

# The Mexican Film Bulletin

Volume 23 Number 1

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## A NEW YEAR!

The first issue of our 23rd volume. There will be four issues (one every three months, more or less) containing articles, obituaries, film reviews, and more. Many thanks to the loyal readers of *MFB* and a hearty welcome to any newcomers.



## MEXICO & THE USA IN MEXICAN CINEMA

I've always been particularly interested in the way in which the USA and its citizens are portrayed in other cultures. Many years ago, my doctoral dissertation dealt with "Images of U.S. Citizens in Mexican Cinema," and this issue of *MFB* will focus on films featuring relations between the two nations, a very topical issue right now.



## HISTORY & HISTORICAL



**El cementerio de las Águilas** [The Cemetery of the Eagles] (Prods. Aztla, 1938) *Dir.*: Luis Lezama; *Scr.*: Rafael M. Saavedra; *Story*: Iñigo de Martino, Alfredo de Noriega; *Photo*: Ezequiel Carrasco; *Music*: Alfonso Esparza Oteo; *Orch.*: Fausto Piñedo; *Prod Mgr.*: Jesús M. Centeno; *Asst Dir.*: Mario de Lara; *Film Ed.*: José Noriega; *Art Dir.*: José Rodríguez Granada;

*Period Advisor*: Roberto Montenegro; *Military Advisor*: Lt. Col. Pedro Mercado C.; *Sound*: Carlos Flores  
**Cast**: Jorge Negrete (*Miguel de la Peña*), Margarita Mora (*Mercedes*), José Macip (*Agustín Melgar*), Silvia Cardell [aka Celia D'Alarcón] (*Ana María*), Alfonso Ruiz Gómez (*Rafael Alfaro*), José Ortiz de Zárate (*Don Pedro de Zúñiga y Miranda*), Lalo Trillo (*Doña Nieves de Zúñiga y Miranda*), José [Pepe] Martínez (*Luis Manuel Martínez de Castro*), Miguel Wimer (*General Nicolás Bravo*), Ricardo

Mondragón (*General Monterde*), Adela Jaloma (*Elvira*), Miguel Inclán (*General Pedro Ma. de Anaya*), Manuel Pozos (*José María Alfaro*), Víctor Velázquez (*Lt. Juan de la Barrera*), Carlos Mora (*Vicente Suárez*), Ricardo Adalid (*Juan Escutia*), Paco Castellanos (*Francisco Márquez*), Manuel Sánchez Navarro Jr. [aka Manolo Fábregas] (*Fernando Montes de Oca*), Crox Alvarado (*Capt. Alemán*), Carlos López Aldama (*General Santa Ana*), Rafael Baledón (*guest at dance*), Manuel Dondé (*servant*), Víctor Junco (*U.S. soldier who bayonets Agustín*), Tito Junco, Guillermo Rivas

**Notes:** Very few films have been made in Hollywood or Mexico about the U.S.-Mexican War of 1847. The dearth of Mexican films is somewhat understandable given that nobody likes to watch movies about wars that were lost. Hollywood apparently found the war of little interest--more films have been made about the Texas War of Secession (during which the battle of the Alamo occurred), which did not officially involve the United States at all. Among the handful of films addressing the 1847 war in detail are *El cementerio de las águilas* and *One Man's Hero* (1999, aka *El batallón de San Patricio* in Mexico and *Héroes sin patria* in Spain, a U.S.-Mexican-Spanish coproduction).

While many Mexican films make reference to the War of 1847 and its ramifications (Mexico lost half of its national territory), one of the interesting things about *El Cementerio de las águilas* is that it isn't rabidly anti-U.S.

In fact, the film goes out of its way to include several scenes in which U.S. officers pay tribute to the bravery of their Mexican adversaries. This is even more surprising considering that the film began shooting in December 1938, just a few months after the Mexican government took over the nation's foreign-owned oil fields, an act that did little to improve U.S.-Mexican relations.

The picture begins with a disclaimer: "This film does not pretend to be a historical reproduction [of] the tragic events of 1847." A soldier arrives at an upper-class party, bearing news for General Bravo: "foreign invaders" have



landed at Veracruz! Miguel, joking about accepting the surrender of General Scott, goes to enlist and sees his friend Rafael already there. Rafael is assigned to Santa Anna's staff. After some training, the troops march off to meet the attacking Yankee army. The battle of Churubusco pits the invaders against General Anaya's forces.



Miguel is sent to carry a message to Santa Anna, thus he does not witness the defeat of the Mexican army. Out of ammunition, the brave defenders are forced to

surrender. Back in Mexico City, Agustín meets a friend of his, a cadet at the Colegio Militar. The cadets are going to defend their school grounds at Chapultepec. Agustín joins the army (he had previously been a cadet at the Colegio but dropped out), and he and Miguel are detached to fight with the cadets, under the command of General Bravo.

Rafael arrives with a message from Santa Anna: no reinforcements will be coming. The cadets are on their own. The U.S. forces attack, and after bitter hand-to-hand fighting, enter the grounds of the Colegio Militar. Miguel takes over when Rafael loses his nerve and is unable to set off some concealed land mines. One cadet wraps himself in the Mexican flag and leaps off a parapet to his death. He is saluted by the U.S. soldiers. The other cadets are all killed, until Agustín is the last man alive in the college. He is badly wounded by bayonets, but his life is spared by a kindly U.S. officer.

Miguel comes to see Agustín in the hospital. Agustín asks Miguel to tell Margarita, his fiancée, that he loves her and died thinking of her. So saying, he dies. Miguel escapes and goes to see Mercedes. He tells her Agustín is dead.

Mercedes: "Where is he?"

Miguel: "In the cemetery of the eagles."

Mercedes: "Where is that?"

Miguel: "Any piece of Mexican soil that covers those who died for her."

The film ends with a montage of battle scenes, and superimposed shots of the cadets ("Los Niños Heroes") standing in line. There is a shot of the Mexican flag as the Mexican national anthem plays.

*El cementerio las águilas* looks, like many Mexican films of the 1930s, a little crude technically when compared to Hollywood productions of the same era (Emilio García Riera says the film "appears contemporary with the events it describes"). Within a few short years, however, the technical qualities of Mexican cinema had advanced significantly, particularly in the area of photography, sound recording, and production design. Nonetheless, the battle scenes in this film are well staged and boast an impressive number of uniformed extras (some of this may be stock footage, but if it is, it isn't obvious). The U.S. characters are not given any particular personality or attention, but it is interesting that they speak English in the film (although sometimes not that well: one character asks "Where are your ammunition?").

Jorge Negrete's film career was just beginning, and although Negrete is the nominal star of the film, José Macip (who had produced Negrete's previous film, *Caminos de ayer*) gets the love interest and dies a gallant death as Agustín Melgar (one of the actual *Niños Héroes*). Director Luis Lezama was an early silent film director in Mexico; he became the head of the RKO branch operation in the country, but returned to directing with two films in 1938, and then remade his 1918 film *Tabaré* in 1946 before disappearing from filmmaking for good.

*El cementerio de las águilas* is not a typical Negrete star vehicle--better examples of the glossy historical romances that made him one of the nation's top stars are *Cartas de amor* and *Historia de un gran Amor*--but as an almost unique cinematic examination of the Mexican-American War, it is worth seeing.

Note: some interesting production stills can be seen at Rogelio Agrasánchez Jr.'s website:

[http://www.mexfilmarchive.com/documents/el\\_cementerio\\_de\\_las\\_e1guilas\\_production\\_stills.html](http://www.mexfilmarchive.com/documents/el_cementerio_de_las_e1guilas_production_stills.html)



### One Man's Hero\*

(Prods. San Patricio--Silver Lion Films--Arco Films--Filmax--Hool/MacDonald Prods--Televisa/Orion Pictures, 1999) Prod: Lance Hool, Conrad Hool, William J. MacDonald; Assoc Prod: Arturo Brito, Jaime Comas, Julio Fernández, Kristine Harlan, Joseph Kluge; Co-Prod: Paul L. Newman; Dir: Lance Hool; Scr: Milton Gelman (Jaime Comas

also credited, on Spanish sources only); Photo: João Fernandes; Music: Ernest Troost; Prod Dir: Diego Gómez Sempere, Peter Wooley; Prod Mgr: Conrad Hool; Asst Dir: Fernando Altschul; Film Ed: Mark Conte; Prod Des: Peter Wooley; Art Dir: Héctor Romero; Set Decor: Enrique Estévez; Additional Photo: Pancho Alcaine, Ángel





Goded, Maurice K. McGuire; *Makeup*: Vonda K. Morris;  
*Stunt Coord*: Gary Jensen; *Union*: STPC

\*Mexican titles: *El batallón de San Patricio*, *Héroes o traidores*; Spanish title: *Héroes sin patria*

**Cast:** Tom Berenger (*John Riley*), Joaquim de Almeida (*Cortina*), Daniela Romo (*Marta*), Jorge Bosso (*Col. Máximo Nexor*), Luis Lorenzo (*Padre Varga*), Mark Moses (*Col. Benton Lacey*), Gregg Fitzgerald (*Paddy Noonan*), Carlos Carrasco (*Domínguez*), Stephen Tobolowsky (*Capt. Gaine*), Don Wycherley (*Brian Athlone*), Stuart Graham (*Cpl. Kenneally*), Wolf Muser (*Cpl. Schultz*), Luke Hayden (*Seamus McDaugherty*), Ilia Volok (*Daniel Grzbalski*), Dermont Martin (*Sheamus Fitzgerald*), James Gammon (*General Zachary Taylor*), Patrick Bergin (*General Winfield Scott*), Jason Hool (*Peter O'Neil*), Garrison Hershberger (*Eammon Daly*), Steve Leone (*John Daly*), Albert Grimaldi [*Prince Albert of Monaco*] (*James Kelley*), Rodolfo de Anda\*\* (*Gen. Ampudia*) Mark Thomas (*McFadden*), Vanessa Bauche (*Flor*), Perla de la Rosa (*Juno*), Roger Cudney (*Col. Harney*), John Polak (*soldier who brands*), Guy De Saint Cyr (*soldier with whip*), Raúl Martínez (*first guerrilla*), Fernando Elizondo (*second guerrilla*), Alex Carrera (*U.S. battalion soldier*), Bret Hool (*Army recruiter*)

\*Spanish sources credit Pedro Díez del Corral but I've seen the Spanish version and it is definitely de Anda in the role, so this is either an error or refers to the voice actor who dubbed this character's dialogue



**Notes:** *One Man's Hero* is a rare example of a film about the Mexican-American War. Produced and directed by Lance Hool, who was born

in Mexico and got his start as an actor in Mexican cinema (and co-productions shot in Mexico). Hool moved to the USA and served as the head of Pemex for several years before becoming a producer and occasional director of films starring Chuck Norris, Charles Bronson, and others. *One Man's Army* was developed by Hool over a long period of time--illustrated by the fact that screenwriter Milton S. Gelman (who had previously scripted the Hool-produced *Cabo Blanco*, 1980, shot in Mexico) died in 1990, 7 years before shooting started (September-October 1997).

The IMDB indicates *One Man's Army* had a budget of approximately \$11.3 million but earned only \$230,000 in a brief release in the USA. A Mexican-Spanish coproduction, one hopes it earned more money in those and other countries (the website of the Spanish Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte database says it was released there in June 2000 and sold just 15,478 tickets).

Although based on historical events and featuring some historical figures, *One Man's Hero* is not completely accurate in some ways. Perhaps the most egregious bit of fiction is the creation of a love triangle between a Mexican

woman and two real-life figures, Juan Nepomuceno Cortina and John Riley, but this is acceptable artistic license. The St. Patrick's Battalion in the film apparently sees its first action at the battle of Monterrey (reasonably accurate, although Riley and some of his men fought in several previous actions before the battalion itself was constituted) and is destroyed after the battle of Churubusco (more or less true, although some commentators indicate the details of the battle itself aren't perfectly in



line with the historical record). Most of the attention is paid to the handful of men who desert with Riley, and although there's a scene in which a fairly long line of apparent deserters join up, the battalion itself is represented in the battle scenes by a relatively small number of soldiers (the real battalion had around 200 members at a low estimate, with some sources claiming nearly 700). The execution of the captured San Patricios at the moment the American flag replaced the Mexican flag over the castle of Chapultepec is based on an actual incident, although once again the characters we have seen throughout the film stand in for a much larger number of men (30 were in fact hung on this day). Finally, the fate of John Riley is romanticised in the film (again, dramatically understandable): not hung, he's whipped, branded and imprisoned, released when the war is over, and reunites with his Mexican sweetheart. In real life, Riley was whipped and branded, but apparently rejoined the Mexican forces and served until 1850, at which time he vanished into the mists of history.

Irish immigrant John Riley joins the U.S. Army, rises to the rank of sergeant, and is in line for a promotion to lieutenant. However, he protests when several of his men are imprisoned by harsh



Captain Gaine for requesting "leave to attend Mass" over the border in Mexico. Riley goes to the chapel where Padre Vargas is holding services, and discovers a number of other Irish and/or Catholic soldiers are there and are planning to desert. Riley convinces them to free his men, who are in the process of being whipped for their infraction. The whole group escapes to Mexico, although Riley intends to return--he'll only be punished for being AWOL, and feels Col. Lacey will be sympathetic--but they are ambushed by Mexicans under the command of Juan N. Cortina. Several are killed and wounded,

including Riley, but their lives are spared when Mexican woman Marta discovers Riley is wearing a cross given him by Padre Varga.



The deserters are held prisoner by Cortina. Riley and Marta become friendly, which makes Cortina jealous. Col. Nexor of the Mexican Army arrives and tells Cortina that the USA and Mexico are at war, and Cortina can either join his country's forces or be considered a traitor. Riley and the others realise they can't escape from Mexico due to the *yanqui* blockade, and can't go back to the United States. They agree to join the Mexican Army. Their artillery unit is called the St.

Patrick's Battalion and fights with distinction at the battle of Monterrey, but their valiant efforts go for naught when the Mexicans surrender.

Riley and his men retreat deeper into Mexico; Cortina, meanwhile, has returned to his mountain stronghold, unwilling to fight for a Mexican government he despises. Riley takes leave to visit Marta, rescuing her and a village from marauding bandits. He rejoins his unit for additional battles, culminating with the battle of Churubusco in which many of the St. Patrick's Battalion die valiantly and the rest are captured.

Over Mexican protests, *yanqui* General Scott says those prisoners who deserted the U.S. Army after war was



declared will be hung; the others, like Riley, will be flogged and branded. Riley is forced to watch as his surviving men are hung at the moment the Mexican flag is taken down over the

castle of Chapultepec. Some time later, Riley is freed from his sentence of hard labour in a rock quarry, and is reunited with Marta. Cortina, recognising true love, allows them to leave to begin a new life together.

*One Man's Army* is a reasonably entertaining, well-produced, historical drama with the usual mix of romance, action, melodramatic confrontations, and cameo appearances by actual historical figures. The film focuses on the plight and the *camaraderie* of the St. Patrick's Battalion members and on Riley's relationship with Marta (and rivalry with Cortina), leaving most of the other issues on the sideline, to be trotted out in the occasional odd moments. These peripheral topics include the massive emigration of the Irish to the USA & their treatment once they arrive (both of which could be construed as allegories about later *Mexican* emigration, although this is not made explicit at all): Capt. Gaine distrusts the Irish because they're Irish, but he also (and perhaps predominately)

dislikes them because they are Catholic (in fact, one of the prominent members of the future *San Patricios* is Polish) and thus presumably owe a higher allegiance to the Pope than to the USA.

The deserters who become the St. Patrick's Battalion don't--as one might expect, and as happens in numerous other films--join up with the Mexicans to fight the USA because they are convinced of the righteousness of the Mexican cause. There is a bit of lip-service paid to the idea that "the Mexicans are just like us back home, they're simple people, good Catholics, and they want to be free," but basically the *San Patricios* have no other choice: they can't return to the USA, and they can't escape from Mexico. The only (very vague) exception to this is Riley, who, when asked by Cortina what Marta means to him, replies: "For me, she is Mexico." So, because you love Marta, you love Mexico? For the most part, the film is not "about" Mexico or even the Mexican-American War, its main focus is John Riley and the men of the St. Patrick's Battalion, who are portrayed as akin to the famous Irish "Wild Geese" who fought as mercenaries in foreign wars from the 1500s through the 1700s.

*One Man's Hero*, to its credit, doesn't indulge in a lot of *gringo*-bashing. Capt. Gaine and his assistant are bigots and General Scott is a stubborn prig, and the justification for the U.S. invasion of Mexico is rightly identified as shaky at best, but there are no scenes of brutal U.S. soldiers committing atrocities or anything of the sort. In fact, in a nice bit of misdirection, when Riley approaches Marta's village, we see that it is under attack: but the attackers are *Mexican* bandits, led by Cortina's former aide Domínguez. There are even a couple of "good *gringos*" included for balance, Riley's former commanding officer Lacey and General Zachary Taylor. [This is a familiar ploy in Mexican cinema, see films such as *El último mexicano* and *Chicogrande*.]

The film boasts substantial production values: not immense spectacle, but satisfactory. The battle scenes are shot and edited to maximise what the filmmakers had in terms of extras and equipment, and while they at times look a bit thin, for the most part *One Man's Hero* is a respectably slick, professional historical-period film. The cinematography by João Fernandes is quite good, as is the "epic" sounding music score.

The performances are generally satisfactory. Although Tom Berenger,

Daniela Romo and Joaquim de Almeida get most of the character-building "drama," James Gammon has a flashy role as Zachary Taylor, and Mark Moses, Stuart



Graham, and Jorge Bosso also stand out. Familiar Mexican faces are limited chiefly to Romo, Roger Cudney, and Vanessa Bauche, plus a cameo by Rodolfo de Anda as General Ampudia. De Anda had previously played Juan Nepomuceno Cortina in *Hermanos del viento*, so perhaps



his casting in *One Man's Hero* was a nod to that (or maybe Lance Hool and de Anda were just friends, although there's no apparent record of them working together before this).

*One Man's Hero* is glossy, old-fashioned entertainment and perhaps because of that did not find a wide audience at the time of its initial release. However, it has aged well and is certainly worth a look.



**El último mexicano**  
[The Last Mexican]  
(Tele Talía Films, 1959) Prod: Rafael Pérez Grovas; Dir: Juan Bustillo

Oro; Scr: Juan Bustillo Oro, Antonio Helú; Orig. Poem: Tomás Mayre Reid [*sic*, Captain Thomas Mayne Reid] ("The Headless Horseman: A Strange Tale of Texas"); Photo: José Ortiz Ramos; Music Dir: Raúl Lavista; Prod Mgr: Raúl H. Arjona M.; Prod Chief: José Luis Busto; Asst Dir: Valerio Olivo; Film Ed: Gloria Schoemann; Art Dir: Salvador Lozano M.; Decor: José Barragán; Camera Op: Manuel González; Lighting: Miguel Arenas; Makeup: Sara Mateos; Sound Supv: James L. Fields; Dialog Rec: Eduardo Arjona; Music/Re-rec: Galdino Samperio; Sound Ed: Teodilo Bustos; Union: STPC

**Cast:** Demetrio González (*Mauricio del Valle*), Luz María Aguilar (*Luisa Poindexter*), Carlos López Moctezuma (*Sam*), José Gálvez (*Casío Calhoun*), Joaquín García Vargas "*Borolas*" (*Pancho Pérez*), Juan José Martínez Casado (*Woodley Poindexter*), Alfonso Torres, Miguel Ángel López, Claudio Brook (*prosecutor Reynold*), Yerye Beirute (*Mali, vigilante leader*), Hernán Vera (*Judge Roberts*), Armando Arriola (*Dr. Richard Romey*), Jorge Casanova (*Lt. Hancock*), José Chávez [Trowe], Guillermo A. Bianchi (*German saloon keeper*), Emilio Garibay (*Zorro*), Rafael Estrada (*Capt. Frederick Sloman*), Juan José Laboriel (*Plutón*), José Dupeyrón, José Muñoz (*vigilante*), Lorenzo J. Trujillo, Chel López (*Lt. Crossman*), Mariachi Vargas de Tecatitlán

**Notes:** *El último mexicano* was adapted from an unlikely source, an 1865 novel—"The Headless Horseman"—by Thomas Mayne Reid, an Irish-born writer resident in the USA. Bustillo Oro and Antonio Helú retained the basic plot—in 1850s Texas, Maurice and Cassius both love Louisa. Cassius frames Maurice for the murder of Louisa's brother Henry. Maurice is nearly lynched but is proved innocent at the last second. The Mexican film altered the characters' names slightly and changed Maurice from a poor Texas horse wrangler to a wealthy Mexican, but the major change is the elimination of the "Headless Horseman" character (a disguised mystery hero) entirely!

"Around 1850," in Texas "which was once Mexican territory but where now the flag of the United States rules," Mauricio comes to the aid of a wagon train from Louisiana, led by Casío Calhoun. Casío and Mauricio don't hit it off:

Casío: "You're not a North American like us, are you?"

Mauricio: "Yes I am, as much as you are."

Casío: "Aren't you a Mexican?"

Mauricio: "I have that honour...this gentleman hasn't spent enough time in school to learn that Mexico is also in North America."

Casío: "There are differences between North Americans and North Americans." [this is probably a play on the word *norteamericano*—which Mexicans often use to refer to citizens of the USA—and the more literal term referring to residents of this hemisphere.]

Mauricio: "I believe it. You're [living] in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and you still have many of your fellow men as slaves, like those poor blacks you treat like animals. On the other hand, in Mexico for many years there are only free men under the tricolour flag."

Casío, who calls himself "Captain" because of his service in the Mexican War, loaned the Poindexter family money to buy a ranch in Texas; he has romantic designs on Luisa Poindexter. Frontier scout Sam knows the Poindexters

and arranges to have Mauricio provide a horse for their grown daughter Luisa. He tells Luisa that Mauricio is the last of

"his class" of Mexicans in Texas; although he owns a large *hacienda* in Mexico, Mauricio chooses to stay in Texas where he was born and where his parents are buried.

Casío threatens to foreclose the mortgage on the Poindexter ranch unless Luisa agrees to marry him. He also sends his henchmen to burn a cabin, disguised as Indians. In the local saloon, Casío proposes a toast: "May the devil take all foreigners in Texas—especially the Mexicans!" and then deliberately bumps into Mauricio. The two men have a duel and each is wounded; Mauricio compels Casío to apologise for his insult to Mexico.

