



# SEEING BEYOND THE STEREOTYPES:

## TELLING AUTHENTIC LATINO/A/X/E STORIES

### A GUIDE FOR THE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY



National Hispanic  
Media Coalition



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# INTRODUCTION

Films and TV are not *just* entertainment. Visual media teaches us how the world works and helps us understand our place in it.<sup>1</sup> For many of us, our first exposure to other cultures, identities, and ways of life is through the TV shows, movies, and content we consume.

For Latinos in the United States, the ways our community is portrayed on screen impact our lived experiences and influence the policies that affect our lives. Latinos have an extensive history in the U.S. and a rich global heritage with distinct cultures, languages, and deep-rooted traditions. We are the largest and second-fastest-growing minority population in the U.S., yet we are notably absent throughout much of the entertainment industry. This means we are left out of the picture, oftentimes literally. Unfortunately, the portrayals that do make it to screen often perpetuate the myth that we don't exist beyond the stereotypical characters of drug cartels, service workers, or hyper-sexualized women.

When these tropes are all you see in popular culture and media, they can become part of your worldview.<sup>2</sup> The repetition of messages in TV, movies, and media content has a way of cementing stereotypes into truth for the viewer.<sup>3</sup> We see this phenomenon in several disinformation campaigns on social media and broadcasts that have dominated politics and public policy.

Throughout its nearly 40 year history, the National Hispanic Media Coalition (NHMC) has fought to increase the visibility of our Latinx community and to challenge hate speech and disinformation across all media platforms. Media and pop culture have an undeniable power over the lives of marginalized and minority communities. We work to bring the diversity, joys, challenges, and authenticity of our community to the industry. We do this because these stories matter.

The question remains, how will the entertainment industry use that power to have a positive impact?

**M**edia shapes society's attitudes, perceptions, values, and beliefs. The way the media decides to portray Latinos is how we are treated in real life. We must push the entertainment industry to support authentic storytelling and increase opportunities for Latine representation from the boardroom to the writers room."

— BRENDA VICTORIA CASTILLO

President & CEO,  
National Hispanic  
Media Coalition





NHMC, with input from Latinx creators, university professors, researchers, and support from industry partners created this guide as a resource for industry professionals to provide an comprehensive education about our community. We hope this guide is the beginning of a conversation about ways the entertainment industry can use its influence to shut down harmful narratives and to tell authentic stories. We also present this information as a challenge to the industry to join us in our work to educate audiences, clear up misinformation, and inspire change.

LEFT NHMC Screening of *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*  
 CENTER NHMC x NALIP Screening of *Flamin' Hot*  
 RIGHT NHMC Screening of *Blue Beetle*

And the time couldn't be better for the industry to rise to the challenge.

*The 2023 Hollywood Diversity Report "Exclusivity in Progress" Part 1: Film* found new evidence from 2022 that continues to support findings from earlier reports in this series suggesting that America's increasingly diverse audiences prefer diverse film content in both theatrical and streaming releases.<sup>4</sup>

Latinas are avid media consumers, buying more movie tickets and subscribing to more online streaming services and video-on-demand than any other group. The audience is there, and it's time for the industry to catch up. We need greater authenticity in storytelling, more representation from the screen to the writer's room, and a commitment from the industry to learn and do better. Through original storytelling, the opportunities for garnering greater audiences and positively impacting the lives of our community are endless.

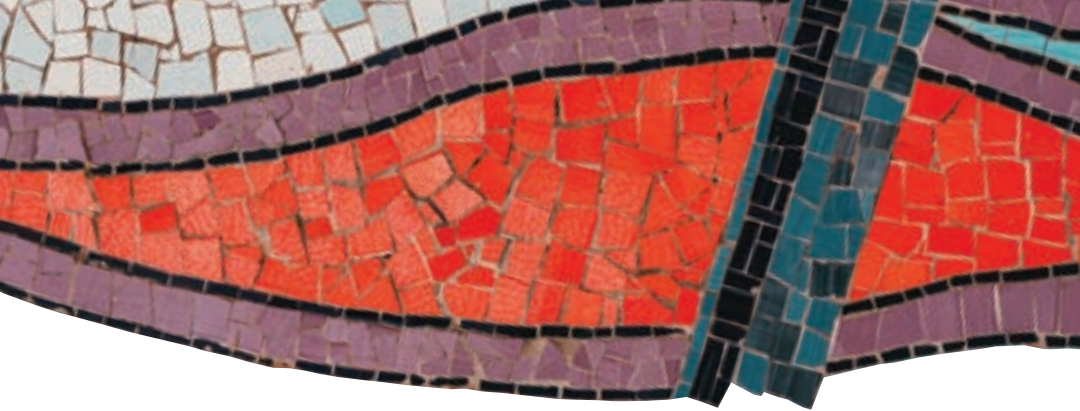
## HISPANIC OR LATINO/A/X/E?

