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# Hispanic Activist Group Weighs Studio Boycott Amid Oscars Protest

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Christopher Polk/Getty Images

## The National Hispanic Media Coalition may launch a campaign against one of the major movie studios with poor representation numbers.

In the same week that awards pundits are celebrating <sup>[2]</sup> the relative diversity of the 2018 Oscar nominations, the National Hispanic Media Coalition is launching a campaign focused on the underrepresentation of Latinos in Hollywood movies and kicking off at the Oscar nominees' luncheon.

On Tuesday, the media watchdog organization, which represents writers, producers and actors and casting, production and entertainment marketing companies, said that it will be holding two demonstrations "targeting" the 2018 Academy Awards in the next two months. These events "are only the first of what will become "increasingly aggressive wake-up calls to Hollywood studios to end institutionalized racism against Latinos," NHMC president and CEO Alex Nogales said in a statement.

The NHMC's first demonstration will take place on the day of the nominees' luncheon, Feb. 5, and the second the day before the Academy Awards ceremony, March 3, with both times and locations to be determined, the organization said.

The group is also weighing whether to launch a boycotting campaign against one of the major movie studios with poor representation numbers, Nogales told *The Hollywood Reporter*. If boycotts yield no results, then the NHMC says it will begin publicly challenging executives in charge of studios with poor representation figures individually.

The goal of the two demonstrations, Nogales said, is to make the "point that we need to speak to [studio executives] and that they need to speak to us and not just through statistics. They need to lay out how they are going to correct their problem, because it is their problem."

While Mexican-born directors have won the best director Oscar for three consecutive years from 2014 to 2016, and Mexican director Guillermo del Toro is nominated this year, Nogales says that the focus of these awards-themed protests is on improving opportunities for American Latinos.

"We're very proud of the fact that we have these Mexican directors that have done incredible things in Hollywood, but they're Mexican and they're not American Latino," he said. "How we are perceived [onscreen] is how we will be treated."

The NHMC cites a July 2017 [study](#) [3] from USC Annenberg that found that between 2007 and 2016, Hispanic characters comprised just 3.1 percent of speaking characters in the 900 most popular films. Meanwhile, according to the MPAA's 2016 theatrical market statistics [report](#) [4], the Hispanic audience comprised 18 percent of American filmgoers that year and 23 percent of "frequent" moviegoers, or those who go to the theater once a month or more.

The NHMC has successfully provoked media companies to improve Latino representation onscreen via boycotting and name-calling tactics before. In 1998, for instance, the group famously [boycotted](#) [5] Disney and ABC for over a year until the company hired and promoted eight Latinos in its organization; in 1999 the organization joined with civil rights groups to stage a "Brown Out" boycott of network television that ended, in the spring of 2000, when ABC, NBC, CBS and Fox signed agreements to diversify their workforce.

In 2017, NHMC and CBS reached an agreement in which the network promised to hear more pitches from Latino creators, order more scripts from Latino screenwriters and employ more Latino directors.

And yet, throughout film history, studios have also found short-term workarounds in response to protests from Latino advocates, says UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television professor Chon Noriega, the author of *Shot in America: Television, the State, and the Rise of Chicano Cinema*. When Mexico and Panama boycotted Hollywood films in 1922 out of outrage over the "greaser" Latino character archetype, studios stopped demeaning those countries in their films "and just started locating the films, when they wanted to do that, in fictitious countries," Noriega says. After numerous protests in the 1960s over Latino media representation, [there were fewer](#) [6] Latino lead actors on television and in top movies in the 1980s than there were in the 1950s.

That's "for the simple fact that in the 1950s they made a lot of Westerns – they needed Mexicans to play the heavies," Noriega said.

Still, coming on the heels over #OscarSoWhite and #MeToo controversies, 2018 poses new perils for entertainment companies that don't respond to representation controversies. Talent has recently been making a stand for causes they believe in — in 2017 Ed Skrein [gave up a part](#) [7] in the upcoming *Hellboy* after fans called it an example of "whitewashing," and in the same year stars [confronted E! Network](#) [8] on the red carpet about an alleged wage disparity between former anchor Catt Sadler and her male co-anchor Jason Kennedy. Movies with major "whitewashing controversies," including 2015's *Aloha* and 2017's *Ghost in the Shell*, have disappointed at the box office, with some attributing their low grosses in part to viral social media campaigns.

NHMC president Nogales is hoping the Academy Awards demonstrations will persuade attending actors, writers, directors and producers to pressure executives to hire Latino talent. "If all of a sudden we start saying 'that studio is racist,' that [white] person who received that part [of a person of color], imagine how people are going to treat that person. We're going after that. We want to go all the way to the top if we're going to [utilize] every means possible and so we're demonstrating in front of all those people who can push their buttons," Nogales says.

Noriega is cautiously optimistic that the campaign's second, more targeted phase, will work. The NHMC "has always done a great job of finding out what is possible at this moment," Noriega said. "And I think focusing attention on one studio and a handful of executives, that will get attention."

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