

LATINX REPRESENTATION IN *SCREAM* AND *THE PURGE*: DEFYING LATINX
STEREOTYPES IN *THE FOREVER PURGE* AND COLOR-BLIND CASTING OF LATINA
FINAL GIRLS MELISSA BARRERA AND JENNA ORTEGA

by

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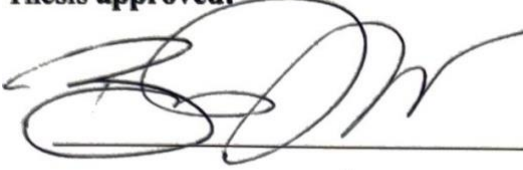
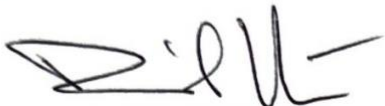
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APPROVAL

LATINX REPRESENTATION IN *SCREAM* AND *THE PURGE*: DEFYING
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CASTING of LATINA FINAL GIRLS MELISSA BARRERA AND JENNA
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ABSTRACT

LATINX REPRESENTATION IN *SCREAM* AND *THE PURGE*: DEFYING LATINX STEREOTYPES IN *THE FOREVER PURGE* AND COLOR-BLIND CASTING OF LATINA FINAL GIRLS MELISSA BARRERA AND JENNA ORTEGA

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The Scream and *Purge* franchises released sequel films during the pandemic that demonstrate how Hollywood addressed diversity. *Scream 5* and *6* highlight how the film industry uses color-blind casting of Melissa Barrera and Jenna Ortega to promote diversify but lacks telling nuanced stories about Latinx individuals without problematic stereotypes. *The Forever Purge* includes a diversified cast of Latinx individuals and filmmakers in front and behind the camera, which promotes a nuanced look at Latinx life in the Southwest.

Introduction

Othered Bodies, Bloody Knives



Figure 1: *Scream 6*'s Latinx Ghostface Killer (Anthony Revolori, a Guatemalan American actor) murders a film professor.

The horror genre has a history of othering Latinx, Black, and Indigenous characters. Since its inception, horror, as a genre, others Latinx, Black, and Indigenous characters. For instance, in the beginning of *Scream 6*, Jason Carvey, an early Ghostface killer, is a Latinx character that kills his white film professor. He is displayed as a stereotypical villainous character who catfishes a female professor to meet him for a date and lures her into a dark alley to brutally kill her. His display of horror plays off stereotypical portrayals of “Latino machismo and male domination over women” as being violent and frightening to white women (Hurtado and Mrinal 11). Latinx bodies have been historically stereotyped throughout early film history, one being “the *bandito* in spaghetti westerns,” promoting negative depictions of Latinx men as being “lazy, dirty, dishonest, and immortal” (Ramírez Berg 39). This violent attack continues to portray Latinx men and women as dangerous, violent, or dark oversexualized stereotypical tropes within the genre of horror. Shortly after he kills the professor another Ghostface killer kills him because Jason killed an innocent white woman. By having a Latino kill a white woman that the film represents as helpless, the film perpetuates the violent *bandito* stereotype. While every

Ghostface killer chooses violence and death as a form of punishment, what makes Jason's inclusion in the franchise different is that he indexes negative stereotypes about Latinx representation alongside this violence. Jason's death early in the film highlights the terms of the violence in this film are different than the films before it. Ghostface killers traditionally die towards the end of the film. However, Jason is the first Ghostface killer of color and thereby must die early in the film to maintain the franchise's investment in killing people of color early in the film. Jason kills an innocent white woman like previous Ghostface killers before him, but unlike these other killers he is punished and killed by another killer who wears the mask because he is a Latino.



Figure 2: Latinx Ghostface is then killed by another mysterious Ghostface villain.

Horror is a time capsule into society's fears and anxieties. Through the genre's monsters and villains, it reveals how "their bodies are always a cultural body" (Cohen 4). The genre asks us to "reevaluate our cultural understandings about race, gender, sexuality, or our perception about difference, and tolerance for expression" (20). Although horror was not established as a Hollywood "genre within film until the sound era" around the early 1930s, other countries were

making horror films (Thompson and Bordwell 206). Among the most notable films were German Expressionism films made during the 1920s (Thompson and Bordwell 206). Films like *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920) and *Nosferatu* (1922) portrayed their country's fears and anxieties during the post World War I era. German Expressionism often had intricate set designs that represented a dark and nightmarish world. Most monsters in these films were linked to antisemitic stereotypes, often displaying their monsters as being mentally insane, uncontrollably violent, or have freakishly long noses and fingers. The monstrosity that Germans used for early Jewish representation in these films advanced the political scapegoating that led to the horrors of the Holocaust. These stereotypes influenced Germans to other Jewish people and use them as scapegoat for Germany's loss of the war and the economic depression that followed. The success of German Expressionism influenced Universal Pictures to create films that mimicked their cinematography and use of monsters toward marginalized communities in the United States. Films like *Dracula*, (1931) *Frankenstein* (1931), and *The Mummy* (1932) othered non-western bodies and disabled individuals to advocate for their destruction during the eugenics movement.

Francis Galton coined the term eugenics from the Greek word that meant "good in stock" in his "1883 novel *Inquires into Human Faculty and its Development*" (Renwick 363). Galton's book popularized the eugenics movement that called for the "social reform of the human population through selective human reproduction due to the "degeneration" of the population" due to poverty and crime (Wester). As "the United States became more diverse" throughout the early 20th century due to "a massive rise in immigration from the 1880s and 1920s," white bourgeoisie societies began to "pressure cultural uniformity" and racism through eugenic ideologies (Kline 22). Hollywood used forms like horror to argue that anyone who could not conform to a specific bourgeoisie "behavior, ability, and white appearance" should be sterilized

or destroyed to benefit “greater society.” When eugenicists during the 1930’s advocated for the sterilization of “abnormality” within society many claimed that “race, class, and ethnicity” were not considered when advocating for who should reproduce or not. The U.S. eugenics movement influenced Hitler to create legislation to persecute Jewish individuals and others who were assumed to “be unfit to benefit the biological improvement of the white race” (Kline 22). As such, German Expressionism’s antisemitism informed Hollywood’s representation and investment in the U.S. eugenics movement which then informed Hitler and his concentration camps. Stated differently, white supremacist visual politics works transnationally to disenfranchise and dispossess marginalized communities on a global scale. The horror genre has used its monsters and antagonists to visually and rhetorically other marginalized communities and others who were seen as “unfit” within white society.

The slasher has continued the genre’s early traditions of othering Latinx and POC individuals’ bodies, subjecting them to violence through a white male gaze and stereotyped as overly violent or over sexualized. Hollywood often compared Latinx bodies to “great white heroes” who were portrayed as “moral, resourceful, brilliant, and intelligent,” to highlight their “superiority within the American landscape.” Hollywood promoted to the American public what was considered “the status-quo, which were “white, upper-middle-class, English speaking, and conformed to “Anglo beauty standards” (Ramírez Berg 67). Latina film stereotypes include “the Clown, the Harlot, and the Dark Lady,” which others their bodies because their non-conformity to white beauty standards. These stereotypes also portrayed Latinas as non-intelligent and moralistic (70). By exploring how the horror genre represents Latinidad, it showcases how the genre uses the objectification and othering of Latinx bodies to reflect America’s continued investment in whiteness. The racial reckoning of 2020 advocated for Black Lives Matter (BLM)

activism and for Hollywood to increase Black, Latinx, and other POC talent through social media activism. The *Scream* and *Purge* franchise released sequel films during the pandemic that demonstrate how Hollywood addressed issues of diversity in their cast. *Scream 5* and *6* highlight how the film industry uses color-blind casting to promote diversify but lacks telling nuanced stories about Latinx individuals without problematic stereotypes. *The Forever Purge* includes a diversified cast of Latinx individuals and filmmakers in front and behind the camera, which promotes a nuanced look at Latinx life in the Southwest. The film also advocates for the destigmatization of border migration and the end of geopolitical violence at the border.

The COVID19 pandemic allowed for America to reevaluate the structures of whiteness in our country, questioning how it affected diversity and inclusion within the film industry. In 2016, the hashtag #OscarsSoWhite ignited a social justice campaign that advocated for increased “diversity in front and behind the camera.” It led to more Latinx, Black, and other marginalized filmmakers to be nominated for Oscars and a “record 13 winners of color took home awards” (Ugwu). The United States shut down due to a global pandemic, many social justice activists utilized social media to promote the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement after the horrendous public murders of “George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery,” and many others by law enforcement. As more Black Americans and other marginalized communities “spoke freely about the racial injustices” they experienced in our country, major companies, and other professionals in various sectors of industry “began to join these conversations and condemn racism” (Blackwell).

Although they used their social media platforms to “release public statements that stated they stood in solidarity” with Black, Latinx, and other marginalized individuals to promote diversity and inclusion within these spaces, they did not diversify their work culture or hire more

marginalized individuals. In a *National Urban League's* "State of Black America" report, human and civil right activists and educators found that Black quality of life and success in "economic, education, and civil engagement had only seen a 0.2 % improvement" in these sectors of wellbeing compared to white Americans. The National Urban League also found that "the state of racial equity between Latinx and white Americans was around 21% when comparing economic, education," and other forms of opportunities for success compared to white individuals (State of Black America). After the incredible increase of BLM and other social justice activism, opposition to change white dominated structures and industries within America "worked double-time to squelch progress and maintain systems of discrimination and bigotry" (Blackwell).

In 2020, Matt Bettinelli-Olpin and Tyler Gillett were hired direct the *Scream 5* after the project was greenlit by Spyglass Media Group. The film also had a delayed release in 2022 due to the COVID19 pandemic on streaming platforms and theaters. The summer of 2020 pushed production companies to increase Black, Latinx, and other diverse representation of marginalized communities within their films. Instead of creating a slasher film that included social commentary about race relations in America, Spyglass Media, Bettinelli-Olpin, and Gillett used their film to advocate for traditionalist horror narratives. The film uses Ghostface's hatred for elevated horror films to discuss the discourse between traditionalist horror fans and elevated horror fans, highlighting how traditionalist horror fans want the genre to focus on white anxieties and fears. Although *Scream 5* included an increase of diverse actors in front of the camera, Latina Final Girl's Melissa Barrera and Jenna Ortega are stereotyped as a monstrous Dark Lady to defend themselves from antagonists and their bodies are fetishized through a white male gaze through violence.

