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Cultural Icons

The image of Latin America and its people as seen from abroad has tended to focus on photogenic individuals, ranging from the political figures of Che Guevara and Eva Perón (Evita) to movie stars Carmen Miranda and, more recently, Salma Hayek. Their faces have reached iconic status, largely thanks to the power of cinema and television screens. These household names have in many cases given rise to often one-dimensional archetypes, such as that of the fiery, hot-blooded Latina.

Throughout the twentieth century Hollywood depicted Latin America and its people through a series of clichés and stock types. The cinema sanitized the racial makeup of Latinos by foregrounding white-skinned stars and relegating those with darker coloring to minor roles as extras. During both world wars, however, the Hollywood images of Latinos improved as a direct consequence of political events and commercial considerations. During World War II in particular, the United States began to exercise greater care in its portrayal of its Latin American neighbors in an effort to unite the hemisphere against the threat posed by the Axis powers.

It is only in the last few years that major changes have taken place in the representation of Latin American identity on screen. U.S. film producers have finally awakened to the fact that Hispanics are the “majority minority” community in the United States today. What is now referred to as “Latino power” in Hollywood has become such an issue that the casting of a non-Latino in the role of a Latin American would now be considered tantamount to casting a white actor in blackface as an African American. But just a few years ago this was not the case. In 1996 Italian-Americans with unconvincing Latino accents were cast in Baz Luhrmann’s *Romeo + Juliet*, and Madonna played Eva Perón in *Evita* (1996). In the forties and fifties the Mexican actor Anthony Quinn was cast only in subordinate ethnic roles; today it is fashionable to look Latino. Light brown skin and a curvaceous physique are portrayed on screen as beautiful, epitomized by the phenomenally successful singer and actor Jennifer Lopez, the first Latina ever to earn a salary in excess of \$1 million for a screen role.

In the United States today, Chicano (Mexican-American) identity draws heavily on iconic figures and myths from that community's shared popular culture. The hybrid nature of Chicano identity, to which concepts such as *mestizaje*, transculturation, and the conceptualization of the border are central, is reflected in such figures as *La Llorona* (literally, "The Weeping Woman"), who on migration to North America has come to symbolize the poor migrant or "wetback." Likewise, *el pachuco*, or disenchanting Mexican-American youth, personifies the mythical hybrid essence of Chicano identity. Despite some ongoing ambivalence about the meaning of *el pachuco* for Chicanos (for some, the word is still synonymous with gang violence and sacrificial, self-destructive urges), in Chicano films such as Luis Valdez's *Zoot Suit* (1981) this figure is nevertheless a potent representation of the community's place in U.S. society.

—Lisa Shaw and Thea Pitman

See also: *Introduction*

Latin Americans in Hollywood

Historically, Hollywood has portrayed Latin Americans via recurrent stereotypes. In the first decades of sound cinema, female actors with Latin American backgrounds were obliged to take screen roles as fiery temptresses (Lupe Vélez, Carmen Miranda) or virginal, aristocratic *señoritas* (Dolores Del Río). Males were typically cast as Latin lovers (Ramon Novarro, César Romero). Such clichéd and unflattering depictions of Latino identity, which hinge on a mythical sexuality, have resurfaced in recent years with male stars like

the Spaniard Antonio Banderas and the Cuban-born Andy García often typecast as smoldering Romeos. Latina actors still have to struggle against a reemergence of the spitfire stereotype.

In the 1930s and 1940s, major films featured Latino and Latina stars with clearly identifiable Hispanic names (Ramon Novarro, Ricardo Montalban, Lupe Vélez, Carmen Miranda, Dolores Del Río), and these actors played a variety of roles. Today it is difficult to find their equivalent among female actors. Even in films with Latino settings and characters, such as *The House of the Spirits* (1993), *The Perez Family* (1995), *Evita* (1996), and *The Mask of Zorro* (1998), the lead female roles are given to established non-Latina stars, reflecting the overwhelming importance of commercial considerations over "authenticity." Contemporary Hollywood film has toned down but not eliminated the Latin lover stock type for male actors, and the Latino bandits that featured widely in early Westerns have been transformed into urban equivalents in films about the Latino community that are increasingly being set in crime-ridden and often violent inner-city contexts. However, alternative filmmakers from the Latino community in the United States have produced creative responses to issues of exclusion, discrimination, and stereotyping.

The exclusion of Latinos from leading roles in mainstream films has been challenged recently by the hit movie *Frida* (2002), produced by Mexican-born Salma Hayek, who also starred in the leading role as avant-garde artist Frida Kahlo. Although some have criticized the choice of non-Latino actors for some of the major parts in this film, such as that of Ashley Judd to play the Italian-born Mexican photogra-



Hollywood's Latino heartthrob, Andy Garcia. (Miramax/The Kobal Collection)

pher Tina Modotti, Hayek herself is being hailed as the first Mexican Hollywood star since Dolores Del Río. There seems to have been a slow awakening in recent years to the fact that 47 percent of the population of

Los Angeles is Hispanic (including 5 million Mexicans). Two major films have been released that contain a significant portion of spoken Spanish (*Before Night Falls* [2000] and *Traffic* [2000]). In both cases a



Ricardo Montalban in 1953, one of many successful Latinos in Hollywood. (Eric Carpenter/MGM/The Kobal Collection)

Spanish speaker not native to the country being portrayed made every effort to imitate a local accent. Both the Spaniard Javier Bardem, as a Cuban in *Before Night Falls*, and Puerto Rican American Benicio del Toro, as a Mexican in *Traffic* (who won the Oscar for best actor for his performance), were entirely convincing. The producers of both films knew how many Cubans and Mexicans would be part of the audience for these films in the United States and realized that they could not be fooled. Just a few years earlier, the filmmakers would not have paid such attention to detail—in 1998 the Welsh actress Catherine Zeta Jones was cast as a Mexican in *The Mask of Zorro*.

From the early days of cinema, Latino actors were divided into two groups, in accordance with their perceived color and class. Those with European “looks” be-

came major actors (Dolores Del Río, Carmen Miranda, Raul Roulien, César Romero), and those with darker coloring were destined to play small parts as bandits or work as “native” extras. When a character with darker pigmentation was called for, brownface makeup was applied.

Myrtle Gonzalez, a native Mexican Californian and the daughter of a Los Angeles grocer, was Hollywood’s first Latin star. She starred in more than forty silent movies between 1911 and 1917. Dolores Del Río is often referred to as “the first Latina superstar,” and her fellow Mexican Lupe Vélez became synonymous with the fire-spitting vamp. Katy Jurado made the journey from Mexico City to Hollywood in 1951 and starred in the critically acclaimed Western *High Noon* (1952) as a strong Latina character who had been the mistress of both leading men but was also the feisty owner of the local saloon. In Mexican films she usually played the role of glamour girl or wealthy socialite, whereas in U.S. films she was cast as a sultry Mexican beauty, Indian squaw, or long-suffering matriarch. Ricardo Montalban and Fernando Lamas both starred as romantic leads in Hollywood films from the 1950s. Montalban was instrumental in forming the organization *Nosotros* (meaning “us” in Spanish) in 1969, which seeks to improve opportunities for Latinos in the U.S. media.

