

"Absolutely masterful!"
"¡Absolutamente magistral!"



"A powerful film."
"Una película poderosa."



SURVIVAL ISN'T TRENDY. IT'S THE ONLY WAY FORWARD.

DOLORES HUERTA · GUILLERMINA RODRÍGUEZ · CHEF ROY CHOI · CHEF RYAN HARKINS · BILL ESPARZA · LUIS VALDEZ



BackStreet to the American Dream

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 90 mins. | 100 mins. | Educational Edition
- 18 Awards & Commendations
- Documentary Feature
- National Educational Distribution: New Day Films
- Dolores Huerta – Exec. Producer
- Jarritos – Promotional Partner
- International Doc Assoc. (ida) – Fiscal Sponsor
- Grant: Eastside Arts Initiative (EAI)

FILM FESTIVALS

- 12 in the United States
- 1 in Paris, FR
- 1 GuadaLajara, MX (L.A.)

EDUCATIONAL REACH

- Universities
- Cultural Centers
- Community Screenings

SOCIAL IMPACT CAMPAIGN

- Cinema. Cultura. Comunidad. (CCC)
- Gardena Cinema | Sept. 27, 2025
- Grant: L.A. County Sup. Holly Mitchell





FILM FESTIVALS



LOGLINE

A bilingual, cross-cultural portrait of race, labor and class in modern-day America, following entrepreneurs from two radically different worlds as they pursue their slice of the American pie.

"Backstreet to the American Dream is the intersection between immigration, workers' rights, social justice, and the informal economy. It's the kind of film I love to show my students at the beginning of the quarter, so they understand the issues we'll cover."
- Professor Gaspar Rivera-Salgado, Project Director at UCLA Labor Center



"...the story is about entrepreneurs chasing The American Dream, changing attitudes around cultural differences and social media's role in this modern-day revolution."



"...Patricia Nazario has counted on various university-level news interns to record, edit and organize media."



"A rich and vibrant portrait of the lives of everyday Americans."



"Our mission is to share Mexican culture with the world, and this documentary aligns with our core company values."





AWARDS & COMMENDATIONS

2025 Certificate of Special Recognition: United States Congresswoman Maxine Waters (43rd District, California)

- “For creating **Cinema. Cultura. Comunidad.**, a film and cultural festival in celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month...and whose work humanizes the perception of immigrants...”

2025 Certificate of Recognition: City of Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass

- “...I extend appreciation for her dedication to telling the stories of the workers and families that demonstrate the strength, resilience, and entrepreneurship that continue to shape the City of Angels.”

2024 Special Commendation: L.A. County Supervisor (Dist. 1) & Former U.S. Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis

- "We recognize the film's accomplishment of delving into how street food fosters inclusion, while exploring the deep connection between food, culture, and community."

2024 Special Commendation: L.A. County Supervisor Lindsey Horvath (Dist. 3)

- "We applaud Patricia for the illustrious response she has received for this film..."

2024 Special Commendation: L.A. City Councilmember Mónica Rodríguez (Dist. 7)

- "Thank you for documenting the hard work and sacrifices of immigrants as they chase the American Dream."

Garifuna International Indigenous Film Festival

Intangible Heritage Documentary

2022

Highland Park Independent Film Festival

Best Feature Documentary

2022

Highland Park Independent Film Festival

Humanitarian Award

2022

Culver City Film Festival

Best Director Documentary Feature

2022

San Antonio Film Festival

Best Food Film

2022

San Antonio Film Festival

Audience Award Best Documentary Feature

2022

Ruben Salazar National Journalism Award

Digital Media (2nd Place)

2021

Riverside International Film Festival

Jury Award Best Animation Short

2021

Independent Shorts Awards

Jury Award Best Animated Short

2021

United Workers Film Festival

Special Jury Prize

2021

2012 United States Congress: The Congressional Award – U.S. Congresswoman Loretta Sánchez, CA Dist. 47

2012 United States Congress: The Congressional Award – U.S. Congresswoman Linda Sánchez, CA Dist. 39

2012 La Asociación Latina de Asistencia & Partners – **Leaders Blazing Trails Award**

- “Dedication to the Betterment of our Communities”

“Hosting Patricia Nazario and screening *Backstreet to the American Dream* at Cal Poly Pomona was a highlight for our campus community. Patricia’s brilliant presentation sparked essential conversations about labor, identity, and economic justice that resonated among our campus community attendees long after the event ended.”