The Forever Purge was another sequel horror film created during the COVID19 pandemic by executive producer and creator James DeMonaco. Although the film was meant to be released in 2020, the fifth *Purge* film was “released in July in 2021 in theaters” (IMDb). *The Purge* creator specifically wanted to use his sequel film to discuss the horrors of the Mexican American border and advocate for positive migration. He hired Everardo Gout, a Mexican filmmaker, to direct the film and through his recommendations hired two Mexican actors Ana de la Reguera and Tenoch Huerta. Gout worked side by side with DeMonaco to create strong Latinx main characters that defied the *bandito* and oversexualized Latina stereotypes. Critics described the film as being too direct and didactic about its representation of white supremacy and violence. The film’s message about the horrors of border politics and racism requires directness because horror as a genre continues to indirectly focus on white anxieties and fears. As elevated horror films continue to gain popularity and discuss social issues that matter most to Latinx and other marginalized individuals, diverse filmmakers are now able to change how the genre tells Latinx and other POC individuals’ stories and experiences.

The slasher movie contained a recognizable formula of the “teen slasher story-structure” that depicts a “shadowy blade-wielding killer responding to an event by stalking and murdering the members of a youth group before the threat he or she poses is neutralized” (Nowell 20). In 1978, the most notorious slasher film, *Halloween* premiered in theaters and introduced one of horror’s most infamous Final Girl’s with main character, Laurie Strode who was portrayed by Jamie Lee Curtis¹. The Final Girl trope was coined by film scholar Carol J. Clover, who defined this lone female survivor as “the one who encounters the mutilated bodies of her friends” and

¹ Jamie Lee Curtis became a “Scream Queen” similarly like her mother. She would continue to star and guest star in over seven films in the *Halloween* franchise.

who viewers see scream throughout the whole movie as she is “chased, cornered, and wounded.” She alone looks “death in the face,” but also surprisingly “finds the strength to stay the killer long enough to be rescued or to kill her attacker herself” (Clover 35). The Final Girl is the film’s main character who stands out from her rambunctious friend group and stereotyped as a geeky character who is “not sexually active” and is “intelligent and resourceful” (39). This Final Girl trope is used within almost all slasher films, showcasing how these leading women characters defy traditionalist gender norms by using their ingenuity and strength to fight against their assailant.

When *Scream* released into theaters, the film became an instant success with young adult and teenage audiences, revitalizing the genre’s popularity. The popularity of the film created a massively successful slasher franchise that featured Neve Campbell, as Sidney Prescott, the franchise’s white female Final Girl character through *Scream 1* through *4*. Then *Scream 5* film introduced horror fans to Samantha and Tara Carpenter, who became the franchise’s new Final Girls, who are portrayed by Latina actresses Melissa Barrera and Jenna Ortega. Compared to Sidney Prescott’s Final Girl portrayal, Sam, and Tara Carpenter’s Latinx identity and experiences are absent from *Scream 5* and *Scream 6*, highlighting a lack of three-dimensional representation of its Latina Final Girls within the franchise. Unfortunately, Matt Bethinelli-Olpin and Tyler Gillet create a one-dimensional look into Latinx life and culture in *Scream 5* and *6*’s main Final Girls. Color-blind casting whitewashes Sam and Tara Carpenter’s Latinx identity and limits the possibility of their culture to upend the erasure of these marginalized groups in the horror genre. By analyzing how *Scream* highlights Sidney Prescott as a three-dimensional character and third-wave feminist icon, horror enthusiasts can be able to see the lack of three-dimensional pillars of characterization with Sam and Tara Carpenter, *Scream 5* and *6*’s Latina

Final Girls. With this lack of three-dimensional representation, the *Scream* franchise perpetrates an erasure of Latinx experiences and the permeation of Latinx stereotypes within the industry.

The COVID 19 pandemic ushered in a new reckoning for diversity within the film industry and led filmmakers within *The Purge* and *Scream* franchise to diversify their cast with Latinx actors. As the world stopped during a global pandemic, the well-established *Scream* franchise used its fandom and influence to hire talented Latinx actresses Melissa Barrera and Jenna Ortega as their main female characters, or Latina Final Girls. Compared to white Final Girl Sidney Prescott, the Latina actresses are portrayed as monstrous, unwanted in their communities, and are subjected to violence to appease the male gaze. *The Purge* also used their fifth installment, *The Forever Purge*, to tell a more nuanced story about Latinx life in Southwest Texas, displaying the racism and othering Latinx individuals face while dealing with the geopolitical politics of the Mexican American border. It is important for the film industry and horror genre to be more inclusive when depicting Latinx and other marginalized groups of people. It is essential to add in front and behind the camera Latinx representation to help bring to life more nuanced stories. Since their inception in 1996 and 2013, *Scream* and *The Purge* has given horror fans iconic survival stories that have captured our anxieties, fears, and experiences that are reminiscent for almost every generation of people. With these stories, these franchises have garnered cult-classic status and worldwide popularity which has helped shaped the genre of horror and how we tell stories. As the industry utilizes color-blind casting to promote diversity amongst popular shows today like HBO's *House of Dragon* (2022-), Netflix's *Bridgerton* (2020-), and other shows, often these Latinx, Black, and POC characters are portraying historically or originally written white characters. As the industry relies on color-blind casting and stereotypical stories about Latinx and POC individuals, the industry needs to diversify in front and behind the

camera representation and talent to create more stories about Latinx and other marginalized people that are created for our diverse communities.

Chapter 1 The Emergence of the Slasher Film and The Final Girl Trope

The emergence of the slasher film as a subgenre of horror, began with films like Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*, a film that depicted the infamous knife wielding shower murder scene of main character Marion Crane, who was portrayed by Janet Leigh². Although films like *Psycho* are classified as a thriller, during the sixties, films within the horror and suspense genres were exploring new ways to tell darker and graphic storylines as the age of the Hays Code ended in 1968. The Hays Code was "a set of rules and guidelines that Hollywood films" followed between 1934 and 1968 that portrayed pro-Christian morales that were meant to make films more "presentable and safe for the public" (Abreu). The Hays Code centered on conservative values in an attempt to create films that were presentable for family viewing. As such the Hays Code prohibited nudity, explicit sexual scenes, swearing, and other offensive language in films. After the Hays Code's ending, the seventies became an era known for grindhouse theater showings of exploitation films that depicted graphic imagery of sex and violence on screen.

Grindhouse theaters were "independently operated theaters located in downtown or inner-city areas, showing double or triple features of exploitation films at all hours" and had low admission cost per showing (Church). Exploitation films contained sensationalist themes and scenes that were created with cheap production budgets, usually including graphic scenes of sex, violence, and other social taboos³. Although exploitation films have been around since the

² Janet Leigh is Jamie Lee Curtis's mother, another iconic "Scream Queen" known for her role in *Halloween*.

³ Exploitation films were not "hard-core pornographic" films, but included topics like "sex hygiene, burlesque films, and other topics that were deemed as forbidden to view in mainstream theaters during the 1920s to the 1960s. Eric Shafer discusses this in page 6 in his novel "Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!" a History of Exploitation Films, 1919-1959."

1920s⁴, throughout the Hays Code era, exploitation films were “separated from mainstream theaters” and were distributed through independent producers and “local independents called states’ righters” who traveled across the country and leased grindhouse theaters to show these less advertised films (Shaefer 4). Although at first early exploitation film screenings didn’t have large crowds, word of mouth brought larger audiences throughout the Hays Code era to find these films that contained non-conservative storylines during the rise of the sexual revolution in the sixties. Exploitation films allowed for adults in urban communities to find escapism pleasure from these films that offered “subtle endorsements of non-conservative lifestyles” and desires (341). This birthed the creation of the slasher subgenre in the early seventies as the Hays Code era ended and films like *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Black Christmas* premiered in mainstream theaters in 1974.

As mentioned above, *Halloween* became a box office success, the genre entered its golden era of slasher films from 1978 to 1984 with a slew of copycat films that tried to recreate John Carpenter’s hit film like *When a Stranger Calls* (1979), *Friday the 13th* (1980), and much more. Horror film director Wes Craven also excelled in the slasher genre, creating iconic films like *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977) and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984). Although slasher films were gaining box office success, many independent filmmakers assumed the slasher fad would fade and began to “develop four types of youth to market films”. This included a production of “gang movies, animal comedies, roller-disco movies, and female coming-of-age dramas,” which produced movies like *Saturday Night Fever* (1977), *Animal House* (1978), *Grease* (1978), and *Flashdance* (1983) (Norwell 112). This led to a decline of slasher films during the late eighties

⁴ First few exploitation films were sex hygiene films that were censored during the 1920s. Shafer discusses this in page 18 in his novel “Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!”.

and early nineties, but an “incline of classical horror film types” that included films about vampires with the adaptation of Annie Rice’s *Interview with a Vampire* (1994), *Bram Stoker’s Dracula* (1992), and more (117). The slasher genre was at an all-time low as Wes Craven began to develop his hit 1996 film *Scream*.

