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OUR 25TH YEAR!

The Mexican Film Bulletin celebrates its 25th anniversary in 2019.



OBITUARIES

CHRISTIAN BACH

Actress and producer Christian Bach died of heart failure on 26 February 2019; she was 59 years old.



Adriana Christian Bach Bottino was born in Argentina in 1959; she received a law degree but became an actress instead, appearing in at least one film and *telenovela* in her native land. Relocating to Mexico at the end of the 1970s, Bach became a popular *telenovela* actress, also appearing in a handful of films. In

1986 she co-starred with actor Humberto Zurita in a *telenovela* and they were subsequently married and had two children (one of whom, Sebastián Zurita, is an actor).

Bach's films include *Gavilán o paloma*, *El hombre de blanco*, *El secreto*, and *Deseo* (2013, her last feature film). Her last television appearance came in 2014. Bach and Zurita also produced films and television programs in the 1990s and 2000s. She is survived by her husband and sons.



LOURDES DESCHAMPS



Actress and producer Lourdes Deschamps died on 28 December 2018. María de Lourdes Deschamps Briones began acting in the early 1990s, appearing on television, in films, and in *videohomes*. In 2005 she produced the feature film *Como tú me has deseado*, directed by Juan Andrés Bueno. In 2010 she teamed up

with Bueno again, co-directing and co-scripting *Apasionado Pancho Villa* aka *Villa, itinerario de una pasión*.

Deschamps, who was married to *fútbol* coach Jesús Ramírez, later produced, directed and wrote *Campeones*, a docu-drama about the Mexican team coached by Ramírez that won the under-17 world championship in 2005.



ALBERT FINNEY

British actor Albert Finney died in a London hospital on 7 February 2019; he was 82 years old. Finney was born in Lancashire, England, in May 1936 and attended the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. He made his professional debut in 1956, and went on to appear on the stage, television, and in films. Finney was nominated for five Academy Awards. His last film was *Skyfall* (2012).



Finney starred in *Under the Volcano* (1984), a U.S.-Mexican coproduction directed by John Huston that was shot mostly in the state of Morelos.



OLIVIA GARCÍA

Former actress Olivia García Leyva died in mid-



February 2019 (her death was announced by her daughter around 19 February). García, born in Acapulco, finished 3rd in the 1967 Miss Mexico contest and became an actress several years later. She appeared in some early '70s films such as *Las reglas del juego* and *La fuerza inútil*, and later had a recurring role on the "El Chavo del 8" television series. García was married to business magnate Carlos Peralta; they had 3 children, including television personality Olivia Peralta.



MATY HUITRÓN

Actress Maty Huitrón died on 14 January 2019; she was 82 years old and had been suffering from emphysema. Maty Huitrón Porto was born in Mexico City in January 1936. She began appearing in films in the

early 1950s, including *Mi papá tuvo la culpa*, *Cuarto de hotel*, and *El casto Susano* and continued to work in the cinema into the 1970s and beyond. Huitrón and Argentine actor Carlos Estrada had 3 daughters. One of their children, Carla Estrada, later became a major *telenovela* producer who often cast her mother in important roles.



FERNANDO LUJÁN

Actor Fernando Luján, an actor for eight decades, died of chronic pulmonary obstructive disease on 11 January 2019. Fernando Ciangherotti Díaz was born in Bogotá, Colombia in August 1939--his parents, actors Alejandro Ciangherotti and Mercedes Soler (sister to the famous Soler brothers Domingo, Fernando, Andrés and Julián), were in that city on a theatrical tour. Luján made his acting debut at age 7; in 1953 he changed his professional name to Luján "because Ciangherotti was too long for theatre marquees" (also, his father and brother were both acting under the family name). From this point on, Luján worked steadily in films, on television, and on the stage until 2018.



Fernando Luján's films include *La Sombra en defensa de la juventud* (starring his father and also featuring his older brother), *El pueblo fantasma* (as a vampire cowboy), *Agente 00 Sexy*, *Estas ruinas que ves*, *Dos cuates a todo dar*, *En el país de no pasa nada*, *El coronel no tiene quien le escriba* and *Cinco días sin Nora* (for which he won the Best Actor Ariel).

Luján had 10 children, several of whom entered the entertainment business, including Cassandra Ciangherotti, Fernando Ciangherotti, Vanessa Ciangherotti, and Fernando Canek.



ROSENDA MONTEROS

Actress Rosenda Monteros died on 29 December 2018 at the age of 83. Rosa Méndez Leza was born in Veracruz in August 1935. She studied acting with Seki Sano and made her film debut in 1954 in *Reto a la vida*,

directed by Julio Bracho. Monteros married Bracho shortly afterwards and appeared in two more films directed by him (the marriage ended in 1957). Monteros later worked in a number of international productions, including *The Magnificent Seven*, *She*, and *Cauldron of Blood*, as well as the occasional Mexican film, but spent much of her later career in the theatre.



THELMA TIXOU

Actress and dancer Thelma Tixou died on 15 January 2019 of complications after undergoing surgery for a brain tumour; she was 75 years of age. Thelma Delia Sukiennik was born in Argentina in May 1944; her parents were Lithuanian and Polish refugees from Europe. She became a popular *vedette* in her home country, appearing in at least one film there, but relocated to Mexico in the late 1970s.

Tixou appeared regularly in live venues and on television, and can be seen in a handful of films, including Jodorowsky's *Santa Sangre* and *Cándido Pérez*, *especialista en señoras*.



JAN-MICHAEL VINCENT



Actor Jan-Michael Vincent died of heart failure on 10 February 2019; he was 73 years old. Vincent was born in Colorado in July 1945 and made his acting debut in *The Bandits*, a U.S.-Mexican co-production shot in 1966. He continued to work in films

and television until the early 2000s, achieving his greatest success in the 1980s television show "Airwolf."

Vincent experienced substance abuse issues which resulted in various legal and physical problems, including a 1990s automobile crash that permanently damaged his voice. He also had a leg amputated in the 2010s.



BLACK & WHITE



Angelitos negros [Little Black Angels] (Prods. Rodríguez Hermanos, 1948) *Exec Prod*: Ramón Peón; *Dir/Scr*: Joselito Rodríguez; *Adapt/ Story*: Rogelio A. González; *Photo*: José Ortíz Ramos; *Music*: Raúl Lavista, Nacho García; *Prod Mgr*: Manuel R. Ojeda; *Prod Chief*: Armando Espinosa; *Asst Dir*: Jorge López Portillo; *Film Ed*: Fernando Martínez; *Art Dir*: Carlos Toussaint; *Camera Op*: Manuel González; *Choreog*: Julien de Meriche; *Makeup*: Román Juárez; *Dialogue Rec*: Luis Fernández; *Music Rec*: Jesús González G.

Cast: Pedro Infante (José Carlos Ruíz), Emilia Guiú (Ana Luisa de la Puente), Rita Montaner (Nana Mercé), Titina [Romay] (Belén), Chela Castro (Chabela), Nicolás Rodríguez (Padre Francisco), Antonio R. Frausto (don Laureano), Mary Douglas (Malú del Rey), Juan Pulido (Idelfonso Sánchez), Chimy Monterrey (Fernando Valdés), Óscar Pulido (Barud, jewelry salesman), Ramiro Gamboa (announcer), Silver Flyers (skaters), María Victoria Llamas (daughter of reporter), Pita Martínez (singer), Cuarteto América, Meride y Pastor, Marta Prado, Lupe Carriles (teacher), Joselito Rodríguez (man with sailor cap), Ramón Peón (Argentine emcee), Ignacio Peón (wedding guest), Kika Meyer (nurse), Elodía Hernández (teacher), Daniel Arroyo (doctor)

Notes: While Pedro Infante is often remembered for his proletarian "everyman" roles in films like *Nosotros los pobres*, and for his *rancheras*, he also appeared in a number of glossy, "society" films throughout his career. *Angelitos negros* is one of these, a florid melodrama set in upper-class environs, with the attendant sets and costumes. This is a rather atypical Infante film with regards to his performance as well, since he is relatively restrained and—while he is the star and features in most of the scenes in the film—is not the sole center of attention, with Guiú and Montaner (and the very young Titina Romay) stealing as many scenes as possible.

Popular singer José Carlos Ruiz [it is amusing in retrospect to see Infante's character have the same name as a later, well-known Mexican character actor] meets and falls in love with Ana Luisa, a rather repressed young woman who lives alone in a large house with her black "nana." They decide to get married, but Nana Mercé opposes the union. She tells friendly priest Padre Francisco that she is Ana Luisa's mother--she was a servant in the home of Ana Luisa's father, and became pregnant by him; when Ana Luisa was born, the father agreed to recognize her as his legitimate heir, but only on the condition that Nana Mercé hide the fact that she was the girl's mother.



For unexplained reasons, Ana has grown up with strong racist attitudes (she refuses to shake the hand of Fernando, José Carlos's black friend, and later persuades him not to attend her wedding). Immediately after the wedding, José Carlos and Ana Luisa leave for an extended tour of South America. Upon their return, Ana Luisa gives birth to a baby girl—who is black! Ana Luisa is shocked, and blames José Carlos (accusing him of having black blood); Nana Mercé tells José Carlos the truth, but Padre Francisco convinces them Ana Luisa should be kept in the dark, due to her delicate emotional state.

Time goes by. José Carlos dotes on his young daughter, Belén, but Ana Luisa is cold towards the child.



The situation comes to a head, and Ana Luisa—reacting to a blow struck in anger by José Carlos—leaves home. Belén falls ill and calls for her mother, who is

not there. Chabela, a black dancer in love with José Carlos, helps nurse the child. Ana Luisa comes home to find José Carlos and Chabela in a sympathetic embrace. She angrily storms out again, pushing Nana Mercé out of

her way. The older woman falls down a flight of stairs and dies; Ana Luisa, when she learns Nana Mercé was her mother, is heartbroken. However, the realization that she was cruel to her mother makes Ana Luisa return to her child's bedside with a promise to care for her from now on.

Angelitos negros is hardly a crushing indictment of racism, inasmuch as the only racist figure in the film is the somewhat mentally and emotionally unbalanced Ana Luisa. José Carlos is presented as completely without prejudice, albeit in a mildly odd fashion: i.e., he professes that Fernando is "like a brother" to him, and makes statements denying the importance of skin color, but he also makes "cute" remarks, such as calling Nana Mercé "chocolate," and so forth.

The film itself is openly outspoken in its criticism of Ana Luisa's racism, and there are even a couple of interesting minor touches which suggest that racial



prejudice exists in the outside world. In one scene, for instance, Fernando tells Chabela that Ana Luisa didn't want him at her wedding.

Chabela asks why, and Fernando simply holds out his (black) hands in front of him. Later, Nana Mercé tries to convince Ana Luisa to treat Belén better, saying the child will face enough problems in the world (due to her black skin) and needs her mother's support. However, the fact that—with the exception of Chimy Monterrey—the "blacks" in the film are played by white actors wearing rather obvious makeup, undercuts the effectiveness of the message (as does the fact that the nearly all of the blacks are referred to as *mulatos*).

Pedro Infante is entertaining in the opening scene when he tries to pick up Emilia Guiú. In Hollywood parlance, they "meet cute"—José Carlos helps a young boy reach the doorbell of a big house, only to discover that the child was playing a prank: the boy rings the bell and runs away, leaving the embarrassed José Carlos to face Ana Luisa when she opens the door. He sings a fair number of songs, including the title song (which is a bit overdramatic but has a superb melody, heard in an instrumental version over the credits). Guiú is good as the disturbed Ana Luisa; Rita Montaner (who also sings) is a bit much as a combination of two stereotypes: the "Mammy" and the self-sacrificing Mexican film mother.

Titina Romay, daughter of director Joselito Rodríguez, is not especially good as the little Belén. Romay—along with her brother Pepe—would find steady employment in her father's films for the next two

and one-half decades, but rarely appeared elsewhere (either a sign of loyalty, or nepotism).

Joselito Rodríguez, encouraged by the financial success of *Angelitos negros*, returned to the theme a number of times later. In 1954 he directed *Píntame angelitos blancos* [Paint Me Little White Angels], which again featured Emilia Guiú, Rita Montaner, and Titina Romay (oddly enough, Guiú's character was again named "Ana Luisa," but was not supposed to be the same woman). This time Titina Romay didn't have to wear dark makeup—instead, it was her younger brother Pepe who was artificially darkened, along with Montaner.

Rodríguez remade *Angelitos negros* in 1969, featuring Manuel López Ochoa and Martha Rangel (another of the director's daughters) in the Infante and Guiú roles. The role of Nana Mercé was played by Juanita Moore, a black Hollywood actress (*Imitation of Life*, 1958), whose dialogue was dubbed into Spanish. Titina Romay took the part of the *mulata* Isabel (Chabela in the original). Rodríguez also produced the story in 1970 as a *telenovela*, keeping López Ochoa but replacing Martha Rangel with Alicia Rodríguez and casting Silvia Derbez in blackface as the mother. Several years later, Titina donned dark makeup again in *Huracán Ramírez y la monjita negra* [Huracán Ramirez and the Little Black Nun, 1972], one of her final screen roles.

Trivia note: there are a number of past/future directors in the cast and crew—Ramón Peón, Carlos Toussaint, Manuel R. Ojeda, Jorge López Portillo (although the only film he directed was *Five Bold Women*, a Texas-shot U.S. film, 1960), and Rogelio A. González.

Reprinted with minor changes from *MFB* 5/10 (July 1999).



Negro es mi color [Black is My Colour]

(Filmex, 1950) *Prod*: Gregorio Walerstein; *Dir*: Tito Davison; *Scr*: Jesús Cárdenas, Mauricio Wall [Gregorio Walerstein], Tito Davison; *Additional Dialogue*: Julio Alejandro; *Photo*: Agustín Martínez Solares; *Music*: Carlos Tirado; *Prod Mgr*: Jacobo Derechín; *Prod Chief*: Enrique Morfín; *Asst Dir*: Manuel Muñoz; *Film Ed*:

Rafael Ceballos; *Art Dir*: Jorge Fernández; *Decor*: Pedro Gallo; *Lighting*: Juan Durán; *Camera Op*: José A. Carrasco; *Makeup*: Margarita Ortega; *Music/Re-rec*: Galdino Samperio; *Dialog Rec*: Rodolfo Benítez

Cast: Marga López ("*Blanca del Río*" [*Luna*]), Rita Montaner (*Rita*), Roberto Cañedo (*Fernando Acuña*), José María Linares Rivas (*don Álvaro*), Andrés Soler (*doctor*), Miguel Torruco (*Alberto Rivera*), Freddy Fernández (*Freddy Acuña*), "Los Panchos" (*singing group*), Raquel Macedas (*Freddy's girlfriend*), Xavier Massé (*Eric*), Jorge Treviño (*don Carlos Robinatti*, "*Nido de Artistas*" owner), Charles Rooner (*ship captain*), Eduardo Acuña (*black priest*), Nicolás Rodríguez (*Chalina*, helpful man at "*Nido de Artistas*"), Sergio Prado, Salvador Quiroz (*false ship's captain*), Hernán Vera & Pepe Nava & José Pardavé ("*Navarrete Brothers*" act), Armando Arriola (*flute player*), Antonio Bravo (*Gaviota nightclub manager*), Magda Donato (*trumpeter*), Stefan Verne (*sailor in "Nido de Artistas"*), Daniel Arroyo (*drummer*), Miguel Ángel López (*apartment elevator operator*), Victorio Blanco (*man in cabaret*), Ana María Hernández (*nun in hospital*), Lucrecia Muñoz (*woman in cabaret*), Rubén Márquez (*man in cabaret*)



Notes: *Negro es mi color* seems to have been inspired by *Angelitos negros*--both films feature a mixed-race female protagonist who has racist feelings (although in the earlier movie these are anti-black and in the latter they're anti-white), and both co-star Rita Montaner as the mother. *Negro es mi color* is a full-blown melodrama containing at least 4 separate sequences of splendid ACTING!, mostly courtesy of Marga López but Rita Montaner gets at least one juicy dialogue scene. Somewhat overlong, the film drags a bit during some of the musical sequences and slows to a crawl in the protracted conclusion, but in general is very entertaining and well-made.

Negro es mi color goes *Angelitos negros* one further by featuring not just one, but two racists (Blanca and Fernando), one on each side of the black/white dichotomy. In fact, Rita is also a racist, so make that 3. Rita hates whites because she was seduced and

abandoned by a white man; Blanca renounces her blackness and wants to be part of the white world, but hates whites because she was also seduced and abandoned by a white man. Fernando's racist attitudes have no such cause-and-effect: he tells Blanca "It's a physical sensation. I can't control myself...[blacks] disgust me [*me da asco*]." He mentions seeing a black man lynched for paying attention to a white woman (it's hard to hear what he says, but it sounds like *hace caso*) and says "I'd rip off my skin if I ever touched a black woman." Fernando angrily attacks his younger brother Freddy when he sees him with a young black woman, indicating the racism is personal to Fernando, and not something that arose from his environment or background.

The voiceover narration at the beginning of the film makes the usual disclaimer that the film isn't set in Mexico: "The story you are told here is absolutely true. The country in which these events could have happened exists, perhaps, but to mention it would be to throw the first stone at just one of the many nations that still, despite progress and civilisation, the thoughts of men and the spirit of the law, founder in the darkness of racial prejudice."



Despite this, it's clear the film is supposed to begin and end in Cuba, with the middle section occurring on Mexico's Gulf coast. Little or no institutional racism is depicted: a sign in a park [in the Cuban section] reads "No Dogs or Blacks Allowed," and after she's been deceived by a fake marriage Blanca says "If I were white the whole country would be demanding vengeance," but otherwise no colour line is obvious. It's not even clear that Alberto drops Blanca because he learns she is bi-racial: earlier he claimed "I've lived many years among black people. I like them a lot and their music enchants me," and when he breaks up with Blanca he simply calls her a *farsante* (a phony) which could be construed as anger at her deception rather than disgust at her mixed-race status. Or, he could just be a hypocrite.

Actually, if one considers the events which occur in *Negro es mi color*, the script could easily have been re-written to ignore the racial issue entirely. Blanca could have just been a rebellious young woman, or she might have simply run away to marry Eric against her mother's wishes, with the same unfortunate results. The number of movies (and plays, and novels, etc.) about evil men who seduce women is endless, and these fictional villains don't only prey on young women of colour. After Eric's betrayal, Blanca might have conceived a hatred of all

men (as opposed to specifically white men), which could have led her to deliberately form relationships with the end-game of breaking her lovers' hearts. Adding a racial component allows for some slight degree of social commentary, but--as noted above--the film doesn't really focus on discrimination. Instead, it's Blanca's own psychological issues that provide the dramatic impetus.

Luna, the daughter of a white father and a black mother, lives in a black *barrio* in an unspecified tropical



nation. Her mother Rita doesn't trust whites since she was impregnated and abandoned years before. Luna has fallen in love with white

sailor Eric [the film never reveals how they met] but Rita opposes the match: "It's been years since a white man has come through the door. Since then a lie hasn't been heard in my house." Eric says "I'm sorry one of my race hurt you. It's not easy to live with such bitterness inside." After he leaves, Luna tells her mother "I'm not like you--I'm white! I'll marry [Eric]. I'll enter the white world with all their rights. If anyone, whoever it is, pronounces a word that would reveal my origin, I'll rip out their tongue!" Rita: "That man knows." Luna: "Eric has a clean soul. He doesn't think like you."

Rita plays her trump card: "And your children? They will have mixed blood in their veins and they could be throw-backs [*volver atrás*]. You'll always live with that threat. From the moment you know you're going to be a mother you won't be able to sleep. You'll see the dark face of your child in the shadows--a black child from your white flesh." Luna: "I'd do anything to prevent that." Rita: "God will punish you" [i.e., if she uses birth control or has an abortion]. Luna tries to sneak out that night; Rita catches her but allows her to leave, giving her a pair of earrings to remember her by.

Rita and Eric are married on board his ship by the captain. However, the next day when the ship docks [in an unnamed country, but presumably Mexico], Rita meets the real captain, who says Eric deceived her (the other "captain" was an impostor), and has now left the ship. She refuses the captain's offer of assistance and vows: "Someday I'll have a white man at my feet, and when he learns I'm black, it'll be the greatest vengeance of my life."

On shore, Luna--now calling herself Blanca del Río--enters the "Nido de Artistas" nightclub and wins a free meal by singing a song that wins the audience's approval. Popular composer Fernando offers her a job in his show, but she chooses to stay at the Nido, on salary.

