



## The Academy Awards: Latinos Who Made it in Hollywood

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Published February 24, 2013 | Fox News Latino

Latinos have always had an interesting place in cinema and Hollywood, with key figures such as Carmen Miranda and Desi Arnaz leading the movement.

Still, not many Latinos have won an Academy Award in the leading actor/actresses categories, and the plethora of others who have been recognized in the technical categories unfortunately go somewhat unnoticed.

"I think that Hollywood is OK with hiring Latinos behind the scenes, but they don't quite understand that Latinos are a growing market and don't know how to deal with that," said A.B. Lugo, who is a member of the Hispanic Organization of Latino Actors (HOLA) as well as an actor, writer and director.

Lugo adds that one of the common things that happens in Hollywood is the "whitewashing" of Latinos and Latino stories in order to make them "appeal to the general market."

"They think that something mainstream is Caucasian and British," Lugo said, giving the example of the movie "The Impossible," where he says the lead characters are white despite the story being about Latinos.

As the Academy Awards are set to take off on Sunday, one of the films buzzing in the foreign films category is "No" featuring Mexican actor/producer and director Gael García Bernal.

The flick is based on the life of Chilean advertising executive René Saavedra (García Bernal), who through a clever campaign is able to overthrow Augusto Pinochet's regime.

Out of the Latinos who have been nominated and/or have won an Oscar in past years, Mexicans seem to be the most nominated.

Aside from García Bernal, last year Mexican actor Demián Bichir was nominated for his moving role in "A Better Life," where he portrays the life of a single undocumented immigrant father trying to raise his son.

"People from other countries, who have access to their nation's higher education and to professional employment opportunities, generally do better in Hollywood than do U.S.-born minorities," said Chon Noriega, a professor in the Cinema and Media Studies program at UCLA.

"Among all US citizens, it is Latinos that have the lowest level of access to higher education and employment in the entertainment industry," he continued, adding that he feels Gael García Bernal "deserves the Oscar for best foreign film," because his film, like "Lincoln," which has received 10 nominations, "offers an entertaining yet provocative mirror on current struggles for rights."

Despite not having as much representation in the entertainment industry and in the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences compared to other cultures, those Latinos who have gone mainstream have made key strides and have opened up doors to other Latino actors.

"If it wasn't for Lauren Velez there would be no Zoe Saldana," Lugo told Fox News Latino.

"Some people say we have to brand ourselves. Jennifer Lopez is great at being a brand," he continued.

"But a lot of us we just like the work. Like Halle Berry said in her speech when she won the Academy Award for 'Monster's Ball' it's for the nameless and faceless actors out there."

Lugo said that some Latinos making big today are those like Michael Peña (End of Watch, Million Dollar Baby, Gangster Squad)

and Judy Reyes (Gun Hill Road, Scrubs, Devious Maids.)

Professor Noriega agrees with Lugo explaining that aside from being underrepresented throughout history, "individual Latino actors have made significant impacts in our media culture" such as Jose Ferrer and Ricardo Montalban.

"These were great actors. Many worked within the studio system on contract, and therefore had regular opportunities to appear in films," Noriega explained.

Like Ferrer, Montalban, Bernal and Bichir, Salma Hayek joins the list of Oscar nominated Latino actors for her role in "Frida" along with and Guillermo del Toro for "Pan's Labyrinth."

There is also Alfonso and Carlos Cuarón nominated in the best original screenplay category for the hit film "Y tu mamá también," and Spanish superstar couple Javier Bardem and Penélope Cruz. Benicio Del Toro, Rita Moreno and Mexican actor Anthony Quinn have also left a huge impression in Hollywood with their talent, such talent which Lugo refers to as "scary good."

Others like Joaquin Phoenix are completely against the Oscars and are indifferent toward being nominated or winning the accolade.

"I think it's bull\*\*\*\*. I think it's total, utter bull\*\*\*\*, and I don't want to be a part of it. I don't believe in it," the Puerto Rican actor, who has been nominated twice, told The Huffington Post. "It's totally subjective. Pitting people against each other. It's the stupidest thing in the whole world."

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