The first installment in the *Scream* franchise is one of the most successful slasher films to date and brought the franchise into the cultural milieu of the late 1990s and the early 2000s. The Ghostface mask is now one of the enduring symbols of horror and gore. *Scream* earned over “\$173 million dollars in worldwide box offices compared to the film’s original budget of \$14 million” (IMDb). The film’s “ultimate success was with critics and audiences,” since it was promoted through “word of mouth and rated favorably” (S. West 113). *Scream* introduced a knife-wielding slasher who kills his way through the teenage population in the small fictional town of Woodsboro, California. Wes Craven, the creator of the film franchise, wielded his killer as an allegory for 90s fear of fading pro-Christian morals as 90s teenagers and young adults revered “pop culture icons, reality tv, casual drug use,” and other anti-conservative traits while living in a post-modernist world (A. West 2). Teenagers were growing up with more technology than earlier generations and straying away from Christian moralist beliefs, engaging in premarital sex, and becoming more desensitized to violence as it’s reenacted on screen for voyeuristic entertainment. Craven “created a new sub-genre of “postmodern” slasher films” with meta commentary that “acknowledged the audience’s understanding” of horror film tropes” (S. West 119). The filmmaker criticized horror tropes that included the lonely, ostracized teen turned killer, the young unsuspecting teenager at a house party who utters “I’ll be right back” to become the killer’s next brutalized victim, and the Final Girl’s fight to be more than a victim but a survivor. Sidney Prescott was the *Scream* franchise’s Final Girl. After the gruesome murders of

her friends, she discovers that her boyfriend Billy Loomis and his friend Stu Macher are behind not only the countless Woodsboro teenage deaths but are also responsible for her mother's death.

In *Scream 2* (1997), the horror franchise attempts to diversify its cast with Jada Pinkett-Smith (Maureen Evans) and Omar Epps (Phil Stevens) who portray a Black couple at the movie theaters. During the opening scene, both characters embody the trope of becoming "the first Black individuals to die within a horror film" (Means Coleman 37). The film also includes Black actress Elise Neil (Hallie McDaniel), who plays Sidney's college best friend. Neil's character is stereotyped into being the sympathetic Black sidekick because her "entire existence is inextricably tied to the main protagonist, and all of their actions revolve around the lead" (80). Just like Scatman Crother's character (Dick Hallorann) within *The Shinning* (1980), Neil's character "dies to save the life of the white protagonist" and becomes another "Sacrificial Negro" character who dies in a horror film (37). *Scream 3* (2000) and *Scream 4* (2011) also contain supporting Black actors Deon Richmond (Tyson Fox) and Anthony Anderson (Deputy Anthony Perkins) whose characters meet untimely deaths during these two films. Although the franchise tries to diversify their cast with Pinkett-Smith, Epps, Neil, Richmond, and Anderson, *Scream's* sequel films continue to stereotype Black characters in horror as sacrificial tropes and problematic white saviors.

In Wes Craven's final film, *Scream 4*, he ties his film franchise's discussion about "our contemporary fears about random, senseless violence perpetrated by media-saturated young men as a means of engaging a media-saturated audience who has seen it all" (S. West 123). Neve Campbell's portrayal as Final Girl Sidney Prescott within the *Scream* franchise ended with a soft bang after *Scream 4* closed their box office numbers at "97 million worldwide with an overall

budget of \$40 million,” earning significantly less compared to past successful *Scream* films (IMDb). Originally, Craven “expressed a desire to make two or more *Scream* movies,” hoping to create a “new trilogy” around *Scream 4*. In 2011, Harvey Weinstein, who at the time was “the Weinstein Company’s Chief and executive producer of the entire *Scream* film franchise,” commented that “although *Scream 4* didn’t do as well domestically” in box office sales, the film gained around “97 million worldwide,” showcasing the film franchise’s potential continuance with more sequels helmed by Craven and Weinstein’s Company (Wigler). Although after “dozens of women went public with accusations of sexual misconduct” against Harvey Weinstein that “went back decades,” the media company that once financed the *Scream* film franchise became bankrupt after a “staggering array of lawsuits” and was sold off (Boghoni). From 2018 to 2019, the *Scream* franchise was in limbo, looking for a new financier and production company to continue Craven’s dream of creating a new *Scream* trilogy.

In 2019, Spyglass Media Group acquired the rights of *Scream* from the Weinstein Company and “began developing a new *Scream* sequel film at first without previous screenwriter Kevin Williamson,” who is known for his work in other horror and slasher related films such as *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (1997) and *The Faculty* (1998) (Miska). Although *Scream 5* included legacy characters from Wes Craven’s *Scream* films “Neve Campbell, David Arquette, and Courtney Cox” to reprise their roles, *Scream 5* was “set to be a reboot” of the previous film series with a new main cast of characters (Bone). In 2020, Melissa Barrera, Mexican Latinx actress known for her roles *In the Heights* (2021), was hired as the leading actress, Sam Carpenter, in *Scream 5*. Spyglass Media also hired Jenna Ortega, another Latinx actress, as the supporting role of Tara Carpenter, as the main character’s younger sister. In the same year, Matt Bettinelli-Opllin and Tyler Gillet were also hired on to direct *Scream 5* after their success with

horror-comedy film *Ready or Not* (2019) that was made by their production company Radio Silence. After a few production delays due to the COVID 19 Pandemic, *Scream 5* was released in theaters January 14th, 2022 and streaming on Paramount Plus. *Scream 5* became a success by earning over “\$137 million worldwide with an original budget of \$24 million” (IMDb). With this success, Bettinelli-Oplin, Gillet, and Spyglass Media released *Scream 6* in theaters on March 10th, 2023, with Barrera and Ortega reprising their roles.

Scream 5 dealt with a lot of challenges when creating a sequel for a popular horror franchise since the first *Scream* film opened more than 25 years ago. Matt Bettinelli-Oplin and Tyler Gillet were hoping to market their film to teenage audiences just as Wes Craven did with 1996’s *Scream*. To reel in a new generation of teenage and young adult movie-watchers, Spyglass Media and *Scream 5*’s directors decided to diversify their new young adult cast by casting Barrera, Ortega, and other POC actors. Mason Gooding (Chad Meeks-Martin) and Jasmine Savoy Brown (Mindy Meeks-Martin) are bi-racial actors who are niece and nephew to Randy Meeks, a supporting character within *Scream*, *Scream 2*, and *Scream 3*. Gooding and Brown also reprised their roles as Mindy and Chad Meeks-Martin in *Scream 6* (2023) as main cast members instead of supporting roles. By including new character linkages to past legacy *Scream* characters, Bettinelli-Oplin and Gillet were able to bring in young adult moviegoers to see the new horror sequel with a fresh new cast of young characters and bring back original *Scream* horror fans to watch legacy characters.

Chapter 2 Scream's Final Girls and Third Wave Feminism

Although *Scream 5* and *Scream 6* offer movie-goers a more visually diversified cast of POC characters, earlier films *Scream 1* through *4* focused on Sidney Prescott, a white woman's fight for survival from multiple Ghostface killers. Throughout the first four *Scream* films, horror movie-goers were able to see Sidney's character grow from a fearful teenager to a kick-ass hero who defied traditional stereotypes of horror's Final Girl. Slashers of the eighties focused on "elaborate deaths and fantastic practical effects with minimal attention paid to the backstory and emotional state of the Final Girl and other female characters in these films. Secondary women characters in slasher films were stereotypically "sliced and diced due to their own silliness or sexuality," displaying a flat dimensional view of womanhood and their lack to protect themselves from male perpetrators. As the Final Girl defeats her assailant, she becomes a "phenomenon that disrupts mainstream characterization practices" of women in horror, creating a symbolic feminist icon within the genre. *Scream* and other nineties slashers challenged the "horror landscape by creating a template in which freedom, survival, and desire of the Final Girl was dependent on subduing" her assailant physically and metaphorically (A. West 4). Sidney's fight against the Ghostface killers showcase how she was able to metaphorically subdue the personification of one-dimensional female horror characters and physically be non-reliant on male protection during her final fight for survival. Ultimately, Sidney's ability to fight Ghostface killers is indicative of her character's broader fight to break out of the one-dimensional characterization of women in horror.

The original four *Scream* movies "exemplify postmodern aesthetic and cultural values at the time" through Sidney's plight against "generational guilt and excess sexual and physical violence" within nineties and millennial culture. Wes Craven's four *Scream* films "raise key

issues in the lives of teen girls,” which involved contemporary post-modern morals around “sexuality and virginity, adult femininity and it’s relation to agency and power, and how feminine identity is shaped by pop culture.” Ghostface is personified as an antagonistic force against the rise of “third wave feminism of “Girl Power” that advocated for sexual and feministic liberation (Karlyn). The *Scream* franchise presented their Final Girl, Sidney Prescott, as a main feminine character who could defend herself against patriarchal forces that tried to bog down a new wave of feministic film portrayals in horror and assert her own form of agency within the 21st century post-modern era.

Third wave feminism⁵ is defined as a wave of feminism that “explores personal narratives that illustrate an intersectional and multi-perspectivity” of feminine icons and characters within the media. “Unlike their mother’s generation, who had to prove themselves,” third-wave feminists advocated for “equality and self-fulfillment” in a means to destabilize patriarchal social and political structures (Snyder 176). Independent female pop culture icons and “Girl Boss” white women portrayed third wave feminist ideals in film, even if they were inactive in fighting “continuing injustices” against women of color and other marginalized groups. “Girl Boss” portrayals in film included women who “could dress in provocative clothing while demonstrating fierce physical prowess” and advocate for female autonomy at the same time (Karlyn). “Girl Bosses” are known to be women who are “self-made and acting as their own boss,” promoting change in patriarchal institutions within the workforce, which includes the film industry (Worthen). Although this wave of feminism wanted to “challenge the assumption of a universal female identity,” pop culture icons and the majority of female Final Girls in horror

⁵ There have been critical discussions from Feminist scholars to move away from discussing feminism progress and change as “waves.”

“over-emphasized the experiences of upper-middle class white women” (A. West 3). *Scream* highlights strong third-wave feministic characters that defy stereotypical portrayals of helpless damsels in distress as Sidney Prescott and Gale Weathers (Courtney Cox), a reporter covering the Ghostface Woodsboro murders work together to take down the Ghostface murderers in the last act of the film.