Some time later, he repeats his offer and she accepts. Blanca is upset when Fernando--who refuses to hire people of colour to perform in his show--has her don blackface to sing her first number, and says he'll be sorry. However, she is a success and attracts an admirer, air force pilot Alberto, who professes to like black people--"They're so enormously picturesque"--although he (like everyone) believes Blanca is white.



Meanwhile Rita has learned of Luna/Blanca's fake wedding. She writes to Álvaro, Blanca's father. Álvaro is now a successful businessman who owns a string of nightclubs. He asks an associate to keep an eye out for Luna, although he doesn't know what she looks like, only that she's a *mulata*. Álvaro then leaves for an inspection tour of his businesses "on the coast." Wouldn't you know it, one of his businesses is the "Gaviota" nightclub, where Blanca is appearing. Álvaro offers her a contract to sing in his chain of cabarets; she says she'll think it over.



Blanca flirts with Alberto and Fernando, both of whom profess their love for her, and refuses to commit to either one. However, when she sees Fernando express his disgust for people of colour (in the aforementioned scene with his younger brother), Blanca allows Fernando to accompany her to her apartment and they have sex (implied but obvious). Afterward, Fernando falls to his knees and proposes marriage. Blanca triumphantly says, "That's what I like...I swore that one day I'd destroy [she actually says *hundir*, which means "sink"] a man like you, and I've done it...your damned white race...so, merely touching black skin makes you nauseous? [Now] you've loved a black woman--you've held a black woman to your breast. Me, daughter of a black woman, grandchild of blacks!" When Fernando calls her a liar, she replies: "I am a lie. My name is a lie. This skin is a lie." Enraged, he nearly strangles her.

A short time later, Alberto and Blanca are having dinner in a club. She forces a smile when the Trío Los Panchos sings “El alma de mi tambor.” She admits she got Fernando fired, and asks Alberto to take her to the “Nido de Artistas.”



When they arrive, they see Fernando is the new house pianist, drunken and unshaven. As he plays, a voice is heard singing along--it's Rita, washing dishes in the kitchen. [What a coincidence!] The club owner brings her out front and she sings to Blanca, who gets up and leaves when Rita begins to cry. [In a nice touch, the rowdy crowd in the club mocks Rita for “forgetting the lyrics!”] Fernando gives Rita the address of Blanca's apartment.

Rita visits Blanca and says “They told me my daughter died.” Blanca: “Yes, she died. She died one night on a boat. Nobody prayed for her. She's dead.” Rita replies: “My daughter isn't dead, she's just lost in the shadows. If I knew her new life was happy, I'd go away satisfied, but I feel it isn't.” She asks Blanca to let her stay: “I'll be like a faithful dog...just another servant,” and Blanca agrees.

Álvaro tells Blanca if she marries Alberto and stops singing she'll only have half a life, and a boring one to boot. He says he's leaving in 2 days and will hold an airplane ticket open for her until the last moment. The next day, Fernando shows up at Blanca's apartment while she's out, and tells Rita he knows she's Blanca's mother. Alberto arrives and Fernando reveals Blanca's secret; Alberto leaves. When Blanca comes home and learns what occurred, she tells Fernando that Alberto isn't prejudiced and will marry her any time she permits him to. She goes to the airport, telling Alberto it was all lies concocted by Fernando, but he says one word to her --“Phony! [*farsante*]” and flies away. Blanca calls Álvaro and says she'll leave with him that night.

Blanca is packing when Álvaro arrives so Rita answers the door; she recognises him as Blanca's father. She tells him the truth about Blanca: she's “white on the outside like you. Black with bad thoughts on the inside like you. There's nothing of me in her, she's rejected her mother but here I am, firm like a rock, waiting for you...The hand of God is never seen, but I was sure that this would be your punishment...you've seen Luna without knowing who she was, your blood on fire with evil desires...[you should] die of shame! You'll never look at a woman like before--never! In your eyes they'll all be like your daughter. You're going to suffer like a dog, day and night, desperately.” Once Rita finishes her angry speech, Blanca emerges and confronts both of her

parents: “I don't need anyone. I've always been alone. Get out, both of you!” When she returns to her bedroom, Álvaro apologises to Rita and departs.

Some time goes by. Blanca has vanished. Fernando says “I despised people for not being like me,” and reads from a book about missionaries in China. “Blanca, where can you be?” Cut to Blanca wandering through a park. She sits on a bench and a cute little blonde girl smiles at her. Just as Blanca smiles back, she hears in voiceover her mother talking about “A black child of your white flesh. A black child. Black! Black!” Blanca runs into traffic and is hit by a car.

She wakes up in a hospital and tells a kindly doctor she doesn't want to have a child. [Earlier, when Rita first visited Blanca's apartment, Blanca got dizzy--a sure sign of pregnancy in a melodrama.] The doctor says “Today you don't want it, perhaps tomorrow it'll be your only reason to live...” Looking around the ward, he says “What colour are these children? I don't ask. I hope someday outside these walls no one will want to know.” Blanca recovers and leaves. In an incredible coincidence, Fernando's brother Freddy works at the hospital and sees her name on a list of discharged patients.

Blanca arrives at her mother's house but it's empty: she sees some flower arrangements and several trestles (to hold a coffin). Rushing to the church she meets the local (black) priest and he gives her a letter from the recently deceased Rita. Rita says she knows Blanca is going to have a child and “the colours of the world will change.” As Blanca leaves the priest's office, she is confronted by Fernando and Freddy. Blanca and Fernando embrace as the film ends.



Negro es mi color

features a number of illogical melodramatic coincidences which conveniently advance the plot. These include: Blanca goes to work at the “Gaviota” nightclub, which just happens to be owned by her long-lost father; Blanca and Alberto visit the “Nido de Artistas” club where she got her start, and Blanca's mother Rita just happens to be washing dishes in the kitchen there; Fernando's brother

Freddy just happens to be working at the hospital where Blanca has been a patient and spots her name on the discharge list. It's also a bit far-fetched that Blanca arrives at the “Nido de Artistas,” which just happens to

allow amateurs to sing for the supper, and she just happens to be a very good singer.

There are a number of subtle touches in the film, some directorial and some probably present in the script. For instance, Fernando specifically says he doesn't employ blacks in his nightclub show, but when Blanca



arrives to meet him for rehearsal, we see that the cleaners in the club are black. Fernando compels Blanca to wear black makeup for her debut number and insists "this is different" than his ban on black performers. [However, when we see the song being

performed, a small group of black musicians--not whites in blackface--accompanies Blanca!] Blanca sings the song with makeup on her face and arms, but when she finishes she deliberately pulls down the strap on her gown to expose one unpainted white shoulder, a look of triumph on her face. Later, after Fernando has berated and beaten Freddy for dating a black woman, he tells Blanca "I'd rip off my own skin if I ever touched a black woman" and she deliberately takes his arm, with a sly look. There are some nice transitions and match cuts. One scene concludes with Blanca removing the earrings her mother gave her, then a closeup of her holding them in her hands; match cut to Rita's hands.

Production values are quite good, with well-designed sets and lots of extras in some scenes. The "Nido de Artistas" is crowded with sailors and bargirls, drinking, laughing and cheering or jeering the performers. The house band consists of senior citizens (including a female trumpeter) who look bored. The performers trying to win a free meal include the inept tumblers the "Navarrete Brothers"--diminutive José Pardavé, plus-size Hernán Vera, and tall Pepe Nava--who are still trying to earn their supper when Blanca and Alberto visit the club quite some time later. In contrast, the upscale clubs where Blanca performs are rather sterile. The direction and photography are quite good.

Rita Montaner sings two songs, Marga López lip-syncs two, Roberto Cañedo lip-syncs one ("Agonía"), and Los Panchos do two numbers. However, only four songs are credited: this because there's considerable doubling-up, as "Alma negra" is heard several times (since it has a racial theme, it's appropriate).

As noted earlier, this film is loaded with hyper-melodramatic scenes. Marga López gets the lion's share of these, ranging from bitter to cynical to harshly triumphant. Rita Montaner holds her own, while Roberto Cañedo is given a couple of good opportunities, and José María Linares Rivas is very effective in his last

scene as a broken man who's forced to confront his past sins and a lonely future. Miguel Torruco, on the other hand, is not given much to do: *Negro es mi color* was his first film (he really was a pilot in real life) and he's handsome and competent enough, but his role isn't very flashy.



Píntame angelitos blancos [Paint Me Little White Angels] (Distribuidora Rodríguez Hnos., 1954)

Prod: Aurelio García Yevenes; *Dir-Adapt:* Joselito Rodríguez R.; *Scr:* Joselito Rodríguez R., Jorge A. Villaseñor, Juan Infante; *Based on a Idea by:* Juan R. Mas, Jesús Saucedo; *Photo:* Ezequiel Carrasco; *Music:* Sergio Guerrero; *Prod Mgr:* Pascual Aragonés C.; *Prod Chief:* Guillermo Alcayde; *Asst Dir:* Valerio Olivo; *Film Ed:* Fernando Martínez; *Asst Ed:* Raúl Portillo; *Art Dir:* Fco. M Chilet; *Camera Op:* Manuel Santaella, Álvaro González; *Lighting:* Mariano García; *Sound Supv:* James L. Fields; *Dialog Rec:* Manuel Topete; *Music Rec:* Galdino Samperio; *Makeup:* Román Juárez

Cast: Emilia Guiú (*Ana Luisa*), Titina Romay (*María Cristina "Titina"*), Rita Montaner (*Soledad*), Julio Villareal (*General Joaquín de la Barra*), Pepito Romay (*Benito*), Sara Guash (*Marta Rangel*), Eulalio González "Piporro" (*Rogelio*), Enrique del Castillo (*Juan Carlos Jiménez*), Eduardo H. Acuña (*Jesús*), Julio Sotelo (*Dr. Andrade*), Cecilia Leger (*Sra. Jiménez*), Miguel Ángel López (*party guest*), Joselito Rodríguez (*cook*), José Pardavé (*cab driver at airport*), *doctor's patients:* Ignacio Peón, Humberto Rodríguez, Victorio Blanco

Notes: *Píntame angelitos blancos* isn't a sequel to *Angelitos negros* even though Emilia Guiú, Rita Montaner, and Titina Romay appear once again (in similar roles), and even though the song "Píntame angelitos negros" (based on a poem by Andrés Bello) is sung once (and heard in an instrumental version throughout the movie). Joselito Rodríguez throws in everything but the kitchen sink: melodrama, comedy, music, alternating every few moments. Mostly

the film is a showcase for Rodríguez's daughter Titina Romay, given a Shirley Temple hairdo (in one scene she even wears a Scots bonnet and jacket, very reminiscent of Temple in *Wee Willie Winkie*) and allowed to emote at will (also dancing in several scenes). She's not bad, honestly; her little brother Pepito Romay (in his first film) is...not as good (although he has his moments).

The racial aspects of *Píntame angelitos blancos* are important but not the main conflict of the narrative. Emilia Guiú's character is depicted as a racist, but since she's generally a bad, unpleasant person overall, her racism is downplayed. Perhaps more insidious is the racism displayed by Julio Villareal's character Joaquín, even though he's otherwise depicted positively. When Joaquín learns his estranged son has died, leaving a wife and 2 children, he travels to their village intent on bringing them back to the city. However, he discovers his son's widow Rita is black, as is their son; their daughter Titina, however, has white skin. Joaquín decides not to bring them back, but Rita urges him to take her daughter so she can be educated, etc. Joaquín agrees, although he complains to his servant Rogelio: "That's all we need, blacks in the family."



Later, when Joaquín has grown to love Titina, they have a discussion about race. When his granddaughter asks why some people don't like blacks, he replies: "I don't know. It's something very special." Titina: "Aren't there any in the army?" [Joaquín is a general.] "Yes there are," he replies, and says they fight well, "like beasts." Titina: "Then why don't they like us?" Joaquín: "I don't know. It's curious--you, a little girl, has made me wonder why we don't see blacks as we see ourselves."

Rita is hired as Joaquín's cook (without his knowledge): he allows her to stay, on the condition that she not reveal her relationship to Titina. At the film's end, Joaquín admits his error: "You can't understand. It was the circumstances, the world in which we live...It doesn't matter now what people say. Things have changed."

Rita and her family live in a village called San Marcos, which has a significant population of blacks.

Her late father worked on the farm owned by his best friend Jesús, a black man. Towards the end of the movie Jesús brings Rita back to the city, castigating Joaquín for forcing her to renounce her own daughter, adding "blacks and whites live as brothers" (presumably referring to San Marcos).

During their 2d wedding anniversary party, military officer Joaquín and his much-younger second wife Ana Luisa receive a message that Joaquín's grown son Jaime has died, leaving a widow and two young children. Jaime has been estranged from his father since the older man married Ana Luisa (it's later revealed that Ana Luisa was Jaime's girlfriend until she decided Joaquín was a better bet). [This chronology is confusing: if Jaime didn't leave home until Ana Luisa married his father, then how can Jaime have two children, the oldest of whom is eleven years old?]

Ana Luisa isn't happy, but Joaquín departs at once for San Marcos, driven by his faithful chauffeur-butler-gardener Rogelio. Joaquín first meets his granddaughter Titina, introduced dancing in blackface makeup. She takes him to the humble hut where she lives with her mother Rita and little brother Benito. Joaquín is shocked to see his son's wife and son are black (Titina, once the makeup is removed, is white). He changes his mind about taking them back to the capital, but Rita urges him to at least take Titina.

Titina skillfully flatters Ana Luisa, who isn't sure she wants a step-daughter but grudgingly allows her to stay. Titina notices Ana Luisa is quite friendly with her "piano teacher" Juan Carlos (in an interesting bit of dialogue, Ana Luisa makes it very clear she no longer has sex with Joaquín). Titina charms her grandfather and becomes great friends with Rogelio. On Christmas, Rita and Benito show up at the house for a visit, and Titina encourages them to stay. Once they're installed in the servants' quarters, Rogelio arranges to have Rita hired as the cook, but she has to conceal her identity from Ana Luisa (who precipitates the whole thing by firing the existing cook--director Joselito Rodríguez in a cameo--when he asks for a raise).

Ana Luisa protests "I don't want blacks in my house," but Joaquín--who obviously knows who Rita is--says they can stay (but warns Titina and Rita never to reveal they are daughter and mother).

When Titina asks Rita why they can't acknowledge this, Rita replies "Because I'm black and my colour condemns me." Joaquín asks

Rogelio to obtain some photos of white women that he can pass off as his son's "late" wife if Ana Luisa gets suspicious (Rogelio isn't very helpful, coming up with



photos of famous actresses María Félix, Mapy Cortés and Sarita Montiel--Joaquín finally accepts one of old-time opera singer Martha Rangel, presumably deceased).



When Ana Luisa attempts to strike Titina and Rita intervenes, Ana Luisa realises Rita is the girl's mother, but Joaquín denies it, and shows her the photo of Rangel. Ana Luisa gives it to Titina, saying it's her real mother, who is dead, and dares Joaquín to deny it. Titina becomes extremely upset and rejects Rita, who is fired by Ana Luisa and leaves with Benito. Ana Luisa decides to run away with Juan Carlos; he temporises until she says she can lay her hands on all the money they need, and will meet him at the airport.

Taken to a doctor's office for her hysterical depression, Titina meets an older woman there who says her child was stolen years earlier. Titina gives the woman her address, saying she might be able to find her daughter. The woman is Martha Rangel, now an alcoholic. When Martha shows up, Titina says "I am your daughter," and pursues the woman when she runs away in fear. Martha, half drunk, stumbles into the street and is hit by a car.

Meanwhile, Joaquín catches Ana Luisa emptying his safe. He takes away her mink coat--"You could be confused with a decent woman"--the money from the safe, and the jewels he'd given her. He says his son was right, she's an adventuress and a thief. Ana Luisa meets Juan Carlos at the airport but he dumps her when he learns she's penniless: "Money is the only thing that matters." [We never learn what happens to Ana Luisa, but she's a bad person so I guess no one cares.]

Rita and Benito return from San Marcos with Jesús, Jaime's friend, who demands justice for them. Joaquín says now that Ana Luisa is gone, he welcomes them into his life. But where's Titina? Eventually they all wind up in the hospital, where Martha Rangel dies--but she dies happy, thinking she's found her long-lost daughter (who, in fact, never existed but was just a figment of her imagination). Titina, Rita and Benito are reunited and (presumably) will live happily ever after with Joaquín in his fabulous mansion.

In addition to Titina and Pepito Romay (performances discussed above), the film's actors are all fine. Emilia Guiú plays a generic gold-digger, but Ana Luisa's romantic pursuit of Juan Carlos is a little sad: he clearly doesn't love her (in one scene he's with another woman while talking with Ana Luisa on the telephone) and is fairly open about this. He wants money, doesn't want a scandal, and will readily move on if Ana Luisa proves to be a hindrance rather than a gold mine. So in essence the gold-digger Ana Luisa is out-classed by male gold-digger Juan Carlos. Julio Villareal had a long career in Mexican cinema playing stern authority figures; he lightens up somewhat here, although is still chiefly a straight-man to Titina Romay. Piporro mugs a bit for the camera, then plays it straight for a while, only to mug some more. In one scene he sings a polka to Titina, imitating Arturo de Córdova and Emilio Tuero, among others (not to be out-done, in Titina's major musical scene, she dances in a can-can outfit, a *gitana* dress for a Spanish dance, and in a *rumbera* costume). Rita Montaner has a couple of strong scenes, but is not as prominent as she is in some of her other roles. She gets to sing one song.

Production values are acceptable. Most of the film takes place on the mansion set, but the film goes outside on real locations occasionally. Rodríguez's direction is satisfactory. Perhaps the major flaw in the film is its inconsistent tone. As noted above, it veers from ripe melodrama to slapstick comedy, farce, and back again, sometimes within a very short period of time. On the whole, it's not without entertainment value but it's not especially profound or affecting.

Trivia note: Sara Guash's character is named "Martha Rangel." This was the name of another daughter of director Joselito Rodríguez--she doesn't appear in the movie but she gets her name in there anyway!



Dios sabrá juzgarnos [God Will Know How to Judge Us] (Prods. Espada, 1960) *Prod:* Sidney T. Bruckner; *Dir-Scr:* Fernando Cortés; *Adapt:* Julio Bracho; *Story:* Sidney T. Bruckner, José María Fernández Unsaín ["Condonado"]; *Photo:* Jorge Stahl Jr.; *Music:* Luis H. Bretón; *Song:* Luis Demetrio ("Mi Veracruz"); *Prod Mgr:* Eloy Poiré; *Prod Chief:* José Alcalde G.; *Sub-Dir:* Américo Fernández; *Film Ed:* Carlos Savage Jr.; *Art Dir:* Ramón Rodríguez G.; *Décor:* Dario Cabañas; *Choreog:* Ricardo Luna; *Makeup:* María del Castillo; *Sound Supv:* James L. Fields; *Music/re-rec:* Galdino Samperio; *Dialog Rec:* Manuel Topete; *Sound Ed:* Teodulo Bustos V.; *Asst Film Ed:* Sigfrido García; *Spec FX:* Juan Muñoz Ravelo; *Script Clerk:* Carlos Falomir; *Union:* STPC

Cast: Rosita Arenas (*Beatriz Navarro*), Guillermo Murray (*Tomás Brown*), Augusto Benedico (*don Felipe Navarro*), Xavier Loyá (*Roberto Ochoa*), Juan José

Laboriel (*Tomás Brown, padre*), Emma Roldán (*Berta Varela*), Arturo Castro (*Luis Martínez*), Julio Monterde (*Julio*), Alfredo W. Barrón (*cabaret owner*), Francisco Meneses (*José María*), Ana María Aguirre, Alicia Moreno (*Angelita*), Silvia Castro Soria, Luz María Soteno & Eduardo Pellegrino (*dance team*), Ignacio Peón (*Roberto's servant*), Luis Demetrio [voice only]

Notes: *Dios sabrá juzgarnos* is a very fine film, with excellent direction from Fernando Cortés, a well-crafted script, and fine performances from the principals. It's quite memorable for its surprising conclusion--the lovers commit suicide, which might be alright for "Romeo and Juliet" but isn't usual otherwise, especially in a film made in a heavily Catholic country. [*La hija de nadie*, 1976, is another movie that, shockingly, concludes with the suicide of two lovers.]



