

AeroEspacial: Making Space Bustelo

Sofia: Do you want me to sing it? And you can put that in there...*starts singing Star Wars theme*

Héctor: *sings more of Star Wars Theme*

BOLD beginning of Star Wars theme comes in and quickly fades under

Sofia: Not really that long ago, in a galaxy not really that far away... that we're in called the Milky Way...

AeroEspacial theme slowly fades in under intro

Héctor: We literally live inside it!

Sofia: We here at AirSpace from the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum got a grant from the National Museum of the American Latino.

Héctor: Through the Latino Initiatives Pool we bring you --AeroEspacial-- stories featuring air and space *and* Latino history and culture

Sofia: They're in English and Spanish so if you wanna listen to this episode in Spanish, head back to the feed and choose that version instead!

Sofia: I'm Sofia Soto Sugar from the National Air and Space Museum.

Héctor: And I'm Héctor Alejandro Arzate, the immigrant communities reporter at WAMU and DCist.com.

Héctor: You may have guessed it from the intro, today we're talking about Star Wars! This universe has recently seen an explosion of representation from Latino actors and creatives, but the stories it tells have always related to the Latino experience, to those who know how to look.

Sofia: And even when they don't, the beauty of something as beloved as Star Wars is that fans will make it their own no matter what.

For some Spanish speakers – like my parents! And the Mexican actor from *Andor*, Diego Luna! – , that included renaming one of the key characters

--*Clip-DiegoLuna on Jimmy Kimmel*¹

Diego Luna: “You know are R2D2 is called in Mexico?”

Jimmy Kimmel: “What is R2 D2...what, arr-dos-dee-dos?”

Diego: “Kind of, little Arthur is Arturito. You know the story? We call Arturito because it sounds like..”

Jimmy: “R2D2 is called Arturito?”

Diego: “For my whole adult life I would say Arturito, I would say the first 15 years of my life I thought it was little Arthur”

Héctor: Aside from Arturito, there are some pieces of the original stories that unabashedly come from Central and South America and Southwest U.S. indigenous cultures.

Sofia: In a 2002 interview with Time Magazine, George Lucas admitted he got the inspiration for Princess Leia's iconic double bun hairstyle from turn of the century Mexican Revolutionary women, known as Soldaderas.² He said "I went with a kind of south-western Pancho Villa woman revolutionary look,"

There are some pictures of Mexican women wearing buns like those around that time. However, the style more likely came from a traditional ‘squash blossom’ style worn by unmarried Hopi women in Arizona.³

Héctor: Another character with some obvious Latino ties is Han Solo.

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=No5o5Tr7iAM>

²

<https://www.ripleys.com/weird-news/the-real-mexican-rebels-behind-princess-leias-iconic-buns/#:~:text=They%20buns%20are%20basically%20from,Mexico's%20rebel%20force%2C%20for%20sure!>

³ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-38452953>

MovieClip “I’m Han Solo, captain of the Millennium Falcon. Chewie here tells me you’re looking for passage to the Alderaan system.”⁴

Michelle: “I mean, is Han Solo not a coyote?”

Héctor: A coyote is a person who is paid to smuggle people across the Mexican American border.⁵

Michelle: “I am, uh, Dr. Michelle Martinez⁶. I teach in the film and media studies department at Arizona State University. And, um, my work specializes in looking at representations of, uh, Latinos in Disney products. And Star Wars is Disney product.”

Sofia: In the films, we first meet Han Solo in a dive bar, haggling over what it will cost to smuggle Ben Kenobi, Luke Skywalker, and two droids off the planet of Tatooine... with no questions asked.

MovieClip: Han Solo:

“What’s the cargo?”

Ben Kenobi: “Only Passengers. Myself, the boy, two droids, and no questions asked.”

Han: “What is it, some kind of local trouble?”

Ben: “Let’s just say we’d like to avoid any Imperial entanglements.”

Han: “Well that’s the real trick, isn’t it? And it’s going to cost you something extra.”

