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A Conversation with Rita Moreno: Examining The Employment Challenges of The Latino Actor

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A CONVERSATION WITH RITA MORENO:
EXAMINING THE EMPLOYMENT
CHALLENGES OF THE
LATINO ACTOR

A Thesis

by

VALENTE RODRIGUEZ

Submitted to the Graduate School of
The University Of Texas –Pan American
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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A CONVERSATION WITH RITA MORENO:
EXAMINING THE EMPLOYMENT
CHALLENGES OF THE
LATINO ACTOR

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ABSTRACT

Rodriguez, Valente, A Conversation with Rita Moreno: Examining the Employment Challenges of the Latino Actor. Master of Arts (MA), May, 2015, 81pp., 16 titles, 2 appendices. Rita Moreno has worked as an actress for more than 70 years. Her first acting job was in the play Skydrift, on Broadway, at age 13, in 1944. She is in an unusual position having garnered all the major acting awards and the presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest award bestowed upon a non-military person in the United States. She is the only Latino EGOT as she has an Emmy, a Grammy, an Oscar and a Tony, the top awards in the field of entertainment. I thought it would be interesting to ask her what her biggest challenge was in the entertainment industry. Was it being a woman, a Latino, or an immigrant?

DEDICATION

The completion of my Masters studies would not have been possible without the support of my family, my wife Ilsa Setziol and my graduate committee. I would like to offer an extra thanks to Marian Monta without whose support I would have been lost. I dedicate this thesis to my father and mother, Concepcion and Jesusa Rodriguez.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you Dr. Marian Monta for providing the guidance and the support. Thank you Rita Moreno for your time and your friendship.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Ms. Rita Moreno is the only Latino/Latina to have won an Emmy, Grammy, Oscar and Tony, collectively called “EGOT.” This accomplished by a 5’2”, 95-pound dancer/actress/singer. There must have been some magic, some kind of help from some super natural power, some angel sitting on her shoulder. And for those of you who think I am exaggerating, I will simply say this: Ms. Moreno was only the third person to complete what is also known as the “Grand Slam of Show Business.”

She was born in Puerto Rico in 1931, and she lived in the Barrio of New York until signed by MGM in 1948. Hers is the story of an American dream. Aptly called a dream because, although stories like this exist in our dreams, they seldom happen in reality. However, here she is, proof that it is possible, proof of the power of the human spirit and the desire to persevere. Her lifetime to-do list would read: To make the best of what is offered you and to do your job so well that you force people to take notice. Because of her unique perspective as a woman, an immigrant and a Latino, and having been so successful throughout her career, I was interested in finding out where she encountered the greatest struggle: as a woman, an immigrant or as a Latina?

Perhaps I am doing a disservice to her by suggesting that it was more than just hard work and dedication that got her to the top. Perhaps there is some magic in any successful person's story. But for every hour of her you see on the screen, there were hundreds of hours working to perfect what she does. The sweat, tears and frustrations of the performing world are something that all performers face. To be able to navigate in that world with such ease and grace and with tremendous talent is what makes her great. We are fortunate to have her as an example of Latino potential and our culture. And yet Ms. Moreno had very little opportunity, like so many other actors of color, to sink her teeth into a leading role of much substance. Maybe the Hollywood studios did not realize how brightly that star would shine. Like a giddy child that takes small bites off of a lollypop to be able to savor it as long as possible, small bites were all that we were allowed from Ms. Moreno.

The woman who ultimately earned the "Grand slam of Show Business," started life with a triple whammy of disadvantage: She was a woman, a Puerto Rican, and an immigrant.

The year was 1936. Hitler had just about taken over the Rhineland. When Moreno arrived in Spanish Harlem at age 5, her family moved into a tenement with three other families. New York City was a maze of streets and sounds she had never heard before.

Gender roles at the time were very different than they are today, especially for Latinas. Women were still meant to find husbands and have babies and keep house. The

Nineteenth Amendment, giving women the right to vote, had been passed only sixteen years earlier. And if you were an immigrant in New York City, and a woman, you had very few choices. In short, you did what you could to survive: cleaned houses, sewed clothes, and made paper roses.

One of the few outlets for little Puerto Rican girls was dancing. Ms. Moreno was six years old when she started dance class. Irene Lopez, who was a Spanish dancer and a friend or Ms. Moreno's mom, saw her bopping around the apartment and thought she had some talent. It was Ms. Lopez who brought Ms. Moreno to Paco Cancino, who would become Ms. Moreno's teacher and partner on the dance floor. Her natural knack for dancing introduced her to life on the stage. And once she heard the applause she was hooked.

But the dance studio provided only temporary refuge from the savage city streets. Ms. Moreno recalls running home from school to avoid danger and the racist words that chased her down the streets.

“Here, by day on Mohegan Avenue, I lived a nightmare. There were Irish and Anglo gangs who roamed the Bronx streets armed with pipes and insults. The cold wind blew, and it carried with it the hiss of the ultimate insult: “Spics!”¹

¹ Moreno

Ms. Moreno recalls a “race war” in the tenements.

“...And the new arrivals, the Puerto Ricans, were the new targets. We were referred to by the more benevolent Jews, Italians, and occasional Swedes as ‘the PRs’.”²

Ms. Moreno recalls feeling “forever a foreigner in more ways than I could imagine”:

“Spics,” was the war cry, the insult, and I don’t even know whether I understood that it had to do with my skin color, or that it meant Hispanic. ...Back home in Juncos, people came in all colors and shades—it didn’t matter that Mami and I were on the light side, that my abuelo Justino was dark. But here it mattered, and my “light” skin was not light enough. I was a running dark girl on the street, an object of ridicule later in the school. And in the apartment I was for the first time critical of my reflection in the mirror.”³

As young Moreno absorbed the larger culture—“blond movie stars, billboard goddesses, and popular blondes at school”—she says she learned that she was “the wrong race,” and that light skin was better than dark skin. Once indoctrinated into this way of thinking, she subconsciously started to cast herself in these subservient roles.

² Moreno

³ Moreno

“I made friends with other little girls who liked to dance; we put on costumes and spun through our living room... We wore slave-girl costumes that proved prophetic of the roles I would play later in films.”⁴

“I was for the first time critical of my reflection in the mirror. I would stare down at my small hands and wonder whether they looked dirty even when they were clean.”⁵

Critical of her own appearance, she tried to become what she thought she had to be—white, or at least not Puerto Rican. She had never experienced the world in a multicultural setting. There was no better place to do this than New York City. But along with the beautiful smells that came from her apartment building, the foods that melded together the stories of all the immigrants that formed this country, came the division and the violent struggle with her own identity. And the challenges that come with finding yourself and establishing your own place.

The racism she first experienced on the streets of Spanish Harlem would remain a constant in her world. She would discover that Hollywood had the same racism and sexism at its core. Trying to fit into the white world, Ms. Moreno tried to look like Elizabeth Taylor, the ideal at that time. L. B. Mayer said it when he met her: “She looks like the Latino Elizabeth Taylor.” Perhaps this is why he signed her.

⁴ Moreno

⁵ Moreno

Still, Ms. Moreno was hampered in the roles she was allowed to play. Producers and other studio personnel did not see her as having the ability to play anything but the stereotypical ethnic woman. What's worse, she often had to work opposite white women in brown makeup playing the parts that should have rightfully been hers. Even after she won the Academy Award for West Side Story, she was still pigeonholed in bad ethnic characters, incidental to the main story and very poorly developed.

Latinos in America come from many different places and at many different times. Some of us have ancestors who lived here before there was a country called America, while others arrive daily. We span the color spectrum from dark to white. It's a nuance that was frequently opaque to entertainment industry executives.

The challenge for Latino actors is twofold: The parts we are allowed to play are often poorly written and stereotypical, and even when Latino stories make it to the screen, white actors frequently play major characters. Ms. Moreno experienced this first hand playing the role of Anita, opposite Natalie Wood, playing the part of Maria, in West Side Story (a role for which Ms. Moreno won the Academy Award).

There is also a scarcity of writers who develop stories about the Latino experience. Those Latino characters that do make it to the screen are secondary characters without the kind of development that would challenge an actor. The story is never told from the Latino character's point of view. And in an industry so wedded to looks and ethnic stereotyping, Latino actors often wind up playing characters that don't speak English well.

And thus you often end up playing characters that are one-dimensional. You frequently are either the victim or the perpetrator, and seldom the hero.

Ms. Moreno faced these limitations after she won the Oscar and consciously decided to turn down most of the roles offered to her. For seven years after she won her Academy Award in 1962, she did very little film work.

“... Before West Side Story, I was offered the stereotypical Latina roles. The Conchitas, the Lolitas in westerns. I was always barefoot. It was humiliating, embarrassing stuff. But I did it because there was nothing else. After West Side Story, it was pretty much the same thing. A lot of gang stories.”⁶

You would think that Ms. Moreno’s journey would have been free from this form of discrimination. Sadly, this has not been true. When she was working, the parts were almost always the “Foreigner” or the “Latina Sexpot.” Ms. Moreno said it best herself in her book, Rita Moreno: A Memoir, “I do not mind playing Hispanic what I do mind is playing a stereotype.” Ms. Moreno, it seems, was looking to challenge herself, to grow as an actress.

At the same time she struggled against stereotyping, she also struggled as a woman in the business. There are far fewer roles for woman than there are for men.

⁶ Lydia Martin: Rita Moreno overcame Hispanic stereotypes to achieve stardom. The Miami Herald, September 14, 2008.

“ Males continue to make up the majority of roles reported, especially in the supporting category, where they contribute about two roles for every female role.”⁷

This business drives you to some incomprehensible extremes. You spend all of your life trying to become someone else. The person everyone loves, the person everyone wants to spend time with, the person that will get employed. You reach for the ideal and try to become, Elizabeth Taylor. After years of doing this you lose who you are; worse yet, you never develop the skills to truly discover who you are. You are left staring in the mirror wondering about the person who is looking back at you.

“But I was young, and gone. A stranger to the world. A stranger to myself. I looked in the mirror and didn’t see anyone. I made myself up past all recognition. I hadn’t even begun to touch my other self. I hadn’t done a lot of things. Yet. And yet.”⁸

Add a bad love affair and a botched abortion, and you get a recipe for suicide. This is where Ms. Moreno found herself with a bottle of pills in her hand and very little reason to persevere. On April 19, 1961, she tried to commit suicide in Marlon Brando’s apartment, but she didn’t succeed.

⁷ Screen Actors Guild - Casting Data Report

⁸ Moreno

“ I reminded myself that this was not a scene in a movie – that if I swallowed these venal little bullets, I would surely die. “ So think about that Ms. Moreno,” I said aloud, staring at myself in the mirror. I truly detested the image reflected back at me: a weak, self-pitying, frail woman with disheveled hair, hollow cheeks, a shiny red face, and a swollen, leaking nose. What could be salvaged here? Nothing!”⁹

Ms. Moreno had pretended to be someone else for so long that she had forgotten who she was, perhaps she had never really discovered who she was? How could she? As a young girl that did not have the right color skin, she tried to assimilate as best she could, and in the process she never allowed herself the time to discover her true self, her true worth.

In the wake of her suicide attempt, with the whole world around her telling her and showing her what was acceptable and what was the ideal, she invented a character that was totally fearless and brilliant. It began as little “bits” that she did during rehearsal breaks. It was her inner-self talking through her character, and it would be developed into her Tony-Award-winning performance as Googie Gomez in Terence McNally’s The Ritz.