Others have forged their careers on the big screen by turning their backs on their Hispanic identities. Rita Hayworth, born to an Irish mother and Spanish father, began her career as Margarita Carmen Cansino, playing Mexican señoritas. By anglicizing her name, raising her hairline off her face through electrolysis, and dying her hair auburn, she went on to become the “all-American girl,” favorite pinup of the 1940s,

and the eponymous heroine of a movie called *The Strawberry Blonde* (1941). Similarly, Raquel Welch, born into an Anglo-Bolivian family in Chicago as Raquel Tejada, has become a movie icon whose ethnic roots are not emphasized, or even well known, from the roles she has chosen.

In the period just before and during the Second World War, large portions of the European economy were closed to Hollywood's products, so the Latin American market for movies became increasingly important. At the same time, the U.S. State Department was concerned about hemispheric unity in the face of the fascist threat in Europe. The United States implemented its so-called Good Neighbor Policy in 1933, aimed at achieving greater understanding and cooperation between North and South America. Film was central in fostering a spirit of Pan-Americanism. The year 1933 saw the release of RKO's *Flying Down to Rio*, starring Brazilian Raul Roulien and Mexican Dolores Del Río (playing Belinha Rezende, a member of Brazil's white-skinned elite). This musical, like others that followed in its wake, aimed to create an impression of Latin identity that would be acceptable to both North and Latin American audiences while loosely enacting the diplomatic gestures toward Latin Americans required by the new foreign policy. However, in *Flying Down to Rio*, Brazilian/Latin American women are once again synonymous with powers of seduction and lasciviousness. When Belinha first dances with her handsome Anglo suitor, one of her blonde female companions from the United States complains, "What have the South Americans got below the Equator that we haven't?"

To more effectively implement the "Good Neighbor Policy," the U.S. government established the Office of the Coordi-

nator of Inter-American Affairs (CIAA) in 1940. Headed by Nelson Rockefeller, the CIAA sponsored newsreels and documentaries for Latin American distribution and encouraged the Hollywood studios to make films with Latin American themes. Between 1939 and 1947, Hollywood films featuring Latin American stars, music, locations, and stories flooded U.S. and international markets. By 1943, thirty films with Latin American themes or locales had been released and twenty-five more were in production; by 1945 eighty-four films with Latin American subjects had been produced. The CIAA's motion picture section, directed by John Hay Whitney, aimed to ensure that North Americans developed a better understanding of Latin America and to avoid causing offense to the neighbors to the south. When the war began, Hollywood's Production Code Administration (PCA) played a key role as "watchdog," ensuring that no negative images of Latin Americans reached the screen. A Cuban-raised Latin American specialist, Addison Durland, was hired as part of the PCA staff in 1941 to monitor Hollywood's depiction of Latin America and its people and to avoid the kind of errors that had previously been committed, such as depicting Brazil as a Spanish-speaking country.

—Lisa Shaw

See also: *Cultural Icons: Latin Americans in Hollywood* (Dolores Del Río; Salma Hayek; Carmen Miranda; Lupe Vélez); *Visual Arts and Architecture: Art* (Frida Kahlo); *Photography* (Tina Modotti)

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Mexican beauty and Hollywood star Dolores Del Río. (Ernest Bachrach/RKO/The Kobal Collection)

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Dolores Del Río (1905–1983)

Mexican film star and legendary, glamorous beauty who became famous as the face of the sophisticated Latina in Hollywood. Born into a wealthy family in Durango, Mexico, on 3 August 1905 (according to some accounts 1901), she died on 11 April 1983.

Del Río arrived in Hollywood with her lawyer husband in 1925, and her career spanned the silent and early sound eras. In

1928 she signed an exceptional contract with United Artists to make seven films at 100,000 dollars apiece, her fee reportedly including six months' paid holiday per year. Between 1925 and 1942 she participated in twenty-eight North American feature films. Although considered "exotic," she appeared in a variety of films and roles, and she was not restricted to playing the part of Latinas even though she was undeniably Latin American. Above all she played ethnically ambiguous characters with a potent sexuality and a penchant for white, blond leading men. These included South Seas princesses, Indian maidens, Latin American *señoritas* (not only Mexicans—in RKO's *Flying Down to Rio* she played an upper-class Brazilian), and a range of other beauties with an aristocratic air. Her status as a great Hollywood star was undeniable and evidenced by the fact that the Pullman company named three of its sleeper carriages in her honor: "Del Río," "Dolores," and "Ramona" (the latter is the title of one of her movies).

In 1943, when opportunities began to dry up in the United States, Del Río returned to Mexico to dedicate herself to the cinema and theater of her homeland, where she had become a focus for national pride. There she went on to star in several box-office successes, such as *Flor Silvestre* (*Wild Flower*, 1943) and *María Candelaria* (1944), where she played an uneducated, barefoot Indian girl, totally transforming her screen image.

Del Río divorced her first husband in 1928, and two years later married Cedric Gibbons, the well-known artistic director of MGM, a union that transported her into the Hollywood jet set. By 1941 she was involved in a controversial relationship with Orson Welles, who, after directing *Citizen*

Kane (1941), was Hollywood's man of the moment. She attended the film's premiere on the arm of her lover. They had been planning to marry, but while Del Río was waiting for her divorce to come through, Welles found another Hispanic beauty to take her place—Margarita Carmen Cansino, better known as Rita Hayworth.

—*Lisa Shaw*

See also: *Cultural Icons: Latin Americans in Hollywood*; *Popular Cinema: Melodrama*

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Lupe Vélez (1908–1944)

Mexican film star who became synonymous with the comic role of the hot-blooded, thickly accented, "fire-spitting vamp" in Hollywood movies of the 1930s, such as *Hot Pepper* (1933) and *Strictly Dynamite* (1934). Born in San Luis Potosí, Mexico, on 6 July 1908, her first major role was opposite Douglas Fairbanks in the silent movie *The Gaucho* (1928). A star of the silent screen by the end of the 1920s, she successfully made the transition to sound films in the 1930s as a result of her husky, almost "cartoon-like" voice. Her career was consolidated in 1939 when she began starring in the so-called Mexican Spitfire series. She made eight films in this series before committing suicide at the

height of her fame and success on 12 December 1944, when she was five months' pregnant out of wedlock.

Vélez's screen persona was the antithesis of that of her compatriot, Dolores Del Río. Together the pair personified the dualistic stereotypical Hollywood depiction of Latin American women as either earthy spitfires or cool *señoritas*. Unlike Del Río, Vélez's position in Hollywood was defined by her potent ethnicity and aggressive sexuality rather than her acting ability. Vélez is sometimes compared unfavorably with Del Río, but she had impressive comic skills, shown off to perfection in RKO's Mexican Spitfire series with her portrayal of the fiery, funny, and streetwise Carmelita, who often outwitted other women to "get the guy" in the end. On and off screen, she, like Del Río, was paired off with and married North American men.

—*Lisa Shaw*

See also: *Cultural Icons: Latin Americans in Hollywood* (Dolores Del Río)

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Carmen Miranda (1909–1955)

Singer and film star who came to embody Latin American music and identity in Hollywood films of the 1940s and 1950s. Born in Portugal in 1909, Miranda's parents emigrated to Brazil when she was a small child. She died in 1955, aged forty-six.