- **Dr. Álvaro Huerta**, Professor of Urban & Regional Planning





SYNOPSIS

SURVIVAL ISN'T TRENDY. IT'S THE ONLY WAY FORWARD.

PLOT OUTLINE

Backstreet to the American Dream brings together two radically different worlds of Los Angeles street food to examine race, labor, class, immigration and economic opportunity in modern-day America.

On one side, Grill 'Em All rockets from the streets of Los Angeles to reality-TV fame, propelled by a devoted social-media following and a booming brand. On the other, Mexican immigrant Doña Guillermina Villa Rodríguez builds El Pescadito across decades through family labor, persistence and deep community ties. Placed side by side, their experiences reveal the complicated relationship between survival and spectacle, and how media visibility and economic opportunity can shape whose work is celebrated and whose labor is overlooked.

An award-winning four-minute animated journey from Ancient Mexico to South Los Angeles, narrated in English, Spanish and Náhuatl, places today's entrepreneurs within a deeper history of food, migration, labor and cultural identity.

Moving between survival and success, visibility and invisibility, and the informal economy and mainstream marketplace, the bilingual, cross-cultural documentary explores how people from vastly different backgrounds define and pursue their own version of the American Dream.



PLOT SUMMARY

Backstreet to the American Dream follows entrepreneurs from vastly different backgrounds as they pursue their piece of the American Dream. Cleveland natives Matt Chernus and chef Ryan Harkins burst onto the national stage in 2010 when their heavy-metal-themed burger truck, Grill 'Em All, won the first season of Food Network's The Great Food Truck Race. Their victory propelled the business from the streets of Los Angeles into reality-TV fame, a devoted social-media following and a booming brand.

Doña Guillermina Villa Rodríguez followed a very different path. She immigrated from Mexico in 1977 to provide for her toddler son back home in Nayarit. In 1982, Doña Guillermina launched El Pescadito, a family-run mariscos lonchera. For decades, she has parked in the same South L.A. immigrant neighborhood, building a livelihood through family labor and deep community ties.

Placed side by side, these stories reveal two very different approaches to entrepreneurship. They expose the complicated relationship between survival and spectacle, asking how race, class, immigration, media visibility and economic opportunity can shape whose work is celebrated and whose labor is overlooked.

The bilingual feature also reaches back in time with an award-winning four-minute animated journey from Ancient Mexico to South Los Angeles, tracing the cultural roots of street food across generations. Told in English, Spanish and Náhuatl and accompanied by handmade instruments, the sequence anchors today's entrepreneurs within a much richer history of food, migration, labor and cultural identity.

(Continue on next page)



At its heart, *Backstreet to the American Dream* is about people working to build something of their own. Through the everyday act of breaking bread, the bilingual, cross-cultural odyssey brings different lived experiences into a singular conversation. It challenges assumptions about pop culture, Latino immigrants and social biases.

Moving between survival and success, visibility and invisibility, the informal economy and mainstream marketplace, *Backstreet* asks enduring questions about the American Dream: Whose labor is valued? How do race and class shape economic opportunities? And what does the American Dream look like when success means something different to everyone chasing it?