Héctor: “Outer Rim” places, like Tatooine, are constantly referenced in Star Wars as far-flung, frontier, lawless places that the Empire uses for resources and fights to control.

⁴ From Star Wars: A New Hope, accessed via Disney+

⁵ <https://www.npr.org/2012/04/19/150973748/inside-the-hidden-world-of-immigrant-smuggling>

⁶ <https://search.asu.edu/profile/477555>

Michelle: "For me it just adds little bit more, support for, for this idea that it is about contested spaces and in some ways the outer rim and Tatooine and Navarro are stand-ins for the American Southwest."

Sofia: If you grew up as a Latino anywhere near the border, or with a foot in two countries, these places might feel familiar.

Michelle: "It's almost taken right from that Western theme that it, it might show up when Clint Eastwood rides into the scene. You have this empire and settlers and refugees and the need for identification or papers. You have, uh, all the things that you have on, on the lived border."

Héctor: Going back to the original trilogy, Star Wars started out very white, with many of the Imperial characters, the bad guys, speaking with English accents. Side characters that were either explicitly or subtly coded as people of color, are all aliens.

Michelle: "That's the other thing that other scholars of Star Wars have pointed out. All of the 20th century Star Wars products and early 21st Century Star Wars products feature, you know, the white savior trope and then all of the others with, with, with the exception of Lando Calrissian, all the others are literally alien in these non-human made up ways."

Sofia: Star Wars' background struggle with colonialism and empire is very much a fantastical retelling of the historical European colonialism that spanned the globe for centuries. The impacts of that colonialism are still felt in Latino communities today.

Genevieve Carpio⁷ came to Star Wars in her teens and really got into it as an adult.

Genevieve: "I am a professor at UCLA over in Los Angeles, where I teach in Chicana, Chicano and Central American studies."

⁷ <https://chavez.ucla.edu/person/genevieve-carpio/>

Héctor: She says that in the original movies themes of colonialism serve as a backdrop. But in the more recent Star Wars stories, like the shows *Andor*⁸ and *Obi-Wan Kenobi*⁹, colonialism and its impacts take center stage.

Genevieve: "In Andor, we see how places like Kenari, where Cassian lives as a child, as well as Ferrix, which is where he lives as an adult, which is a bit of a salvage yard. These are planets, like entire planets that serve the center of the empire, which is Coruscant, and we see these images juxtapose of, of, of labor, of hardship, of people making do against Coruscant where things are lavish. They are extravagant, they are based on parties and politics and, um, glitter and glitz and technology. And they have those things because of places like Kenari and Ferrix, uh, and their resources and their labor."

Sofia: In *Andor*, the main character Cassian Andor is played by Diego Luna, who you heard talking about Arturito at the beginning. He first played this role in the 2016 movie *Rogue One*¹⁰.

Cassian is from a planet that has been taken over by the Empire and destroyed by extractive mining.

Genevieve: "And this is where we see Cassian Andor, the protagonist of Andor growing up as a child. And what we learn about that universe it has this, this large pit, and it was a planet that was used for extractive colonialism. So it was used for mining and there was a mining disaster that left the planet toxic and killed the miners. So the children that we come across in that episode are the only people who live there, and they're the orphan children of the miners."

Héctor: The disaster leaves the planet desolate and eventually leads some of its residents, including Cassian Andor, to join the revolution and fight the empire that has killed their families, destroyed their homes, and left them for dead.

⁸ https://www.imdb.com/title/tt9253284/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1

⁹ <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt8466564/>

¹⁰ https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3748528/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1

Sofia: At a turning point in the series – and this is a spoiler – Cassian’s mother figure, Maarva, has died. A key scene shows her funeral. As part of the ceremony, a holographic speech¹¹ from the deceased is played to those gathered to mourn her passing, almost like a self-eulogy. Maarva, however, uses the opportunity to encourage resistance.

MovieClip-Maarva Andor: “We've been sleeping. We've had each other, and Ferrix, our work, our days. We had each other and they left us alone. We kept the trade lane open, and they left us alone. We took their money and ignored them, we kept their engine churning, and the moment they pulled away, we forgot them.