Luisa's brother Enrique is killed and Mauricio is blamed. Mauricio's wound prevents him from escaping, and although Luisa believes in his innocence and tries to hide him, he is captured by a lynch mob. Luisa's father and Sam save Mauricio and he is instead tried legally for murder. During the trial, the real killer—Casío—is exposed. As the film concludes, Luisa and her father head for Mexico with Mauricio. Poindexter family slave Plutón asks: "Is it true, don Mauricio, that there are no slaves in Mexico?" Mauricio: "It's true, Plutón. Everyone in my country is a free man." Plutón: "Well, *qué viva la libertad! Qué viva México!*"



*El último mexicano* addresses a number of interesting topics—although many of them rather obliquely—



including racism against blacks, racism against Mexicans, the Mexican-American War, the loss of Texas, and so on. Casio Calhoun is the main anti-Mexican villain and causes most

of the trouble: although a lynch mob also appears, it's unclear how much anti-Mexican sentiment there really is in Texas (Sam, for example, is Mauricio's friend). The institution of slavery is cited as a moral flaw of the nation of the United States, with Mexican held up as an example of a free nation.

Although Mauricio initially refuses to leave the land where he was born and where his parents are buried, by the end of the movie he decides that the conversion of the territory from Mexican to U.S. sovereignty makes his residence untenable, and departs. This sentiment is echoed in the film versions of *Los desarraigados* and in various *mojado* movies: the USA is hostile to Mexicans (and Mexican-Americans), so it's best to return to Mexico. Some of the 1970s Chicano films take a different point of view, suggesting people stand up for their rights, both as citizens (if they're Chicano) and as human beings (everyone).



*El último mexicano* is fairly well produced and has a decent cast, filled with instantly recognisable faces even in supporting roles. As has been mentioned before, it's ironic that Spanish-born Demetrio González (who died in 2015—unfortunately, I missed this and didn't include an obituary in *MFB*) became famous in Mexican cinema in the Fifties and Sixties almost exclusively playing Mexican characters in *rancheras* and other such films. González is, as usual, handsome and stalwart in *El último mexicano*, opposite José Gálvez. Gálvez occasionally—especially later in his career—played sympathetic roles, even comedies, but was best-known for villainous parts. In a curious bit of trivia, Gálvez later worked with *El último mexicano*'s ingenue Luz María Aguilar on the long-running television sitcom

"Hogar, dulce hogar." Carlos López Moctezuma is a Davy Crockett-like frontiersman (complete with coonskin cap), a "good gringo" to offset Gálvez's character. Juan José Laboriel, born in Honduras, was for many years the most prominent performer of colour in Mexican cinema. He appeared in roles which ranged from minute (he was also a musician and can be seen in various musical numbers) to substantial.

Trivia note: Mayne Reid's novel was later adapted to the screen as a Russian-Cuban co-production in 1972 as *Vsadnik bez golovy* (The Headless Horseman). This film was shot in the Crimea and features Russian and Cuban actors.



**Los hermanos del viento** [Brothers of the Wind] (CONACITE 1-STPC, 1975) *Dir-Scr*: Alberto Bojórquez; *Photo*: Manuel Gómez Urquiza; *Music*: Raúl Lavista; *Prod Mgr*: Luis Quintanilla; *Prod Chief*: Nicolás Reyero; *Asst Dir*: Manuel Ortega; *Film Ed*: Jorge Bustos; *Art Dir*: Alberto Ladrón de Guevara; *Decor*: Jorge Morales; *Lighting*: León Sánchez; *Action Co-ord*: Hernando Name; *Makeup*: Felisa Ladrón de Guevara; *Sound*: Alfredo Solís; *Union*: STPC; Panavision

**Cast**: Jorge Martínez de Hoyos (*Federico*), Patricia Luke (*Mercedes*), Rocío Brambila (*Catalina*), Guadalupe Álvarez (*Rosa María*), Antonio Zamora (*David*), Rodolfo de Anda (*Juan Nepomuceno Cortina*), Jaime Garza (*Manuel*), Julio Alejandro Lobato (*Felipe*), Fernando García Ortega (*Luis*), Farnesio de Bernal (*Martín*), Max Kerlow (*Amberson*), Fernando Borges (*Georgy*), Manuel Trejo Morales (*doctor*), Carlos East (*Richard*), José Nájera (*Sheriff*), Steven Noriega (*Louie*), Roger Cudney (*Georgy's father*), Guadalupe Perullero (*Madame*), José Martí (*Frencie*), Félix Moreno (*pianist*), Lars Nelson (*cowboy in saloon*), Roberto Los (*Ted*), Rubén Calderón (*Doctor in El Dorado*), José Gómez Parceró (*Buchanan*), Teo Tapia (*Robert*), Miguel Mora (*bellboy*), Irma González & Guadalupe Pérez Arias (*opera singers*), Fernando Pinkus (*hotel mgr*), José Luis Avendaño (*Jorge Cadena*), Branimir Zogovic (*Sean*), Salvador López (*bartender*), Marcelo Villamil (*man in hotel*)



**Notes**: this film, like *El último mexicano*, takes place after the conclusion of the Mexican-American War, when territory that was previously Mexican has been absorbed into the United States; the Mexican residents could either leave, or remain and be governed by the USA. Featured in the movie is a historical figure, Juan Nepomuceno Cortina,



who in real life did form an armed band to fight against Anglos who, in his opinion, were stealing land from the original Mexican (now Mexican-American) owners. *Los hermanos del viento* takes place during the "First Cortina War" in 1859.



[Trivia note: an earlier period in Cortina's life (his service during the Mexican-American War) is depicted in *One Man's*

*Hero* (1999). Cortina is played in this movie by Portuguese actor Joaquim de Almeida; curiously, Rodolfo de Anda, the "Cortina" of *Los hermanos del viento*, also appears in *One Man's Hero*, in a cameo role as General Ampudia.]

A long printed prologue explains the background: "On 2 February 1848, the United States acquired more than half of Mexico's territory. This was the result of many years of intrigue that began an unequal war... Little is spoken of the Mexicans that lived in these lands. These men were stripped of their property through legal technicalities of the *norteamericanos* or by force. In many places they were simply expelled... in 1859 Juan Nepomuceno Cortina organised a guerrilla movement to assist and dignify the deposed Mexicans who had a sacred right of self-defense."

Mexican cattle thieves Federico and Felipe are arrested and will be hung: "They're Mexicans, that's sufficient to hang them," says Martin. "The best Mexican is a dead Mexican."



However, saloon girl Rosa María seduces Martin into letting her see the prisoners, and then convinces her four brothers and sisters—Mercedes,

Catalina, Luis, and Manuel—to help break them out of jail. The family tells Federico and Felipe that they want rancher Amberson killed: he murdered their father and stole their land. Federico confesses that he and Felipe are just cattle thieves, not members of Juan Cortina's rebel group, but they agree to stay and help because they "have nothing better to do."

Federico and Felipe witness a group of Amberson's men raiding the ranch of Dr. García: García is hung and his daughter is raped and murdered. They kill several of the raiders. Later, Martin attacks Rosa and shoots her when she flees; he's killed in turn by Manuel and Federico. Mercedes finds Juan Cortina's proclamation: he won't let Mexicans be robbed of their land. Mercedes and the others steal a wagon load of money and guns on its way to the Amberson ranch, and capture Georgy's father, who calls Mercedes a "beaner slut" and "lousy Mexican bitch" when she kills his son. Amberson is outraged at the robbery and

asserts his right to the land: "All the men that died in the Alamo were more than men—they were immortals!"

Georgy's father escapes from the cave where he's being held prisoner; he and his men ambush Mercedes, wounding her and killing one of Federico's friends. Manuel is later shot to death by Amberson's men. Luis and Catalina are captured and taken to Amberson: when Amberson's nephew Louis refuses to shoot Catalina, Amberson kills him instead. His men also shoot Luis.

Federico and Felipe are joined by Cortina and his men, brought by troubadour David. "This is our business," Federico says, but Cortina replies "It's the business of all of us, *paisanos*." They attack the ranch and kill Amberson. Afterwards, Federico, Felipe and Catalina ride off with Cortina.



*Los hermanos del viento* is a handsomely made film, shot in Panavision and boasting decent sets and other production trappings. Alberto Bojórquez directed a number of shorts and documentaries before making his feature debut with *Los meses y los días* in 1971. *Los hermanos del viento*, a period Western, is a distinct outlier in his career, since all of his other features were contemporary dramas, often with socio-political content. *Los hermanos del viento* is politically oriented, and it partially retains the strong female-centric nature of his other features, including *Los meses y los días*, *Adriana del Río--actriz*, *Retrato de una mujer casada*, *La lucha con la pantera*, *Lo mejor de Teresa*, and *Los años de Greta*.

The basic premise of *Los hermanos del viento* is that Mexicans were robbed of their land after the Mexican-American War: former Mexican territory was now owned by the USA, and *gringos* moved in to take possession by any means necessary. Robber baron Amberson—who has Buffalo Bill-



style hair and costume--says the land is America's by right of conquest, and castigates his nephew:

"You forgot Davy Crockett! You forgot Daniel Boone!" Cortina, and the 5 young protagonists of the film, fight back against this. The children don't have a plan to reclaim their stolen ranch, they just want to avenge their dead father--Mercedes tells Felipe that when Amberson is dead, she's moving across the border to Sonora--and this is achieved at the film's climax (at the cost of 4 of the children's lives).

The film also depicts discrimination and prejudice against Mexicans by *gringos*. Martin, although he tells "Rosie" (Rosa María) "I don't care that you're Mexican, I

want to marry you," also says "the best Mexican is a dead Mexican." [*Gringo* Georgy is attracted to another sister, Mercedes--ironically, both Georgy and Martin are used by the sisters and are then killed.] Amberson and others also use terms like "little brown bitches," "beaner slut," "greaser, and "Mexican bitch," which indicates that they are not simply desirous of stealing land, they are also racists.

There is a long sequence in which Mercedes, Felipe and Federico visit the Mexican town of El Dorado. Somewhat irrelevant to the plot, the sequence is useful mainly to contrast Mexican culture with the newly-conquered lands north of the border: Mercedes and the two men attend the opera "The Marriage of Figaro," suggesting Mexico is actually more civilised than the rough, brutal American West.

*Los hermanos del viento* is one of those films which really does have an "ensemble cast." Significant screen time is given to characters Federico, Felipe, Rosa María, Mercedes, Amberson, Martin, Manuel, and Georgy's father--in other words, multiple protagonists and multiple villains share the limelight.



## MOJADOS & INDOCUMENTADOS

**Adiós, mi chaparrita\*** [Goodbye, My Little One] (Central Cinematográfica Mexicana, 1939\*\*) *Dir:*



*Dir:* Rene Cardona; *Scr:* Ernesto Cortázar; *Orig. Novel:* Rosa de Castaño ("Rancho Estradeño"); *Photo:* Ross Fisher; *Music:* Manuel Esperón; *Prod Chief:* Manuel Sereijo; *Asst Director:* Jaime L. Contreras; *Art Dir:*

Ramón Rodríguez; *Sound:* [Rafael] Ruiz Esparza, J. de Pérez

\*also released as *Los repatriados*

\*\*[this film did not have a Mexico City playdate until 1943, although it had been shown elsewhere prior to that point; Emilio García Riera lists this as an Ixtla Films production but the TV print screened says Central Cin. Mexicana]

**Cast:** Rafael Falcón (*Chávalo Pérez*), Josefina Escobedo (*Chabela*), Alfredo del Diestro (*don Andrés*), Emma Duval (*tía Chole*), Antonio Badú (*Indalecio*), Tito Junco (*Fermin*), María Porras (*Nicolasa*), Ángel T. Sala (*cruel foreman*), María R. Claveria (*Cruz*), Mimi Derba (*doña Panchita*), Elvia Salcedo (*Flora*), Manuel Pozos (*don Chema*), Ricardo Mondragón (*Tiburcio*), Emilio Cantú, Armando Arriola (*short worker*), Francisco Achiu, Julio Ahuet, Bohemia Serret, Cliff Carr (*Mr. Clark*), Manuel Dondé (*Clark employee*), José Torvay (*man at dance*), René Cardona (*man whose horse Chávalo takes*)

**Notes:** This is one of the earliest films dealing with undocumented Mexican workers in the United States. The

film alternates scenes of Chávalo in the U.S. with the story of his sweetheart Chabela, left behind in Mexico. Before he leaves with his friend Indalecio to cross the border, Chávalo declares his love for Chabela and (presumably) they sleep together. Time passes, and Chabela gives birth to Chávalo's child. However, the infant is later bitten by a snake and dies (an extremely uncomfortable scene). Chabela is nearly convinced to marry another suitor, Fermín, but Chávalo comes back just in time (literally minutes before the wedding, in fact), and the lovers are reunited.

Why was Chávalo away so long without contacting Chabela? His job on the nice Mr. Clark's ranch fell



through (Clark hocks a valuable ring in order to get enough money to pay his workers something, the opposite of the later cinematic stereotype of the *gringo* boss who exploits his Mexican workers).

Chávalo heads back for Mexico, but falls in with a group of his countrymen who are hired to harvest crops. The foreman warns them: "anyone who doesn't have a valid passport can't be contracted [to work]." When it's clear no one has their papers, he says, "well, it doesn't matter to me," and hires them anyway!

However, the "farm" is actually a patch of woods, and the Mexicans are ordered--by the cruel foreman, who has a pistol and whip (and who happens to be a "renegade" Mexican)--to build their own cabins to live in, to dig their own well for water, and their job is actually to clear the land, not pick crops. If anyone complains, he'll have them arrested by Immigration and they'll spend "ten years in prison."

After days of mistreatment including excessive work and poor food, which results in the collapse and death of one man,

Chávalo and the others revolt, and Chávalo thrashes the foreman. The Mexicans all leave; the foreman recovers and



starts to pursue them, but is stabbed to death by the Chinese cook, who has also been abused. Chávalo is arrested for the crime and sent to prison for the killing, but is eventually freed through the intervention of Indalecio and Mr. Clark.

*Adiós mi chaparrita* is an extremely uneven film (the badly-worn print shown on TV years ago is missing some footage, including the director's credit!), with some very awkward (both technically and dramatically) scenes. On



the other hand, Ross Fisher's photography is quite good and makes use of plentiful locations in the countryside.

Additionally, Josefina Escobedo is not your typical



Mexican actress of the period, either physically or in terms of her acting style. One particularly affecting scene is the birth of Chabela's child: Chabela lives with her drunken father and kindly aunt,

neither of whom know she is pregnant. One night, she begins to feel labour pains while in bed. This scene is shot in closeup, showing only Escobedo's face as she feels the pains, then looks over at her sleeping aunt and father. Finally, she gets out of bed and leaves the house, giving birth to her child on a nearby river bank.

The rest of the cast is uneven. Singer Rafael Falcón had a minor screen career in the '30s, and is adequate as the hero. A young Tito Junco (before he became typed as a villain) is better as the long-suffering Fermín, who loves Chabela and defends her against calumnies, then sees his chance to marry her snatched away at the literal final moment when

Chávalo returns (he is noble enough to take Chabela--in her wedding gown--to meet Chávalo, and then sadly drives away). Cliff Carr, the predominant screen *gringo* of



Mexican cinema in the 1930s and 1940s, plays the good-hearted Mr. Clark. Carr, born in the USA, worked in Mexico from the mid-Thirties until his death at a relatively young age in the late Forties. He's perhaps best known for his role as the amiable "John Smith" in *Los tres García*.

*Adiós mi chaparrita* (the title comes from a song, naturally) is not without interest, but is hardly a polished piece of work. Still, as a very early example of a Mexican film depicting *indocumentados*, it is of definite historical interest.

Historical footnote about this film: in April 1943, anthropologist Joseph E. Weckler sent a letter to Victor Borella, the director of the Division of Inter-American Activities (part of the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Activities agency, led by Nelson Rockefeller, which was charged with promoting cooperation and friendship in the Americas during World War II), complaining about *Los repatriados* (aka *Adiós mi chaparrita*), which had been shown to a group of people interested in Inter-American relations. Weckler indicates that the film begins with a scene in which U.S. border guards open fire on Mexicans crossing the Rio Grande on rafts: this scene does not appear in existing prints of *Adiós mi chaparrita*. Weckler mistakenly identifies the evil foreman as an "American Anglo," but correctly says he is

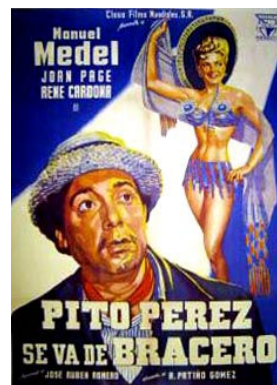
the "cruellest 'Simon Legree' type of labor boss, complete with black snake whip and revolver to enforce his domination," who "grossly mistreats" his Mexican workers. Weckler concluded by saying "I strongly recommend, therefore, that the showing of this movie not be allowed anywhere in the United States."



Just over a week later, "CM" of Azteca Films sent a memo to the AFD Company in El Paso, indicating that Frank Fouce (a leading distributor of Spanish-language cinema in the USA, and a "dollar a year" man for the OCIAA) had received several complaints about *Los repatriados*. "In deference to our company, the Office of the Coordinator does not wish to nor will it take steps in this matter, but it does ask us through Mr. Fouce that if by this time we have more or less finished exploiting this film, we might retire this film from distribution and thus do away with any more complaints...bearing in mind the way in which the Office of the Coordinator has asked us to do it and considering the substantial aid which that Office has just agreed to give us, it is quite proper that we should reciprocate these attentions by withdrawing this film from the market--especially since, after all, we have almost completely exploited this film." [National Archives & Records Administration, RG 229, Box 235, "Mexican Films" folder.]



### Pito Pérez se va de bracero [Pito Pérez Becomes a Migrant Worker] [CLASA Films



Mundiales, 1947) *Prod*: Salvador Elizondo; *Dir*: Alfonso Patiño Gómez; *Scr*: José Ruben Romero, Alfonso Patiño Gómez; *Dialog*: Leopoldo Baeza y Aceves (uncredited); *Photo*: Ezequiel Carrasco; *Music*: Federico Ruiz, Rosalío Ramírez; *Prod Chief*: Alberto A. Ferrer; *Asst Dir*: Felipe Palomino; *Film Ed*: Jorge Bustos; *Art Dir*: Ramón Rodríguez G.; *Decor*: Raúl Serrano; *Makeup*:

Margarita Ortega; *Sound Dir*: José de Pérez; *Rec*: Fernando Barrero

**Cast**: Manuel Medel (*Pito Pérez*), Joan Page (*Joan Page*), René Cardona (*Alex Parelli*), Julián de Meriche (*Tony Garento*), Charles Rooner (*Immigration Dept. official*), Rafael Icardo (*Molina*), Guillermo Calles (*railway worker*), Cliff Carr (*U.S. judge*), Edmundo Espino (*judge*), Julio Ahuet (*political organizer*), José Muñoz (*Rocha, worker*), Jorge Arriaga (*railway worker*), Pedro Elviro "Pitouto" (*stationmaster*), Joaquín Roche (*Macías*),

Arturo "Bigotón" Castro (*policeman*), Hernán Vera (*cook*), David Lama, "Los Tres Diamantes"

**Notes:** Manuel Medel's greatest success in films was as the philosophical vagabond Pito Pérez. Four years after *La vida inútil de Pito Pérez*, Medel returned to the role. The first film was based on a well-known novel; the sequel, on a screen story by the novel's author. During World War II, the Mexican and U.S. governments established a system of controlled temporary immigration, allowing Mexicans to enter the U.S. legally to work as *braceros*. This program was discontinued in the mid-1960s, but even while it existed, the problem of illegal immigration was still present. *Pito Pérez se va de bracero* deals with both legal and illegal immigration, and in some ways lays the foundations for the most famous film on the topic, *Espaldas mojadas* (1953--the two pictures have a number of similarities). However, *Pito Pérez...* is far milder than the *mojado* films of the 1970s and 1980s--Pito does not encounter overt racism or extreme exploitation in the U.S., and in fact the picture seems to take some pains to be even-handed in its criticism and praise of Mexico and the United States.

Pito Pérez, arrested for being drunk in public, is ordered out of town. Pito boards a departing train, courtesy of a political worker who is paying *campesinos* to attend a rally



and vote for his candidate. However, the train is also carrying men headed for the United States. Getting drunk again, Pito says "Mexico is a great country

that produces... produces *braceros* for the United States," and he tries to dissuade the men from leaving their homes and families: "Your country needs your labour. Your mother, your wife, your children need you." However, the rootless Pito winds up in line at the Immigration Office with the others. A man named Parelli gives him false papers (in return for \$50 after Pito gets work in the U.S.), and Pito proceeds to an interview with the U.S. officials. When they ask what work he's done before, Pito says "Work is something so bad that they have to pay you to do it"--he's never worked in his life. He is also asked if he is a Communist and if he'd defend the United States if war came: despite his ambiguous answers, Pito is eventually passed through the border.

Parelli gets Pito a job packing fruit\*\* on the Pomona Ranch, but after one day of the hectic pace and unfriendly atmosphere--one man constantly walk arounds saying "C'mon, hurry up please," Pito has his hand slapped when he takes an apple for himself--he leaves. He then gets a job washing dishes in a nightclub where beautiful blonde Joan Page is the star attraction (he has repeatedly seen her glamorous image on "RC Cola" billboards). Pito stumbles into the spotlight and dances with Joan, to the delight of the audience. Joan says she's thinking about making a tour

of Mexico, and he can come along as her dance partner; she likes everything about Mexico, and quizzes Pito about *charros*, *mariachis*, and so forth.



\*\*[The crates of fruit are being loaded on a United Fruit Company boxcar: this company had a significant presence in, and influence on, numerous Latin American countries, particularly those with banana crops. This reference could be deliberate, or possibly just coincidental.]

