th Century: Hispanics in America which shows both the positive accomplishments and some of the negative issues surrounding Latinos in America. This will be done to provide information about Latinos in a less biased manner than film. Students will write a final reflective essay describing if and how their views have changed regarding Latinos since the beginning of the unit.

A Latin Power Surge

By Arian Campo-Flores and Howard Fineman

Newsweek

May 30 issue - Antonio Villaraigosa's cell phone was trilling incessantly. Every Democrat in the nation, it seemed, wanted a piece of the newly elected mayor of Los Angeles, the first Latino to win the office in 133 years. John Kerry phoned to congratulate him, as did John Edwards, Howard Dean, Al Gore and Sen. Chris Dodd. Driving to city hall last Friday as he spoke by phone with a news-week reporter, Villaraigosa interrupted the interview to field yet another call on a different phone. "Yes, I would like to speak to Senator Clinton," he said. "Can I call you back?" he told the reporter. Afterward, Villaraigosa recounted his exchange with Hillary: "She said that she and President Clinton were just elated with my victory," and "if they could be helpful in any way in the coming weeks and months," they were eager to do so. Villaraigosa said he had responded with a few admiring words of his own. She was "an example of what I need to do as mayor of the city of Los Angeles," he had told her. "Not get so caught up in all of the national attention and focus on my job."

Good luck. The stream of calls may well build into a deluge. Dashing and charismatic, with street smarts bred in the barrio, Villaraigosa accomplished what Democrats dream of doing nationwide: he energized Latino voters to turn out for him at historic levels and stitched together the sort of multiracial coalition that has often eluded less-gifted politicians. Though they won the Hispanic vote last November, Democrats lost ground to Republicans for the second straight presidential-election cycle. President George W. Bush captured roughly 40 percent (the exact figure remains in dispute) of the Hispanic vote, compared with 35 percent in 2000 and Bob Dole's 21 percent in 1996. For the Democrats, the setback came in just the year that Latino voters, long considered a sleeping giant, stirred from their slumber. With turnout increasing from about 6 million in 2000 to an estimated 8 million last year, the Hispanic vote has become the El Dorado of American elections. To remain viable as a party, Democrats need to win Latinos back. At stake is nothing less than control of the presidency and Congress. If the GOP maintains its current share of the Latino vote, says Simon Rosenberg of the New Democrat Network, "then the Democrats will never be the majority party again in our lifetimes."

How did things become so dire for the Democrats? For starters, John Kerry's campaign botched its Hispanic outreach, according to many accounts. Latino operatives complained that the campaign leadership marginalized and undermined them at every turn. The leadership's assumption, according to Paul Rivera, a

senior political adviser on the campaign: that Latino votes would break down roughly as they did in 2000, as a Democracy Corps poll last July wrongly suggested. The Hispanic team struggled constantly for resources, the operatives say, and assurances of ad buys in battleground states often went unfulfilled, keeping Kerry off the Spanish-language airwaves for days at a time. "If the Kerry campaign had won Nevada, Arizona and New Mexico," all Latino-rich states, says Tom Castro, the campaign's deputy national finance chair, "John Kerry would be president right now."

Over at the Bush-Cheney campaign headquarters, where Latino outreach was embraced zealously, a different world order prevailed. "We were sitting at the big kids' table," says Frank Guerra, a consultant on the national media team. He and Lionel Sosa—a Hispanic marketing guru and veteran of six presidential campaigns—joined weekly conference calls with campaign strategists and chimed in freely with suggestions for Hispanic ads and even general-market ones. A master of the softly lit spot saluting Hispanic heritage and patriotism, Sosa built his ads around a consistent theme: "*Nos conocemos*" ("We know each other"). As he puts it, "We have a great leader, a man of his word, a man that truly is close to us." But Sosa also cut attack ads, an infrequent tactic in Hispanic political marketing. For one series of spots, he dispatched a cameraman to a Latino neighborhood within miles of Kerry's Beacon Hill home in Boston. "Have you ever seen him here?" the interviewer asked people on the street. "Has he been to any fiesta?" (He hadn't.)

With Karl Rove, a direct-mail devotee, at the helm, Republicans tailored messages to particular segments of the Latino electorate—a strategy they hope will keep winning over converts on the road to 2008. They targeted first-generation Hispanics with Spanish-language ads and second- and third-generation Latinos with English-language spots. "The day of advertising simply in Spanish to reach the Hispanic voter is dead," says Guerra. The campaign also tweaked some messages to appeal to particular nationalities clustered in different regions—like Cuban-Americans in Miami or Mexican-Americans in the Southwest—using radio announcers who could summon an array of accents and local idioms. "You don't dare use one accent in the wrong place," says Blaise Underwood, a grass-roots organizer for the campaign.

But the segmentation strategy that most worries Democrats involves religion. As with voters generally, last year the campaign courted Hispanic evangelical Protestants, who make up a growing portion of a traditionally Roman Catholic constituency. "In some states, such as New Mexico," says Underwood, "most of the evangelicals we were targeting were Hispanic." By reaching out to such churches, the campaign tapped into large concentrations of potentially sympathetic souls. "Many evangelical communities are greatly identified with the

Hispanic community," says Roberto Suro, director of the Pew Hispanic Center. "That explicit ethnic connection is considerably more rare in the Catholic Church." The Republican effort reaped rewards. According to a Pew Hispanic study scheduled for release this week, Bush's support among Latino Protestants—who comprise one third of the overall Latino electorate—grew from 44 percent in 2000 to 56 percent in 2004. Democrats were caught flat-footed. They "were so focused on the 527s, I'm not sure... they paid sufficient attention to the 3:16s," says Luis Lugo, director of the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, referring to the Biblical passage from the Gospel of John. Unlike black churchgoers who remain mostly Democratic for socioeconomic reasons, Lugo says, Latinos are "not a community in which economic issues alone are going to win it."

