



Film

Culture

Film Festival

Latinx

Trauma

"These Days," A Tale Of Latinx Youth Striving To Heal Trauma, Won Big At Chelsea Film Festival During Hispanic Heritage Month

"These Days," the debut of filmmaker Junior Gonzalez, is a rich docudrama about traumas and cultural ties impacting Latinx youth on Long Island. The film won big at this year's Chelsea Film Festival, particularly resonating during Hispanic Heritage Month.

The Chelsea Film Festival showcased various diverse voices from a multitude of backgrounds. Held at Union Square's Regal Cinema, the festival boasted a rich array of films, each one representing various aspects of human identity.

These Days: Junior Gonzalez's Debut Film Explores Long Island's Latinx Youth In Personal Narrative

Amid the selection, one film stood out. It captured the hearts of many and resonated particularly during Hispanic Heritage Month. *These Days*, a powerful

docudrama, unfolds in the heart of Brentwood, New York, a Long Island town where nearly 71 percent of its population identifies as Hispanic (as per the U.S. Census). The powerful debut, from director Junior Gonzalez, not only explored the history of the Salvadoran immigrant community in Brentwood, but also delved into his and the cast's own roots, grounding the film in a deeply personal narrative.

These Days paints a vivid picture of the history of the community, and focuses on the profound effect of the Salvadoran civil war, which forced thousands to seek refuge and asylum in the United States between 1979 and 1992. Against the backdrop of the at-risk youth in the community, the film expertly unveils the difficult realities of generational trauma and institutional challenges faced by immigrant Hispanic families in their quest for healing. The movie beautifully intertwines this myriad of experiences, offering an inspiring message of resilience.

The film's significance extends far beyond the screen. Its entire cast and crew, as well as Gonzalez, share a deeply personal connection to *These Days*. They all faced similar challenges as seen in the story, and engaged in youth programs designed to combat the allure of gang violence and address the trauma central to the film.



THESE DAYS poster (C) These Days Productions

How Does *These Days* Explore Trauma For Latinx Youth And Communities?

Throughout *These Days*, we follow 15-year-old protagonist Jay (Billy Mayorga Reyes), who is navigating the harsh realities that many Latinx youths face. Beyond the struggle of living with his single mother, he also deals with the dangers of gang violence and the temptation of alcohol. A crucial element of the docudrama's narrative is the role of community-based youth programs, the nonprofit S.T.R.O.N.G Youth in particular, which aims to prevent gun violence. These programs, as the film depicts, serve as a vital support system during the formative years of Brentwood's at-risk youth, and facilitate the healing and growth of these very same families. The collaborative spirit showcased in *These Days* celebrates the crucial work of organizations dedicated to at-risk youth.



Still from THESE DAYS (C) These Days Productions

***These Days* Examines Family Stories Within The Hispanic Community**

Gonzalez also shared challenges that marked the project's journey, with pandemic-related delays leading the film process to span nearly three years,

causing it almost not to be completed. However, the camaraderie among the cast and crew saved it in the end, and those bonds were immediately noticeable, both on screen and at the showing. Furthermore, the strong cultural ties within the Hispanic community most certainly contributed to the film's success. The characters in *These Days*, each very rich and diverse, carry their unique familial backgrounds, with the diversity adding depth to the narrative. Various family dynamics and stories are represented, exploring the power of storytelling within the context of Hispanic experiences. Beyond shining a light on a powerful narrative, *These Days* raises awareness about issues that impact youth nationwide, which encourage difficult conversations about generational healing and education.



THESE DAYS cast and crew at the 2023 Chelsea Film Festival, courtesy of These Days Productions

Which Awards Did *These Days* Win At Chelsea Film Festival?

Beyond the portrayal of these personal stories, the true crux of the film's importance is community and support, leaving an enduring mark on its viewers.

Not surprisingly, it claimed a multitude of awards: Best Film, Best Young Actor (for Billy Mayorga Reyes), and Best Director (for Junior Gonzalez) at Chelsea Film Festival, and the Suffolk County Next Exposure Grant at the Hamptons International Film Festival.

In a world with consistent challenges and external forces, *These Days* emerges as a beautiful, heart-wrenching testament to the resilience that can blossom from love and community support, even in the toughest of times. It is a must-see film that resonates deeply, especially during Hispanic Heritage Month, offering a priceless opportunity to engage with this profound story, and the family and strength that holds all of them together.

For more about THESE DAYS, visit thesedaysmovie.com. To learn more about the Chelsea Film Festival, visit chelseafilm.org.

--

Written By:

Isabel Garcia-Sosa is a passionate student and writer who enjoys seeing the world from various viewpoints by connecting with people. She can be found on Instagram at @isaaa.