The next day, Pito is observing a crew laying railroad track, when the foreman asks if he wants a job, adding that the penalty for vagrancy is two months in jail. Pito says it's the same in Mexico: "It's really a crime to be poor." He takes a job carrying water to the workers, but is fired when he adds liquor to the water to make it more palatable. Back at the nightclub, Parelli asks Pito to help him in his alien-smuggling operation, adding that the "*espaldas mojadas*" (wetbacks) will come anyway, but he can help provide them with job leads, etc. Joan--who knows Parelli--is enlisted to convince Pito.

However, the first time Pito and Parelli try to bring across a group of illegal immigrants, they are spotted by the police. One of Parelli's associates is shot and everyone else surrenders. In court, Pito says he doesn't think it should be a crime to enter a friendly neighbor country: in Mexico, "*güeritos*" like you are everywhere, he tells the judge. Joan pays Pito's fine and he is deported. On the train back to Mexico, Pito tearfully sings "El Repatriado" (The Repatriate).



Joan Page was the primary "blonde gringa" in Mexican films from the mid-1940s through the early 1950s, appearing with Pedro Infante, Jorge Negrete, and Luis Aguilar, among other stars. She's stereotyped in *Pito Pérez se va de bracero* as the sexy, Mexico-loving blonde, who nonetheless (indirectly, at least) causes Pito trouble but bails him out and bids him a fond farewell in the end. The rest of the cast is satisfactory but not especially noteworthy in their roles.

Manuel Medel as Pito Pérez doesn't have much opportunity to shine as a comedian--in fact, the film is really not a comedy. He's given some sharp lines (such as those quoted above, and one where he defines a cigarette as "something with a cinder on one end and a fool on the other"), but when he is given some comic "business" (Joan Page's toaster keeps shooting toast at him) it really doesn't work in the context of the film. Pito Pérez is an actor's role as opposed to a comedian's role--it's interesting to note



that later screen versions of the original starred Tin Tan and Ignacio López Tarso, both capable actors (Tin Tan was certainly not a one-dimensional performer, although



he had a tendency towards broad over-playing) despite their widely disparate styles. As an actor in the role, Medel is perfectly satisfactory, but gives little

evidence of the comedic talent he apparently possessed.

As noted above, the political content is muted. Pito doesn't fare too badly in the USA, quitting various jobs and losing others chiefly because he's not motivated to work. For example, after making a successful if inadvertent debut as Joan Page's comic dance partner, we next see Pito working as a waterboy for a railroad track crew! [This is just another similarity between *Pito Pérez se va de bracero* and *Espaldas mojadas*.] Pito's job in a fruit-packing company is arduous but hardly unbearable, but he walks away because he doesn't like being supervised. Pito is admitted to the USA despite his evasive answers to their questions--so he isn't exactly an illegal immigrant (although his papers are forged)-- and is only deported because he's accused of helping bring *indocumentados* across the border. Pito doesn't view Mexico as a paradise either: he's ordered out of a town because he can't pay a fine for being drunk in public. He later boards a train filled with paid political supporters of a candidate, and says "what a miserable country, where people exchange their liberty for 2 pesos and a lousy taco." As the film concludes, he has tears in his eyes as he returns to Mexico, but whether this is because he's leaving the sexy Joan Page behind or because he's returning to his homeland isn't clear.

Quite interesting overall.



**Espaldas mojadas** [Wetbacks] (Productora Atlas-ATA Films, 1953) *Prod:* José Elvira R.; *Dir/Scr:* Alejandro Galindo; *Photo:* Rosalio Solano; *Music:* Jorge Pérez H.; *Prod Mgr:* Manuel Jasso Rojas; *Prod Chief:* Luis

G. Rubín; *Asst Dir:* Jesus Marín; *Film Ed:* Carlos Savage; *Art Dir:* Edward Fitzgerald; *Makeup:* Carmen Palomino; *Rec:* Rodolfo Solís; *Re-rec:* Jesús González Gancy

**Cast:** David Silva (*Rafael Amendola Campuzano*), Víctor Parra (*Mister Sterling*), Martha Valdes (*"Mary"--María del Consuelo*), Óscar Pulido (*"Louie Royalville"--Luis Villareal*), José Elías Moreno (*Frank Mendoza*), Pedro Vargas (*singing bracero*), Carolina Barret (*Margarita*), Lola Beltrán (*Big Jim Cafe singer*), Guillermo Álvarez [Bianchi] (*Rico*), Alicia Malvido (*Agnes*), Salvador Godínez, Rogelio Fernández (*bracero*), Trio Calaveras, José Chavez Trowe (*Felipe Qula*), Eulalio González "Piporro" (*Alberto Cuevas*), Salvador Quiroz (*Mexican police official*), Gregorio Acosta, Julio Sotelo, José Luis Fernández (*man in Big Jim Cafe*), Emilio Garibay (*man in Big Jim Cafe*), Jorge Treviño (*Pete, bartender*), Regino Herrera (*bracero*), Jorge Arriaga (*storekeeper*), Héctor Mateos (*consul*), Humberto Rodríguez (*man mopping floor*), José Mufioz (*Mexican policeman*)

**Notes:** This is a very famous and somewhat controversial film about Mexican workers in the United States. At the time the film was made, a legal program (started during World War Two) allowed Mexicans to work in the U.S. under specific conditions. The workers were called "*braceros*," and their working conditions and salaries were overseen by the U.S. government (the plan was discontinued in the mid-1960s). However, as this film and others (including *Pito Pérez se va de bracero*, 1948) show, Mexicans not accepted into the legal program were still crossing illegally to work in the U.S.

The film opens with a printed statement that tries to ameliorate the anti-U.S. tone of the film: "The characters in this film are not real, but rather symbolic representations of the situation that can occur when someone puts himself outside the law, and the story itself doesn't deal with actual events. The author has combined acts that occurred on the borders of different countries to form a dramatically-interesting whole. Our goal is to warn our countrymen of the inconvenience of trying to abandon the country in an illegal manner, with the risk of suffering bothersome and painful situations that could even create difficulties in the good relations that currently exist between both countries."

A montage sequence contrasting Ciudad Juárez and El Paso--two cities separated by the Rio Grande--follows.

Rafael visits an officer where Mexicans being contracted for work in the U.S. He knows how to operate a tractor, but the clerk says "Machines aren't for Mexicans, you have to go as a field hand." However, when Rafael admits he doesn't have the paperwork necessary to become a *bracero*, he is dismissed.

The downcast Rafael wanders into the Big Jim Cafe, where he meets a friendly bargirl, Margarita. He says he got into an argument with the son of a political boss in his hometown: that's why he can't stay in Mexico, and yet doesn't have the paperwork necessary to become a legal *bracero*. Margarita introduces him to Frank Mendoza, a "coyote" who takes illegal immigrants across the river, for a price. That night, Frank, Rafael, and some other men swim the Rio Grande; on the U.S. bank, there are guard

towers with searchlights and sirens, and the guards open fire on the Mexicans in the water.

Rafael helps the wounded Felipe reach shore; Felipe, mortally wounded, gives his

money to Rafael, and asks that his body be put into the river, so the current will carry it back to his own country.

Separated from the group and not knowing any English, Rafael is at a disadvantage in the USA. A friendly Spanish-speaking woman helps him buy a hot dog at a parade (an effective scene: a man bumps into Rafael and makes him drop the food, but Rafael picks it up and brushes off the dirt, then hurries away). As he is preparing to eat his humble meal in a railyard, Rafael meets the philosophical tramp Louie Royalville ("Luis Villareal in Spanish"), who invites himself to share the food. Louie tips Rafael off to a place where he can get work without papers.

Rafael loses this job and (in a montage sequence punctuated by sirens) is questioned and pursued by a series of U.S. policemen. He finally winds up working on a railroad track gang supervised by Mister Sterling (Victor Parra with his hair dyed blonde). The Mexicans miss their country (*bracero* Pedro Vargas hanging around singing the sad "Canción mixteca" doesn't help much!), and the working conditions are not good. The "company store" (located in a boxcar) overcharges them for food and other necessities, but they are too far from a town to buy anywhere else. A truckload of prostitutes arrives and all of the men (except Rafael and the maudlin, drunken Alberto) line up to spend part of their hard-earned dollars on the

whores.

When one of the workers is injured, Mr. Sterling accuses him of malingering; Rafael steps in to defend his co-worker, and Sterling says: "Don't touch me, you

Mexican greaser," then spits in Rafael's face! Restrained by his friends, Rafael doesn't hit Sterling, but he takes the first opportunity to leave the camp. Sterling and the storekeeper decide to accuse Rafael of the theft of a leather jacket (he was buying it on the installment plan), and notify the police. Rafael wanders into a diner, and once

again meets the young woman who had earlier helped him buy a hot dog. She is Mary, a *pocha* (Mexican-American), who tells Rafael that real Mexicans don't like her kind, and Anglos treat them poorly. Rafael asks her to come back to Mexico with him and get married. However, Sterling and the police come into the diner, and Rafael has to flee. He tells Mary to meet him at the Big Jim Cafe in Ciudad Victoria.

Crossing the Rio Grande back into Mexico, Rafael is arrested by Mexican police, who ask him to prove he's a Mexican! Rafael's impassioned outburst about his reasons for leaving Mexico, how he was mistreated in the USA, and his reasons for coming back, convince the police to set him free.

Meanwhile, Mary is waiting in the cafe. Mr. Sterling comes in and tells Mendoza he can't hire any more illegal workers for a while, because U.S. officials are getting suspicious. As Sterling leaves, Rafael arrives and they get into a fight.

Before Rafael can strangle the exploitative *gringo*, other men in the bar pull him off. Instead, they take Sterling to the Rio Grande and make him swim towards the U.S. by throwing rocks at him. Sterling is caught in the spotlights and ironically shot to death by U.S. border guards. Rafael reunites with Mary (now "María del Consuelo"). He says Sterling was bad, but Frank Mendoza and his kind are still out there, ready to make money from the hunger and need of other Mexicans.

*Espaldas mojadas* was not commercially released in Mexico until 1955, allegedly because the Mexican government asked director Alejandro Galindo to make some changes and he refused. As noted above, the printed prologue tries to mitigate the film's anti-U.S. tone (and far worse indictments would appear in later films), but the image of the United States as a country with a fortified border and guards who shoot to kill with no warning isn't exactly favorable! At one point in the film, a U.S. official tells the Mexican consul that the United States has to protect itself against foreign "enemies" who would try to sneak in by pretending to be "wetbacks," and that's why the guards shoot at Mexicans swimming across the river! Hmm...Wouldn't it be easier if there was...a wall?

The exploitation and racism on view in *Espaldas mojadas* is largely personalised to Mr. Sterling and his railroad crew, but the deadly border-crossing scenes and Mary's statement about the mistreatment of Mexicans and *pochos* indicate a larger pattern of racial discrimination does exist in the USA. However, Mary also broaches a





sub-theme present in a number of Mexican movies, an economic rivalry between Chicanos and Mexican immigrants.

David Silva and Víctor Parra were two of Alejandro Galindo's favorite actors; Silva was typecast as the long-suffering "common man," and while Parra occasionally had sympathetic roles, he was often cast in villainous parts. Both are satisfactory here, although Parra's bleached white hair and his unusual accent make him come across as a very strange character (he could almost be considered a unique case, rather than emblematic of gringo exploitation of Mexicans). Óscar Pulido is, as usual, quite amusing and Martha Valdes is OK in her brief scenes.



An interesting facet of *Espaldas mojadas* is that back projection was used in several scenes. It's understandable that footage of a train going by—choking the Mexican workers in the foreground with dust as it does so—would be back-projected, but there are also several static dialogue scenes with a projected background. Oddly enough, this doesn't seem to be the function of a reduced budget, since the film has a number of substantial sets and is well-populated by extras: possibly Galindo just wanted better control by working in a studio whenever possible.

*Espaldas mojadas* was a successful and popular film when it was finally released, but did not immediately spur imitations. It was not until the 1970s that the *mojado* film genre got underway with a vengeance, lasting into the 1980s and beyond. Galindo himself made "Wetback" (*Mojados*) in the late '70s; it was not exactly a remake of *Espaldas mojadas* but does bear more than a passing resemblance to his seminal work in this area.



### Un camino/One

**Way\*** (Estudios Churubusco Azteca-Vogue Film, 1972)  
*Exec Prod:* Luis García de León;  
*Assoc Prod:* Toni di Carlo; *Dir:* Jorge Darnell\*\*;  
*Adapt:* Hugo Argüelles, Giovanni Fago, Marino Onorati, Jorge Darnell;  
*Story:* Jorge Darnell, Giovanni Fago; *Photo:* Erico



Menczer; *Music:* Riz Ortolani; *Asst Dir:* Winfield Sánchez, Filiberto Fiaschi; *Film Ed:* Alberto Gallitti, Reynaldo P. Portillo (Mexican version); *Art Dir:* José Rodríguez Granada, Gianni Polidori; *Camera Op:* Guadalupe García,

Roberto Brega; *Makeup:* Steffano Trani, Sara Mateos; *Adaptation/Dubbing:* Bruno Rey (Mexico), Giuseppe Rinaldi (Italy); *Union:* STPC

\*[this film has also been released on video under the title: *De Michoacán a Nueva York*; the Italian title was *La Faccia Violenta di New York* (The Violent Face of New York)]

\*\*[credited as George Darnell on the Italian and English-dubbed prints.]

**Cast:** Mimsy Farmer (*Milena*), Fernando Rey (*Mr. David*), Sergio Jiménez (*Sergio Fuente*), Luigi Pistilli (*Javier*), Tere Velázquez (*Rita*), Agustín Isunza (*Sergio's father, Mateo*), Carlos Nieto (*Pedro*), Memo Gil, León Singer (*Chevo*), Stella Inda (*Rosa*), Renato Pincirolí (*Vorgo*), Yolanda Rigel (*Dolores*), Adolfo Lastrelli (*Nico*), José Chávez Trowe (*man at meeting*), Jorge Zamora (*worker at bowling alley*), Gerardo Zepeda (*thug*), José Luis Avendaño (*worker*), Giuseppe D'Avanzo (*Price*), Juan G. Sánchez B. (*Valdez*), Alejandra Ramírez (*Jacinta*), Lorenzo Piani (*Bob*), Luigi A. Guerra (*Rick*)

**Dubbing for Mexican version:** Sergio Bustamante dubs Fernando Rey's dialogue; Bruno Rey dubs Luigi Pistilli; Rubén García dubs Renato Pincirolí; Mimsy Farmer is dubbed by Azucena Rodríguez

**Dubbing for Italian version:** Vittoria Febbi dubs Mimsy Farmer, Sergio Graziani dubs Fernando Rey, Ferruccio Amendola dubs Sergio Jiménez, Rita Savagnone dubs Teresa Velázquez

**Notes:** This was a Mexican-Italian co-production, shot in Mexico, Italy, and in New York City. Director Jorge Darnell was Argentine, and in addition to Mexicans and Italians, the cast includes U.S. actress Mimsy Farmer and Spanish actor Fernando Rey.

*Un camino* is a fairly well-made, grim version of the "exploited illegal alien" tale that would become very popular in Mexican cinema of the 1970s and '80s. Not as blatantly didactic as some of the later explorations of this topic, *Un camino* contains some nice, reasonably subtle touches in addition to its fair share of blatant (not to say crude) observations about U.S. society and its treatment of minorities in general and illegal aliens in particular.

Mexican fisherman Sergio leaves his home on the shores of Lake Janitzio and travels to New York City, where his friend Javier is living. At a meeting of the "Latin Brotherhood," Sergio runs into Rita, Javier's Puerto Rican girlfriend, and is reunited with his friend. Javier introduces Sergio to Mr. David, a "fixer" who arranges to get Sergio a job even though he doesn't have his "papers."



Sergio goes to work as a pin-setter in a bowling alley (this sequence nicely contrasts the frantic actions of the workers behind the scenes with the merriment of the middle-class bowlers), but gets into a fight with some of the patrons who harass him. Milena, a young woman who works for Mr. David, helps him escape when the police

arrive, and takes him to Rita's apartment where he can have his injuries patched up.

Sergio and Milena fall in love, although she is apparently Mr. David's mistress. Sergio gets a job in a warehouse, but the work is hard and the pay is bad, made even worse by the Latin Brotherhood which levies "dues" on the workers. When one man complains, he is beaten to death by thugs.



Milena tells Sergio that Mr. David is behind the Brotherhood, which pretends to fight for the rights of Latinos but is really corrupt. They break into Mr. David's office and steal some incriminating documents, proving that David is behind the smuggling of aliens. As they leave, Sergio kicks over a heater and sets the office on fire. He decides to go back to Mexico and turn the documents over to the police. Milena agrees to go with him. Meanwhile, Javier has stabbed a man at a party, and has to hide from the police as well as the man's friends. He goes to Mr. David for help; in exchange for resolving the problem, David gives Javier a knife and tells him to take care of Sergio. Javier confesses to Milena that David wants Sergio dead; he tells her that it would be better for Sergio if she didn't try to go with him to Mexico.

Instead of killing Sergio, Javier warns him to leave the city. Milena, with nowhere else to go, returns to Mr. David.

Sergio makes it to the border, swimming the river that separates the United States from Mexico. As he reaches Mexican soil, he is shot to death by one of Mr. David's henchmen.

*Un camino* combines aspects of the thriller genre with



the exploited-wetback theme, although Sergio's status as an illegal alien isn't absolutely crucial to the plot. He is exploited, he is constantly vulnerable to

being arrested and deported, but--unlike some later Mexican movies--this is not the central point of the film, and while Sergio's experiences are shared by others, their plight seems diminished in the metropolis of New York City, as opposed to "wetback" movies set in Texas or California where the protagonists are much more exposed and isolated.

There are, however, a number of political points which show up quite clearly. In a pre-credits sequence, a group of Mexicans trying to swim the Rio Grande are greeted with searchlights and machine guns, and some are killed. Later, in New York City, the police wade into the brawl at the bowling alley with their nightsticks, beating and arresting the patrons, many of whom look Hispanic (possibly because this was shot in Mexico City and there were the extras who were available). In addition to these violent demonstrations of U.S. authority (and antipathy to Hispanics) there is a clear suggestion that the government is also corrupt: Mr. David tells a "client" that he can call off the Immigration agents who are threatening his business, but only if the man hires two more illegals from David.

In one scene, a worker says "We don't exist without documents, we aren't alive or dead." He worked in California on a farm before coming to New York, and "we were treated even worse there than here." The Puerto Rican Rita complains: "There wasn't even enough [work] for the Puerto Ricans, now the Mexicans are coming to take the bread out of our mouths."

The United States (New York City in particular) is also clearly depicted as a morally decadent society. On his first day in the city, Sergio is taken by Javier to a sex shop where he watches a porno loop, and then to a bordello. Mr. David (who isn't a caricature but could possibly be construed as Jewish, given his name; furthermore, his "front" is renting costumes for films and TV shows, a surrogate for the Jewish-dominated garment industry?) is never shown having sex with Milena (she does sleep with Sergio): instead, he merely sits and watches as she undresses, makes up her face, and so on. He derives pleasure from the power he exerts over others. Milena says many people hate him, and he replies: "I know, but they need me to fix things for them, to get them work."

*Un camino* is an interesting, slick, and professional picture. The performances are good (even those which have to be judged with someone else's voice dubbing their dialogue) and the political aspects make the film more than just another thriller.



**"Wetbacks" (Mojados)\*** (Prods. Filmicas Agrasánchez—Películas Mexicanas, 1977) *Exec Prod:* David Agrasánchez; *Prod:* Rogelio Agrasánchez L.; *Dir:* Alejandro Galindo; *Scr Adapt:* Rafael García Travesí;





Story: Rogelio Agrasánchez; Photo: Lorenzo Contreras;  
Music: Gustavo Pimentel; Film Ed: Sergio Soto; Sound  
Ed: Ignacio Soto; Prod Asst: Jorge Moreno, Ernesto  
Fuentes; Union:  
STIC

\*the title on-screen is displayed this way.  
Promotional "paper" for the film lists the title in various formats, including *Wetbacks Mojados*, *Wetbacks-Mojados* and--on English-language posters--just *Wetbacks*.

**Cast:** Jorge Rivero (Juan García), Narciso Busquets (Peter Rivers aka Pedro Ríos), María Fernanda (Judy), Antonio de Hud (Alfonso Bringas), Eduardo Noriega (Richard Harris), Carlos Agosti (Alex Douglas), David Agrasánchez (Jacinto), Humberto Cabañas (Foley), Jim Abif [sic] (prosecutor), Deloy White (Donald Rogers), José Mercado, Antonio Moreno, David Lennon, Ralph Cowen, Carlos de la Fuentes, Marco Antonio Marín

**Notes:** 24 years after he made *Espaldas mojadas*, Alejandro Galindo returned to the topic of *indocumentados* with "*Wetbacks*" (*Mojados*). In 1953, Galindo's movie was shocking and original, but by the late 1970s the *mojado* film genre was in full swing, and his second project on the topic was competent but not particularly original or outstanding.

*Wetbacks* was an Agrasánchez production, written by Rafael García Travesi, which may explain the numerous similarities between this film and another Agrasánchez/García Travesi collaboration, *Ley fuga*. Both films begin with a mass killing of *indocumentados*; both feature a dogged investigator (a reporter in this one, a



Dept. of Justice agent in the second) who in one scene makes a point of saying he speaks English very well; in both films this investigator cooperates with a local district attorney; Eduardo Noriega appears in both movies as a corrupt policeman who argues with his criminal partner; Narciso Busquets has roles in both movies, although he's a villain in the first and a sympathetic character in the second; there's a scene in *Wetbacks* in which *indocumentados* are informed that they must work 12 hours a day but will be paid for only 8, no one can leave the farm, and any dissenters will be turned over to the La Migra--this scene is replicated in almost identical terms in *Ley fuga*. In both films one of the farm workers falls ill and dies, and in both films a group of



*indocumentados* is asphyxiated in a truck and their corpses are buried in a communal grave. Clearly, Rafael García Travesi believes in recycling!

The film opens with aerial shots of the border between the USA and Mexico. A narrator says a "human avalanche" pours in to the "promised land" in search of the "fable of the dollar." Peter Rivers collects money from Mexicans, including Juan García, who want to work in the USA. They swim across the river towards a truck which flashes its lights as a signal: "they are a bunch of helpless bastards," the driver says (in English). However, when the Border Patrol\* shows up, the truck leaves.