Outmaneuvered and outspent, the Kerry campaign learned a definitive lesson on Election Day: Hispanics had become much more of a swing constituency than a base, and no one could take their votes for granted anymore. In the aftermath, Kerry's Latino staffers and advisers, who had warned of such an outcome, vowed never to let it happen again. On Nov. 23, about 30 Latino Democrats convened in Washington, D.C., to plot strategy for future battles. Among the results: a proposal to create a new partisan Latino organization—for which \$25,000 was quickly raised for a feasibility study—and a new group called the Coronado Project, composed of several members of Kerry's Hispanic team. This week the Coronado group will send a 12-page memo to a variety of Democratic bigwigs with a caustic critique of the party's handling of Hispanic outreach and a set of recommendations. "Failure to reform the party's approach to Latino voters," the memo reads, "maintains a caste system that is ineffective, if not suicidal, for the party." Recently, Kerry himself acknowledged his campaign's anemic Hispanic effort. During a dinner for Latino backers at his Georgetown home last month, he offered what two guests called "a full *mea culpa*" and the assurance that he'd strive to avoid a similar fiasco in the future. (The two guests asked not to be named because they considered it a private event.)

As a party, the Democrats' renewed commitment faces its first test in the midterm elections next year. On his travels as head of the Democratic National Committee, Howard Dean is making sure to schmooze Hispanics along the way—granting a recent interview, for instance, to *El Latino*, a Spanish-language weekly in Arkansas. The DNC has also run Spanish-language ads as part of its assault on Bush's Social Security plan. And the New Democrat Network, which poured \$6 million into a comprehensive program to target first-generation Hispanics during the 2004 cycle, is eyeing potential races to direct resources to next year.

Some Latinos see a political opening in Bush's immigration policies—arguing that the president's guest-worker program, for example, does not do nearly enough to help the community that has shown him so much support. For their part,

Republican ardor for Hispanics is as *caliente* as ever. Dean's counterpart at the Republican National Committee, Ken Mehlman, recently formed a Hispanic advisory committee with an impressive cast of luminaries, including George P. Bush, the president's half-Mexican nephew. Mehlman recently addressed the Latin Chamber of Commerce in Las Vegas and has held a "conversation with the community" in Orlando, Fla. Underwood, the GOP grass-roots organizer, says the party will be trying to master the complex brew of Hispanic nationalities in Florida during next year's Senate contest. "President Bush has given Republicans an opportunity," says chief polling strategist Matthew Dowd. "He's tilled the soil among Hispanics. Now we have to work it."

Faced with such GOP incursions, Democrats will be studying Villaraigosa's formula for victory, hoping to replicate it in other races nationwide—where the terrain may be more challenging than two Democrats squaring off in a Left Coast city. Villaraigosa captured 84 percent of an energized Latino-base vote, combined with half the white vote and nearly half the black one. Villaraigosa's "coalition-building is a map to be followed," says U.S. Rep. Luis Gutierrez of Illinois, a Democrat, who hopes to emulate him in a future Chicago mayoral run. To cobble his alliance together, Villaraigosa had to perform an adroit balancing act—galvanizing his Hispanic supporters without coming across as ethnocentric and thereby alienating other racial groups. "He neither played [his ethnicity] nor downplayed it," says Rodolfo de la Garza of Columbia University. "It was just there." Villaraigosa assured he'd be a mayor "for all of Los Angeles," and assiduously courted other groups, most importantly blacks, who voted overwhelmingly for his opponent during their previous face-off in 2001. This time, his efforts paid off: he secured key endorsements from leaders like U.S. Rep. Maxine Waters and former L.A. Lakers star Magic Johnson

The experiences of Villaraigosa's predecessors offer insights as well. Back when black mayors were sweeping into power in major metropolitan areas, many of them also knit together multiracial coalitions. David Dinkins—New York's first and only African-American mayor, elected in 1989—brought together black, brown and white folks on a foundation of organized labor, recalls Bill Lynch, who helped build the bloc. "If you energize your core base [blacks], it has a contagion effect on the other parts of the coalition," he says. It's what Fernando Ferrer needs to address in his current New York mayoral run if he has any chance of reviving a candidacy hobbled by some controversial remarks he made about the case of Amadou Diallo, who was gunned down by police in 1999. "If the Latino vote is going to count, it needs to be cohesive and establish a strong link to other groups," says de la Garza. "My own sense is that Ferrer is not energizing the base." But Lynch, who's advising Ferrer, says "it's still early in the process."

Increasingly, Latino candidates must confront another barrier: African-American misgivings about a surging Hispanic population. While blacks are accustomed to playing the dominant role in multiracial coalitions, says Lynch, "what happened in L.A. sends a clear signal that that could be about to change. There's always potential for power struggle in a coalition." Historically, de la Garza argues, blacks have hesitated to share the stage with Latinos. "They initially opposed extending the nomenclature of 'minority' to Latinos in the Voting Rights Act," he says. As much as things have evolved since then, "the romantic image of blacks and browns uniting is just that—romantic."