Throughout our guide, we use Latine, Latinx, Latino, Latina, and Hispanic. True to the diversity of our people, there is no single preferred term. We hope through this guide that you will gain a better understanding of the terminology used throughout our broad community. Latino as a term has evolved since its initial use. Through the work of women's and LGBTQIA+ movements, Latino has shifted from the default to more inclusive options, such as Latinx and/or Latine.

"The emergence of Latinx coincides with a global movement to introduce gender-neutral nouns and pronouns into many languages whose grammar has traditionally used male or female constructions. In the United States, the first use of Latinx appeared more than a decade ago. It was added to a widely used English dictionary in 2018, reflecting its greater use."<sup>5</sup> The terms Latino, Latina, Latinx, Latine is are mainly used to identify people living in the United States. Note these labels may not always be interchangeable. You should ask what the person prefers or identifies with.



National Hispanic Media Coalition's 2023 Impact Awards Gala honorees



# NOT A MONOLITH: UNDERSTANDING THE SPECTRUM OF LATINO/A/X/E IDENTITY

We have been called the “Sleeping Giant” in politics and a “Latin Explosion” in entertainment. Our voting and U.S. Latino purchasing power at \$3.4 trillion can’t be ignored.<sup>6</sup> Still, when it comes to politicians and industries understanding and authentically connecting with Latinos, we’re often given a one-size-fits-all treatment.

After decades of being consistently misunderstood, Latinos are rising to say — we are not all the same. At nearly 20 percent of the U.S. population, Latinx are the largest racial/ethnic minority group. We come from a myriad of Latin American countries outside of the U.S., with just as many — if not more — sub-ethnic groups, racial and multiracial identities, and multinational origins. Just as there are Mexican-Americans, Cuban-Americans, Salvadoran-Americans, and more — there are Chilean-Argentiniens, Chinese-Peruvians, Honduran-Panamanians, Puerto Rican-Dominicans, and every combination you can think of. And we bring all of those identities and stories to the U.S. culture and consciousness.

While members of our community often identify with their families’ country of origin, we aim to unite under shared identities to strengthen our decision-making power and influence.

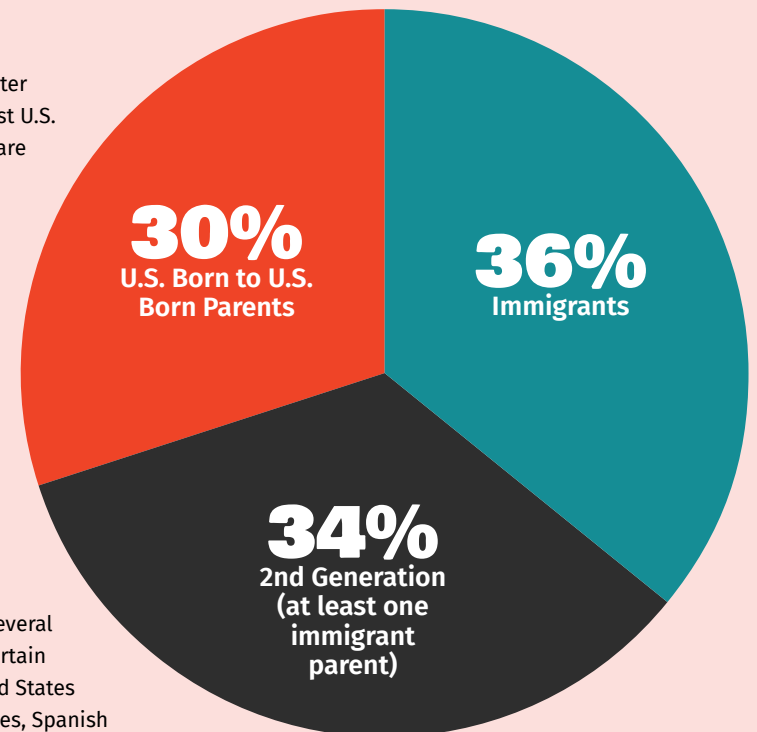
**Y**ou’ve heard it all before. We are not a monolithic group. We come from all walks of life, we have all different kinds of backgrounds and experiences. We are hard working blue collar people, we are doctors, lawyers, and Supreme Court justices, and everything in between. And I always hear people refer to Latinos as if we aren’t part of the mainstream. We are the mainstream!!!”