The police use a bullhorn: "Get back, you sons of bitches! Return to your country!" Then Chief Harris gives the signal, and the patrolmen open

fire with submachine guns, killing all of the *mojados* (or so he thinks). One officer (Douglas) refuses to shoot. Harris calls in the press, including "that Mexican bastard," Bringas. When Bringas arrives, Harris says we'll speak in Spanish for your sake, but Bringas replies "I was born in this country, I can speak English as well or better than you can." Harris

claims the *mojados* were smuggling marijuana and Bringas accuses him of lying. Harris calls him a "Mexican greaser" but backs down

when other reporters say they also think Harris and his men massacred the men for no reason. Bringas says they only need one witness to prove it. That witness is Juan, who survived the attack, although he was wounded. Harris knows there were 10 *mojados* in the group but only 9 bodies were found: he orders a manhunt for the missing man.

\*[Harris and his men are described as agents of "Immigration," i.e., INS, but they appear to be functioning most of the time as the Border Patrol, a force which actually pre-dated the creation of the INS; it was later incorporated into that agency but remained a distinct unit.]

Bringas goes on television and accuses Harris ("a high Immigration official") of murder and corruption. Harris, along with businessman Rogers, politician Benson, and Rivers (who is of Mexican descent and changed his name from "Pedro Ríos"), charges Mexicans \$200 each to cross the border: in two months the group has earned \$3 million this way. Harris demands his percentage or the operation will be shut down. Meanwhile, Juan eludes the search, at one point knocking out patrolman Foley and stealing his pistol. This enrages Harris, so Foley goes to visit Douglas



(the officer who refused to shoot the *mojados*) and suggests they turn state's evidence: otherwise "the Mafia" will have them killed. However, when they arrive at the prosecutor's office, a sniper kills Douglas, Foley having set him up.

Juan arrives at Judy's farm. [They are acquainted: in a flashback, Judy watches as Juan and others are deported. Juan is kicked and beaten by the guards. Judy criticises the Chicano onlookers who shout "They deserve it for taking the bread out of our children's mouths!" and "Go back to your country!"] She asks why a young, strong man like him couldn't find work in Mexico. When Juan replies "it doesn't pay enough," she says *mojados* all think they'll become millionaires but instead they're exploited. Judy's parents left Mexico with the same illusion, and wound up poor. Jacinto, a Border Patrolman Judy knows, arrives and says *if* (wink, wink) Judy should meet the fugitive *mojado*, she should advise him to flee to Mexico. After Jacinto leaves, Juan tells Judy he's not going--in his newspaper article, Bringas accused Harris of framing the dead *mojados* for drug- and arms-smuggling and Juan wants to clear their names. Juan and Judy meet Bringas and the local prosecutor, who say they can now arrest Harris but the leaders of the organisation will get away.

Juan agrees to go undercover. He joins a group of workers and is hired by Rivers to work on a farm. By siding with the employers against the other *mojados*, Juan earns the trust of Rivers and is promoted to foreman. He participates in



the smuggling of *indocumentados* and when one truckload of workers is killed by exhaust fumes, Juan arranges for them to be buried in a mass grave. He passes this information along to Judy, but Juan wants to convict Rogers, the leader. However, at a meeting with Rivers, Harris and Rogers, patrolman Foley recognises Juan as the missing *mojado*. A chase ensues and concludes with Juan shooting and wounding Harris; the others are arrested.

Judy is waiting for Juan on the bridge to Mexico. Jacinto (who was undercover in the Border Patrol on orders from the prosecutor) is driving Juan there, when snipers open fire on their car, killing them both.

[Earlier in the film, there are two scenes in which these snipers shoot at a police car. Presumably these are flash-forwards to the climax--since there's no reason for them to fire on a police car otherwise, and no mention of this is made at any point in the movie--but it is quite confusing.]

*Wetbacks* is not the only *mojado* film to implicate U.S. government workers, police, politicians, and business interests in racism, exploitation, and murder directed at Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, but it contains some interesting twists. It goes without saying that Harris, Rogers, etc., are racists, but their primary motivation is monetary: they don't want to stop illegal immigration, they

want to profit directly from it. That is, in addition to profiting indirectly, by exploiting *indocumentados* as underpaid workers. Rogers says cheap immigrant labour makes factories owned by "the organisation" in "Las Vegas" much more profitable. [This and several other statements and events indicate the Mafia is behind the whole scheme.] This begs the question: why does Harris order his men to massacre the group of *mojados* at the beginning of the movie, if these men were sent across by his partner Rivers?

And why does he declare that all *indocumentados* are dangerous smugglers, which would tend to increase public pressure to stop the immigration that he is



profiting from? In fact this ploy backfires, since Bringas goes on television and accuses Harris of being a corrupt, lying murderer, making boss Rogers explode in anger. [In the aftermath of the massacre, framing the dead men as drug smugglers is understandable, but this still doesn't explain the murders themselves.]

Corrupt Immigration/Border Patrol supervisor Harris is not an isolated case, either. Numerous other officers are shown executing the *indocumentados*, and in another sequence uniformed Immigration police are seen shoving, beating, and kicking Mexicans being deported. Only officers Douglas (who is murdered for his reluctance to shoot at the *mojados*) and Jacinto (exposed as an undercover agent at the end) are portrayed favourably.

The film does not paint a very positive image of Chicanos, either. Rogers' partner William Benson is the "new state senator," elected "thanks to the Chicano vote." Rogers says Benson and other like-minded politicians will prevent the U.S. government "in Washington" from passing laws to combat illegal immigration (this implies Benson is a U.S. senator, not a "state senator," but Rogers could mean "senator from this state"). "Peter Rivers," described by the prosecutor as a "renegade Chicano," has rejected his heritage thoroughly by Anglicising his name and exploiting members of his *raza*. As mentioned above, there is also a

scene in which a Chicano man and woman shout angrily at *indocumentados* being deported.

Judy berates them, saying "have you forgotten your parents came here just like they did?" Judy is a *chicana* (albeit an extremely blonde one) but her greatest desire is to move to Mexico, so her heart is in the right place.



*Wetbacks* is professionally made, with only a few clunky bits (the crowd of onlookers in the flashback "deportation" scene varies in number from shot to shot, for instance). The script is fairly complex, with two or three



separate threads--Juan, the villains, and Bringas--running parallel, but with considerable links between them (unlike a plot where two diverse stories converge only at the end). Most of the character development is reserved for Juan and Judy, although the interaction between Rivers, Roger, and Harris (and Harris and his men) is given a fair amount of screen time.

Performances are good overall. María Fernanda was a busty blonde actress who mostly played supporting roles, but she's fine here in a de-glamourised role. It's nice to see Jim Habif from *Chicano* (1975) back again, albeit in a smaller part, along with David "Hijo de Alma Grande" Agrasánchez, Carlos Agosti in a rare sympathetic role, a slim Humberto Cabañas, and familiar '70s gringo Deloy White (*The Bees*, *Fuego negro*, *Guyana: el crimen del siglo*, etc.). Technical aspects are mostly good, although the final aerial shot as the camera pulls up and away from the wrecked police car containing the bodies of Juan and Jacinto is extremely shaky and annoying.



### Las Braceras [The Female Migrant Workers]

(Cin. Grovas—Prods. Fílmicas Agrasánchez, 1980) *Exec Prod*: J. David Agrasánchez; *Prod*: Rogelio Agrasánchez;



*Dir*: Fernando Durán; *Scr*: Adolfo Torres Portillo; *Orig Idea*: Rogelio Agrasánchez; *Photo*: Agustín Lara; *Music*: Gustavo Pimentel; *Prod Mgr*: Ernesto Fuentes, René Agrasánchez; *Film Ed*: Enrique Murillo; *Sound*: Salvador Topete

**Cast**: Lyn May (La Venada), Maritza Olivares (Rosario Rodríguez), Roberto Montiel (Daniel

Fuentes), Patricia Rivera (Marcela Rodríguez), Quintín Bulnes (Jesse), Noé Murayama (Jesse's partner), Eduardo Noriega (Cándido), Carmelita González (La Gorda), Arturo Benavides (Pirri), César del Campo (newspaper editor), Ana Ma. de Panamá, Ernesto Solís (Maldonado), Arturo Salvador "El Regazón" (Regazón, bartender), Luis A. Elizondo, Miguel A. Domínguez "Cri-Shan," José Ma. Elizondo, Bulmaro Castillo, Inéz [sic] Murillo (Sra. Rodríguez), Ariel Leal, Rolando Cabrera, Alfredo Ibáñez, Manuel Ortiz

**Notes**: *Las braceras* is a fairly narrowly-construed *mojado* film, focusing primarily on the lawless antics of two Border Patrol agents persecuting a small group of people. There is evidence of more widespread corruption and exploitation of undocumented workers, but the plot chiefly revolves around the efforts of the two evil law enforcement officers trying to cover up their crimes.

The film begins with voiceover narration: "The people and events in this film are fictitious; the reality is even more cruel, more degrading, more inhuman. The illusion of the dollar takes our best men...[because] oil, silver and all the riches of Mexico [have been taken], man must cross the border in order not to die of hunger."

Cándido is involved in an attempt to smuggle people



into the USA from Mexico. The Border Patrol opens fire on their truck, wounding one man. Cándido helps him escape, and they go to a nightclub (on the U.S. side), where Cándido knows the featured dancer, La Venada. Cándido is trying to earn enough money to save his farm in Mexico. "La Migra" raids the club; one of the agents takes a bribe from the manager, but his partner breaks into La Venada's dressing room and catches Cándido there. They beat the Mexican badly, later claiming he was a marijuana smuggler who pulled a knife on them. As he's being taken away in an ambulance, Cándido asks La Venada to notify his daughters in Mexico.

[The film does not make a distinction between the Border Patrol and "La Migra" (agents of the INS); in fact, it's not totally clear which agency employs the two villains.]

Marcela and Rosario, Cándido's daughters, ask *coyote* Maldonado to smuggle them across the border so they can see their father. Marcela goes first, hidden in an automobile trunk (Maldonado pays off the border guard). She visits her father in the hospital just before he dies. La Venada tells Chicano journalist Daniel that Cándido was murdered: "Don't we have the same rights as you?" She agrees to testify against the Border Patrol agents. The two agents learn about this, and La Venada and Marcela go into hiding on a ranch.

Meanwhile, Rosario crosses into the USA (she has to swim, since Maldonado's crooked border guard isn't on duty), eluding a Border Patrolman and his dog. When she gets to the nightclub, she learns her sister is in hiding.

The next day, La Venada doesn't show for her deposition. Daniel refuses to give up: "Forget the deaths of my countrymen, while in this country the politicians don't stop talking about human rights?" Daniel is later demoted to writing sports by his editor, who says they can't accuse Immigration of crimes without proof.

Rosario is forced to work in the club as a waitress to earn her keep. She later slugs a drunken customer sent to her room by club owner La Gorda and runs away. Walking down the road, she's picked up by the two Border Patrol agents; one of them, Jesse, beats and rapes her. Daniel visits her in the hospital and helps her escape. Back at his apartment, he says his father died while crossing the border; Daniel was born in the USA and says there are good things and bad things about the country.

Meanwhile, La Venada and Marcela are working on a ranch. They earn \$1.00 per hour because they're illegals. The workers are treated harshly but can't go elsewhere without papers. When the foreman and ranch owner threaten to notify La Migra unless La Venada and Marcela are "nice" to them, the two women hit the rancher with a whiskey bottle and flee. They get jobs picking cotton (for \$1.00 an hour) at another farm, but narrowly escape an INS raid. Returning to town, they learn Rosario is in the

USA but has vanished. However, Daniel's newspaper article on the case eventually reunites Marcela and



Rosario; La Venada also says she'll testify now. However, when Daniel leaves with the two sisters, the two Border Patrol agents murder La Venada and another woman. Later, they catch Rosario alone at Daniel's apartment and kill her. The agents finally ambush Daniel's car and the reporter is killed; Marcela escapes.

Some time later, Marcela is working as a bargirl at the nightclub. The two Border Patrolmen break into her room (#13, aptly) and she shoots them both to death. The End!

The above synopsis doesn't closely follow the film's narrative structure, which intercuts between Marcela, Rosario, and the two Border Patrol agents. *Las braceras* is thus structured like an action thriller, with the villains trying to tie up the loose ends and prevent an investigation of their crime (Cándido's murder). Various vignettes about the poor treatment of *indocumentados* in the USA are sprinkled throughout, along with some standard *mojado* film tropes (helpful Chicano, investigative reporter, exploitative rancher, oppressive ranch foreman, swimming the Rio Grande, and so on).

The opening narration of *Las braceras* suggests that Mexican workers are just another "natural resource" which has been exploited by the *gringos*, but it doesn't really criticise the immigrants for leaving their homeland (as some *mojado* films do): Cándido tells La Venada that once he earns enough money to save his farm in Mexico (it's unclear why the farm needs "saving"), he'll leave the USA and never come back. [It's also not clear exactly what he's doing in the movie's opening scene—is he working as a *coyote* to help Mexicans get into the USA? Because it's established that he's not crossing for the first time, he's

already involved with La Venada—platonically, of course.]

Daniel's passing comment to the contrary, *Las braceras* is fairly negative in its portrayal of the United States. Border Patrol agents (1) open fire on a pair of truck drivers, (2) take a bribe from the nightclub manager, (3) rob and murder Cándido, (4) chase Rosario with a dog, (5) beat up the club manager and call him a "greaser," (5) beat and rape Rosario, (6) shoot La Venada and another woman, then (7) murder Daniel (whose father was killed crossing the border, although this isn't shown). To be fair, most of this mayhem is caused by the two specific Border Patrol villains, but there is some institutional racism on display. There is also a corrupt border guard who takes a bribe to allow Maldonado bring illegals to the USA, and a dialogue reference to "politicians" who ignore the murders and exploitation of *indocumentados*. We also see ill treatment, sexual harassment, and economic exploitation of farm workers, and the sexual exploitation of the employees of the nightclub.

So *Las braceras* isn't quite as ideologically outrageous as some of its contemporary films, but in general the USA is certainly not depicted as a welcoming place for *indocumentados*. On the other hand, as with a number of similar movies, *Las braceras* does largely depict a "United States" populated by Hispanics—while this is largely out of convenience (given the film's intended audience, the available performers, and where the film was shot), it's still slightly at odds with a strictly racist interpretation of U.S. immigration policies.

Many Agrasánchez films were shot in Texas and, while the budgets were probably not high, the general production values are satisfactory. Competent professional actors and technicians were utilised and while *Las braceras* isn't glossy, it's not crude or amateurish.



### Ley fuga\* [Law of Flight] (Prods. Filmicas

Agrasánchez, 1983)

Exec Prod: J. David

Agrasánchez; Prod:

Rogelio

Agrasánchez; Dir:

Alfredo B.

Crevenna; Scr:

Rafael García

Travesí; Orig. Idea:

Rogelio

Agrasánchez; Photo:

Antonio Ruiz;

Music: Gustavo

Pimentel; Prod Mgr:

Jorge Moreno, Julio

César Agrasánchez;

Film Ed: Federico

Landeros; Sound Ed: Antonio López; Sound Engin:

Ricardo Saldivar; Union: STIC

\*aka *Braceras y mojados* and *Cementerio de mojados*; also released as *Maten al gringo*





**Cast:** Joaquín Cordero (*Felipe Gómez*), Maritza Olivares (*Rosenda*), Miguel Ángel Rodríguez (*Antonio Macías*), Cecilia Camacho (*Lupe*), Guillermo Herrera (*Manuel Gómez*), Isaura Espinoza (*Hermelinda*), Noé Murayama (*Jesús Bernal*), Miltón Rodríguez [sic] (*John Mallory*), Narciso Busquets (*Marcelo*), Arturo Benavides (*Pedro Medina*), Eduardo Noriega (*Sheriff Bill Duncan*), Julio César Agrasánchez, Cristian Crishan (*Reynaldo Rojas*), Lili Soto, José Luis Said, Alfredo Ibáñez, Rubén López García, Marcos Rodríguez, Sergio Lerma, Alfredo B. Crevenna (*District Attorney Peterson*)

**Notes:** this film shouldn't be confused with *Las bracerías* (1980), although both films were made by Prods. Agrasánchez, both feature Maritza Olivares (whose character is raped in both movies), Noé Murayama, and Eduardo Noriega, and both deal with exploitation and murder of *indocumentados*.

There are a striking number of similarities between the script for this film and that of 1977's *Wetbacks* (*Mojados*). Both films were written by Rafael García Travesí, who apparently felt a good idea (or ten) was worth repeating.

*Bracerías y mojados* is an odd title, since it uses different terms (and genders) for basically the same thing (undocumented immigrants). *Ley fuga* is also inappropriate, since the term usually means a prisoner is deliberately released and then "shot while trying to escape," and this situation never occurs in the film. *Maten al gringo*, a re-release title, makes even less sense. Perhaps the most appropriate title (cited in "Diccionario del cine mexicano 1970-2000") is *Cementerio de mojados*, but I have no evidence that the film was actually released under this title.



As the film opens, a group of *mojados* swim across the river and are loaded into a waiting truck. However, when the vehicle arrives at Mallory's ranch, all of the passengers have suffocated. Their

corpses are buried in a mass grave as the local sheriff and his deputies watch.

Department of Justice agent Antonio meets District Attorney Peterson: he's investigating crimes against Mexican immigrants, including those committed by *cholos*. Antonio travels to Mexico and poses as someone who wants to cross the border. Jesús agrees to help: he charges \$300 for the trip, but says Antonio will receive \$4 per hour and good food at the ranch where he'll be working. Among the others in the group are Rosenda, her friend Hermelinda, Lupe (who confesses to Hermelinda that she's pregnant), and Felipe and his brother Manuel (who is attracted to Rosenda).

When Antonio and the others arrive in the USA, they're assaulted by *cholos* who rob them and kill one girl.

The police show up and shoot all the robbers, but let the *indocumentados* go when Jesús identifies himself as Mallory's foreman. On the ranch, the newly arrived workers are told they'll only be paid \$1 per hour, must work 7 days per week picking oranges, and can't leave the ranch. To top it all off, they're given poor food and are assigned to live in filthy barracks. Anyone who complains will be turned over to La Migra, Mallory says.

Later, Sheriff Duncan warns Mallory that the Department of Justice is investigating the situation, so Mallory needs to improve his workers'



conditions, pay them the agreed sums, allow them to leave the ranch on their day off, and so forth. Mallory scoffs, saying the investigation is "pure theatre" and U.S. agriculture would collapse if *indocumentados* are kept out. However, he gives in to Duncan's demands. Some time later, Mallory and Duncan meet again and the rancher complains once more, saying he's losing money and "you're fool to think mistreating *indocumentados* is important to our country." Duncan calls him a "dumb bastard" and says an investigation might uncover the dead bodies, landing them both in prison.

The workers are suspicious of the sudden change in their treatment. In town, Antonio tells D.A. Peterson that Mallory must be hiding something very bad. Manuel and Rosenda fall in love (there is a vague hint that Felipe and Hermelinda are also attracted to each



other). Lupe dies of complications with her pregnancy. Marcelo, the most humane of Mallory's employees, is disgusted. He tells Antonio he's going to quit, but first shows him the mass grave of *indocumentados*. "This isn't murder, it's genocide," Antonio says. Marcelo and Antonio go to Patterson with the evidence.

Jesús, with Pedro's assistance, knocks out Rosenda and rapes her. Felipe and Manuel find out and attack Jesús and Pedro. Manuel seizes a pistol from Jesús and shoots him to death. He and Felipe

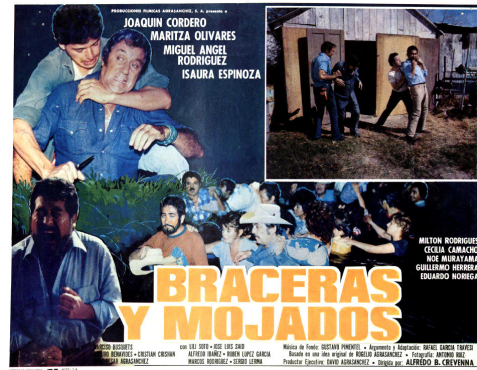


flee towards the border. Manuel is bitten by a snake and dies, but Felipe is determined to take his body back to Mexico. Mallory, Duncan and their henchman Miller catch up to Felipe at the river and shoot him to death. When Miller says "Look at him, he looks like Christ

during Holy Week in Mexico,” Mallory shoots Felipe’s hands. Antonio and another officer arrive and kill Mallory and Miller. Duncan is arrested.

*Ley fuga* was shot in Brownsville, Texas in December 1983. The opening sequence of *indocumentados* dying in a closed vehicle was based on numerous, tragic real-life

cases. Rafael García Travesí had previously used it in *Wetbacks* (*Mojados*) (1977), and it was repeated in a number of *mojado* films,



including *El carro de la muerte* (1984) and *El vagón de la muerte* (1987). This is much more believable than having immigrants gunned down by border guards or the Klan as soon as they cross the river, and the script goes a step further by explaining that the usual truck broke down, so the smugglers had to rent a smaller U-Haul vehicle which was subsequently over-crowded. The driver of the truck hears the passengers banging from inside the back, but refuse to stop, complaining that “*pinches mojados*” take work away from Chicanos, so who cares if they suffer some discomfort on the ride.

Oddly, while D.A. Peterson describes the *cholos* as *indocumentados* who are “desperate because they can’t find work [and] turn to crime,” the *cholos* themselves call Antonio and his group “*pinches mojados*” who “shouldn’t be here.”

The film’s depiction of the mistreatment of *indocumentados* also seems realistic: the shabby sleeping area is bad enough, but Antonio literally gags when he goes into the filthy, non-functioning toilet area! Bad food, poor pay, and demanding supervisors are also thrown in as a bonus.

*Ley fuga* does a good job personalising a number of characters (curiously, top-billed Joaquín Cordero probably has less character development than most of the others), starting with Antonio, who proudly makes it clear to District Attorney Peterson that he speaks English (Peterson insists they speak Spanish, claiming he doesn’t get much chance to practice that language). Hermelinda says she’s a single mother whose child is still in Mexico, Lupe wants her baby to be born in the USA, Rosenda and Manuel begin a relationship (and even go to a hotel together on their day off). Jesús is



a lecherous villain (he spies on the women workers as they shower, even before he rapes Rosenda), but his relationship with Pedro is also bit more developed than usual for this type of movie, and while Marcelo doesn’t have a lot to do, he’s portrayed as a decent fellow overall. Mallory is mostly all bad, but it’s amusing to see him sparring with Sheriff Duncan, who’s corrupt but pragmatic and cautious.

