

Comparing Latino and Asian American Film Narratives

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a preliminary exploration of analysis of feature films across ethnic lines through a comparison of Latino and Asian American film narratives. Given that these two ethnic groups have significant commonalities as well as important divergences, we should expect such analysis to turn up both similarities and differences in the two film traditions. Both groups, for example, occupy the status of linguistic minorities in the United States. At the same time, their histories and the manner in which they became incorporated into this country vary considerably. Among the commonalities are: the practice of putting minority characters center stage; the concern with countering traditional stereotypes; the critiquing of racist and ethnocentric patterns in the society; wrestling with issues of structural and cultural assimilation; and a tendency to see the country and culture of origin as sources of strength. There is, however, some indication from this preliminary comparison that there are some differences between Latino and Asian-American filmmakers in their attitudes toward acculturation. The Latino films seem to take a somewhat harder line on this issue, with greater emphasis given to a stance of rejecting or resisting incursions by mainstream cultural patterns. If this generalization turns out to be valid—and it must remain highly tentative at this point—it may be related to differences in the timing of immigration flows, or to the greater geographic proximity of the Latino homelands.