

Latino leaders nominate 5 East LA movies for the National Film Registry

By Antonio Mejías-Rentas



The film *"Walkout"* about the 1968 Chicano student protests was one of the movies nominated for inclusion in the National Film Registry.

Photo by Rico Torres/HBO.

East Los Angeles -- The Chicano Blowouts of March 1968, in which thousands of students at Garfield and seven other Eastside high schools walked out of their classrooms to protest unequal conditions, were featured in a 2006 film directed by Edward James Olmos titled *"Walkout."*

It's one of five movies set or shot in East LA that were nominated this month to become part of the National Film Registry. The registry includes culturally significant films kept by the Library of Congress.

Congressmen Raul Ruiz and Joaquín Castro, members of the Hispanic Caucus, nominated a total of 25 films. According to NBC News, the nominations are part of an ongoing effort to fight Latino underrepresentation in Hollywood, which the congressmen say contribute “to the misperceptions and stereotypes about Latinos in our society.”

In a letter sent to the Librarian of Congress, Castro and Ruiz said the 25 films were “selected with feedback from the public, including from Latino arts and media advocacy groups, and they reflect the diversity of Latino identities, histories, geographies, and political perspectives.”

The list includes two films directed by Olmos – who is also an East LA native. The second one is “[American Me](#),” a controversial 1992 film about a Mexican American man’s experience with prison and discrimination.

Not surprisingly, Olmos appears as a lead actor in one of the other East LA films nominated. The remaining three are:

“[A Better Life](#)” - Mexican actor Demian Bichir earned an Academy Award nomination for the 2011 about an undocumented worker searching for his stolen truck with his son. The film was shot in several East LA and Boyle Heights locations.

“[Blood in Blood Out](#)” - The 1993 film by Taylor Hackford tells the tragic story of three Chicano cousins who are divided by their divergent life choices amidst gang conflict in East Los Angeles. The film is credited with establishing the giant El Pino tree as an East LA landmark.

“[My Family](#)” - Gregory Nava directed the 1995 film about a multi-generational Mexican-American family settled in East Los Angeles. Olmos plays the older brother; the film also stars Jimmy Smits and Easí Morales.

Three East LA films are already in the Registry: “Boulevard Nights” (1979), “Zoot Suit” (1981) and “Stand and Deliver” (1988). Perhaps one of the best known East LA films, Cheech Marin’s 1987 comedy “Born in East LA,” is not on the registry and was not nominated by the Hispanic Caucus.

Despite their nomination, some of the films on the list have been actually criticized for the way they portray East Los Angeles. Some say that many of their characters and situations are repetitive and stereotypical.

Jonathan Perez, co-founder of the Immigrant Youth Coalition, [wrote in a 2012 commentary](#) that “A Better Life” “makes it look like every person in East LA is a gang member or will eventually be one.”

But Chon Noriega, director of the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center, says that some Chicano directors who focused on gang stories “were looking toward works like the Oscar-winning The Godfather as a model for bringing their stories into the mainstream” and should not be accused of exploitation.

The real issue, Noriega pointed out, is the fact that members of Congress had to point out the lack of Latino representation in Hollywood.

Which is your favorite East LA movie?

- A Better Life
- American Me
- Blood In Blood Out
- Born in East LA
- Boulevard Nights
- My Family
- Stand and Deliver
- Walkout
- Zoot Suit

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