The performances are all quite effective. Alfredo B. Crevenna has one of his larger acting roles (he made cameos in a number of the movies he directed), speaking precise, cultured English and decent Spanish.



## MEXICANS VS. THE KKK & THE NAZIS

### Las pobres ilegales [The Poor Illegal Immigrant Women]

(Prods. Del Rey--Prods. Jaen, 1979)  
 Prod: Arnulfo Delgado; Dir: Alberto Mariscal; Scr: José Loza;  
 Photo: Fernando Alvarez Colín;  
 Music: Ernesto Cortázar [Jr.];  
 Assoc Prod: Alberto Mariscal; Prod Mgr: Luis Quintanilla R.;  
 Asst Dir:



Damián Acosta; Film Ed: Angel Camacho; Camera Op: Alberto Arellano; Makeup: Graciela Muñoz, Lucrecia Muñoz; Sound Engin: Abel Flores; Re-rec: Salvador Topete; Union: STIC

**Cast:** Yolanda del Río (*Juanita*), Mario Almadá (*Gumaro*), Carmen Salinas (*Petra*), Tito Junco (*el patrón*), Queta Jiménez "La Prieta Linda" (*La Prieta*), Emilio Gálvez, Alfredo Arroyo, Valentina Leyva, Malena Reyes, Lupita Ortiz (*Rosita*), Lilián González (*Lilián*), Las Hermanas Huerta (*singers*), Los Humildes (*bar band*), Antonio Raxel (*Petra's client*), Simón López (*Simón?*), Francisco Tostado (*pollero*), Carlos Jaen (*Carlos?*), Olivia Royval, Patricia Royval, Berta Plascencia, Mary de León, Tito Novaro (*INS agent*)

**Notes:** this is an interesting but rather bizarre and outrageous film, with a very strange final 10 minutes or so and a frustratingly open ending. While cheaply made, the film is professionally put together, with locations in Mazatlán, Tijuana, and in the state of California. The acting isn't so good, once you get past the real pros in the cast (Almadá and Salinas): del Río is a good singer but an actress of limited range, Tito Junco's dialogue was post-



dubbed, which ruins his performance, and the supporting players range from adequate to poor.

*Las pobres ilegales* doesn't really address the issue of illegal immigrants, certainly not to the extent that other Mexican movies of the era do. There are some familiar scenes (crossing the border, montages of field work), but del Río's character leaves Mexico to escape a lustful stepfather, not poverty. The Mexican workers (all women, oddly enough) work in an environment protected from "la



Migra," with a friendly Mexican foreman, decent pay (presumably), good food, and a nice dorm to live in. Mario Almada's character, making a speech on the eve of September 16 (the Mexican equivalent of the 4th of July), says "bless this land which feeds us"--he also says "God bless Mexico," and wishes for the day when there will be plentiful work there so families will not be broken up by those who emigrate in search of jobs. But for the most part the U.S.A. gets off fairly easy this time. There is the threat of the Immigrant and Naturalization Service, of course, and the little matter of a sadistic, murderous, ex-Nazi ranch owner, but we're getting ahead of the story.

One curious point: despite the plethora of musical talent in the cast, no songs are heard until more than 30 minutes have elapsed. After that, del Río gets to sing a couple of numbers, and Las Hermanas Huerta and Los Humildes do one each.

Juanita lives in Mazatlán with her mother, two younger sisters, and her stepfather. The stepfather is constantly making advances at Juanita, but her mother won't acknowledge this (it's clear she knows, but has to stay with her husband in order to provide for her younger children). Juanita and her friend Petra, the village prostitute, set out for the United States. First stop, Tijuana.

In Tijuana, Petra hooks up with a wealthy *gringo* and earns enough money to pay the *pollero* who will take them across the border. After crawling through a hole in the border fence, the women are loaded into a secret compartment in a pickup truck and driven into California. However, when the truck stops, several carloads of INS agents (including Tito Novaro in a stylish pink leisure suit) appear and arrest everyone, except Petra and Juanita, who flee (but are separated).

Juanita stumbles onto a ranch where a crew of illegal workers (all women, as noted earlier) are working in the orchards. The foreman Gumaro says the *patrón* is decent and la Migra never comes there. The other workers are friendly, and the work is hard but bearable. The women tell Juanita the plum job is working as the housekeeper for the *patrón*. Rosita, a coquettish young woman, is chosen for the position.

However, the audience knows something the workers do not: in a flashback, we see a younger version of the boss (Tito Junco, stuffed into a German army uniform with a little helmet perched on his head) whipping a man in a barn. An abused woman seizes a pitchfork and stabs the Nazi right in the family jewels. Snapping back to the present, the *patrón* beats up his housekeeper, which leads to the vacancy Rosita fills (the *patrón* tells Gumaro the former worker stole money and ran off). Rosita soon runs afoul of the *patrón*'s lusts. He ties her up and tortures her in his game room (adorned with Nazi flags and photos of Hitler), finally strangling her with a belt.

Meanwhile, Juanita and Gumaro go to town and run into Petra, who is going to marry a friend of one of the *polleros* who helped them enter the USA. Juanita gets the job replacing Rosita, who "ran off." The *patrón* is outwardly kind and makes no real demands on her. Juanita sneaks out to attend the party on the night of 15 September. Petra is also there. After a lot of singing and drinking, Juanita heads back for the main house. In the woods, she finds Rosita's dead body.

The INS is tipped off and arrests all the workers, except Gumaro (apparently a legal resident) and Juanita (who is not at the camp). Juanita tells Gumaro what she



saw in the woods, although she admits she had been drinking. They search and eventually find Rosita's corpse in a shallow grave. The *patrón* appears--Juanita flees, but Gumaro is knocked out. The *patrón* turns Gumaro over to the police. Over 30 corpses are unearthed on the ranch, and several personal items (Gumaro's neck scarf and belt, used to murder Rosita) are found in one of the graves.

Meanwhile, Juanita and some other women have been picked up by the INS and deported. Back in Mazatlán, one of Juanita's younger sisters says her stepfather has been molesting her. Juanita takes a machete and buries it in the man's skull. Her former boyfriend helps her escape.

Returning to Tijuana, she reunites with Petra. They are shocked to read newspaper accounts of Gumaro's plight. As the film ends, Juanita crosses the border illegally once more in an attempt to help him.

*Las pobres ilegales* takes part of its plot from the real-life story of Juan Corona, a Mexican-American arrested in 1971 for multiple murders (although in the film the equivalent character is framed). Making *el patrón* a former Nazi dilutes the anti-*gringo* impact significantly (although it also means Tito Junco's dialogue is dubbed in a ridiculous phony German accent), but the end result for the victims (the murdered women and Gumaro) is the same: working in the USA was not a good idea.



## El muro de la tortilla [The Tortilla Wall]



(Acuario Films, 1980) Prod: Raúl Ramírez; Dir: Alfredo B. Crevenna; Scr: Raúl Ramírez, Alfredo B. Crevenna; Story: Raúl Ramírez; Photo: León Sánchez; Prod

Mgr: Manolo Fregoso; Film Ed: Raúl Portillo; Sound Ed: Sigfrido García; Re-rec: Jesús González Ganet [sic]; Dubbing & FX: René Ruiz Cerón; Makeup: Carmen Olivarez; Union: Técnicos y Manuales

**Cast:** Raúl Ramírez (*Emeterio*), Rosenda Bernal (*Lupita*), Juan Gallardo (*Calixto*), Marcela Daviland (*Jenny*), Raúl Marcello [sic] (*Yuca*), Roberto Cañedo (*don Benito*), Rigoberto Alfaro (*singer*), Eduardo Alcaraz (*crooked lawyer*), Federico Falcón (*pollero*), Marcelo Villamil (*John Patterson*), Manolo Fregoso, Carlos González (? *Christopher*), Fidel Garriga, José Luis Rivero, César Gómez, Alfonso Pérez Ávalos, Sixto Hinojosa, Roberto García

**Notes:** for those who think the current talk about "building a wall" on the Mexican-U.S. border is a new thing, *El muro de la tortilla* proves otherwise. The opening scene of the film depicts the erection of a chain-link fence between the two countries, as the Border Patrol observes from one side and Mexicans look on from the other. Later, a song entitled "El muro de la tortilla" is sung, a radio commentator uses the term, and the chain-link fence appears prominently in several other scenes, including the tragic climax.



*El muro de la tortilla* has a curious structure: the first half of the film is basically a buddy comedy (aside from

one brief scene in which the Ku Klux Klan murders a Mexican who has crossed the border). Emeterio and Calixto have various adventures and brawls, drink, sleep with whores, enter the USA and are deported, then (more or less accidentally) cross the border again. At this point, the plot proper begins, although there is still a fair amount of comic relief (and the second half of the picture is loaded with songs as well) until the unexpected, nihilistic conclusion.

Raúl Ramírez began acting in the 1950s and started producing his own films in the 1970s. In the first phase of his producing career, Ramírez made most of his movies in Guatemala, then relocated to the Texas border area, and finally wound up back in Mexico City for the final stretch. Alfredo B. Crevenna was the house director for most "Acuario Films" productions until the Mexico City era, when Ramírez took over these chores in addition to producing, writing, and starring in his pictures (he had directed the occasional film before this time, I suppose when Crevenna was on vacation!). The majority of Ramírez's films featured his wife, Marcella Daviland, and their son, Raúl Marcelo Ramírez (billed as "Raúl Marcelo").

Ramírez had previously made *Ilegales y mojados* (1978), which begins as a typical movie about *indocumentados* attacked by the Ku Klux Klan, but then switches gears and becomes a crime film about drug smuggling. Ramírez returned to the topic in 1985's *Los malditos polleros*, which once again confounds expectations: ruthless *polleros* (smugglers) abandon Ramírez, his wife and two sons, and some other *indocumentados* in the desert, and all except Ramírez perish. The rest of the film depicts his efforts to find the *polleros* and avenge his family, rather than the expected story about the travails of Mexican immigrants in the USA.

Waiting in line at the U.S. embassy in Mexico City to apply for their green cards, Emeterio, Calixto, and Emeterio's cousin Leandro are tricked by a crooked lawyer into allowing him to "fix" their papers.

When they arrive at the border, they learn their documents are false. Instead, they hire a *pollero* to take them to the USA; they cross successfully, but are

robbed by the *pollero* and his men. A short time later, the 3 *indocumentados* are spotted by the Ku Klux Klan, who kill Leandro. Emeterio and Calixto escape and are hired to work on a ranch. The pay and conditions aren't bad, but the Chicano foreman is hostile, saying he's a citizen and "I pay my taxes," but "*mexicanos muertos de hambre*" come to the USA to take jobs from Americans. He calls Emeterio a "Mexican son of a bitch" and they get in a fight. Emeterio and Calixto are later arrested and deported.

Back in Mexico, they find the *pollero* who robbed them and get in another brawl. Fleeing from the *pollero* and the





police, they scale the chain-link fence on the border and wind up in the USA again. They're hired on a ranch owned by Jenny, a wealthy *gringa* widow (her husband was killed in Vietnam). Jenny likes everything about



Mexico, and is attracted to Emeterio. Meanwhile, Calixto falls in love with (and eventually marries) *chicana* Lupita, who runs a restaurant with her father don Benito (in a wheelchair as a result of his Vietnam service). Jenny asks

her lawyer (and uncle), John Patterson, to arrange for Emeterio to become legalised. Patterson objects: "These people are bad. They could attack you, they could rob you. If we let in the rubbish from other countries..." Jenny insists, and he finally agrees to process the papers. When Emeterio shows up to sign the documents, he spots a tattoo on Patterson's hand--Patterson is one of the Klansman who killed Emeterio's cousin Leandro. He follows Patterson and witnesses a KKK meeting: two young captured *indocumentados* are shot by the hooded racists.

Emeterio later tricks Patterson into accompanying him to the Klan's hideout. He forces the lawyer to don Klan robes, then ties him to a wooden cross. "I have real American blood," Patterson says, "I [belong to] the white race, a race that you and the worthless blacks try to degrade...my



brotherhood has its own laws." "And who gave you the power to kill human beings just because they're another colour," Emeterio asks rhetorically, before dousing Patterson with gasoline and setting him on fire. This is

witnessed by another Klansman. Emeterio tells Jenny and she drives him to the border, but he is shot by the KKK as he reaches the border fence: Jenny runs to his side and is also killed.

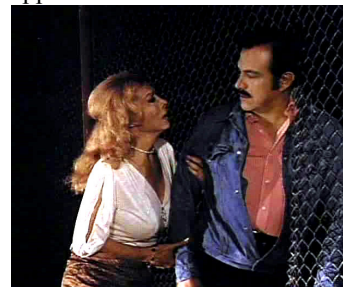
Aside from the whole "KKK murdering people" thing, *El muro de la tortilla* doesn't necessarily paint a highly negative picture of the USA. In one scene, another *indocumentado*, reacting to a radio report blaming the death of Emeterio's cousin on *polleros*, says "Our own countrymen screw us. The *gringos* screw us. We're screwed." In the context of the movie, there is enough blame to go around: Emeterio and his friends are swindled by the Mexican lawyer, robbed by the Mexican *pollero*, insulted by the Chicano ranch foreman, and then Emeterio is murdered by the *gringo* Klansmen. On the other hand, Emeterio and Calixto find decent jobs (both times), receive fair pay, and are given decent accommodations on the first ranch (we don't see where they live on Jenny's ranch). The "bad Chicano" character (on the first ranch) is offset by

Lupita, a "good Chicana," and Jenny is a typical Mexican cinema *gringa*, blonde and enamoured of all things Mexican, especially Mexican men. There is even a scene in which Emeterio and Calixto go on a buying spree after receiving their first pay, so the USA doesn't seem like such a bad place (aside from the *mojado*-murdering KKK, that is).

*El muro de la tortilla* is reasonably well-produced, probably shot entirely on location. The music score is standard "canned" music,



but at least it's moderately appropriate for the scenes it accompanies. Raúl Ramírez and Juan Gallardo make a good team, Raúl Marcelo has a relatively straight role for once, and it's interesting to see Marcelo Villamil as a villain. Villamil appeared in numerous Mexican movies from the late 1960s



until the mid-1980s (as an extra, in bit parts, and in larger supporting roles), often cast as *gringos*, other foreigners, or in "authority" roles (doctors, lawyers, reporters, businessmen, political figures, and so

on). Marcella Daviland plays her standard mature-but-sexy blonde, mangling Emeterio's name every time she says it, but showing considerable determination when facing down Patterson's opposition to legalising Emeterio's status. Oddly enough, director Crevenna didn't play his usual cameo role this time.

Tonally all over the place, *El muro de la tortilla* is a bit atypical for a *mojado* film of this era, but it's still generally entertaining and the conclusion is still rather shocking.

Final note: this film isn't as easy to find as some of Ramírez's pictures. I have a worn-out VHS pre-record (with tracking issues and muffled sound) on the "Cardinal" label that I used to re-view the film and supplement my notes from my original screening in the early 1980s. Fortunately, I recently obtained a nice-quality DVD version on the DistriMax label, which (wonder of wonders) has optional English sub-titles.



**Supervivencia [Survival]** (Goyri Asociados S.A.-- Video Prods. de Tijuana, ©1992) *Exec Prod:* Sergio Goyri; *Prod:* Sergio Goyri, Delfino López, Fina Coronado; *Dir:* Sergio Goyri; *Scr:* Ignacio Honorato Magaloni (uncredited); *Photo:* Tim Ross, Jorge López; *Music:* Kiko Campos; *Prod Mgr:* Jesús Bretón M.; *Asst Dir:* Jorge Arvizu, Lilia Soto; *Film Ed:* Enrique Murillo; *Camera Op:*

Jorge López; *Sound Op*: Ever Jiménez; *Re-rec*: Ricardo Saldivar; *Stunt Coord*: Gabriel Godínez; *Union*: STIC



**Cast:** Sergio Goyri (*El Moro*), Alfonso Zayas (*Miguel*), Telly Filippini (*Telly Sanders*), Raúl Araiza Jr. (*Raúl*), Armando Araiza (*Fernando*), Sebastián Ligarde (*McCoy*), Sergio Sánchez (*gringo friend of McCoy*), Arturo Martínez Jr. (*Frank Wilson*), Pathy [sic] Thomas (? *pregnant woman*), Gabriel Godínez "Tarzán" (*Poncho*), Fina Coronado (? *Telly's producer?*), Brenda Careaga (*Raúl's girlfriend*), Ventura Silva, Francisco Javier López, Raúl Leobardo Cornejo, Luis José Rodríguez, El Brawn, Pancho Tiscareño, Héctor Jiménez, César Jiménez, Daniel Calderón, Carlos Zárate, Carlos Zárate Jr., Raúl Zárate, Frank A. Rentería, Jorge Alberto Higuera, Vicente Hueso, Javier Montaña, Cacharpas Bill [Rubén Hernández] (*El Moro's employer*), José Luis y Los Amos del Norte (*band*)

**Notes:** despite being co-produced by "Video Producciones de Tijuana," and contrary to some reference sources, *Supervivencia* was not a direct-to-video film, since promotional materials (alright, one lobby card) for a theatrical release exist (this also applies to *Arma secreta*, another Goyri-directed film made in 1992).

Mexican-American television reporter Telly decides to go undercover as an *indocumentado*, using *polleros* Miguel and Fernando as her contacts. Meanwhile, wealthy U.S. rancher McCoy and his friends "hunt" Mexican immigrants in the desert, killing them



with high-powered rifles. Fernando's friend Raúl, at loose ends in his life, argues with his older brother El Moro, and leaves home. He will cross the border with Telly and others on Fernando's next trip to the USA, serving as her cameraman.

McCoy and his henchmen abduct *pollero* Poncho and another man, Fernando's contacts in the USA: they learn when the next group of *indocumentados* will be brought across the border. McCoy tells his henchman Frank that he's a member of the Ku Klux Klan, the "chosen ones to save the country from decadence, to revitalise the white

race." Frank is ordered to shoot Poncho's partner to prove his reliability, and he does.

Fernando and his group reach the U.S. border, represented by a wooden sign in the middle of an empty field. (What, no wall?!) They have to walk from here. McCoy forces Poncho to guide him and his friends to the meeting point. Some of the



*indocumentados* (including a pregnant woman) and Poncho are killed, and Telly is captured. She tells McCoy he'll pay for his crimes; when he says "you're not Mexican," she tells him she is (her father is an Anglo but her mother was Mexican). McCoy says Frank will have to kill Telly, but he protests that she's white: "on the outside" only, McCoy says. However, he locks Telly, Raúl and the other surviving *indocumentados* in a barn to until their "time."

Fernando, wounded and left for dead, goes back to Miguel's house in Mexico. El Moro and Miguel, learning what has transpired, cross into the USA to save Raúl and the others, discovering the bodies of the murder victims. They reach McCoy's ranch at night where a KKK meeting is in progress. McCoy makes a long speech to the other members: he talks about the history of the Klan, and says "Now it isn't the Jews who are threatening white supremacy. No, no, the enemy is the Latin Americans. The only thing they have brought to this country is corruption and disorder. Now the Latin Americans dare to run for public office...aided by a great mass of illegal invaders. Are we going to permit this degenerate race to take the power that God put in white hands? Long live white supremacy!"

McCoy shoots two of the captives, then Raúl and Telly are brought out and tied to wooden crosses. Before McCoy can kill them, El Moro and Miguel attack, blowing up a truck and shooting various Klansmen. McCoy and El Moro fight, and the Klan leader is pushed into a flaming cross--his robe catches fire and he dies. Miguel and El Moro free Telly and Raúl as the police arrive. *Supervivencia* concludes with a printed quote from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.: "We must feel unsatisfied until our Third World brother stops being the victim of imperialist exploitation and emerges from the long night of poverty, illiteracy and illness..."



*Supervivencia* spends about half of its running time on the villains, chiefly racist rancher McCoy. McCoy discusses his ideology in multiple scenes. In one, he tells his accountant that the USA's taxes are too high because the government spends money on foreign aid and welfare



for the "*pinches negros y los Chicanos*." Later, McCoy criticises (and then kills) a man who brought his Klan hood to the *indocumentado* hunt, saying they have to stay undercover until the moment is right. He tells Frank that



white supremacists have many friends, including governors and "even presidential candidates." McCoy even gets one brief and bizarre scene in which he chews out his young son (in

English) for getting bad grades in school!

On the other side, there is only one philosophical discussion about discrimination and the ill-treatment of Mexican immigrants, and it is a confused one, between Telly and her producer. The producer tries to draw parallels between the Spaniards who oppressed the indigenous people during the Conquest and contemporary racial discrimination and economic exploitation of *indocumentados*. Telly doesn't agree, saying "it's the fault of the system, not [*gringos*]." She says Mexico can build itself up, become better-educated and more efficient and compete with the USA, but the producer replies: "Compete against the ones who make all the rules? Who control the capital? We can't win."



There is very little discussion about the motivation of the Mexicans who cross the border with Telly. Raúl is dissatisfied with his life and angry at El Moro, but it's not even clear he intends to spend much time in the USA (Miguel tells El Moro that Fernando travels back and forth frequently but doesn't want to live there). Of the other members of the group, only one pregnant woman is given any real attention, and that's mostly so her subsequent death is seen as even more of an atrocity.

*Supervivencia* was shot in and around Tijuana (McCoy's ranch in real life was apparently owned by former boxer Raúl Zárate and his family). Production values are fine, and Goyri's direction is solid and professional. The performances are also good. Sebastián Ligarde was cast more than once as psycho killers and fanatics, and is fine here; Alfonso Zayas plays his role more or less straight. Everyone else is satisfactory.