Which may lead some Latinos to ask: will there be a day when they can simply rely on their own demographic power to propel candidates into office? In recent years Hispanics have made considerable gains, winning in some unlikely places, such as Wichita, Kans. (mayor), Idaho (state senator) and Carrboro, N.C. (alderman). There are now more than 6,000 Hispanic elected officials, according to the National Association of Latino Elected Officials. Just last year the Senate gained the first two Latinos in recent times: Republican Mel Martinez from Florida and Democrat Ken Salazar from Colorado. Yet in most of these cases, the candidates won because they either resided in majority-minority districts or they fashioned new iterations of multiethnic and multiracial alliances. Even if Latinos were to pursue a singularly Hispanic campaign strategy in a competitive race, their dizzying diversity—with recently arrived Dominicans, Cuban-American exiles and 10th-generation New Mexicans living under one umbrella—would raise its own prickly issues. Whatever the strategy, though, the bottom line is that Latinos are steadily securing higher office. While the traditional critique of Hispanic politics has been "that you guys aren't ready for prime time," says Antonio Gonzalez of the William C. Velasquez Institute, Villaraigosa shows that "Latinos can win the big one." Surely the next victory can't be too far away. Democrats had better pray they're part of it.

With T. Trent Gegax, Andrew Murr and Jonathan Darman

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The Survivor's Story

By Andrew Murr

Newsweek

May 30 issue - Bridging communities "is what my whole life has been about," says Los Angeles Mayor-Elect Antonio Villaraigosa. But few of those hailing the victory of the first Latino elected to lead the City of Angels since frontier days know just how big a gulf he's had to span.

Antonio Villar, as he was born in 1953, grew up a poor Chicano kid from East L.A., raised by a single mom who worked as a part-time secretary in a state office. His father drank, and his parents divorced when he was 5, but he still remembers terrible fights. "I saw my father beat my mother," he recalls. "I remember my sister hiding under the bed when he'd come in screaming in a drunken rage." Studious and well dressed in grade school, young Tony made money by taking the bus downtown to shine shoes and sell newspapers. "I used to sell La Opinion in front of the Olympic Auditorium on the boxing nights," he says. "I've been working since I was 7 years old."

But his school career soured after he was diagnosed in 10th grade with a tumor in his spine that began to paralyze his legs. Once he recovered, he started getting into fights; he got a tattoo that read born to raise hell. He was kicked out of one high school and dropped out of a second. He eventually went back to school, where teacher Herman Katz noticed him in his remedial English class. "He stood out," recalls Katz. "He was bright, good-looking and brash." Katz mentored the young man, and even paid for him to take the SAT. "He just needed somebody at that particular time to say you could be something and do something in life," Katz says. The young Villaraigosa finished high school, graduated from UCLA in 1977 and went to law school at night. (He also got married, to Corina Raigosa, and merged their surnames.)

And last Tuesday he did something more, building a rainbow coalition—in a city where Latinos make up 48 percent of the population but just a quarter of the electorate—to become the first candidate to oust a sitting L.A. mayor in 32 years. The charming 52-year-old did it handily, capitalizing on widespread disaffection with the lackluster incumbent, James Hahn, to register a resounding 59-41 percent win.

But the bridge-building is just beginning, and Villaraigosa knows it. This city of 3.9 million—the nation's second largest—is as fractured as the seismic blocks on

which it is built: ethnically, geographically, economically. Tensions between blacks and Latinos boil just below the surface, as recent outbreaks of violence in the city's schools make clear. Unemployment in the black community remains high, despite gains for the city's other ethnic groups. Angelenos all over town are frustrated with crime and traffic and failing schools. "We have to create a city where more people are making it. That has a broad appeal," Villaraigosa says with his usual eager manner. But solving L.A.'s problems means risking alienating one group in order to devote scarce resources to another. "It's easier to put an electoral coalition together than it is to keep it together in a governing coalition, when the bullets are live," says UCLA political scientist Franklin Gilliam.

Villaraigosa got a crash course in those dynamics just minutes into his first press conference as mayor-elect. Violence had just erupted at a high school where Villaraigosa was planning to take a victory lap later that day, a TV reporter informed him. Would the mayor-elect cancel his visit? "I'm going over there," he shot back. "I'm not going to be a mayor who hides under a rock." A school-district official tried to dissuade Villaraigosa's staffers from letting him go, but he wouldn't have it, and when he arrived at Taft High School in the San Fernando Valley, the scene was "completely out of control," he said later. The campus had been in lockdown, and frustrated parents were banging on the doors as the media swarmed outside. "It's important that we calm the waters and not incite fears," Villaraigosa lectured the cameras and the parents, after learning that the violence wasn't, in fact, race-related. But knowing too well this won't be the last time he has to deal with this kind of situation, Villaraigosa hastened to add, "I'll have zero tolerance for racial violence."

He's been calming the waters his entire political career. In the 1980s he worked as a union organizer representing black workers at the school district, and he served as head of L.A.'s ACLU office, which brought him in touch with Jewish liberals on the city's west side, an important part of this year's coalition. Along the way, he made friends who continue to be his allies. Assemblyman Mark Ridley-Thomas was the local head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference when he and Villaraigosa cofounded a Black-Latino Roundtable in 1985. "He has always demonstrated a collaborative or unifying presence," says Villaraigosa's old ally. Elected to the California State Assembly in 1994, he became speaker four years later, and showed an ability to broker deals between rival camps. In 2001, he tried for the mayoralty, running on a labor-left platform. But excitement about the possibility of making ethnic history overshadowed his message. After losing to Hahn in a bitter runoff battle, Villaraigosa retooled, pledging to be a mayor "for all of Los Angeles." That approach comes at a cost: "My whole life there's been criticism that I wasn't Latino enough," Villaraigosa says. He's proud of his Mexican heritage, but, he says, "I don't wear it on my sleeve."

This week Villaraigosa will announce a transition team. And he's rushing to put together an administration that he promises will be "the most diverse in Los Angeles history." Big problems loom. More students in the public schools drop out than graduate, according to a recent Harvard study (Villaraigosa says he wants power over the school district, something current law prohibits). L.A.'s roadways remain hopelessly clogged (more reversible lanes and staggered work hours will help, he says). And his is "the most underpoliced big city in America," Villaraigosa says—a hole he hopes to fill by pledging to hire 1,600 cops in the next several years. "He's committed to that," notes a delighted L.A. Police Chief William Bratton. It's a daunting challenge. But a weary Villaraigosa leans back in his chair and smiles as he contemplates it. The poor kid from the east side knows a thing or two about getting from here to there. He's survived worse.

