

# 10 Great Books on Chicano/Mexican Cinema to Buy This Navidad

BY GUSTAVO ARELLANO

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Demián Bichir: Someone do a book about him!

*Andrew Cooper, SMPSP / © 2015 The Weinstein Company*

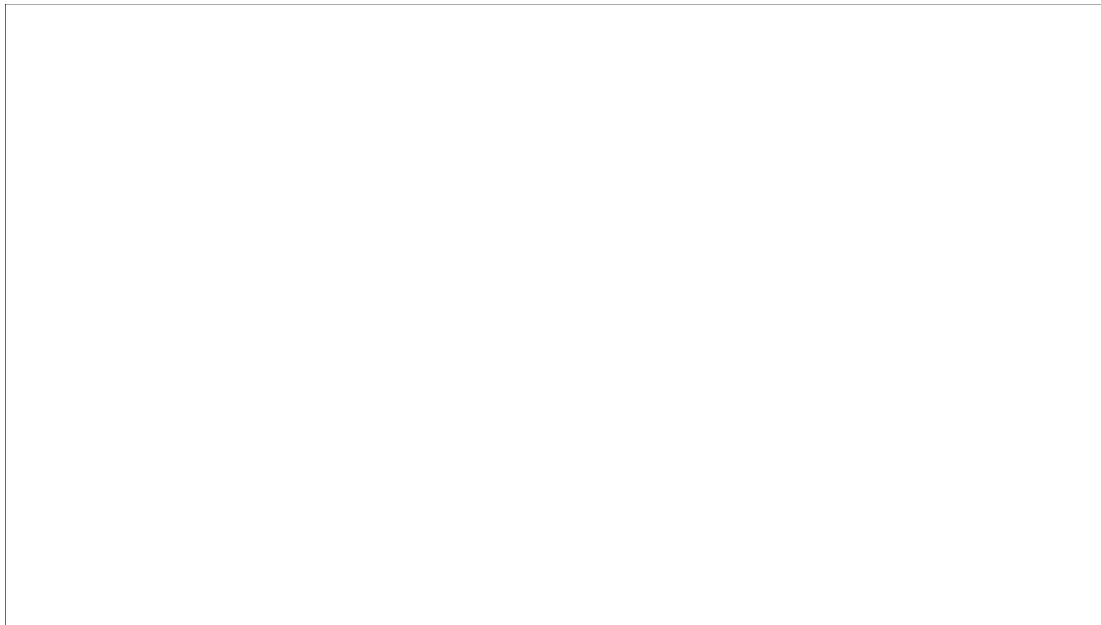
A couple of weeks ago, someone sent in a letter for ¡Ask a Mexican! seeking a list of great books about Mexican and Chicano cinema. Rather than answer it in my *columna*, I thought I'd do so in our Film section, if only to make use of the film studies degrees I got from Orange Coast College and Chapman University back in the day. Buy these for the cinema geek in your family this *Navidad*, and don't forget: #renewbordertown.

*Tex[t]-Mex: Seductive Hallucinations of the "Mexican" in America* by **William Nericcio**. I

recommend this 2006 book every year on my ¡Ask a Mexican! Christmas shopping list—and for good reason. Not only is Nericcio sharp in his deconstructionist takedowns of iconic Tinseltown Mexicans from Speedy Gonzáles to *Touch of Evil* to Lupe Velez, but he's also ruthlessly hilarious, making this one of the best academic books ever published, period. And lest you think Nericcio is all shits and giggles, his chapter on the creation of Rita Hayworth (born Margarita Cansino, she had to undergo painful electrolysis to raise her hairline to American beauty standards) is poignant and will have you cursing the Hollywood dream machine forever for ruining so many lives. Hey, Nericcio, write your *pinche* sequel already!

*Latin Looks: Images of Latinas and Latinos In the U.S. Media*, edited by **Clara E. Rodríguez**. This collection of essays examines depictions of wabs, Cubans, Puerto Ricans and South Americans in film, television and even radio. It has classic takes on the *Aliens* series as a parable of illegal-immigrant anxieties during the 1980s, though it doesn't tackle the brownfacing of Vasquez, for some reason. . . .