**Sentenciado [Sentenced]** (Prods. Potosí—Central Video de Noroeste—Mexcinema Video Corp., ©1993) *Assoc Prod:* Raymundo Mesa, Martha Mesa, Arturo Martínez; *Dir:* Román Hernández; *Scr:* Arq. Arturo Martínez Sánchez; *Photo:* Salvador Zerecero; *Prod Mgr:* Juan Carlos Sánchez; *Co-Dir:* Rubén Gonzáles; *Film Ed:*

Armando Esparragoza, José Luis Chávez; *Sound Ed:* Leonel Durán; *Makeup:* Guadalupe Robledo

**Cast:** Jorge Luke (*Cmdte. Simón Estévez*), Arturo Martínez hijo (*Fernando Arias*), Agustín Bernal (*Sheriff*), Claudia Bringas (*Rebeca Lowe*), Fernando Sáenz (*Steve Montes*), Candelaria Domínguez (*Nazi 1\**), Mario Arévalo (*Rodríguez*), Manuel Benítez (*Beto*), Sergio Murguía (*police 1*), Jorge de Marín (*police 2*), Rafael Horta (*campesino 1*), Flavio Peniche (*police 3*), Arturo Ostos (*Nazi 2*), José Luis Luna (*campesino 2*), Paco Pharres (*federal judge*), Carlo Punte (*illegal 1*), Ramiro Wall (*guard*), Octavo Acosta (*prison doctor*), Alejandro Raffel (*immigration agent*), Roque Casanova (*rector*), Yesenia Lavín (*Nazi 4*), Carlos Meza (*Nazi 3*), Jaime Magallanes, Zaida Castellón (*fat woman*), Hugo Guerra (*campesino 3*), Jesús Gómez (*pollero*)

\*the end credit lists this as "*voluntario*" which means "volunteer," and there is a scene towards the end where the Nazi leader calls for volunteers, so I'm assuming this is what the credits are referring to.

**Notes:** this *videohome* isn't terrible, but it isn't really good, either. The blatant political commentary is the only reason to watch it, and this content isn't really unique or unusual. One interesting dialogue exchange: Fernando says violence was committed by "Racists," and Rebeca replies "The Klan, of course." Fernando corrects her: "No, Nazis." I don't know if this necessarily marks a tipping point where traditional racist icon the KKK becomes passé and Nazis (i.e., white supremacists) move into the position of primary villain (since there were certainly Nazi racists in Mexican cinema before this film and



probably Klansmen in Mexican cinema afterwards), but this dialogue makes a specific point of identifying the Nazis as a "new" menace to Mexicans.

As the film begins, prisoner Fernando is marched from his jail cell to a room where he's strapped to a table and given a lethal injection. In flashback, we are introduced to Fernando and Steve, who hire Mexican workers on their U.S. ranch. One of the latest group is Simón, later revealed to be an undercover Mexican policeman. Simón says his friend was in another truck which drove off to the north, and Fernando is puzzled because he knew of no such "delivery" of workers.

[Fernando and Steve specifically indicate their workers are legal but this is later contradicted—it's very confusing—by the identification of Beto and another man as *polleros* (people who bring undocumented immigrants across the border).]

[I wonder if Fernando and Steve are supposed to be a gay couple? There is no hint of this in the film, but they

apparently live together. Not that's there anything wrong with that.]

Fernando decides investigate a nearby abandoned textile factory, and Simón conceals himself in Fernando's truck to go along. Fernando and Simón see two uniformed policemen torturing several Mexican men. Fernando goes home to tell Steve. In an amusing bit, Simón is left behind (because Fernando is unaware of his presence) and has to walk back to Fernando's ranch.



[This sequence is harmed by some awkward and obvious post-dubbed sound. Fernando and Simón's footsteps as they approach the ruins of the factory are ridiculously loud and over-emphasized. The rest of the film's sound isn't going to win any awards, either. At a later point the "natural" sound—including dialogue and sound effects—drops out and is replaced by canned music for a rather long time.]

Fernando and Steve go to the local sheriff and tell him what they saw. The Sheriff claims he can't do anything without videotaped proof (!) and he's not even allowed to investigate his own men. After they leave, the Sheriff says Fernando is "the leader of the Chicano movement," and reveals his own bias: he has a painting of Hitler hidden behind another picture on the wall of his office! He later urges his followers to "kills the greasy pigs in the memory of the Fuehrer!"



Meanwhile, Simón meets Rebeca Lowe, identified as some sort of "social service" worker. [Her name seems Jewish but this is not stated or even alluded to. It's also probably a coincidence that Jorge Luke's character is named "Simón," which is a Biblical name and the first name of Nazi-hunter Simon Wiesenthal.] He goes on a rant, criticising both *gringos* ("Racism is the number one idea of the *gringos* in this country") and Mexican immigrants, stating there is "no reason" for Mexicans to come to the USA, since there's work for all in Mexico.



Fernando and Steve are notified that two corpses have been found: it is the men Fernando saw being tortured. One has a swastika carved into his face. Fearing a wider investigation, the Sheriff sends a Nazi hit squad (driving a van with a large Nazi flag on it!) to the ranch. Simón is

knocked out and later escapes, but Steve and all of the Mexican workers are massacred. Fernando is also knocked unconscious and is framed for the killing. Rebeca asks the Mexican consul for assistance, but since Fernando is a U.S. citizen, he can't help.

In what is probably the quickest trial ever, Fernando is sentenced to death. [We don't see the trial, we only see the judge pass sentence—not in a courtroom, but in an office of some sort.] This brings us back to the beginning of the film, but wait! A plot twist! Fernando was only fake-executed, a plot by the Mexican consul and Rebeca to save him and expose the Nazis. However, he's later abducted by the Nazis who kill his police escorts and blame "Chicano Power" for the "escape" and murders.

[Apropos of nothing, there is a scene in which a young, long-haired Mexican is running through the desert and is confronted by a Nazi. The Mexican makes some martial arts moves but is quickly gunned down.]

Meanwhile, Simón has taken shelter with Beto, a *pollero* (the Nazis murder another *pollero* so he won't talk). Beto and Simón are driving a truckload of Mexicans when they're ambushed by Nazis. They're sent to a "concentration camp." They escape but Beto is killed.

Simón and Rebeca arrive at the concentration camp, where the Nazis are holding a meeting; Simón tells Rebeca to go for help. Fernando is tortured and is on the brink of being murdered by the Sheriff (now wearing his blackshirt Nazi uniform with swastika armband). Simón crashes in with two machine guns (!) and kills the Nazi leader. The authorities arrive. Simón, the battered Fernando, and Rebeca stroll off.



*Sentenciado* (I suppose the title refers to Fernando being sentenced to death) is cheap but not ultra-cheap. There are actually a fair number of Mexicans and Nazis in several scenes, not the expected 4 or 5, and while there aren't really any "sets" to speak of (the interiors are probably actual offices or residences), the technical aspects (other than the sound) are satisfactory.

For a *videohome*, there are a surprising number of familiar faces in the cast: Luke, Martínez *hijo*, Roberto Montiel, Mario Arévalo, Manuel Benítez, Octavio Acosta, and even veteran Jesús Gómez (who was appearing in Mexican movies as early as the 1940s). Claudia Bringas gets a "*presentación estelar*" credit but she'd actually been in movies for a few years as well.

Agustín Bernal rants and raves while in Nazi mode, but also acts rather calm and reasoned when he's dealing with Fernando and Steve (and he seems to be deliberately speaking rather stilted Spanish, perhaps to suggest he's not Latino). Jorge Luke gets one big scene (his rant about racist *gringos* and *malinchista* Mexicans) and Arturo Martínez *hijo* is also satisfactory. Everyone else is alright,



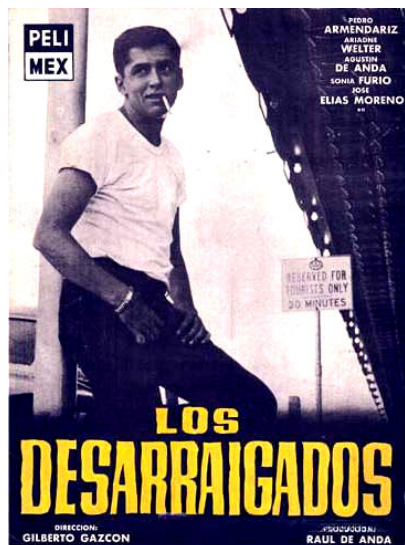
with the script making very few demands on them, dramatically.

As mentioned above, the most interesting aspect of *Sentenciado* are the overt statements made by Simón and by Sheriff Nazi, as well as the rather oblique references to “Chicano Power.” In addition to his repeated racist statements, the Sheriff also explicitly says that Mexicans are taking jobs from people in the USA, which is—sadly—still familiar rhetoric in 2017. At least this film (unlike some of its predecessors) doesn’t pit Chicanos against Mexicans—Fernando and Steve are U.S. citizens but have no problem working with Mexicans (and Steve gives his life to defend them). The Mexican consul indicates he can’t interfere in Fernando’s case because Fernando isn’t a Mexican citizen, but he later changes his mind when Rebeca and Jorge make the point that Fernando got into trouble trying to help Mexican workers. It’s never made clear why the Sheriff identifies Fernando as a leader of the “Chicano movement,” since we see no such “movement” (or even any other Chicanos); the later reference to “Chicano Power” also seems rather dated and, once again, no such group is ever seen or otherwise referred to.

## ◆◆◆ CHICANOS & MEXICAN- AMERICANS

### Los desarraigados [The Rootless Ones]

(Cinematográfica Intercontinental, 1958) Exec Prod:



Agustín de Anda; Prod: Raúl de Anda; Dir: Gilberto Gazcón; Adapt: Raúl de Anda, Gilberto Gazcón; Orig Play: J. Humberto Robles [Arenas]; Photo: Rosalío Solano; Music: Manuel Esperón; Prod Mgr: José L. Murillo; Prod Chief: José Alcayde; Asst Dir: Miguel A. Madrigal; Sub-Dir: Jesús Marín; Film

Ed: Carlos Savage; Art Dir: Salvador Lozano; Makeup: Sara Mateos; Sound: James L. Fields; Dialog Rec: Francisco Alcayde; Re-rec: Galdino Samperio; Sound Ed: Raúl Portillo G.; SpFX: Juan Muñoz Ravelo; Union: STPC

Cast: Pedro Armendáriz (Joe Pacheco), Ariadna Welter (Elena González), Agustín de Anda (Jimmy Pacheco), Sonia Furió (Alice Pacheco), José Elías Moreno (Pancho Pacheco), Lola Tinoco (Aurelia Pacheco), Quintín Bulnes (Fred Smith), Emily Lee, Carol Snow, Lee Morgan (Mr. Smith), Alejandro Parodi (Johnny), Stillman

Segar, Paula Barto, Mario Chávez [Cid] (mechanic), Lawrence Gray, Jorge Chesterking (new hotel mgr.)

Notes: based on a play by Jorge Humberto Robles Arenas, *Los desarraigados* deals with the life of Mexicans in the United States, albeit from a different perspective than usually seen in Mexican cinema. Pancho and Aurelia Pacheco are legal residents of the USA, having arrived there more than 25 years earlier, fleeing the unrest that the Mexican Revolution caused in their native land. At least some of their children were born in the USA—it’s unclear if Joe or his two brothers who perished in the Army “at Guadalcanal and in Korea” were U.S. citizens (it’s implied that they weren’t, since it’s mentioned that the Mexican consul advised them to serve when they got their draft notices), but the younger Jimmy and Alice are both U.S. citizens by birth.

The film does contain some evidence that Mexicans and Mexican-Americans face discrimination and racism, but this is generally down-played. Pancho doesn’t get a

promotion he apparently deserves and assumes it’s because he’s Mexican, but there are certainly other possible reasons for this (such as being arrested—



albeit falsely—for selling drugs!). Joe and Elena are harassed by a drunk who calls Joe a “dirty greaser,” but the man is obviously intoxicated and even his Anglo friend is ashamed of his actions. And Alice is rejected by her boyfriend’s parents because of her race, but the two older Anglos seem incredulous and bemused rather than overtly hostile (the fact that their son walks up and diffidently introduces her and says “she wants to marry me” without the slightest preparation might have had something to do with their reaction). There is also a brief allusion to discrimination regarding Joe’s failure to obtain employment with the “Jackson Motor Company,” leading to him running his own business out of the family garage.

*Los desarraigados* instead suggests that the real harm that comes to Mexicans and Mexican-Americans in the USA is the loss of their *mexicanidad*. Leaving their homeland—or failing to return to the land of their ancestors—means they have (as the title suggests) lost their roots, their culture, and everything else that it means to be Mexican. The moral failings of the Pacheco children: one is alcoholic, one sells drugs, and one is a “loose woman” (by appearance only—Alice is introduced wearing very tight shorts and top, later appears in a bikini, and also does a suggestive public dance, but in the end it is revealed that she slept with her boyfriend only once, while drunk and agitated). In contrast, visiting Mexican Elena is attractive, independent, but respectful and home-loving (and she doesn’t speak English, a sign she hasn’t been infected by the Anglo culture). Other than Fred, who is

loud and boisterous but not really criminal, there are no significant Anglo (or, as the film calls them, *bolillos*) characters in the film, but there are several brief scenes—one in which a drunk accosts Elena, and the rowdy Smith garden party—which depict Anglos as crude, noisy, rude and uncouth, if not violent.

[The film begins with shots of the U.S.-Mexico border, as an instrumental version of the "Canción mixteca" is heard. This song, although written about migrants from the provinces to Mexico City, has become associated with the sadness and longing of Mexicans who emigrate to the USA.]

Pancho Pacheco has been working in a large San Antonio hotel for 25 years, working his way up from bellboy to night manager. The current manager, who is retiring, says "I feel sure you'll be one to get my job." Pancho, his wife Aurelia, and their grown children Joe, Jimmy, and Aurelia live in a large house in a nice neighbourhood. Joe, a veteran and a recovering alcoholic, runs an automotive repair shop out of the garage. Alice, who considers herself American and speaks mostly English, dates Fred, an Anglo. Jimmy, it is later revealed, sells marijuana at the behest of Betty, a *gringa*.

Elena González shows up and asks Joe to repair her car: she's from Mexico and was traveling to meet friends. [Later, she confesses that, after her widowed father remarried, she felt slighted and thus left home. She calls and reconciles with him at the end.] Pancho and Aurelia insist

that she stay in their guest room until her auto is fixed. Elena and Joe become friendly and he takes her out one evening; she is propositioned by a drunk,

who then makes a racist comment to Joe and is knocked down for his efforts. Joe says he doesn't like Mexico: having traveled a short distance over the border several times, he says it's dirty, people are distrustful, and they mock Mexican-Americans by calling them *pochos*. Elena claims this isn't the true Mexico. She admits she is attracted to Joe, but says she doesn't feel comfortable in the USA.

Jimmy sells some marijuana to another young man, who—when arrested—identifies Jimmy as his supplier. Jimmy flees, and the police instead arrest Pancho, who's merely walking down the street. Joe forces Jimmy to confess, and they go together to the police station, where Jimmy turns himself in so his father will be freed. There is considerable discussion later about how difficult and expensive it is to find a lawyer to defend Jimmy, and how Pancho had to borrow money from his employer to pay for his son's defense. However, by the end of the film it seems likely Jimmy will be released on bail.

[In the play, although it is clear Jimmy is selling drugs, none of his activities are depicted because the entire play takes place in the Pacheco house. However, in the film we see him pick up drugs from Betty (she hides them in the popcorn machine at work!), and there is a considerable bit of "business" in the Pacheco house, as Jimmy hides the drugs under a loose step in the staircase. He doesn't notice that he's dropped one joint, and Pancho later picks up it. This leads to some Hitchcockian suspense, as Pancho thinks it's a regular cigarette and is ready to smoke it (!) but keeps getting interrupted. He finally sticks it in his shirt pocket. Later, when he's arrested, I was sure the police would find it and use it as proof that he was a drug dealer, but this never occurs. We do see Jimmy selling the reefers to various people, one of whom is caught by the police and identifies "Pacheco" as the vendor.]

Meanwhile, Alice argues with her mother and storms out to be with Fred. After they spend the night together, she compels him to take her to his parents' house, where Fred says "This is Alice. She wants to marry me." Fred's parents are in the midst of a rowdy garden party, and don't take him seriously.

Alice goes home, planning to run away to New York, but Elena tells her what's happened to Pancho and Jimmy. Alice confesses that she slept with Fred—not because she loved him, but to force him to marry her. Elena is shocked but urges Alice to make peace with her family, since they need her.

Elena arranges to meet her father in Monterrey and prepares to depart. She deflects Joe's romantic overtures, saying she could never live in the USA but perhaps they'll meet again in Mexico. Joe breaks into the family liquor cabinet and starts to drink, over his mother's objections. Pancho comes home and says "we all need a drink," and reveals that he did not get the hotel manager's position, which was given to a *gringo* outsider. He attributes this to discrimination, and castigates himself for being a "cowardly Mexican" who wasn't brave enough to stay in his own land and make a life for himself and his family. The United States took two of his sons, leaving him with one in jail, one who is an alcoholic, and one "*americana*." Elena departs, probably glad to get out of this dysfunctional household.

Although *Los desarraigados* includes a number of scenes and locations not in the original play, it is still fairly clearly a film adaptation of a stage drama, although director Gilberto Gazcón uses a lot of different camera angles and editing to avoid a static look and feel. The performances are mostly solid, although Sonia Furió seems slightly too old for her role. Lola Tinoco, who had originated the role of "doña Aurelia" on the stage, is solid, as is José Elías Moreno. Pedro Armendáriz, despite being





the biggest star in the cast, fits in to the ensemble well, and Agustín de Anda is also satisfactory. Ariadne Welter is quite good in a nuanced role as Elena. Most of the other roles are small (and weren't even in the play), including Quintín Bulnés (his hair dyed white) as Fred, Hollywood actor Lee Morgan as Fred's father, and Alejandro Parodi in a brief part as the customer who snitches on Jimmy.

*Los desarraigados* was shot in Mexico, mostly in the studio, but passes this off as San Antonio. This is not an easy film to see: the version I have has sub-titles in an East European language (Romanian? Czech?) and may have been shot off a television or a movie screen.

Trivia note: the play "Los desarraigados" premiered in Mexico City in 1956. In addition to Lola Tinoco, the cast included Luis Aceves Castañeda as Pancho, Martha Patricia as Elena, Judy Ponte as Alice, Luis Bayardo as Jimmy, and José Alonso (not the later actor José Alonso [Zepeda] who became popular in the Sixties and beyond, and who was married to Irma Lozano) as Joe.



### Los desarraigados [The Rootless Ones]

(Filmadora Chapultepec, 1975) Prod: Pedro Galindo



Aguilar; Dir-Scr: Rubén Galindo; Orig. Play: [Jorge] Humberto Robles Arenas; Photo: José Ortiz Ramos; Music Arr: Gustavo César Carrión; Music Supv: Pedro Galindo; Musical Numbers: Tom Elliot, Neil Amsterdam; Prod Mgr: José Luis Orduña; Prod Chief: Vicente Domínguez; Asst Dir: Rafael Villaseñor [Kuri]; Film Ed: Sigfrido

García; Camera Op: Teodoro García; Lighting: Gabriel Castro; Makeup: Ana Rojas; Sound Supv: James L. Fields; Dialog Rec: Eduardo Arjona; Re-rec: Ramón Moreno; Sound Ed: José Li-Ho; Union: STPC

**Cast:** Mario Almada (*Francisco "Pancho" Pacheco Morales*), Pedro Infante Jr. (*Jimmy Pacheco*), Blanca Torres (*doña Aurelia*), Adalberto Arvizu (*Joe Pacheco*), Leticia Pinto (*Alice Pacheco*), Rosa Gloria Chagoyán (*Elena González*), Dr. Narciso Cortés (*doctor*), Jennice Murray (*Jennice*), Stanley Smith (?*Fred*), Roberto Andulsa, Jorge Domínguez, Rodolfo Cantú, Debra Ingram, Brooke Scalise, George Hinojosa

**Notes:** two decades after the first film version, the play "Los desarraigados" was adapted to the screen once more. Although both movies follow the play fairly closely, the 1970s *Los desarraigados* was updated—it's set in the mid-Seventies (and has a very '70s music score) and refers to the Vietnam War rather than WWII and the Korean War—

expanded with some additional scenes, and diverges slightly in its plot and *denouement*.

The film also includes nudity (Leticia Pinto mostly, but also Jennice Murray) and a long car chase that concludes with a fiery crash, both of which would be more appropriate in a mid-'70s Mexican action movie. Curiously, both the 1958 and 1975 films contain a scene in which Jimmy spies on Elena in her bedroom (she's wearing a black corset in 1958 and white bra and panties in 1975), only to be chastised by Joe. This rather exploitative scene is not exactly in the original play—the action takes place all on the first floor of the Pacheco household, whereas Elena's room is upstairs—but Jimmy does describe spying on Elena to Joe, and invites him to watch, an offer Joe angrily rejects.

The film begins in Brownsville, Texas, with a sequence not present in the 1958 version or the play: Pancho tracks down his oldest son Joe in a bar and takes him home. Joe spends 2 months in a hospital for alcoholism and is released. [There are several dream sequences in which Joe "remembers" his military service—this consists of tinted stock footage, first of naval warfare and then of aerial bombing, which is odd since Joe implies that he was in the infantry in Vietnam. In the 1958 film, Joe's two older brothers were killed at Guadalcanal (WWII) and in Korea, but here it's stated that they died in Vietnam.]



The rest of the Pacheco family is introduced: father Pancho, who's worked in the same hotel for 25 years and is told he has a good chance of replacing the retiring manager; his wife Aurelia; other son Jimmy, and daughter Alice. Alice is rebellious, doesn't like speaking Spanish, and has a *gringo* boyfriend. She says "I'm not Mexican," even though her father points to her skin and says she's

*prieta* (dark) like him. [In both the 1958 and 1975 versions, some of the actors appear to be wearing dark makeup. Here, it's Mario Almada, whose hair is also unconvincingly streaked with gray.] Jimmy is proud to be of Mexican heritage,



but wouldn't want to live there, because "I was born here." He also has a *gringa* girlfriend, Jennice, who is older than him and who encourages his drug dealing.

Elena González, on her way from Mexico to visit friends in Houston, shows up: her car broke down a few blocks away. Joe agrees to fix it, but it will require some time. Doña Aurelia and Pancho insist Elena stay in their guest room. Later, Joe and Elena go to a nightclub and a man makes a pass at her (Elena doesn't speak English). Joe defends her and there is a brief fight. The man calls Joe a "dirty greaser!"