The Empire is a disease that thrives in darkness, it is never more alive than when we sleep. It's easy for the dead to tell you to fight, and maybe it's true, maybe fighting is useless. Perhaps it's too late. But I'll tell you this, if I could do it again, I'd wake up early and be fighting these bastards from the start! Fight the Empire!”

Genevieve: “I think the speech is really powerful because we see the large crowd listening to her and we can read it as her speaking to the people of Ferrix. We can also read it as her speaking to anyone for whom this message resonates. Um, it can be a call out to the larger audience who itself is maybe passively watching, maybe laying down, watching it in bed, even, you know, um, this idea of sleeping of ignoring the injustices that are occurring around us, whether that be empire, colonialism or some other uneven power relationship.

And it's a call to action, to, to wake up, to, to view it, to be aware of it, to decide how one wants to react to it.”

Héctor: There are echoes of this speech later, when Cassian goes to a forced labor camp and meets Keno, an Imperial factory foreman turned prison-break leader.

Keno says:

¹¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TaKrm5txGCQ>

Genevieve: 'I'd rather die trying to take them down than die, giving them what they want.'

And that may be a callback to Emiliano Zapata¹², who was a Mexican revolutionary in the early 1900s when Mexico itself was under a dictatorship, which included sending men into forced labor camps.

A quote that's been attributed to Zapata is, 'I'd rather die on my feet than live on my knees.' And as someone who would've grown up educated on Mexican history, the Mexican Revolution being a large part of how, um, nationhood is understood and talked about in Mexico, I, I wondered if that was a callback to that moment."

Michelle: "I've grown up with Star Wars, right?"

Sofia: That's Michelle. She says even just watching as a kid...

Michell: "it's hard to not see it as a part of my formation and a part of my life, but also ...it kind of gave me the gift of resistance."

Music button

Héctor: It's not only Latino *stories* that are visible in Star Wars. Particularly in the newest generation of Star War stories; Latino actors, writers, and other creatives have been taking center stage.

Michelle grew up in a Mexican-American household in the Southwest, and back then she certainly didn't see herself on the screen.

Michelle: "And I kept wondering like, where, where my, where's my family in the movies I didn't. And then on TV. The only other Latinos I really clocked in film was like, I watched West Side Story on the carpet floor at my grandma's house, and I was like, wait a minute. They're like us, but they're not like us.

¹² <http://web.eecs.utk.edu/~miturria/project/zapata.html>

You know, they're in the city and we're in the desert. Um, so, you know, I was kind of looking for my family and looking for representation and, and now we say that so easily, right? Representation. It's a thing we all talk about. It's all over the social media, people expect it, they want it. Um, but back then here I was kind of quietly looking for it and couldn't find it."

Sofia: Michelle actually knew someone in the biz that she could ask about this, her father.

*Michelle: "And, uh, my dad at the time was, uh, in the union building sets for mostly Universal studios, but wherever, you know, other places where he was needed. He worked on *Murder, She Wrote*, he worked on *Knight Rider*, he worked on *Scarface*, um, *Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*. I mean, he worked on like the eighties classics.*

*And I asked him, uh, where are Mexican Americans in film? Uh, why aren't we there? And humor is a big part of my, our family tradition. And the first thing he said was, *mija*, who do you think are building all the sets?"*

Héctor: Starting with the 2005 release of *Revenge of the Sith*, Latinos started to be more visible, at least in the Star Wars galaxy. Jimmy Smits, who is of Puerto Rican and Surinamese descent, portrayed Bail Organa¹³, the man who would become Princess Leia's adoptive father.

Sofia: More recently you have Diego Luna and Puerto Rican Adria Arjona in *Andor*. You have Din Djarin--the Mandalorian-- played by Chilean-American Pedro Pascal. Afro-Latina Rosario Dawson portrays Ahsoka Tano--who just got her own show. Then there's Guatemalan and Cuban descended Oscar Isaac as Poe Dameron, who was part of the main trio in the most recent trilogy of movies.