SOCIAL IMPACT CAMPAIGN | Program + Impact

Cinema. Cultura. Comunidad. (CCC) brought *Backstreet to the American Dream* beyond the screen and into the community through film, culture and public dialogue. Launched Sept. 27, 2025, at the historic Gardena Cinema, the daylong event showcased films by 25 Latina directors, local artisans and community storytellers, culminating in a spotlight conversation with NASA astronaut José Hernández (*A Million Miles Away*) examining harmful media portrayals of Latinos and their real-world consequences.

Backstreet to the American Dream closed the event, which raised \$800 for Public Counsel, a nonprofit public-interest law firm serving immigrant and other underserved communities. Funded by a grant from L.A. County Supervisor Holly J. Mitchell (Dist. 2), the initiative received Certificates of Special Recognition from U.S. Rep. Maxine Waters and L.A. Mayor Karen Bass.



PATRICIA NAZARIO, M.S.

Award-Winning Filmmaker | Journalist | Producer | Educator

Patricia Nazario is an award-winning bilingual filmmaker and journalist whose career spans more than two decades across broadcast news, documentary film and live production. A graduate of UCLA and Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism, her work has earned five Golden Mike Awards, four L.A. Press Club Awards, Associated Press honors and three Congressional recognitions.

Nazario's reporting career spans major events of the early 21st century, including the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York, hurricanes across Florida and Argentina's economic and political crisis. Her reporting on Miami's Cuban-American community earned WLRN its first statewide journalism award. Fluent in Spanish, she has also reported extensively from South America, producing international work for NPR, Marketplace and the BBC.

Partially raised in a blue-collar Latino community in Los Angeles, Nazario grew up around immigrant-run taco trucks that were fixtures of

working-class neighborhoods long before food trucks became a pop-culture phenomenon. Years later, while reporting on the rise of gourmet food trucks for KPCC, she recognized a larger story about entrepreneurship, labor, immigration, race,

class and economic opportunity.

That story became *Backstreet to the American Dream*, the bilingual feature documentary Nazario wrote, directed, produced and edited. The film has screened at 14 film festivals in the United States and abroad, including Dances With Films, Newport Beach, Sonoma, San Antonio, GuadaLajara and Ethnografilm Paris, and has received 18 awards and commendations. Executive produced by civil rights and labor leader Dolores Huerta, with Jarritos as a promotional partner, *Backstreet* is now distributed by New Day Films to the educational market.

Nazario's work brings a journalist's rigor and a filmmaker's eye to stories about people, work, culture and the different ways Americans define and pursue opportunity.



DOLORES HUERTA

Presidential Medal of Freedom Recipient
Executive Producer | Labor Leader | Civil Rights Activist