Sidney and Gale exemplify intersectional and multi-perspective third wave feminism through their characterization in the *Scream* franchise. They are female icons who use their independence and non-reliance of protection from male figures to metaphorically destabilize patriarchal social and political structures. Gale is portrayed as a top television reporter within Woodsboro, wearing bold two-piece matching suits sets⁶ and acts as an authoritative figure who bosses around her cameraman to create news segments that highlight her journalistic talents. *Scream* uses Gale to push back stereotypical feminine portrayals of “the ambitious career woman and bloodthirsty tabloid TV, both targets of derision in our culture” (Karlyn). *Scream* reimagines Gale as a relatable character with dreams, ambitions, and flaws who refuses to be domesticated. Gale Weathers is not afraid to ask controversial questions about Sidney’s mother, Maureen Prescott, who died a year before the Woodsboro murders. Although Gale’s prying upsets Sidney and her best friend’s brother, Dewy Riley, a police officer who is investigating the murders; Gale is the first person to question if the man Sidney accused of killing her mother, Cotton Weary, was her mother’s real murderer. Throughout the film, Gale flirts with Dewey to get insider information about the Woodsboro murders and even engages in a relationship with him, displaying her “girl boss” prowess by being a desirable feminine character toward white men and a strong top-tiered journalist.

⁶ Gale wears a bold highlighter yellow matching suit set in *Scream*.

After her mother's death, Sidney's childhood is effectively over, since her father is often on business out of town and stays home alone within her large house. Sidney independently gets herself to and from school, completes homework assignments, and handles the care for her home. When she is threatened by Ghostface via phone, Sidney even questions her father's absence, wondering if he is behind the killings for a moment, realizing how her independence has made her a target for a Ghostface attack. Although it is later revealed that her father was kidnapped by the Ghostface killers, Sidney learns about the connection between her mother's death and the teenage murders when Ghostface admits he is responsible for the all the violent crime in her Californian town. Both Gale and Sidney represent strong feministic third-wave characters who defy traditionalist patriarchal structures with their independence and intelligence, but they exemplify the white female upper-middle class experience within the *Scream* franchise. Wes Craven's film series also focuses on nationalistic fears of the destruction of white virginity and violence, not shrinking from the "realization that sex is tied to violence and power." As Sidney tries to find love, protection, and support from her boyfriend, Billy Loomis, who in the beginning of *Scream* embodies stereotypical "female fantasies of Prince Charming boyfriends," she assumes she is safe from the threat of Ghostface (Karlyn). Although the film reverses this myth, showcasing how the heroic male can also become a perpetrator that endangers not only her virginity, but her life also. After Billy Loomis accomplishes his goal of taking Sidney's virginity, he assumes that he has taken Sidney's confidence and autonomy away as he unmask himself as a Ghostface killer.

Before his unmasking, Billy discusses Sidney's lack of sexual intimacy in their relationship in Stu's parent's home during a party, realizing that she is haunted with images of her dead mother whenever they are intimate. He compares her to "Jody Foster in *Silence of the*

Lambs (1991), when she keeps having flashbacks of her dead mother,” to which Sidney replies “but this is life. This isn’t a movie.” Billy on the other hand disagrees, “sure it is Sid. It’s all a movie. It’s all one great big movie” (Compura 81). Billy believes that the tropes in the slasher genre affect the living world and assumes once he reveals himself as one of the Ghostface killers that Sidney will not be able to have the physical or mental strength to fight her life. He assumes that this destruction of Sidney’s virginity will destroy her status as a Final Girl icon, which metaphorically preserves the pro-white male superiority structure of patriarchy within their world and the horror genre. Although like other strong-female characters who metaphorically demonstrated the rise of third-wave feminism in media and television like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) and *Xena the Warrior Princess* (1995-2001), Sidney fights Billy and Stu by using her own intelligence and strength to destroy these patriarchal antagonistic forces that threaten the rise of feminism in American postmodern culture and film.

When analyzing multiple portrayals of third-wave feminism within nineties television and film, these television shows and films promote feminism that is reserved for only white women. Since third-wave feminism acts as an anthesis toward the destruction of white virginity, Melissa Barrera and Jenna Ortega’s characters, Sam and Tara Carpenter, are color-blind casted as third-wave feminist icons and Final Girls whose culture and identity as Latina women is ignored and erased. Color blind casting “assumes that color is the least consequential or least significant element when evaluated alongside age, gender, and race,” and as a result, “it can be ignored or overlooked” (Day 344). This form of casting, also known as “nontraditional casting,” casts individuals in roles “where race, ethnicity, or gender are not germane to the character’s development” or overall storyline within a film (Sun 87). Although this type of casting is assumed to give more actors of color hard to find roles, instead it creates an erasure of POC and

other marginalized group's culture, identity, and struggles for equality within the film industry. Just like Melissa Barrera and Jenna Ortega were casted as leading roles within a popular horror franchise, this form of "color blind casting might land a few promising actors' prestigious roles, but it doesn't address the systematic problems that exist behind" and front of the camera, "nor does it compel Hollywood to tell more racially aware stories" (Bastién). This form of color-blind casting creates an erasure of Latinx identity, culture, and race within the film series that perpetuates problematic Latinx stereotypes and forbid storylines that bring the Latinx experience to life.

To tell more nuanced stories about Latinx and other POC individuals, three-dimensional character representation within film helps display a character's unique "physiology, psychology, and sociology." This gives an audience a unique viewership into how a character's "habits, attitudes, and other characteristics" show how an individual "behaves differently from another." Three-dimensional representation highlights a protagonist's physiology, "a description of the physical aspects of a character that may affect the character's feelings regarding his or her surroundings." The protagonist's psychology is displayed through the "character's unique behavior, emotions, and thoughts." A character's psychology is also represented by their visual and mental strength during major conflicts within the film. Then lastly, the protagonist's sociology shows how they fit organically within their communities and world. A character's sociology can also be analyzed through their "social life, job, education, and social status" (Mulyawan 9). By analyzing Sidney Prescott's physiology, psychology, and sociology within 1996's *Scream*, audiences will be able to see how director Wes Craven and screenwriter Kevin Williamson were able to give three-dimensional representation and unique characterization for their white Final Girl.



Figure 3: Sidney Prescott Inhabiting the Final Girl "Good Girl" Stereotype.

Audiences are introduced to Sidney Prescott, who is portrayed by Neve Campbell, in the beginning of *Scream* as a studious teenager who is working independently on her homework. She is informed by her father that he is going away for a business trip, which seems typical for this father-daughter duo. Sidney's physiology or physical personification of a clean and primly dressed teenager articulates to audiences that she is a smart intelligent girl who is valued by her family that fits "good girl" character stereotype. During this time, Billy, her boyfriend of two years, expresses his concerns about their relationship and lack of sexual intimacy. This scene indicates that since her mother died, Sidney has been dealing with trauma that has caused her to fear intimacy with her boyfriend. As Billy leaves her bedroom through her window, Sidney asks if "he would be interested in a PG-13 relationship," displaying the emotional baggage to she is working through when it comes to dealing with the sexual assault and murder of her mother. Sidney's interaction with Billy showcases her mental health and psychology when it comes to dealing with grief and trauma, displaying a realistic depiction of how trauma has affected this young teenager's life.

When Sidney learns about her classmate, Casey, who is the first teenager killed by Ghostface in the opening of *Scream*, she listens to her friend group discuss Casey's gruesome murder. Sidney's friend group includes her best friend Tatum, her boyfriend Stu, Randy, and Billy, whom discuss who could be the mysterious killer and argue that the murderer is more likely a male instead of a female. They discuss the murder callously, to which Sidney asks a rhetorical question "but how could you gut someone," reminding the teens of the horrific nature of Casey's death. Sidney's friend group is silent at first until they begin to joke about Stu, who used to date Casey previously, could be the potential murderer who "sliced and diced her." Although Sidney has little to no dialogue in this scene, this highlights her psychology and everyday life interactions, specifically being the voice of reason with her friend group. This scene also highlights how alienated she feels from her teenage friends who could make jokes about death when she is still traumatized by the violent death of her mother. The scene ends as Sidney arrives at her empty home, where she receives her first Ghostface phone call.

At first when Ghostface proceeds to ask Sidney "What's your favorite scary movie," Sidney assumes her friend Randy is playing a prank on her and says, "you know I don't watch that shit." She tells Ghostface that "They're all the same. Some stupid killer stalking some big-breasted girl who can't act, who's always running up the stairs when she should be going out the front door." Sidney demonstrates how she is used to navigating her world and dealing with challenging life experiences by herself, especially as she uses self-defense to fight Ghostface and contacts 911 through her computer because her phone line is disconnected. When she accuses Billy of being her attacker⁷, Dewey, Tatum, and other community members rally around Sidney

⁷ Billy comes to Sidney's rescue a little too fast and when he climbs into her window a cell phone in his pocket falls to the floor, indicating he could have called Sidney as Ghostface.

to protect her from another Ghostface attack and media attention. When Gale tries to bombard her with questions about her attack, Sidney deflects these questions by asking about Gale's book, which is about her mother's death, and punches her for exploiting her mother's murder. The town of Woodsboro rallies again behind *Scream*'s Final Girl since none of the police press charges for assaulting Gale, showcasing Sidney's sociology within Woodsboro. This scene displays Sidney's importance within the Californian community that goes to great lengths to protect an endangered white teenager.

After school is canceled and Woodsboro instills a nightly curfew, Sidney and other Woodsboro teenagers have a party at Stu's home, wanting to watch a slew of classic horror films. Sidney sits with the rest of her peers' asking questions about Jamie Lee Curtis's appearance in multiple horror films⁸, where Randy and other classmates let her know that she is known as a "scream queen" of horror. This small scene displays how her own teenage peers consider Sidney an important member in their community. When the teenagers learn of their principal's murder by Ghostface, they quickly leave the party⁹, which leaves Sidney, Randy, Dewy, and Gale vulnerable to a Ghostface attack. Once Billy and Stu reveal their motivations for donning the Ghostface masks, they reveal their plan to frame Sidney's father for Woodsboro's murders and kill off the film's Final Girl. Gale attempts to save Sidney by stealing Stu's gun and points it at the killers, showcasing her girl boss ingenuity. "Man, I thought she was dead," Billy exclaims, to which Gale replies that "I like this ending, where the reporter saves the day."

Although she is disarmed from the gun, this gives Sidney time to formulate a plan to take down

⁸ Jamie Lee Curtis has been in horror movies like (1980) *The Fog*, (1980) *Prom Night*, (1980) *Terror Train*, and many other *Halloween* sequels.