The “Brazilian Bombshell,” Carmen Miranda, 1939. (Bettmann/Corbis)

Miranda’s career in Brazil as a singer of samba was established in the 1920s and 1930s, when she recorded gramophone records, performed regularly on the radio stations of Rio de Janeiro, and was featured in many of the first sound films or *chanchadas* made in Brazil. “Discovered” in 1939 by U.S. show business impresario Lee Schubert, Miranda was taken to Broadway and subsequently to Hollywood, where she became the highest-paid female star, best known for her performances in the Twentieth Century Fox “Good Neighbor” musicals of the early 1940s, such as *That Night in Rio* (1941) and Busby Berkeley’s *The Gang’s All Here* (1943). She also became known for her flamboyant costumes, and particularly her fruit-laden turbans. Since the 1960s she has become something of an international icon among gay men and transvestites, not least for a

carnival group in Rio named after her. Her characteristic tutti-frutti hats and necklaces, frilly sleeves, and multicolored skirts are easily parodied.

Within the context of the so-called Good Neighbor Policy toward the Latin American subcontinent, Miranda’s success in the international arena as the epitome of Latino identity hinged on her acquiescence in diluting samba for the Anglo-Saxon palate. For this reason she has remained a polemical figure in Brazil, as was eloquently conveyed in Helena Solberg’s biopic *Carmen Miranda: Bananas Is My Business* (1994). This film highlighted Miranda’s iconic status among the ordinary people of Brazil, despite the fact that elite intellectuals criticized her for being a passive tool of North American cultural imperialism.

President Getúlio Vargas of Brazil, in power between 1930 and 1945, was a great fan of Miranda, and he saw her 1939 trip to the United States as a public relations coup for his nation. For her part, Miranda took her role as Brazil’s “goodwill ambassador” quite seriously, and the ultimate good neighbor was later drafted into the service of the Allied armed forces. Newsreel footage of her arrival in New York declared that the Depression was over when Miranda came to town. For American audiences she would remain the archetypal Latina bimbo. (In her first interview in the United States she famously claimed to know only the following words of English: money and men.) When she returned to Brazil some eighteen months later, the Vargas regime’s DIP (Press and Propaganda Department) held an official reception in her honor, and the masses clamored to greet her. This warm welcome could not have differed more from the frosty reception she received from the elite audience

at her homecoming show at the Urca casino, organized by Brazil's first lady, Darcy Vargas.

Carmen Miranda soon returned to the United States and to a contract with Twentieth Century Fox, and her immense popularity ensured that she was the studio's greatest asset. Consequently, Fox insisted that she play stereotypical roles in similar musicals, which reproduced the image of the exaggerated and caricatured Latina, despite her desire to play more varied roles. In *Carmen Miranda: Bananas Is My Business*, Helena Solberg comments on Miranda's poignant attempts to reaffirm her own Brazilian identity, often by merely speaking a few words of Portuguese in a film, and by poking fun at her poor English. Solberg also focuses on the inconsistencies and paradoxes in Miranda's screen image; her outfits and the music she danced to (samba) were symbols of black Brazil, yet she was the daughter of white Portuguese immigrants. She was the most potent symbol of Latin America in the Hollywood musical, yet was fiercely attacked back in Brazil for acquiescing to this cultural stereotyping. She became the highest-paid woman in the United States, and although she acknowledged her debt of gratitude to her iconic status, singing "I make my money with bananas" and stating "bananas is my business," she was clearly uneasy in the cultural strait-jacket she had been forced to wear.

Her attempts to free herself from her image are reflected in her decision to buy herself out of her contract with Twentieth Century Fox, and the fact that in her first movie with another studio, *Copacabana* of 1947 with Groucho Marx, she appears for the first time as a blonde. Nevertheless, fragments of her old caricature were retained in this film, in which she played

both the role of the blonde Mademoiselle Fifi and that of the archetypal Latin temptress, a Brazilian singer named Carmen Navarro. In the context of a postwar America, where the neighbors to the south of the border ceased to be a pressing concern, Miranda was destined to become merely a novelty act, particularly on television.

By the mid-1930s Miranda was relatively well established as a singer in Brazil. In 1936, she was one of the many Brazilian radio stars to appear in the film *Alô, alô, carnaval!* (*Hello, Hello, Carnival!*), often called the first example of the *chanchada* musical genre. Though successful in Brazil, the film achieved no critical or popular attention when shown in the United States. In 1939 she made her final film in Brazil, *Banana da terra* (*Banana of the Land*), set on the fictitious Pacific island of Bnanolândia. It was in this film that Miranda first appeared dressed as a *baiana*, in a stylized version of the costume worn by the Afro-Brazilian street vendors of the city of Salvador in the state of Bahia, which transformed the baskets of fruit that these women carried on their heads into an exuberant, edible turban.

In the 1940s the image of Carmen Miranda became central to both Hollywood's "Good Neighbor" films and Pan-Americanism itself. She made nine films with Twentieth Century Fox between 1940 and 1946 and was also a key figure in advertising campaigns of the time, promoting clothing based on her own exotic style for Saks Fifth Avenue, along with various beauty products.

—Lisa Shaw

See also: *Popular Music:* Samba; *Mass Media:* Radio (Brazil); *Popular Cinema:* Comedy Film (*Chanchada*)

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Salma Hayek (1966–)

Actor born in southeast Mexico to a father of Lebanese origin and a Mexican mother, often referred to as the first Mexican Hollywood star since Dolores Del Río. She began her career in *telenovelas* or soap operas on Mexican television in the late 1980s, then moved to Hollywood, where she played several minor roles before receiving critical acclaim for her work in *Desperado* (1995) alongside the Spaniard Antonio Banderas. She then returned to Mexico to film *El Callejón de los Milagros* (*Midaq Alley*, 1995), for which she was nominated for an Ariel, the Mexican equivalent of the Oscar. She was the creative force behind the latest film based on the life of Mexican artist Frida Kahlo, coproducing and starring in the title role of *Frida* (2002).

In the late 1980s, Hayek was perhaps Mexico's biggest television star. She appeared in soap operas such as *Un nuevo amanecer* (*A New Dawn*, 1988) and *Teresa* (1989). When she arrived in Los Angeles, however, she found that it was hard to carve out an acting career. She once said:



Mexican actress and Hollywood star Salma Hayek. (Mitchell Gerber/Corbis)

"Being Mexican was considered so uncool. People in Hollywood only know Mexicans as maids." She has espoused the Latino cause in the United States, running through the streets of Washington, D.C., wearing a wedding dress in 2002 to protest domestic violence. In an interview with *Latina* magazine in October 2002 she tackled the subject of the marginalization of Latino actors in Hollywood, saying: "You can't wait for things to change, so I don't wait; I try to create jobs for myself and for other Latinos and tell our stories. That's the best we can do."

It took Hayek eight years to get her beloved Frida Kahlo project off the ground, fighting off fierce competition from Madonna, who had long been campaigning to play the role. Since then she has directed the television film *The Maldonado*

Miracle (2003) and has starred in the Roberto Rodriguez movie *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* (2003).

There is evidence that Hayek is sometimes stereotyped as the fiery Mexican, following in the footsteps of Lupe Vélez. As recently as 22 July 2003, the admittedly low-brow *National Enquirer* described Hayek as “the 5-foot-2 spitfire.”