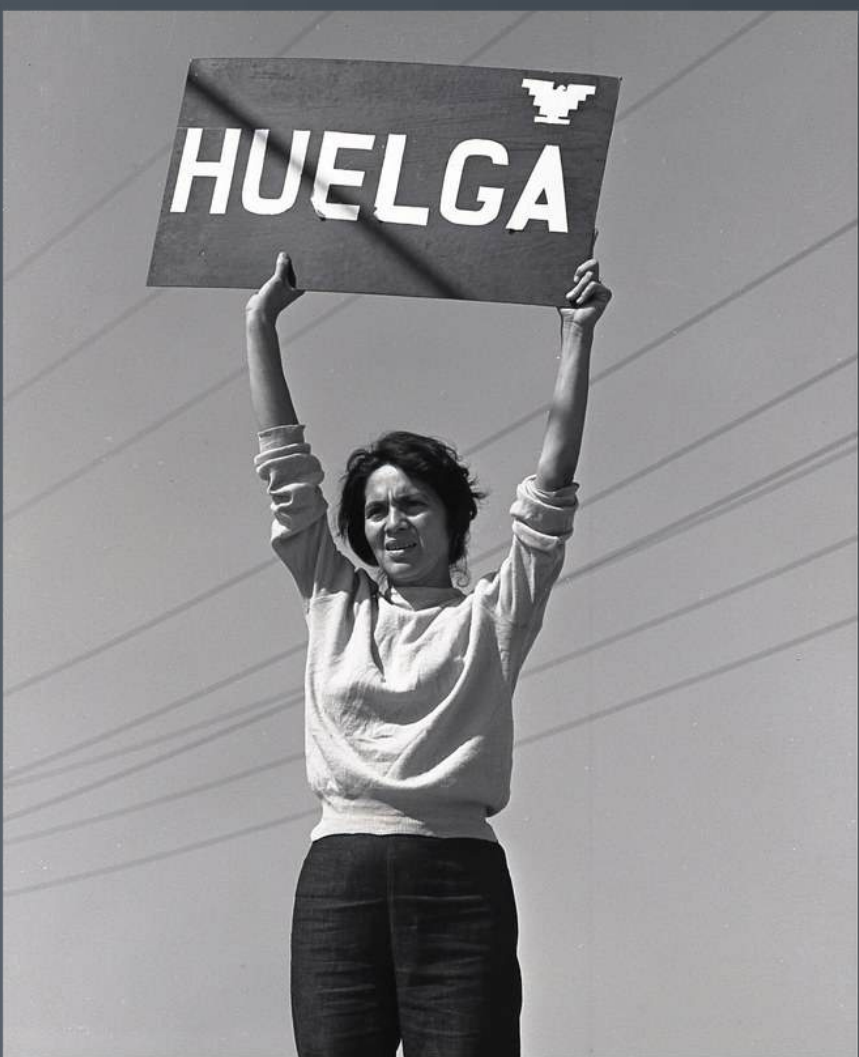
Dolores Huerta is a nationally recognized labor leader and civil rights activist. For more than six decades, she has worked to address economic, social and civil injustices, first for farmworkers, and later for immigrants, women, and the LGBTQ+ community.

Huerta discovered her calling as a community organizer with the Stockton chapter of the Community Service Organization (CSO), where she founded the Agricultural Workers Association, led voter registration drives, and successfully lobbied for improvements in barrios, marginalized neighborhoods of working families across California.

In 1962, Huerta co-founded the United Farm Workers (UFW), forever changing the labor movement in America. As the union’s chief negotiator and national strategist, Huerta secured historic victories for farmworkers’ rights, including groundbreaking labor contracts that improved wages, working conditions, and dignity for a long-overlooked workforce.

In recognition of her lifetime commitment to social justice, President Barack Obama awarded Huerta the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2012, the nation’s highest civilian honor.

She continues her activism today through the Dolores Huerta Foundation, building grassroots leadership,



driving policy reform, and empowering disenfranchised communities nationwide.

Dolores Huerta is Executive Producer of *Backstreet to the American Dream*. Her lifelong work on behalf of working families and immigrant communities reflects many of the questions at the heart of the film: how labor is valued, how economic opportunity is shaped by race and class, and how people from vastly different backgrounds define and pursue the American Dream.



MITCH LEVINE

EDITORIAL CONSULTANT

Mitch Levine is an award-winning film and stage director whose work spans film, theater and live performance in the United States and internationally.

A graduate of the American Film Institute, Levine was the recipient of the first James Cameron Fellowship in Directing. His career includes directing and producing independent film, documentary and theatrical projects through AntiMatter Entertainment.