⁹ This scene is a metaphorical demonstration of fears that 90s teenagers were losing their connections to communal ties for cheap entertainment like MTV.

the Ghostface killers herself, using Billy and Stu's Ghostface tricks to threaten them via phone. Sidney uses their Ghostface voice modifier, saying she called the police and decides to use household items as weapons to defend herself. Gale returns to save Sidney and uses the previously forgotten gun to shoot Billy. As Sidney, Gale, and Randy assess if the terrorization of Ghostface is finally over, Randy reminds the women that "this is the moment where the supposedly dead killer comes back to life for one last scare." As Randy predicted, Billy lunges up to terrorize Sidney for one last scare. After Sidney kills Billy, Randy and Gale function as a united front that approves of Sidney's actions, highlighting how both the adults and teens within her town advocate for Sidney's right to defend herself from these vicious killers.



Figure 4: Sidney Prescott supported by her friends at the end of (1996) Scream.

Sidney's sociology is demonstrated by how both her adult and teenager peers fight alongside *Scream's* Final Girl to protect her from Billy and Stu. This also demonstrates her importance within Woodsboro and the community's need to protect innocent endangered white women from the grips of villainous men. Sidney Prescott's Final Girl character showcases all three aspects of three-dimensional representation within Wes Craven's *Scream* films. Compared

to Sidney Prescott, Sam (Melissa Barrera) and Tara Carpenter's (Jenna Ortega) lack the representation of their sociology within Bethinelli-Olpin and Gillet's *Scream* films. This lack of representation excludes how Sam and Tara's Latinx culture, identity, and experiences affect their communities and how audiences see the world through their lens.

Scream 5's opening scene begins with Tara Carpenter (Jenna Ortega) home alone at night answering her landline phone, when Ghostface asks his iconic line from the first *Scream*, "what's your favorite scary movie?" Tara gives a poignant answer about admiring "elevated horror" movies that address social issues and other postmodern concerns. Ghostface mocks her taste in horror movies, preferring jump scares and the gory special effects of slasher movies. This meta conversation about horror movie tastes depicts Tara as a third wave feminist icon who is knowledgeable about recent horror films in the last decade that depict strong feministic characters with three-dimensional characterization¹⁰. This horrifying scene where *Scream 5's* Tara Carpenter is attacked also perpetuates problematic stereotypes that objectify Latina bodies as a disposable commodity for the male gaze. The male gaze subjects' women's bodies to be "displayed as sexual objects" as a form of an "erotic spectacle to evoke male desire." This form of desire is achieved when a film camera captures a scene with an "active male and a passive female that plays an exhibitionist role to be looked at and displayed" for male pleasure. (Mulvey 809). Ghostface uses a knife not only to inflict violence, but to "arouse himself sexually," getting off on subjecting Tara to fear and pain while he inflicts multiple stab wounds on the teenager (Clover 78). By surviving a vicious attack from Ghostface, Tara's body is rendered stronger than most white women's bodies because she is given "overly strong superwomen like qualities" to

¹⁰ Tara mentions films like (2018) *Hereditary*, (2014) *It Follows*, and (2019) *Midsommar*, which all contain three-dimensional characterization of white Final Girls and main characters.

survive multiple stab wounds. “This characterization” of Latinx and other POC women “as overly strong and superhuman in all aspects is a method of dehumanization” (Brooks 26). By using Tara’s attack as a symbolic scene to evoke the male gaze and giving her super strength abilities, this subjects her Latinx body to be othered and used as a commodity for male entertainment and pleasure.



Figure 5: Tara Carpenter is attacked in her home by Ghostface.

It is common to see a “hyper sexualization” of Latina bodies within film and the horror genre. Salma Hayek, a very successful Spanish and Lebanese actress, during the beginning of her career took on roles where her body was hypersexualized in films like *From Dusk Till Dawn* (1996) and more. Produced by Latino filmmaker Robert Rodriguez, Hayek played a “bikini-clad erotic vampire demon who seduces and attempts to murder two Anglo protagonists.” Robert Rodriguez is known for going against action genre stereotypes when it comes to creating Latino heroes within films like *El Mariachi* (1992). Rodriguez portrays his Latino protagonist as a “non-physically exceptional superman that redefines heroism and masculinity” in a non-white male body (Ramírez-Berg 234). Although with *From Dusk Till Dawn*, he has been criticized for portraying Latina women as monsters “who will use and abuse men.” Rodriguez admits that his

vision of portraying a “Latina enacting revenge on oppressive white men got lost within the film.¹¹” (250). In another film *54* (1998), Hayek plays a “wanton woman who openly exchanges her body for the right professional connections,” showcasing her body as a “sexualized ethnic spectacle.” Similarly to how Jenna Ortega’s body is subjected to violence to evoke male desire, both Hayek and Ortega’s bodies “provide a voyeuristic moment of sexual fantasy” for a white audience (Guzmán 120). This form of hypersexuality and othering demonstrates how Latina bodies are used as a commodity and portrayed as stereotypical one-dimensional heroines within the horror genre.

After the first attack scene in *Scream 5*, the audience is introduced to our other Latina Final Girl, Sam (Melissa Barrera), who lives away from Woodsboro and gets a phone call from one of Tara’s friend’s, Wes, that Tara was attacked. This prompts Sam to return to her hometown of Woodsboro and check in on her little sister. Sam is shown to be in a committed relationship with her boyfriend, Richie, and has a fulfilling life away from Woodsboro and doesn’t wish to return. Audiences learn that Sam willingly left her hometown to escape her mother’s destiny because she is Billy Loomis’s daughter. Sam is portrayed as an alienated woman who is not welcomed by her community and is accompanied by her boyfriend when she returns to Woodsboro. Tara’s friend, Amber expresses that if she comes to their town that “watch everything will get worse.” Although Tara’s high school peers know nothing about her connection to Loomis, they convey she is unwanted.

¹¹ Robert Rodriguez discusses an interview with Charles Ramírez Berg about portraying Salma Hayek’s character (Santánico Pandemonium) as a matriarchal figure that got lost within the film. Rodriguez revisits his character’s story in (1999) *From Dusk Till Dawn 3: The Hangman’s Daughter*. Read more about Rodriguez’s interview with Charles Ramírez Berg’s on pages 243-258 in *Latino Images in Film: Stereotypes, Subversion and Resistance*.

When Sam visits Tara in the hospital, she is relieved to see her awake and alert and is given a warm welcome back home by most of Tara's friends, except from Amber who is wary of her presence. Afterwards, Sam has a hallucination of Billy Loomis¹², a previous Ghostface killer, who recommends her to tell Tara about a secret she is keeping about her parentage. Sam then receives a call from Ghostface, alluding that he also "knows her secret" and is attacked within the hospital's empty break room. She is unharmed but visibly shaken as police come to her aid and demands for the town's local sheriff to place more protective detail on her sister. Sheriff Judy Hicks, who was a minor character in *Scream 4*, berates Sam for coming back to Woodsboro. Hick tells Sam that she "remembers all the troubles she used to cause her family" and "that her presence here is not helping." Hicks advises Sam that "once the sun comes up you and your boyfriend could hit the road and leave" the problems Tara is facing "to the people who actually care about this community." Sam is deemed as an outcast within Woodsboro society compared how the Californian town protected and rallied around Sidney Prescott when she was preyed on by Ghostface.

With this negative portrayal of *Scream 5*'s Final girl, Sam's Latina character is categorized into a stereotypical Latina trope called the Dark Lady. The Dark Lady stereotype is described as a Latina love interest that is portrayed as a "virginal and aristocratic" woman in the first half of a film and "then suddenly reverts into the harlot" (Ramírez-Berg 77). The Dark Lady is also a villainous antagonist who causes conflict for the film's protagonist, who is usually a white man. Other stereotypical tropes of Latina women are "the harlot," who is "a secondary character" that is also "lusty and hot-tempered" (70). The third trope is being the "female clown,

¹² Skeet Ulrich returns as Billy Loomis for *Scream 5* and 6 as a conscious voice within Sam's head. Sam is the first Final Girl in the *Scream* franchise to hallucinate and have prolonged struggles with mental illness.

a silly or comical character” who is portrayed to be less desirable than her white counterparts because of her clownish behavior (77). The Latina clown character is also meant to influence male white characters to find other white female counterparts as suitable wives. Although Sam is not depicted as a harlot, instead she is seen as a Woodsboro antagonist within the community, which is visibly a majority white community. This negative depiction of Sam does not make her unique compared to Sidney Prescott or other white Final Girls. Instead, it stereotypes her body and character as an ethnic spectacle and enforces problematic Latina tropes.

When the sheriff leaves the room, Sam decides to tell her sister about her long-kept secret that was a catalyst that broke up their family. Sam reveals that around the time their father left their mother when she was thirteen, she found her mother’s childhood diaries that revealed she was Billy Loomis’s daughter, one of the original Ghostface killers. Sam confronts her mother with this information and subsequently ruins her marriage. She swore to their mother to never tell Tara about their family secret. Sam admits to Tara “that’s why I changed,” and “I went out and started doing every drug that I could get my hands on, until I couldn’t take it anymore and left town.” Sam describes the agony she felt for being abandoned by her parents, describing how it led her down a dark path toward destruction. She left Woodsboro to heal from her past trauma and left her hometown that deemed her as a “Dark Lady.” This tearful scene shows Sam’s mental strength and psychology of being the older protective sister to Tara, who needed to find peace outside of her Woodsboro community.