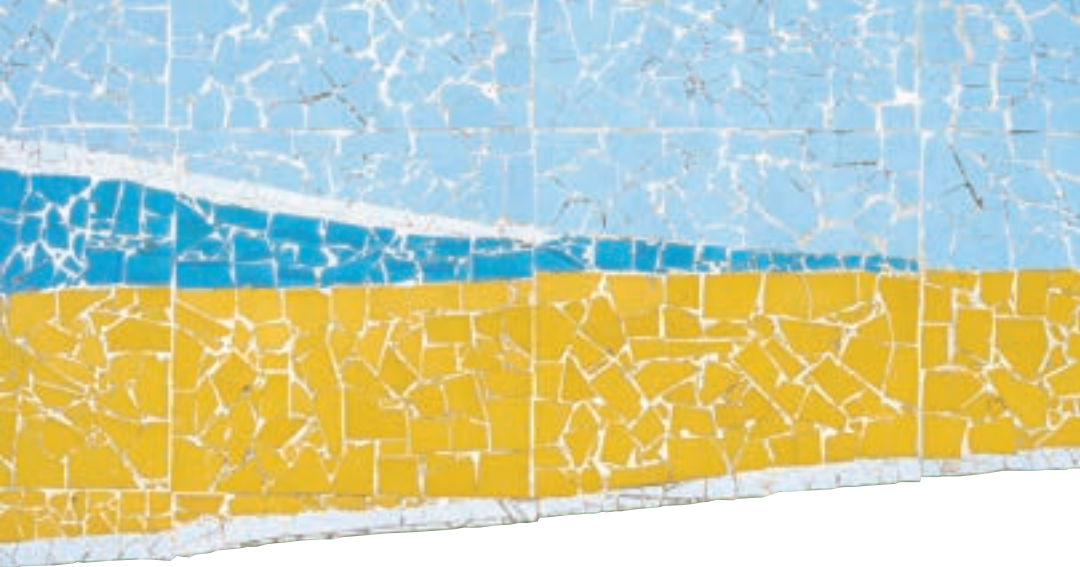
— EUGENIO DERBEZ  
*Mexican Actor, Writer,  
Director, & Producer*

### SOURCE

Pew Research Center demonstrates most U.S. Hispanics/Latinx are born here.



In addition, many Latinx families have lived in the same region for several generations, as certain parts of the United States were Mexican states, Spanish colonies, and Indigenous territories.<sup>7</sup>



## CALL US BY OUR NAMES

Throughout U.S. history, the names Latinos have been given, and the ones we've chosen for ourselves, have shifted with the politics and culture of the times. The varied uses of classifications are complicated and tied to regional differences. While these differences can be confusing, and even a point of debate within our community, it's crucial for the entertainment industry to understand the nuances to better connect with who they are making media for and about. The Latine community is ever-evolving and diverse.

Ultimately, it is always preferable to allow people to self-identify and state the term they would like to use for themselves. This is why it is essential to be clear about who you intend to reach with your projects, and to work directly with the community you are featuring. Beyond the U.S. Census exists a world of intersectional identity that's very personal to each individual and their family. Additionally, each term can carry distinct political, regional, and cultural connotations that make their use deeply personal.