⁹ Moreno

“... I invented this character, a singer and a dancer, even a bit of an actress, who couldn’t sing or dance or speak worth a lick. But she knew, even if no one else did, she absolutely knew that she was brilliant.”¹⁰

“For years this character lived in my handbag like some loose change or a party hat that I’d pull out whenever I needed it. But then I went to a get together at a friend’s house and he begged me to do a bit of her and you know, who wants to be rude? And Terence McNally the playwright just happened to be there.”¹¹

Perhaps this invention was a way of assuring herself a connection to her past, a past that would be forever tied to her because of the color of her skin and the kink of her hair, the rhythm in her heart and the dreams in her soul.

Her Googie Gomez earned Ms. Moreno a Tony for best supporting role. “I was ecstatic! Winning the Tony Award in 1975 made me one of the few performers in history to win an Oscar, an Emmy, a Grammy *and* a Tony!”¹² Ms. Moreno was forty-four years old and on top of the world, and about to discover yet another “ism”.

“But the sad truth is finding work in Hollywood--or anywhere as an actress--was now very difficult. I was no longer a “hot chick.” Nobody

¹⁰ Moreno

¹¹ Moreno

¹² Moreno

remembered, much less cherished, my Oscar turn in that violet dress, and my kiddie show fame did not translate into grown-up prestige. I had battled racism and sexism all my life. Now I had to battle the worst enemy of all: ageism.”¹³

From the times when she was running home after school to try to avoid the calls of “spic” to all her struggles as an actress, Ms. Moreno’s journey was full of experiences that tested her resilience. She doggedly put her head down and pushed forward trying to forge her own path. Was her story any different than others of that time? It was, in that she has been recognized as having exceptional talent. She is still working after 70 years in the business. Through it all Ms. Moreno has persevered. Ms. Moreno, in spite of being a small woman, has a big personality. As she says, we Latinos are nothing if we are not big. She did not sip of life: she gulped it. She has lived to tell her own story, in her book and her one-woman show. She has become Hollywood royalty, perhaps the last of her kind.

In my conversations with Ms. Moreno, we sat and talked as friends and as co-workers. The conversation rambled a bit and the stories and memories flowed. This is what Ms. Moreno is: a storyteller. And it is a grand story: From utter poverty to a house overlooking the San Francisco Bay with a room full of awards and accolades. It is the story of a life built for herself, at a time and in an industry that didn’t always understand her true value. The conversation was full of laughter. Ms. Moreno has a clever and quick

¹³ Moreno

mind and wit. Her stories are full of voices and gestures and movement—“bits,” as she called them. And when she tells them, you see and feel the attitude of these characters. It’s in her nature. It is her nature. Having worked for over 70 years as an entertainer, she is still working and looking forward. She has left us with some very vibrant performances--performances that not only let us know this lady’s got talent, but also reveal something within ourselves. They pull at our heartstrings and make us want to cry, laugh, sing and dance.

CHAPTER II

FIRST INTERVIEW

V: So, born in 1931. Right?

R: Yeah.

V: In Puerto Rico.

R: In Humacao Puerto Rico.

V: Humacao.

R: Yeah.

V: How old were you when you came to the United States?

R: I was five years old. I was a little girl.

V: Do you have strong memories of Puerto Rico?

R: Very, very – that’s the beginning of my book. I have memories. Very many sensory memories, colors, smells, sights and they’re all pleasurable and joyous. Actually my problems didn’t start till I came to this country. But really it’s like paradise lost. We may have named the first chapter, I don’t remember now, but um... Oh yeah, I remember walking through the rain forest with my Mami all the time. And for some bizarre reason I used to know all the names of all the herbs and things, many plants. So in order to show me off she would take me with her friends and break off a branch of something and say, “What is this Rosie?” and I’d tell her what it was. It’s a very sweet memory. But, it was a

really simple life but it was noisy and crowded in the best sense, full of music, full of laughter. Really my memories of Puerto Rico are so happy and positive, which is why it was such a shock to come to this country in the middle of winter and wonder what the hell happened to the trees and the leaves on the trees.

V: And that was in 1936?

R: Yeah, yeah, it was really hugely shocking – it was freezing to boot. And I remember asking my mother what happened to the trees, did they all die, and she said “ No, no they came back in the summer this is New York in the winter.” I was not happy. I was not. Everything looked grey.

V: Was it a boat trip?

R: Yes. It was a boat trip and there was a big storm at sea. We didn't get to New York for days. It was (laughing) Ferocious! It was just a horrid introduction. And the funny part is that the actual ship, was that it was called the Carabobo. SS Carabobo. And you know when I think back on that, and I have a picture. I have an actual picture of it and there is also a wonderful reproduction of the manifest of who was on board. It has my mom's name, my name and the other passengers, and every single one of them Latino, of course. But uh, that storm... there was one funny line we had in the play about uh... “ The name of the boat was the SS Carabobo”, what was the line I had?” Not a very positive name to begin a journey with. (Laughs)

V: Not a very good omen.

R: That's the word, that's the word we used. Not a very good omen. (Laughs)

V: So at five you get to the United States. Your mom has a place? Did you find a place?

R: We went to an aunt's place. Titi. We called her Titi. Her name was Tomasa Lopez. And we stayed in her apartment for ...gosh it seems to me...months, with other families. She had two other families, herself, and us. My mom and I slept in one bedroom. And it was a place in the Tenement, in the ghetto, which was filled with cockroaches, but you know I was probably the only kid in life who didn't get scared of them because we saw insects all the time in Puerto Rico. So it was not a big deal. But uh, you mention the word cockroach to my daughter and she has a hysterical fit. A very violent "wevvvwevvv." And we had bed bugs too. I remember once a month, when we had our own apartment, getting kerosene with my mom and cleaning the springs. You know with Kerosene. Which must have been great for us to inhale. I mean no wonder I was very near asthma and the things you didn't... Flit! You don't know flit.¹⁴

V: Yeah Flit, but we called it Fleet.

R: Fleet! My mother used to say that too. "Oye don ta el Fleet."

V: El Fleet.

R: El Fleet. (She laughs)

V: Did you always, you say there was a lot of music at home a lot of dancing.

R: I used to dance for grandpa to make him, you know my mom used to say dance for Grandpa, for Abuelito, whose name was Justino. He was a good-looking man, slightly fierce looking with a dark skin and white, white hair. I have one picture of him only. I never met my grandmother because she died before I was born. Her name was Trinidad Lopez. And she was as big as a minute. I have a picture of her in a corset. You know the

¹⁴ Flit. A product launched by the Standard oil company in the 40's and 50's. Originally intended to kill flies and mosquitos, the product contained 5% DDT. The original artwork for Flit was put together by Theodor Suess Geisel (Dr. Sues).

corseted dress; she must have had like a fifteen-inch waist. And she was no more than five feet tall. She was probably even shorter than that. Looking very patrician standing next to a wonderful wicker chair. See, she was a Spaniard. She had her hair done up in, like, a pompadour. She was beautiful. Probably that's where I get my fairish skin cause the rest, much of my family is darker.

V: Now you say she was a Spaniard. Was there a, I know in my family there's a difference there.

R: A division. And that was a big deal.

V: And a lot of time it goes back and forth between being good and being considered bad.

R: Right! Absolutely, she was a, you know I remember having those kinds of lines in a movie I did called. It's called I like It Like That. There is a line that my character has, she's always saying, " Well I don understand dos tings because I am Castilian" cause they ask me to comb their kids hair and I say " O I don has to com, I's nappy heads."

Cause I am Castilian. It was a big deal. Usually your features are different. They are not, as you know, they don't have the wide nose. You don't have those very full lips and your skin is fairer. I didn't look exotic in other words but you can see that I (referring to picture of herself) I look like a little Spanish girl there or maybe not I don't know I look like a little Puerto Rican girl there.

V: I think a lot of times we forget that a lot of the Caribbean; the majority of the Caribbean population is Spanish and Black. There was very little Native population left.

R: Absolutely, and the true Puerto Rican was the Taino Indians which is another color, the copper color, and don't forget that the Dutch invaded and raped the island and so did

the Spaniards. I mean everybody has been to our poor little island. It is a real rape victim. There is almost nothing left of the relics and stuff. It's very sad.

V: Did you always... you said that you were dancing for your grandfather. Was the choice to become a performer ever a choice?

R: It was just a forgone conclusion that I would be a dancer at the time. That I would be in the "Business," that I would eventually be a professional. When my mom and I came to this country she had a girlfriend named Irene Lopez who was a Spanish dancer, and Irene was actually. She might have been Spanish, I'm not sure she was a friend of mom's, not mom, pero Mami, and she came to the apartment one time and I was bopping around, I must have been 6 years old. And she watched me, and she said to my mother "You know, I think Rosita has some talent. Would you let me take her to my dance teacher?" And mom said "Sure," and that's how I started doing professional dance. I mean, when my grandpa saw me, I was doing, shaking my little bootie and jumping around like a child does. But I started very young. I was six years old when I started dance class

V: And thinking?

R: This is it! My debut was with my dance teacher, Paco Cancino, who in fact was Rita Hayworth's uncle. She was Margarita Cancino.

V: That was Ms. Rita Hayworth's real name.

R: Yeah that was her real name, Margarita Cancino. Whose father I think was a rather famous, at least in Spain, Spanish dancer. So it was the dancing Cancino's, and when she came to Hollywood, that's what she was, very low hairline, very dark hair, but fair skin and nothing Caribbean looking about her. So, that was a big deal to be with Ms. Rita

Hayworth's uncle teaching me. And I made my debut with him in a Greenwich Village nightclub. He partnered me, and he was so short, it was really startling looking. He was really so short, (laughing) he was a tiny, fierce looking man. He was wonderful, he had long sideburns and he had that Cordoves attitude. He might have been tiny but he was mighty. He was wonderful, and he spoke in Castilian Spanish. "Rosita, vamos a ver el baile de la THathathatha (laughing) (both of us laugh) I did that in my show cause it's so funny. " Vamos hacer el baile de la Sambra que es muy popular en la ciudad de...de... THaragotha (Saragossa)!"

V: And then how do you go from... you get to Broadway?

R: When I was thirteen.

V: Yeah –

R: When I was thirteen.

V: As a dancer?

R: Passing for eleven looking nine.

V: Wow

R: Cause I always looked very young for my age. And there was a Broadway show, yeah, called Skydrift and I played a little Italian girl in it. And it literally closed the night after it opened.¹⁵

V: Oh my goodness.

R: Isn't that freaky?

V: Yeah.

¹⁵ Skydrift had 7 performances at the Belasco theatre. Opened November 13th 1945.

R: I mean I had never seen a play at that time. My mother had never seen a play, ever. Uh... I don't think she even went to the theatre in Spanish in Puerto Rico. There were always some shows at a couple of Latin movie theatres. They had shows but I don't even think she saw those. So this was a very new and first experience for us.

V: And how did that leave you? Did you want to do more?