Sidney Prescott, who was supported by her Woodsboro community, was blessed to have a father who raised her after Moreen, Sidney’s mother died. Although Sidney’s father never guest starred within any of the other *Scream 2* through *4* films, his presence in her life impacted her positively and she continued upkeep her strong familial connections with her Prescott family

in *Scream 4*. Sam and Tara's mother is never seen within both *Scream 5* and *6*, which portrays Latinx parents in a stereotypical light as neglectful parents. Worse, Sam and Tara's mother is portrayed as the stereotypical Latina harlot, who fathered a child while she was a teen with Billy Loomis and married another man to cover up her secret affair. Without her presence in any of the *Scream* films, audiences assume that she is a toxic Latina harlot who neglects and abandons both her children. *Scream* fans could argue that Bethinelli-Olpin and Gillett decided for Sam and Tara to have no family ties to ensure that they don't have other people who they love that would be threatened or killed by Ghostface. In *Scream 4*, Sidney loses her aunt and cousin because of Ghostface, leaving her to be the last family member within the Prescott's. Sidney's family presence within the franchise helps build up *Scream's* white Final Girl as a beloved character. Unfortunately, Sam and Tara's lack of parental figures depicts *Scream 5* and *6's* Latina Final Girls as if they have no stable influence in their life that grounds them to their home, family, and Latinx identity other than their sisterhood.

When Tara learns of Sam's parentage, she reacts angrily, asking why she lied to her and tells her to leave. Sam pleads that she only wanted to protect her, but Tara tells her to "get the fuck out" because she is so angry. When Sam's boyfriend Richie overhears their conversation Sam asks if her parentage to Loomis frightens him, he says a little bit but tries to comfort her. Sam says, "you know that part in horror movies where you want to yell at the characters to be smart and get the fuck out" she advises her boyfriend that "this is that part." Instead, Richie professes his love for her, similarly to how Sidney in *Scream* (1996) believed Billy Loomis was her protector. Although since *Scream* often makes every character feel as if they are a potential suspect, Sam decides that she needs to talk to an expert who has dealt with Ghostface killers before, which brings back legacy character, Dewey Riley (David Arquette).

Dewey allows Sam and Richie to ask him questions about his past with multiple Ghostface murderers, explaining the three rules to surviving a Stab¹³ film. Rule number one “never trust the love interest.” He expresses that they seem “sweet, caring and supportive, then welcome to act three where they are trying to rip your head off.” Rule two, Dewey discusses how “the killer’s motive is always connected to something in the past.” Lastly rule number three “is the most important rule,” because “the first victim always has a friend group that the killer is a part of” Dewey in this scene becomes the new informative Randy character, who previously informed *Scream*’s main characters about the rules of the slasher. This role differs from Dewey’s previous role as a protector for Sidney and is now a retired cop. Dewey is alienated from the Woodsboro community¹⁴ after his retirement and becomes a helpful ally for Sam. Although Sam has gained a valuable legacy character as an ally for her fight against Ghostface, *Scream*’s Latina Final Girl’s is significantly more isolated and alone in her struggles to keep her younger sister safe.

After Dewey forces Sam and her boyfriend to leave, he calls Sidney to inform her that Ghostface is back. This scene is interesting because although he claims that “something feels different” about these Ghostface murders, he is focused on Sidney’s safety first. Understandably, he has protected Sidney for decades and they have a close relationship because of their shared past. This scene can be perceived as Dewey placing more importance on the safety of a white woman over a Latina woman. It isn’t until Sidney exclaims that she is glad the Woodsboro community “has you to protect them,” he is galvanized into action to help Sam and her sister. Sam and Tara’s psychological dimensions are explored by displaying how her Latina body is

¹³ Stab is a fictitious film franchise that is based on the Woodsboro killings Sidney survived in 1996, so yes, it’s a film franchise within a film franchise. *Scream* films use Stab to create meta commentary about themselves.

¹⁴ Dewey is also divorced from Gale Weathers who was his wife in *Scream 4*. This might be demonstrating more of the real-life divorce between actors Courtney Cox and David Arquette.

subjugated to violence and terror as a form of sexual pleasure from the male gaze. The Latina Final girl's psychological dimension is explored within *Scream 5* as audience members see how Sam and Tara deal with the emotional turmoil of their mother's secret affair by Billy Loomis. Although their sociological dimension showcases their alienation from the Woodsboro community, which other both Latina Final Girls. Dewey's representational status as protector of Woodsboro signifies how without the persuasive advice to help protect Sam and Tara from the franchise's white Final Girl, *Scream 5*'s Latina Final Girls are deemed as less important within their white majority community and within the franchise. With this lack of sociological dimension and alienation from their community, Latina Final Girls Sam and Tara are unable to be viewed as three-dimensional characters unlike their white counterpart Sidney.

Chapter 3 White Fear and Discourse about Elevated Horror Films within *Scream*

Mandy-Meeks Martin, who is the niece to Randy Meeks, the know-it-all horror fan enthusiast, introduces the concept of the “Requel” within the *Scream* franchise while Sam and Dewey interview Tara’s friend group to investigate who might be a Ghostface killer. She explains how in their universe the latest Stab film was “crammed with social commentary” and upset classical slasher fans by giving them an “elevated horror film.” Tara’s friends have an animated conversation about how Jordan Peele’s films have elevated the horror genre, providing horror films with critical commentary about society, race relations, gender, etc.

In Jordan Peele’s *Get Out* (2017), the film’s storyline discusses Black and white race relations and Black liberation. The film uses its mixed-race couple to show a “mainstream, dominate cultural desire for positive affective connection between racialized individuals- specifically, Black and white people- to remedy complex structural legacies of enslavement, Jim Crow segregation, and continuing marginalization.” Although once Chris, our main Black character discovers his white girlfriend Rose is using him as a conduit to keep aging white men alive, he realizes that it is near impossible to “disentangle from a pro-longed history of white supremacy” (Frank 5). *Get Out* knowingly references the racist outlook between Black and white relations within classical films like D.W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation* (1915) and “expanding social commentary and imagery” of mix race couples as 1967’s *Guess Who’s Coming for Dinner* did during the post-civil rights era (6). *Get Out* acknowledges our country’s problematic past with systemic racism and white supremacy, allowing for an alternative Black survivance storyline that advocates for the liberation of Black individuals from colonialist institutions and factors that continue to disenfranchise and dispossess their communities.

The use of social commentary within *Get Out* categorizes the film as elevated horror that helps “raise the horror genre to a level where it might mix with genres already associated with “higher aesthetic” strata, such as character-based dramas” (Church 45). Although “many horror fans suggest that “elevated horror” demean the genre as a whole,” films like *Get Out* are trying not to be “pigeonholed as simply as horror film” with one-dimensional characters and reliance of graphic special effects gore. Elevated horror explores “repressed cultural anxieties that include familial traumas” and more importantly “gender, race, and class inequalities at a deeper thematic level” (48). By raising the genre to a “higher aesthetic” the film helps bring more critical acclaim to horror films, but also allows for audience members to ask profound questions about their society that they might have not been exposed to previously. When *Get Out*’s main character, Chris meets his white girlfriends’ parents, they exclaim their love for President Barack Obama and their wish to vote him in for a third presidential term. This scene offers a complex view of white guilt of systemic racism, wishing that acts like voting for Obama for another presidential term would have the power to “neutralize and repair generational effects of institutional practices of anti-Black exclusion and oppression” (Frank 8). Peele’s film asks audience members to investigate our own society and world to see how white individuals try to “alleviate white guilt by promoting fake liberalism” when it comes to understanding race relations and generational trauma due to systemic racism (9). Instead of creating insightful metaphorical discussions about race relations in America, *Scream 5* purposefully creates another stereotypical slasher film with stereotypical racial tropes that focus on white experiences.

Scream 5 decides to focus its meta commentary on the horror genre itself, not realizing that their gory special effects, murderous slasher antagonist, and color-blind casting of their Latina Final Girls continue the horror genre’s tradition of basing their storylines on the fear

mongering of white terror. During the rise of elevated horror during Barack Obama's presidency, films during this period "embodied the anxieties of white Americans who were struggling with a perceived loss of social and economic standing in a post-recession America." With this rise of white anxiety, "the genre itself focused on the fears and privileges of white people, showcasing the rise" of racism against Black, Latinx, and other marginalized groups that made way for Trump's presidency (Meeuf 5). Horror films often "forget discussions around race," instead portraying the genre as universal to all racial groups and communities because it "engages mostly with essential human concepts like death, violence, gender and sexuality." Horror films do not simply "offer a meditation on death and the body" because it also provides a meditation on death from the vantage of those with less power and privilege, most often from the vantage of whiteness." Horror movies with topics that revolve around "the universal parts of the human experience like death, bodily decay, violence, sex, and emotion" are always "filtered through social identities like race" (8). *Scream 5* suggests that a substantial portion of horror fans are against elevated horror that offers social commentary about race and how they want the genre to focus on white anxieties and issues. Instead of discussing how the horror genre could address greater issues that impact marginalized communities, *Scream 5* also alleviates white guilt and promotes fake liberalism by not acknowledging past and current stereotypes the genre has inflicted on Latinx, Black, and other marginalized communities.

Horror films that were "released between 2008 and 2016" were documented to have around "sixty-one featured people of color in significant roles, which equaled around 41.4%" of horror films that had POC characters with more than one line of dialogue." Although during this time, "only eleven people of color were central characters in lead roles," equaling around a "measly 7.4%" of POC main characters within horror films during the 2010 era. Specifically,

during this era was a rise of “Latinx actors who were playing ambiguously ethnic characters in roles without any significant reference to their character’s race or ethnicity.” This specific ignorance of race and ethnicity is seen within horror films like “*Quarantine* (2008) and *The Eye* (2008) with Jessica Alba and Jay Hernandez” playing ambiguously ethnic character roles as Latinx actors. In total “only five serious horror films” in the 2010 period focused their storylines on people of color, which “only represented 3.4% of films” (Meeuf 10). With this lack of Latinx and POC representation within horror during this period, these statistics highlight how horror fans’ distaste in elevated horror is related to the dislike of social commentary that lacks discussions about white anxieties and terror.

Historically, horror films have revolved around telling stories around the dread of “white privilege as they face the haunting proposition that their privilege cannot protect them from all dangers.” These fears prove how white terror in horror films focuses on “the fears of people with something to lose, not the fears of struggling to get by.” Within traditional slasher films like *Friday the 13th* (1980) and *Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), these films focused on the fears of “privileged white teens being stalked by working-class figures who threatened the mundane rituals of white teenage life.” As horror filmmaking embraces an “era of multiculturalism” with more diverse POC horror characters and storylines, whiteness feels threatened that their “righteousness and superiority” within society is being questioned. Since 2010 horror films focus on white anxieties, this displays how horror fans who are against elevated horror want storylines that tell “self-deluded beliefs that emerge from white supremacy about the horrors of white guilt” (Meeuf 11). By observing how white terror dominates 2010 horror films, fans and scholars can be able to see how white-centric horror filmmaking is impacting the rise of elevated horror films

and forcing POC actors like Melissa Barrera and Jenna Ortega to play racially ambiguous characters.