Coco (Walt Disney Pictures/Pixar)

### LATINO/A

A gender-binary term for someone of Latin American descent.

Includes all languages.  
Does not include Spain.

### LATINX/E

A gender-neutral term for someone of Latin American descent.

Includes all languages.  
Does not include Spain.

### HISPANIC

A gender-neutral term for someone who descends from a Spanish-speaking country or culture.

Does not include English or Portuguese-speaking countries.  
Includes Spain.



Ugly Betty (Walt Disney Television/Touchstone/ABC)



What We Do in the Shadows (FX/Hulu)



## ACCORDING TO THE UCLA HOLLYWOOD DIVERSITY REPORT 2023 SERIES:

### IN THEATRICAL & STREAMING FILMS:

**8.4%** Latinx leads  
**5.1%** Latinx writers

**6.1%** Latinx directors

The above statistics correlate to the 300 top theatrical and streaming films in 2022.

**4.4%** Latinx TV leads

The above statistics are from the 2021-2022 television season across broadcast, cable, and streaming platforms.

In the same television season, Latinx actors who were part of the main cast represented an average of 5.7% of all leading cast roles across platforms.

**0** Latinx CEOs or chairs of studios or networks

There are few Latinx executives in key decision-making or greenlighting roles in the executive suites. There are no Latinx CEOs or chairs of the major or mini-major studios and TV/streaming networks.

In 2020, key executive positions were held by mostly White non-Latino men.



## WE DESERVE TO BE IN FRONT OF AND BEHIND THE CAMERA

Decisions about what types of projects to make, stories to tell, how large a budget to assign, how they will be marketed, and who will direct, are made by the people who occupy Hollywood's executive suites. In 2020, the UCLA Hollywood Diversity Report found that non-Latino White men dominated these decisions at the 11 major and mid-major film studios and the 74 television studios, network, and streamers. Compared to five years earlier, when the executive suites were last examined in the report series, the only noticeable improvements were at the unit heads level, which was slightly more diverse but still overwhelmingly non-Latino White men.<sup>8</sup>

In recent years, visual representation, which has increased in film and TV, is not enough for increasingly diverse audiences. They want meaningful representation that happens when the filmmakers and the scriptwriters are also diverse. The most authentic Latine stories and portrayals come from members of our community. Yet we make up a tiny fraction of writers, directors, actors, and crew. There is no lack of talent among our community, simply a lack of opportunity and access.

Across the board, our community is severely underrepresented in crucial roles in Hollywood.

# WE ARE ENTERTAINMENT'S BIGGEST FANS

The entertainment industry has yet to catch up with its most loyal audience. More than any other group, Latinos are avid entertainment consumers, and there are limitless opportunities to tap into an audience eager for content that reflects their lives. "In 2021, the Hispanic/Latino category was overrepresented in share of moviegoers (24%) and movie tickets purchased (23%)." <sup>9</sup> We are also frequent moviegoers (going to a movie once or more a month), buying more movie tickets per person than any other group, and have the highest annual attendance. Latinos are also overrepresented among online content subscribers and electronic sell-through/video-on-demand, daily viewers. <sup>10</sup>

## THE IMPACT OF OUR LATINO AUDIENCES COULDN'T BE CLEARER:



Encanto (Walt Disney Animation Studios)

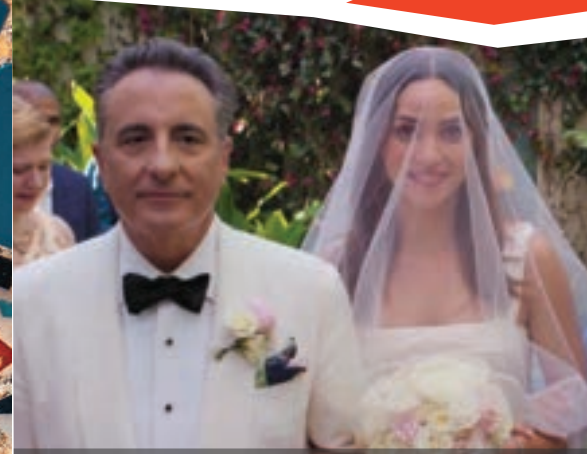
**ENCANTO's** "We Don't Talk About Bruno" reached #1 on the Billboard Charts, surpassing Frozen's "Let it Go," which was previously charted at the #6 spot.