—Lisa Shaw

See also: *Cultural Icons: Latin Americans in Hollywood* (Dolores Del Río; Lupe Vélez); *Mass Media: Telenovelas* (Mexico); *Visual Arts and Architecture: Art* (Frida Kahlo)

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Walt Disney's Latino Cartoon Characters

The animated character of Joe Carioca (Zé Carioca in Brazil), a Brazilian parrot, starred in two feature-length films in the 1940s, *Saludos Amigos* (RKO-Disney, 1943) and *The Three Caballeros* (RKO-Disney, 1945). *Saludos Amigos* also featured Pedro, a “baby” Chilean airplane that transported mail between Chile and Argentina; Goofy dressed as an Argentine gaucho; and Donald Duck as a U.S. tourist visiting the Andes. In *The Three Caballeros*, Joe Carioca starred alongside Donald Duck, a Uruguayan flying donkey called Burrito, and a Mexican bird named Panchito.

These cartoon representations of Latin American identity were central to Hollywood's depiction of the subcontinent in the

political context of the U.S. “Good Neighbor Policy” toward its neighbors to the south. On returning from his fact-finding trip to South America in 1941, Disney was keen to emphasize that attention to authentic detail would be a principal feature of his “Good Neighbor” projects.

Saludos Amigos was a combination of a travelogue that documented a trip carried out by Disney and his creative team to Latin America and an animated cartoon. The latter was divided into four discrete shorts, the first set in Bolivia, the second in Chile, the third in Argentina, and the fourth in Brazil. The first short begins with Donald Duck arriving in Lake Titicaca, suffering from altitude sickness and encountering a friendly indigenous boy and his llama. The second shows Pedro the plane transporting the mail over the Andes between the cities of Santiago in Chile and Mendoza in Argentina when his “papa” (the official mail plane) falls ill. The third segment is set in Argentina, with location shots of sophisticated Buenos Aires and an animated sequence set in the rural pampas. In the final sequence, entitled “Aquarela do Brasil” (“Watercolor of Brazil”), the streetwise, cigar-smoking Joe Carioca introduces Donald Duck to the wonders of Rio de Janeiro, more specifically samba, *cachaça* (sugarcane brandy), and the nightspots of the Urca casino and Copacabana. Disney's Brazil combines natural and exotic treasures with cosmopolitan sophistication, and the foreign tourist (Donald) is made most welcome. The documentary footage that precedes this fourth animated segment opens with picture-postcard shots of Rio, as Disney narrates: “This time we planned to stay a little longer and get a better look at some of the famous sights, such as Sugarloaf overlooking the bay, and Co-

pacabana beach, the playground of Rio, and Corcovado overlooking Rio itself. This is the kind of city that always appeals to artists, picturesque little outdoor cafes, colorful mosaic sidewalks.”

The Three Caballeros mixed live action with animation and was viewed in the motion picture press as a remarkable technical achievement. Aurora Miranda, Carmen Miranda’s younger sister, appears dancing alongside Joe Carioca. Beautiful young girls such as Miranda, the Mexican singer Dora Luz, and dancer Carmen Molina feature prominently in this Technicolor visit by Donald Duck to Mexico and Brazil. In Mexico, Donald flirts with Luz and Molina on the beaches of Acapulco and later visits Mexico City. The Brazilian section is authenticated by the incorporation of songs by the Brazilian samba composer Ari Barroso (“Bahia” and “Os quindins de Yayá”—“Missy’s Coconut Cakes”). Promotional material for the picture describes it as “a miracle-world of rhythm and fun!” (*Variety*, 3 January, 1945), an epithet that encapsulates Disney’s view of Latin America. In this film the spectator visits Bahia (Salvador), not Rio, but the two cities are barely distinguishable and the choice of Bahia would appear to stem, in part at least, from the themes of Barroso’s two songs, one of which is a hyperbolic anthem to Salvador, the other a tribute to the Afro-Brazilian food sellers of the city (represented on screen by the very white Aurora Miranda in the traditional dress of the Afro-Brazilian *baiana* street vendors).

In both *Saludos Amigos* and *The Three Caballeros*, Brazil and its “representative,” Joe Carioca, epitomize, more than any other nation depicted, the essence of Hollywood’s vision of Latin America in the

1940s as a source of pure spectacle, rhythmic exuberance, and carnal spontaneity.

—Lisa Shaw

See also: *Popular Music*: Samba; *Sport and Leisure*: Food (Brazilian Food); *Cultural Icons*: Latin Americans in Hollywood (Carmen Miranda); Regional and Ethnic Types (The Gaucho in Argentina and Uruguay)

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Political Icons

Evita (1919–1952)

The affectionate nickname of Eva Duarte de Perón, the one-time actress of lowly origin who rose to a position of considerable power within Argentine society and whose political life was tragically cut short by cancer.

Eva María Duarte Ibarguren was born in Los Toldos, in the province of Buenos Aires, the illegitimate child of a failed landowner. According to popular mythology, Eva from an early age was determined to drag herself out of the penury into which she had been born. At age fifteen she seduced a tango singer and convinced him to take her with him to the Argentine capital, where she embarked on a series of romances. She survived financially by taking small parts in theatrical and radio productions. Some of her biographers have



Argentina's former first lady Eva Perón, better known as Evita, gives an election speech at a mass labor meeting, Buenos Aires, 1951. (Bettmann/Corbis)

suggested that when acting work was thin on the ground, Eva turned to prostitution.

Eva's fortunes took a turn for the better when she met and married Colonel Juan Domingo Perón, the minister for labor, in 1945. Perón became president of the Republic in 1946 on a populist ticket and was reelected in 1951. Eva's role in Perón's government was to offer a softer, more humane face to what was ultimately an authoritarian regime. Taking the role of first lady far beyond its traditional limits of dutiful support and companionship, Eva became directly involved in her husband's welfare policies, heading the charity foundation *Fundación Eva Perón*, which was responsible for the distribution of vast quantities of foodstuffs and material goods, including cookers, bicycles, and toys.

Eva Perón's supporters (a wide majority of the population at the time) viewed her with great affection because, as they saw it, her welfare work helped bring the so-called *descamisados* (literally "the shirtless" poor, partly made up of Argentina's previously invisible mixed-race peasants) to the center of political discussion. She also provided a strong role model for many of the women (the new breed of female factory worker, for example) who had been granted suffrage under Perón's government and who felt included in political culture for the first time. Her enemies, the conservative elite and radical Left, accused her and her husband of the worst excesses of populist politics and "clientelism."

Evita's perceived generosity was not the only reason for her remarkable popularity.

She was a highly charismatic figure whose stage presence and melodramatic speeches captivated the masses. Through her charity work and the time she took to visit and talk to the poor, she successfully projected messages of hope and empathy to the Argentine people, whom she frequently described as her family. In 1951 she was matron of honor at the wedding ceremony of 1,608 couples. The love for Evita was so powerful that she was likened to the caring Virgin. Many believed that she was capable of miraculous acts. On her death, tens of thousands of letters were sent to the Vatican attributing miracles to her and demanding that she be canonized. When Evita was diagnosed with cancer, many of her fans made ambitious promises to God to have her restored to good health. Also, large numbers of people attempted to make the headlines, in the hope that they would be in her thoughts when she passed on, for example, the tango dancer who danced for 127 hours with 127 different partners.