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*Images of the Mexican American In Fiction and Film* by **Arthur G. Pettit**. Not only was this 1980 book the first scholarly examination of Mexican Americans in film, but it also dives into cinema's predecessor in the American pop-culture imagination: dime-store novels that treated Mexicans as little better than oversexed trash, creating archetypes that exist to this day. You can only buy used copies of this book, alas, because Pettit tragically passed away just before his debut published; a forward by his boss touchingly shares how Pettit was working on this

masterpiece until the very end.

*Chicanos and Film: Representation and Resistance*, edited by **Chon Noriega**. Noriega is the longtime head of UCLA's Chicano Studies Resource Center, the country's pre-eminent department in the discipline. But before that, he was a pioneering academic in Chicano indie cinema, and this 1992 collection brings to light a vibrant movement the Snapchat generation should study instead of wishing Snap would create a Cinco de Mayo filter.

*Salt of the Earth: The Story of a Film* by **Herbert Biberman**. *Salt of the Earth* is a pioneering film of social realism, taking on the true story of New Mexican Hispanos going on strike against the mining company that simultaneously employed and poisoned them. The movie's content was so radical for Eisenhower America that it was blacklisted—fitting, considering the movie's makers were on Hollywood's blacklist for their political leanings. Director Biberman recalls making the landmark.

*Narco Cinema: Sex, Drugs, and Banda Music in Mexico's B-Filmography* by **Ryan Rashotte**. Released last year, this witty British entry takes on the insane world of *narcopelículas*, gloriously ultraviolent flicks informed (and sometimes financed) by Mexico's cartel wars. I've only read parts of it on Google Books, though, since it's only available in hardback and starts at \$95—hey, Santa . . .

*Cinema of Solitude: A Critical Study of Mexican Film, 1967-1983* by **Charles Ramirez Berg**. The University of Texas professor is a pioneer in writing about Latino media images, combining a sharp filmic eye with a smart understanding of Mexican politics on both sides of the border. His first book, originally published in 1992, remains a classic of the genre, examining the Mexican film industry in the turbulent times after its *Época de Oro* (Golden Age) but before its most recent renaissance of Guillermo del Toro and his fellow *chavos*.

*Hispanics In Hollywood: A Celebration of 100 Years in Film and Television* by **Luis Reyes and Peter Rubie**. This one-volume encyclopedia is severely outdated, given it came out in 2000. But in a pre-IMDb world, *Hispanics In Hollywood* was an indispensable bibliography of nearly every actor who had ever worked in the industry, from the silent era right up to Jessica Alba, my third cousin once removed (true story). Here's to hoping the authors expand this tome sooner rather than later.

*Mexico's Cinema: A Century of Film and Filmmakers*, edited by **Joanne Hershfield and David R. Maciel**. Another '90s release (for some reason, that decade was a fruitful era of scholarship and Latino films in Hollywood), it's a great primer on Mexico's supremely underrated film industry and touches on all of its strong points: the films of Emilio "El Indio" Fernández and his iconic cinematographer, Gabriel Figueroa, charro movies, even the eternally enjoyable camp of besuited Mexican wrestlers taking on monsters of all provenance.

*Cine Mexicano: Poster Art From the Golden Age/Carteles de la Época de Oro, 1936-1956* by **Rogelio Agrasánchez and Charles Ramírez Berg**. Berg pops up again to offer a long essay to this collection of film posters from Mexico's *Época de Oro*. The overview was such a success, highlighting the gorgeous images of Mexican genre films ranging from *comedias rancheras* to Cantinflas, urban drama to horror, that two sequels followed with a *chingo* of imitators. You don't have to know your Dolores del Río from your Miroslava to marvel at the dexterity of Mexican poster artists, who made their Hollywood counterparts resemble rejects from Termite Terrace.

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