The racial aspect of *Dios sabrá juzgarnos* is kept a secret until the final section of the picture, which begins with a prologue in which Tomás and Beatriz decide to kill themselves because their romance must end (for unexplained reasons), then goes into a long flashback showing the events leading up to this. However, for the bulk of the film it's a more or less conventional story about a cross-class romance between a rich young woman and a young man from humble origins (although he's a university student about to become an architect, so it's not as if he was a ditch digger or something) who fall in love. The big reveal doesn't come until about minute 66 (of a film that runs just over 80 minutes): Tomás (unknown to him) is the son of a black man and a white woman. Then there's a lot of discussion about racism in the last few minutes.

The only very slight hint of this theme comes much earlier in the movie, when two groups of university students get into a brawl at El Altillo, a (real-life) restaurant where they hang out (when the police arrive, everyone stops brawling and starts dancing!). You have to look very carefully to see that one group consists of black students and the other (the aggressors) are white students; there is no overt discussion of the racial basis

of the fight, so this could easily be missed by the casual viewer.

Dios sabrá juzgarnos begins with a distraught Beatriz leaving her home and visiting the apartment of her fiancé Tomás. She realises he's planning to commit suicide over their hopeless romance, and decides to join him: "I can't live without you. I don't want to live without you." He has sealed up the windows and she turns on the gas heater. They embrace...dissolve from a photo on his nightstand of Beatriz in an evening gown to that photograph being taken in her home, some time before. She's hosting a party for her wealthy friends, and meets Tomás, an architecture student who's doing some work for her father don Felipe. Tomás is ignored by Roberto, a snobbish (failed) suitor of Beatriz.

Beatriz pursues Tomás and they eventually fall in love. Tomás tells her that his parents are both dead and he was raised by an old family servant in Veracruz. Roberto visits Tomás and warns him that true love between people of such different social classes "only happens in *telenovelas*. And this isn't a *telenovela*." When Tomás brushes him off, Roberto departs, stealing a letter addressed to Tomás as he goes. After Beatriz definitively rejects Roberto's marriage proposal and states she's going to marry Tomás instead, Roberto hires a private detective to track down the woman who wrote the letter to Tomás.

[In a somewhat out of place scene, it is revealed that Roberto has gone into debt and written bad checks in anticipation of marrying Beatriz. This motivation just adds another coat of villainy to Roberto: instead of making him a snobbish, possessive ex-boyfriend, he's also a fortune-hunter and criminal. Not needed, and in fact it's never brought up again. Roberto is also depicted as xenophobic, making a snarky remark about Tomás's "foreign" last name.]



Tomás receives his architecture degree. He goes to work for don Felipe (as previously arranged), and proposes officially to Beatriz. However, he tells Beatriz they can't marry until his career is established, and he doesn't want any favours from her father. Don Felipe

says he married his wife when they were both poor, and Tomás doesn't necessarily have to wait so long to wed Beatriz: they decide to announce the engagement at a big party.

Meanwhile, private detective Martínez visits Veracruz and interviews Berta, the woman who raised Tomás. She says his mother owned the "Siete Mares" cabaret but later died; she was married to a man who arrived "on a boat from overseas," who is also dead. However, the current owner of the cabaret tells Martínez that the father of Tomás was sent to prison for 20 years for killing a man--in defense of his wife's honour--and his wife died shortly afterwards. Martínez returns to Mexico City and informs Roberto, who is delighted at the news.

On the night of the engagement party, none of the guests show up. Roberto arrives and says "This man must not marry Beatriz." He then introduces the father of Tomás...a middle-aged black man. Tomás, Beatriz



and don Felipe are stunned (Roberto smirks, and is ordered to leave). Tomás turns to Beatriz for support but she merely shakes her head. Sr. Brown: "Forgive me." Tomás: "No one

is to blame. If there's blame, it's on everyone." They walk out, closing the barred gate to the house behind them.

This scene is put together excellently, although it does manipulate filmic reality to achieve full impact. Señor Brown is first seen via a shot of his shoes only. For some reason, Beatriz and Tomás are staring down, then they look up and get shocked expressions on their faces. While the audience is only shown what the camera lets us see, Beatriz, Tomás and don Felipe would have instantly seen Sr. Brown as soon as he came through the door. Instead, we get the "shoes shot," then repeated closeups of Beatriz, Roberto, Beatriz, Tomás, and then the camera tilts up to show that Sr. Brown is black. There's a cut to a closeup of Tomás, then back to Sr. Brown, with a zoom in to a closeup of his face, another cut to Beatriz, and then Roberto smirking.

Beatriz recovers from her shock and insists she's still going to marry Tomás, every if they have to "leave town." Don Felipe: "He's the son of a black man. He carries it in his blood," adding that "we can't change the world. That's how it is." Beatriz retorts: "That's not true. The world isn't like that. It was made that way by cowards like you. The millions of white cowards..." Her father replies, "It's unjust, I know. It's a long-standing injustice that will end some day." Beatriz: "When? When I'm dead? When millions of blacks are dead, sunk

by white pride? I have the right to love. And it's not my skin that gives me that right, it's my soul, the same as the most unhappy black person."

Don Felipe plays the trump card. "Have you thought about...the children? They could be born black. You can't deliberately bring them into a grossly hostile world, a world in which the colour of one's skin is above the laws of God."

Meanwhile, Tomás and his father are talking in the older man's hotel room. Sr. Brown says he was tricked into accompanying Roberto: "I didn't want to shame you. Black people stain even our own children." Tomás commiserates with his father for a time, then gives him some cash and says "Go back to Veracruz," promising to join him and Berta shortly.

Tomás visits Beatriz once more: "Forgive me and forget me. Our love is forbidden, Beatriz. Between you and I there are whole centuries of cruelty and lack of understanding...Sooner or later we'd hate each other. Or our children would hate us." He leaves.

[End flashback, dissolve to the photo of Beatriz in Tomás's room, where the gas can be heard hissing. Tilt up to the shadow of a crucifix on the wall, pan left to a dead canary in a cage, tilt down to the gas heater. Pull back and track right to the dead Tomás, kneeling next to the bed, his head on Beatriz's thigh.]



Sr. Brown breaks through the door, turns off the gas, and smashes a window with a chair, but it's too late. He crosses himself. The last shot of the film is the crucifix on the wall over the bed.

Dios sabrá juzgarnos begins with perhaps the most ingenuous disclaimer (in voiceover narration) ever heard: "This story is based on problems of other countries. And although it was filmed in Mexico, do not identify it with [Mexico's] social life [*vida social*]." The basic theme of the movie is thus undercut from the beginning: two young people clearly living in Mexico are afraid of racial prejudice in Mexico (to the extent they commit suicide), even though (a) the narration tells us there's no such problem in Mexico, and (b) we see virtually no evidence of such a problem. The allegedly race-inspired brawl in El Altillo and the absence of guests at the engagement party (there's a brief and vague allusion to a "newspaper article" apparently spreading the news about Tomás's bi-

racial status, although it's just as likely that Roberto informed his social circle and they told others, etc.) are the only suggestions that race means anything. It would not have been that difficult to set the film in the USA (except that very few Mexican films in this era had "foreign" settings). And it goes without saying that changing the script to make Tomás the son of an indigenous person (thus a *mestizo*)--or even making him an indigenous person himself--and suggesting this was socially unacceptable was not a topic Mexican cinema wanted to address directly at this time.



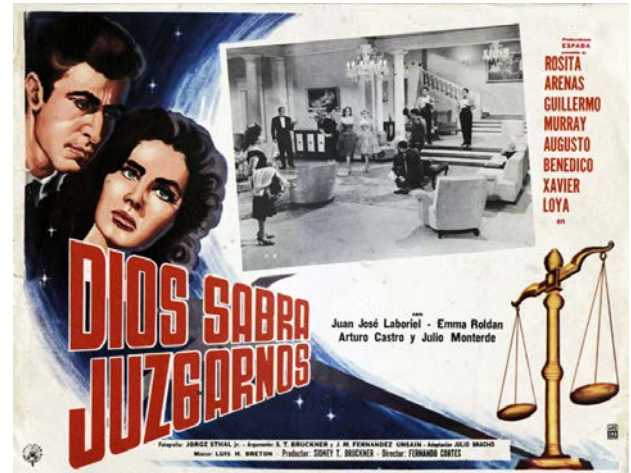
The religious aspects of *Dios sabrá juzgarnos* are not prominent, despite the title. No priests appear in the movie, and there is minimal discussion of the doctrinal issue of suicide. When Beatriz insists she is going to kill herself alongside Tomás, he says "Have you thought about God? He will judge us..." to which she replies "We'll also judge him" (an odd statement). Both Tomás and Beatriz have religious icons hanging over their beds (an actual crucifix for him, a painting for her)—more or less par for the course in Mexico at the time--but religion certainly plays a negligible role in the narrative.

The performances in the film are quite good overall. There are only seven significant roles: Tomás, Beatriz, don Felipe, Roberto, Sr. Brown, Berta, and Martínez. Guillermo Murray and Rosita Arenas are fine, playing somewhat nuanced characters, and Xavier Loyá is an appropriately nasty villain. As Beatriz's father, August Benedico is a sympathetic, kindly character who demonstrates a bit more depth than one might expect. Emma Roldán is solid as usual, while Arturo Castro provides some understated comic relief as Roberto's detective who is forced to carry out his investigations on a shoestring budget (this may allude to Roberto's financial problems mentioned earlier, but it just makes him look cheap).

Juan José Laboriel has only a few scenes as Sr. Brown, but he imbues them with considerable dignity and emotion. Laboriel appeared in a large number of Mexican films from the 1940s through the 1970s; this is one of his more notable roles. Sr. Brown apologises for "ruining" his son's life—he says they told him

something bad would happen to Tomás if he didn't come to Mexico City, and he only wanted to help. He's been out of prison for a year and didn't appear in his son's life until this time, which supports his statement. Sr. Brown and Tomás get along well in their brief time together, which is a nice touch (no melodramatic scenes of Tomás accusing his father of destroying his chance for happiness).

Dios sabrá juzgarnos is fairly well-made. It appears a second unit actually did visit Veracruz since there are shots of Castro (or a stand-in) on the street; a number of exteriors were shot on location in Mexico City (including the exterior of "El Altillo," although it's possible the interior shots were done on a set). Par for the course for Mexican cinema of the late 1950s-early 1960s, there are stock shots of the *Ciudad Universitaria* (UNAM) campus, including the distinctive central library with its Juan O'Gorman mural on the exterior walls.



Unfortunately, the Navarro house—where a fair amount of drama unfolds—looks exactly like what it was, a sterile studio set. This is a minor flaw. In compensation, Tomás's one-room apartment is nicely designed and decorated, giving one a real feel of what his life as a impecunious architecture student is like.

[Trivia note: the Navarro home features the infamous "lightning" painting, which can be seen in numerous Churubusco-shot movies of the Sixties and Seventies.]

It's interesting that a number of Mexican performers known chiefly (if not exclusively) for their comedic roles became directors who made a number of non-comedy films: Joaquín Pardavé and Carlos Orellana come to mind, and to this list one can add Fernando Cortés (although the majority of his directorial efforts were comedies, not all were). Cortés does a really excellent job here, with some very outstanding sequences.

In sum, what can one make of *Dios sabrá juzgarnos*? As the first major film dealing with non-indigenous racial issues since *Píntame angelitos blancos*, it's interesting but the "mystery" structure of the screenplay compresses any actual discussion of race into the last 15 minutes. Even then, there is little or no context given for

the frantic reaction of Beatriz, Tomás, and don Felipe to the revelation of Tomás's racial background. This may be 21st-century USA sensibilities applied to a 1960 Mexican film, but the main characters appear to take the issue extremely seriously (again, as noted above, this in some manner contradicts the opening disclaimer which basically says "in Mexico we don't care about these things as much as other countries do."), and this feels...odd, even a bit hypocritical. The potential consequences of a mixed marriage seem to boil down to "our mixed-race children would have a difficult life"--this is, of course, a major issue in *Angelitos negros* and *Pintame angelitos blancos*, but it's only a hypothetical here (and in both of those earlier films the "rejection" of a dark-skinned child is shown to be primarily the fault of a single, prejudiced individual, and not "society" as a whole).

However, the grim conclusion retains its ability to surprise audiences today, and elevates *Dios sabrá juzgarnos* from a routine melodrama to a satisfying one.



La maldición de mi raza [The Curse of My Race] (Caribbean Films de Puerto Rico & Juan Orol, 1964) *Dir-Scr:* Juan Orol; *Photo:* Agustín Jiménez; *Prod Mgr:* Santiago Perales; *Asst Dir:* José Prieto; *Film Ed:* Carlos Savage Jr.; *Asst Ed:* Sigfrido García; *Camera Op:* Federico [sic? Felipe] Mariscal; *Lighting:* Miguel La Villa; *Makeup:* Nancy Roldán; *Sound Engin:* Julio Roldán; *Sound Ed:* Abraham Cruz; Eastmancolor

Cast: Armando Silvestre (*Peter Sanders*), Luz María Aguilar (*Carol Andriani*), Lupe Suárez (*Rosa*), Dinorah D'Orgaz (*Mary; dancer*), Luis Oquendo (*Jorge*), Luciano de Pazos (*white doctor*), Bertha Sandoval

(*Carol's friend*), Eduardo Pacheco, Celia Ayala, Alma Darling, Diosdado del Pozo, Santiago Perales

Notes: *La maldición de mi raza* is a melodrama with a well-intentioned plea for racial harmony, the latter message slightly undercut by the shiny black facial makeup applied to actress Lupe Suárez. Seriously, it actually looks like someone literally put shoe polish on her face (and only her face--her neck and hands are much lighter in colour). *La maldición de mi raza* was filmed in Eastmancolor, but the television broadcast version I saw was in black and white, so it's very slightly possible that this makeup was less obvious in the original, but I doubt it.

Cuban actress Lupe Suárez came to fame playing "Mamá Dolores" in the first film version of *El derecho de nacer* (1951), a famous radio serial (later turned into films and *telenovelas* multiple times and in multiple countries) by Félix B. Caignet. She wore dark makeup for this role but it was considerably less noticeable then. Suárez played similar roles in *La intrusa*, *Sanda (la mujer del fuego)*, etc. One might guess that the black-face makeup for Suárez in *La maldición de mi raza* was meant to



make her really black (in real life Suárez was light-skinned) to emphasize the difference between her skin colour and that of her daughter. It's still extremely off-putting to see and the viewer never gets used to it.

Millionaire playboy Peter says he's never gotten married because he views marriage as "long vacations behind the bars of a prison." But when Peter glimpses his friend Jorge's secretary Carol, he changes his mind: "This woman has transformed me in an instant." Carol has an Italian last name and an "aristocratic air." However, when Carol visits her mother in the "black *barrio* Luis Aldea," the viewer discovers her mother Rosa is black (her father was an Italian man who abandoned Rosa). Carol blames her mother for her racial status and wishes her father would "die alone, like a rabid dog." After Peter proposes marriage and Carol accepts, she tells Rosa she won't be visiting any more, to prevent Peter from discovering her mixed heritage. After Carol leaves, Rosa asks God: "Will we always be slaves in the shadows or will our dawn ever arrive?"

After Carol and Peter wed, they visit Acapulco and then return to Miami. During a nightclub performance by a black dancer [Orl's future wife Dinorah Judith in the first of her two roles in the movie], Peter says the

dancer is talented but she doesn't appeal to him because she's black. It's not "racial hate," he says, acknowledging blacks have a right to happiness as everyone does, but he can't conceive of how white men could love "women of colour." For some mysterious reason, Carol takes this badly and they leave.

Carol is pregnant. She learns her mother is ill and visits her until she recovers. Carol takes taxis to the *barrio* “Luis Aldea” and each time is dropped off at a



different spot, but a suspicious Peter follows her anyway and sees her go into the house for a time. He thinks she's having an affair; back home, he confronts Carol and she faints, going into labour

early. The baby has black skin, which causes Peter to shout “No! No! This isn’t my son! No!” Believing Carol has been unfaithful, he ponders: “What a diabolical monster I chose for my wife.”

Carol herself is unaware of the baby's skin colour and is shocked when she sees him. Peter tells her "You are the most corrupt and despicable woman that could exist. Under a sweet, ingenuous exterior hides a depraved spirit. You were capable of giving yourself to a man of colour..." He adds

that he is barely able to prevent himself from strangling her and throwing her body out the window. [Tell us how you really feel, Peter, don't hold back.] Carol takes her baby and goes home to mother. Rosa is



sad: “[Carol] despises me because I’m black. And you’ll suffer too, my poor little angel. What fault is it of ours that we don’t have white skin?” The infant dies.

Carol becomes delirious, calling for Peter. Rosa: “When one is black, you don’t have the right to love. You don’t have the right to anything.” To save Carol’s sanity and/or life, Rosa tracks down Peter, who realises Carol wasn’t faithful to him. Peter and Carol reconcile and Carol recovers, at least physically. As they leave, Peter calls Rosa “Mami” and says they’ll visit soon. However, Carol’s mind has been affected: she can’t stand the colour black and doesn’t like black people. Peter “doesn’t care about the race or origin of his wife.”

When Carol gets pregnant again, she fears her child will be born black, but is happy when the baby has white skin. But Carol refuses to let her mother visit to see her

grandson, despite Peter's urging. 6 years pass. Rosa visits a park so she can watch the boy (Tony) walk by in the company of Mary, the maid. Carol still won't allow Rosa to visit, telling Peter "your friends would despise us" if they learned she was a *mulata*. However, during a party one afternoon, Tony runs into the street after a ball and is nearly hit by a car: the lurking Rosa pushes him to freedom but is struck herself. Taken into the house for medical attention, Rosa seems near death and Carol says "Mother! Forgive me!" The other party-goers look disconcerted, but Peter tells them "I'm very proud that she's my mother-in-law. Because beneath that black skin is a noble heart."

Rosa recovers and as the film ends she is a beloved part of the family.



La maldición de mi raza is more than a little reminiscent of *Angelitos negros*: both films have a protagonist who looks white but is actually a *mulata*, gives birth to a black baby, develops racist attitudes, and reconciles with her mother at the end. Neither film addresses racism on a larger scale.

The racist attitudes of Peter and Carol are not clearly motivated. Peter makes an off-the-cuff racist remark in the nightclub scenes, but his outburst when he sees his black son seems mostly because he thinks Carol has betrayed him (in *Angelitos negros* it's Ana Luisa who blames her husband for their black child, accusing him of having Negro blood because she's unaware of her own bi-racial status). As soon as Rosa shows up and explains that she's Carol's mother, Peter understands the truth, asks about his wife and son, and shows no more racism for the rest of the movie. However, he doesn't really interact with any other black characters except a black doctor in the *barrio* and Rosa's neighbour, so his sudden embrace of racial harmony is really personal--he loves Carol and Rosa as individuals, regardless of their race.

Carol flees from her racial identity from the beginning, moving away from the *barrio* and “passing” as white to improve her socio-economic standing. Like Peola in *Imitation of Life* (1934)--which has a similar love-hate relationship between light-skinned daughter and dark-skinned mother--Carol doesn’t want to be known as a *mulata* because she fears discrimination.

This translates into hatred of her mother and a general disdain for blacks (in one sequence Carol sees various costumed people on the streets of the *barrio* for some sort of *carnival* celebration, and complains about them to her mother; these black-faced characters later appear in a nightmare). However, her aversion to all things black (the narrator says she won't even wear black clothing!) comes about only after the death of her first son and is (again somewhat reminiscent of *Angelitos negros*) portrayed as mental illness. This is only manifested by her refusal to allow her mother to visit--we don't see her behaving in a hostile manner to any other black person.



Juan Orol's personal attitudes about race are not known, but it can be inferred from evidence in a number of his films (which he mostly wrote as well as directed) that he wasn't racist. The title of *La maldición de mi raza* informs the audience that racial attitudes are the focus of the story, and that he sympathises with blacks and their struggle for equality. As the dialogue quotes above suggest, he seems to have believed being born black is a burden, but one caused

by white society, not some inherent inferiority. Carol tries to hide her race, Rosa accepts it with resignation and can only hope that God will treat everyone equally in Heaven (without overtly questioning why God permits racism to exist on Earth).

The film avoids the *Angelitos negros*/*Píntame angelitos blancos* issue--a mixed-race child with dark skin is rejected by a parent/grandparent--by having Carol's first baby die, a rather unpleasant *deus ex machina*. This somewhat undercuts the "racial harmony" conclusion, since Carol and Peter's second child has white skin, and accepting Carol's mother into the family is not so much of a stretch (particularly since her role as a grandmother seems--from the little we see--as more or less equivalent to a beloved, caregiving *nana*). Still, *La maldición de mi raza* is certainly well-intentioned.