Héctor: There's more, but even the fact that that list is getting too long to say in a podcast episode is an excellent sign that Latino representation is picking up in the Star Wars Universe.

¹³ https://starwars.fandom.com/wiki/Bail_Prestor_Organa

Sofia: Diego Luna not only did his own dubbing for Spanish versions of the shows, but he even uses his natural Mexican-accented English in Rogue One and Andor. It's written into the character.

¹⁴*Clip-Diego Luna on the View.*

"First of all they would have had to get another actor if they wanted to get rid of my accent. Because it's not my first language and I cannot take it away, it's not something I plug in and...but I would say something. There's 13 percent of the people in this country, they speak Spanish at home so the accent is just a baby step. And I think finally the industry is reflecting on the world that's out there. "

Genevieve: "I think the representation's incredibly significant and we see it on a number of levels. One, we see the increase in representation also reflected in public interest. So if you were to do just a simple, Google search of Latinos and Star Wars, you'll find your web search populated with listicles¹⁵ of who the actors are, their background, what films they're in and not just our, our physical actors who we see in body, but also voice actors and the extended, extended Star War universe that is in cartoon form.

And it's important that when this type of, um, integration in the universe began to happen, it began with largely male actors, largely lighter skinned actors. And over time we've seen that diversify as well.

Something else that I think is really significant is that we don't just see it in the casting, but we also see it in who's producing these series, who's directing this series, as well as even the sound."

Genevieve: "I think that part of what's so important about the type of representation or significant about the representation that we see in Star Wars, in Mandalorian and in Andor is that although it's placed in a galaxy far away, and it's a long time ago, so technically it's in the past, it's definitely marked by futurism because of the technology involved. And for Latinos in film, um, as well as in

¹⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ElsekWumZ6k>

¹⁵ <https://nuestrostories.com/2023/05/every-latino-star-wars-universe/>

society, it's often been a struggle to be seen as modern. Instead, they've often been placed in the past,"

Héctor: Off screen, the Star Wars Universe has just as many-if not more- stories being told in books and comics. Daniel José Older¹⁶ is one of the writers expanding the Universe on the page.

Daniel: "I'm a writer of science fiction and fantasy. I write for Star Wars. I write comic books, I write novels. I write for all ages and all different kinds of people and creatures."

Sofia: Daniel has written several of his own books outside of Star Wars. He was first asked to write a short story and a novel featuring iconic characters from the original trilogy.

Héctor: Lately Daniel's work in the Star Wars Universe has been in the High Republic¹⁷--a series of stories set around 200 years before Obi-Wan Kenobi meets Anakin Skywalker.

Sofia: The High Republic was developed as a part of the Star Wars Universe that book and comic writers could have all to themselves. But the stories, like all stories in the Star Wars Universe, are based in a set of common lore and history.

Daniel: "I'm like a history nerd, um, in my own, just for fun. And I, I just love it. And I love that Star Wars is really in love with its own history too. And that's not just sort of, random nerdiness, like it really matters to the people creating the stories that they contextualize each story and make sure that it, that it lines up, you know, to moments in galactic history. And I just think that's so cool.

But I think it's also very, it's, there's a political imperative to it that says history matters. That says, you know, the context around us is important, the politics of the world around us matter. They're not just like window dressing, you know, they're not, uh, just people making speeches on soap boxes. They're important. They affect

¹⁶ <https://www.danieljoseolder.net/>

¹⁷ <https://www.starwars.com/the-high-republic>

lives of the people in the galaxy at the time. Just like in this world, the politics around us affect our lives, whether we want to deal with that or not.”

Sofia: Even with the massive back catalog and reams of history, there's still space in Star Wars for writers like Daniel to bring in their own heritage and experiences.

Héctor: One of the ways Daniel does this is by creating characters that will feel very familiar to certain people,

Daniel: “So I have a character named Sav Malagán¹⁸, you know, with an accent on the a. I think she might, she's probably not the first, but she's certainly one of the few Star Wars characters with an accented name. Um, because I have an accent on my name.