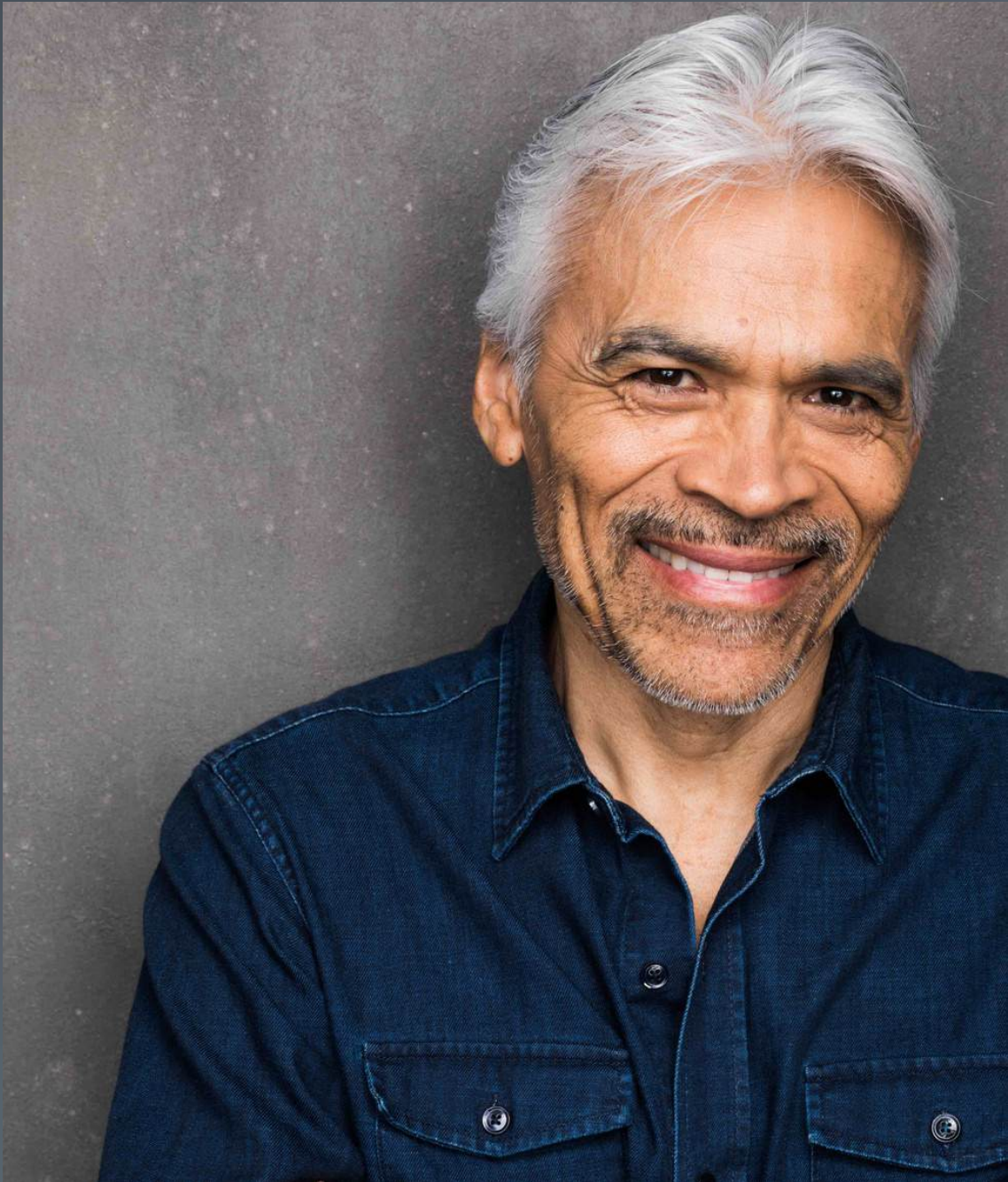
As Editorial Consultant on *Backstreet to the American Dream*, Levine brought his experience in narrative structure and visual storytelling to the film’s development. He conceptualized the four-minute animated open that traces street food through time from Ancient Mexico to South L.A.

SAL LOPEZ

ANIMATED OPEN VOICE ARTIST

Sal Lopez is a veteran actor who started his career after landing a key role in the hit play Zoot Suit. He was born in Mexico and grew up in South Central Los Angeles. Lopez is a founding member of The Latino Theater Company with numerous plays to his credit.

