Selena (1997)
In the movie, values of women being below men or unable to do the same things that they are able to do are common. During a scene where young Selena does not do well at a gig, her mother urges her father to eventually give up on his efforts of having Selena continue her Tejano music singing because of the belief that there is no place for women in that industry. Later, Selena’s sister also argues with her father about playing the drums, asking about when he’s ever seen a woman play on the drums before, implying it’s something she just wouldn’t be able to do. These concepts tie back into the ideas of machismo and marianismo, where men and women in Latin American countries or cultures are expected to fill certain roles or stereotypes. Without female Tejano music singers or female drummers to look up to, both of these characters are reasonably hesitant to fulfill these roles. America Ferrera, a director, actor, and activist, states that “Presence creates possibility… Who we see thriving in the world teaches us how to see ourselves, how to think about our own value, how to dream about our futures” (Ventura) when speaking about representation in media or in life. Selena and her sister eventually fill these role-model stances for future female Tejano singers or drummers in the Latino sphere because of their massive and positive impact.
Demonstrated/Assumed Cultures/Behaviors

When Abraham’s singing group, the Dinos, are denied from their first paying gig for being Mexican, the man who denies them does so based on the assumption that because they are Mexican, their behaviors or culture are somehow worse or negative by default. The Dinos also assume that because they are also Mexican-Americans, a Mexican club or dance joint would not deny their singing in a similar manner. They end up being wrong about this, with these situations being building blocks that lead to the car scene later in the movie where Abraham states that “[Mexican-Americans] have got to be twice as perfect as everyone else” because of the doubled and different standards of being someone within two communities or groups. Many other cultural assumptions or demonstrations are present in the movie, but this one demonstrates the clearest message about the unique experience that Selena’s family and other Mexican-Americans have to go through.
Perspectives of the Director

Gregory Nava is a Mexican-American who directed the films Selena (1997), My Family (1995), El Norte (1983), and many more. He is someone who is dedicated to representing Latinos and Latino culture on film because he thinks that telling their own stories is the way to tell the world, who also watches American films, who they really are (Medrano). Being Mexican-American or Latino also means that Nava is able to understand or connect with Selena’s story or cultural impact in a different or more meaningful way compared to the way that others might, with his unique perspective affecting the way the film is written or portrayed. Some parts of his unique experience are described in his interview with the Library of Congress, where he describes that when he was younger part of his family lived across the border, he was bilingual, he experienced Mexican cinema and Native influences along with American media or cinema, and many other small anecdotes which influenced his life or worldview (Shaping Latino Representation at the Movies with Gregory Nava).
Impact of Casting

The most famous actor of the Selena (1997) cast is Jennifer Lopez, a Puerto Rican who portrayed Selena in the film, something that skyrocketed her career and led to future roles in the industry. Her portrayal was met with some backlash, as Gregory Nava stated that protestors “should [have been] celebrating that we have an all-Latino cast and that Jennifer Lopez, one of our own, is becoming a star” (Karger). Although some disliked her casting, most were supportive, and the all-Latino cast in the movie ties back into the idea of mirrors in media. One article by Monica Chon in Opera Daily records a heartwarming moment where a child recognizes a character from the musical Hamilton as being “them,” showing the positive impact representation can have in media to those consuming it. In Selena (1997), the Latino casting is understandably one of many reasons that the movie resonated within audiences so well.
Symbolism in the Movie

The crowds of people shown several times throughout the film are a form of symbolism that represents the love that the people and culture had and has for Selena. In the opening scene, the mass of attendees shows the fame that Selena has acquired and the impact she has had on those who followed her. According to an interview with Gregor Nava from LATIN HEAT TV on YouTube, for the Houston Astrodome scene, “35,000 people came down for free… dressed as they would for a Selena concert… That kind of love is what makes the movie so powerful today.” This information further shows the amount of love fans have for Selena, with other scenes in the movie driving this point home further. During the scene where the stage is collapsing because of the crowd, Selena is able to calm them down, and during the mall scene, she is also able to completely crowd the area around her through her reputation alone.

“Director Gregory Nava Talks about the making of "Selena" Movie's Re-Release.” YouTube, uploaded by LATIN HEAT TV, 8 April 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YRACO9kIb40.


Works Cited