R: Oh, I couldn't wait to do more. But the, Oh, I'll tell you a funny story that happened on stage, on a preview night, cause it was a really poor production, they couldn't afford to go on the road with it, which is what you did then, you don't do that anymore, you just hold previews in the theatre in which you are going to open. And I think during our (chuckling), our very last preview, you won't believe I did this. It's a scene where my mom's son, my older brother, comes back from the dead to say one last goodbye to the family and that's what the play was about. There were four. One was a Latino soldier, one was an Italian boy one was a Jewish boy, so this boy comes back, by the way it was Eli Wallach's first play too. And he was the one that was the Jewish boy that comes back to his family. So my mother is talking, it seems to the family, just to the air. And it's very sad. He is saying goodbye to her, the young man who played my brother. And I saw that the audience, this is crazy, was not happy with the scene. They were coughing they were shifting. Interesting how instinctive a performer's mind can be, even at a very young age. So I decided to help the scene... by... taking, we were all having spaghetti, spaghetti dinner, by putting a spaghetti in my mouth. This shows you how I had no experience doing theatre, and sucking it up very slowly. I can't believe I did this. I mean the only thing I didn't do was look at the audience and make a face. But I am going (Ms. Moreno makes sucking/slurping sound). Well of course there were snickers and the scene went

on, and Lilly Valenti, a rather well known character actress at the time, after our curtain went down, she took me, by the neck, in the wings, and she was a real old fashioned Diva type lady. And she said to me, with a tremolo in her voice. “ If I ever...” and she is shaking me by the neck “...ever hear about you doing this again, I will find out about it, and I will find, you and I will kill you.”

V: Oh my goodness.

R: Isn't that a great story.

V: Oh my goodness what a wonderful story.

R: Isn't that a marvelous story? But it's the voice, and I was a scrawny little kid. And she is taking me by the neck, and she is shaking me till my eyeballs were bouncing. (Laughs)

V: Now when did you decide...

R: But it is a sign that I knew nothing about theatre that you couldn't do nothing like that. I was trying to save the moment.

V: But you felt there was something missing.

R: Something missing, people were restless.

V: You didn't have the technique to know what to do correctly.

R: Absolutely. Done in all innocence. I wasn't trying to steal the show. I was just thinking this scene needs help. (We both laugh)

V: What a great story. And when did you move to LA?

R: I made my first movie in New York. It was one of the very early independents, a black and white film about reform school girls. And it was called “So young, so bad”¹⁶

V: Right.

¹⁶ So Young So Bad – Danziger productions 1950. Distributed by United Artists.

R: Which my agent could never get right. He'd say "Yeah – you know she's in So Good, So Young (laughs). So Bad, So Spoiled (laughs). He could never get it right.

V: What year was that?

R: Oh, I don't remember. I drove Tony Taccone¹⁷ crazy when we were putting the play together. I don't remember dates. I just don't remember dates. Anyway, he found out cause he went into heaven knows what kind of data. But after that, lets see I was thirteen, so when I was sixteen a talent scout saw me in a dancing school recital because they really used to do that kind of stuff.

V: They would look for talent.

R: Yeah! And you don't really see that anymore. They do it in baseball, in sports, but I don't know that they do it in show business. So he went back stage and gave my mother his card. And he said, I'll never forget his name, Dudley Wilkinson, and he said I am with MGM Studios and I was going Ahhh (deep breath), biting my knuckles, because that was the studio of my dreams. It was the studio that did all the great musicals. There were other studios that did musicals, but MGM was the top dog. MGM had Gene Kelly, MGM had Ann Miller, it had Judy Garland.

V: And by then you were thinking this is what I want to do.

R: Oh yeah absolutely. Well, the little nightclub engagement did it. You know, I saw that spotlight and said THIS is what I want to do for the rest of my life. When they were applauding. He said (scout) "It's not time yet but I'll just keep in touch with you every now and then and I, I'll talk to you at some point." And about, I'm guessing six months

¹⁷ Tony Taccone Artistic director or Berkley Repertory Theatre in Berkley California

later, maybe even more than that. He did call with business in mind and said LB Mayer¹⁸ is coming to town. Louis B. Mayer, and I would like Rosita to meet him. And can you meet us at the Waldorf Astoria penthouse at 4 o'clock, whenever it was, tomorrow. We went there. I mean, the dressing and the changing of the clothes and putting falsies on myself, cause I wanted to be Elizabeth Taylor more than anything in the world. So I had her eyebrows, cause my eyebrows were thicker then, and I did her hair. And we bought a waist cincher so that, I mean the woman had a wasp waist. So I got all done up like that, and we got into the elevator at the Waldorf. First of all, we'd never been to a hotel, all right, so the first thing you do is you're looking for an elevator, and you can't find it, and we didn't want to ask anybody because we didn't want to embarrass ourselves. So we searched and searched and finally found the fucking elevator. We get in the elevator, the door closes and we don't know what button to push. Well it didn't say 26 or 27, it said PH, but we had no idea. So we get out of the elevator and very embarrassedly go to the desk and say. "Excuse me I'm here to see Mr. Louie B. Mayer". And they say " Oh yeah take the elevator" and I say, " we were there in the elevator but what button do you push?" and they said, "PH, it means Pent House".... Oh...OK... I mean we were only Jigaritos. But that's what so wonderful about that story, my story. And we get up there and it opens up into his apartment and there he is "The Wizard" you know, this tubby little man with the rimless glasses, and Dudley Wilkinson was there with him. And he introduced us and interestingly enough, it took so little time, and guess what he says?

V: What?

¹⁸ Loius B Mayer founder of MGM studios

R: “Why, she looks like a Spanish Elizabeth Taylor!” I nearly peed my panties and within like, it seemed to me, maybe it was longer, maybe it was 20 minutes, he said, “How does a 7 years contract sound to you, young lady?” And, you know, I walked on air all the way home. And about... and then I made my first movie, So Young So Bad and then we went by train to California and found a little cottage in Culver City where the Studio was, cause I didn’t know how to drive, neither of us. I mean we were really babies in the woods. And I remember that at first they’d pick me up until I was able to get enough driving lessons to learn how to drive, and the very first day I got in the car, it was a real old little Jalopy. It was a coupe. You know what coupes look like it had a thing in the back a little trunk in the back that opened. The very first day my mama is sitting with my little brother. He was a baby then, he was about three years old, and I drove. Of course, there were no seat belts.

V: Right

R: And I start to drive, and within minutes I crunched into somebody making a turn. I was so humiliated. He bumped the windshield and made one of those little things.

V: One of those kind of round cracks?

R: Yeah, round thing, and he started to cry and I thought I would die of humiliation. I hated my little brother at that moment. Of course it was his fault! That was my first experience in a car. And then I started to go to the Studio, and I went every single day. I visited every set. I mean I am the envy of all the people I tell this to, because it was a magic time. The Studios still had big stars. They had what they called stables; they had stables of young people.

Ms. Moreno and I were working on a sitcom called Happily Divorced. At this point we were called into work and the interview was to be continued on another day.

CHAPTER III

SECOND INTERVIEW

R: I'm gonna be anxious to read this. You better get a good grade or I'll kill you. Don't even come to me with less than an A+ man.

V: What do you feel was a tougher road? Being a woman, being a Latina or being an immigrant?

R: You know when you ask a question like that to me, they are all the same. They are absolutely all the same, being an immigrant and Latina and a woman are one those are clones of a persona. And I can't ever say that I was not treated well in Hollywood because I was a Latina. I have to add that it had to do with my being a girl, and a pretty girl at that, and kind of a sexy looking girl, which was really in its way, a bit of a curse. I have to admit that I used it because I thought it was the only way to get along. You know, tight little dresses, a little too much make up and all that kind of stuff. But to me it's one thing. I am glad you asked that, because I am going to give a talk in front of about a thousand, no more than that, like, fifteen hundred women in Miami next week, and it's kind of about that. It's about being a woman and these particular women, some of them, are girls under 21, are in business, or want to be in business, so the talk gear sort or bends towards that, but at the same time you can't talk about that without talking about the

woman...La mujer...you know? But to me you can't separate them, that's the surprise answer. I see that you are surprised. V: Well, as you say that, I am thinking specifically, of the time frame. All three of them suggest some kind of outsider.

R: Oh for sure. More than anything else that's what I called myself, an outsider, and of course that doesn't help your mental health very much when you constantly think that you are outside of what is really happening, outside of positive things happening, always outside, and there comes a point when you get paranoid about it. That's to medical a term, but you know what I mean. You become suspicious of everything because you have been conditioned to that. I mean, if you are called a little spic from the time you are a very young child. I am sure we have covered this before but it is important to be reminded of it, and you are young and impressionable as all children are, and you are tender, you are bound to believe the hate people say. It doesn't come from your momma or your poppa, but it comes from everyone else. And you begin to think, well of course my mother thinks I'm wonderful, she is my mother, she has too, but these people who are just getting a perception of me have a very bad one so there must be something wrong with me and that just, man, that just haunts you all the way. It's still there in me, it's still, that is what amazes me. Maybe I am just such a stubborn neurotic that I am going to hang on to this till the day I die (Ms. Moreno does voice).

V: Is that that voice you talk about?

R: That nasty little girl. "I told you you couldn't do it...Nya,nya,nya...nya nya, you got away with it this time" ... yes. That little girl became that voice for me. It encompassed all of the things that influenced me about my value and my worth.

V: Do you think that speaks to the idea of America being a melting pot? And we are all suppose to become a new people. I have found that as hard as we try to be not racist, not sexist, we keep getting hit over the head with images that are the blonde, the blue eyed...

R: Look at the trouble that Obama just got into for saying that Kamala Harris is the best looking attorney. And I think, come on man, give the man a break, he was being a male. And what's wrong with being a male who finds a woman attractive? It's so out of proportion. That man is in so much trouble.

V: I also find, both of us have chosen the same paths, and it's one of the tougher paths, Hollywood wants to present us, and make money off of us but there is a certain way they want to present us.

R: They want Latinos to be...you know how that works? Here's how it works. As you were speaking I just suddenly got an image, and I was thinking the Latinos that we see in film are terrific looking people, they are exceptionally beautiful. I mean really, Andy Garcia is a very handsome guy. Jimmy Smits, etc. And the advantage that the Latino women have, if you want to call it that, is breasts! Breasts and buttocks, isn't that crazy? You guys don't even have that so you better be beautiful. Right? You're up shit's creek.

V: Here's the thing. From my aesthetic, I find that the people with the shading being black or brown or yellow, I find that suggestion of history much more interesting, and yet Hollywood still tries to push this plain look.

R: It's what my husband used to call, the name is outdated, but we used to call it the "Marry Martin" world, the "Meryl Streep" world. No aspersions on her, she is brilliant, but it's still that kind of world. I think Latino's are still being "Niched". In fact, I remember making a big point to the publishers of my book, I said, "I don't want this to be

a niche book. I want this to be promoted as the story of a person that came from another country.” I think it’s a very important story, but I don’t want it to be only for Latinos because, when I did the play based on my life, everybody, the reaction, was just extraordinary. Everybody laughed just as hard as the Latinos. Well, maybe the Latinos laughed a little harder. Yes we are a loud. We are raucous people, but what I am getting at is that the white people in the audience and the Jewish people, the Italian, the whatever, the Lebanese... were very moved by this story. They were amused and very, very moved. When we are isolating ourselves, we are “Ghetto-izing” ourselves.

V: Now do you think us as Latinos? Do you think we put ourselves in second place?

R: Absolutely, for sure. I think we also victimize ourselves. That sounds like a finger wagging accusation but it’s not meant to be. Mostly because it is important that we understand what we, with the help of others, will do to ourselves. And it does take, it takes another element to make us feel so second-class as we tend to do and it’s very, very hard. I mean having an Oscar did not make that much of a difference. That’s what’s so interesting.