He's known for roles in Full Metal Jacket, American Me, Batman v. Superman, Selena, and TV shows such as Westworld, Queen of the South, and Too Old To Die Young. Some of his voice credits include Grand Theft Auto, L.A. Noire, Red Dead Redemption, Dark Void, Call of Juarez: The Cartel, and Grim Fandango.



BILL ESPARZA

STREET FOOD EXPERT

Bill Esparza is a professional musician, author and food writer whose travels across Latin America have made him a leading expert on Latin American cuisine. He fell in love with Mexican cooking at his grandmother's table and was introduced to street food on childhood trips back home to Aguascalientes, Mexico.

His original style of writing and passion for culture have made Bill an invaluable resource on Los Angeles street-food culture for magazines, newspapers, and food travel shows. Esparza acquired his knowledge the old-fashioned way, through firsthand experience on the streets and at market stands in L.A., Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, and South America, and writing about those experiences in his blog, @streetgourmetla.

Esparza won a James Beard Award in 2016, and in 2017 authored the book, L.A. Mexicano: Recipes, People & Places.





MARTIN ESPINO

ANIMATED OPEN MUSIC COMPOSER

Martin Espino's heritage reaches back to Sonora and Durango, Mexico, as part of the indigenous Yaqui and Tepehuáno people. He is a Sound Worker (using principles of Neuroscience for beneficial well-being or healing), and the creator of "Ancient Mexico Vibration Experience" for the hearing impaired.

Espino is based in Los Angeles. In the tradition of his ancestors, he hand-carves his musical instruments, and he performs locally, nationally and internationally as a soloist and with his acclaimed ensemble. Espino is also a Master Outreach Teaching Artist and facilitates Sound Bath Meditation events.

GEOFFREY BEATTY

LEAD ANIMATOR

An animator, designer, artist, and educator, Beatty began his career at the MIT Media Lab, creating animation for research into artificial intelligence and robotics. Through his animation practice, Germantown Studios, Beatty has worked on a wide variety of projects for clients as diverse as Google, Target, Hermès, Hasbro, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Beatty is an Assistant Professor of Digital Arts at La Salle University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.



JULES RIVERA

LEAD ILLUSTRATOR

Jules Rivera is an illustrator, graphic novelist, colorist, animator and writer. A trained engineer and former defense contractor, Rivera served as lead illustrator for the film's four-minute animated open, which she also drew from scratch.

Rivera's passion is indie comics. She's the creator of *Love, Joolz*, a webcomic about weaponized femininity. Rivera contributed to the Eisner Award-winning Puerto Rico Strong (Lion Forge) and Ringo Award-winning *Where We Live, A Benefit for the Survivors* in Las Vegas (Image Comics). She is the co-creator of sci-fi graphic novels *Spectre Deep 6*, and *200*.

A prolific creator and avid surfer, Rivera reimagines sci-fi designs for TV and film.



Ten Most Frequently Asked Questions of Patricia Nazario

1) What made you want to direct a documentary about food trucks?

I was born in New York and partially raised in Los Angeles. I went to Paramount High School, which is on the southeast side of town. In the late 1980s, it was a blue-collar neighborhood that's about 80% Hispanic. So, we had that classic mom-and-pop operation, a Mexican family running their taco truck on the same corner, night after night, for years. Back then, food trucks were commonly called 'roach coaches.' Fast-forward to 2010, and I'm a daily news reporter at the National Public Radio affiliate, KPCC. One day, I was sent to cover a turf war over parking involving gourmet food trucks on the Miracle Mile near the L.A. County Museum of Art. The Miracle Mile is the proverbial 'other side of the tracks' from where I grew up. It occurred to me that the fight might not be against young, hip entrepreneurs serving fusion food to office workers, but about the legacy of 'roach coaches' and the shame associated with them: immigrants, the working poor, and the disenfranchised struggling to make ends meet. The more I researched, the more complex the story became.

2) When did you start, and how long did it take to finish the documentary?