Considering the melodramatic nature of the script, most of the major performers handle their roles effectively, although Suárez is a bit too lugubrious as the self-sacrificing Rosa. She does have one good scene in which she discusses her affair with Carol's father,

insisting that she loved him and regrets the fact that he left her, but doesn't hate him as a result. When Carol says she hates him, Rosa slaps her. The other major supporting role goes to Luis Oquendo, a Cuban expatriate actor who had a long career in Spanish-language media in Florida: he's clearly a professional and is effective in his scenes with Armando Silvestre. Silvestre and Aguilar are both satisfactory in their parts.

Appearing in two roles is Dinorah D'Orgaz, who (as Dinorah Judith) would soon become Juan Orol's final muse (and wife), playing major roles in all of his subsequent directorial efforts. She plays the masked dancer and Carol's maid.

As Emilio García Riera notes, it isn't clear if the film is supposed to take place entirely in Miami, or if there are scenes which are set in Puerto Rico. Rosa lives in the same area as Carol--this is consistent throughout the film--so she is not living in Puerto Rico (even though a number of scenes were shot there, presumably including the village where everyone lives in geodesic dome houses!) and thus presumably Miami is where the story takes place. Except there are several dialogue references where Carol



and Peter briefly talk about how lovely Miami is, which suggests she's unfamiliar with the city until she marries Peter. Peter visits Jorge at the film's outset, which could mean Jorge lives and works in Puerto Rico and that's why Peter rarely sees him, and that Rosa and Carol also live there. However, as noted above, even after the couple is married Rosa still lives close enough to them that she can walk or take a cab to their house.

La maldición de mi raza features a number of familiar Orol tropes, including voiceover narration (most of the time by an anonymous narrator, but Peter's thoughts are heard in voiceover several times). Although the film is cheap, it's more or less professionally put together. There are a couple of sequences which utilise "movie magic"--Peter and Carol attend a small party in Jorge's house, attended by perhaps 5 other couples. However, Peter and Carol are never shown in the same shot as anyone else, indicating their conversation was shot separately. The same sort of thing occurs when Peter and Carol go out to a nightclub: they're shown sitting in the audience (with a few other couples seated at other tables), but the dance footage they're allegedly "watching" clearly takes place elsewhere (a very small room). In both cases the editing "sutures" the disparate shots together in an attempt to indicate the events are

taking place simultaneously in a single location. It doesn't really work, but it's more or less standard film practice.

The music is all "canned." There are two songs, one heard over the credits and the other "sung" by Carol as she dances with Peter. Aside from these songs (and instrumental versions of them), all of the underscoring is stock music. Sometimes it's appropriate, sometimes not.

Although the credits for *La maldición de mi raza* state it was "filmed totally in "exteriores," this should not be taken literally. There are interior shots (quite a few, actually), so one supposes *exteriores* means "on location" rather than "in studio." Hotels in Miami and Puerto Rico are thanked, but U.S. lobby cards crediting "Acapulco" as one of the shooting locations may not be completely accurate: there is one scene that takes place in Acapulco, but this consists almost entirely of stock footage. The only new shot shows Peter and Carol sitting in a park which could be located anywhere, and then Carol points off-screen, at which point some more Acapulco stock footage is inserted.



No juzgarás a tus padres [Don't Judge Your Parents] (Interfilms, 1967) *Dir:* José Díaz Morales; *Scr:* Alfred Varela [Jr.], José Díaz Morales; *Story:* Edmundo Báez; *Photo:* Fernando A. Colín; *Music:* Enrico C. Cabiati; *Song:* Charles Singleton, Bert Kaempfert [sic], Eddie Snyder [and Ivo Robic, uncredited] ("Strangers in the Night"); *Song performed by:* Juan Torres; *Prod Mgr:* Roy Fletcher; *Asst Dir:* Ángel Rodríguez; *Film Ed:* Federico Landeros; *Asst Ed:* Francisco Chiu; *Art Dir:* Octavio Ocampo, José Méndez; *Asst Art Dir:* Raúl Cárdenas; *Camera Op:* Javier Cruz; *Asst Cam:* Antonio Ruiz; *Makeup:* Antonio Ramírez; *Re-*

rec: Heinrich Henkel; *Recordist:* Ricardo Saldívar; *Choreog:* León Escobar; *Union:* STIC; Eastmancolor

Cast: Ana Bertha Lepe (*Alicia Torres*), Joaquín Cordero (*Dr. Roberto Garza*), Armando Silvestre (*Federico Alonso*), Roberto Cañedo (*Darío Martínez*), Orlando Rodríguez (*Padre Álvaro Torres*), Carla [sic = Karla] (*Petrita*), Virginia Avendaño (*mother of El Reintegro*), Víctor Alcocer (*Fernando*), Fanny Schiller (*cut?*), Manuel Dondé (*Dr. Horacio Islas*), Manuel "Güero" Castro (*Hilario Huerta*), *reporters:* Mario Chávez [aka Mario Cid], Jorge Fegan, José Loza, Carl-Ihllos [sic = Carl-Hillos]; Francisca L. de Laboril [sic] (*Alicia's mother*), Filemón Silva (*El Reintegro*), Guillermo Álvarez Bianchi (*party guest*), ?Sergio Sánchez (*man who gives up airplane seat*)

Notes: *No juzgarás a tus padres* (a title which doesn't mean very much) continues the theme of *Angelitos negros*, *Dios sabrá juzgarnos*, and *La maldición de mi raza*--a protagonist "passing" as white (albeit, in the first two instances, inadvertently). As in *La maldición de mi raza*, the protagonist of *No juzgarás a tus padres* is a young woman who appears white but is of mixed race: a white (Italian, Mexican) father and a black mother. She hides her racial identity to avoid discrimination.

Curiously, while *Dios sabrá juzgarnos* makes a point of claiming the film--though set in Mexico--doesn't reflect the actual situation in that country, *No juzgarás a tus padres* makes no such effort: Alicia comes from the United States to Mexico but still feels the need to pass as white. Her fears are justified: when her fiancé Roberto learns of her parentage, he refuses to take her calls. Alicia confronts him and says she hid her mixed-race status because she was afraid of what would happen if he knew, and he proved her right. (In an earlier scene, Roberto says his high-society parents have their "prejudices"--although it's implied these are social rather than specifically racial--but he has none.)

The issue of the children of a mixed-race union appears in all four of these films: children with black skin are born in *Angelitos negros* and *La maldición de mi raza*, and the fear of a black-skinned child is raised in *Dios sabrá juzgarnos*. *No juzgarás a tus padres* doesn't reveal the skin colour of Alicia and Roberto's child: Alicia's brother asks "boy or girl," then his mother asks "Colour?" but Roberto says only "It doesn't matter. He's our son, and he'll be a good man."

As the film begins, Alicia is flying to Mexico; seated next to a black man, she looks uncomfortable, and speaks to the flight attendant (we don't hear what she's saying). The attendant asks another man to switch seats, and Alicia is happily moved next to a blonde woman (they both immediately light up cigarettes--hey, it was 1967). A minute into the movie and Alicia is already defined as a racist. Later, she gives El Reintegro, a dark-skinned young messenger boy, the cold shoulder. However, these are the only two overt racist actions shown in the film (although since we see no other black

people except Padre Álvaro, Alicia really doesn't have much chance to act on her impulses). There is a curious scene in which Alicia reads a magazine featuring photos of the police (?) standing over a body in the street (with repeated zooms to the images): one suspects this is a news magazine about racial unrest in the USA, but it's not obvious. Hypocritically, Alicia tells reporters "I adore all human beings. All." This is in the context of discussing her Mexican father, from whom she learned to sing, but it's heavy-handed irony as well.



Alicia meets publicist Federico: she gives him \$4000 to promote her career, and sleeps with him in his private office to seal the deal. After a press build-up, Alicia asks impresario Fernando

to hire her for his cabaret. He demurs, saying only world-famous performers play his establishment, so Alicia sleeps with him. Then we're treated to a 10+ minute musical number featuring Alicia "dancing" (and I use that term loosely, mostly she just struts around or moves "sensuously") on stylised sets representing (apparently) the different seasons of the year.

Next step in her career is becoming the spokesmodel for "Morena clara" beer, which she gets (wait for it) by sleeping with the company owner, Darío. He buys her a house as well. This upsets Federico, whose company lost Darío's account and Alicia's services when she made an exclusive deal. A short time later, it's strongly implied that Alicia got an "import concession" from politician Hilario after sleeping with him.



[This sequence was probably inspired by Gina Romand's role as the face of Superior beer, "La rubia de categoría" (the Classy Blonde).]

Alicia's carefully constructed empire is threatened by the arrival of Padre Álvaro, a black Catholic priest. She says he's "a friend of the family," but he's actually her brother. "You have black blood." Álvaro says Alicia

should be happy now, because "hundreds and hundreds of whites applaud you." Alicia tells him "I feel white, I look white," and asks him not to reveal her secret. He agrees. He's in Mexico researching a book on the "22 Ugandan martyrs," killed in the 1880s by the king of Buganda. [Álvaro says the Pope wants the book finished soon because the martyrs are being canonised, but that actually occurred in 1964.]



While dining alone at a restaurant, Alicia is approached by young doctor Roberto. Although she reacts oddly when Roberto has a young messenger bring her a dahlia (it's not the flower, it's the boy's skin colour), they become friends. Eventually, Alicia decides she loves him.

[The version on YouTube of this film (taken from an XEQ-TV broadcast) seems to be missing some footage. At their second meeting, Roberto asks Alicia to accompany him so she can see what's important in his life. In the next scene, Alicia comes home and tells Álvaro she's in love. The missing sequence apparently took place at Roberto's children's clinic, according to Emilio García Riera. Fanny Schiller is billed but does not appear in the TV version, but since García Riera doesn't identify her character, this suggests she may have been cut from the final release print.]

When Álvaro hears the news, he asks Alicia: "Did you tell him the truth? Your origin?" She replies: "You were born black and strong. I was born white and weak. Why is it my fault?" Álvaro warns her that keeping her mixed-race status a secret is a mistake.

Roberto visits and Álvaro talks about his book. "Racists try to demonstrate blacks are sub-human. Those youths [the Ugandan martyrs] show that while being black, they're capable of dying for an ideal." Roberto sagely comments "We must fight for equality for all races."

[A long and very odd sequence follows. Álvaro strolls through a park and hears various radio broadcasts. Radio Vatican says "Love one another." Radio Cairo announces that "President Nasser has said 'we'll push the Jews into the sea.'" Competing radio stations refer to the war in Vietnam, one supporting the "struggle for liberty" and the other claiming the "imperialist, capitalist" USA has "helped recover the freedom of South Vietnam." Finally, Álvaro sits down and the camera zooms in to a small statue of Don Quixote. What just happened?]

Federico runs into Alicia and says she's doing well, planning to catch a very important husband: "You won't be trash anymore, you'll be a lady." She retorts: "As for you, you were born trash and will die trash." Federico meets a black guy in the hallway; this guy is later seen lurking outside Alicia's house (whistling "Strangers in the Night") but nothing ever comes of this. Is he a



detective? Federico later learns Álvaro is Alicia's brother, but did this guy help prove it?

Alicia and Roberto

discuss their relationship. He says his parents have their prejudices and he respects their wishes, even though he isn't prejudiced himself. Alicia admits she has a "secret" she can't reveal. Roberto: "Another love? A divorce?" Alicia: "Worse." Roberto: "Worse than that?" She says she's joking and drops the matter.

Later, Álvaro asks Alicia if she plans to marry Roberto without telling the truth. "And if afterwards a child is born black?" Alicia: "I'll always carry the stigma of being black." She says she'll enjoy her love with Roberto as long as she can, then vanish from his life.

In another odd sequence, Roberto and Alicia attend a "Cuban" party at a friend's house. There are a few blacks in traditional costume there, but most of the guests are white. The guests are caught up in the "savage" Cuban music, dancing wildly, falling on the floor, etc. [This really looks more like a voodoo rite than a "Cuban party," but what do I know?] Alicia and Roberto leave.

Yet another didactic sequence follows. Alicia's servant Petrita gets a letter from Andrés, the father of her little son. He's working in Texas. She asks Álvaro to read the letter to her, since "I know most of the letters but not when they're all together [in words]." Andrés tells a tale of trouble crossing the border. He sends Petrita money and says he'll come back someday, marry her, and they'll return to their village. The people in the USA aren't bad, but they look at him oddly. "My only friend is a black man who learned to speak Spanish of his own free will. He is also very sad. I don't understand, because he's from here and knows how to speak English well." [We get it. Mexicans and blacks are both underprivileged groups in the USA. Mexico is better for Mexicans, but the film doesn't make a case that blacks suffer less prejudice in Mexico, which is a little odd.]

Federico reveals he knows Álvaro is Alicia's brother and tries to blackmail her into becoming his mistress: "I

don't have racial prejudices." She smashes a bottle and forces him to let her leave: "I'd exchange the rest of my life for one day of happiness." But *No juzgarás a tus padres* still refuses to get to the point. Roberto and Alicia visit El Reintegro's house when he doesn't show up for work. He lives in poverty with his widowed mother and 3 siblings. Roberto diagnoses peritonitis and has to operate right there and then, with Alicia's assistance. El Reintegro will survive. Roberto and Alicia visit Xochimilco and have sex (the camera discreetly pans away as they kiss).

However, Federico meets Roberto and says, oh by the way, "Alicia's brother is a *mulato* priest!" then laughs and leaves. Roberto refuses to see Alicia or take her calls. Naturally, after having sex one time with Roberto, Alicia becomes

pregnant (I guess she was just lucky all the times she had sex with Federico, Fernando, Darío, etc.). She tells Álvaro she's not going to have the child: "Not you or anyone can



force me to have a child that could be [pause] black. In our race we never know when there could be a throwback [*salta atrás*]. I'm not going to have it!" Álvaro calls her a "murderer" and says they'll talk the next day, but Alicia has a nervous breakdown in her room, hearing drums and so forth; she falls on the floor and punches herself in the stomach! Álvaro slaps her to snap her out of it. Later, he asks: "What did you contribute to this child? A piece of dirty flesh? Its soul? No, God gave it a soul." Alicia says she doesn't want her child to suffer what she's suffered as a mixed-race person. "If you despise yourself for being black, is it strange that others despise you?" Álvaro replies. "Perhaps your child will be black and strong enough to free our race." Álvaro agrees to take Petrita and her child to Chapultepec park, and Alicia rides along; a funeral procession passes in front of their car...with a child's coffin. [Symbolism!]

And the film goes on and on...Alicia visits Roberto's office and says she's moving back to California. She tells him she was afraid to confess that she's black because she was afraid of the consequences...and she was right! She also adds that Roberto doesn't deserve to know what she was going to tell him (that she's pregnant). Alicia goes to Petrita's provincial village, but the local doctor refuses to perform an abortion: "If you've come to this town to hide your dishonour, I'll help you," but he won't commit "a murder."

Álvaro arrives, bringing Alicia's mother with him. Alicia changes her mind about having an abortion. Then Roberto shows up (tipped off by Álvaro) and reconciles with Alicia. Alicia goes into labour and Roberto and the town doctor deliver her son. As noted above, Roberto doesn't reveal the baby's skin colour to the audience: "It



doesn't matter." The final shot of the film is a closeup of a happy Alicia, then a tilt up to the ubiquitous crucifix over the bed. The End. Finally.

No juzgarás a tus padres is a

real mess in many ways. The script lurches from sequence to sequence with no particular rhyme or reason. Whole scenes are essentially pointless. If you removed Ana Bertha Lepe's dance number, the scene in which Padre Álvaro wanders through a park, and the "Cuban party" sequence, the movie would probably be less than an hour long. It just seems like the filmmakers threw in every possible melodramatic set-piece they could think of, including an emergency operation, a funeral, a nightclub act, a child-birth scene, multiple parties, fierce arguments, emotional breakdowns, and so on and so forth. On top of this the writers threw in numerous dialogue scenes explicitly referencing the "race issue" theme, just so the audience wouldn't forget the "important" topic being addressed.

The production values are variable. Much of the film is shot on location, which is a plus since it means the schematic Estudios América sets are not as much in evidence.

The film opens with a jaunty instrumental version (by organist Juan Torres) of "Strangers in the Night" under the credits, and goes on to feature snatches of the song (both orchestral versions by Enrico C. Cabiati and reprises of the Torres' version) throughout the movie. It's as if the producers said "We paid for the rights to this song and by golly we're going to use it." Given the racial theme of the film, it's a curious coincidence that the lyrics were written by Charlie "Hoss" Singleton, himself African-American.

The performances are adequate. Ana Bertha Lepe gives it the old melodrama try, running the gamut of emotions from haughty, loving, paranoid, pitiful, and so on. She gets one very long dance sequence which is very kitschy but shows off her body admirably (she's wearing paste-on bra cups and panties which are sometimes flesh-toned so she appears almost nude). Of course, she's later given the bizarre freak-out scene in which she collapses on the floor, screams, hits herself, etc., and this is sadly more laughable than affecting.

The script doesn't help her much: Alicia's motivations are inscrutable and often contradictory. She sleeps her way to the top: alright, that's understandable, except she doesn't even bother to tease men or play hard to get, sleeping with them at the slightest provocation. I guess she was in a hurry. Her "racist" attitudes, illustrated a couple of times very early in the film, are never explained. Does she not want to be around black people because...she hates herself? She's afraid someone will say, "Hey, are you black, too?" It's not really irony, either. Alicia's racism seems like a character trait borrowed from *Angelitos negros* without any particular thought of relevancy.

The rest of the cast is mostly fine. Puerto Rican actor Orlando Rodríguez is coated in makeup that looks greenish in existing prints and his dialogue appears to have been post-dubbed, but he's earnest enough. Joaquín Cordero and Armando Silvestre are satisfactory. Karla doesn't go full *india* as Alicia's servant: she has some sort of rural accent and wears her hair in *trenzas* (braids), but her skin doesn't appear to have been darkened. Still, it's a stereotyped role and one without any particular depth; the scene in which she receives a letter from *bracero* Andrés focuses chiefly on Padre Álvaro, who's reading it aloud to her.

No juzgarás a tus padres isn't a very good film, but it's not completely without interest.



La amargura de mi raza [The Bitterness of My Race] (Estudios América, 1972) *Exec Prod:* Alfonso Rosas Priego Jr.; *Dir-Scr:* Rubén Galindo; *Photo:* Agustín Lara; *Music:* Ricardo Carrión; *Prod Mgr:* Antonio Chávez; *Asst Dir:* Rafael Villaseñor; *Film Ed:* Raúl Casso; *Asst Cam:* Adrián Canales; *Re-rec:* Ricardo Saldívar; *Sound Op:* Guillermo Carrasco; *Union:* STIC; Eastmancolor

Cast: Andrés García (*Mario*), Yolanda Liévana (*Lilí*), Arthur Hansel (*Bob Cotton*), Alicia Encinas (*Karla Cotton*), Irlanda Mora (*Nancy Cotton*), Ricardo Carrión (*Henry Pearson*), Julio César [Imbert] (*José Alfonso Oñate*), Federico Falcón (*Capt. Ballesteros*), Carlos León (*doctor*), Gustavo del Castillo, Rebeca Silva (*Ballesteros' date*), Carlos Bravo "Car-Hillos," Alfonso Oñate, Margarita de la Fuente, Carmelina Encinas, José Luis de Alba, Juan Garza (*assailant #1*), Guillermo Ayala, J[uan] José Laboriel (*José's father*), Francisca L. de Laboriel (*José's mother*) Roberto "Flaco" Guzmán (*flower vendor*), Víctor Iturbe "El Pirulí" (*singer*)

Notes: after *No juzgarás a tus padres* (1967), in the late '60s and early 1970s Mexican cinema suddenly "discovered" black people. Films dealing with vaguely defined "racial issues"--albeit sometimes in very oblique ways--include the remake of *Angelitos negros* (1969), *Rosas blancas para mi hermana negra* (1969), *Arde, Baby, arde* (1970), *Mamá Dolores* (1970), *Vidita negra* (1971), *Cumbia* (1972), *Huracán Ramírez y la monjita negra* (1972), *Mulata* (1972), *Slaughter* (1972--a co-production with the USA), *Las adorables mujercitas* (1973), *Negro es un bello color* (1973), *El Poder Negro* (1973), *Un mulato llamado Martín* (1974, co-prod with Peru), *La venganza de la Llorona* (1974), and *Los temibles* (1975). Virtually all of these had major characters played by (or playing--black-face still showed up in *Huracán Ramírez y la monjita negra* and *Las adorables mujercitas*, for instance) people of colour.