**FURIOUS 7's** opening weekend brought in \$384 million, thanks to Latino fans who purchased 37% of tickets.



Furious 7 (Universal Pictures)

**FATHER OF THE BRIDE** drew HBO Max's largest audience for a streaming-only film, and ranked in the top-10 for Mexico's HBO Max audience in 2022.



Father of the Bride (Warner Bros/HBO Max)



# TELLING OUR AUTHENTIC STORIES

Non-Latino White people dominate the media on all platforms. To the typical viewer, there is no question that non-Latino White people can be anything from lawyers, professors, and scientists to U.S. Presidents, Ivy League graduates, astronauts, museum curators, and Tech CEOs. Why? Because the media landscape is dominated by non-Latino White creators, executives, and actors, who create a big, broad world reflecting their communities and identities on screen.

Latinos are no less complicated. We are multidimensional people with rich lives and stories. Latinx individuals should be portrayed with unlimited possibilities. Latines are also lawyers, professors, and scientists with dreams and hardships, but the diversity of our community and our experiences is rarely represented on screen in film and television. Instead, the world is accustomed to seeing only one narrow, static, often stereotypical portrayal of our lives. If the character isn't of service to the White lead with a minimal role in the plot, they're in need of a White savior's help, guidance, acceptance, and love.

A narrow and stereotypical view of Latine life isn't just inauthentic and bad for the entertainment industry's bottom line; it also causes actual harm. Developmental research shows that these limited media depictions harm young people's self-esteem. The erasure of a group or its limited visibility signals the importance that the group carries in society. When a group is left out of media content, it reflects a lack of status and power. Yet, this couldn't be further from the truth for the Latine community. There are endless opportunities to explore untapped Latinx talent that can bring real and entertaining stories to life.

"Werq It"  
National Hispanic Media Coalition  
Latinx Stream Showcase (2020)

Latinx leading stories are worthy of being told. There is so much more to tap into within Latinx culture other than being portrayed as a gardener or a house cleaner. As much as those voices are valid & real, there are others that deserve to be amplified. I would love to see more Latinx individuals in leading roles, inspiring our culture & paving the way towards our future."

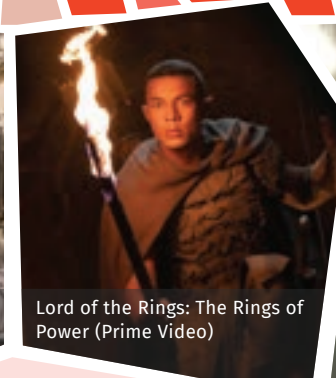
— CIERRA RAMIREZ  
American Actress & Singer

# WHAT WE WANT TO SEE MORE OF

- ◆ Multiracial families where the richness of diverse cultures is explored healthily rather than pitting communities of color against one another.
- ◆ Latinx characters that are multidimensional and complex.
- ◆ Latinx in science fiction or fantasy genres as humans and other life forms.
- ◆ Triumphs and successes of Latinx characters.
- ◆ More love and acceptance of LGBTQIA+ Latinx characters on screen.
- ◆ Storylines covering Latinx characters' love and family life.
- ◆ Stories that depict diversity within the Latinx community.
- ◆ Feature characters with intersectional identities (e.g., LGBTQIA+, AfroLatino, Indigenous Latino, Asian Latino, characters with disabilities, etc.)



The Mandalorian (Lucasfilm/Disney+)



Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power (Prime Video)



Our Flag Means Death (HBO Max)

- ◆ Stories that explore colonization and its effects (e.g., systematic racism, systemic racism, White Supremacy, etc.) on Latinx families.
- ◆ Multigenerational families where Spanish speakers interact with non-Spanish speakers.
- ◆ If Spanish dialogue is to be used, it should be used with limited or no subtitles, for the translation to appear natural and not foreign.