V: How do you mean?

R: In my case getting an Oscar, not having it, but getting an Oscar, was something that was earned. I mean I didn’t have any friends that said I am going to vote for you. I’m gonna see to it that you get an Oscar. You can count on us. Um... I didn’t do a film for seven years. I think I told you that, The Oscar meant nothing. That story in my book about going to the director at 60 and having him wanting me to read for the whore house madam, two lines, I cannot tell you how devastated I was.

V: That is just beyond me. How do they ask you to come audition for just two lines?

R: Yeah.

V Why?

R: There is no answer to that question other than obviously a lack of awareness, and the lack of awareness comes from not having any interest in cultures outside of their own. This man was an Englishman, and that's the way he saw Latinos and it's a killer. I was absolutely dissolved, I don't know how else to put it... Como se dice? "Desbaratada"... Undone, that's the only word that really describes it, and it's in Spanish: Desbaratada. I couldn't believe it at 60 years old. You have to grow another skin, and the problem with that; instead of a skin, you need a hide. You know what I'm saying? The problem with that is that with a hide you get very hard. I never wanted to... I was always very aware of that, and I remember one time when I was doing nightclub engagements in Las Vegas and after this particular show, that particular night, I got a big standing ovation. People were standing and yelling. It's very heady stuff. Then I went to my dressing room, and I was all alone there. My husband wasn't there. My daughter wasn't there. They were back in LA where they were supposed to be, and I suddenly remembered why. At that time, I thought of it this way: people like Joan Rivers were so hard and tough, hiding a lot of feeling, because it's such a tough business. The worst mistake you could make, you could ever make, is to believe strangers when they tell you they love you, and a lot of actors do that. They believe them. I remember seeing Diana Ross in one of her concerts a couple of years ago, when she was still doing them, and in the middle of the applause she says, and in a plaintive way, she said to the audience "Do you love me?" Like a little girl and I was just, my jaw dropped, and they were "Yea"! And she said, "Do you love me?" And she said it several times and I thought "Ahhhh" that does it for her, huh? That's what I

thought. Well, that only lasts a while, because the next concert she has to ask the question again... but... we are so vulnerable, actors... I don't know how I got to this point. You asked me something totally different.

V: I love it, where you went, because that leads me to one of my next questions. What do you think that is, about us, that we run towards it like a moth to the flame?

R: To the attention and the love?

V: Yeah, and we put ourselves in that position.

R: And we put ourselves there. But you know you put yourself in that position doing something that you love. It's very complex, it's not as simple as it seems... Yeah, I'm a ham" I mean I say that all the time, I love the attention. Anybody who tells you, who acts, tells you that they are not, are full of shit. Nonsense, of course they love it. I mean even people like Streep, I am sure there is a sense of satisfaction in wresting that kind of attention and appreciation from people. It's wonderful. It's unbeatable. So, I think, the possibility of getting that from an audience for an actor is everything. To often, to often, it's not good for you. It's not good for your mental health but it is so much a part and parcel of this business. Why, you might as well say, why do you act in the first place? Because I love it. Because what is the real, at the bottom, at the core, reason that I do what I do? It is hard for me to differentiate between my love of creating something in a role. I just, sometimes the most wonderful part of doing a play, for instance, is the rehearsal period, the gestation period, and then when you open, that great opening night, and then, now you got night two. I gotta do that again and can I ever duplicate it, or whatever, so I love the creative part of putting together a character that isn't me. But where can I find parts of me that will fit that character? It's very convoluted. It's difficult

and that's the challenge. It's thrilling! Why would I want to give up something that is so thrilling? The other part of it, of course, is, wanting people's attention and people's love. And very often on a given night in the theatre, because it works more in the theatre than anywhere else, is when they don't react the way you hope they would, or expect them too, and you say, "The audience is lousy". (Laughing) "Oh we had a horrible...God!" and you know it's possible. I can tell, literally from my first five minutes on stage, how the audience is going to be. It's just intuitive. I've been around so long that I know and sometimes it becomes a challenge, and I am thinking, well this has all the makings of a really crappy audience. I am going to just make them pay attention and sometimes I do that. I don't know how, don't ask me, but I can do that. But other times, it don't work. And that's when you go back to your dressing room feeling very unsure of yourself, yet again. We are very vulnerable. We are our own violins. We play ourselves, and we can only hope that the audience gets inside that music with you. That was a good line.

V: It is. Talking about theatre and TV and film, it appears to me that the one that has been the kindest to you has been theatre.

R: Always

V: In terms of allowing you to play...

R: Other parts, other roles. Absolutely, from the time I was a little girl. It was always the theatre. When I was in my late teens into my early twenties it was theatre, summer stock or regional theatre, where I regularly played roles other than the "Conchita, Lolita" roles. And I love the Theatre for that, I respect it because it respects me and people like me. Also theatre is what I love to go back to whenever I have a chance, to just work on my chops, because you know very well that, television, is just a killer of actors. It is a killer

of the creative impulse. It is an encourager of what's easy and will work, but I don't think we have a choice. If that's what you have to do, then that's what you do when you do television. And if you have any respect for yourself, you can go away unharmed, because you know you are sensible enough and reasonable enough to understand that this is how THAT works, you don't have days and days and days to say "well why does my character do this?" You gotta go for what's quick.

V: It's like an assembly line

R: It is and if you are lucky, if you can make people laugh like you, I just think you are brilliant.

V: Well, thank you.

R: You just have that native talent. You are very talented I would love to see you in a serious role one day. I think you would love that, too.

V: I would.

R: But it ain't gonna happen in television, I'll tell you that.

V: I think regardless of if you are white or brown or black, I think that people that can afford to do whatever they want are very few, and even the Tom Cruises of the world don't get all the roles they desire.

R: Which is probably why he sticks to the formula stuff. You know, when you think of it, I've seen this guy do some really great work. This guy is so talented. But you can see that he goes for. "This is gonna make a million bucks" or at least I think it is so, he goes for it and it's fun and it makes me very manly, you know, all of that stuff.

V: It feeds his ego.

R: Yeah.

V: Now, talking of performances, is there any such performance that sticks in your mind as your most memorable work?

R: Yes. The first memorable, there are two memorable performances. Well, there are several. The first was doing The Rose Tattoo. And that happened...uh... I think that happened after my Oscar. I'm so bad with dates. Yeah, it was after my Oscar for West Side Story, because I wasn't doing any work in the movies, and I started to do more regional theatre, and I did The Rose Tattoo for which I thought I was too young, which I probably was but the director said, "You are Serefina Delle Rose you gotta do this. You'll love it." And I did, and what happened was that I set that theatre on fire. I know that's braggy, but I set that theatre on fire. It was the first time I had had the opportunity to really let go as an actress, to be creative to, just come up with ideas that were all my very own, not just the director's, and it was, I had an epiphany. It was a revelation that I could move people like this. I, the actress, playing someone who was so different from myself could do this. The same thing happened to me when I played, that was the first time actually, Annie Sullivan in The Miracle Worker. The Irish schoolteacher. It just blew me away, because I had been so accustomed to not getting any feedback. You know, doing TV can be murder, well no, at least we have an audience, which is great fun, I love that. But I hadn't had anything like that and suddenly people were reacting to what I was doing and it was thrilling, and I remember saying to myself, with Annie Sullivan, which was the very first time I had that revelation was "I have to do this more often. It's good for me." Obviously audiences like what I do very much, they are moved. And it helps me as an actress to expand my horizons as an actress. It gives me, it makes me think in different ways about a character not just how you... How for instance you open a

door as this character... THAT! Was a real revelation and that came from that director, George Kiethly, who I think I mention in the book, who said... "Well, you have to find a walk" and I didn't even know what he was talking about, find a ...what? He says, " You have to find a way to walk like Annie." And, as you know, he said, "I don't know," when I asked, "How do I do that??" He said, "I don't know".

V: Find it!

R: Exactly! It was scary and challenging and ultimately thrilling

V: You mention having a revelation on stage. Is there any one in your life that was like that for you?

R: You know I had a fabulous talk with Sonya Sotomayor about a month ago. We spoke in front of an audience of about 800 people, mostly women. It was not open to the press. She talked constantly, and if you've read her book, about how she always found people to mentor her. This was one child who just knew what she wanted and when she found someone who was smarter than her, she gleaned on to them, which was marvelous. I, ultimately, I always found girlfriends that were smarter and more educated than I. This was very unconscious, on her part it was very conscious, and I...No, I had no mentors, who was I gonna have? Well that's not a good question because anybody in my life might have wanted to mentor me. I didn't live in that kind of atmosphere. I didn't have that circle of friends and people around me. I was this little Puerto Rican girl so isolated. You know when you really think bout it, so isolated, who's gonna mentor me? My mom? My mom went along with what ever I wanted in terms of the business because, because she felt I deserved that, but I had no role models. There was no one. Ultimately it became Elizabeth Taylor and that's why the publishers chose that photo. They thought it would, it

kind of you know, on the Sunday morning show you can still look it up they take that picture and they dissolve it into Elizabeth Taylor (the picture on the cover of her book) it is so eerie. A picture that is so similar it is just eerie how they did that, they cloned it anyway... That's my answer.

V: Is there anything you would change about your life/career?

R: Yes, I would not have gone to Hollywood. I would have stayed in New York and done theatre where I had a much better chance, but I had a dreadful experience with Tennessee Williams, I told you that and that scared me to death. I was just such a fragile person, so frail emotionally I couldn't take any rejection and that was the ultimate one so. Tennessee Williams didn't want me, daddy didn't want me, so that was that. I would have stayed; I would have gotten the courage, because a friend of mine who was Frank Silvera, who was a wonderful actor, a black actor, called me up after I was fired and he said. "Don't, don't leave." He said. "Beg them for the understudy role," I had the chance. He said "You are really so good, you have such promise, don't leave this production. So you are embarrassed, so what? It happens to everybody, believe me, I have been fired." And I didn't have the courage. I should have stayed with that production and learned, that's what I should have done but that would have taken so much character, and I don't think I had it, I know I didn't, I didn't have the strength of character to do that...

V: You were still in your teens?

R: Yeah, I was seventeen.

V: You mention in your book that you were on the stage when Dr. King gave his "I have a dream" speech.

R: It wasn't a stage. It was at the Lincoln Memorial site. We were up there with him literally ten feet away from this astonishing man. I could see the beads of sweat because it was an incredibly hot day hot day, it was boiling, I remember thinking if only I had brought a hat because everybody's scalp got seriously burnt. And, yeah, it was one of the greatest moments of my life for sure. He was right there and, as you know or you may not know, I just found out recently that half way through the speech he just put the text away and just got inspired.

V: I didn't know that.

R: Yes the whole I have a dream thing, the whole I have a dream thing was just inspiration, improvised! Just astonishing!

V: You could see him and the crowd?

R: All I had to do is turn around and I could see the sea of faces. Where that pool is jammed, jammed, jammed many, many people coming from the south, from the Burroughs in New York, with the signature outfit which was the overall with one strap on. I mean, it was just; it was enough to bring many, many tears to your eyes. It was an astonishing moment, and I was there, and that's where I met Jimmie Forman.

V: Right, in the book you talk about him. Do you ever, in recalling these moments do you ever think "Was I really there? Was that real?"