Scream 5 uses Mandy Meeks-Martin's depiction of how the new Ghostface murderer is using the killings to create a "requel" that honors the original Stab and/or *Scream* movie. She explains how today "you can't just reboot a franchise from scratch anymore" because the fans of the original horror film "won't stand for it." She describes how fans "don't want a straight sequel either and has to build something new that is a part of an ongoing storyline" from the earlier films. Mandy says these requel horror films will have "new main characters that are supported and related to legacy characters." She specifies how horror franchises like *Scream* are trying to create storylines that pay homage to "the original film." Understandably, Sam is upset that she is in the middle of Ghostface's game of reenacting "horror fan fiction" and Mandy informs her that Ghostface has chosen her as "the star" of this requel. Oddly enough when Mandy and the teenagers question who might be the new Ghostface killer, they all assume that Sam is the perpetrator. As a Latina woman, she is ostracized as a villainous character throughout the first half of the film and not given the benefit of the doubt compared to other white characters. *Scream 5* spends most of its storyline arguing how it's requel film pays homage to the original *Scream* film but lacks the acknowledgement of the rise of racism and villainous portrayals of Latina women in horror because it is focused on advocating against elevated horror.



Figure 6: Sam Carpenter's surprised face when she is accused of being a Ghostface Killer.

The discourse between horror fans about pro and anti-elevated horror also stems from the love of nostalgic horror tropes and escapism. Anti-elevated Horror fans love “the simply forbidden nature of the grotesque, exploitative, and crude” nature of the genre, which “appeals to all of our humanistic worst instincts.” With elevated horror, fans might feel that social commentary within horror films might also love aspects within traditionalist horror films that “provide simplistic yet pleasurable fear” (Church 53). Some fans are nostalgic for a simplistic story about a Final Girl’s conflicts to defeat a psycho killer and her survivance story. These stories do not delve into the real horrors of being a woman who could be “one of the three women who have been sexually assaulted or raped” within America (World Health Organization). Since the genre reflects our society’s fears and anxieties, the genre can create both elevated horror and traditionalist horror films to appease both sides of the horror fandom. Although anti-elevated horror fans fear that elevated horror has doomed the “extinction” of simplistic horror films without social commentary.

These horror fans also argue that “there is a sense of fun that is missing from these tasteful horror films” and purposefully want to use horror as a form of escapism from reality.

Like *Scream 5*, horror fans believe that elevated horror is “overrated or stray from imagined generic core that is associated with scariness, monsters, gore,” and other entertaining aspects about traditional horror (Church 53). These fans feel as if elevated horror is trying to create entertainment for a “cultural middle” that does not exist (54). The biggest difference between traditional slashers and elevated horror is that usually “less-gory horror films make more money than gory films.” While more “hardcore fans devoted to the genre and numerous franchises may revel in seeing graphically rendered mutilations of pounds of flesh” on the big screen, there are “in fact larger sections of mainstream cinema-going audiences that also like the occasional scary movie, so long as there isn’t too much gore” (68). What *Scream 5* seems to forget about the horror genre is that “there is a stable market for each variety of these horror movies” (Davis and Natale 71). Horror has benefited from the expansion of its genre to include more elevated horror films to bring in a larger audience demographic to the movie theaters and gain critical acclaim.

Fans who dislike elevated horror films have a nostalgia for classical tropes and narratives found in traditional slasher films. Nostalgia is a word that is “derived from the Greek word *nostos*, which means “to return to home and *algia*, a mournful or painful condition”. Although the term was first coined by a “Swiss doctor in the late seventeenth century, which didn’t become a prominent word” within America’s lexicon or vocabulary “until the last hundred years or so.” There is a direct link into “the expansion of industrial capitalism and colonization that described the melancholia of soldiers fighting in foreign soil.” The word has also been used to “lament about a vanishing sense of mass community,” which demonstrates traditionalist horror fans fears of having less slasher films that create communal bonding (Flinn 94).

Nostalgia also acts as a “symptom of our age” that amounts to a longing for an unattainable past, which the entertainment industry attempts to make accessible through pop

culture artifacts.” Nostalgia also “has become a vital means of marketing consumer items from the recent past,” giving this false hope that if “there is any lingering tension between past and present, it is easily overcome.” With the creation of sequel films within the *Scream* franchise, “the media industry exploits people’s nostalgia for the recent past to be commodified” for younger audiences to enjoy who were not alive to see the 1996 *Scream* film. Sequels and reboot films are characterized by “returning characters, cinematic universes, and reused plotlines that serve as an ideal vessel for nostalgic exploitation.” Film studies often “consider sequels and reboots a safer financial bet than introducing new IP’s” into the market, “since they come with built in audiences.” Although sequel and reboot films have a challenging time trying to “strike a balance between sentimentality and renewal, aiming to attract new audiences to an established franchise while honoring the original to avoid alienating fans” (De Cock, et. al.). Just as Mandy Meeks-Martin discussed in *Scream 5*, fans of traditional slasher horror demonstrate how powerful “nostalgia can be” and how it “reaches outside the boundaries of film” (Flinn130). Although groups of people who are adamant for nostalgic movies often becoming “resentful” because it is impossible to “satisfy this utopic construct out of the past” (132). Since traditionalist horror fans are unable to stop the expansion of the horror genre itself, they created a wave of resentment and backlash against elevated horror that is mimicked within *Scream 5*. These fans are unable to recreate the past and ignore how most earlier slasher films centered on whiteness. They also ignore how elevated horror want to challenge the genre to tackle social issues that question race relations, gender, sexuality, and much more.

With a film like *It Follows* (2014), the narrative focuses on a white teenager’s trouble to stop a predatory sexually transmitted demon from killing her in the backdrop of Detroit, Michigan. As the teens are walking around in a working-class area of Detroit, the film’s focus on

whiteness becomes clear by seeing a “non-point of view of the many other POC bodies” that are within the town (Burgess 180). The film showcases how “whiteness is constant,” even when Jeff, the teenage boy who gave *It Follows* Final Girl, Jay, the monster that follows her, “hides out in an abandoned Black neighborhood to protect himself” from the demonic presence. His character suggests how becoming this demonic being’s prey “feels like being Black to him.” This suggestion highlights the “existential beliefs of Black dread” by white individuals who fear of “experiencing the consequences of racial capitalism that include the experiences of being followed” and perpetrated by socioeconomic conflicts. Films like *It Follows* contain traditionalist slasher narratives that center around white experiences which demonstrate the genre’s “possessive investment in whiteness” (181). *It Follows* displays how horror films with little to non-Black, Latinx, and other POC characters have metaphorical discussions about race relations in America. Traditionalist horror fans assume that slasher films do not discuss issues regarding race relations, but even with an all-white cast, slasher films contain themes and metaphors that showcase the conflicts POC individuals face in America.

There is also a classist spectrum within the discourse between pro and anti-elevated horror because classical horror fans enjoy “purer” or less “bourgeois” styled horror films. Traditional horror fans want to have films like *Hostel* (2005) and other 2000s horror films that included more “crude and exploitative torture porn imagery” (Church 54). Early 2000s horror films like *Hostel* and *Saw* (2004) gained popularity within the torture porn subgenre that included helpless “victims that were not just impaled or cut but are frequently dismembered or mutilated” for cinematic audiences. Since torture porn victims that are also “interchangeable and expendable,” the graphic detail of their physical torture also includes “emotional and psychological torment.” Torture porn films also have very flat narratives that have narratives that

“go nowhere, offer no resolution, no reaffirming of order, and the violence goes unanswered.” Although the *Scream* franchise “offers a modicum of character development,” they also contain elements like torture porn to “punish nubile teens for their promiscuity” (Kerner 3). Just as *Scream 5* inflicts its viewers toward a male gaze, torture porn and slasher films provide a pornographic sensory experience that audiences have craved since the early 2000s. Since elevated films do not provide these pleasurable or pornographic experiences that is geared toward the male gaze, The *Scream* franchise is advocating for less emotionally driven narratives with weak character development of their Final Girls.

Torture porn specifically “adopts a pornographic regime to play on the sensorial experience” of the male gaze that purposefully “designed with an explicit and singular objective in mind: sexual arousal.” For example, in *Hostel*, “the sexual episodes are set in contrast with scenes of torture” which replicate pornographic imagery that leads to “the eventual end of the discharge of bodily fluids.” In the *Saw* franchise, “several characters are compelled to play a series of games that end in their gruesome deaths” that also result in a loss of bodily fluids that resembles pornography (Kerner 13). With pornographic imagery in torture porn films, the narrative format “does no appeal to the audiences’ emotions” and creates a narrative focused on the objectification of the body (12). The lack of emotional connection to horror characters shows how women’s bodies within slasher films that are stereotyped as promiscuous and are utilized for the sexual gaze of men who find violence to be as pleasurable as porn.

In *Scream 5* as Sam Carpenter becomes more isolated from her community members in Woodsboro, she is pulled to engage in ruthless violence, just like her biological father. While driving away from Tara’s friends who accused her of being Ghostface, Sam hallucinates a conversation with Billy Loomis, who encourages her to accept that is capable of violence. Sam

argues that “she is not like him,” but Billy accuses her of “running away like she always does” when she encounters a problem. Worse he asks, “how else is she going survive” another Ghostface attack and that she needs “to accept who you are by “finding who is doing this and cut some fucking throats.” This scene displays how the franchise sets up its slasher narrative to drive their Final Girl to embody Ghostface’s violent demeanor. Sam Carpenter “assumes the role of the monster” when she is persuaded to use violence to protect her sister from harm (Kerner 68). Sidney Prescott also embodied the monster within 1996’s *Scream* when she delivers the final kill shot to Billy Loomis. The difference is that Sidney’s entire town protected her from being labeled as a cold-blooded killer compared to Sam who is denied this communal protection and is forced to use violence to protect her family.

