

COVER STORY
This week's top story

Small studios true pioneers

Continued from 1E

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The 37,000-member organization is hoping, for instance, to get young Latinos interested in seeing *Glory*. To lure them, the club has set up screenings for high school students and is sending out about a million e-mails to college students across the country. The group could become an important marketing player: New Line Pictures and Screen Gems have talked to the club about getting involved with marketing their upcoming pictures, according to Miller.

But enticing Hispanics to Latino-themed films isn't easy.

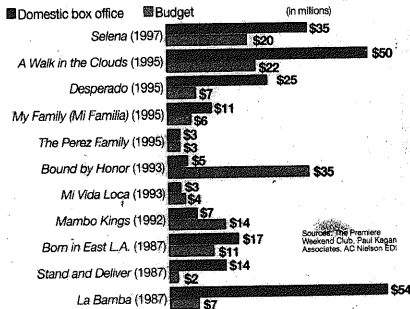
In a recent study, fewer than 40% of Latinos surveyed said they go to movies because of a Latino community focus. And, "when asked about



In demand: Jennifer Lopez starred with George Clooney in *Out of Sight*. Director Gregory Nava is writing a part in his new project, *Bordertown*, for the actress.

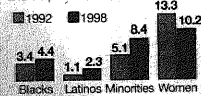
Latino-themed films stand and deliver

A sampling of English-language films focusing on Latinos during the past 15 years indicates that — with a couple of notable exceptions — more movies about that ethnic group succeed than fail.



Directing

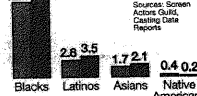
The Directors Guild breaks down the number of hours worked on a set. Percentage of overall days worked by minorities and women on film and TV productions.



Source: Directors Guild of America

Acting

Breakdown of roles in TV and theatrical releases for minorities: (numbers in percentage)



Source: Screen Actors Guild, Casting Date Reports

By Quin Tian, USA TODAY

the most important reason for selecting a film, few respondents said they based their decisions on explicitly ethnic considerations," says the Tomas Rivera Policy Institute report. Reaching the "Latino community" also can be difficult because Latinos of Mexican, Cuban, Puerto Rican or Central and South American descent have cultural differences, and their mingling reflects that.

"When New Line released the Mexican-American-themed *Mi Familia*, we did very well in the Southwest and West, but we had no degree of interest in the film's story in (Cuban-American heavy) Florida," says Mitch Goldman, a former New Line executive who is dis-

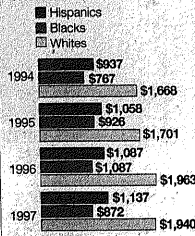
tributing the Mexican movie *The Other Conquest*. "Latinos are not as homogeneous as the black audience can be or the white community definitely is."

So his company plans to distribute the Spanish-language *Conquest*, which comes out April 19, in some 50 theaters only in California, where there is a heavy concentration of Mexican-Americans.

An added hurdle for filmmakers: Latino-themed movies have not consistently made money on video, which makes finding financing difficult, says Michael Harpster, president of worldwide marketing for distributor Providence Entertainment.

"On the one hand you look at a film

Average annual family spending on entertainment



Source: Tomas Rivera Policy Institute, Bureau of Labor Statistics

By Quin Tian, USA TODAY

like *Selena*, which did (very well in video), but *Mi Familia* (didn't do as well)," he says. "We are lacking for data because there haven't been a lot of Latino films, and, without data, finance people are leery."

Harpster says that Providence, best known for releasing the surprisingly profitable religious-themed *The Omega Code*, is still looking for the right Latino film to distribute.

Yet Santiago Pozo, founder of the Arenas Group, a company that specializes in Latino film marketing, says that the idea that his community is splintered is the talk of "amateurs." He says that Hispanics of varied backgrounds have enough in common for studios to create a cohesive Latino marketing campaign.

In fact, many of Hollywood's biggest players have taken special steps to get the support of Latinos for general audience films.

Universal, for example, ran a special promotion for *The Mummy* last year in Hispanic media. Noting that a large portion of Latinos are Catholic, Universal touted the movie with give-away trips to Jerusalem and the Middle East. The film ended up doing well among Latinos and was a surprise hit, grossing \$155.3 million.

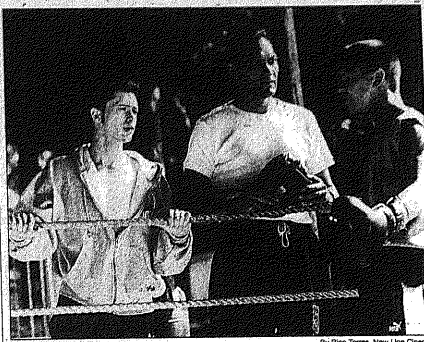
And DreamWorks has run more than 30 preview screenings of its *The Road to El Dorado* (review, 6E) for its Latino community leaders. The studio also makes sure that press kits for all its movies are translated into Spanish for Hispanic media.

Studios are going after the Hispanic moviegoing audience because Hollywood is ever in search of the black audience," says Rich Ingrassia, film analyst at Paul Kagan Associates. "Data shows that minority populations go to movies in black and with Hispanics growing faster (as an audience) than any other demographic, they are very important."

But Latino artists are still looking forward to the day when Hollywood's biggest powers treat Latino-themed films as movies for everyone, as opposed to merely marketing general audience films especially for them.

Glory steps in that direction, with New Line marketing it not only to Latinos but also to sports enthusiasts. "I don't think of this film as just part of the Latino community," Smith says. "Getting support from the Latino community is very important, but I firmly believe this story is an American story with a Latin heart."