One Day at a Time (Sony Pictures Television/Netflix)



# & LESS OF THIS:

- ◆ Latinx as gang members.<sup>11</sup>
- ◆ Latinx as drug cartels/criminals.
- ◆ “Cholos” or “Cholas.”
- ◆ Roles with no or limited dialogue.
- ◆ Characters in service or subservient roles.
- ◆ Characters with stereotypical accents.
- ◆ Oversexualized women.<sup>12</sup>
- ◆ Depicting or casting only White or White-passing people.
- ◆ LGBTQIA+ people as solely a suffering group.
- ◆ White Saviors and only White love interests.
- ◆ Colorism, consciously or unconsciously, favoring lighter skin over darker skin.

## THE COMPLEXITIES OF COLORISM

The entertainment industry, like all other systems in the United States, has a color problem. White people or White-passing Latinos have a distinct advantage in casting and behind the scenes.

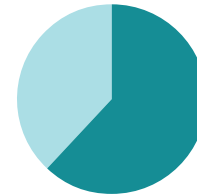
Latines in the United States face discrimination because of their ethnic group. The degree of discrimination varies depending on their skin color due to colorism. Colorism has roots in systemic racism. Darker-skinned Latines experience discrimination from non-Latines as well as Latines. Colorism has been shamefully passed on through generations among Latine families. It has historically created a false belief that Latine individuals would be accepted by those in power and by society in general if they were light-skinned or could pass as “White.”

The industry is critical to embracing diversity in front of and behind the camera. It has the power and influence to perpetuate the idea that lighter skin is key to greater success in life. Perceptions begin to shift when people are exposed to the diversity of an ethnic and racial group.

Pose (FX Network/20th Television Studios)

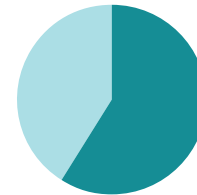


## PEW RESEARCH CENTER NATIONAL SURVEY OF LATINOS FOUND THE FOLLOWING:



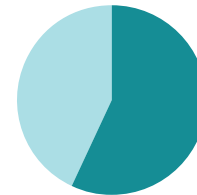
**62%**

Having a darker skin color hurts Hispanics' ability to get ahead in the United States today at least a little.



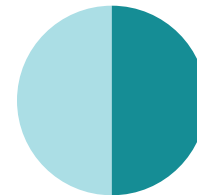
**59%**

Having a lighter skin color helps Hispanics get ahead.



**57%**

Skin color shapes my daily life experiences a lot or some.



**50%**

Discrimination based on race or skin color is a 'very big problem' in the U.S. today.

**SOURCE**  
Pew Research Center bilingual national study surveying 3,375 Hispanic adults.<sup>13</sup>

# YOU CAN DO MORE, DO BETTER

You cannot create genuinely authentic Latinx stories if, from concept to final product, the only people making the decisions and creating the content are not members of our community. Latino creators need the same access and authority that White non-Latino creators have. Starting to build a network and create the opportunities that make for complex, unique, authentic, and marketable content is critical.

While producing U.S. Latino content, Latino creators, advisors, and crew should be brought in throughout the process from the very inception of the development and writing of the pilot. It's also essential that the cast and crew be educated throughout the process while telling Latino stories. Some thought can be given to paying for cultural sensitivity training before the production begins and/or during the filming of scenes. Community advocacy groups can also be brought in during the filming to give input on depictions, tone, and set design. There is a rich and diverse pool of untapped talent in our community, which should be utilized.

**I**t's [Latino representation in *Wakanda Forever*] inspired by Mesoamerican culture, and the people who were involved as advisors are academics — Mexicans of the region, Latin Americans, they call themselves Latinoamericanistas. They made it possible. And the company, the production — totally open, eager, respectful, smart, sensitive. That is representation, that's how things should be done — with this commitment, with this humility, which is incredible."

— TENOCH HUERTA

*Mexican actor of Nahua and Purépecha origin*



# YOU CAN TAKE ACTION

Recruit, hire, promote, and sponsor more Latine executives in development positions.

Establish, invest, and support a target number of Latine-created projects that can be developed and receive equitable budgets throughout the process.

Create a strategy that will foster the growth of a developed series, so they can be given the opportunity to find an audience in the competitive market.