R: Yes, yes I do. The thing that makes it more real for me is Jimmie, James Foreman's presence, because that brings it home for me. Because this is where I met him, and wow what a lovely man he was. You gotta look up his sons. Even you as a man will say now those are two good-looking men. One of them is a professor at UCLA, most likely having to do with race relations, and the other is in some kind of show business movies, but I

don't think as an actor. They are so handsome. I mean your tongue just hangs out looking at these two guys. Infinitely more than their father.

V: Did you see and experience the changes in the 60s and 70s: the civil rights movement, the women's lib movement? Did that move you personally any closer to getting more respect from Hollywood? Or more doors opening or getting a better wage? A lot of times what ends up happening is the world changes on the outside but.

R: No, I was isolated from that. I really didn't. I read about the women's movement, and I wasn't entirely sure that I liked, what I was hearing. I mean, I am a Puerto Rican girl raised in a certain way. I found some of these women kind of raucous and self absorbed. And, be that as it may, that's what gave them the courage and the belief to act on what they felt they were missing. So eventually I completely sympathized and empathized (with the women's movement). But the civil rights issue was very, very close to my heart. Actually I didn't even start with that. I started with the "Ban the Bomb" movement, which was much, much earlier. At the time I had a roommate who was very, very political very smart woman, and we were very, very close. We met in group therapy. So we really knew each other well, and there was no bullshit. So she was very political, and she started to indoctrinate me, and you know, I would watch. It's not that she forced me, it's just that I saw. I began to see injustices whereas before I thought "Well that's just shitty luck". You know, that's the difference. And she said "No, no that's not just bad luck. That is injustice, and that's called being servile. That's called being diminished by the notion that people have of you." And because of her, and I will always credit her for this, I became socially aware. It was always in me, I just didn't know how to apply it, and when the time came to demonstrate against the Atomic bomb tests that they were doing

in, I think it was in Vegas. In Nevada it was found at some point, you can look this up, the air was filled with Strontium 90. A very toxic chemical which landed on the ground, and if it was grass, cows would eat it, and the milk from the cows would have this toxic chemical in it, and babies were getting deformed before birth because of that. Then during that time, that got me started, and I remember very clearly, the very first demonstration that I ever attended was to stop those nuclear tests. Because also it was so close to home. Particularly in California, we had our first demonstration in the parking lot of the Capitol Records Building, which still exists, doesn't it?

V: Right, it's still there.

R: Yeah, and apparently they used that place a lot, I can't forget that I saw a lot of people taking pictures that weren't just tourists. I mean people with movie cameras and stuff and I was told, that's the FBI. You are now, I'm in a file somewhere." Yeah I am now in Hoover's old files, along with billions of people, as having been in one of these Communists demonstrations. It was so easy to call anybody a Communists, so that was the first experienced I had, and I was so exhilarated by it. One of the writers, he was a film writer, wrote me a speech and apparently it was an old left wing speech where you wanna see a sea of green. I didn't know it was a left wing thing, all I knew was it was a wonderful idea. Hold up a dollar bill, boy, that's when those cameras really started grinding away I had no idea. People held up a dollar bill, and the dollars were collected to help pay for this demonstration, buy coffee for people, or whatever the heck we did, but it was very exhilarating. And I thought, wow, I like this a lot. It makes me feel good to do something that's in service for something that's outside of myself.

V: Something larger than yourself.

R: Oh yeah, it was very exciting.

V: Wow, yeah, what a great story. Oh, tell me a little bit about the Electric Company:

Morgan Freeman, Bill Cosby, and Irene Cara.

R: Judy Graubart.

V: Just the names.

R: She came from the Chicago improvisational group, what were they called? (The Second City) You know the one I'm talking about. She came from there. It was one of the best experiences of my life. It was vaudeville, it really was vaudeville, except you were teaching, and what was really special about it, aside from the great cleverness of the way it was put together, all those writers are now series writers, isn't that interesting

V: Yeah.

R: All of them Josh... he does a lot of TV, his father was one of the people... I can't remember his name, but you would know the name, because he's all over television.

Again that was a great service. I mean, yes we got salaries. But believe me they were not great salaries.

V: And they were long hours.

R: Oh God, they were brutal hours, *brutal* hours. We would finish work in the day, and we would, those of us who sang or danced or that kinda stuff, would go downtown to a recording studio and prerecord the songs for the next day. So, while you were working during the day, you were also rehearsing the songs you had to learn. And of course they were always complicated, because they had to do with writing, and they were complicated because they were clever. It was very hard work, but I have to say that I loved it, and it was the show that taught Fernanda to read.

V: Your own daughter.

R: My own daughter.

V: You have answered some of these other questions...

R: See, I give such long damn answers that I answer the other questions you had for me.

V: I know.

R: I don't just say yes or no.

V: I like it though

R: (Laughs)

V: I wanted to ask you a tough question or perhaps not so tough.

R: OK.

V: How did you feel in playing...

R: Anita.

V: Anita. Let me preface this by saying. I think Anita is the best part in the film.

R: It is.

V: Although you consider Maria the lead.

R: Right.

V: What were you feeling when, for lack of a better word, this white woman is playing the part that you should have rightly had or somebody else of color should have rightly had?

R: First of all, when I heard that Natalie Wood was going to play Maria I was very disappointed. I had a feeling that almost all the kids, whether they were Latino or not, because they just felt it was wrong. In fairness to the producers and directors, however, it was very hard to find an Anita and a Maria. The boys too, the two leads, very hard to

find. One of the reasons I believe is that a lot of Latino kids didn't have the money at that time to do dance class. A lot of people don't realize this and not only dance class. We're not talking about tap or something. We're talking what they called at the time Jazz. Some people call it modern dancing. It's not. It's called Jazz 1300. Which is a combination of all those things. It's also Ballet. And a lot of those kids could not afford lessons. Now, this is a conclusion I have come to, because it seemed so odd that there were so few Latino kids who were able to do that kind of dancing. They auditioned tons of kids. My guess is that Jerome Robbins would have loved having nothing but Latino boys playing the Sharks and that he just couldn't find kids that were good enough dancers. I mean the kids that were ultimately chosen were extraordinary dancers particularly for their ages. They were young they were not teenagers.

V: And the moves were probably hard, even for them.

R: Oh they are very hard. Jerome Robbins, impossible those moves! So I am taking the side, for the moment of the people looking for the talent. I know that they tested every brown-eyed, brown haired girl in Hollywood. I know that they did. I don't think they were able to find a Maria among those because, my guess is that they didn't test that many brown eyed, and brown haired girls or Latinas, there were no Latinas. God I am guessing, and this is purely a guess. That maybe, maybe four or five Latina girls tested for Maria, if that. I know that one of the girls that tested for my part was a girl named Barbara Luna, who I always thought of as my adversary, because she was always up for the same parts as I. She was really gorgeous. She was very exotic and had dark skin. I think she was Filipino and a really beautiful girl, but from my point of view, particularly at that time, not all that talented. They needed someone who could really mine their soul

for Anita, even more than Maria, I think. So, yes, I was very disappointed that it was Natalie Wood. Who knows, they might have found someone else who was good enough, and lets say had a voice dubbed in for her, and Natalie did anyway, why not use that girl? I have a feeling that somebody, somewhere in the higher echelon, said, “Well Natalie Wood has a name.”

V: Yeah

R: The truth is that Natalie didn't have that huge a name at the time. She really didn't. She was on her way. I think she had just done Splendor in the Grass in which she was very, very good. She had Elia Kazan to direct her, and I think he got the best out of her, more so than anybody who has ever directed her, so I think that was the reason they hired her. Why they hired Richard Beemer? Well, he had that adorable face that all American boy face, but I don't think he was, in fairness to him, directed well. He came across very sissy like, and a lot of people said that about him, they thought he was gay it was, it broke my heart, because he was really a dear, dear darling young man. George, I think, was a great find. I think he was the find of the movie. I think he and I were the find of the movie, and we had the most colorful parts, so it was inevitable that we would steal some scenes.

V: Some scenes? All the scenes you're in you steal.

R: Well you know Anita is a scene stealing part. Let me explain what that means. I just saw the movie of Guys and Dolls, and the scene stealing part in that is Adelaide. Because in those days, when you had the leading part in a musical, if you were a girl, you were always virginal and always yearning and boring. That's something that Yul Brynner taught me when I was doing The King and I with him. He said, “ You have a boring part.

I want you to be more interesting.” And he sent me to an acting teacher. Yeah, he sent me to an acting teacher. He said all you do is pine for the guy, and that’s boring. He didn’t say that he said, “That’s fucking boring”! And he was right, and Miss, uh, whatever her name is in Guys and Dolls, Miss Sarah Brown is also kind of a bore. So it was inevitable, and, you know, the poor people playing the virgins are really stuck with that unless you bring some spirit to it. I don’t think that Robert Wise was able to do that with the leads. Natalie played more attention to Jerry Robbins, who had the gumption and the guts and the drive, than she did to Robert Wise, who was very soft and gentle. A very sweet man but he didn’t have anything in him to spur you, to make you angry. Jerome Robbins was full of that. He was mean, he was a sadistic man, and he was also brilliant I’d drop everything right now just to work with him again. But he drove you. And Jerome Robbins drove you way beyond what you think you could do, cause at the time, I was no dancer of any kind. I was a Spanish dancer. Believe me that means CACA! That means nothing. Spanish Dancer? Oh that’s nice. Now do THESE steps.

V: And the second part of that question is would you, if you could go back, would you trade parts, if by some...

R: NO WAY! I think Anita even though she disappears, I always thought, when I saw it recently, I thought, I said to myself. “She should have been in that school yard scene along with everybody else. Everybody else was in that scene except Anita. It was so odd. She should have been there with her rebozo, but that’s neither here nor there.

V: In terms of looking at the Latino actors, how do we get to a point where we can be good enough to be able to be considered for those parts that require so much?

R: I think many of us are good enough we just don’t get the parts.

V: Well, I think you are right, and on top of that, I think that if you are constantly fed these smaller parts that are not well written and...

R: It's not good for you. It's not healthy for you as an actor.

V: It's like candy. You need the vegetable and the meat and the potato.

R: Exactly, because so many people, Latinos have asked me, in the past, why have we never been, except for you, why have we never been nominated and won Oscar's and stuff? As I recall Rosie Perez was nominated for Fearless but it didn't happen. My answer to all the Latinos is because we don't get the parts. It's great to be wonderful in the parts we are given, but that's not enough. It just so happens that Anita was such an attention getter. She was so dynamic in a very dynamic movie.

V: Well, and you were exceptional; you did that part exceptionally well. A lesser actor might have...

R: She was close to my heart.

V: Whatever it might have been, the magic happened. The flint struck and the powder burned.

R: Yeah

V: Speaking of great parts, I wanted to ask you about Googie Gomez. I love the story in the book about, the party and a friend of yours ...

R: I was at a party with James Coco with whom I was doing a play. A Neil Simon play called Last of the Red Hot Lovers, and he was very friendly with Terrence McNally. He did a lot of Off Broadway stuff with Terrence McNally, acting in his plays. And I invented Googie when I was doing West Side Story, you know we all used to do bits. You get dancers together; they are always, doing bits. They do two things on their

ten-minute break. They light up, unbelievable. They light cigarettes, and they do bits. Silly, crazy bits. We are like children, and it's one of the best parts of us. And James Coco said, "Rita do that crazy Latina character, that Puerto Rican thing you do, for Terence..." and I do that. I did the players King speech which is really hilarious... (Ms. Moreno doing character) "Espeek de speech I pray ju" (I Laugh) and it was also the attitude you know like nothing could phase her. "As I proonounceit to ju threepingly off de tong". The attitude, I don't know that it is so much the accent as the attitude, I can do anything. "Prom the chorse of GIEETCHEE GOOMMIE" Hiawatha. It's very funny.