However, *La amargura de mi raza* is one of the few films in this period which specifically addresses race as its central premise, depicting a romance (and marriage) between a Caucasian woman and a black man. The film is set in Mexico but the nationalities of the major characters are never explicitly defined. José Alfonso leaves his native land in the opening scene and moves to Mexico--we assume he's from the Dominican Republic because (a) actor Julio César Imbert was from that country, and (b) neither he nor his mother have stereotypical Cuban accents (the nation of origin for most performers of colour in Mexican cinema to that

time). Karla, on the other hand, speaks perfect Spanish (as do her parents), but her family name is "Cotton" (possibly a reference to slavery in the USA) and it seems clear they're supposed to be *gringos*, albeit ones who've been living in Mexico for some time.

The plot: José Alfonso leaves his home [unspecified, but one assumes it's the Dominican Republic, where both Andrés García and Julio César Imbert were born] for Mexico, where he wants to become rich and famous as a race driver. He makes friends with playboy Mario, who pays José Alfonso to be his mechanic and allows him to live in Mario's luxurious mansion, rent-free. Mario and José Alfonso get jobs as test drivers for the (real-life) VAM [Vehículos Automotores Mexicanos] automobile factory. Plant executive Bob Cotton doesn't want José Alfonso working for him but is opposed by Capt. Ballesteros, who runs the test-driving unit. Some time later, Cotton's teen-age daughter Karla visits the factory at the invitation of her friend Henry. Karla's dog wanders onto the test track and José Alfonso wrecks his car to avoid it. Cotton blames José Alfonso and slaps him. José Alfonso is fired (we assume, see below).

Karla arrives at Mario's house that night and apologises for her father's behaviour. José Alfonso says he'd like them to be friends. In a short period of time, they become romantically involved. Karla invites José Alfonso, Mario, and Mario's girlfriend Lilí to her birthday party, held in the garden of her family's luxurious home.



Karla introduces José Alfonso as her boyfriend to her mother, then her father orders José Alfonso to leave. Karla, having reached the age of majority, moves out of the Cotton house and into Lilí's apartment. Eventually, Karla and José Alfonso--now working at a automobile dealership--marry and move into a rented apartment. Karla becomes pregnant. Mario asks José Alfonso to become his partner in the Mexican Gran Prix race, noting that a victory will allow the newlyweds to make a down payment on their own home.

During the race, Karla goes into labour and Lilí takes her to a hospital. Mario and José Alfonso, concentrating on the race, are unaware of this. Mario and José Alfonso take turns driving, but Mario allows José Alfonso to take the wheel for the final laps and thus get credit for the win. At the hospital, the doctor says there are complications and since the husband can't be reached, Karla's parents are summoned. After the race, Mario and José Alfonso speed to the hospital, trophy in tow,

only to learn Karla and her child both died. José Alfonso walks away alone, still carrying the trophy.

As in a number of Mexican movies on the topic, the supposed lack of racial discrimination in Mexico is explicitly spelled out in the dialogue, and the only racists in the film are Mr. Cotton and (to a lesser degree) his wife. Every Mexican in the movie treats the protagonist fairly and even defends him against the Cottons. José Alfonso's best friend Mario makes joking references about race—including one very tasteless scene in which he tries to pick up two women by claiming José Alfonso is a "Watusi" warrior; when José Alfonso spoils the subterfuge, Mario says his friend should have shouted "Kreegah bundolo" (a phrase in "ape language" used by Tarzan of the Apes) and insists "You owe me two white women." However, for the most part these are intended to be harmless and even today seem fairly innocuous. To make sure the audience "gets" this, Mario at one point says "It doesn't matter to me what colour you are. You could be spotted, green, even white. We're all equal. What bothers me is that you have a complex about [race]." "It's not a complex," José Alfonso replies, "it's rage [*coraje*] against people who treat us as lesser [beings]. You see what's happening in the United States." Mario: "Yes, but that's there. We're here in Mexico. There is no racial discrimination. Also, [even]



in the USA there are many people on the side of people of colour." "This problem has caused many deaths," José Alfonso tells him, "and it'll continue until it reaches us here."

Bob Cotton is portrayed from the very first as a racist. When he sees José Alfonso is black, he says "He doesn't drive well. Fire him." Ballesteros, head of the test driving unit, refuses and threatens to go to the factory directors and tell them Cotton is using his position to "spread his hate for the black race." Later, when José Alfonso crashes his car into a fence to avoid hitting a dog on the track, Cotton tells Ballesteros: "I warned you if this damned black made a mistake he'd have to be fired..." When José Alfonso says "Excuse me Mr. Cotton, the next time you refer to me, do it by name," Cotton retorts "You're like all members of your race. You weren't satisfied with no longer being slaves, you

insist on being treated as if you were a member of the white race." He slaps José Alfonso, who has to be restrained by Mario.

Cotton orders José Alfonso leave Karla's birthday party, even before he discovers José Alfonso and Karla are seeing each other romantically. Karla leaves home and eventually marries José Alfonso. One night, Cotton confronts José Alfonso: "I don't want to kill you. Leave Karla." José Alfonso refuses and Cotton has two thugs attack him (he's rescued by Mario, who demonstrates some martial arts prowess).

Cotton is domineering towards his wife and daughter and is shown to be sexist as well as racist. He rudely interrupts Karla, who's talking about an upcoming conference on human rights, suggesting she join her mother in the kitchen. He adds that he's sorry he spent money to send her to a fancy *colegio* (high school) "where they teach you lack of respect for older people... You think the world belongs to you." To top it off, he says "The attraction of a woman is to have a beautiful smile and a closed mouth."

In only one scene does Cotton do something even mildly positive (although it depends on one's point of view): when Karla goes into labour, the doctor tells her parents that an operation is required, and either the mother or the child might die. Cotton quickly says "Save my daughter." One could speculate that Cotton prefers that his daughter live rather than a mixed-race child—in an earlier scene, Karla's mother pulls the old "you could have a child and it could be its father's colour" scare tactic—but there's no clear evidence to support this. While Karla is in the hospital and after her death neither of her parents says anything else, to José Alfonso or anyone.

It might be noted that Cotton's decision could be construed as problematical under Catholic Church doctrine (although this isn't clear), but *La amargura de mi raza* has virtually no religious content (unlike some previous race-topic films). Perhaps Cotton is intended, as a *gringo*, to be understood as a Protestant. Karla and José Alfonso are married in a civil ceremony, not a religious one, slightly unusual for a Mexican movie.

There are several loose ends in the plot of *La amargura de mi raza*. For instance, Karla arrives at the automobile factory to visit Henry. She has a black dog with her, but is told she can't take it inside the plant, so she leaves it outside. This is apparently the dog that runs onto the test track, causing José Alfonso to swerve and hit a fence. Karla, Henry, Cotton, Mario and Ballesteros witness this, and José Alfonso makes a special mention of the animal. However, Karla says nothing about the dog (which was never seen before and is never seen again), allowing José Alfonso to take all the blame and receive her father's tongue-lashing. The script did not need for the dog to belong to Karla if she wasn't going to apologise or at least thank José Alfonso for saving it: his

bona fides as a good guy would have been equally valid if he'd swerved to miss any dog (or cat for that matter).

Later in the film, José Alfonso loses his job with the factory as a test driver and goes to work in an automobile dealership. However, this is never explained—it seems to have occurred either after the fence incident or after José Alfonso and Mario are ejected from Karla's birthday party, but it's not mentioned specifically and is thus rather confusing.

Andrés García as Mario gets a reasonable amount of footage, but he's definitely subordinate to Julio César Imbert as José Alfonso, especially in the latter half of the movie. García is his usual breezy self, playing an apparently wealthy womaniser with an interest in racing. His martial arts



expertise, as mentioned above, comes out of nowhere for one scene. Although he has a steady girlfriend (Lilí) throughout the movie, he constantly reneges on his promises to marry her, and in one odd scene is shown—in full evening dress—telling her on the telephone that he's going to bed immediately. This is neither set up nor followed up: we don't see where he's intending to go.

The cast is very good in their roles. Alicia Encinas and Julio César Imbert, just beginning her careers, are fine. It sounds like Imbert was post-dubbed, but it might be his own voice. Julio César Imbert Salas was born in the Dominican Republic in November 1938. A talented athlete, Imbert attended 1958 spring training with the San Francisco Giants, one of group of Dominicans including Juan Marichal, Matty Alou, and Manny Mota. Imbert, a left-handed pitcher, played for various Pittsburgh Pirate minor league teams for four seasons (1959-61), then moved to the Mexican League in 1962. He played for the Mexico City Diablos Rojos, Jalisco Charros, Campeche Pirates, Yucatán Venados, Orizaba Charros, Águila (of Veracruz) and the Saltillo Saraperos, among other teams, retiring after the 1972 season. On the recommendation of a photographer, Imbert was hired as Jim Brown's double for *Slaughter*, shot in Mexico in 1972. This led to his role in *La amargura de mi raza*, which was followed by film, television, stage, and fotonovela work. His later movies included *The Bees*, *Ilegales y mojados*, and *Fuego negro*. Imbert continued to work in baseball, serving as a pitching coach, manager, and scout for various Mexican League teams.

Arthur Hansel, the "professional *gringo*" in Mexican cinema from the late 1960s through the mid-1970s (eventually replaced by Roger Cudney), is stern and

unforgiving as Cotton, although his character's racism and belief in white superiority is never explained.

Audiences may have construed these attitudes as par for the course for a *gringo* (even though Cotton is



never specifically identified as such, it's pretty clear). Appearing in one scene and heard singing on the soundtrack is Víctor Iturbe [sometimes spelled Yturbe] "El Pirulí," a popular singer of the period; Iturbe made a few film appearances and died tragically in November 1987, the victim of an unsolved gangland-style murder.

Production values are fine, with most of the film shot on location. The pacing is generally good, although there are several slow spots, including a nearly 5-minute montage sequence

accompanied by a song on the soundtrack, and the overlong final race, which is intercut with scenes of Karla in the hospital. The title sequence is a bit



odd: the credits appear over "antique" photos and art of Africans, slaves, early 20th-century blacks, and so on.

La amargura de mi raza is well-intentioned and for once shows an intentional (where both people know the other's race) and happy interracial romantic relationship. The ending is tragic, of course, and one might cynically think this was intentional: the script could have concluded with Karla giving birth and both mother and child surviving, and the Cottons renouncing their racist ways and accepting their grandchild and son-in-law...but that wasn't dramatic enough. So instead we're given a conclusion where everyone involved is unhappy (or dead).



BEFORE ROMA

María Isabel (Películas Rodríguez/Prods. Guillermo de la Parra, 1967) *Dir:* Federico Curiel; *Adapt:* Julio Alejandro; *Story:* Yolanda Vargas Dulché; *Photo:* Rosalío Solano; *Music:* Sergio Guerrero; *Prod Mgr:* Luis Quintanilla Rico; *Prod Chief:* Armando Espinosa; *Asst Dir:* Mario Llorca; *Film Ed:* José Bustos; *Decor:* Raúl Serrano; *Camera Op:* Felipe Mariscal; *Lighting:* Antonio

Solano; *Makeup*: Felisa Ladrón de Guevara; *Supv of Sound & Dialog*: Enrique Rodríguez; *Sound Ed*: Raúl Portillo; *Union*: STPC; Division Color



Cast: Silvia Pinal (*María Isabel Sánchez*), José Suárez (*Ricardo*), Norma Lazareno (*Gloria as a young woman*), Irma Lozano (*Graciela*), Tito Junco (*don Félix Pereyra*), Lucy Buj (*"Güerita"--Graciela as a child; Rosa Isela*), Maura Monti (*Lucrecia*), Eric del Castillo (*Jerónimo Curiel*), Roberto Cañedo (*Rogelio*), Fredy Fernández (*Gilberto Valdés*), Lolita Ramos (*young María Isabel*), Martha Vázquez (*?Gloria as a child*), Fany [sic] Schiller (*Manuela*), Consuelo Monteagudo (*spinster sister #1*), Carlos Román (*Rubén*), Tamara Garina (*spinster sister #2*), Óscar Moreli (*Leobardo Rangel*), Diana Gari (*Lorenza, maid*), Enriqueta Lavat (*Rubén's mother*), Amado Sumaya (*Pedro*), Queta Carrasco (*doña Chona*), Daniel Villarán (*don Jacinto, gardener*), Gloria Ahuet, José Loza (*Antonio Altimirano*), Alfredo Gutiérrez (*Andrés*), Mario Chávez [Cid] (*lawyer*), Felipe del Castillo, Alejandra Meyer (*teacher*), Jorge Casanova (*doctor*), Óscar Grijalva (*medical student*), Manuel Trejo Morales (*Tomás, mayor domo*), Ricardo Adalid (*Carlos*), María Antonieta de las Nieves (*voice of Rosa Isela*), Concepción Martínez (*grandmother*)

Notes: "María Isabel" was a comic strip that appeared in 50 episodes of the comic book "Lagrimas y Risas" in 1964. It was then adapted as a *telenovela* in 1966, starring Silvia Derbez. In 1967-68, the story was made into two feature films (one covering each half of the story--the second was titled *El amor de María Isabel*) with Silvia Pinal in the title role. Derbez was 34 years old when she played María Isabel and Pinal was 36, neither exactly age-appropriate for the role. Pinal, to be fair, looks great and does an excellent job in the role, but she's definitely a full-grown, mature woman. This doesn't matter and didn't at the time, since *María Isabel* was a huge hit, playing in its opening engagement in Mexico City for ten consecutive weeks.

Although not precisely an "epic," *María Isabel* does have some epic attributes. It's long (just short of two hours), and covers a number of years--beginning with

Graciela and María Isabel as adolescents and concluding several decades later. The production values are satisfactory (at least one source says the luxurious house in which the latter half of the film largely takes place was Silvia Pinal's own residence), and the cast is loaded with familiar faces and "guest stars." One minor annoyance is the amount of dubbed dialogue: José Suárez is dubbed throughout, as is Lucy Buj in both of her incarnations (allegedly her dialogue was done by the future "Chilindrina," María Antonieta de las Nieves).

María Isabel is essentially a Cinderella story. A poor, uneducated *india* (with a wicked stepmother!) moves to the city, becomes a servant, and eventually marries her wealthy employer. However, the story has many nuances (and one rather surprising twist at the end), so the happy ending seems neither inevitable nor facile.

María Isabel herself is a fascinating character. She is a diligent worker, a loyal friend to Graciela, and throws herself whole-heartedly into the role of mother to Rosa Isela. Once she leaves the *hacienda* she appears to have no personal life (other than her role as mother): no friends, no suitors, no hobbies. María's only "flaw" is a propensity for assaulting those who attack her--she's not passive and doesn't hesitate to attack her abusive stepmother, don Félix's unpleasant housekeeper Manuela, the greedy spinster sisters, or Lorenza the maid. These scenes are played slightly for humour, but are always shown to have been provoked by María Isabel suffering repeated abuse at the hands of the others.

The film doesn't demonise whites and praise indigenous people as flawless exemplars of humanity--while racism against *indios* is depicted, it is not shown to be systemic.

Instead, racism is personalised to a few individuals who are all depicted as flawed in other ways as well.



Don Félix is a violent, domineering father who whips his daughter and intends to shoot her lover. The spinster sisters who first hire María Isabel are avaricious, exploitative and duplicitous. Tomás and Lorenza, Ricardo's servants, are guilty of regularly stealing from their employer by falsifying the household accounts. Interestingly enough, the film goes out of its way to (a) show them getting their just desserts (losing his daughter, losing a good servant and getting physically thrashed, and losing their cushy jobs) and (b) generate a bit of audience sympathy for them after their punishment. Don Félix is repentant at the end, the spinsters are left dishevelled and alone, and

the discharged servants are shown walking sadly away from Ricardo's house.

In some ways, *María Isabel* exemplifies the way in which race and socio-economic status are intermingled in Mexico. While the aforementioned "racists" use *india* slurs against María Isabel, her lower-class status may contribute to this. [One exception may be Tomás and Lorenza, who are also domestic servants and might have accepted a new employee in their household more readily if she had not been an *india*.] In some subtle ways, María Isabel sheds her indigenous identity as the film goes on: she becomes literate, she learns to wear shoes, she has her *trenzas* (braids) cut off. She even loses some of her stereotypical accent. And yet, the film does illustrate that María Isabel is still racially labeled: when she visits her daughter's school--her hair short and wearing a reasonably "modern" dress (although she has a sort of *rebozo*)--María Isabel is asked by a teacher, "Are you here to pick up a child?" (when informed that María Isabel is the mother of a student, the woman at least has the grace to be embarrassed). She's considered an *india* despite her shoes, dress, and short hair.

María Isabel grows up on the Hacienda de la Soledad, owned by don Felipe. She and the *patrón*'s daughter



Graciela are friends, at least until don Felipe finds out. "What's this *india* doing in my house?" he demands. "She's my friend," Graciela replies.

"Your friend, an *india*?" he asks incredulously, then chases María Isabel away. He sends Graciela to school in the capital: before she leaves, she gives María Isabel her beloved doll Rosa Isela. Time passes, and a grown Graciela returns to the *hacienda* and resumes her friendship with María Isabel, who works there now. Don Félix warns his daughter not to be so familiar with the servants, "they're pure rabble [*gentuza*]."

Graciela falls in love with Leobardo, an engineer constructing a highway nearby, but don Félix wants her to wed the *gauche* son of a rich neighbour. Graciela spends the night with Leobardo and is whipped by her father when she returns. [María Isabel is criticised as well, earning her father's disapproval and losing her boyfriend Andrés as a result.] Graciela refuses to marry anyone else, saying she can only marry Leobardo: "You understand why, papa?" [i.e., she had sex with him] Don Félix grabs a pistol and rides off for the construction site, but Graciela and María Isabel take a shortcut and get there first. However, construction blasting is about to

occur, and Leobardo loses his own life while warning Graciela to stay away.

Graciela (pregnant, naturally, because in melodramas every young woman gets pregnant after they have sex one time) and María Isabel flee to the city. Graciela gives birth to Rosa Isela--named after her doll--and asks María Isabel to raise her, then she dies. To prevent the baby from being sent to an orphanage, María Isabel takes the infant and goes to a church to pray to the Virgin of Guadalupe ("You're an *india* like me."). It works: the friendly priest baptises the child and arranges for María Isabel to get a job as a servant. However, María Isabel's employers are two spinster sisters who under-pay and over-work her, subtracting every broken dish and lost spoon from her salary. Snooping through the young woman's belongings, they find an antique necklace given to María Isabel by Graciela. Accusing her of stealing it, the women call María Isabel an "*india infeliz*," hit her, and threaten to notify the police. María Isabel thrashes the two older women and quits.

Her next job is with a middle-aged lady and her grown son Rubén, a medical student. Rubén constantly lusts after María Isabel and one day when his mother is away attempts to rape her. She smashes him over the head with a vase, but then has to seek his help when Rosa Isela falls ill. Rubén helps save the child but says he can't guarantee he won't lose control again: he makes sure María Isabel has a glowing letter of recommendation when she leaves.

Finally, María Isabel shows up at the mansion owned by Ricardo, a widower whose daughter Gloria is a few years older than Rosa Isela. Although Tomás and Lorenza,

his current servants, mock the newcomer for wearing *huaraches* [sandals] and Gloria calls Rosa Isela a "*india*



mugrosa" (grubby Indian), María Isabel works hard and honestly. Lorenza slaps María Isabel and is clobbered with a frying pan for her trouble; Ricardo demands to know what's going on, and María Isabel reveals that Tomás and Lorenza have been cheating him. They're fired and María Isabel takes over the whole house.

Things go well for a time. Rosa Isela is sent to the same school as Gloria, and eventually teaches her mother to read and write (María Isabel also learns to wear "real" shoes). However, Rosa Isela is infected by Gloria's snobbishness and is ashamed of her mother's profession. She points out a doll in a shop window and says "this is the one I want but you're a servant and don't have

money.” María Isabel has her *trenzas* (braids) cut off to earn enough to buy the doll, but her “daughter” says “How ugly you are! You got rid of the only pretty thing you had.” Later, Rosa Isela is angry when María Isabel shows up at the Mother’s Day celebration at her school: “I’m ashamed that you’re my mother and I don’t want to be seen with you.” María Isabel gives her the valuable necklace to mollify her.