Invest in Latine filmmakers, help them create independent films, and then hire them to direct higher-budget films.

Create a strategic Latine initiative at your company, studio, and/or network

Hire Latine-owned companies, including recruiters for your projects.

Hire more Latine people across the board at all levels.

Highlight Latine actors and creators in all marketing content, especially in trailers, aimed at mainstream audiences.

# NURTURING TALENT IN LATINX COMMUNITIES

NHMC is dedicated to supporting Latinx talent. Writers, directors, showrunners, actors, and staff behind the scenes should reflect the diversity of our community; but opportunity and access are limited. We want to change that. For more than 20 years, the NHMC Series Scriptwriters Program has helped support a network of talented creatives who are making some of the best TV and movies in Hollywood.

## SERIES SCRIPTWRITERS PROGRAM ALUMNI SUCCESS STORIES

**T**he NHMC program literally brought me to LA and had an immeasurable impact on my success. I still use lessons I learned from Geoff Harris today as a writer and showrunner. Geoff and the program work tirelessly to set you up for success, not only as a writer but as someone trying to navigate a writers' room."

— **SIERRA TELLER ORNELAS**  
 Showrunner | *Rutherford Falls*  
 Co-Executive Producer | *Loot & Superstore*  
 Producer | *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*



**E**very good day I've had in a writers room I owe to the NHMC Writers Program. The mentorship and sense of community I got there has been an invaluable support throughout my career."

— **ZAYRE FERRER**  
 Writer | *Our Flag Means Death*  
 Creator & Executive Producer | *Tijuana*

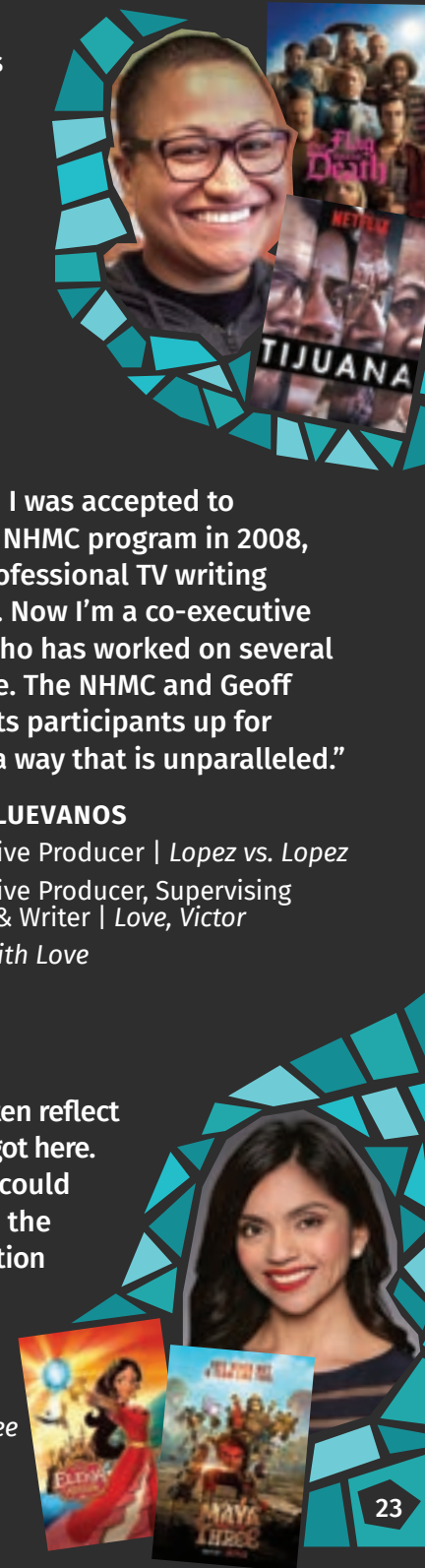


**W**hen I was accepted to the NHMC program in 2008, I had no professional TV writing experience. Now I'm a co-executive producer who has worked on several shows since. The NHMC and Geoff Harris set its participants up for success in a way that is unparalleled."