The police surprise Jimmy and Jennice in the middle of a drug deal. Jimmy flees, and crosses his father's path; Pancho blocks the pursuing police and Jimmy escapes. [In the 1958 version, Pancho does not deliberately help Jimmy escape, and is arrested only because he's walking down the street and the police know they're looking for someone named "Pacheco."] However, Joe later gets a phone call: Pancho has been arrested and charged with drug dealing. Jennice says Jimmy was her partner, not Pancho. A warrant is issued for Jimmy's arrest. When the police arrive at the Pacheco house, Jimmy drives away and is killed when his car crashes. [In the 1958 film, Jimmy surrenders to clear his father's name, and it's implied that he'll be given a light sentence.]

Alice, enraged at Jimmy's death and blaming her parents, runs off to see her boyfriend Fred. They sleep together, but the next day a blonde shows up and calls Alice a whore. Alice hits her and Fred throws Alice out—



saying the blonde is his *chica*, and Alice is just his "bitch" (in English)—although she's pregnant by him. [In the earlier film, Alice sleeps with Fred for the first time and then breaks up with him

when Fred's parents oppose their relationship.]

Elena talks Alice out of running away to New York. Elena's car is fixed, so she prepares to depart, which upsets Joe, who thinks about getting drunk. Meanwhile, Pancho learns he will not get the hotel manager's job (it's given to Anglo "Mr. Jones" instead). He tells his family that Jones got the position because "he's *americano* and I'm a cowardly Mexican." Pancho and Aurelia decide to return to Mexico. As Elena departs, Joe says he'll see her again, someday soon.

The two versions of *Los desarraigados* have the same basic plot, but they feel very different. The 1958 film is stagier, with most of the scenes taking place in or around the large Pacheco house, which resembles the sort of home one sees in Hollywood "small town" movies or on television programs. However, even this version "opens up" the play considerably, with scenes at the hotel, at "Charlie's Place," at the police station, and at a nightclub. The 1975 version was shot entirely on location, which has its advantages and disadvantages: the Pacheco house is not especially distinctive and doesn't have the same sort of dramatic sense of place as the earlier set. The 1975 film depicts just a bit more Anglo racism: Joe and Elena still have a confrontation with a drunk, and Pancho still loses his promotion to (we assume) preference given to an Anglo, but the awkward confrontation in the '58 version between Alice and Fred's parents (which is racist but not overtly and no slurs are used) is changed to the showdown between Fred, his blonde girlfriend, and Alice, in which the blonde implies Alice is a prostitute. When Alice

protests, "I'm not a hooker," the blonde replies "No, you're a Mexi—" and Alice hits her.

While not presuming to speak for Jorge Humberto Robles Arenas (whose son, Jorge Humberto Robles, was a prominent Mexican actor in the 1970s), the main point of *Los desarraigados* isn't that Mexicans and Mexican-Americans are treated poorly in the USA, but rather that Mexicans who move to the United States lose their moral compass and their traditions because they've abandoned their homeland. Pancho Pacheco, born in Mexico, is a hard-working father who has risen to a position of some responsibility and has made a good life for himself and his family, but 2 of his 4 sons were killed in U.S. wars, Joe became an alcoholic, Jimmy sells drugs, and Alice has rejected her race and heritage entirely. Thus, the U.S.-born generation has failed, and the implication is that this would not have happened had Pancho and Aurelia stayed in Mexico and raised their children there.

In the 1958 version, the Pachecos imply they left Mexico due to the Mexican Revolution, but this would not have been applicable to the 1975 film: if Pancho has worked for the hotel for 25 years, that would mean he started there in 1950, which is at least 30 years after the Revolution is generally considered to have concluded.

Consequently, 1975 Pancho's statement that he was too cowardly to remain in Mexico and fight for his country is rather curious.

The production values of *Los desarraigados*



(1975) are satisfactory, although some of the dialogue appears to have been post-dubbed and at times there is almost a mild fish-eye look to José Ortiz Ramos' cinematography. The performances are generally solid. Mario Almada and Blanca Torres are fine as the elder Pachecos. Adalberto (occasionally billed as "Alberto") Arvizu had a solid if unspectacular career as a supporting actor in Mexican cinema from the late 1960s through the early 2000s (he died in 2008), mostly in action films. Arvizu seems to have been a favourite of Almadás, appearing in nearly 2 dozen films with one or both of the brothers. He's perfectly good as Joe Pacheco, mostly under-playing his role. Pedro Infante Jr., Leticia Pinto, and Rosa Gloria Chagoyán are also satisfactory.



**El pocho** (Raza Films, 1969) *Dir/Scr*: Eulalio González Ramirez; *Photo*: Raul Martínez Solares; *Music*: Jorge Ortega; *Prod Mgr*: Said Slim K.; *Film Ed*: Rafael Ceballos; *Lighting*: Miguel Arana; *Sound Ed*: Sigfrido García; *Union*: STPC

**Cast**: Lalo González "Piporro" (Jose "Joe" García), Lucha Villa (Mexican singer), Julio Aldama (Pedro), Beth Hendry (Susan aka "Susy"), René Muñoz ("Snowball"), Miguel Ángel Álvarez (Puerto Rican soldier), Manuel Alvarado (El Gordo), Pablo González Balli (Jose as a



boy), Sor Clara (*Mother Superior*), Agustín Isunza (*don Pancho*), Carlota Solares (*dona "Gertie" Gertrudis*), Ricardo Carrión (*Tom*), Julio Ahuet (*old husband*), Sherry Lee, Christa von Humboldt (*Susan's mother*), Jhon Kelly [sic] (*John*), Alejandro Algara, Carlos Guzmán, Guillermo Acosta, Jimmy Gelabert (*judge*), Jim Brunden, Manuel Flores, Jorge Reyes, Ricardo Lara, Jaime Manzano "El Pecas," Barbara Ransom (*employee of drugstore*)



**Notes:** this may not have necessarily been Piporro's best movie, but it was the only one he produced, directed, wrote, and starred in, so it was clearly an important and personal project for him. It was also something of a turning point in his screen career--after 1969, he would only star in two additional films, and then work as a co-star or

supporting player in a few more. The success or failure of *El pocho* probably did not lead to his virtual retirement from screen stardom, since the movie itself is pleasant enough and not a horrible vanity project.

After the (offscreen) death of his parents, Jose "Joe" García is raised in a church orphanage, serves in the U.S. Army (we later learn he earned the Medal of Honor), and now manages a drugstore in Texas. He has a blonde girlfriend named Susy, whose mother dislikes him. After Susy's mother mistakenly believes Joe and her daughter have spent the night together, she insists they get married, but Joe refuses to be coerced. He's called a "Mexican greaser" and beaten up by Susy's brother and another man.



Joe and Pedro, who works at a gas station, were in the Army together. Joe: "At the front we knew who the enemy was, but in the barracks we could find the enemy under our own flag." [Flashback] When an Anglo soldier calls a Puerto Rican soldier a "spic," they fight. Joe breaks it up, saying there is "no first class or second class [here]. I'm sure, absolutely sure we're all the descendants of immigrants." The Anglo calls Joe a "greaser," and Joe replies, "That's like saying kike, wop, limey, kraut." He takes off his rank and fights the other man, but they conclude by shaking hands.

Back in the present, Pedro says Joe's Medal of Honor didn't keep him from being discriminated against in a Warren, Texas restaurant, a story that apparently made the newspapers. Pedro, by the way, lost a leg in the war. [Which war isn't clear: the stock footage of battles is vague (although palm trees are shown), but, given the apparent ages of Joe and Pedro, it must have been either Korea or Vietnam. Gazing at a photo of their old unit, Joe says only Tony Martínez (now a politician), Pedro, and he are left: "the rest came home in aluminum coffins."]

Joe and Susy decide to elope, and have to evade her mother to do so. Afterwards, Joe receives a telegram with money from the (Mexican) government, an indemnity for land which has changed hands due to the altered course of the Chamizal River (this long-running dispute between Mexico and the USA was resolved after a meeting between the presidents of the two countries in 1964; the final decision was approved in October 1967). He and Susy go to look at the land, and discovers the spot where he was born is now located in the exact center of the river, equidistant from the USA and Mexico.



*El pocho* was shot on location in El Paso and Ciudad Juárez, but still boasts the presence of numerous Mexican movie veterans in the cast (virtually all of the major roles, with the exception of Beth Hendry as "Susy," were filled with familiar faces). Even relatively minor roles--an older man with a young wife whose virility was restored by medicine Joe sold him, the Puerto Rican soldier in Joe's unit, Susy's brother Tom, and a man who "abducts" his own children while Susy is baby-sitting--are played by Julio Ahuet, Miguel Ángel Álvarez, Ricardo Carrión, and John Kelly, "real" actors rather than locals. It's possible Piporro was calling in some favors, since it's a little surprising to see these actors--and Lucha Villa and René Muñoz (who appear in cameos) in a film shot far away from Mexico City.

The performances are generally good. González is his usual effervescent self, but convincingly delivers his serious dialogue (he also has a well-staged brawl with Ricardo Carrión and another man). He sings a number of songs and appears in a packed bullfight arena where he and Aldama have a singing "duel" between *norteño* and *mariachi* style music, then perform a mock bullfight.

Reminiscent of the earlier Piporro film *El bracero del año*, there are also a couple of dream/fantasy sequences. In

one, Joe takes part in the Mexican Revolution, but is shot in the back as a suspected spy by his Mexican compatriots because he speaks English! The film opens with a prologue in which a giant Joe straddles the Rio Grande and talks about his dilemma, a *pochito* caught between two cultures and countries.

Hendry is quite attractive but her Spanish dialogue was post-dubbed (if you watch her lips, she was clearly speaking English).

Towards the end of the movie, Joe's Mexican friend El Gordo arrives to congratulate Joe and Susy on their marriage, accompanied by 7 of his 11

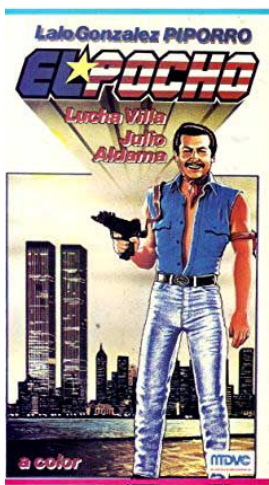


children. Joe reassures Susy, "We're just starting out, we can catch up [to El Gordo's total]" and she turns to stare at the camera (a split-second shot, but a funny one).

*El pocho* is both a comedy about Joe's relationship with Susy (which has some cultural aspects to be sure) and a rather didactic examination of the mental and emotional processes of Mexican-Americans and their treatment in the USA (and Mexico). Joe seems to have a good life: he's the manager of successful business (a Walgreen's Pharmacy), drives a red Cadillac convertible, lives in a nice tract house, and has a cute blonde fiancée. On the other hand, he has experienced (and apparently continues to experience) discrimination due to his race--although the only contemporary evidence we see of this in the film itself are the actions of his future mother-in-law and her son. However, there are dialogue references to being treated like a "second class" citizen. [Curiously, especially in contrast with future Mexican movies about the USA, the police and

other authority figures in this film are very positively portrayed.]

When he attends a party thrown by El Gordo in Ciudad Juarez, Joe meets a young Mexican woman (Lucha Villa) and they get along well, but she makes it clear she isn't crazy about *pochos*--"they don't want to be Mexicans." Joe confesses he thinks in English (throughout the movie, except when he's talking with other Chicanos, Joe talks in both English and Spanish, often--for the sake



of Mexican movie audiences--repeating himself in both languages) but doesn't deny his Mexican heritage (he is disappointed to find a long-haired rock band playing at

Gordo's party, and is pleased when some *mariachis* show up; he also likes Mexican food even though he finds it too spicy!).

The production values of *El pocho* are good: the whole film is slick and professional, although the dubbing (of various characters) is sometimes noticeable.

Trivia note: the videotape I have of this film features one of the most misleading box-covers of all time. Remember this is a romantic comedy: the cover has art of a muscular Piporro holding an Uzi!

Overall, an interesting and entertaining film that mixes social relevance with comedy.



## Soy Chicano y mexicano [I'm Chicano and Mexican] (Prods. Filmicas Agrasánchez, 1974) Prod:

Rogelio Agrasánchez L.; Dir: Tito Novaro;

Adapt: Rogelio Agrasánchez L.; Story: Laura H. de Marchetti;

Photo: Fernando Colín; Music: Gustavo César Carrión; Prod Mgr: Rafael

Rosales, Ernesto Fuentes; Asst Dir: Damián Acosta; Film Ed: Ángel Camacho; Asst Ed: Rogelio Zúñiga; Makeup: Lidia Muñoz; Camera Op: Armando Castillón; Second Cam: Carlos Martell; Recordist: Roberto Muñoz; Re-rec: Salvador Topete; Union: STIC

**Cast:** Cornelio Reyna (Efrén Torres), Ana Bertha Lepe (Mary), Félix González (Sam González), Alicia Juárez (Emilia), Raúl Martínez (Hilario "Larry" García), Laura Marchetti (?Laura), Rafael Valdéz (Billy Parra), Rafael Rosales, Damián Acosta, Arturo [Salvador] Regazón [sic] (surly Chicano), Jorge Moreno, José Armando de Hoyos, Juanita Hurón, Margarita de Hoyos, Johnny González (Sergio), Marcos Gómez, Lorraine Meeks, Tim Meeks, Cleto Rodríguez, Emilio Aguilar, El Güero Polkas, Genaro Aguilar, Frances Abrigo, Perry Salinas, Juan Antonio "El Remolino," Juanita de la Garza, Tony Meléndez, Tony Bloodworth, William Ron (Mr. White)

**Notes:** somewhat unusual for a Mexican production, this film splits its focus between the protagonist, an *indocumentado*, and the female lead, a *chicana*. Cornelio Reyna, although hardly movie-star handsome, was a popular singer and composer who starred in a number of popular Seventies films, usually as a sort of hapless but noble "everyman" character. Ana Bertha Lepe's career had faltered at the end of the 1960s, but she was brought back by Agrasánchez for this picture and *El hijo de Alma*





*Grande*, and then appeared with Cantinflas in *El patrullero 777* before spending the rest of her life in semi-retirement, with occasional stints on television. In *Soy chicano y mexicano* she wears a number of different wigs and various “mod” outfits (usually *sans* bra), playing a perky, “liberated” woman.

Efrén, turned down for a job because he doesn’t speak English, decides to work in the USA for a time in order to learn the language, then return to Mexico to live (and



marry his girlfriend Emilia). Billy Parra agrees to take him there, legally. When they reach the

border checkpoint at Roma, Texas, Efrén sees one of the returning workers kiss the ground of Mexico. “Don’t talk to those who are coming back because they’ll mislead you” about life in the USA, Billy warns. After going through the checkpoint—where they’re sprayed to prevent aftosa (aka, foot-and-mouth disease, deadly to animals), the workers are picked up by their employer. Efrén has to sing a paper renouncing his rights (!) and agreeing to accept whatever they pay him. His roommate is a surly Chicano who says “I don’t es-peak es-panish, you Mexican greaser.” The two men fight and Efrén is denounced as a trouble-maker and will be deported. However, he escapes from custody.

Meanwhile, a group of women arrive to see lawyer Sam: their company went bankrupt and owes them money. Sam isn’t there, but his wife Mary goes with the women to city hall; they demand to see the mayor. After causing a disturbance, the group is locked up and doused with water for protesting too loudly. Sam shows up and bails them out. The two plots intersect when Efrén arrives at his uncle Hilario’s house. Hilario (aka “Larry”) is Sam’s father, and Mary, Sam, and Larry’s other son Roy all live together. Efrén joins the extended family.



That night, a group assembles at the house to plan a protest: they want the same pay as the *gabachos* for the same work, and the women want legal maternity leave. Efrén sings and then Larry performs “México, lindo y querido,” accompanied by a montage of footage of Mexico. Efrén gets a job working on Nacho’s farm.

Mary and the woman picket the courthouse, carrying signs reading “We Have Rights,” “Women Pay Taxes,” and “Women’s Lib.” They stage a sit-down strike on the steps when the mayor refuses to see them: when the police remove the protestors, they are replaced by fat women (!) who can’t be lifted. The mayor laughs and says he’ll talk to the women.

Sergio, Nacho’s brother, is arrested on unspecified charges, but his wife Laura suspects it’s because of the “equal pay” petition that the men published in the newspaper. Mary informs Nacho, and he says he knew their peaceful methods wouldn’t work. He reminds her of the case of “Chávez,” who was allowed to present his written arguments for consideration, but after a couple of days “they deported him.” Nacho says they need to have guns—not to use them, but to appear strong and to make sure they’re treated with respect. Efrén overhears and tells Sam and Larry. Nacho and the others decide to rob a gun store, but Sam prevents Mary from participating. The police arrive: the other men surrender but Nacho is killed when he opens fire on the officers.

Since Efrén has (inadvertently) gotten his employer killed, Larry sends him to work for a construction company. “He pays poorly but doesn’t ask questions.” Efrén and a black worker become friends: Efrén teaches him to play the guitar. When the boss bumps into the black guy and says “Careful, you bastard!” Efrén punches him and is fired. After a montage of job searching, he’s finally hired as a masseur (!). Unjustly accused of robbing a client, Efrén is arrested. He’s cleared of the criminal charges but his status as an *indocumentado* is exposed.



Sam defends Efrén at his trial, arguing that his client’s immigration status was revealed as the result of his unjust arrest. The judge says “it’s the duty of every country to protect its own citizens. The unemployment situation in this country is too acute to allow the acceptance of others who come to this country to displace our people.” Sam: “But the Constitution--?” Judge: “When it was written, the problem we’re speaking of didn’t exist.” She orders Efrén deported, and when Sam says he’ll appeal, Efrén says don’t bother: he wants to go back to Mexico anyway.

One of Efrén’s songs wins a contest and he receives a check, but sends it to Larry, saying it should be used to help those “who search outside their country for that which they could find right here with a little effort and patience.”

Unfortunately, Efrén discovers Emilia didn't wait for him to return. She married Bill. On the positive side, when Efrén applies at an employment agency and is asked "do you speak English?" he can now reply, "*Sí, hablo inglés.*"

*Soy chicano y mexicano* isn't a bad film but it has some flaws. There is an odd inconsistency in the scenes allegedly set at Larry's house. When the women first show up looking for Sam, the house is a relatively small, single-family home (which does not appear to be a house converted to an office). Later, when Efrén arrives at Larry's home—where Sam and Mary also live—it's clearly a different house, but still a one-story, single family home. However, the next day Nacho picks up Efrén to go to work, and the "house" where he's living is now a huge, two-story building with an exterior porch running the length of the first and second floors (and Sam is shown there too, so it's clearly supposed to be the same place). This lack of concern for continuity is bizarre and confusing.

There are some other issues. While Tito Novaro's direction is acceptably professional, some of the scenes—especially when Efrén first arrives at Larry's house—are quite awkward, with strange pauses, giant interpolated closeups, and other clumsy technical bits. After Efrén's trial, he declines Sam's offer to appeal. However, Mary disguises herself as a cleaner and sneaks into the judge's chambers, later emerging to tell Sam that she recognised the judge as a fellow member of a women's rights group, and got her to agree to reconsider Efrén's case. But this goes nowhere, because the next time we see Efrén he's back in Mexico City!

The political aspects of *Soy chicano y mexicano* are rather vague. The initial "protest" concerns women who've been fired and denied 2 months' pay by their bankrupt company. However, the subsequent meeting at Larry's house focuses on two separate issues, the men's desire for equal pay (about which they'll run a protest petition in the newspaper) and the women's demand for their legal maternity rights (which inspires the protest and sit-in outside the courthouse). Neither one of these issues is ever resolved, although it is alleged that Sergio's arrest (which is also not resolved) was due to his signature on the petition (why no one else was arrested is never explained). Sergio's arrest prompts Nacho's robbery of the gun store and his subsequent death at the hands of the police (who are very restrained, firing only warning shots until Nacho shoots back at them). Efrén's trial gets a little political due to the judge's comments about *indocumentados* taking jobs from U.S. citizens (she also warns Sam that by representing an illegal alien he's "bordering on illegality" himself—what th--?!).

Although there is little or no overt racism or discrimination depicted in the film, there are some allusions, such as Nacho's story of a man deported for

daring to protest, and the passing mention of *gabachos* receiving higher pay than *Chicanos*. One might also see some symbolism in Efrén's friendship with a fellow worker who happens to be African-American, which is contrasted with Efrén's earlier fight with a hostile Chicano.

It's not entirely clear who in *Soy chicano y mexicano* is Chicano and who is a Mexican resident of the USA. Mary is presumably a *chicana*; Sam is a U.S. citizen (the judge states this), but it's not clear if he was born in the USA or not. Larry was clearly born in Mexico but is a U.S. resident. The various supporting characters are apparently a mix: Mary asks Sergio's wife if he's "legal," and she says he is, from which we infer that he's not a citizen but is a legal resident.

Shot on location in various Texas locations (Mission, Roma, San Antonio, El Paso, Zapata, and Castroville), *Soy chicano y mexicano* doesn't look cheap or crude—indeed, the actual houses, government buildings, farms, shops, etc. give it an air of verisimilitude, and the furnishings and fashions serve as a sort of time capsule of 1974 Texas. The performances are satisfactory, even those of individuals who were probably non-professionals (or, at the least, not Mexican cinema regulars). Cornelio Reyna was always a much better singer than actor, but he appears sincere (even when at times he seems to be trying to remember his lines). Lepe, González and Martínez, the other "name" performers, are also fine.