Meanwhile, Ricardo starts dating blonde Lucrecia, a gold-digger, and his daughter Gloria throws wild parties and defies her father. Ricardo tells María Isabel: “Don’t sacrifice so much for your daughter. Children never appreciate what we do for them.” Towards the end of the film, Gloria refuses to accompany Ricardo on a trip to Europe, insisting she’s going to marry her boyfriend. Ricardo: “What are you going to live on? He’s still a student.” Gloria: “Aren’t you rich?”

María Isabel dislikes Lucrecia and discovers she and her real boyfriend Jerónimo (who poses as her “cousin”) plan to leave the country with the jewelry Ricardo has given her. Ricardo doesn’t believe this, referring to María Isabel as an “*india estúpida*,” but he and his pal Rogelio discover it is true and recover the jewels (and Ricardo punches Jerónimo).

However, through a bizarre set of melodramatic coincidences involving a schoolmate whose father just happens to be entertaining don Félix when Rosa Isela walks in wearing the family heirloom necklace, don Félix shows up at Ricardo’s house and demands custody of his granddaughter. María Isabel claims Rosa Isela is her biological daughter and Ricardo nobly asserts he’s the father (to explain the girl’s light skin, eyes, and hair), but don Félix isn’t convinced. He finally gives up, saying “My solitude is my punishment [for mistreating Graciela]. Remember this poor, repentant old man” is willing to give Rosa Isela whatever she needs in the future. He prepares to depart but Rosa Isela has been eavesdropping the whole time and in an extremely shocking twist, she says she’s ashamed of María Isabel—who isn’t her real mother anyway--and wants to go with don Félix!

As the film concludes, Ricardo and María Isabel are married. She imagines she sees Rosa Isela in the church, but it’s just a dream.

María Isabel mixes various melodramatic threads into a long, episodic narrative: Graciela and her father; Graciela and Leobardo; María Isabel and her abusive step-mother; María Isabel and her childhood sweetheart Andrés; María Isabel’s work; María Isabel as self-sacrificing mother; Rosa Isela as snobbish, ungrateful daughter; Ricardo’s relationship with his spoiled daughter Gloria; Ricardo’s relationship with gold-digger Lucrecia; Ricardo’s relationship with María Isabel.

Parent-child relationships and romantic relationships are major factors in *María Isabel*. Rather surprisingly, parents and children are in conflict for much of the movie. Don Félix is an authoritarian parent and Graciela is a rebellious daughter. María Isabel and her step-mother are hostile to each other, while María Isabel and her father have a better relationship; he’s more hurt than angry when she refuses to explain her overnight absence, gives her his blessing when she leaves for the city, and is savagely



beaten by don Félix’s men when he refuses to say where his daughter and Graciela have gone. Ricardo is a single parent and Gloria is spoiled and elitist. María Isabel is the quintessential self-sacrificing mother to Rosa Isela, only to be rejected at the end.

The roles of Rosa Isela and Gloria are somewhat reminiscent of Peola and Jessie in *Imitation of Life* (1934). They are the daughters of a servant and her employer (both single parents); they have rocky relationships with their mothers. Peola “passes” for white, although she is black; Rosa Isela is considered an *india* (or, given her colouring, is assumed to be biracial) --they both reject the roles society has assigned to them, Peola as a person of colour and Rosa Isela as the daughter of a servant and (she thinks) a person of colour. Gloria and Jessie have less to do in their narratives, but both are spoiled and both meddle in their parent’s romantic relationships.

The romantic relationships in *María Isabel* also fail in many ways. Graciela loves Leobardo but can’t marry him (and he eventually dies); in contrast, she rejects the awkward Antonio, her father’s choice. María Isabel’s childhood friend Andrés becomes her *novio* when they are grown, but he rejects her violently when he thinks (mistakenly) she’s been unfaithful to him. Ricardo loves

the sexy Lucrecia but she's just using him and has a younger (but less wealthy) lover already. María Isabel has an unrequited crush on Ricardo (and is jealous of Lucrecia); they become close one night after he's discovered Lucrecia's perfidy and gets drunk, but the next day Ricardo doesn't even remember their *rapprochement*. He does finally marry María Isabel--claiming he's "loved her without knowing it" for a long time--but one suspects each of them is (to an extent) compensating for recent losses (for Ricardo, Lucrecia and Gloria; for María Isabel, Rosa Isela).



María Isabel, as can be seen, is loaded with significance, both melodramatic and socio-economic-political. On purely entertainment terms, it's also quite good. There are no slow spots despite the nearly 2-hour running time, the performances are generally fine, the cast is strong. Federico Curiel displays a slick, zero-degree style which is perfectly suited to the colourful, glossy comic book adaptation, and yet the script is much richer and detailed than one would expect of a flamboyant, melodramatic "Cinderella" pastiche.



La gatita [The Servant Girl] (Cinevisión, 1971)
 Prod-Dir: Raúl de Anda Jr.; Scr: Fernando Galiana;
 Photo: Fernando Colín; Music: Enrico C. Cabiati; Music
 Dir: Sergio Guerrero; Prod Mgr: José L. Murillo; Asst
 Dir: Javier Durán; Film Ed: Sergio Soto; Art Dir: Raúl

Cárdenas; Camera Op: Agustín Lara A.; Makeup:
 Antonio Ramírez; Dialog Rec: Consuelo Jaramillo; Re-
 rec: Heinrich Henkel; Union: STIC; Eastmancolor;
 Mexiscope

Cast: Jacqueline Andere (*Licha*), Héctor Suárez
 (Guz), Jorge Lavat (*Daniel*), Nadia Miltón (*Genoveva*),
 Fernando Luján (*Rubén*), Queta Lavat (*Sra. Barrios*),
 Bernardina Green, Marcelo Villamil (*don Adolfo*
Barrios), Diana Torres (*receptionist in beauty salon*),
 Leonor Gómez (*portera*)

Episode titles: "La gatita," "Problema gatuna,"
 "Gatas vemos, corazones no sabemos"

Notes: *La gatita* is an entertaining comedy with good performances, some witty dialogue, and a few points to make about society. Fernando Galiana was a Spanish actor who moved to Mexico in 1949 and after a couple of years turned into an extremely prolific screenwriter, earning nearly 200 credits before his death in 1995.

Licha works for architect Daniel and his wife Genoveva, who runs a boutique. Licha was raised in a Church orphanage in Pijijiapan, Chiapas (it sounds funny--which is why it was chosen--but it's a real place); she's intelligent and efficient. Taxi driver Guz is her boyfriend, constantly frustrated because she won't let him even kiss her. There is only one problem: Licha is in love with Daniel. When Daniel overhears her passionately proclaiming her love for him (to a photograph), Licha is embarrassed and decides to quit.

Daniel and Genoveva discuss the issue. "Licha is indispensable for our happiness," she says. Daniel agrees--if Licha leaves, they'll have a terrible time finding another servant, so Genoveva would have to quit her job and become a full-time homemaker. "You want me to become an unpaid servant with the right to certain intimacies," she retorts. Genoveva has a proposal: Daniel must flirt with Licha--"without me knowing, of course"--until she gets over her crush.

Daniel tells Licha that he's very sad she's quitting, since that will make him very lonely. He says his wife doesn't understand him. "Are you separating?" Licha asks, eagerly. "It hasn't come to that," he tells her. Nonetheless, Licha

agrees to stay. She takes her savings and has a complete makeover: her *trenzas* are cut off and her hair is cut, dyed and styled. Her bushy eyebrows are plucked. She even buys new uniforms with shorter skirts and lower necklines. Daniel is astonished (at first he fears he's entered the wrong apartment).

Guz is angry when Licha breaks off their relationship. Thinking Daniel's lecherous friend Rubén is the man who's come between them, Guz knocks him out with a



club. Rubén sinks to the ground, unconscious--the building's *portera* (we assume) spots him, and Guz puts a coin in the unconscious man's hand. Feeling sorry for the "poor fellow," the *portera* also gives the unconscious Rubén a *limosna* (but a bread roll rather than money). Later, Guz confronts Daniel on the street and they have a "fight" (neither one really touching each other) until Guz runs out of breath.

Daniel takes Licha to Xochimilco where they ride the canals on a *trajinera* (flower boat): Daniel tells Genoveva, "none of our friends go to Xochimilco," so he won't be spotted.



However, he's wrong, since his business associate Barrios and his wife are also there (in another boat), and Sra. Barrios snaps photos of Daniel's "infidelity" and gives them to Genoveva. Genoveva, who's been suspicious of Daniel since he refused to have sex

with her, wonders if she should get divorced. "No," Sra. Barrios replies, "there's too few available men these days."

Genoveva approaches Guz, who's parked outside of their building waiting for Licha. They go on a sort of pub crawl together, beginning in a high-class cocktail lounge and concluding in a working-class *pulquería*. Totally drunk, they return to Genoveva's apartment where Daniel and Licha are waiting, concerned. Guz berates Daniel for betraying Genoveva with Licha and also criticises Licha for betraying him with Daniel. After Guz is sent off (with a punch in the jaw from Daniel), Daniel also departs, leaving Licha and the now-passed out Genoveva behind.

The next morning, a hung-over Genoveva says it would be better if Licha quit, and she does. As Licha walks down the street with her suitcase, heading for Chiapas, Guz picks her up and they drive off together. Meanwhile, Daniel comes home and finds Genoveva struggling to fix breakfast for him. They embrace.

The conclusion of *La gatita* is a bit disappointing and vague. Is Guz going to drive Licha all the way to Chiapas? Are they going to be married? Is Genoveva really rejecting her career to become a full-time housewife? I suppose some sort of happy ending had to be arrived at--and having Daniel divorce Genoveva and marry Licha or setting up a *ménage à trois* with the two women was not very likely--but the reconciliation of each of the two couples comes too quickly. Genoveva and Guz seem to be sincere about their feelings for their opposite numbers, but it's unclear if Daniel has actually fallen in love with Licha or if he's just flirting with her to annoy Genoveva and punish her for putting him in this position to begin with. And Licha rather quickly

surrenders, despite her love for Daniel: she tells Genoveva "I'm Catholic and honourable" and doesn't want to break up a marriage (she also tells Genoveva that Daniel truly loves his wife, but this might be a white lie to salve Genoveva's feelings).

The acting in *La gatita* is of a fairly high level, with most of the major players performing in a most entertaining fashion. Jacqueline Andere was not afraid to accept acting challenges, playing a mentally disabled person in *El juego de la guitarra*, a murderer in *Con amor de muerte*, a lesbian in *Las bestias jóvenes*, a gypsy in *Yesenia*, a blind woman in *Fallaste corazón*, etc. She's very good here as Licha, made up to appear like an indigenous woman, utilising the accent, and so on. Jorge Lavat played both straight and comic characters during his career; he underplays his role as the husband in *La gatita* and is very effective. Nadia Milton is also fine and quite attractive in more of a straight role. Fernando Luján and Héctor Suárez are allowed more leeway in their supporting parts. Luján's Rubén is an inveterate womaniser, grabbing Licha in the kitchen (until she threatens to smack him with a pot), and spinning a spiel of seductive patter to the middle-aged Sra. Barrios (who, when he finishes, says "May I tell my husband? He'll die laughing!"). Suárez plays an early version of his *chilango* character, feisty and working-class.



Raúl de Anda Jr. began directing in the mid-1960s; most of his films were action pictures or Westerns, but he did make a few contemporary dramas and a handful of comedies. De Anda has no discernable personal style, but *La gatita* is slick and professional overall, mixing location shooting and perhaps some interiors done on Estudios América sets.

While it does not pretend to be a serious film about the system of indigenous servants in Mexico, *La gatita* contains some interesting direct and indirect commentary about this topic and others. The film opens (after some clever animated titles, not uncommon in América films of this era) with voiceover narration describing the importance of household servants: "Among the working class there exists a speciality that governs the homes, that

allows us to eat well or badly, that [makes sure] the house is clean or dirty, that the clothing is well or badly ironed, that the *patrona* is sad or contented, and at times [makes sure] that the marriage has or doesn't have conjugal problems. It's so indispensable that the Spanish language has given it many names..."

As noted above, Licha displays some stereotypical attributes, but is not depicted as clumsy, clueless about modern technology, or illiterate. In fact, the script deliberately makes a point of Licha's literacy: since Daniel has no time to read the newspaper at breakfast, Licha offers to repeat the headlines (from memory) since she's already read the paper.

This means (a) she's literate, (b) she is up so early that she can read the newspaper and prepare breakfast, and (c) she has an incredible memory. The



headlines are amusing: "United States Announces It's Pulling Its Troops Out of Vietnam" (Daniel: "Like every day"); "Coup in Argentina" (Daniel: "Again"); "América Passes to the Second Division" (in *fútbol*); "Police Launch Tear Gas Bombs at Black Power"; "Russian Diplomats Expelled" (Daniel: "From where?" Licha: "From Russia."); "The Pope is Against the Pill."

The dialogue between Licha and Daniel after the last headline is witty. Licha: "What's the Pill for?" Daniel: "Er...for a cough." Licha: "Why does the Pope forbid it?" Daniel: "Um...because he prefers cough syrup." Daniel has finally had enough: "That's the same news [we've had] for the last six years."

Trivia note: Guz and Licha go to the cinema, where they watch *Campeón sin corona* (made in 1945!).



Los pequeños privilegios [The Little

Privileges] (CONACITE UNO, 1977) *Prod*: Héctor López [uncredited]; *Dir*: Julián Pastor; *Scr*: Julián Pastor, Gerardo Fulgueira; *Photo*: José Ortiz Ramos; *Music*: Jesús Zarzosa; *Prod Mgr*: Luis Quintanilla; *Prod Chief*: Nicolás Reyero; *Asst Dir*: Américo Fernández; *Film Ed*: José W. Bustos; *Art Dir*: Jorge Fernández; *Decor*: Raúl Serrano; *Lighting*: Gabriel Castro; *Camera Op*: Andrés Torres; *Makeup*: Ana Guerrero; *Sound*: Eduardo Arjona; *Sound Ed*: José Li-Ho; *Re-rec*: Jesús González Gancy; *Union*: STPC

Cast: Pedro Armendáriz [Jr.] (*Pedro Ochoa*), Hugo Stiglitz (*Hugo*), Cristina Moreno (*Cristina*), Anaís de Melo (*Jackie*), Yara Patricia (*Imelda Sánchez*), Blanca Torres (*Julia Ochoa*), Kiki Herrera Calles (*Cristina's mother*), Leonor Llausás (*Yolanda*), León Singer (*Dr. Landeros*), José Nájera (*Arturo Ochoa*), Lili Garza & Laura Azpeitia (*friends*), Sergio Molina (*gas station attendant*), María Clara Zurita (*nurse*), Zacarías Gómez Urquiza (*emergency room doctor*), Rodrigo Cruz (*Rodrigo, porter*), Alfredo Rosas & Eduardo Ocaña (*shop clerks*), Carl-Hillos (*Joaquín, waiter*)**

**Carlos León is credited on the film but I am 99% sure this is incorrect

Notes: some online sources mention *Los pequeños privilegios* as a precursor of *Roma*, but there are only a few basic similarities. A young woman from Uruapan, Michoacán agrees to work as a servant for an upper-class Mexican couple, becomes pregnant and loses the child. That's about it. Yes, the contrast between the hard-working servants and their entitled employers—who aren't abusive, it should be noted—is a major theme of both films, but that's about it. Imelda is not depicted as an indigenous woman (she does have darker skin than her employers, but they are so extremely white-bread that this isn't significant), she doesn't speak an indigenous language, and is not at all stereotyped as a typical pop culture *india* servant (although her future employers do disparagingly refer to her as a "María" when they first meet her).



Upper-middle class couples Pedro and Cristina and Hugo and Jackie vacation together, visiting various tourist locations (with Pedro constantly shooting home movies). In Uruapan, Michoacán, they have lunch at an open-air stand operated by Imelda. Cristina says the girl (we later learn she's 15 years old) would make a good servant (adding that she's already had 3 different servants since she married Pedro). Imelda turns down their offer but Pedro gives her their Mexico City address in case she changes her mind. The two couples move on,

eventually winding up in Acapulco before returning to the capital.

Imelda does change her mind and takes a bus to Mexico City, where she's hired at once by Pedro and Cristina. Imelda is befriended by Yolanda, a somewhat older servant in the building, and confesses that she left home because she's pregnant. Yolanda says an abortion costs 1,000 pesos but Imelda might try an herbal remedy instead. Meanwhile, both Cristina and Jackie are now pregnant. They have the best medical care and take natural childbirth classes to prepare themselves.

Imelda drinks herbal tea and gets sick but doesn't abort. She tries an extremely hot bath, then goes roughly down a flight of stairs on her bottom, with no result (except more pain). Yolanda says "I'll give you the worst advice--borrow money for an abortion from a *prestamista* [money lender]." Imelda asks how an abortion is performed, and Yolanda tells her that a device is introduced into the body to terminate the pregnancy. Imelda sterilises a wire coat-hanger and tries to self-abort. [This is a horrifying scene, extremely difficult to watch.] Yolanda knocks on the servants' entrance door and sees a bloody Imelda collapse on the floor but is unable to reach her (she finally smashes the glass with her shoe). Imelda survives but will be unable to have children.



Cristina gives birth to her child, with Pedro filming the delivery. As the film concludes, Imelda pushes the baby through the park in a stroller, sitting on a park bench to read a romantic *fotonovela* (it would have been wonderfully ironic if she'd been reading "María Isabel" but that would have been an anachronism, since that story had appeared more than a decade before).

What is *Los pequeños privilegios* advocating for? The viewer is given no information about Imelda's pregnancy (or her life, even): she's only 15 years old, was she impregnated by a boyfriend? Was she raped by a stranger or a family member? Given the absence of this information, one can't say the film is asking for better sex education or easier access to birth control. At the time the film was made, a recent law and a Constitutional

amendment mandated family planning assistance and stated that Mexicans were free to make family planning decisions. Perhaps *Los pequeños privilegios* is suggesting that this was not enough, or not widely implemented.

Or perhaps the film was proposing easier access to abortions? While the legal situation is very localised and has changed considerably since 1977, the film makes it clear that abortion is not illegal in Mexico City. Yolanda tells Imelda the procedure costs 1,000 pesos: this not an inconsiderable sum, but it's not outrageous. As the Ochoa's maid, Imelda makes 1,200 pesos a month, and (one assumes) receives room and board. Is she sending money home? Possibly, although there's no hint of this, and in fact she tells Yolanda that her father doesn't even know where she is. Yet Imelda tries every possible home "remedy" to end her pregnancy, suggesting she doesn't have 1,000 pesos to spare. Nor does she take Yolanda's last suggestion, which is to borrow the amount needed from a *prestamista*. Again, at 1,200 pesos a month and minimal living expenses, it seems Imelda could have repaid a loan fairly rapidly. Imelda's situation is tragic but *Los pequeños privilegios* mostly blames Imelda's youth and innocence and rural upbringing for her desperate actions.

Is the film criticising the exploitation of indigenous servants by the entitled upper classes? Once again, only subtle hints of this appear in the movie itself. Certainly Pedro, Cristina, Hugo, Jackie, Pedro's parents, Cristina's mother, and Cristina's friends are privileged and frequently mock or complain about those in a lower socio-economic status, but they generally do this among themselves (i.e., they don't openly deprecate others to their faces) instead displaying a generally patronising but not hostile attitude.

The scene of Cristina's baby shower contains the mostly overtly racist/classist attitudes in the film. Cristina's guests ask for details on Imelda's failed abortion, and one says "for a woman like that [being sterile] solves the problem," i.e., she can have sex without fear of pregnancy. They ask Cristina to call Imelda into the room so they can see her--Cristina does so, even though she says she doesn't want them gawking at Imelda as if she were in a zoo. Imelda comes in, empties the ashtrays, then departs; one of the guests says, sympathetically, "she's just a girl."