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Why We're the New Irish

By Gregory Rodriguez

Newsweek

May 30 issue - Antonio Villaraigosa may not realize it, but his election as mayor of America's second largest city borrows a page from Al Smith. Like a lot of Irish-American politicians of his day, Smith knew how to play the ethnic card to great effect. After all, "shamrock politics" had helped the Irish establish a firm grasp on power throughout the Northeast in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. But as Smith rose through the ranks in New York politics, from speaker of the Assembly to the statehouse in the 1910s, both he and Irish-controlled Tammany Hall, the powerful Manhattan Democratic Party organization, agreed that he needed to build out his base. While never forgetting his ethnic roots, Smith broadened his outlook and became more politically independent, seeking allies in all corners of the state. Smith's political success helped normalize the image of the Irish as mainstream Americans throughout the Northeast.

As with the Irish, so too with Mexican-Americans, as Villaraigosa's comfortable margin of victory in the Los Angeles mayor's race attests. Villaraigosa, a onetime militant campus activist, fashioned his first race for the mayoralty in 2001 around a labor-left-Latino alliance. He lost. Four years later he broadened his message, built a more ideologically moderate multiethnic coalition and won by nearly 20 percentage points.

Villaraigosa's political ascent is a metaphor for the maturation of Mexican-American politics—a process that is more evolutionary than revolutionary, and, at bottom, a classic American story of ethnic integration into the mainstream.

Throughout American history, countless other ethnic groups have been stripped of their foreignness and have achieved mainstream acceptance. Political and cultural icons are often the vehicles for this cultural shift. In 1939, *Life* magazine complimented Italian-American ballplayer Joe DiMaggio for not reeking of garlic or using grease in his hair. By his retirement in 1951, however, it called him an all-American hero.

Of course, while European immigrant experiences generally had a beginning and an end, Mexican immigration has been virtually continuous for the past century. This has made the process of Mexican integration a perpetual one. But this dynamic hasn't so much retarded assimilation as it has sown confusion in the formulation of political and cultural identities. Though the self-definition of European-American groups gradually evolved from an immigrant to an ethnic American identity as time passed, Mexican-Americans have always had to contend with the presence of unassimilated newcomers as well as cyclical waves of anti-Mexican sentiment. Consequently, Mexican-Americans have had to battle against the presumption of foreignness longer than other ethnic groups.

What's happening with Mexican-Americans is happening to some extent among other Latino groups as well. In New York City, Puerto Rican mayoral hopeful Fernando Ferrer's only hope of catching the wealthy Republican incumbent Mayor Michael Bloomberg is to build bridges to blacks and other ethnic-minority groups in the metro-politan mosaic, while denting Bloomberg's base among middle- and upper-class whites. A growing number of immigrants from Latin America are flooding into south Florida, teaming with non-Latinos to chip away at the Cuban hold on political power there. Those groups pale in comparison to the political clout of Mexican-Americans, though. While Latinos now live in all parts of the country, two thirds of the nation's Hispanics are of Mexican origin—and their heavy concentration in Texas and California, the country's two most populous states, gives Mexican-Americans extraordinary clout.

Villaraigosa's overwhelming victory is a reminder that despite the uniqueness of Mexican immigration, the process of—and desire for—achieving "Americanness" is as strong as it ever was. Over the next generation, Mexican-Americans will only produce more of their own modern Smiths and DiMaggios. In so doing, they will be exchanging the now outdated language of multi-culturalism for an updated version of the melting pot.

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The final assignment in the unit will be a second completion of the Multi-Cultural survey to gauge how much the students have learned about the Spanish speaking world and if their feelings have changed through this unit.

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Rodriguez, Gregory. "Why We're the New Irish," Newsweek, May 30, 2005,
Volume CXLV, No. 22

This article compares the current situation with Latinos in politics to that of the
Irish in the past.

Viewing List

Cheech and Chong's The Next Movie

Colors

Falling Down

I Like it Like That

Mi Vida Loca

Real Women Have Curves

Hollywood filmmaking paradigm—is understood as the norm of good, professional filmmaking practice—is implicated in the process of movie stereotyping.

THE POETICS OF HOLLYWOOD STEREOTYPING

The stereotypical image, the human stereotype, is the most obvious and prominent part of the stereotype, but it does not act alone. It is presented to the viewer along with a full array of stereotypical devices deployed at every cinematic register, everything from mise-en-scène to framing, from camera angles to shot duration, from set decoration to music and sound effects. These devices complement the image in cinema but hardly imperceptible ways and together help to create the complete stereotypical statement.

This poetics of stereotyping is derived from and embedded in the classical Hollywood cinema's narrative paradigm, the system of film conventions devised by early filmmakers to tell their visual stories clearly and efficiently. As I mentioned above, stereotypes are an important part of this paradigm, inasmuch as they facilitate narration. As a purely industrial practice, then, stereotypes are maintained because of their valued narrative economy, which is related to their financial economy as well. Because 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.