**Chicano** (CONACITE DOS, 1975) *Dir-Scr:* Jaime

Casillas; *Photo:* Javier Cruz; *Music Dir:* Ernesto Cortázar [Jr.]; *Film Ed:* Ángel Camacho; *Art Dir:* José Méndez; *Set Decor:* José Luis Garduño; *Sound Op:* Francisco Guerrero; *Re-rec:* Ricardo Saldivar; *Union:* STIC

**Cast:** Jaime

Fernández (*Manuel Cantú*), Gregorio Casal (*Héctor*), Rosalía Valdéz (*Paula*), Jim Habif (*Caldwell\**), Roberto Cañedo (*Chicano activist*), Alicia Montoya (*Herlinda*), Alejandro Parodi (*Ray Gutiérrez*), Eduardo Noriega (*priest*), Rosa María Tijerina (*Lupe*), Miguel Ángel Ferriz [nieto] (*Ricardo*), Alberto Mariscal (*López, district*)





attorney), Mario Casillas (*Sheriff Sam Montoya*), Anaís de Melo (*Becky*), Aurora Clavel (*Manuel's wife*), Raúl Meraz (*panel member*), Armando Acosta (*Héctor's lawyer*), José Luis Avendaño (*sheep man*), hunters: Thomas Baird, Joe Brown, Fred Clark; Deloy White (*television anchorman*), Inés Murillo, Marcelo Villamil (*Max Oliver aka Max Oliveros*), Nancy Compare (*Laurie Stevenson*), José Luz Murillo (*don Víctor*), Carlos Cardán (*Ruiz*) [cut?], Manuel Alvarado (*Pablo Herrera*), Eduardo López Rojas (*emcee at political rally*), Victorio Blanco (*bearded man*), Manuel Dondé (*man at rally*), Fernando Pinkus (*courthouse cop*), Peggy Bass, Rigoberto Carmona, Abel Casillas (*man wounded by Army*), George Belanger (*lawyer*), Roger Cudney [cut?], Violeta Elizabeth, Alberto Estauillo, Fernando Ferriz, Raquel García, Alfredo García Márquez, Juan Garza (*police detective who arrests Héctor*), Ken Hammond, Rory Hoy, Regino Herrera, Ernest Juárez, Damián Image, Herbert Nanaren, Paul King, Donne Lee Sobrino, Raúl Martínez, Chadwick Minge, Héctor Moctezuma, Armando Pacheco, Angelina Peláez, Fabio Ramírez, Glen Ranson, David Recoret, Rubén Ross, Roberto Ruy (*man in meeting*), Herbert Rutherford, Julio Salcido, Ivan Scott, Burt Sharp, Earl Sorenson, Alejandro César Tamayo, Stuart Wolensky [aka Steve Wilensky?] (*moustached hunter*)

\*in the Spanish sub-titles translating English dialogue, his name is spelled "Cadwell."

**Notes:** Jaime Casillas, the younger brother of actor Gregorio Casal (another brother, Mario Casillas, was also an actor and appears in *Chicano*), entered the Mexican film industry in the early 1970s as a writer, then directed his first feature film in 1975. *Chicano* was inspired by the actions of Reies López Tijerina, a former preacher who tried to recover land rights lost to Mexicans after the



Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. [Casillas even cast Tijerina's daughter, Rosa María Tijerina, in *Chicano*, although the role of the protagonist's daughter went to

Rosalía Valdés, and Tijerina played the sister of the secondary protagonist played by Gregorio Casal.] His efforts, which began in the mid 1950s, resulted in him becoming a fugitive and a public figure, both admired and reviled. The film recreates Tijerina's armed 1967 raid on a New Mexico courthouse and his subsequent trial. After spending several years in prison in the 1970s as a result. Tijerina eventually moved to Mexico, dying in 2015.

*Chicano* is an unusual work of Mexican cinema because it deals entirely with Chicanos rather than Mexicans: previous films about the Mexican-American experience (such as *Los desarraigados* and *El pocho*) usually included Mexican characters to provide contrast and (one assumes) to give Mexican domestic audiences a

point of identification. This was the also the case in many subsequent Mexican films dealing with the subject as well.

*Chicano* begins with printed prologue which states "The principal problem of Mexico is its nearness to the United States..." and that "the unjust war" resulted in conflicts between the Anglo conquerors and Mexicans who didn't want to leave the land where they'd buried their ancestors. "Any coincidence between historical and present reality is fully intentional." The film proper starts with a scene showing 4 Anglo hunters killing sheep (this is hard to watch, because it looks like the sheep are actually being shot and killed). The local farmers respond, armed and angry, and are told by the police that "if a crime was committed, we'll take care of it." Activist Manuel meets with the farmers and says the Anglos claim the land by "right of conquest" because the USA won a war in the last century, but "we have older rights." The drunken hunters are arrested and the farmers and Manuel demand justice. Héctor shows up and says the hunters had permits (so apparently this allows them to destroy people's private property?). The farmers depart, as Manuel and Héctor glare at each other, before Héctor leaves with his Anglo girlfriend Becky.



Manuel tells a group of farmers "we lost [the war], but they promised to respect us!" The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo has been broken: "these lands are ours!" Manuel is arrested. His daughter Paula doesn't know how to drive, so farmer Ricardo offers to drive her in Manuel's camper. Meanwhile, newspaper publisher Caldwell makes a speech (in English) about the "33 million acres" included in the treaty. Afterward, he visits Héctor at his apartment (he's in



bed with Becky). They learn Manuel has been arrested. Caldwell gets him released, but Manuel is given 24 hours to leave the county. Ricardo joins Manuel and Paula: he was also ordered out of the county.

Manuel speaks to a large rally, saying "we demand [the land] that belonged to our ancestors!" The audience shouts, "they say we have no papers! They say we're all *mojados*!" Héctor and Becky are there, and Manuel and Héctor exchange hostile glances once more. In the parking lot, Becky is taken away by (one assumes) a relative (or ex-boyfriend) and Héctor is badly beaten by a group of Anglos.

Caldwell visits Héctor in the hospital, and meets his mother and sister. Meanwhile, Manuel agrees to speak at a political meeting for Pablo Herrera, but the audience doesn't want to listen to his Chicano rights spiel and Herrera doesn't stand up for him. A bandaged Héctor meets Manuel outside the rally and the two men argue.

Manuel leads Gutiérrez and some homeless migrant workers to "occupy" land owned by Anglos. Sheriff

Montoya resigns rather than evict the squatters on the orders of district attorney López. *Gringos* attack the camp, burning several trucks and killing three people (a migrant worker drapes a Mexican flag over one of the bodies). Manuel and Paula are arrested, charged with "instigation," while the attackers escape.

Upon his release from the hospital, Héctor crashes a pool party and beats up the leader of the men who had attacked him (Becky's brother?). As he departs, a blonde woman gazes at him intently. Later, she approaches Héctor when he leaves a restaurant, having been snubbed



Ignacio López Tarso and a re-release of the 35-year-old Cantinflas feature *Aquí está el detalle!*) and go into a bar, where they dance to a *norteño* band. He looks at her driver's license and discovers she's Laurie Stevenson, the married daughter of a senator. They wind up in his apartment...

Manuel and Paula are released from jail. He speaks to a large meeting and says they haven't been served by the law, it's time for them to fight for themselves. Paula is reunited with her mother there; Manuel takes them to his grandfather's house and asks them to take care of it in case something happens to him.

A group of people march to join the Alianza but are confronted by armed police on orders of the district attorney. A shootout ensues; Manuel and some men--including former sheriff Sam--make an armed raid on the courthouse, but the D.A. isn't there. They leave, killing one deputy before they go. The "Army" [a newscaster later says it was the National Guard] is deployed and the women and children squatters are arrested. "Isn't this a violation of civil rights?" asks report Max Oliver. "Let's not talk now of civil rights," replies a general. "The Albuquerque Tribune" headline reads: "Guerrillas in U.S.A." Manuel and the others are hiding in a cave; they all tie bandannas around their heads and pose as "Indians" to pass through the National Guard lines ("the Indians are our friends").



Laurie arrives at the Army headquarters where Héctor is waiting for news. She says she told her father everything, and the National Guard is being withdrawn.

by one of the guests who would talk to Caldwell. They drive off together (passing a cinema showing *En busca de un muro*, starring

Héctor laughs. Manuel is informed that he'll be guaranteed a fair trial if he surrenders and he agrees, but "I don't want an Anglo lawyer." Héctor is arrested, accused of giving Becky drugs; Manuel and his men are in the cell across the way. Héctor says "*putas y cabrones*" have always been his downfall. He tells Manuel "we have 3 things in common: we're alive, we're going to die, and we're screwed."

Manuel testifies in front of a university panel about the "old laws" based on customs and an oral tradition that Anglos can't understand ("Your language prevents it"). [This is an incomprehensible scene.] He later makes the same argument in his trial and is (unbelievably) found "Not Guilty"--his "citizen's arrest" in the courthouse raid apparently excused an armed assault and the killing of a police officer. [In real life, Tijerina was sentenced to prison.] Manuel is released to a crowd of supporters, a *mariachi* band, and so forth. He crosses paths with Héctor--also being released--and says "I'm going to obtain those lands!" "Do it," Héctor replies, "I'm tired of losers."

*Chicano* is hampered by some things which are never clearly explained. Manuel Cantú is not given any backstory, he's just introduced as a traveling activist who drives around in a camper with his 14-year-old daughter (late in the film, his wife finally shows up, briefly). Manuel has no job and no money, apparently existing on the kindness of strangers (in one scene, a local priest gives him groceries after Manuel has been unable to pay a trailer park operator in full); suddenly at one point he's the leader of the "Alianza" (Alliance), who hire a lawyer for him. Héctor is apparently a well-off



businessman (we see him in a record shop at one point, apparently giving directions to an employee) but his background and motivation are also never explained (in one scene, his Anglo friend Caldwell says "I know more about Héctor than any of you," but he never shares this with the audience). Essentially the film presents the story of two Chicanos, Manuel the idealistic activist, and Héctor the cynical, womanising businessman who works within the Anglo system and secretly harbours similar views, but is more realistic. But because there is no particular connection between the two men--I was waiting for some "reveal" about a relationship, but it never comes (in fact, in one scene Manuel asks Héctor "why are you following me around?")--the parallel stories simply don't mesh effectively.

There are other issues with the script. Manuel does not seem to have any concrete plan or (as noted above) organisation (until later in the movie). He just drives around making the same speech time after time, raising awareness but making no concrete proposals, filing no lawsuits, urging no specific action. Additionally, *Chicano* has a (possibly deliberately) skewed view of the U.S. legal system, evident from the very beginning. Even if the 4



Anglos have legal "hunting permits," in no situation would this give them *carte blanche* to shoot sheep (and later, cattle) belonging to other people. It's like saying "I can steal this car because I have a driver's license." The hunters could have gotten off due to political pressure or they could have paid a fine, but to simply set them free (and furthermore to indicate they're within their rights to do it again!) is ludicrous. The conclusion of the picture is similarly hard to swallow. Perhaps some kind of happy ending was desired, but to have Manuel and other armed men attack a government building and shoot a policeman to death, then have Manuel acquitted by saying he was carrying out a lawful "citizen's arrest" is simply silly. If a sympathetic jury had found Manuel guilty but sentenced him to a token fine or "time served," it'd still be a mockery of the justice system, but it'd have been less so. Or, the film could have eliminated the killing of the policeman in the attack, making Manuel's crime less heinous. (At one point, one of his supporters says "A policeman was killed" and Manuel callously replies, "Then let them bury him.") Maybe audiences at the time didn't notice this, but it stands out strongly today.

*Chicano* was shot in Mexico and the USA (Mexican sources cite Texas, but some scenes appear to have been filmed in New Mexico). Production values are fine: several sequences feature large crowds of extras, and the "National Guard" troops are represented by a reasonable number of uniformed soldiers and military vehicles. The direction of Jaime Casillas is effective and slick, with a few stylish touches. The performances are generally solid: Jaime Fernández and Gregorio Casal are given the most to do, and they're both fine. I don't know much about Jim Habif, but he appears to have been a working actor from at least the late Sixties into the mid-Eighties, working in both Hollywood films (such as *Meat Cleaver Massacre*) and Mexican productions. Habif turns in an excellent performance in *Chicano*, mediating between Manuel and Héctor and also serving as the film's "good gringo."

An interesting if not completely successful political film.



**Johnny Chicano** (Acuarius Prods.—Filmadora Panamericana, 1980) *Exec Prod*: Reynaldo Puente Portillo; *Dir*: Enrique Gómez Vadillo; *Scr*: Eduardo Luján Urzaiz; *Story*: Enrique Gómez Vadillo; *Photo*: José Ortiz Ramos; *Music*: Raúl Lavista; *Post-prod Mgr*: Gustavo A. de Alba; *Asst Dir*: Jorge Bustos; *Film Ed*: Alfredo Rosas Priego; *Camera Op*: Manuel González; *Lighting*: Salvador Hernández; *Makeup*: Sara Mateos; *Sound Dir*: Ramón Moreno; *Sound Op*: Rodolfo Solís; *Re-rec*: Jesús González Gancy; *Sound Ed*: Abraham Cruz; *Union*: STPC

**Cast**: Fernando Allende (*Johnny López*), Verónica Castro (*Debbie Williamson*), Silvia Pasquel (*Raquel*), Jaime Garza (*Pepe Domínguez*), Rosalía Valdés (*Lupita*), Bruno Rey (*Mirko*), Víctor Alcocer (*don Filemón*), Carmen Molina (*Johnny's mother*), María Martín (*Mrs. Williamson*), Fernando Osés (*Mr. Williamson*), Ricardo Martí (*Dick Flores*), José Arrieta (*Alex*), Arnulfo Jiménez (*Chris*), José Ortiz Ramos (*Papa López*), Jorge

Valentino (*Nene*), Rosa María Bris (*grandmother*), Sara Mateos, Pedro Infante (*heard on soundtrack only*)

**Notes**: the "*chicano*" film was a relatively short-lived phenomenon in mainstream Mexican cinema, despite the large U.S. audience for Mexican films. Filmmakers apparently felt more comfortable making films about Mexicans in the USA than Mexican-Americans, although the *videohome* revolution did result in the production of a number of Spanish-language movies made by Mexicans and Mexican-Americans in Los Angeles and elsewhere.

*Johnny Chicano* is one of the later Chicano movies, shot in Indio and Coachella (spelled "Cochela" on the credits) California in 1980. The cast and crew are composed mostly of Mexican industry veterans, although some of the supporting roles may have been filled by locals. As with the majority of the Chicano films made by the Mexican film industry, a Mexican character is included to provide some audience identification.

Johnny picks grapes in the Coachella Valley. He visits the bar where his friend Raquel works, and a brawl breaks out when a customer makes a pass at her. Johnny and Pepe escape on Johnny's motorcycle; Johnny asks his family if Pepe can stay with them, since he's an *indocumentado*. Pepe joins the grape pickers; Johnny tells him "La Migra" only shows up at the beginning of the picking season.

Back at the bar, Johnny is surprised to see his sister Lupita there with Pepe, but she says their mother asked her to

take him out. *Gringa* Debbie, whose family owns the ranch where Johnny is employed, is also there, and asks Lupita to introduce her to Johnny. Later, they visit her luxurious family home to use the swimming pool; one of Debbie's friends makes a racist remark and is asked to leave.

The next day, Debbie drives by the vineyard and talks to Johnny. They meet later and she kisses him, even though he says "oil and water don't mix." However, Johnny is subsequently shown in bed with Raquel. Johnny is promoted to running the ranch warehouse (*bodega*) thanks in part to his friendship with Debbie. Foreman



Mirko (previously identified as a "psychopath" and Vietnam veteran) suspects Pepe is an illegal alien.

Raquel has quit her job at the bar and is now a supermarket checker. She tells Lupita that she loves Johnny and is pregnant with his child. Nonetheless, Johnny and Debbie's relationship progresses. Debbie's erstwhile suitor Dick is angry at this, and his own mother criticises him for allowing a Chicano to steal his girlfriend. This prompts another brawl in the bar, Dick and some friends versus Johnny, Pepe and other patrons. Johnny is arrested. Johnny's father tells Debbie that his son was arrested even though the others started it, because Johnny is a Chicano (as the film's title indicates!).



Pepe decides to return to Mexico; he and Lupita get married and leave together. Before she goes, Lupita tells Johnny that Raquel is the woman for him (and she's having his baby). Debbie and Johnny agree that love can't overcome the other differences between them. As the film concludes, Johnny and Raquel ride off on his motorcycle to "change the world."

*Johnny Chicano*, as can be seen from the above synopsis, is a glossy, "light" film with a lot of *telenovela*-style romantic melodrama but not too much social commentary. Johnny faces some racial discrimination, but



he never runs into the Ku Klux Klan or Nazis, and even his clash with Dick is motivated more by the gringo's jealousy of Johnny's relationship with Debbie. Change the location to Mexico City and strip out the differing ethnicity of Debbie and Johnny, and this could have been a standard cross-class romance between a rich young woman and working-class guy. The *indocumentado* character Pepe pays lip service to his fear of "La Migra," but there is never any real threat shown in the film itself, and he returns to

Mexico voluntarily (it's not clear why he left in the first place), with a new *chicana* wife.

As noted earlier, the cast is loaded with familiar faces. Some of them--Victor Alcocer, Bruno Rey, Fernando Osés--don't have much to do, but it is nice to see Carmen Molina back on screen after nearly a decade's absence. It's curious that the cast seems to have been padded out with crew members--cinematographer José Ortiz Ramos and makeup artist Sara Mateos--as if they'd been pressed into service at the last minute because several actors didn't show up. Fernando Allende was an extremely popular, handsome film and *telenovela* actor in the Seventies, and here he's paired with Verónica Castro--who also had a decade's worth of experience but would soon go on to even greater television stardom.

Director Gómez Vadillo made a number of other slick, sexy films, including *Verano salvaje* (also with Fernando Allende) and *Playa prohibida*, but his co-writer Eduardo Luján was better known for his "serious" scripts of the Seventies: *Muñeca reina*, *Coronación*, *Los cachorros*, *La casta divina*, *El profeta Mimi*, etc. *Johnny Chicano* is definitely an outlier in his filmography.

*Johnny Chicano*, although shot on location, looks glossy and professional, not at all "gritty" and realistic. It's pleasant enough, but is certainly *Chicano* film-light.



## OBITUARIES

### Abril Campillo

Actress Abril Campillo died on 5 March 2017; she had been suffering from breast cancer for three years. Campillo was born in December 1958. After making her debut as a *fotonovela* "actress" in mid-decade, Campillo began acting in films in the late 1970s under the name "Elianne Campillo." Her films include *Las del talón*, *Corrupción*, *Masacre en el Río Tula*, and *Semana Santa en Acapulco*, working for directors including Arturo Ripstein, Alejandro Galindo, Juan Ibáñez, Ismael Rodríguez (and Ismael Rodríguez Jr.), Alfredo Gurrola, Luis Alcoriza, and Óscar Blancarte. She also appeared in *videohomes* during the 1990s.



Campillo worked in numerous *telenovelas*, from the mid-1990s until as recently as 2016. She also had a musical career.

Abril Campillo, who never married, is survived by her adopted son Michel.





**Fernando Riba**

Composer and singer Fernando Riba died of liver



cancer on 26 February 2017; he was 67 years old. Fernando Gutiérrez López was born in Mexico City in February 1950. His father was singer-actor (and later director-producer) Roberto G.[utiérrez] Rivera. Riba studied at the Actors Studio in New York, then returned to Mexico and

began a musical career. He first came to fame as a singer in the 1970s, winning a contest on the popular TV show “Siempre en domingo.” Riba later wrote hit songs for numerous pop artists and groups like Timbiriche, Thalía, Ricky Martin, Pandora, and others.

Riba’s sister was actress Gloria Mayo—who married his composing partner Kiko Campos—and Riba was the music coordinator for her film *Luchadores de las estrellas*. His songs can be heard in a number of other films, including *El crimen del Padre Amaro*, *Solicito marido para engañar*, and *Noche de buitres*.

Fernando Riba is survived by three children.

**José Solé**

Actor-director José Solé died of heart failure on 15



February 2017; he was 87 years old. José Solé Nájera was born in Mixcoac in July 1929. He studied acting and set design, and became a professional stage actor, then branched out into directing and administration. He retired in 2010.

Although primarily a stage actor and director, Solé had small roles in a handful of early 1950s films, including *Prefiero a tu papá* and *Venganza en el circo*. In the 1960s and 1970s he made a few more appearances in films and *telenovelas*, and was credited as the stage director for 1963’s *Las troyanas*, a filmed version of a play staged at the Teatro Xola (which Solé later managed). Solé also directed television programs from the 1960s through the 1990s.

**Josefina Leiner**

Actress Josefina Leiner died on 9 February 2017; she was 88 years old. Josefine Noguera Escobar began her screen career in the early 1950s and appeared in films such as *Retorno a la juventud*, *Los hijos de María Morales*, *Pablo Carolina*, and *Un minuto de bondad*, alongside performers including Tin Tan, Pedro Infante, Luis Aguilar, María Antonieta Pons, and Enrique Rambal.



She retired from acting in 1962.

**2016 MEXICAN CINEMA**

The *cine nacional* of Mexico had a reasonably good year in 2016. 162 films were made, including 60 documentaries. 90 Mexican films were released in the year (22% of the total 407 releases). 9.5 percent of the 321 million cinema tickets sold in Mexico were for Mexican movies (87 percent of tickets sold were for Hollywood productions).

The most seen film in Mexico in 2016 was *Captain America: A Civil War*, which sold 14.5 million tickets.

The most popular Mexican films were:

<i>Qué culpa tiene el niño?</i>	5.89 million (13 <sup>th</sup> overall)
<i>No manches Frida</i>	5.1 million (22 <sup>nd</sup> overall)
<i>Treintona, soltera y fantástica</i>	2.95 million (#35)
<i>La leyenda del Chupacabras</i>	2.57 million (#48)

Other films in the top 100 overall included *Compadres* (#56), *Busco novio para mi mujer* (#71), *Desierto* (#83), *El Jeremías* (#87), and *Km 31-2* (#91), *Que pena tu vida* (#93), *Macho* (#94), *La vida inmoral de la pareja ideal* (#96), and *Me estás matando, Susana* (#100).

The majority of these films were, as the titles might suggest, comedies (especialmente romantic comedies). Curiously, only one Mexican animated feature made the top 100, *La leyenda del Chupacabras*, the fourth film pitting juvenile protagonist Leo San Juan against folkloric Mexican monsters (his previous opponents: *La Llorona*, *la Nahuala*, and *las Momias de Guanajuato*).

30 Mexican films, although released theatrically, sold fewer than 4,000 tickets; 19 sold fewer than 10,000.

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