The official mourning of Evita's death lasted for four days. Juan Perón set to building a mausoleum in which to display her embalmed body, but in 1955 the military regime buried her in a Milanese cemetery to prevent her grave from becoming a symbol of resistance. It was not until 1976 that Eva Perón was finally accepted by the Argentine elite, when she was laid to rest in Recoleta, the Buenos Aires cemetery for the rich and powerful.

Evita still enjoys iconic status in Argentina, similar to that of the tragic figure of Princess Diana in the United Kingdom. Like Diana, she was a trendsetter. Young people would copy her attire, in particular her penchant for wearing flared skirts and strappy shoes, as well as her hair swept back in plaited chignons. To this day, the

trend set by Evita for peroxide-blond hair continues in Argentina among upper-class women in northern Buenos Aires, those working at the grassroots political level, and among the wives of governors.

During her lifetime Eva Perón enjoyed a high profile throughout much of the Spanish-speaking world, but it was not until the 1970s that she became known to a wider, English-speaking public, when lyricist Tim Rice, having heard a radio broadcast on Eva Perón in his car, decided to transform the story of her life into a musical. With music by Andrew Lloyd Webber, *Evita* the musical premiered in London's West End at the Prince Edward Theatre in 1978 and enjoyed a run of over 2,900 performances. It hit Broadway in 1979, where it ran for 1,567 performances and garnered seven Tony awards. Since then it has been staged in twenty-eight countries in fourteen different languages, making it one of the most successful musicals of all time. The show, which questions Eva's morality in earlier years and emphasizes her ruthlessness in acquiring an important husband, was banned in the Philippines because of alleged parallels between the life of Eva Perón and President Marcos's wife, Imelda.

In 1996 a film version of the musical was released. Alan Parker's practically dialogue-free movie was a bold attempt at a modern reworking of the musical form. Starring Madonna in the title role (another love/hate figure with iconic status), with Antonio Banderas playing Che, the everyman character, it was shot on location in Argentina, sparking controversy among Evita's many fans for its seemingly irreverent treatment of their heroine. Despite the film's hype, *Evita* the movie received a lukewarm reception by critics and the public.

—Stephanie Dennison

See also: *Popular Music: Tango; Popular Social Movements and Politics: Peronismo*

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Che Guevara (1928–1967)

The most romantic and photogenic of all Latin American revolutionaries, Ernesto "Che" Guevara has, ever since his death, been associated primarily with a single image. The famous picture of Che, gazing into the distance from beneath the star on his beret, became the single most potent element of his iconic status in the 1960s and early 1970s. Since then, images of him in the West have become increasingly divorced from his political and historical context and, ironically, have been exploited as a radical-chic commercial icon. In Latin America, however, awareness of the value of Guevara's thought and example has largely been maintained.

Ernesto Guevara Lynch de la Serna was born into a comfortable but politically active family and spent his childhood in the Argentine city of Córdoba. He showed few early signs of the political activity to come and appeared destined for a medical career. Journeys into deprived areas of Argentina (1949) and into Chile, Peru, and



Che, Hoy y Siempre movie poster (1983).
(Swim Ink/Corbis)

Colombia (the famous motorcycle trip in 1951–1952) brought him to an increasingly militant position and the renunciation of a comfortable bourgeois existence. Having completed his studies, he was in Guatemala in 1954 during the CIA-led overthrow of the Arbenz government. By now a hardened foe of U.S. imperialism, he traveled to Mexico and his fateful encounter with Fidel Castro.

After the success of the armed struggle in the Cuban Sierra Maestra mountains, during which he rose to second in command, Guevara's writings and actions compounded his immense popularity and identification with the Cuban Revolution. Granted Cuban citizenship, he coined the notion of a new humanity, which had to

arise from the socialist experiment in order for the latter to make any sense. Idealistic and even anarchic, he was in many ways the antithesis to Fidel Castro's pragmatism, and the two tendencies could not coexist indefinitely. After briefly filling an ambassadorial role, he criticized the Soviet Union in 1965 as an accomplice of imperialism and was sidelined from formal politics. Progressively less involved with Cuban internal affairs and more with revolutionary activity elsewhere, Che went to Africa and took part in efforts to end the Belgian colonial presence in the Congo. After returning to Cuba for training, he embarked upon the ill-advised incursion into eastern Bolivia that was to prove his downfall.

Many of the peasants he had hoped would support and even join the cause proved to be mistrustful, susceptible to government propaganda demonizing foreign Communists. Having expected to find the same degree of political awareness in the sparsely populated east as in the militant mining areas of western Bolivia, Guevara's forces were left hopelessly depleted and outflanked, and their leader was finally shot dead without trial on express instructions from Washington in December 1967.

As a grisly postscript, Che's hands were severed from his corpse by the military for reasons of identification. Having been hidden in a house in La Paz, they were eventually smuggled to Cuba for burial. Publication of the diaries of Guevara's motorcycle journey through South America in 1950–1951 was greeted by attempts to discredit him through an anachronistic application of 1990s "political correctness." However, this book brought to light the self-abnegation and identification with the Latin American poor that characterized Guevara. A new film of the book, *The Mo-*

torcycle Diaries (2004), directed by the Brazilian Walter Salles and featuring Mexican actor Gael García Bernal as Che, may further enhance the Argentine revolutionary's reputation.

—Keith Richards

See also: *Popular Social Movements and Politics: Castrismo*

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Regional and Ethnic Types

The Gaucho in Argentina and Uruguay

A figure that has long held a central place in the national imaginations of both Argentina and Uruguay. From the eighteenth to twentieth centuries, metropolitan views of this "cowboy of the pampas" were transformed from initial contempt to grudging admiration to an eventual nostalgia for the loss of a way of life seen as quintessentially Argentine or Uruguayan.

The origins of the gaucho are unclear, and debate on the subject is divided into "Hispanist" and "Americanist" schools. These hold that the gaucho's crucial formative factors are, respectively, the Arabic-Iberian influence crystallized in Andalusia, and the frontier experience of the New

World. What is beyond doubt is that these people were the result of a cultural and ethnic mixture (*mestizaje* in Spanish) discernible from their speech, accoutrements, and lifestyle. An example is the hunting instrument known as the *boleadora*; of indigenous origin, it consists of stone balls strung together and thrown to entwine the legs of a running animal. The gaucho's music also took native and African forms and blended them with Spanish verse patterns, resulting most notably in the *milonga* song form that would later metamorphose into the tango. Even the etymology of the term "gaucho," a possible corruption of the Quechua *guacho* (orphan), suggests an indigenous element.

A crucial dimension of gaucho life was their almost uncanny empathy with their horses and understanding of their natural environment, the vast *pampa* or open plains. This is conceded even by some of those people least sympathetic to gaucho existence, particularly the writer (and later statesman) Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (1811–1888). Even though his project for the Argentine nation was the elimination of such apparent obstacles to progress, Sarmiento records his awe at the feats of gaucho trackers in his seminal *Civilization and Barbarism*. This work, written while he was in exile in Chile in the 1840s, set out the positivist dichotomy that would prove to be the gaucho's death-knell: "civilization," synonymous with private capital and modernization, and "barbarism," the brush with which all non-Europeans would be tarred. Ironically, much of Sarmiento's work was done for him by his bitterest enemy, the tyrant Juan Manuel de Rosas (1793–1877). The frontier wars waged by Rosas in the 1820s, pitting mostly press-ganged gauchos and Negroes against in-

digenous populations in order to win control of the *pampa*, did much to eliminate all these "undesirable" elements.