V: It's hilarious.

R: It makes me laugh. Once in a while I am in the kitchen, really, and I am opening the fridge and suddenly I think of something, and I do it like Googie, and I start to laugh. She is like another person. I think she is Hilarious and it's the balls that she has. The ovaries. "Barbara Estriesand estole my ack!"

V: And he actually went away and wrote...

R: Wrote this play, which he had in mind anyway, apparently, but he wrote this character Googie. She was originally called Rita "Googie" Gomez.

V: Wow.

R: And when I read that play, I couldn't stop laughing, it was so outrageous.

V: That must be one of those times when you looked at yourself in some quiet moment and ... you know, that was a good mark for you...

R: It was marvelous and you know what's interesting, because a lot of people have asked me, "Well weren't Latinos offended at this character?" No! They understood it. They got

it. It wasn't meant to make fun of all Latinos, it was just one crazy Latina who thought she was the bees knees and the cows nuts and whatever else.

V: And you mentioned it earlier, you mention the word courage several times. It's a character that has the courage to be how they are.

R: Exactly. Because she was like so many women in my mother's world, you know? It's not in the book because you have to see the person doing it. My mom and I would watch these ladies on television. These Latina ladies, just so dramatic (very dramatic) "Aye Amor... Ya no me quieras taaanntooo...AYI!" And my mother would sit there and watch and say "(smacking, sucking air through teeth sound) Esscent Chee Gwonderfuul." (I laugh) I mean I do that in the play because it just sounds and looks so funny. You can't write that.

V: Now how much of Googie was your mom?

R: Googie was really those ladies essentially, and my mom's accent. I mean my mom really destroyed the language. It was so darling. Did I tell you about when my brother went to Le Conte Jr. High School? "Mom can you just say younior high please?" and not "La Cunt Younior High, please". None of us could tell her what that word was, it was too awful. So we didn't dare say. That is just a horrific word, you don't want to say that. She was so cute.

V: Here are the last two questions I have. In playing all these ethnics parts you mention that you came up with your own accent.

R: Oh, the universal ethnic accent? The one who made up that phrase was Tony Taconne when I was telling him about it. He is the one who wrote the play with me. I said to him, "You know I assumed all these girls, who were different ethnic people, had to have an

accent, but I had no Idea what they sounded like, so I invented my own.” And he called it the universal ethnic accent. So if I was playing a Polynesian girl in a movie, and then I played an Arabian girl in a movie, I did called El Alamein, they all sounded the same, and I can’t even do it anymore, because it was some weird hybrid that sounded like, sorta sounded like an accent, but you weren’t sure. They all sounded the same.

V: Just something unfamiliar.

R: I played an East Indian girl; she sounded the same. On the Robert Young show, what was that show? Make Room for Daddy.

V: But it was, I’ve been watching a whole bunch of you and it’s a slow, some of the words don’t quite...

R: Yes, or they are over pronounced a “little bit”.

V: With a Staccato delivery sometimes. Did anybody ever call you on it?

R: Nope. They didn’t give a shit! That’s the thing, nobody ever gave a shit. The first time I had an accent was in Pagan Love Song, the musical with Esther Williams. And that’s when I thought; well nobody said anything but I don’t think she should speak English well. I don’t think she should speak English the way we do. So I invented this thing that was sort of Latino but not quite. We do something so delicious in the play; we show a piece of me in that movie, in that dark, dark makeup, with a little Hawaiian thing on me, peeking through the bushes saying, “Here I am.” And the audience just loves that.

V: Those were all the questions I had. The last thing that occurred to me was in one of the articles. Someone asks you what you think is your biggest strength and you say perseverance.

R: Yeah, O yeah. I just stuck with it. Kept at it. I have a talk now that I have with women, and I tell them, you know “My middle name should really be Perseverance. Because it’s what seen me through many...” I say my name should be Rosita Dolores Alverio Perseverance Gordon.

V: And now, as tough as it has been, and as wonderful as it has been...

R: It’s tough and wonderful absolutely.

V: Would you advise someone to jump in and give it a go?

R: Absolutely, absolutely. Fernanda wanted to be in the business for a while, and we did plays together. Did I tell you that? And she tried to do certain things, and Fernanda needed to have a good time more than to take the time, and I thought good for her. She didn’t want to miss those parties and the proms, like I did, and it wasn’t because I set an example, but because that’s who she was. Also, Fernanda wasn’t able to mine those feelings. She was just, she was much too careful. That’s her nature. Fernanda is very, I wouldn’t say closed in, but she is very guarded. And if you are guarded, you can’t be an actor if you are going to be that guarded. You have to be able to see what’s there. I remember one time when I was doing a scene where I had to cry in OZ, and Tom Fontana had a little nephew or something like that visiting the set. He was about twelve, and I did this take several times about my husband dying. I was reading something about him and the tears came up each time. The little boy came up to me afterwards, I was told, “He wants to meet you,” and they introduced me, and the little boy said “I have to ask you something”, and I said sure. He said, “How do you do that?” and I said something like “O my dear, there is a Well inside me. A well that never empties.” And you know Tom started to laugh because he knew what I meant. That stuff never goes away. You know

you have to be able to mine that stuff and Fernanda couldn't do that. She's too private. And I just go like this (poking herself with a finger and starts crying). (Ms. Moreno laughs heartily).

V: And so the last question is what piece of advice would you give to a young actress wanting to be in the business?

R: I'll tell you what I think is so important as a really young person. You gotta get an education. I didn't and I think I paid dearly for that. I think you have to get enough of an education so that it will allow you to get a good paying job. I'm not talking about washing dishes and I am not talking about picking up somebody else's dirty stuff at home. You have to really, you must get an education. Whenever I talk too young people that's the, and I know everybody says this, but you know what? It's true. It's truer now than when I was a girl, cause when I was a girl I could still make a living at sixteen doing nightclubs and this and that. That doesn't exist any more. You can't do that any more. You have to be a very good receptionist, or do shorthand, or do something worthy and worthwhile that will give you enough money to pay the rent and get acting classes. Cause you should study acting. It's all very well to say "I have good instincts," but it's not enough. I had somebody say to me once, on the OZ set, I said, "What do you want to be?" He's an extra, and he said, "I want to be a star" and I just stared at him and I said, this was a black boy, a young man about twenty, and I said "What does star mean to you?" And he said, "I want to have a couple of cars, and I want to get great clothes and those great sneakers." That's what he was thinking. Now this was obviously a very uneducated young man, but still. If that's your aim, good luck to you.

V: What I always tell them is, if that's your aim, there are easier ways to do it than acting.

R: (Laughing) That's right! There sure are.

V: And you don't have to put yourself through an emotional roller coaster to get to that place.

R: That's right. And you know in order to... to... you should hang on to your tenderness and your sensitivity and your specialness, and you can't do that if you are going for... if you are going for... the cars and stuff. If that's what your after, you are very likely not gonna be a terrific actor. You may be a personality, that may happen, but you really need to nurture that about you which is soft and sweet and tender, and that is very hard to do in that business. You can get so hard and cynical, especially if you don't have breasts. (I laugh) And that was Ms. Moreno's last line. "You gotta have breasts" (Ms. Moreno starts to laugh) it's true.

And we finished the interview and Ms. Moreno made me lunch.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

“They are all the same.” A provocative answer to the question of which was tougher, being a woman, a Latina or an immigrant. Examining her life story, it is clear that she experienced barriers, setbacks and discrimination on all three fronts.

My own experience is somewhat similar to Ms. Moreno’s. In college I prepared for an actor’s life, thinking I was going to play characters in Shakespeare and O’Neill, Simon and Becket. However, the majority of the parts I have played have been those specifically designated as Latino. My first professional job was a Public Service Announcement (PSA) in 1988. That job qualified me for AFTRA (American Federation of Radio and Television Artists). Soon after, I landed a co-starring role in a movie entitled Salsa: the Motion Picture, which allowed me to join the Screen Actors Guild (SAG). The very next year I secured my Actors Equity card (the stage acting union) when I appeared in a professional stage play.

I have been very fortunate. For almost 30 years, I have made a living as an actor. From my first professional acting job, I have never had a day job, i.e. waiting tables or such. And yet there has been and continuous to be a scarcity of parts for which Latinos

are allowed to audition. The best acting roles for me have been in the theatre, where I've played varied parts, from a Latino kid with two personalities to a sailor on the ill-fated Edmond Fitzgerald. And although my resume reads better than the average actor, stereotypical parts dominated my first few years in film and TV: gang members, laborers, and gardeners. I remember auditioning for an episode of Divorce Court, for the part of the hot Latino pool boy, whose name was "Good and Plenty" Gomez. This sounds almost too ridiculous to be true but there it is. In the early 1990s, I was turned away from an audition, after having been initially called in to read, because the casting director saw my last name was Rodriguez. I looked the part, but I had a Latino last name, so I was not allowed to audition. When they are willing to cast a part non-white, the audition will say, "Submit all ethnicities."

In recent years, Latino actors have begun to see different kinds of Latino parts. Latinos are starting to appear as lawyers and doctors, especially on television. On television there are more shows that include Latinos as part of the cast, and even some shows where the majority of the actors are Latino. The George Lopez show, on which I played Ernie, became the first Latino sitcom to reach syndication. Television has started to open its doors to inclusive casting. In film, however you still see the majority of casts are white or, worse yet, the Latino part is usurped by a Caucasian actor.

Ms. Moreno attributes her success to perseverance. Yes, for an actor to succeed there has to be some talent and drive, but you also need to stay dedicated. You need to constantly look for work. And figure out ways to stay sane in spite of your opportunity or

lack there of. The latter is perhaps the most important part of the equation. The daily grind can wear you down. You need to love what you do so much that you would do it for free, because you will, over and over.

According to a 2001 SAG earnings report, only 12 % of union actors earn more than \$20,000 dollars a year. A little more than 73 percent of SAG members earned less than \$5,001 dollars a year, with a full 30% reporting no earnings under SAG contracts,

Entertainment industry executives, producers and directors say casting is driven in part by economics. They justify the casting of a white actor, in an ethnic part, stating that without said actor, the film would not be made. Without that name actor, the film would not draw sufficient audience or make money. That leaves the Latino actor with very few, if any, opportunities to develop into the name that the studios desire.

There is also a disparity in pay. The smaller budget movies where a Latino might get an opportunity to play the leading role pay less. The Screen Actors Guild (SAG) has special contracts for smaller budget movies that allow the movie to be made, but set the pay at lesser rates than larger budget films. At face value, these contracts appear to be a good thing, however, here again, we see a lesser value placed on the Latino actor. The pay scales for this kind of movie could be as little as one quarter the amount of a Studio movie.