Falling Down and the Poetics of Stereotyping

In order to demonstrate Hollywood's stereotyping poetics of Latinos working at peak efficiency at numerous cinematic levels, let me analyze a four-minute scene from *Falling Down* (1993, directed by Joel Schumacher). The film, a contemporary drama set in Los Angeles, follows a divorced, unemployed defense industry engineer (Michael Douglas) who snaps one morning in bumper-to-bumper freeway traffic, abandons his car, and sets off on foot to see his daughter. The movie uses his trek across Los Angeles to make its beddled critique of the vacancy and absurdity of modern urban life. When D-FENS (the police refer to Douglas's character using the name on his personalized license plate) stops in East L.A. to rest and repair a hole in his shoe, he encounters two Mexican American homeboys (Agustin Rodriguez and Eddie Frias). They

pull a knife on him and try to steal his briefcase, but D-FENS bears them off with a baseball bat.

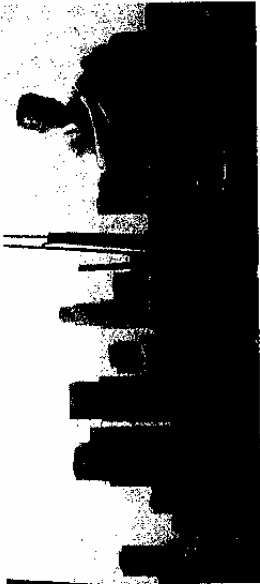
Falling Down is unusual for a Hollywood film in that its protagonist is not a typical hero. Instead, D-FENS is a nerd, complete with overgrown crew cut, hard-shell briefcase, black-framed eyeglasses, plastic pocket protector wedged into the pocket of his ill-fitting white short-sleeved shirt, and drab polyester necktie. That the film's protagonist is himself an in-group stereotype is its most progressive element, and might lead one to believe that the film will be a sustained critique of the maddening way the Anglo dominant abuses its own. But the film is so entrenched in typical Hollywood clichés, conventions, and stereotypes that any possibility of a real critique is seriously undermined. There are plenty of film narrative cues, which I will discuss below, to signal to the viewer that D-FENS is indeed our hero and that the film is a lot more conventional than it may appear at first glance. One major one, for example, is the star casting: the fact that D-FENS is played by Michael Douglas, an Academy Award-winning actor-producer who is a certified box-office superstar commanding top salary and billing.⁴

A second way the film's ostensible criticism of the system is compromised is the unthinking way it uses standard movie stereotypes of Latinos, Asians, and even white males to score its thematic points. But beyond these there are a host of cinematic elements that contribute to the film's stereotypical depiction of these two East L.A. *banditos* that deserve to be discussed in some detail.

Framing

As David Bordwell has shown, typical compositions in Hollywood films are centered. According to Bordwell, most shots in classical Hollywood films "work with a privileged zone of screen space resembling a T: the upper one-third and the central vertical third of the screen constitute the 'center' of the shot." Furthermore, "the human body is made the center of narrative and graphic interest."⁵ Balance within the frame is maintained by the positioning of figures. The most important figure, usually the protagonist, or figures (the protagonist and the leading lady and/or sidekick) take the center of the frame, and the less important ones (the minor characters) are relegated to the edges. The usually Anglo male protagonist, as the center of interest, will therefore assume the center one-third of the frame. The composition will be balanced with minor characters who will fill out the sides of the frame.

These principles are clearly in evidence in the scene under discussion



D-FENS (Michael Douglas) stops for a rest in East L.A. in *Falling Down* (1993). An analysis of this scene illustrates how the basic elements of Hollywood filmmaking practice contribute to stereotyping. Initially, the *mise-en-scène* and set design establish two contrasting landscapes. Sitting atop the graffiti-covered rubble in a vacant lot, D-FENS has obviously entered a danger zone. Behind him, the distant skyline of the metropolis indicates how far he has strayed from "civilization."

in *Falling Down* (and Hollywood films in general). D-FENS is centered within most frames in which he appears and the two Chicano hoods (listed in the credits as Gang Members 1 and 2) are placed on either side of him. From this and many other examples of stereotyping in Hollywood cinema we can draw a stereotyping corollary to Bordwell's observations: the center one-third of the frame is the realm of the dominant hero, who is usually male, Anglo, Christian, etc., and the two-thirds on either side are the realm of minor characters and stereotypes. Moreover, applying this corollary, the narrative can be read in purely pictorial terms. In fact, it is not too much to say that compositionally, the narrative of neatly every Hollywood film usually boils down to a struggle between the Anglo male hero and a villain (most often some form of class, gender, race, nationality, or ethnic Other) to control and maintain the center of the frame.

Mise-en-scène

The staging of the scene is yet another way stereotyping is enhanced. To begin with, downtown Los Angeles can be seen in the distance behind D-FENS, demonstrating in spatial terms just how far he has wandered from "civilization." Second, as discussed above, the blocking of the ac-



Surrounded by the two circling Chicano toughs (Eddie Frias and Agustín Rodríguez), D-FENS remains calm at the center of the brewing confrontational storm. In addition, camera angles serve to indicate power. From the level of the homeboys, the camera looks up at D-FENS, giving him dominance.

tion places D-FENS at the center. So when the two gang members first encounter him alone on a deserted hill, they circle around him like animals circling their prey—he is the focus of their (and the film's and the audience's) attention.

Third and fourth, D-FENS is surrounded and stationary. In the movies, when a First World hero enters the Third World and confronts the native, two things are virtually guaranteed: he (or, if he is accompanied by the standard small band of explorers, they) will be surrounded by a larger band of natives, and his (their) immobility will contrast with their usually frenetic activity. This centered stillness connotes power, even mastery. (So it is no surprise when the natives sometimes mistake the white man for a god.) It also connotes intelligence (conquering energy for the violent confrontation that will inevitably occur), cunning (sizing up the situation, making mental preparations for the upcoming fight), and moral reserve (he will not resort to violence until provoked; after all, he's not savage—they are). The most familiar example of this in the movies is, of course, the settlers' circling the wagons or preparing the fort for the siege by the bloodthirsty Native Americans. D-FENS's cool poise while the two hoods buzz around him is consistent with a long history of Hollywood heroes' typically unruffled, smart-ass responses to danger when surrounded by natives in the Third World wilderness.