— **MARCOS LUEVANOS**  
 Co-Executive Producer | *Lopez vs. Lopez*  
 Co-Executive Producer, Supervising Producer, & Writer | *Love, Victor*  
 Writer | *With Love*

**W**hen I'm in the writers' room, I often reflect back on my own path and how I got here. I think about how many Latino writers could be sharing their own voices if they had the benefit of the mentorship and collaboration that I had. The NHMC's Writers Program was instrumental in my journey."

— **SILVIA OLIVAS**  
 Executive Producer | *Maya and the Three*  
 Co-Executive Producer & Story Editor | *Elena of Avalor*



Selena (Q Productions/Esparza Katz/Warner Bros.)



## TELL US A (GOOD) STORY.

As we said before, non-Latino White people are allowed development and complexity on screen, which is rarely seen in Latinx stories. You can change that.

To begin, start with a quick check-in:

What percentage of your characters are Latinx?

Do your Latinx characters contribute to the story's main plot or have they been relegated to the outskirts?

Are your Latina characters oversexualized and/or playing the victim to the male hero?

Do any of your characters represent intersectional identities like LGBTQIA+, people with disabilities, Black-Latinx/ Afro-Latinx, Indigenous-Latinx, and multi-racial/Latinx?

Do your Latinx characters have professional positions, including leadership roles?

Can you describe your Latinx characters as intelligent, strong, reliable, successful, confident, or heroic?

Are any of your characters over the age of 50? Do they look over the age of 50?

Do your characters reflect a range of skin tones and body types?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[nhmc.org](http://nhmc.org)

[nhmc.org/ttie-fact-sheet-latinx-people](http://nhmc.org/ttie-fact-sheet-latinx-people)

[bechdeltest.com](http://bechdeltest.com)

[nielsen.com/insights/type/report/](http://nielsen.com/insights/type/report/)

*Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America*, Juan Gonzalez (2022)

*Finding Latinx: In Search of the Voices Redefining Latino Identity*, Paola Ramos (2020)

*Inventing Latinos: A New Story of American Racism*, Laure E. Gómez (2020)

*An African American and Latinx History of the United States*, Paul Ortiz (2018)

*An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz (2014)





High School Musical:  
The Musical: The Series  
(Disney+)

## LATINOS BELONG IN EVERY STORY

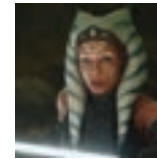
We, as a community, are ever-changing, much like the identifying terms we label ourselves with. From Hispanic to Latino/a to Latinx and Latine, we are forever defining and shaping how we see ourselves and how we wish for others to see us.

NHMC aims to guide the conversations behind the camera to create accurate depictions of the Latine community. We believe the entertainment industry has a unique opportunity to tell authentic Latine stories that our community of media consumers eagerly awaits. The industry also has a powerful role to play in challenging the stereotypes we face. Stories don't need to revolve around immigration or violence to include our community. Like everyone else, we live beyond suffering. We win. We laugh. We raise families and have professional careers. We are multi-racial. We look different. We are not all the same, and it's time for the entertainment industry to catch up. We belong in every story.

# CITATIONS

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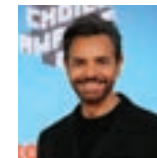
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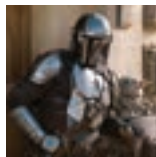
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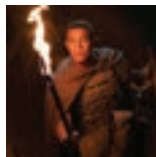
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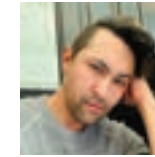


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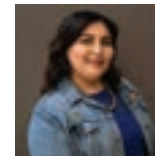
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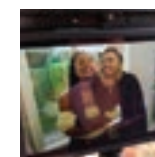
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## ABOUT NHMC

NHMC is a woman-led non-profit civil and human rights organization that was founded to eliminate hate, discrimination, and racism toward Latino/a/x/e communities. We educate and increase Latinx visibility from our policy work in Washington, D.C., to our media advocacy work in Hollywood, where we connect, collaborate, and create with Latinx talent within the entertainment industry. At NHMC we focus on all forms of media because it is one of the most influential and powerful institutions that shape society's attitudes, values, and beliefs.



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