The contracts for Spanish and English commercials are different as well. While the session fee is the same, Spanish market commercials are usually buyouts. Actors are paid one fee for a thirteen-week segment. While English language commercials have to pay for every broadcast in each and every market, New York, Los Angeles, Chicago. The Result is an actor in a Spanish language commercial can expect to receive, on average, 10% of what he or she would be paid for an English language commercial, despite the fact that the Spanish language market is the third largest behind English and Mandarin. And by 2050, it is estimated that there will be 100 million Spanish speakers in the US alone. Less opportunity and less pay, create a kind of ghetto acting pool for Latinos. They don't have the time or the resources to improve themselves. So they are destined to stay in the roles they are currently cast in.

According to the last Data Report done by SAG in 2008, Latino/Hispanic actors garnered 6.7% of the parts in 2007 and 6.4% of the parts in 2008. At 10.6% of the population, you can see the disparity in representation on TV and in film.¹⁹ The reports were done to "...examine and determine hiring trends of our traditionally underemployed and disenfranchised membership." The numbers show a steady increase, but they are still well below population norms.

In 1999, SAG commissioned the Jose Rivera Policy Institute for a study to address the concerns of their Latino Union members, the study was titled: Missing in Action: Latinos In and Out of Hollywood. In the opening statement, the then president of SAG Richard

¹⁹ Screen Actors Guild 2007 & 2008 Casting Data Reports. www.sagaftra.org

Masur, stated, “ Latino actors and actresses still encounter limited and stereotypical roles.” Here are some of their comments.

“ I was building a lovely resume playing Maria the Latina maid. It is very frustrating to not be even considered for other roles.”

“ I peaked as a Colombian drug lord.”

“I’ve only gotten roles playing a nanny or a house keeper. There is prejudice, but then, even your agent is responsible for that.”

“ I’ve played the whole range of Hispanic roles – killers, pimps, priests...”

“These casting directors called my manager and said, “We told you we wanted somebody who was Mexican. We wanted somebody dirty. He was white as far as we were concerned.”

SAG commissioned a second report the very next year. One of the focuses of that report was talking to directors as well as studio and television executives. Then President William Daniels said.

“This study is a tool we will provide to executives to assist them in creating the true *American scene*, which includes a fair representation of the Latino/Hispanic American landscape.”

In a section entitled The View From Inside, the most glaringly honest comment came from a studio executive "...The reality is that economics determine the portrayal of Hispanics."

Throughout the history of entertainment, all characters have been co-opted by the male white actor. In the beginning, there were no women in live theatre. With all the parts being played by men, the female roles were usually played by the young apprentices/actors. In addition there have always been more parts written for men than for women: "Males continue to make up the majority of roles reported, especially in the supporting category, where they contribute about two roles for every female role"²⁰. We are also not far off from the 19th / 20th century tradition of "blackface", where the actor merely blacked his face out with make-up to play Black role. There is a long list of white actors playing Latino and American Indian roles.

1934 Wallace Berry playing Pancho Villa.

1939 Paul Muni played Benito Juarez.

1952 Marlon Brando Played Emiliano Zapata.

1961 Natalie wood played Maria.

1968 Yul Brenner plays Pancho Villa.

1969 Omar Shariff played Che Guevara and Jack Palance played Fidel Castro.

²⁰ Latest Casting Data – SAG Los Angeles Oct. 23rd 2009 – www.sagaftra.org

Both Faye Dunaway and Madonna played Evita Peron.

1993 all key roles on Uruguayan soccer team in the movie *Alive* (I auditioned for this movie).

1996 Anthony Hopkins played Pablo Picasso Jonathan Pryce played Juan Peron.

2001 *A beautiful mind* – Jennifer Connelly played wife Alicia Lopez Harrison Lande.

2010 NBC created the role of a Cuban American as president and cast Blair Underwood citing they could not find a Latino to play the role.

2012 – Ben Affleck played lead Latino role, Tony Mendez, in *Argo*.

This is what Moctesuma Esparza²¹ wrote about Ben Affleck playing Tony Mendez.

“The concern I am focusing on here is the director/producer’s choice to portray Tony as if he is a white non-Latino, so he could play the role. This is classic “brown face” at its worst. There is no reasonable justification for this choice as the film could have been cast otherwise without affecting its commerciality. Not only did a Latino actor not play Tony, who clearly in real life looks like a Chicano, but his ethnicity is stolen from the Latino community at a time when Latinos have been demonized. Our real Latino national heroes if

²¹ Moctesuma Esparza : Producer of [Selena](#), [The Milagro](#) [Beanfield War](#), [Gettysburg](#), [Gods and Generals](#). Founder of Maya Pictures. (IMDB)

acknowledged would dramatize our patriotism and contribution to the United States. The film actually goes out of its way to obscure Tony Mendez' ethnicity. His name (Mendez) is mentioned only once and the character says he is from New York (Tony was born in Nevada from a mining family with six generations in Nevada and raised in Colorado). Nowhere in the movie does the viewer get that the hero is Mexican American.”²²

According to one studio executive, “The bottom line of why there is a lack of Latino-themed entertainment is that a business case has not been developed for developing such material.” I think the mistake here is that they feel they have to reinvent the wheel, when all they have to do is cast Latinos in some of those parts that are already written. As one of the SAG actors in the 1999 report said:

“What I would like to see for the Hispanic American actor . . . where we are no longer Latino actors. We are actors. We should be able to compete and have the same opportunities that a Western kid has, that a guy from New York has, or a guy from London has. That is the ultimate dream . . . not to be labeled. You don't call Lawrence Olivier an English actor . . . just an actor. Sidney Poitier . . . you

²² Esparza, Moctesuma: Ben Affleck's Argo and the White-Washing of the Mexican American - December 4th 2012.

don't call him a black actor. That is the direction we should be trying to get to... where we are not labeled any more.”²³

Another Latino actor's response points at what the industry is thinking - that somehow casting a Latino, even though he might be the best actor for the part, in some way changes what they have written.

“All I want is for it to be left up to my talent. I don't want to walk in and because you think I am Hispanic, you think it's going to change the role or the fact that I can play the role.”²⁴

Those executives still see us as the “other,” the foreigner, the newly arrived immigrant that they do not know how to relate to, rather than seeing us as a neighbor. In this sense, the TV/Film world does not match the real world. In today's society there are Latino gardeners but also Latino doctors, lawyers, merchants, mechanics, cops. As of 2010, Latinos are the fastest growing segment of the population in the US and make up sixteen percent of the total population, that's 50 million people in the US.²⁵

“...Hispanic purchasing power has increased at a compound annual growth rate of 7.5 %, more than twice as fast as the 2.8% growth for the total US purchasing power. Hispanic purchasing power increased 45% in the last five years, and has reached 1.38 trillion.”²⁶

²³ Missing in Action: Latinos In and Out of Hollywood.

²⁴ Missing In Action: Latinos In and Out of Hollywood.

²⁵ www.census.gov

²⁶ www.gahcc.org - Greater Austin Hispanic Chamber of Commerce web page.

Advertisers have been targeting the Latino market, through Spanish language networks, for decades. They realize that the way to make their product profitable is to reach this new growing market. I have no doubt that the further integration of the Latino actor into mainstream TV and film will be powered by this growing demographic, Which is estimated to reach 47% of the total US population by the year 2050²⁷.

Americans are already starting to see the result of this population shift. Univision and Telemundo, two Spanish-only networks, have been around for decades In 2013 Univision and Telemundo, had historic highs in terms of their viewership.

“But the big four would love to have the audience profile of Univision, whose median age of 39 was, on average, 12 years younger than ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox. Also more than 90 % of the viewing is done live – a key selling point to advertisers in the commercial-skipping era of the DVR”²⁸

Newer channels also target the Latino market: Si TV, Sorpresa! Mun2, SUR, Telehit, and many others. And many networks now have a Spanish Language division: CNN, Discovery, ESPN, Fox Sports, MTV all have Spanish –language affiliates. As Latino population and buying power increase, so will its presence on TV. With more familiar faces on TV Latinos will have the opportunity to develop the talent and the “Q factor”

²⁷ Pewhispanic.org – Pew Research – Hispanic trends project.

²⁸ Variety

that the major studios require in order to be allowed to audition for those parts that are more substantial and integral to major motion pictures.

The image of Hollywood is the same for everyone. It something that is deeply ingrained in who we are. In the 1940's most little girls, of various backgrounds, wanted to be Elizabeth Taylor. Was there anybody who looked like Ms. Moreno who she could aspire to be? Carmen Miranda--with the big fruit hat? The nearest role model was of Rita Hayworth, whose look was changed in order to appear more "American." The studios and the press touted this as a good thing, not seeing the greater consequences. Perhaps we were also naïve about how much movies and TV would affect our perception of ourselves as a society and as individuals.

Our strength to influence media content will lie in our population growth. As our numbers increase the pressure that Latinos can bring to bear on the studios for more fair representation will grow to the point of being too large to overlook. In its latest report on Latinos in the media, the National Association of Latino Independent Producers (NALIP) offers some hope, albeit tempered with some disheartening data. Its findings indicate that Latino consumers are influencing media content and driving "new media production and innovation." In addition, Latino content is expanding viewership.

"Latino consumer pressure is increasingly effective in bringing about change by using the Internet and social media. From 1968 to 1998, 63% of Latino media campaigns aimed at television shows,

advertisements, or movies prevailed in all or part of their goals.

After 1998, this figure jumped to 86 %. Even further, the average length of time required to obtain a successful campaign's goal has shrunk from an average of two years in 1970 to three weeks today."²⁹

Young kids will always see examples in the images that are thrust in front of them: the TV, movies, and social media that they choose to interpret as the "ideal" image of themselves. What's more, the larger society will view those images as representative. But as Latino children begin to recognize themselves on the screen in non-stereotypical roles, they will realize that they too are a valued part of this society.

And as we move forward, we lean on the example set by those who have been in the middle of this struggle over identity for decades. The images that Ms. Moreno has left us with are those of strong, vibrant and emotionally evocative characters. Some of those characters are stereotypical, but she does not cheat the performance. She finds those things that are the most honest and human to play within that character. She brings us along in the journey to that particular characters truth.

From a village in Puerto Rico to the streets of New York to Hollywood and the silver screen, Ms. Moreno achieved what was thought to be the unattainable. It was a true artistic journey to the bottom of her soul in search of that little girl/woman who was

²⁹ The Latino Media Gap

staring back at her in the mirror. It was, at least in part, a search to silence that doubting voice in her head.

She has been upheld as the example of Latino potential; this has made her struggle to find herself and remain true to her art seem even more meaningful. Ms. Moreno is the mirror of the journey that we, as Latinos, have to face. Despite the barriers, she made the best of her situation and flourished and persevered. Her life is a great success story—one that transcends gender and ethnic boundaries—and is a model for us all.