I started shooting in mid-August 2010. At first, I worked full time and would hire photographers to shoot footage at hot spots around town. After about six months, I realized I would have to jump in with both feet if I ever wanted to finish, so I bought my own camera/production gear and resigned from my full-time job as a daily news reporter at KPCC. From working in radio, I knew how to mix sound. I had been a multimedia TV news reporter, as well, so I also knew how to shoot and edit video. Because it was my first documentary, post-production probably took longer because I had to watch a lot of YouTube tutorials to figure out my editing software and long-form storytelling. The world premiere was at Hollywood's Dances With Films Festival in June 2021.

3) Ten years is a long time to focus on a single project. What kept you interested?

The characters were so compelling that with each interview, I felt a deeper obligation to tell their stories. I speak Spanish, so I was able to connect with the immigrant side of the industry. Plus, I was genuinely curious about their struggles, and the more I asked, the more willing they were to share. I gained their respect. They trusted me, so over time there was no way I could walk away from that. I also lived by a few rules that kept me sane: I did the best I could every day, I worked on it every day (even if only for a few minutes), and I never looked for validation in other people's opinions. When I heard someone say something sarcastic about the story idea, the amount of time it was taking to finish, or my part-time job, I just ignored it. Steady encouragement from family and a few close friends were my real secret weapon.

4) Documentaries are expensive and take time. How did you get your funding?

I mainly self-funded the whole thing. Early on, I applied for a grant, but I didn't get it. The application process was long, tedious, and it distracted me from making my movie. So, I never applied for another one. I tried a crowdfunding campaign, too, which was also tons of work, and it didn't get funded. To focus on this project full time, I had to get creative with my finances after resigning from KPCC. So, I moved in with my sister. A few years later, I started working part-time gigs to pay my freelancers. Fortunately, my family supported the process, and my sister never charged me rent!

5) What other type of support helped you complete the project?

The Mexican Consulate in L.A. has always been very supportive. They worked with their colleagues in Oaxaca, Ensenada, Guadalajara, and Acapulco to sponsor hotel accommodations and ground travel for all of our production trips to Mexico. Interacting with street vendors in Mexico was literally like stepping back in time, and that's how we connected street food culture from the old world to the new.

In 2011, I approached the La Raza Foods Commissary with the idea of corporate sponsorship via incubator office space. We struck a deal, and for more than five years La Raza Foods hosted us with three dedicated cubicles. We had meeting-room access, Wi-Fi, a photocopier, and storage space for production gear. Having actual office amenities is the reason why college interns were able to participate in the post-production process.



Ten Most Frequently Asked Questions of Patricia Nazario

6) Why was it important to you to include college students in the post-production process?

Internships are where the magic happens. I remember going to orientation for the Dances With Films Festival in July 2021 at the Sunset Gower Studios. That's where I had my first internship during my senior year at UCLA in the '90s. Back then, I worked on the docudrama TV series, *Rescue 911*, which was hosted by William Shatner. For Latinos from blue-collar neighborhoods, wishing for a studio or newsroom job can feel like a pipe dream. I saw *Backstreet to the American Dream* as a viable way for students with families or jobs and less free time to gain experience in the competitive world of journalism and documentary filmmaking.

7) How did you gain access to gourmet and traditional food trucks, and to food truck commissaries?

In 2010, gourmet food truck events were popping up all over L.A. I was living in Echo Park at the time, and one weekend about six food trucks were lined up in front of my house. I walked over and introduced myself to Mong Skillman (Mandoline Grill Food Truck). She let me tag along for a lunch service in Santa Monica the following week. I realized the trucks serving on the Westside would have never parked in Paramount, where I grew up, and the trucks that did park in Paramount would have never been welcomed on the Westside before the pop-culture boom. Skillman parked at the La Raza Foods Commissary next to the Grill 'Em All truck. That's how I met Ryan Harkins and the commissary management.