The reverse angle, seen from D-FENS's point of view. Even though it is a closer shot of the two hoods, and even though they are menacing, the camera looks down on them, diminishing their power in the shot.

Camera Movement

The camera's movement gives two perspectives on D-FENS. In most of the shots in this sequence, the camera regards D-FENS not from a character's perspective, but from an omniscient point of view. In these shots, the camera is stationary, mirroring the stillness of his commanding Anglo presence. In two shots that present D-FENS from the thugs' perspective, the camera is in motion, circling around D-FENS (in one shot making a complete 360-degree move). Rather than allowing a viewer to sympathize with the two Chicanos, whose point of view those shots are aligned with, these low-angle shots show D-FENS as the calm at the center of a brewing storm. The reverse shots from D-FENS's point of view are stationary, emanating from his centered and still power position. His is the controlling gaze here. Furthermore, as I will discuss below, from his elevated point of view, we look down on the two thugs, thereby diminishing their power and their threat.

Camera Angles

In the cinematic "language" of the classical Hollywood paradigm, low-angle shots looking up at characters tend to give them importance, power, and control, just as high-angle shots generally reduce their importance, making them less dominant and more vulnerable. In the be-



When he descends to talk to them, framing, costuming, and staging combine to convey the superiority of the white male protagonist. D-FENS is centered in the frame, the position of greatest graphic importance, is the brightest area because of his white shirt, and is the tallest figure.

ginning of this scene, D-FENS is sitting atop the rubble of a demolished building and the gang members are below. Since the camera usually records action from the protagonist's point of view, the camera shoots down on the Mexican American youths, quickly proclaiming the Anglo character's importance, power, and dominance—as well as the Chicanos' lack of it. And when the camera shoots from their point of view, it is a low-angle shot looking up, giving him power.

The shots after D-FENS comes down to meet them at ground level are not angled, but straight-on. But these shots also emphasize him and stress his dominance. First, he is centered in the frame. Second, he is just slightly taller than they are. Third, to assist viewer identification with the hero, "normal" (nonangled) shots are typically set at the protagonist's eye level (actually, in practice, just above his shoulder level). Therefore D-FENS's face-to-face confrontation with the two Chicanos is recorded from his subtly higher eye-line. In every shot, then, the Chicanos are at a pictorial power disadvantage.

Editing: Shot Selection and Duration

Except for an opening close-up of D-FENS, the scene generally follows the standard Hollywood progression of establishing long shots (LS), followed by contextualizing medium shots (MS), and emphatic close-ups



In tighter close-ups, D-FENS is again centered and seen in full face, while the Mexican Americans are at the margins and in profile.

(CU) for meaningful details and dramatic emphasis. But as the main character, D-FENS has more close-ups than the other two characters, and his are tighter and last longer. So by the framing and editing rules of proximity (the tighter the close-up in Hollywood films, the more important the character) and duration (the longer a shot lingers on a subject, the more important the character), the film indicates who is the most significant character and where viewers' sympathy and ultimately their identification ought to lie.

Music

The music in the scene is a combination of eerie electronic sounds and more conventional Hollywood movie soundtrack melodies. The ominous technomusic used early in the scene underscores the growing unease between D-FENS and the gang members. When the fight starts and D-FENS beats them into retreat with the bat, it gives way to the sort of Hollywood-style "tribal" music often heard in films with African or Third World jungle settings: conga drums providing the reverberating bass backbeat while bongo drums ripple across the track providing more nervous staccato rhythms. Thus the musical soundtrack adds a subtle layer of stereotypical meaning, based on decades of Hollywood's conventionalized and imperialistic portrayals of Others. The drums say that the natives of the barrio jungle are restless, even if they have—for the moment at least—retreated. And sure enough, the hoods appear later in the film, trying to get their revenge on D-FENS.

Sound Effects

Besides the sound of children playing in the distance, the main sound effects, which fade in and out of this scene, particularly in its first half, are animal sounds (a crowing bird, other birdsongs, a dog barking), the sound of an unseen helicopter, and a song in Spanish. The soundtrack effectively reiterates what the visuals suggest, that D-FENS has wandered into a Third-World-within-the-First-World war zone. Moreover, there is tension on the sound effects track. More often than not, bird-song simply connotes the serenity of nature. But here this is offset with contrasting sounds of the crowing bird, the dog's barking, and the helicopter propeller noise, which combine to jar the initial pastoral tranquility, especially when juxtaposed with the disquieting layer of electronic music. The cackling bird sound (in the movies, a familiar sound effect often denoting an uncharted jungle world) also betokens a wild (rather than domesticated) animal presence, further accentuating the dangerousness of "darkest" East L.A.

The helicopter sound, especially after its exquisite use in Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979), has since come to indicate in American films a military presence in a battle zone and, connotatively, the futile attempt to find a rational explanation for the irrationality of war. In *Falling Down*, the chopper's sound links D-FENS's quest for sense in a senseless world with Lieutenant Willard's (Martin Sheen) similar journey in *Apocalypse Now*. But the helicopter with its signature sound are also common in urban crime dramas, in everything from *Blue Thunder* (1983) to *Boyz n the Hood* (1991) to *Heat* (1995). In these cases, it depicts the out-of-control criminal element that has forced the police to resort to military hardware and tactics. Thus from recent movie conventions, the chopper sound suggests that East L.A. is an out-of-control urban no-man's-land where (presumably, though we never actually see the helicopter in the scene) hovering police surveillance helicopters are the only way to maintain any semblance of law and order.