Sarmiento's eventual return and election as president in 1868 meant that such ideas could be fully implemented. One of the most eloquent voices of opposition to Sarmiento's brutal "civilizing" project came in literary form. José Hernández's epic poem *El Gaucho Martín Fierro* (1872) is still hugely popular in Argentina. The finest example of the *gauchesco* poetic genre that drew on the speech, song, and mythology of the *pampa*, it has been the source of numerous adaptations and imitations. The success of the first part, *La Ida* or outward journey, seems due to the transparency and fallibility of the protagonist, a gaucho enlisted in the wars, and his predicament. Torn from his family, he deserts and then kills a man in a duel, becoming a pariah. The less convincing *Vuelta*, or return (1879), sees the gaucho rehabilitated, Fernández having partly accepted the new social climate.

The passing of the gaucho into folklore represents the abandonment of a kind of primeval innocence and adoption of the new rationalism that entered the region along with British commercial interests after the industrial revolution. The theme has often been revisited, albeit more obliquely, in the work of Jorge Luis Borges.

—Keith Richards

See also: *Popular Music:* Tango; *Popular Literature:* Science Fiction; *Language:* Indigenous Languages

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The Gaúcho in Brazil

Traditional mixed-race inhabitant of the *pampas* of Brazil's southernmost state, Rio Grande do Sul, and now a term used to describe Brazilians of any ethnic origin who hail from the south of the country.

The press that the Brazilian *gaúcho* received was never as bad as that of gauchos elsewhere in the Southern Cone. In Brazil, the brunt of the criticism from Brazil's white, sophisticated elite was aimed not at the *gaúchos* of the south, but at the mixed-race, landless poor of the northeastern states (the *caboclos*), famously portrayed by Euclides da Cunha in *Rebellion in the Backlands* and later by Colombian Boom novelist Gabriel García Márquez in *The War of the End of the World*.

Like his Argentine and Uruguayan counterparts, the Brazilian *gaúcho* as a social type has clearly defined (and widely mimicked) characteristics. He is associated with eating barbecued meat (*churrasco*) and drinking green tea (*chimarrão* or *mate*). According to social etiquette, *chimarrão* is consumed informally by groups of *gaúchos* in a *cuia* or small wooden basin and is sucked through a heavy metal straw or *bomba*. The *cuia* is drained before being

refilled with hot water and passed on to the next drinker. The origins of drinking hot, green tea can be traced back to the sixteenth century, when Spanish soldiers borrowed its use from Guarani Indians as a much-needed hangover cure. *Gaúchos* strongly deny both the unhygienic aspect of the method of consuming this communal beverage and its alleged carcinogenic properties.

In addition to their own style of music and dance (for example, the fandango with its Hispanic roots) and speech that is peppered with phrases borrowed from their Spanish-speaking neighbors, Brazilian *gaúchos* have their own traditional attire, which relates to their cattle-herding past: black boots or espadrilles, neck scarf, and cowboy hat. The Turkish-style pants or *bombachas* that they wear were inherited from English soldiers, who reportedly brought them from the Ottoman Empire as spoils of war and dumped them in Paraguay during the War of the Triple Alliance (1865–1870).

The stereotypical *gaúcho* man is one who refuses to mince his words, and who is notoriously sexist and racist. He was brilliantly portrayed by comic writer Luis Fernando Veríssimo in *O analista de Bagé* (*The Analyst from Bagé*), which imagines the kind of politically incorrect advice that would be dished out by a psychoanalyst from the *pampas*.

In the 1940s, when rural workers poured into the towns and cities on the southern coast in search of jobs in the blossoming industrial sector, a *gaúcho* traditionalist movement began, with the purpose of combating the influence of culture from Rio de Janeiro and North America. This *Movimento Tradicionalista Gaúcho* claims to be the largest popular cultural organization in the Western world. The *35 Centros de*

Tradições Gaúchas or 35 Centers of Gaúcho Traditions were set up at this time as a space to celebrate *gaúcho* culture. There are now over 1,500 such centers in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, as well as large numbers in the two other southern states of Santa Catarina and Paraná. They can also be found as far afield as Paraguay and Boston. Critics of the movement argue that poor *gaúcho* peasants, on whom the modern cultural stereotype is based, were excluded from participating in the movement because of the costly joining fee. They also argue that at meetings the traditionalists take pride in dressing up in the clothes of these poor cowboys, but they adhere to the ideology of the rural elite. Such organizations are frequently seen from outside Rio Grande do Sul as being potentially politically conservative, separatist, and socially exclusive.

—Stephanie Dennison

See also: *Popular Literature: The Boom*

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El Pachuco

Although the *pachuco* was the early twentieth-century predecessor of the contemporary Chicano *vato loco* or gang member (literally, a “crazy guy”), the image has not disappeared from contemporary popular culture. Since the Chicano movement of the 1960s the *pachuco* has become an icon of Chicano “national” identity.

The figure of the *pachuco* first became visible in the 1930s and 1940s in the run-

down Mexican-American barrios of U.S. cities, particularly in the Southwest. The term *pachuco* is most probably a slang term for a resident of El Paso. *Pachucos* distinguished themselves as alienated youths who did not identify with the cultural values of their Mexican or Mexican-American parents or with those of their new Anglo-American cultural context. Instead, they created a whole subculture for themselves, with a particular form of slang (*Caló*) and a distinctive, exaggerated fashion sense, epitomized by the zoot suit. This consisted of very baggy trousers with tightly tapered bottoms, and a long jacket with padded shoulders. Typically *pachucos* also wore a long watch chain, slicked back hair, and a fedora hat. Even their gait was an exaggerated lope, with their shoulders pulled back and their hands deep in their pockets. What they were doing with this image was appropriating and exaggerating eclectic aspects of mainstream U.S. culture. In other, less visible respects, particularly in their perceived alienation, they could be seen as exaggerating facets of Mexican identity.

In wartime USA, the *pachuco* was demonized by the Anglo-American press, aggressively pursued by Anglo-American youths (in the Zoot Suit Riots of 1943, for example), and shunned by the more conservative, assimilationist factions of the Mexican-American community. Nevertheless, he laid the cornerstone for contemporary Chicano identity as a hybrid of two different cultures that seeks to create a third, distinctive culture for itself. Over the course of time this negative, hostile image has been sanitized and reappropriated by both mainstream U.S. and Mexican culture (see, for example, the fashions worn by The Fonz in the television series *Happy*

Days or the characters in the blockbuster movie *Grease* [1977] in the United States, and the film comedies of Tin Tan in Mexico). The figure of the *pachuco* continues to be a powerful embodiment of the Chicano community's place in U.S. society.

