

Mexico in American movies: representation and stereotypes

Academic supervisor – Скальная Юлия Андреевна

Трузян Роман Игоревич

Student (bachelor)

Lomonosov Moscow State University, Факультет глобальных процессов, Образовательная программа «Глобальные политические процессы и дипломатия», Moscow, Россия

E-mail: truzanroman@gmail.com

What would you have answered, if someone had asked you: you depict Mexico in a few words for me? You would probably imagine an orange filter, men with sombreros and guitars singing on the sidewalk wearing black costumes with red scarves, women wearing traditional dresses and dancing in the streets, children eating guacamole and tacos at home, dogs running across roads in unimaginable heat and so on. All of these assumptions are not based on nothing. They are based on what we see in pop culture, especially in movies. Movies usually portray nations in a way that is easy to understand for your regular viewer: stereotypes, images, pictures, famous people etc. While one half of what is being depicted in them might be true, the other might be complete nonsense that does not have anything to do with the reality of things. This second half we usually call “. But what is a stereotype? A stereotype is a set idea that people have about what someone or something is like, especially an idea that is wrong. (Cambridge Dictionary, 2026) In this scientific research we are going to look at some stereotypical portrayals of Mexican culture in movies and see if it has anything to do with reality or not.

When talking about Mexican culture in movies we can not simply forget about one of the most famous genres in cinematic history: western. A western is a movie based on stories about life in the part of the US west of the Mississippi River when white people began going there to live in the 19th century (Cambridge Dictionary, 2026). One of the most prominent of them is most definitely the 1966’s Good, the Bad and the Ugly“ starring Clint Eastwood, one of, if not the most, recognisable actors in “. Here, Mexican culture is shown through the prism of Tuco Ramírez, an arrogant, cunning, resilient, bandit. A comedic relief character, played by a Jewish-American actor Eli Wallach. And this is a testament for what’s to come in the future: Mexican people portrayed as the guys“ and not even played by a Mexican or Latino actor. This trend had been followed throughout the first half of the 20th century up until the death of westerns in the 1980s, where Mexican culture would be shown as antagonistic to American, presented as something altruistic and unholy, something too sensual to show to the kids. The death of westerns would lead to a “ in representation of Mexican culture, however, still not very accurately.

Since then, more and more stereotypes have appeared on screen, like the mariachis in „¡Three Amigos!“ (1986), the yellow tobacco filter from the 2000 movie “, especially in comedy films like the former mentioned „¡Three Amigos!“. However, in the 2010s the Mexican culture began to back“ so to say, with movies like Guillermo Del Toro’s Book of life“ and Disney’s “ depicting the beauty of Mexican interpretation of the afterlife. Not only that, these movies also represent the actual lives of Mexican people, not only showing the magical parts but also the real interactions and festivals, like the Day of The Dead, picturing the traditions, the food, the costumes, the art and every other aspect that makes the Mexican culture so uniquely fascinating.

However, Mexican culture is not always as colourful and joyful as it is shown in the aforementioned cartoons. It also can be violent and sometimes even hard to watch on a screen. The one aspect I am talking about is the depiction of cartels. It would be a shame to talk about

Mexico and not mention one of the most infamous parts of its culture and, in my and many of the critic's opinion, the most astounding movie to show cartels' activities in action is the 2015 film " by Denis Villeneuve. It perfectly represents the fight against the gangs between themselves and the government of US and Mexico. The horrors it depicts are on such a level that not all viewers could watch the movie until the end. And the last scene of the film perfectly illustrates that even after the death of one cartel leader, the fight against the others still continues with constant gunfire being heard even in the most friendly neighbourhoods.

In conclusion, it is safe to say that representation of Mexican culture has come a long way in films, from being associated with sensual content and bandits, to being one of the most fascinating cultures ever shown on the screen. We can clearly see that nowadays Mexican people in movies are played by Mexican actors, are not portrayed as dull bandits with no honour and are not presented as comic relief characters, fully acknowledging the country's cultural significance to the US and the world as a whole.

Источники и литература

- 1) The Evolution of the Western in Cinema | by MiscelAna // Medium • MiscelAna URL: <https://medium.com/@anaclaudiapaixao/the-evolution-of-the-western-in-cinema-634e1632d42c> (дата обращения: 02.03.2026).
- 2) The Good, the Bad and the Ugly // Moviepedia Wiki URL: https://movies.fandom.com/wiki/The_Good,_the_Bad_and_the_Ugly (дата обращения: 02.03.2026).
- 3) The 25 best movies set in Mexico // Yardbarker URL: https://www.yarbarker.com/entertainment/articles/the_25_best_movies_set_in_mexico/s1__29007833 (дата обращения: 02.03.2026).
- 4) Sepia Stereotype // Digital Media, Society and Culture URL: <https://digmedia.lucdh.nl/2021/12/24/sepia-stereotype/> (дата обращения: 02.03.2026).
- 5) Sicario (2015 film) // Wikipedia URL: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sicario_\(2015_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sicario_(2015_film)) (дата обращения: 02.03.2026).