The song in Spanish places the protagonist outside the Empire of English, which in Hollywood movies means beyond the pale of rational discourse. Spanish (as opposed to other Western European languages like French, German, or Italian) spoken outside of Spain in American films signifies that (a) the narrative has moved to a Third World country (or the barrio, or a Puerto Rican ghetto in New York, or the Southwestern border, which for Hollywood are all the same thing) where the rules of "civilization" no longer apply; (2) because English cannot be re-

lied on in this place, words and reasoning will be of little use (since rationality exists only in English); therefore, violent action is a very likely outcome.

Costuming

Costume provides another common narrative cue. The most familiar example of this is the well-known Western genre convention whereby good guys wear white hats and villains dress in black. This elementary color coding is part of long-standing Western cultural traditions (white being the color associated with purity and goodness, black the color of darkness and evil). Pictorially, white creates a bright area in the frame that attracts viewers' attention, so it is no surprise that it is the color most often associated with the protagonist. This costuming practice is carefully observed here, with D-FENS wearing a neatly white shirt, but a white shirt nonetheless, and the barrio gangster wearing darker, more muted colors. Gang Member #1 wears a dark blue shirt and Gang Member #2 wears a sleeveless red plaid shirt over a T-shirt. As is often the case in Hollywood cinema, costume design is narrative.

Makeup

Skin color follows the same pattern as costuming: protagonists are usually white, antagonists often dark. In its history, Hollywood has gone to extremes to preserve this system of representation, such as putting white actors in brown face to portray "greasers" or other Latino villains or in black face to play African American villains. More recently, however, conventions of realism have changed, and for the sake of verisimilitude it has become less and less acceptable for a white actor to play a character of color. Here, with Latinos playing the parts of the homeboys, casting did what makeup historically did in the past.

But there are other, carefully placed signs of Otherness the makeup artist has employed. Gang Member #1's ponytail is one such indicator, long hair being a counterculture signifier. In addition, Hollywood uses visible skin marks, usually scars, and other bodily handicaps or imperfections (the gold or missing tooth, the eyepatch, the limp, the wheezing cough), as an external indicator of the deformed psychology of the villain. In *Falling Down*, the Chicano characters' tattoos serve this purpose. This contrasts with the physical perfection of the hero, attesting to his good psychological health and moral righteousness. (Hidden scars, however, are a different matter. They are given to the hero to denote

some heroic rite of passage that shaped and strengthened his character—physical medals of valor. He and his beloved will talk about them during their lovemaking.)⁶

Set Design and Art Direction

The action takes place on a deserted hill, amid the graffiti-laden rubble of the decaying ghetto. D-FENS sits on the stoop of a destroyed building, and contorted rebar protrudes from exposed edges of crumbling concrete. This is the stereotypical habitat of American Others—the dilapidated inner-city war zone. Outsiders, like D-FENS, clearly enter at their own risk. Here the stereotypical point is not whether places like this actually exist in our cities—of course they do—but rather the repetitive frequency with which Hollywood visits them. It does so because such settings fulfill its dramatic and narrative needs so well. Extreme locales—the jungle (South American or African), the ghetto (East L.A., East St. Louis, or the South Bronx), the desert (the U.S. Southwest or the Middle East)—are, in the movies, inherently hazardous. The terrain is a crucible that the Anglo protagonist enters to test his mettle. And the inhabitants are as treacherous as the locale. Audiences have become conditioned to know that the very location supplies conflict, with danger (what perils await our hero in such a place?) and suspense (how will he survive?) framing viewers' expectations.

Scripting

The unspoken conventions of screenwriting are yet another aspect of Hollywood's stereotyping poetics that informs the audience as to the superiority of the hero and the inferiority of the Others. Naturally, the best and most entertaining lines go to the protagonist, and so does any dialogue that illustrates intelligence, rationality, or wit. The Others' dialogue reveals them to be literal-minded and humorless (they exhibit only a gruesome, sadistic kind of humor, laughing, for example, at the violent end about to befall the white interloper). In addition, their speech typically exposes slow, unimaginative, and shortsighted thought processes.

Most of these characteristics are illustrated in the following exchange, which comes early in the scene when D-FENS, seated on a concrete ruin covered with graffiti, is surrounded by the two Chicanos, who accuse him of trespassing and loitering:

D-FENS: I didn't see any signs.

GANG MEMBER #1: (*pointing to a red graffiti skull*) What you call that?

D-FENS: Graffiti?

GANG MEMBER #1: No, man, that's not fuckin' graffiti, that's a sign.

GANG MEMBER #2: He can't read it, man.

GANG MEMBER #1: I'll read it for you. It says this is fuckin' private property. No fuckin' trespassing. This means fuckin' you. (*He points at D-FENS menacingly.*)

D-FENS: It says all that?

GANG MEMBER #1: Yeah.

D-FENS: Well, maybe if you wrote it in fuckin' English, I could fuckin' understand it.

GANG MEMBER #2: He thinks he's being funny.

GANG MEMBER #1: I'm not laughing.

GANG MEMBER #2: I'm not either.

They are serious and literal-minded, and he is funny and ironic.

Consistent with the fact that the Anglo protagonist gets the most screen time is the rule that he gets the longer speeches. In D-FENS's speech that immediately follows he demonstrates his quick analysis of the situation, his grace under pressure, and his ability to opt first for reason over violence—all demonstrating his underlying moral and intellectual superiority:

D-FENS: Wait a minute. Hold it, fellas. We're gettin' off on the wrong foot here, OK? This is a gangland thing, isn't it? We're having a territorial dispute, humm? I mean, I've wandered into your pissin' ground or whatever the damn thing is, and you've taken offense at my presence. And I can understand that. I mean, I wouldn't want you people in my backyard either. This is your home, and your home is your home and I respect that. So if you would just back up a step or two, I'll take my problems elsewhere. OK? Fair enough?