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APPENDIX A

APPENDIX A

RITA MORENO

RESUME

(partial)

FILM

YEAR	TITLE	ROLE	NOTES
1950	So Young So Bad	Dolores Guerrero	As Rosita Moreno
1950	The Toast of New Orleans	Tina	
1950	Pagan Love Song	Terru	
1952	The Ring	Lucy Gomez	
1952	Singin' in the Rain	Zelda Zanders	
1952	The Fabulous Senorita	Manuela Rodriguez	
1952	Cattle Town	Queli	
1953	Fort Vengeance	Bridget Fitzgibbon	

1953	Ma and Pa Kettle on Vacation	Soubrette	Uncredited
1953	Latin Lovers	Christina	
1953	El Alamein	Jara	
1954	Jivaro	Maroa	
1954	The Yellow Tomahawk	Honey Bear	
1954	Garden of Evil	Cantina Singer	
1955	Untamed	Julia	
1955	Seven Cities of Gold	Ula	
1956	The Lieutenant Wore Skirts	Sandra Roberts	
1956	The King and I	Tuptim	
1956	The Vagabond King	Huguette	
1957	The Deerslayer	Hetty Hutter	
1960	This Rebel Breed	Lola Montalvo	
1961	West Side Story	Anita	Academy Award for Best Supporting actress, Golden Globe for Best Supporting Actress
1961	Summer and Smoke	Rose Zacharias	
1963	Samar	Woman Convict	
1963	Cry of Battle	Sisa	
1968	The Night of the Following Day	Vi	

1969	Popi	Lupe	
1969	Marlowe	Dolores Gonzales	
1971	Carnal Knowledge	Louise	
1975	Shhh		Seven Short Films featured in a Compilation
1976	The Ritz	Googie Gomez	Nominated: BAFTA Best Actress in a Leading Role, Golden Globe Best Actress in a Supporting Role
1977	Voodoo Passion		
1977	Call of the Blonde Goddess		
1978	The Boss' Son	Esther Rose	
1980	Happy Birthday, Gemini	Lucille Pompei	
1981	The Four Seasons	Claudia Zimmer	
1991	Age Isn't Everything	Ms. Moreno	
1993	Italian Movie	Isabella	
1994	I Like It Like That	Rosaria Linares	
1995	Carman Miranda	Herself	Documentary
1995	Angus	Madame Rulenska	
1995	America: A Call to Greatness	Herself	Docudrama

1998	Slums of Beverly Hills	Belle Abromowitz	Nominated: Alma Award – outstanding actress in a cross over role
1999	Carlo's Wake	Angela Torello	
1999	The Puerto Ricans: Our American Story	Herself	Documentary
2000	Blue Moon	Maggie	
2001	Pinero	Miguel's Mother	
2003	Casa De Los Babys	Senora Munoz	
2003	Beyond Borders: John Sayles in Mexico	Herself	Documentary
2004	King of the Corner	Inez	
2006	Play it by Ear	Ruth	
2013	Rio 2	Ms. Moreno	

TELEVISION

YEAR	TITLE	ROLE	NOTES
1952	Schlitz Playhouse	Lit-Lit	
1952	China Smith	Mariamán	
1952	Fireside Theatre	Maria	
1954	Where's Raymond		
1954	The New Adventures of China Smith	Mariamán	

1954	The Ford Television Theatre	Serene Crane	
1954	Cavalcade of America		Episode – Cat With The Crimson Eyes
1956-58	Climax	Francesca, Denise Cardoza, Maria, Irene	Episodes – Spider Web, The Stranger Within, Strange Sanctuary, The Chinese Game
1956	20 th Century Fox Hour	Sonseeahray	
1957	Matinee Theatre		Episode – The Daughter of Mata Hari
1958	The Red Skelton Hour	Senorita Delores	Episode – Clem the Bullfighter
1958	Father Knows Best	Chanthini	Episode: Fair Exchange
1959	Tales of Wells Fargo	Lola Montez	
1959	Trackdown	Tina	Episode – The Samaritan
1959	Millionaire Theatre	Alicia Osante	Episode – Millionaire Alicia Osante
1959	Cimarron City	Elena Maria Obregon de Vega	Episode – The Town is a Prisoner
1959	Zane Grey Theatre	Linda	Episode – The Last Raid
1959	General Electric Theatre	Princess Michal	Episodes – The Stone, Princess Michal
1959	This Rebel Breed	Lola Montalvo	
1959	The Fat Man: The Thirty-Two Friends of Gina Lardelli	Gina Lardelli	TV Movie

1960	Playhouse 90	Ms. Moreno	Episode – Alas, Babylon
1960	Bourbon Street Beat	Manuela Ruiz	Episode – Suitable for Framing
1960	Richard Diamond, Private Detective		Episode – Coat of Arms
1960	Walt Disney’s Wonderful world of Color (Zorro)	Chulita	Episodes – Adios, El Cuchillo / El Bandido
1961	Michal Shayne	Myra	No Shroud for Shayne
1961	Adventures in Paradise	Inez Sanders	Vendetta
1963	Burke’s Law	Margret Cowls	Episode – Who Killed Julian Buck
1963	A World of Stars		TV Movie
1963	Seaway	Annabelle	Episode - The Only Good Indian
1965	The Trials of O’Brien	Caressa	Episode - Dead End of Flugal Street
1967	Run For Your Life	Anita	Episode - Who’s Che Guevara?
1971-77	The Electric Company	Carmela	780 Episodes
1974	Medical Center	Lydia	May God Have Mercy
1974	Dominic’s Dream	Anita Bente	Nominated: Emmy Award, Outstanding continuing or Single performance by a Supporting Actress in a Variety or Musical
1974	Out To Lunch	Various	Nominated: Emmy Award, Outstanding Supporting Actress in Variety or Musical

1975-76	On The Rocks		Episode – I’ll never forget What’s Her Name – Old Fish, New Fish
1976	The Muppet Show	Herself	Emmy Award for Outstanding continuing or single Performance in Variety or Music
1977	Lanigan’s Rabbi	Millie Hillman	Episode - Corpse of the Year
1977	Westside Medical	Leonor Carbajal	Episode - The Witch of Four West
1978	The Rockford Files	Ms. Moreno Capkovic	3 Episodes, Emmy Award for Outstanding Guest Actress in a Drama Series for The Paper Palace
1979	Bonkers		Episode 1.1
1979	Anatomy of a Seduction	Nina	
1979	The Muppets Go Hollywood	Herself/Host	Special
1981	Trapper John, M.D.	Liz Boyce	Episode - Days of Wine and Leo
1981	Evita Peron	Renata Riguel	TV Movie
1981	CBS Library		Episode – Orphans, Waifs and Wards
1982	American Playhouse	Waitress	Working
1982	Portrait of a Showgirl	Rosella Deleon	TV Movie

1982-83	Nine to Five	Violet Newstead	33 Episodes - Nominated: Prime Time Emmy for Outstanding Lead Actress in a Comedy Series; Golden Globe Award for Best Actress – Television Series Musical or Comedy.
1982	Working	Waitress	
1982	Portrait of a Showgirl	Rosella DeLeon	Nominated: Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding supporting Actress in a Miniseries or Movie
1983	The Love Boat	Gladys Gordon	4 Episodes
1986	The Golden Girls	Renee	Episode “Empty Nest”
1987	The Cosby Show	Mrs. Granger	Episode “ You Only Hurt The One You Love”
1988	Tales From the Hollywood Hills: Closed Set	Julie Forbes	TV Movie
1989-90	B.L. Stryker	Kimberly Baskin	6 Episodes
1989-90	Top of The Heap	Alixandra Stone	6 Episodes
1992	Raw Toonage	Voice	3 Episodes
1993	Hearts Afire	Senator Rhonda Hall	Episode – While the Thomason’s Slept in The Lincoln Bedroom
1993	Bonkers	Voice	Episodes – Gold jitters and the Three Bobcats, Witless for the Prosecution

1994	The Nanny	Miss Wickervich/Mrs Stone	Episode “ The Gym Teacher”
1994	The Larry Sanders Show	Ms. Moreno Moreno	People Choice
1994	Capitan Planet and the Planeteers	Ella Salvator	Episode – Disoriented Express
1994-98	Where on Earth is Carmen San Diego	Carmen San Diego	39 Episodes - Voice
1994-95	The Cosby Mysteries	Angie Corea	2 Episodes
1995	Best Defense	The Judge	TV Movie
1995	Burke’s Law	Jackie Lodge	Who Killed the Gadget Man?
1995	The Wharf Rat	Mom	
1995	Women of the House	Rita Moreno	Women in Film
1995	The Magical School Bus	Dr. Carmina Skeleton (voice)	Episode – The Busasaurus
1997	Murphy Brown	Dr. Nancy Goldman	Episode – Ectomy, Schmectomy
1997	Touched by an Angel	Amanda	The Comeback
1997-2003	Oz	Sister Peter Marie Reimondo	55 Episodes Alma Award for Best Actress in a Drama Series(1998-99,2002) Nominated: Alma Award for Best Actress in a Drama Series (2000-01)
1998	The Spree	Irma Kelly	

1998	Buddy Faro		Episode – Done away in a Manger
1999	Resurrection	Mimi	TV Movie
1999	The Rockford Files: If it Bleeds... It Leads	Ms. Moreno Kapkovic Landale	TV Movie
2001	Resurrection Blvd.		La Visita
2002	American Family	Juana	Episodes – The forgotten War, Mexican Revolution
2003	Strong Medicine	Lydia	Degeneration
2003	Open House	Lydia Fitch	TV Movie
2003	The Guardian	Caroline Novack	3 Episodes
2003	Scooby-Doo and the Monster of Mexico	Woman # 3 (voice)	Dona Dolores
2003	The Handler	Daniella Isabella	Off the Edge
2004	Copshop	Mary Alice	TV Movie
2005	Law & Order: Special Victims Unit	Mildred Quintana	Episode “Night”
2005	Law & Order: Trial by Jury	Mildred Quintana	Episode - Night
2005	Wanted	Mrs. Kelly	Click, Click, Boom
2006	Lolo’s Café	Lucretia(voice)	TV Movie

2006-2007	Law & Order: Criminal Intent	Frances Goren	3 episodes
2007	The George Lopez Show	Luisa Diaz	“George Testilies”
2007	Ugly Betty	Aunt Mirta	
2007	Cane	Amalia Duque	13 Episodes
2007	In Plain Sight	Ms. Moreno Ramirez	Coma Chameleon
2011	Special Agent Oso	Abuela	For Tamales With Love/Pinata Royale
2011-13	Happily Divorced	Dori	34 Episodes
2013	Rock in a Hard Place	Mimi Janowitz	
2013	Nicky Duece	Tutti	TV Movie
2014	Old Soul	Ms. Moreno	TV Movie

APPENDIX B

APPENDIX B
RITA MORENO
AWARDS

PRESIDENTIAL MEDAL OF FREEDOM - June 23rd 2004.

ACADEMY AWARD – for best supporting actress for West Side Story 1961.

GRAMMY AWARD – the Electric Company Album 1972

TONY AWARD – for Best featured actress in play, The Ritz 1975

EMMY AWARD – for individual performance in a variety or music program 1977 – The Muppet Show.

Golden Globe 1961 West Side Story

The Joseph Jefferson Award – Best Chicago Theatre Actress, 1968

Emmy outstanding Guest Actress – drama series 1978

The Golden Apple – cue Magazine

Library of Congress Living Legends Award, April 200

HOLA (Hispanic Organization of Latin Actors) renamed award The Rita Moreno Award for Excellence.

The Sarrah Siddons Award for her portrayal on Olive Madison in the female version of The Odd Couple

Special Recognition award from International Latin Music Hall of Fame 2001

Star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame 7083 Hollywood Blvd.

California Hall of Fame 2007

National Medal of Arts 2009

HOLA – lifetime achievement award 2010

Sag Lifetime Achievement Award 2013

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Valente Rodriguez was born In Elsa Texas. He graduated from Edcouch-Elsa High School and received his B.A in communications in 1986 from Pan American University and his M.A. in Communications in 2015 from The University of Texas Pan American. Mr. Rodriguez has been a member of the Screen Actors Guild for 28 years.