So Sav Malagán, you know, um, is very Latina coded, like, I do want Latinos and other people who haven't felt included in the larger sci-fi realm for decades to read the work and find some kind of home in it. And I think that's very important. And I think we can do that without being like they're dancing salsa music, you know, like, it doesn't, like there's ways to kind of get at it in a subtler way.

But Sav Malagán, you know, she, like, if you read her in the comic, and you have a Latina abuela, she will read that way. She's a little old lady who will whoop anybody's behind if they, you know, step outta line. She's one of the toughest Jedi of the era who like has taken on entire leagues of bad guys all by herself and won.

And she loves her cafecito and they don't call it cafecito, they call it caff. That's the, caff is the Star Wars lingo for that. But she makes it in a little cafetera looking thing, you know, that's clearly like space Bustelo. And she puts it on the burner and she's like trying to have a little sip of coffee before the, the, uh, invaders attack. And that's her, that's her opening scene.”

Héctor: But Daniel also has to manage a bit of a balancing act. He wants to speak to an Earth-bound audience without leaving a galaxy far far away.

¹⁸ https://starwars.fandom.com/wiki/Savina_Besatrix_Malag%C3%A1n

Daniel: “The tricky part with Star Wars is it does take place in a totally different realm. It's not, it's not the future of Earth.

It's not the past of Earth. It's not Earth at all. Right? So, The risk, of course, is always that you pull someone out of the story by, by dropping in something so Earth-feeling that they no longer feel like they're in the galaxy far, far away. And this is a constant sort of conversation, I think between all of us. How do you draw from your life and from the world around you? And, and I think it's important to note too, how do you make sure you're in a, in a responsible conversation with the world around you?

Not just because that's what you're taking in and spitting back out, but that's where the book is gonna be. The book will be in the world, right? The comic book, the novel, whatever it is, it's gonna be in this world. And that matters. Because of that, you can't just. Pretend that none of these things exist because, ‘oh, it's in a galaxy far, far away. It doesn't, you know, these are whatever, you know, race doesn't exist there, whatever, right?’

But race exists here. Culture exists here. These cultural references do exist in the world that the book goes into, and the book matters. It affects the world. Stories change the world. If we truly believe that. It means we have to story very responsibly, and we can't just pretend that, you know, it's a, it's a, it's a fantasy, so it doesn't matter.”

Sofia: Characters like Sav Malagán and Cassian Andor and Poe Dameron are not Latino because our Earthly ethnicities don't exist in the Star Wars universe. But if they drink space Bustelo and speak with Mexican accents and answer the call to resist colonial injustices, then la fuerza is clearly with them.

(music fades in then under)

---Credits---

Sofia: This is our last episode of AeroEspacial! Thank you all for listening to this second limited series, we'll be back with regular AirSpace programming soon.

Sofia: AeroEspacial is from the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum. This project received federal support from the Latino Initiatives Pool, administered by the National Museum of the American Latino. It is presented by Olay and distributed by PRX.

AeroEspacial is produced by Jennifer Weingart, Ruth Morris and me, Sofia Soto Sugar. Special thanks to Héctor Alejandro Arzate for co-hosting this project.

Héctor: Additional editorial help by Matt Shindell, Amy Stamm, Vanessa Parés and our intern, Jenna Bertschi.

Mix by Tarek Fouda. Music by Story Mechanics. Additional related content is also on our website, airandspace.si.edu/aeroespacial and on Instagram and Twitter, @AirSpacePod

Music fades up and then out

Héctor: For whatever reasons some Latinos will print out a picture of Jesus and it's like the picture that they found on Google and it's usually a picture of Obi-Wan Kenobi.

Sofia: Shut up!

Héctor: Ewan McGregor with his

Sofia: Not Ewan McGregor

Héctor: long beautiful chestnut hair. And he looks just like... *laughs* I shouldn't say this but he looks just like white Jesus¹⁹.

¹⁹ <https://starwars.fandom.com/f/p/4400000000003434817>

Sofia: You're telling me that a central Latino experience is having Ewan McGregor as Obi-Wan Kenobi as Latino white Jesus *laughs*

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