Of course it isn't OK. The two stereotypical homeboys are incapable of heeding the Anglo voice of reason and demand his briefcase as a trespassing "toll." "Listen, fellas, I've had a really rare morning," he pleads,



D-FENS's measured, rational, and witty pleas for a peaceful resolution fall on deaf ears. The two threaten him at knife-point and demand that he give them his briefcase.

but they insist. When he refuses, Gang Member #1 pulls a knife on him. D-FENS then goes into a slow burn and delivers another speech in which he tells them how unreasonable their demand is. And since Hollywood heroes use violence only when all other options have been tried and have failed, the speech also explains, mainly for the audience's benefit, why he will now have to resort to the use of force:

D-FENS: (*Close-up; at knife-point*) OK. I was willing to mind my own business, I was willing to respect your territory and treat you like a man, but you couldn't leave it alone, could you? You couldn't let a man sit here for five minutes and take a rest on your precious, piece-a-shit hill. OK, you want my briefcase? I'll get it for you, all right? You can have my briefcase.

Crossing to his briefcase, he pulls out the baseball bat concealed beneath it and attacks them, sending them fleeing.

The hero is patient and reasonable, he must be goaded into violence. The Other is pure aggression whose only mode of expression is violence.

Acting Conventions

A crucial element of a character's psychology is revealed in the classical Hollywood cinema via gesture. Acting conventions are based on the fact that heroes and villains behave in certain circumscribed ways. Here, Agustín Rodríguez and Eddie Frias play their parts in the standard

tough homeboy mode, which is a variation of Hollywood villains in general. The facial scowl, the aggressive attitude, the simmering hostility are its basic features. Similarly, Michael Douglas plays his part in typical heroic fashion. If they are hot and agitated, he is cool and collected. They taunt and point, he looks and listens serenely. He is the hero because he can control his feelings and, in the face of danger, can channel his violence against evil, exhibiting heroic qualities. They, on the other hand, are unalloyed danger—unstable, irrational, combustible.

Lighting

If this were an interior shot, the lighting scheme would light the set and highlight the Anglo hero, drawing the viewer's eye to the important character. In daytime exterior shots, however, the action is mostly lit naturally, by sunlight. Additional illumination is most often provided by reflectors, which bounce the sunlight onto the actors' faces. "Normal" Hollywood lighting, though, is based on a white skin standard, on getting the proper exposure for the faces of white actors.⁷

One result of this system is that in a scene like this one, in broad daylight and in an uncovered area, fair-skinned actors reflect more light into the camera lens and thus require less supplemental illumination (fill light) than darker-skinned ones. Since actors of color require more lighting in order for the film emulsion to record their facial details, this means that—all other things being equal—actors of color have more light bearing down on them. Therefore they are made hotter than their white counterparts and presumably perspire more. Within the poetics of stereotyping, that is fine, because it conforms with the understood coolness of the Anglo protagonist and the heated impetuosity of the dark and sweaty Other. Here, especially in the close-up shots of the two gang members, beads of perspiration can be noted on their faces, sometimes even revealing a hot or shiny spot (a cardinal sin of Hollywood lighting—at least for a white actor playing the protagonist). In contrast, Michael Douglas's composed D-FENS never breaks a sweat, even after he sends them fleeing in pain.

STEREOTYPES, MINOR CHARACTERS, AND THE ARCHETYPE

What I have endeavored to show above is how the classical Hollywood paradigm—the accepted conventions of "good, professional" filmmak-

ing—contributes to stereotyping in the movies. If the typical Hollywood film story follows the pattern of equilibrium-disequilibrium-equilibrium, then from our perspective it is often the tale of a valiant Anglo male overcoming the threat posed by some Other. Eliminating the Other eliminates the threat, restores equilibrium, and leads to closure. Minor characters of color and villains are typically Others (of one kind or another—race, class, ethnicity, gender, etc.) and usually stereotypes. The protagonist and his love interest are handsome Anglos. As defenders of the dominant and representative of the dominant ideal, they are the two Beautiful People in the story—let's call them the archetypes.

But if, as we have said, with repetition the stereotype comes to represent the Other group, whom do the archetypes represent? And what about the many other Anglos in the story? How should we classify them, and whom do they represent?

To begin with the archetypes, as representatives of the dominant ideal, they possess the full complement of dominant virtues. They have it all, and, as we have seen, as the focus of the narrative the classical cinema identification is clearly an asymptotic affair. As viewers, we may to a greater or lesser extent approach the archetypal ideal, but most of us do not have—and will never have—the perfection of the male protagonist or his beloved. After all, how many of us look like Tom Cruise or Demi Moore? How many of us have the degree of heroic characteristics that the characters such actors play exhibit in film after film?

Rather, most viewers have more in common with the minor characters, who are "minor" precisely because they lack qualities possessed by the archetypes. Because the classical Hollywood narrative must be absolutely clear about who the protagonist is, it is populated with secondary characters who cannot be confused with primary ones. This is achieved in two main ways. First, by the cinematic techniques I just enumerated above, the Hollywood paradigm focuses the narrative on one and only one subject. To make doubly sure there is no confusion, the protagonist couple are surrounded by in-group characters who physically could not possibly be mistaken for the leads: parents and relatives, rival love interests, best friends, and sidekicks who are conveniently too old, too young, too heavy, too plain, too ethnic. For in-group characters in Hollywood cinema, "too ethnic" generally means not completely assimilated, not American enough, and thus "too Jewish" or "too Swedish," "too Irish," or "too Italian," and so forth. They are also marked emotionally and/or morally as unfit for leading-role status—they are weak, dumb, overly excitable, and impulsive, or they operate out of a