Los pequeños privilegios is careful to paint a balanced picture of white privilege and *mestizo/indio* life. Pedro and Cristina are good employers, paying Imelda 1,200 pesos a month (versus the 15 pesos a day she earned at the food stand), treat her well, and don't exhibit overt racism. Imelda is clearly a servant and has an array of duties (including cleaning, cooking, laundry, shopping) but is not shown to be over-worked. There are a few touches which reinforce Pedro and Cristina's *laissez-faire* attitude about Imelda (which is not the same as deliberate exploitation or maliciousness): Imelda tells Pedro she

tripped on the stairs and he asks her why she didn't take the service elevator. She replies that it doesn't go to the roof (where she would hang up the laundry to dry), and Pedro is surprised to learn this. Later, after Imelda's botched self-abortion, Pedro asks Cristina why she didn't know Imelda was pregnant: "How was I supposed to know," Cristina retorts, as if the idea of being involved in her servant's personal life was unheard of.

While in general Pedro and Cristina treat Imelda impersonally, they do exhibit some kindness on rare occasions. Pedro is legitimately concerned when he sees Imelda limping and insists on treating her ankle with sports cream; Cristina tells Imelda they'll be showing home movies of

"your town" that night to guests, and Imelda should be back by 8pm if she would like to watch them (which she does, but through the window in the kitchen door --



she later observes the movies of Cristina in child-birth through that same window). Additionally, Pedro and Cristina are depicted as basically decent people; their relationship is loving and "normal"--for instance, in one nice scene, Cristina excitedly calls Pedro at his office to tell him that she heard their baby's heartbeat via a sonogram, and Pedro seems honestly delighted to hear this.

Perhaps the "moral" of *Los pequeños privilegios* is that when such socio-economic and racial differences exist, society is unequal and potentially unstable (and perhaps ripe for "Marxism"). But until change comes about, the losers will be--as expected--*los de abajo*. In an early scene, Hugo tells Pedro that his company uses materials for their buildings that are carefully calculated to last "until the last payment is made." Pedro reluctantly admits "Corruption is like motor oil that the engine needs to run," although he seems slightly more scrupulous than his friend. Both he and Cristina come from moneyed families: Pedro's father talks about building factories and worries about "Marxists," while Cristina's mother slips her a check for 15,000 pesos as a baby gift. [On a more sinister note, Cristina mentions that she saw her father in Acapulco, where he was using drugs to prey on young women, something he has apparently done before.]

In one sequence, Pedro, Cristina, Hugo and Jackie visit a nightclub. A young man sings a song listing all of his expensive material possessions, concluding with the line "When people ask me where I got all my money, I reply...[and everyone in the audience sings in unison] *Viva la revolución!*"

Los pequeños privilegios is quite stylishly made.

Julián Pastor likes traveling shots, medium-long shots and relatively long takes, particularly when showing Pedro, Cristina, and their friends and families. He also contrasts the upscale, carefree lifestyle of these characters with lower-class individuals such as Imelda, but in subtle ways. For example, after Imelda takes her scalding bath, the film cuts from her crying in pain to Pedro and Hugo energetically playing tennis (the ballboy is young and dark-skinned); on the lawn nearby, Cristina and Jackie (neither one yet showing their pregnancy visibly) do their childbirth exercises.

The performances are solid, although Hugo Stiglitz's character is not really developed, other than to be the least likeable member of the two couples. Pedro Armendáriz Jr. and Cristina Moreno both do a good job of portraying privileged individuals who aren't wholly obnoxious

and in fact seem to be decent people at heart, albeit largely self-centered.



Moreno (Cristina Margarita Luria Bustindui) seems to have appeared in Mexican cinema and television only in the Seventies, before retiring from acting. She's fine here, in probably her best role (and best film). Yara Patricia (aka Yara Patricia Palomino) had an even shorter run in Mexican cinema, working in only a handful of films (but an excellent handful, including *Los poquianchis* and *Los albañiles*). Her role here is a difficult one. While Imelda is not very verbal and we get little information about her past life, her thoughts, dreams, and so on, Yara Patricia--who received a Best Supporting Actress Ariel nomination for her performance--effectively conveys the fear and pain that Imelda undergoes.

Los pequeños privilegios was also nominated for a Best Picture Ariel (losing to *El lugar sin límites* and *Naufragio*, which tied for the top award), Best Director, Best Actor (Armendáriz), Best Story, and Best Editing, but was shut out entirely.



LET'S GO TO THE DISCO

Discotec fin de semana [Discotheque Weekend] (Prods. Filmicas Agrasánchez, 1978) *Exec Prod:* David Agrasánchez; *Prod:* Rogelio Agrasánchez; *Dir:* José Luis Urquieta; *Scr:* Ramón Obón [Jr.]; *Orig Idea:* Rogelio Agrasánchez, Miguel Benítez; *Photo:* Armando Castillón; *Music:* Ernesto Cortázar [Jr.]; *Production:* René Agrasánchez, Ernesto Fuentes, Jorge

Moreno, Luis Tovar; *Film Ed*: Sergio Soto; *Action Scenes Dir*: Ronne [Ronald C.] Ross; *Sound Engin*:



Salvador Topete; *Sound Ed*: Ignacio Soto; *Cast Chief*: Arturo Salvador ["Regazón"]; *Union*: STIC

Cast: Silvia Pasquel (*Susana*), Arcenio [sic] Campos (*Luis*), Maritza Olivares (*Chata*), Patricia Rivera (*Lucy*), Anaís de Melo (*Lulú*), Fernando Sáenz (*Ricardo Aguirre*), Alejandro Agrasánchez (*Armando*), Alfonso Munguía (*Chucho*), Óscar Traven (*El Fósil*), Salvador Julián (*Luis's friend with moustache*), Sergio Goyri (*Luis's friend*), Víctor Herrera, Anabel Solano, Luis Aquiles Elizondo, Malena Robles, Fernando Osés (*Héctor Aguirre*), Rosita Díaz, Fredes Guajardo, Queta Carrasco (*Lucy's grandmother*), Josefina de la Peña, Enrique Márquez

Notes: *Saturday Night Fever* was released in the USA in December 1977 and in Mexico in July 1978. Disco music, popular since the mid-Seventies, became even more prevalent, and the "disco culture" was (briefly) quite widespread. Mexican film producers jumped on the bandwagon with several disco-themed films, as well as making others with varying degrees of relationship to the musical fad (for instance, *El naco más naco* with Capulina, in which he plays a bumpkin who magically changes into a John Travolta-imitator).

Disotec fin de semana has a very slight plot but does have several things in its favour: a soundtrack which includes a number of bona-fide disco hits, and location footage which provides a fascinating time capsule of south Texas, 1978. The film was shot in Brownsville, Corpus Christi and McAllen (possibly Los Fresnos as well). [It's also possible a scene or two was shot in Mexico City, such as the one-scene cameo by Queta Carrasco.] The opening basketball sequence apparently takes place in the gymnasium at the St. Joseph Academy ("Go Bloodhounds!"), although most of the other high

school interiors and exteriors were filmed elsewhere (possibly Los Fresnos High, based on a sign proclaiming it to be "Falcon Territory"). The disco scenes were shot in Boccaccio 2000, located in Brownsville. If you search "Boccaccio 2000" you'll find numerous references to an urban legend about the Devil dancing in the disco (in 1979)! The costumes, hairstyles, cars, etc. are authentic and entertaining, helping disguise the skimpy storyline.

Plotline #1: high school senior Ricardo is a star basketball player and has a cute girlfriend, Lucy, but his life is not perfect: his father complains that Ricardo is failing 4 classes, so he cuts off his son's allowance and takes the keys to his motorcycle. Meanwhile, wealthy Luis returns from university and tries to convince his ex-girlfriend Lucy to take him back, but she wants nothing to do with him anymore. **Plotline #2:** Armando, who along with El Fósil is a disc jockey at the Boccaccio 2000 disco, has a crush on sexy Lulú, but is too shy to make the first move. El Fósil encourages him and Armando finally seals the deal: first, he signs up for the disco's dance contest with Lulú as his partner (seems like a conflict of interest, but I guess not), and then takes her to a drive-in to watch the 1977 Agrasánchez action film *Wetbacks* (*Mojados*). There are a few other characters, including Chucho and his girlfriend Susana, comic relief Panzón, and Luis's two henchmen (Charlie and Kiko or Quique) and two henchwomen (Chata and some other blonde whose name may never be mentioned).

Luis (driving a yellow Mustang that belongs to one of his sidekicks) and Chucho participate in an impromptu street race (winner pays the entrance fee to Boccaccio 2000) and Chucho wins. Later, Luis challenges Chucho to a rematch on the beach, but this time Luis is driving a fancy car of his own. One of Luis's pals tosses a rock at Chucho's windshield mid-race, causing a wreck; Chucho breaks his leg and can't participate in the finals of the big Dance Contest. Chucho's pals--including Ricardo, who goes along despite Lucy threatening to break up with him if he does--confront Luis and his friends and a brawl ensues.

On the night of the contest Lucy gets over her snit and teams up with Ricardo. Luis and Chata are the other



couple in the finals. Ricardo and Lucy win a sports car (that Ricardo intends to give his father) and “25,000 pesos in cash” (I guess they figured Ricardo could cross the border to Matamoros to spend it). Ricardo gives his Travolta-esque dance outfit to a young teen, saying “this was my last night in the discotheque. Starting tomorrow: university!” [This conflicts with the fact that the characters are seen attending high school earlier in the movie; there’s no way the film’s events cover an entire summer.]



As noted above, *Discothec fin de semana* utilises some actual disco songs on its soundtrack (as opposed to “sound-alike” disco music). “Singing in the Rain” (by Sheila and B. Devotion is heard over the credits (and repeated later), followed by “Disco Heat” (which doesn’t sound like the original by Sylvester, but might be—this song is also repeated later). However, more familiar are “Don’t Take Away the Music” (Tavares), “Yes Sir, I Can Boogie” (Baccara), and “Boogie Nights” (Heatwave). *Discoteca es amor* managed to steal a march on Agramánchez by signing up the rights to “You Should Be Dancing” by the Bee Gees, which is heard over the credits of that film and in the final sequence.

The cast of *Discothec fin de semana* features a number of relative newcomers who’d go on to have long careers, including Sergio Goyri, Óscar Traven, and Fernando Sáenz. As is often the case, the billing does not necessarily reflect a performer’s importance to the plot. Top-billed Silvia Pasquel (nearly 30 years of age at the time of production, she looks nothing like a high school student) and Maritza Olivares only have supporting roles but were fairly well-known at the time, so they get preference over the actual stars of the movie, Fernando Sáenz (in his first feature film) and Patricia Rivera. The overall level of acting is fine, as are the direction and other technical aspects.

The script includes several odd sequences, including one in which Ricardo and Chucho don boxing gloves and fight each other (although they’re friends), and a very marginally relevant scene in which Ricardo, Chucho, Susana, Lulú, Armando and Lucy practice disco dancing

in a “radio laboratory” classroom at their high school (before being ejected by an irate teacher). Ricardo’s issues with his parents crop up a couple of times, and the only other parent shown is Lucy’s mother (quite briefly), and these scenes have no particular effect on the narrative.

Trivia note #1: “Ronne Ross” is credited with the direction of the film’s “action scenes,” which presumably means the two car races. Ross was a longtime stuntman and stunt coordinator who specialised in automobile footage (*Death Race 2000*, *Joy Ride to Nowhere*, *Eat My Dust*, *Smokey and the Bandit II*, etc.). The first race, through the streets of a city, is shot and edited effectively, with a couple of minor crashes (Luis hits a car and it turns over, a police car sideswipes a parked car); the beach race is brief and the “crash” is minor (Chucho’s car winds up on its side).

Trivia note #2: the DVD version of this film, released by Brentwood on a double-feature with *La pachanga*, has been edited for profanity and in one scene replaces footage of (apparently) Luis groping the bare legs of a young woman who’s making out with another guy in the back seat of a car (he’s trying to retrieve a bottle of liquor) with random and confusing shots of a city at night, although the soundtrack is untouched (a common tactic). Curiously, *Discothec fin de semana* was given an “A” (all audiences) rating in Mexico for its theatrical release there, so there’s some question as to when and why these edits were made (possibly this is the Mexican theatrical version).



Discoteca es amor [Discotheque is Love]

(Estudios América, 1978) *Exec Prod*: Jorge Durán Chávez; *Dir*: Sergio Véjar; *Scr*: Sergio Véjar, Óscar Menéndez; *Photo*: Jorge Senyal; *Music*: Ernest Cortázar Jr.; *Prod Mgr*: Enrique Gutiérrez; *Prod Chief*: Carlos Lozoya; *Co-Dir*: Damián Acosta; *Film Ed*: José J. Munguía; *Art Dir*: Fernando Ramírez; *Camera Op*: Manuel Tejada; *Makeup*: Lucrecia Muñoz; *Sound Ed*: Enrique Murillo; *Sound*: Ricardo Saldívar; *Sound Op*: Guillermo Carrasco; *Union*: STIC

Cast: Armando Silvestre (*Gustavo Ruiz*), Maritza Olivares (*Angélica*), Tere Alvarez (*Dulcinea*), Roberto Montiel (*Romeo*), Elianne [Abril] Campillo (*student*), Anabell [sic] Gutiérrez (*Clarita*), Alicia Montoya (*school director*), Gerardo Moreno (*friend of Romeo & Dulcinea*), María Teresa Olmedo, Lulú Torres, Lizbeth Vega, Martha Elena Cervantes (*Señorita Martínez*), Héctor Godoy (*Maestro Dávila*), Sergio A. Romero, Victoria Ruffo (*Victoria*), Polo Salazar (*waterbed salesman*), María Villanueva, Mario Zebadua ["Colocho"] (*husband #1*), Alexandra Cabarga, Enrique del Castillo, Antonio Escobar, Fausto Fierro, [María] Rocío Prado (*wife #1*), María de Lourdes Flores, Mónica Gómez, Irma Laura Gutiérrez, Claudia Guzmán (*student*), Luz María Rico, Georgina Lola, Olga Rinzón, Dulce María, Pancho Muller (*neighbour*), María Elena Orendain, Arlette Pacheco (*friend of Romeo & Dulcinea*), Delia Peña (*?student*), Manuel "Gordo" Alvarado? (*husband #2*)

Notes: *Saturday Night Fever* was released in Mexico in July 1978, and *Discoteca es amor* went into production in August of that year. However, compared to *Discotec fin de semana*--in which dancing is a major plot point and in which a significant amount of action takes place in a discoteque--*Discoteca es amor* was clearly a conventional script that was slightly doctored to include a few minutes of disco footage and three songs by the Bee Gees: "Stayin' Alive," "Night Fever" and "You Should Be Dancing." *Discoteca es amor* is also more adult-oriented, dealing with sex and featuring some nudity, whereas *Discotec fin de semana* has very little sexual content. *Discoteca es amor* marked a sort of watershed in the directorial career of Sergio Véjar-- prior to this film, his movies were generally (although not entirely) serious dramas, whereas his films from 1978 until the end of his career were a mix of innocuous pictures starring pop singers like Lucero, Pedro Fernández, and Los Tigres del Norte, and generic action movies.

The film is split into two unrelated stories. At the very end of the first story, one student mentions to another that she and her friends are going to a disco that night, but that's it. The first 49 minutes of the picture more closely resembles *La lucha con la pantera* in its examination of the romantic & sexual fantasies of adolescent and teenage girls in 1970s Mexico.

Angélica attends a religious girls' school in Mexico City. She has run afoul of the strict school director, who has confiscated a "scandalous" novel Angélica was reading. The teen students travel to and from the *colegio* on a school bus driven by the handsome Gustavo. All of the girls flirt

with him outrageously, as does one of their teachers, the middle-aged Clarita, who rides the bus as their chaperone/monitor. The students dismiss boys their own age as too young to be interesting. Angélica in particular has romantic fantasies about Gustavo, day-dreaming about making love to him in a flower-bedecked school bus and in his tool-strewn bedroom. When Angélica hears rival student Perla intends to seduce Gustavo, she decides to act first, hiding on the bus one morning. She confronts Gustavo in the repair shed but is shocked by his crude and lustful actions; she knees him in the groin and flees, disillusioned.

Clarita tells the school director that Gustavo is being harassed by the teenage students and he is transferred to driving the bus that carries the elementary school girls instead. However, the new driver assigned to the high school bus is even younger and handsomer than Gustavo!

This story is rather slow and contains a couple of extraneous scenes (a male teacher teaches sex education, a woman teacher lectures on literature), but is generally not boring. The majority of the footage features various teenage girls talking with each other, expounding on their theories about love and sex. One student earnestly says sex is only for procreation and men are bad, then the film hints (rather broadly) that she has lesbian tendencies. Although *Discoteca es amor* was written by two men, the script isn't too awfully sexist or condescending. [Maritza Olivares appears topless in the fantasy sequences and there's a swimming class interlude that spends a lot of time showing the students in bathing suits.]

The acting by most of the "students" is overly broad, although Maritza Olivares isn't bad. Armando Silvestre does his best to deliver a working-class accent, not totally convincingly. Martha Elena Cervantes seems out of place as a "progressive" teacher sympathetic to Angélica, Annabelle Gutiérrez overacts as the frustrated Clarita, and Alicia Montoya is strict and unbending.

#2: "La cama de agua" [The Water Bed] is aimless and not particularly entertaining. A group of young people decides to purchase a waterbed as a present for the first wedding anniversary of their married friends



Romeo and Dulcinea. The bed is installed in the couple's apartment and a sort of party ensues; then everyone troops off to the disco. Romeo and Dulcinea leave early so they can "christen" their new bed, but of course it springs a leak and floods their apartment. They wind up at the home of Dulcinea's parents, who generously offer their own bed to the young people for the night: another waterbed! The film concludes by intercutting scenes of people dancing at the disco and Romeo and Dulcinea making love on the floor of the bedroom.

This section is not really amusing and goes on much too long. One bizarre aspect is the inclusion of a sort of music video or commercial, featuring a few young women in nightgowns singing a jingle about the advantages of a waterbed. This is repeated multiple times, including clips as short as a few seconds, perhaps an attempt to be ironic, given the unpleasant results experienced by Romeo and Dulcinea with their waterbed. There are also two brief vignettes narrated by the waterbed salesman to his prospective customers: in one, a woman cuckolds her husband on their new waterbed and becomes pregnant; in another, a plus-size couple struggles on their waterbed, with the husband finally rolling off the bed and crawling to answer the telephone.

The final sequence feels extremely protracted. Dulcinea and Romeo arrive at her parent's house; her father seems to have a slight Middle Eastern accent, and



her mother is loud and possessive. There's a lot of shouting and arguing, then everyone troops upstairs and the mother brags about how generous

her husband is, which leads to the punchline--they have a waterbed too! This is not amusing in the slightest.

None of the characters are especially sympathetic (most don't even have distinctive personalities or even character names). Dulcinea whines and wails at the slightest provocation. [Curiously, given the comic tone of this story, Tere Alvarez has several extended nude scenes; Roberto Montiel or a body double also appears nude, although there is no full-frontal of either performer.] Another sub-plot involves the middle-aged couple who live beneath Romeo and Dulcinea's apartment: after the wife complains that her husband hasn't made love to her for months, he goes upstairs and gets "inspired" by the sexy young people, then goes back and jumps on his wife (whom we've just seen depressed and crying), making her happy.

The "disco" content of this section is minimal and unmotivated. The story begins with some footage of people at a disco (irrelevant to the story), then (about 65 minutes into the movie!) the group of friends finally go to the disco themselves. The 3 Bee Gees songs are repeated several times (there is also one generic disco instrumental, presumably by Ernesto Cortázar Jr.), but that's it. The discotheque plays no integral part in the narrative and the title of the film is extremely misleading.

One positive aspect of *Discoteca es amor* is the presence of a number of young performers who would go on to have substantial careers. Abril Campillo and Claudia Guzmán show up in the first story, and Victoria Ruffo, Gerardo Moreno (who later briefly changed his name to Gerardo Albarrán to star in some action films, but has mostly had a career as a stuntman and stunt coordinator), and Arlette Pacheco are prominently featured in the second section.



The production values of *Discoteca es amor* are adequate. The majority of the film was shot on location in Mexico City--it's possible Dulcinea and Romeo's apartment was a set at the Estudios América, however--and this is of some interest (it was frustrating not to be able to identify the school where the first story was set: the school bus has "Colegio [something] Inés" painted on its side).

Final verdict: false "disco" advertising, mediocre film.