And if *Glory* shows box office punch like Smith hopes, bigger studios may be ready to jump into the ring for Latino films.



Pugilists at rest: Ex-boxer Jimmy Smits pushes his sons — Clifford Collins Jr., left, and Jon Seda — to attain the dream he never could in *Price of Glory*.

Good-intentioned 'Glory' knocked out in the end

MOVIE REVIEW

By Andy Sella

Price of Glory
★½ (out of four)

Stars: Jimmy Smits, Jon Seda, Maria del Mar, Clifton Collins Jr., Ernesto Hernandez, Ron Perlman, Paul Rodriguez, Danielle Canestro.

Director: Carlos Avila

Distributor: New Line Cinema

Rating: PG-13 for violence, language and brief drug content

Opens nationwide today

Price of Glory is not a contender. This tale of a family boxing dynasty must have looked like a paleoeka from the start.

The talents of a spirited cast are wasted in this predictable saga that, without the Mexican-American touches, would have been wholly familiar to moviegoing audiences a half-century ago. But in those days, it would have made a fast-paced 74-minute time-filler on the bottom half of a double-feature. This year's version is two wearying hours long.

Jimmy Smits plays Arturo Ortega, a former boxing champion, his dreams long since shattered, who coaches, trains and bullies his three sons into the same career — and the triumph that he never experienced.

The punch-drunk plot stumbles badly from the outset, practically knocking itself out in the first round. A scene in which Arturo first gets his sons into the ring has the sun-dappled look and feel of a phony feel-good TV ad — complete with giggling, cute kids. Yet Arturo's determination to send even his youngest child into the ring, and his refusal to allow his kids to do anything else, plays almost like child abuse.

The hero is astonishingly unsympathetic, which is not at all a bad thing if you're making *Raging Bull*. But *Price of Glory* is not an expose or a searing, dark portrait. It's a much more mainstream project, and Arturo, however flawed, is the good guy. Though Smits does all he can to make Arturo human, the character is so driven and insensitive from the get-go that it is hard to root for him.

His excuse for his behavior: his own failure.

"You think I want them to end like me — with a crappy assembly-line job?" he asks.

Not necessarily the best argument against college.

Pig-headed, old-fashioned and almost willfully naive about the real world, Arturo is obviously heading for a fall. So there is little pleasure in poring over his hapless hero take two hours to learn what we could plainly see in the first scene.

Along the way, the rudimentary writing exercise that is this movie's script (the first-time screenwriter is a former New York Times sports reporter) punnels you with dialogue that you'll swear you've heard before.

"I'm their manager!" an angry Ar-

turo declares to wife Rita (Maria del Mar) at one point.

"No, Arturo!" she responds passionately. "You're their father!"

The talented cast tries hard to put muscle on the weak characters, but it just won't take. After much implausible and depressing melodrama, director Carlos Avila abruptly changes course to climax in the kind of rah-rah finale the Rocky series was notorious for, even though it is about as well on *Price of Glory* as a tutu on a heavyweight.

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of
ROSEMOUNT



Cable ahead of networks in minority programming

Real Live Woman, 4E
John Cusack picks his favorite tunes, 5E
Sunday start on 8E



vistas for Hollywood



By Andrew Hottel for USA TODAY

For other Latino actors, plays an ex-boxer in *Price of Glory*, opening today.

ts assesses value of roles

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role model) is in
it "do I turn down
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to take the same path. He plays a heroic FBI agent opposite Kim Basinger in *Bless the Child* and a con artist in *The Million Dollar Hotel*, with Mel Gibson, Milla Jovovich and Jeremy Davies.
Still, Smits, a Brooklyn native with roots in Puerto Rico and Suriname in South America, is aware of the importance of positive portrayals of Latinos.

Despite their numbers, Latinos have yet to conquer the big screen

By Josh Chetwynd
USA TODAY

The likes of Ricky Martin and Marc Anthony have Americans dancing to the Latin beat, but their music has yet to get many of the movie industry's top players on their feet.

While the Latino population has skyrocketed 17% in the USA during the past four years, Hollywood's biggest studios have shown limited interest in telling stories about and directly for that audience. *Price of Glory*, a \$10 million-budgeted movie about a Mexican-American boxing family opening today, could change all that.

The drama, starring Jimmy Smits, is the first wide feature film release to focus on the U.S. Latino community since 1997's *Selena*. And if it does well, more movies with Latino themes could get the green light.

Glory director Carlos Avila says he knows of three projects on hold because people are waiting to see how his movie does.

That studios haven't carved out a niche for Latino movies is a bit surprising. After all, studios have aggressively courted black moviegoers. In recent years, for example, 20th Century Fox released *How Stella Got Her Groove Back*, Paramount distributed *The Wood*, and Universal put out *The Best Man*.

There is reason to believe Latinos could also turn films targeted at them into moneymakers. Hispanics are the fastest growing moviegoing ethnic population, according to the Motion Picture Association of America. They attend 11 films per year and make up 15% of overall movie attendance. An average Latino family spends \$1,137 on entertainment a year, compared with \$872 by black families and \$1,940 by white households, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Most films in the past 15 years centering on Latino characters have been profitable, including *Selena* (\$20 million budget and \$35 million gross) and *La Bamba* (\$7 million cost and \$54 million gross).

"Only a fool would not pay attention to the fact that this market is the only one that is growing" in terms of moviegoing, says Miramax L.A. president Mark Gill.

Some insiders say major studios such as Disney, Paramount and Fox shy away from Latino films because they tend to be modestly budgeted, the kinds of films smaller companies release.

"Mainstream studios are not going to do pioneering work," says Gregory Nava, who directed *Selena* and

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▶ New TV shows explore the community, 2E



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