

the Liberator

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SPRING 2016
WRITING
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PREJUDICES OF THE PAST

May 9, 2017 · by The Liberator Magazine · in Art & Lifestyle,
Christina Lopez, Current Staff, Political ·

Written by: **Christina Lopez**

Images cited when applicable.

My childhood was written in windblown dirt against my neighborhood's sidewalks. The infrequent rainstorms left a brown aroma upon the earth, the citadel of mountains surrounding the city were composed of brown dirt. The brown was in my brother's skin, my mother's hair, and my father's eyes. The brown was everywhere.

As a Hispanic born in a city with a predominantly Hispanic population, I never realized how much it mattered that I was a minority.

”

The idea that people were fundamentally different because they were from one side of a border, and not the other, confused me beyond belief.

My sobering confrontation with prejudice happened when I was assigned to watch the movie, *Giant*, for a course entitled “Life and

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~~ "The Language Issue" ~~

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Literature of Texas.”

The film depicted Texan prejudice against Mexican Americans in a way that I had never witnessed myself. The Mexican American characters weren't considered worthy of treatment by a white doctor. They weren't expected to communicate with the people they served, even though those same characters ran the Benedict family household. One of the white characters even declares them inherently “lazy,” and prides herself on “convincing” them to do the monotonous chores their jobs entail.



Elsa Cárdenas as Juana in Giant (1956).

The main character's son, Jordan Benedict Jr., is meant to inherit the ranch and continue the Benedict legacy. Instead, Jordan decides to pursue a medical degree to become a doctor for the Mexican village, much to his father's disapproval. Furthermore, Jordan marries a Mexican named Juana in a small Catholic ceremony—a decision that furthers his father's disappointment.

From the moment Juana is introduced on screen, something in my heart pulled for her. When Jordan and Juana locked eyes from across the room at a lavish party, it was the moment where the audience knew that a romance between two characters was inevitable.

”

But this time, it was different. Jordan was looking at me.

Juana was the closest I had come to seeing a Mexican in the traditional princess role. But Juana isn't just swept off her feet, married, and whisked away off-screen. Instead, Juana does everything she can to establish herself as more than just the wife of a powerful white man, more than the damsel in distress. In *Giant*,

2016)

Juana portrays a person, not a stereotype, and that small detail eclipsed the rest of the film for me.

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Juana with her family in the film.

My fascination with watching Juana's rough fairytale unfold on-screen made me realize just how much Mexican Americans are under-represented in American media.

”

Nothing about Jordan and Juana's first scene together would be considered normal by America's standards, even now.

In every rom-com I've seen, the film showcases the love between two beautiful people, who never look anything like me, or my family. And if they do, (as in the film *Maid in Manhattan*), they are the stereotypical maid or waitress; any role that ignores the fact that Hispanics can be people, not just stereotypes. Though not as blatant a theme as it was in *Giant*, this underrepresentation is unmistakable prejudice.

”

Why, as Texans, do we avoid confronting prejudice when it is the foundation on which our state was built?

When will we get past the prejudice that encourages a stranger on the bus to ask me if I can believe he knows a Hispanic doctor?
When will a Hispanic woman elected as student body president not make headlines because it's the first time that has happened?



Elsa Cárdenas and Dennis Hooper as Juana and Jordan in Giant (1956).

Now, I can understand why the brown of my hometown feels so comfortable and so secure. It takes unanimity to allow the border city to maintain its heritage in peace, and it took several women and men just like Juana to get there.

”

But it is possible, and that is the key.

Giant, in 1956, was groundbreaking because it brought attention to the prejudices deeply ingrained in Texas culture. Yes, we've progressed since then, and incidents like the man on the bus are few and far between, especially in a city like Austin. However, the divide between White- Americans and Mexican-Americans still exists. In particular, the rhetoric spewing out of our current politician's mouths means that this divide is at risk of growing wider.

We need to bring attention to the lack of representation of the Hispanic culture in everyday settings before this divide again becomes commonplace. We need to realize that we are people, and permanently shed the prejudices of the past.

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