THE LATE . . . JAN-MICHAEL VINCENT

Los bandidos [The Bandits] (Alfredo Zacarías, 1966*) *Mexican credits*: Prod-Dir: Alfredo Zacarías; Scr: Edward Di Lorenzo; Story: Robert Conrad, Alfredo Zacarías, Edward Di Lorenzo; Photo: Ted Voigtlander; Music Dir: Manuel Esperón; Admin Gen of Prod: Anuar Badín Zacarías; Prod Mgr: José Llamas U.; Prod Assts: Harry Harvey Jr., James George; Sub-Dir: Winfield Sánchez; Helicopter Shots: Nelson Tyler; Film Ed: Gloria Schoemann; Art Dir: Javier Torres Torija; Decor: Raúl Serrano; Camera Op: León Sánchez; Lighting: Horacio Calvillo; Supv of Action Scenes: Whitey Hughes; Second Unit Photo: Enrique Wallace; Prod Chief: José Alcalde G.; Makeup: Elda Loza; Sound Supv: James L. Fields; Dialog Rec: José B.

Carles; *Re-rec*: Galdino Samperio; *Sound Ed*: José Li-Ho; *Union*: STPC

USA credits (where different): *Exec Prod*: Alfredo Zacarías; *Prod*: James George; *Assoc Prod*: Harry Harvey Jr.; *Dir*: Robert Conrad, Alfredo Zacarías; *Film Ed*: Grant K. Smith, Gloria Schoemann; *Gaffer*: Horacio Calvillo; *Stunt Co-ord*: Whitey Hughes

*Neither the Mexican nor the U.S. prints I have seen have specific company credits. The cover of the Unicorn Video release of *The Bandits* lists "Lone Star Pictures International" as the releasing company.



Cast: *Mexican credits order*: Robert Conrad (*Chris Bonner*), Manuel López Ochoa (*Miguel Valdez*), Roy Jensen (*Josh Ryker*), Narciso Busquets (*Alfredo*), [Jan] Michael Vincent (*Taye "Boy" Brown*), Pedro Armendáriz Jr. (*Pedro*), Pilar Pellicer (*Alicia*), María Duval (*Estela*), Enrique Lucero (*Capt. Sánchez*) [*USA credits order*: Conrad, Vincent, López Ochoa, Jensen, Armendáriz Jr., Busquets, Lucero] José Chávez Trowe (*bandit leader*), José Ángel Espinoza "Ferrusquilla" (*Pepe*), Quintin Bulnes (*Ranger captain*), Elizabeth Dupeyrón (*María*), Hortensia Santoveña (*Miguel's mother*), José Eduardo Pérez (*French Lt.*), Fanny Schiller (*woman in cantina*), Juan Antonio Edwards (*village boy*), José Loza (*French officer*), José Luis Caro (*Ranger*), Joaquín Martínez, Pascual García Peña (*villager*), José Dupeyrón (*Luke, bounty hunter*), ?Whitey Hughes (*bounty hunter*)

Notes: Robert Conrad spent his 1966 summer vacation (between seasons of his "The Wild, Wild West" TV show) making two movies for Alfredo Zacarías in Mexico. The first was *Ven a cantar conmigo*, filmed in Guadalajara, with Alicia Bonet and juvenile singer-actress Evita. [Curiously, Conrad had previously made *La nueva Cenicienta* in Spain in 1964, in which he was paired with Marisol, another adolescent girl

singer/actress.] He followed this with *Los bandidos* (shot in the Distrito Federal). Curiously, on the Mexican posters Conrad's billing is "Bob Conrad (Tom Lopaka)," referencing his role in the TV series "Hawaiian Eye" (I guess "Wild, Wild West" hadn't made it Mexico yet).

Los bandidos was shot mostly in English and subsequently dubbed into Spanish for its Mexican release, but some scenes--generally those not featuring Conrad, Jensen, or Vincent--were clearly filmed twice, once with the Mexican performers speaking English and the second time with them speaking Spanish. However, this is even further complicated by the fact that some dialogue was post-dubbed in both versions (not the same dialogue). For example, when you watch Quintin Bulnes' lips, it is obvious he is speaking English in *The Bandits* but he's dubbed with a strong Texas accent (his real voice can be heard in *Los bandidos*). Conversely, Pilar Pellicer's Spanish dialogue seems dubbed, while her real voice can be heard in the English version (this may have been a simple matter of convenience--Robert Conrad had to be dubbed in his Spanish-language scenes with her, so it was probably just as easy to dub everything in those sequences).

Robert Conrad receives co-directorial credit on *The Bandits*, and an additional film editor is listed, yet the two versions are quite similar (not identical). *Los bandidos* is around 6 or 7 minutes longer than *The Bandits*, but I have only seen a TV print of the latter so it may have been slightly trimmed. A few sequences are

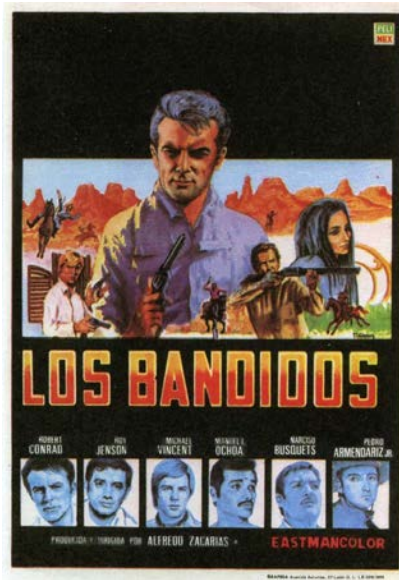


in different order in the two versions, but this does not affect the narrative at all. *Los bandidos* includes a few additional cutaway reaction shots of the Mexican protagonists: *The Bandits* stays focused on the *gringos*. Interestingly enough, the two major action sequences are cut slightly differently in the two versions: there no major differences or omissions, so this probably simply reflects the personal editing styles of Grant K. Smith and Gloria Schoemann. Another noticeable difference: *The Bandits* tends to break up dialogue scenes into alternating closeups of the actors, while *Los bandidos* has more long-take medium shots in its versions of the

same sequences. This dichotomy occurs several times but is by no means consistent or prevalent.

The two versions both utilize Manuel Esperón's excellent theme music, but *The Bandits* and *Los bandidos* are not scored identically. In *Los bandidos*, Captain Sánchez and the French troops have their own *leit-motif* utilizing a familiar French tune (García Riera identifies it as "Au pres de ma blonde") played on fife and drums--this is replaced by repeated versions of Esperón's theme music in *The Bandits*. Other sequences in the two versions also contain different music.

Where *Los bandidos* and *The Bandits* diverge most notably is in the conclusion. At the end of *The Bandits*, Josh, Miguel, and Pedro are all captured and hung from the belltower of a monastery; the film's final image is a long shot of their bodies dangling from three sides of the tower. In *Los bandidos*, only Josh is hung--Miguel and



Pedro escape down the mountain, pausing when they hear the bell ringing (presumably as Josh dies); the final shot is of a mountainous landscape.

As the film begins, three outlaws--Chris, Josh, and Boy--are about to be hung by bounty hunters. Suddenly, the bounty hunters

are all killed by Mexicans Miguel, Pedro, and Alfredo, who rescue the *gringos*. In gratitude, Chris and his companions help the Mexicans wipe out a troop of French soldiers, led by Mexican Captain Sánchez, who have crossed the border into Texas to capture them. Captain Sánchez is wounded and left to die.

The six men enter Mexico, and Miguel convinces the *gringos* to visit his village, hinting that a fortune in gold awaits. The villagers receive Miguel coldly: seven of his companions were killed by Sánchez and the French, including Miguel's own brother. The group had stolen \$100,000 in gold from the occupiers, and this is the money Miguel wants Chris and his friends to help retrieve. In the village, Chris--a widower--falls in love with Alicia, and Boy forms a romantic attachment to barmaid María.

Captain Sánchez is rescued by Texas Rangers, who agree to ignore his violation of the U.S. border if he will capture Chris, Josh, and Boy and turn them over to U.S. justice. Sánchez and French reinforcements arrive in the

village while Miguel, Chris and the others are away, and Alicia is executed by a firing squad when she refuses to reveal the hiding place of the stolen gold. However, *cantinero* Pepe reveals the secret to Sánchez (the gold is hidden in a remote mountain monastery)--Sánchez shoots the traitor when he sees the man is wearing a ring Josh had stolen from the "dying" Mexican officer.

Miguel, Chris and the others reach the monastery after an arduous climb up the mountain (they can't use the road because the French are guarding it) and unearth the hidden gold, but Sánchez and his men ambush them. Boy and Alfredo die; Josh is wounded and captured; Chris kills Sánchez but is shot to death himself. In *The Bandits*, Miguel and Pedro are, like Josh, wounded, captured, and hung, but in *Los bandidos* the two Mexicans escape with at least some of the gold.

Los bandidos is an entertaining Western, well-produced and with a decent cast. Robert Conrad remains perfectly clean-shaven and his hair is never out of place, which is a bit unrealistic, but he's handsome and has a surprisingly violent and bloody death scene. López Ochoa, Lucero, Pellicer, and Ferrusquilla are all quite good on the Mexican side (Ferrusquilla is actually better in the English-language version!), while Roy Jenson and Jan-Michael Vincent are fine. It's interesting to see familiar Mexican actors

performing in English--Pedro Armendáriz Jr., José Chávez Trowe and Fanny Schiller, in particular, appeared in quite a few Hollywood movies and co-productions thanks to their command of the English language. [On the negative side, María Duval has a very thick accent in her brief dialogue scene in *The Bandits*, and it's odd that she wasn't post-

dubbed.] There isn't much political or social commentary, and the presence of French troops (with a Mexican officer) in Mexico is never explained--they're just convenient villains and the movie could have been set 35 years later with *huertistas* or any other group of villainous soldiers in place of the French.



In either version, *Los bandidos-The Bandits* is satisfactory entertainment.

Reprinted from MFB 13/6



THE LATE . . . CHRISTIAN BACH

El hombre de blanco [The Man in White]*

(Real Film Prods.-Transatlantic Films-Televisine-SAMA



Film, 1991) *Exec Prod:* René Cardona Jr.; *Prod:* Fernando de Fuentes [Jr.]; *Dir/Scr:* René Cardona Jr.; *Photo:* Arturo de la Rosa; *Music:* Daniele Iacono; *Assoc Prod:* Angelo Iacono; *Co-Exec Prod:* Pilar Labarthe; *Asst Dir:* Óscar Sama; *Film Ed:* Jesús Paredes C.; *Prod Co-ord:* Guillermo Vázquez; *Camera*

Op: Héctor García; *Makeup:* Theresa Patterson

*[end credits are in English and give title as *The Man in White (Terminator from Hell)*]

Cast: Christian Bach (*Erika*), Daniel Stephen (*The Man in White*), Omar Fierro (*Manuel*), Manuel Ojeda (*José*), Aurora Clavel (*María*), Óscar Lancer (*highway patrolman*), Julima [Cardona] (*Christy*), Eduardo Amador (*truck driver*), William Ruffo (*doctor*), Alfred Piñera (*fisherman*), Alexandria Sylvia G. (*nurse*), Marcela Vázquez (*Indian girl*)

Notes: René Cardona Jr. took a break from his "Risa en Vacaciones" series of the 1990s to make this tepid action thriller, which serves mostly to show off the admittedly attractive body of Christian Bach in a variety of form-fitting costumes. It is interesting to note Cardona's affinity for films about the sea: his first starring role as a teenager was in *Un nuevo mundo*, about divers; as a director, he made a number of films with similar settings, including *Ciclón*, *Triángulo diabólico de las Bermudas*, *Tintorera!*, and--of course--the Acapulco beaches of the "Risa en Vacaciones."

This, like a number of Cardona movies, was a co-production. In this case, the partner country was apparently Italy, which explains the co-starring presence of Daniel Stephen, who can be seen in some Italian features of the '80s like *Warrior of the Lost World* and *War Bus* (although his real name is Daniel Ronald Stepanow and it seems he was born in the USA). Associate producer Angelo Iacono had worked in the

Italian film industry since the early 1960s, with films like Fellini's *8 1/2*, Argento's *Deep Red*, and Jodorowsky's *Santa sangre* on his resume. He had been associated with the Cardonas since the 1970s (*Ciclón*, etc.).

Director Cardona employs his daughter Julima in a major role, while his wife Pilar Labarthe gets a producing credit as well.

Erika and her young daughter Christy are staying in a seaside villa in Baja California Sur. While Erika is talking to her husband Manuel on the telephone (he is flying in to visit them), Christy wanders into the surf and nearly drowns. Erika runs up and down the beach frantically searching for her child and finally collapses; however, one of the servants (José) saves the little girl. But he says death never goes away empty-handed. Erika scoffs at his "superstitions."



In order to meet Manuel at the airport, Erika and Christy will have to drive all night. On the highway, Erika sees a man, dressed in white, kill a woman with a shotgun and put her corpse in his car. Up ahead, traffic is stopped for construction. The Man in White shoots a police officer, puts this body in his car with the dead woman, sets this vehicle on fire, and steals the police car! Erika observes all of this but manages to drive off before the Man can kill her.

The rest of the film is a protracted chase in cars, on foot, and in and on the water. Erika hides Christy and tries to lure the Man away; she takes refuge in a cabin cruiser, but the Man takes it out into the ocean, finds (and rapes) Erika, then prepares to set the boat on fire (he has a little rubber boat to escape on). Erika shoots the Man in the face with a flare gun, he comes back; she



stabs him in the head with a screwdriver, he comes back again; she dives overboard and the boat blows up! But as she is swimming back to shore, she sees the Man speeding off in his rubber dinghy with Christy on board.

However, this has all apparently been a dream (everything since Erika collapsed on the beach). Her husband Manuel talks to a doctor about his wife's bad heart. He goes outside to play with Christy. Erika awakes, spots Manuel (who, unfortunately, is dressed all in white) and tries to kill him with a speargun. She misses, and collapses again. While Manuel is carrying Erika back to the house, Christy

wanders into the surf again and starts to drown, but this time it is Manuel who saves her. The end?

El hombre de blanco is not only cursed with a confusing, frustrating and illogical "twist" ending, the entire middle portion of the film (the chase) is far too long and not very suspenseful, and the whole plot is pretty pointless and abstruse. On the positive side, Arturo de la Rosa's photography is quite good, Christian Bach looks good even though her character is extremely annoying, and overall production values are slick and professional.



reprinted (with updates) from MFB v.7 #6



THE LATE... FERNANDO LUJÁN

El pueblo fantasma (The Ghost Town)
(Estudios América-Prod. Film.
México, 1963)

Exec Prod: Alfonso Morones A.; *Prod:* Enrique Rosas Priego, Francisco Gómez González;
Dir: Alfredo B. Crevenna; *Scr:* Alfredo Ruanova;
Photo: Fernando Colín; *Music:* Antonio Díaz Conde; *Asst Dir:*



Tito Novaro; *Film Ed:* Raúl J. Caso [sic]; *Art Dir:* Arcady [sic] Artis Gener; *Camera Op:* Raúl Domínguez; *Makeup:* Graciela Muñoz; *Anotador:* Fernando Durán; *Asst Camera:* Javier Cruz; *Dialog Rec:* Enrique L. Rendón; *Music Rec:* Heinrich Henkel; *Union:* STIC

CAST: Rodolfo de Anda (*Manuel Saldívar "El Texano"*), Fernando Luján (*Río Kid*), Julissa (*Carmen*), Elsa Cárdenas (*Marta*), Carlos López Moctezuma (*Nestor Ramírez*), Mario Alberto Rodríguez (*Juancho*), Celia Manzano* (*Amalia*), Manuel Dondé (*comisario*), Jorge Russek (*El Rápido*), Pepe [José] Loza (*Roberto*), José Chávez Trowe (*Fernando Rivero*), Guillermo

Hernández (*Atenógenes Rivero*), Rubén Márquez (*don Beto*), Alicia Montoya, Felipe del Castillo, Jesús Gómez (*man in first cantina*), Vicente Lara "Cacama," Conjunto Río Bravo de Pancho Pantera

*[really Emma Arvizu? She appeared in first "Manuel Saldívar" film, made immediately prior to this, and the still reproduced in García Riera seems to show the same actress]

NOTES: Interesting but not entirely successful vampire-Western. Some unrealized potential and good concepts aren't wholly supported by the script and direction. Production values are generally good with a few very nice setups and shots.

In a pre-credits sequence, boastful bully El Rápido is killed in a cantina gun duel by the Río Kid, a black-clad gunfighter. Manuel Saldívar "El Texano" is the son of a notorious outlaw of the same name. He has heard of the Río Kid, who knew his late father, and decides to visit the town of San Juan to meet him. On the way, Manuel saves the life of Nestor, stranded in the desert when his horse dies.



Nestor was framed by the Río Kid and sent to prison for 10 years. He is surprised to see that San Juan, his hometown, has turned into a virtual ghost town in the meantime. Most of the population lives on the outskirts, including Nestor's wife and his daughter, Marta. The Río Kid is away on one of his periodic trips, seeking out and challenging the fastest gunmen in the West.

Also visiting San Juan are singer Carmen and her blind father don Beto, and the Rivero brothers, who have heard of the Río Kid's speed with his guns and want to challenge him. The Riveros harass Carmen, and Manuel steps in to help her. The Río Kid arrives and congratulates Manuel for his brave act. The surprisingly-youthful looking Río Kid says Manuel looks like his father physically, but is his opposite, morally (which makes Manuel happy).

The Río Kid shoots and kills the Riveros when they make another attempt to molest Carmen. The corpses later disappear. The Río Kid is actually a vampire who draws his gunfighting prowess from his victims. Nestor sees the Kid putting the bite on Carmen and shoots him,

but goes mad when the bullets have no effect. Carmen turns into a vampire and Manuel drives a stake through her heart, "to save her soul." This angers the Río Kid,



who exposes Manuel's true identity to the townspeople. They shun him, fearing that he is like his outlaw father.

Manuel outdraws the Kid and shoots him with silver bullets made from a religious medallion; the Kid dies

and his corpse ages rapidly. Nestor recovers his sanity, and the town of San Juan starts to come back to life.

Curse of the Undead, a 1959 Universal film, pre-dates *El pueblo fantasma*--Michael Pate stars as the black-clad vampire gunfighter "Drake Robey" (aka "Draco Robles," which is obviously a play on "Dracula"), who is killed when the hero (Eric Fleming) shoots him with a bullet that had a cross cut into its tip. The vampire aspects of *El pueblo fantasma* are down-played for most of the picture's running time: the Río Kid only vampirizes Carmen (both he and she are given some of the fakest-looking teeth I've ever seen --Luján looks like he has two cigarettes in his mouth!). The idea that he is getting his gunfighting ability by killing other outlaws is interesting but a bit hard to figure out: he doesn't kill them by drinking their blood, he



shoots and kills them. Then, their bodies disappear. Is he practicing cannibalism? In one nice scene, the Río Kid emerges from his crypt (sometimes, however, he seems to rest in his old house in town) and is apparently physically lifted out of the shot (it doesn't seem

that there is a cut here), and the shadow of a flying bat is seen--a nice way to avoid having him either optically transform or just have him "change" into a bat off-screen or via a cutaway. When the Kid is killed at the end (Manuel shoots him several times, including once right in the middle of the forehead!), the old-age makeup is fairly good (Luján somewhat resembles Fernando Casanova in *La marca del muerto*, apparently just a

coincidence since Armando Meyer did the makeup on that picture).

Rodolfo de Anda is earnest and straightforward as Manuel, and the rest of the cast is adequate, although López Moctezuma overdoes it a bit when he goes crazy after trying to kill the Kid. Julissa gets to sing, something she didn't do too often on-screen (although in real-life she was a budding pop singer who had a record contract even before she started making movies). To Manuel's irritation, she sings the unflattering "Corrido of Manuel Saldívar," about his outlaw father! (Immediately after the credits sequence, Manuel gets into a fight when some guys are singing this song, but he doesn't say anything to Carmen when she does it, both because he's a gentleman and because he hasn't revealed his true identity to the townspeople). Elsa Cárdenas (as Marta) is actually the female lead: she's somewhat attracted to Manuel (although he's indifferent), while the son of the comisario (roughly equivalent to the sheriff), Roberto, is interested in her. She's the one who gives Manuel the religious medal that he later melts down into vampire-killing bullets.



This was the second of eight "Manuel Saldívar El Texano" films, the first being *El Texano* (1963) and the last *Manuel Saldívar el Texano* (1970). De Anda played the title role in six of the films, with Rogelio Guerra taking over for the two 1965 entries in the series. *El pueblo fantasma* was the only fantasy-Western in the bunch.

On the whole, satisfactory without being as flamboyant as "straight" Mexican vampire films like *El vampiro* or Santo's encounters with the the fanged menaces.

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