—Thea Pitman

See also: *Language:* Chicano Spanish; *Popular Cinema:* Comedy Film (Tin Tan)

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Legends of Popular Music and Film

Carlos Gardel (1890–1935)

Argentine singer and film star who died tragically in a plane crash in 1935 at the age of forty-five but is even now, nearly seventy years after his death, still a household name in Argentina, across Latin America, and beyond.



Carlos Gardel, Argentine tango singer, movie star, and heartthrob. (Bettmann/Corbis)

Gardel's exact origins are something of a mystery. He was probably born Charles Gardès in Toulouse, France, in 1890, the illegitimate son of a French woman; Gardel's preferred version of the story has him born in Uruguay (or occasionally Argentina). But regardless of his exact place of birth, he grew up in the poor *barrios* or districts of Buenos Aires, where he started to make a living as a folk singer before he became the supreme icon of the new, rather risqué tango songs in the 1920s and 1930s. Some of his most famous hits include "Volver" ("Return") and "Mi Buenos Aires querido" ("My Lovely Buenos Aires").

By the late 1920s, after achieving success in Argentina and in other parts of South America, Gardel became a hit in Europe, especially France, and later in the United States as well. In fact, most of the films that he would star in during the latter

half of his career were made by either French or, more often, U.S. companies. Films such as *El día que me quieras* (*When You Fall in Love with Me*, 1935) were largely vehicles for Gardel's songs—a tango equivalent of the immensely popular Hollywood musicals of the day. Another factor in Gardel's international presence was that his songs suffered at the hands of the censors in Argentina in the early 1930s, and he left his “homeland” for a kind of self-imposed exile in Europe and the United States in 1933. His body was later returned for his funeral—an event of immense public interest—in late 1935.

While Gardel's debonair appearance and appealing, husky voice (he had a bullet lodged in his lung for much of his life) may partially account for his massive appeal to the Argentine public, it was the lyrics and vocabulary of the tango-songs, penned by songwriters such as Alfredo Le Pera for Gardel, that made him the icon of popular Argentine identity. Gardel was a poor boy, probably an immigrant, as were so many Argentines, and he expressed their feelings and concerns in their language, *lunfardo*, the working-class slang of Buenos Aires. Furthermore, the character that he projected in his songs exemplified perfectly the psychology of the *porteño* (Buenos Aires) working-class male: he was macho, loyal, materially successful, and haughty—often something of a *malevo* (a bad guy) but also alienated and vulnerable in some senses, particularly where women were concerned.

Gardel was not only enormously successful with the Argentine working classes, whom he represented. Despite the censorship of Gardel's work, tangos—particularly the music—have been appropriated by successive populist leaders, most notably Juan

Domingo Perón, in an attempt to harness the people's support. Several state-sponsored films were made about Gardel during Perón's regime. Today, tangos and Gardel himself are seen by both the Argentine people and their successive governments as the purest expression of their national identity.

—Thea Pitman

See also: *Popular Music: Tango; Popular Social Movements and Politics: Peronismo; Language: Lunfardo*

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Pedro Infante (1917–1957)

Mexican singer and film star who, nearly fifty years after his death, remains one of the nation's most enduring icons and idols, along with other famous names from the “golden age” of Mexican cinema, such as María Felix and Jorge Negrete.

Infante was born in 1917 into humble surroundings in the northern Mexican state of Sinaloa, where he quickly developed an interest in the kind of popular music played by mariachis and *ranchera* singers. Set on trying his luck in the big city, he moved to Mexico City in his early twenties and started making a living as a radio actor and performer of popular music in the con-



Lupita Infante (right), daughter of Pedro Infante, and Amparito, the president of the Pedro Infante fan club, stand next to the star's grave to mark the 47th anniversary of his death in Mexico City. (Daniel Aguilar/Reuters/Corbis)

cert halls of the day. He rapidly became a big hit. In the period from 1943 until his death in 1957, he is reputed to have recorded over 200 albums. One of his most famous numbers is the bolero “Amorcito Corazón” (“Little Darling”), and his *ranchera* inflection of boleros in general is still a popular approach to the genre in Mexico.

At almost the same time that his career as a singer took off, Infante started to act in films, and over the course of his movie career he appeared in sixty films, starring in up to five different feature films in the course of any one year. Some of his most

famous films include *Los tres García* (*The Three García Cousins*, 1946), *Nosotros los pobres* (*We Poor People*, 1947), *Angelitos negros* (*Little Black Angels*, 1948), and *La vida no vale nada* (*Life Is Cheap*, 1954). Many of the films that he starred in fall within the bounds of the *comedia ranchera* genre, a very popular type of “golden-age” Mexican film that blends comedy, often with an amorous theme, with the setting of the northern Mexican ranches, one of the most iconic locations of a sense of Mexican national identity in the post-revolutionary era. Later in his career, Infante would appear in films with more urban locations, helping to create the myth of modern Mexico City. He met an untimely end in 1957 when the plane that he was flying crashed on the Yucatan peninsula. Ironically, at the time of his death, he was preparing to make a film based on the theme of air travel entitled *Ando volando bajo* (*Flying Low*).

By the time of his death, Infante had become an icon of national proportions in Mexico—so much so that the day of his death was declared a national day of mourning across the Republic. His success was due not only to his good looks and his particular style of singing, but also to the fact that, as an actor, he frequently played the part of the poor boy he had once been, and despite his fame and fortune, he still remained very much one of the people. Furthermore, through his songs and film roles he epitomized the macho Mexican male that lies at the heart of the traditional, popular concept of Mexican identity. Like Carlos Gardel in Argentina, Infante became the most visible icon of Mexican identity and was co-opted by the state into representing this role after his death. Infante's iconic status has not diminished with time.

In Mexico today, young stars such as Luis Miguel still record hits with old Infante songs and, in popularity contests, Infante is still likely to win hands down against these younger heartthrobs.

Infante's success has not only been limited to Mexico. In his lifetime, he toured both North and South America and received prizes and awards in many countries. At the time of his death, he was also on the cusp of breaking into the U.S. film industry. Even today, he remains an icon of Mexico in the international arena.

—*Thea Pitman*

See also: *Popular Music:* Bolero; Mariachi, Ranchera, Norteña, Tex-Mex; *Cultural Icons:* Legends of Popular Music and Film (Carlos Gardel); *Popular Cinema:* Melodrama; The Mexican Film Industry

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Religious and Mythical Figures

Virgin of Guadalupe

Mexico's patron saint, Guadalupe, is said to have appeared to an indigenous peasant named Juan Diego on 9 December 1531 at



Mexico's revered Virgin of Guadalupe. (Mireille Vautier/The Art Archive)

the village of Teyepac near what is now Mexico City. Legend tells that she ordered the man to have the local bishop Zumarraga build a church upon the site and provided proof when Diego's story was questioned. What is beyond doubt is that Guadalupe has become a source of comfort and sustenance for the poorest of Mexicans, and indeed she is now recognized throughout Latin America.

The extraordinary persuasiveness of the image surely has much to do with its heterogeneity. Even the original document describing the apparition, produced by an interpreter since Diego spoke no Spanish and Zumarraga no Nahuatl, is of uncertain veracity; the perpetual bugbear of mutual incomprehension, rife in most stories of conquest in the Americas, also leaves its

mark here. There is also a Nahuatl-language document published in 1649 and of unknown authorship.