Before starting this project, I was the health beat reporter at KPCC for about four years. So, L.A. County Health Department officials were already familiar with my work. Earning the trust of long-established lonchera operators came after years of shooting private membership meetings of the Association of Loncheros and documenting their ongoing struggle for social justice.

8) Food trucks seem so claustrophobic. How did you manage to move around and shoot video inside?

Because of my one-man-band TV news reporting experience, I knew how to shoot quickly and work with bare-bones gear. My equipment generally consisted of a professional HDV camcorder, a wide-angle lens, a monopod, and a mountable Electronic News Gathering (ENG) light that I could screw into an attachable mount on top of the camera when needed. That streamlined approach minimized my presence inside food trucks because I could squeeze myself and my monopod against a wall and just focus on the action before me.

9) What's unique about the four-minute animated open?

The four-minute animation (in English, Spanish, and the indigenous Náhuatl language) traces street food from the El Pescadito mariscos (seafood) truck near South Los Angeles to open-air markets in Ancient Mexico. To write the script, I researched Mesoamerican codices under the tutelage of Cal State University, Northridge Chicano Studies Professor Fermin Herrera. To create authentic voices, we brought together Chicano Studies students from CSU Northridge and Ricardo Garcia, PhD, Santa Monica College Adjunct Instructor, for a Náhuatl language practice session. Then, we built the animation around those scenarios. Martin Espino relied mostly on his handcrafted instruments to create music in the Aztec tradition. The animation itself took two years to produce and cost about \$6,000.

10) How does *Backstreet to the American Dream* compare to the 2014 feature film, *Chef*?

Chef is a fictional feature film that had an \$11 million budget. *Backstreet to the American Dream* was grassroots from day one. It's a true story about the everyday lives of real people on their own journeys.

One connection between the two films is Chef Roy Choi. In *Chef*, Jon Favreau's character is loosely based on Choi's phenomenal success with his Kogi Korean BBQ Truck. Chef Choi also makes an appearance in *Backstreet to the American Dream*, cementing the cultural shift from immigrant-run loncheras operating largely outside mainstream visibility to food trucks becoming mainstream around the world.



TECHNICAL INFORMATION

GENRE

DOCUMENTARY FEATURE

MPA RATING

NOT RATED

COUNTRY

UNITED STATES / MEXICO

LANGUAGE

ENGLISH / SPANISH

RUNTIME

90 mins. | 100 mins. | Educational Edition: 54 mins. + 4 Course Modules (9-16 mins. each)

EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

5-Day Study Guide

FORMAT

HD (1920 x 1080)





LOGLINE

A bilingual, cross-cultural portrait of race, labor and class in modern-day America, following entrepreneurs from two radically different worlds as they pursue their slice of the American pie.

CAST

DOLORES HUERTA	PRESIDENTIAL MEDAL OF FREEDOM, 2012
SAL LOPEZ	ANIMATED OPEN VOICE ARTIST
GUILLERMINA VILLA RODRÍGUEZ	OWNER/OPERATOR, EL PESCADITO MARISCOS LONCHERA
CHEF ROY CHOI	KOGI KOREAN BBQ TRUCK, 2008
CHEF RYAN HARKINS	GRILL 'EM ALL, CO-FOUNDER, 2009
BILL ESPARZA	STREET FOOD EXPERT
LUIS VALDEZ	ZOOT SUIT PLAYWRIGHT & FILMMAKER

CREW

PATRICIA NAZARIO	DIRECTOR, PRODUCER, WRITER & EDITOR
MARTIN ESPINO	ORIGINAL MUSIC, ANIMATED OPEN
OCTAVIO PADILLA	AUDIO ENGINEER, ANIMATED OPEN
JULES RIVERA	LEAD ILLUSTRATOR
GEOFFREY BEATTY	LEAD ANIMATOR
HIGH FIVE AUDIO	RE-RECORDING MIXER
BIG GAME COLOR	COLORIST

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