Similarly the religious origins of the Virgin have been traced to many sources other than Christian. The Aztec goddess Tonantzin, also a virgin mother, has been associated with Guadalupe, as has Quetzalcóatl, the winged serpent. For Gloria Anzaldúa, she is derived from Coatlapoeh, one of several Mesoamerican goddesses associated with creation and fertility, in turn an aspect of the figure of Tonantzin. Anzaldúa points out that for Chicanos, Guadalupe is one of three mothers alongside the symbolic traitor, *La Malinche*, and *La Llorona*, the weeping mother forlornly seeking her lost children. The three are seen as complementary aspects of a complete figure.

A further possible interpretation of the Virgin of Guadalupe's origin is that soon after the devastation wrought by the Spanish Conquest, indigenous peoples were in dire need of some form of moral sustenance. At the same time the Catholic Church would have been eager to find a means with which to convert and claim this spiritually disenfranchised people. Guadalupe, much as occurred in other Spanish colonies at key moments in the process of acculturation and consolidation of empire, proved an invaluable tool of empire as well as a source of solace for the dispossessed. Guadalupe is thus a classic example of transculturation and *mestizaje* (cultural mixing) in Mexico and throughout Latin America.

—Keith Richards

See also: *Introduction; Cultural Icons:*

Religious and Mythical Figures (*La Llorona; La Malinche*); *Language:* Indigenous Languages

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La Malinche

A quasi-mythical figure distilled from the traumatic conquest of Mexico by Spaniards led by Hernán Cortés, *La Malinche* is as much fictional as historical. She is in some ways typical of a select group (selected as much by chance as by choice) of indigenous people enlisted to assist the Spanish effort during the era of Conquest. Felipillo in Peru, to cite just one other famous example, was tutored in Spanish and used as an interpreter. Such figures were invaluable in forging alliances with outlying peoples colonized by the dominant Aztec and Incas. These peoples joined forces with the Spaniards in the belief that they would rid themselves of oppression. Felipillo, whose testimony was manipulated by Pizarro's men to justify executing the Inca Atawallpa, is despised by native Andean peoples as a symbol of collusion with the invaders. *La Malinche*, too, represents the "translator-traitor," though with crucial differences associated with her gender and nationality.

Little is known for certain about her origins, but it seems indisputable that she was from a noble indigenous family in the Tabasco region of Mexico. Whether she was initially stolen or given away is unknown, but she doubtless became a token passed between powerful masters until she was given to Cortés's men as part of a gift of twenty women. When her linguistic skills came to light, she was swiftly accorded far higher status than that of concubine, though she did become the lover of Cortés and bore at least one child by him. However, her knowledge of several indigenous languages, from both central and southern Mexico, was what made her invaluable to the invaders. She was able to speak to the envoys of Moctezuma, and even to the emperor himself, in a highly specialized and recondite form of Nahuatl. This, according to Frances Karttunen, leaves no question as to her noble ancestry.

The shifting focus on her personality and role is reflected by the mutations of her name. Baptized "Marina" by the Spaniards when they received her as a gift in 1519, she became known by natives as "Malintzin" through an adaptation to indigenous phonetics and conventions, which in turn was to be re-hispanicized into "Malinche." The respectful "doña Marina" used by chroniclers such as Bernal Díaz del Castillo reflects the status she enjoyed among the Spaniards. Similarly, the Nahuatl suffix "-tzin" in Malintzin points to her high esteem in the eyes of contemporary fellow natives. The denigration of her name seems to have come about following Mexico's independence from Spain, the consequent search for an independent identity, and the need for scapegoats to exorcise the sense of national humiliation.

Writers and artists in the twentieth century have been keen to review the adoring image presented by Bernal Díaz. Perhaps the most famous is Octavio Paz, who made *La Malinche* the focus of his chapter "Los hijos de la chingada" ("Sons of the Sexually Abused") in his seminal essay on the Mexican national psyche, *El laberinto de la soledad* (*The Labyrinth of Solitude*, 1950). In exploring her image as mother of mixed-race Mexico, Paz identifies a *mestizo* sense of abandonment and humiliation as the product of a violation. This gels with the central tenet of Mexican machismo that, in the final analysis, everything can be blamed upon women. It is a notion enshrined in countless popular songs and in the unflattering 1926 depiction of *La Malinche* with Cortés above the body of a murdered native, painted by José Clemente Orozco (1883–1949). The surrealist-influenced painting *El sueño de la Malinche* (*Malinche's Dream*, 1939) by Antonio Ruiz (1892–1964) offers a more circumspect view, with the sleeping woman seen against cracks in the walls resembling lightning and thunderclouds, her bedclothes turned into a landscape with, at the highest point, a Christian church. Ruiz appears to suggest that she was an unconscious harbinger of traumatic changes in her country, a view that may gain further currency in forthcoming years.

—Keith Richards

See also: *Language:* Indigenous Languages; *Visual Arts and Architecture:* Art (José Clemente Orozco)

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La Llorona

Literally "The Weeping Woman," *La Llorona* is an extremely popular figure in Mexican and Chicano folklore, though the tale is told throughout Latin America. There are several variants to the story, but in all versions *La Llorona* is the ghost of a woman who cries at night near lakes and rivers for her child or children whom she has drowned. The different versions of the tale focus on the reasons she might have killed her own children before taking her own life—through jealousy and anger over their father's infidelities, his heartless rejection of her, her inferior social class or racial group, or her callous desire to obtain a new lover. One version exonerates her completely by suggesting that her own father drowned her illegitimate baby (possibly the fruit of a virgin birth) and that she died from overwhelming grief.

La Llorona is the equivalent of the "bogey woman" for Mexican and Chicano children. Although she is more often heard than seen, she is imagined as dressed in black, with long gleaming fingernails, and either a horse's head or an empty space in place of her face. Parents tell small children the story to warn them off staying out late at night. For older girls, the story warns of the dangers of falling for dashing young men with no intention of marrying them. In

the case of young men, *La Llorona* is depicted as a siren figure who will lure them into danger and an uncertain fate. Nevertheless, in contemporary times, the "fright value" of the tale has largely been supplanted by the association of *La Llorona* with other familiar figures from the pantheon of Halloween ghosts, now popular in Mexico as well as the United States.

The origins of the tale are unclear. Some critics have found pre-Columbian echoes in the story, although empirical proof suggests that it was first told in the late nineteenth century and that it is more clearly associated with European folkloric tradition. More recently, some critics have been tempted to find a resonance of the story of *La Malinche* in that of *La Llorona*, in that both are bad women who betray their people/children. *La Llorona* has also enjoyed a surge in "popularity" in contemporary Chicano culture, perhaps because of the potential for betrayal that the Chicano community faces as they try to balance Mexican and Anglo-American cultures. Or, perhaps, because her mourning along the banks of a river reminds Chicanos of the experiences of so many "wetbacks" who lose their own lives, and those of their children, trying to cross the Río Grande/Bravo. Indeed, in these newer interpretations of her story, she ceases to be associated with evil and selfish behavior, and emphasis is placed, instead, on her grief and pain. Finally, some of the contemporary interpretations of her story also seek to draw parallels between her and other bad mother figures from world folklore, such as Medea.

—*Thea Pitman*

See also: *Cultural Icons: Religious and Mythical Figures (La Malinche)*

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