The Final Girl’s use of violence reflects how she becomes “that one girl who is the most sexually uptight just keeps stabbing this guy with a long knife.” When viewed through a male gaze lens, the Final Girl “is the most sexually frustrated because she is the one that kills” the murderer and not because she is “a virgin, but because all this repressed energy is coming out” during this act of violence. Because Sidney “bears the traumatic weight that couples with sex and violent death” she becomes a monster who embodies Ghostface by using his methods of violence to punish her boyfriend Loomis who failed to protect her from sexual betrayal. As a third-wave feminist Final Girl, Sidney uses her repressed energy to extinguish males who threaten the rise of feminism in late nineties culture and is “made into a monster” to achieve this goal (Kerner 89). Although with Sam Carpenter, *Scream 5*’s Latina Final Girl, she is tempted to use violence to protect herself from the sexual trauma enacted by her mother’s secret affair that resulted in her parentage with Loomis.

Maureen Prescott, Sidney's mother who was murdered by Loomis before the events of *Scream*, is shown to have been flawed and had numerous affairs with men. When Billy Loomis accuses Sidney of being a "slut like her mother," Sidney "acknowledges her confusion about who her mother was," who pretended to live the picture-perfect image of motherhood and parenthood. Sidney's confusion stems from the "vulnerability to the power of the double standard, especially as it applies to mothers" through a misogynistic viewpoint. Sidney embodies the monstrous character of Ghostface to kill Loomis which reveals "her struggle to know her mother as a person in her own right." Throughout the *Scream* franchise, Sidney's fight against multiple Ghostface antagonists focuses on her "quest to understand her own identity as it related to her mother's" infidelity, realizing that the repression of her sexual angst caused the breakdown of her family and vulnerability of male antagonism (Karlyn). Since Sam's mother is only discussed between her daughters and never makes a physical appearance within the franchise, she is othered as a Latina harlot whose sins are passed onto her older daughter. Sam is stereotyped as a "Dark Lady" who is tempted to use violence as a psychological and physical catharsis for her mother's infidelity. Since Sam's mother is defined as a promiscuous Latina mother, Sam tries find her own identity outside her mother's sins as Sidney did throughout the *Scream* franchise. Since Sam is alone while dealing with family problems and impending Ghostface attacks, she is tempted to become a monster to protect herself from being labeled as a harlot and becoming a torture porn victim.

When Sheriff Hicks and her son Wes dies, Sam meets Gale Weathers who introduces herself to *Scream 5's* Latina Final girl and promptly leaves her alone to talk to her ex-husband Dewey. They have a lengthy conversation about the details that ended their marriage, which takes the attention away from our Latina final girl, who realizes there are no police officers

watching over her sister in the hospital. Dewey, who was previously persuaded by Sidney to help the films *Latina Final Girls*, decides to accompany Sam to the hospital. Tara, who is still healing from her wounds, is only able to move around using a wheelchair. When Richie, Sam's boyfriend comes to Tara's aid, he is used as leverage by Ghostface, who forces Sam to "choose which loved one to save." Luckily with Dewey's help Sam, Tara, and Richie escape Ghostface, but Dewey, who needed to make sure that Ghostface is dead instead dies. With the death of one of *Scream's* legacy characters, *Scream 5* sets itself up as a sequel that makes the audience aware that any character, legacy or new, could be Ghostface's next torture porn victim.

Sidney makes a small cameo within *Scream 5* to help Gale with her grief over the death of her ex-husband, Dewey. With the rise of death and terror in their lives, Tara admits that she was not angry at her sister for being the reason their family was broken but was disappointed that Sam ran away from home and fractured their sibling relationship. Sam admits to Tara that she ran away because she was afraid of being just like her father. They both decide that their best choice is to leave Woodsboro to get away Ghostface, but while they are leaving, Sidney Prescott stops them. Sam appreciates that Sidney offers her support to discuss their shared traumas of dealing with Ghostface attacks, although she recommends that Sam and her sister not run, stating that it "never works."

Sam Carpenter realizes that Sidney and Gale plan to use her as bait to lure Ghostface. Both women do not deny her assumption and instead try to persuade her to seek revenge for her dead friends. Sam decides to put her sister first, saying that she chooses to leave Woodsboro to protect Tara and drives away from Sidney and Gale, who unknowing put a tracker on their car. When Tara cannot find her inhaler, Sam, Richie, and her sister decide to make a pit stop at Amber's home where she is holding a party. Mimicking the events of the first *Scream*, which has

the third act take place at Stu Macher's house during a teenage party. During this act, it's revealed that Tara's best friend, Amber is one of the Ghostface killers. When Sam and Richie run away from Amber who is threatening them with a loaded gun, Richie tries to persuade Sam that her sister could be the potential second killer. Sam questions if her sister, whom she has been estranged from for years, might be one of the killers and abandons her in a closet where she is tied up.

As Sidney Prescott fights Amber who dons the Ghostface costume, they fall from the second story railing and both are incapacitated, allowing Sam the advantage of grabbing Amber's gun to protect herself. Although when she grabs the gun, Richie walks up to her and suddenly stabs *Scream 5*'s main protagonist, revealing himself as the second Ghostface killer. Just like 1996's *Scream*, Sam's boyfriend betrays her because he wants to recreate the violence seen within slasher films to find fame. Richie's motivations for donning the Ghostface mask lies in his outrage against the destruction of the Stab franchise that released a lackluster sequel film that upset the original fandom. By creating another Ghostface massacre, Richie and Amber hope their killings would inspire a new film that could revitalize the franchise. Like traditionalist horror fans, Richie wants slasher films to focus on torture porn imagery and narratives without social commentary. Richie is a white man who finds "pleasure in the spectacle of the sickest form" of aggression and violence to voice his opposition against horror films that stray away from white anxieties and fear (Kerner 56). Richie asks himself how "could fandom be toxic" when he reveals his plans to have Sam to take the fall for his and Amber's murders. Since Sam is the only POC character who is held hostage, this scene displays how nostalgia for torture porn imagery have created these racist and anti-feminist villains.



Figure 7: Sam Carpenter as she kills Richie, who turns out to be a Ghostface killer. She cleans off her knife in the same style as her biological father, Billy Loomis and embodies the Dark Lady and violent Latina stereotype.

Sam makes a significant choice to embrace her worst fears of being like her biological father by becoming a violent knife-wielding monster that stabs Richie multiple times. Unlike Sidney who killed Loomis with a single final kill shot to the head, Sam instead viciously slits Richie's throat, ensuring that our Latina Final Girl is exceedingly more violent than her predecessor Sidney Prescott. Like Sidney who bared the weight of the sexual and violent death of her mother, Sam instead bears the weight of being othered by her community and dealing with the fallout of her mother's affair that resulted in her birth. Sam Carpenter is stereotyped as a Dark Lady due to her mother's infidelity and embraces violence to survive two Ghostface murderers. Sam and Tara Carpenter survive as *Scream's* Latina Final Girls, but the sisters struggle to overcome the otherization they receive from their Woodsboro community and oversexualization of their bodies through violence. This showcases how *Scream's* Latina heroines are given less three-dimensional character representation compared to their white predecessor Sidney Prescott. Sam is stereotyped as a Dark Lady who is pre-destined to become a

monster that uses violence to protect herself and her sister because the Latina monster is used to appeal to a male sexual gaze through torture porn violence.

Melissa Barrera (Sam Carpenter) was meant to reprise her role as *Scream*'s Latina Final Girl in *Scream 7* but was fired from the franchise due to her pro-Palestine comments on her personal Instagram page. Spyglass Media's spokesperson offered a statement for their firing of Barrera, claiming that "her posts were seen as antisemitic" (Siegel). Spyglass Media insisted that Barrera's social media posts included "Holocaust distortion," although credible news sources and journalists have shown that they "couldn't find any evidence of this and actually found the opposite" (Stern). After her firing, Jenna Ortega (Tara Carpenter) announced she was not going to reprise her role for *Scream 7* due to "scheduling conflicts with Netflix's *Wednesday*'s (2022-) season 2 filming schedule" (Mercuri). With the two Latina Final Girls not being available to continue with the *Scream* franchise, both Matt Berrinelli-Olpin and Tyler Gillett also "stepped away from the franchise." In a 2024 interview with *Rolling Stone*, Barrera commented about her firing, saying "I know that what I said" on social media "always came from a place of love and a place of human rights and a place of freedom for people, which shouldn't be controversial and shouldn't be up for debate" (Stern).

Although Spyglass Media has started production for *Scream 7*, "many *Scream* fans are boycotting the upcoming sequel" in solidarity with Barrera (Murray). The production studio also decided to bring back Neve Campbell (Sidney Prescott) to portray the film's Final Girl and hired past legacy actors like Matthew Lillard (Stu Macher) to create buzz around the film. As the *Scream* franchise disposes of its Latina Final Girls for its original white protagonist Sidney Prescott, this highlights the lack of investment to tell nuanced stories about Latinx and POC communities within their films. Although color blind casting is known to give a few POC actors

career defining roles, *Scream 5 and 6* stereotyped Sam and Tara Carpenter's bodies and actions, showcasing how Spyglass Media and the horror genre continue to forbade stories that bring Latinx identities and experiences to life.

Chapter 4

***The Forever Purge* and Nuanced Portrayals of Latinx Life in Southwest Texas**

Although *The Purge* franchise is categorized as an anthology horror film series, these films contain multiple “shadowy blade-wielding killers” that are “responding to an event by stalking and murdering the members of a group before the threat they pose is neutralized” (Norwell pg. 20). Film scholar Carol J. Clover describes there are “six important elements within a slasher film which contain a killer, bad place, weapons, victims, and shock effects” (Clover 26). *The Purge* films tell a story about a dystopian American society where citizens are given a 12-hour window for all crime to be legal. Once a year *The Purge* allows for American citizens to commit crimes like theft, assault, and murder to be legal. In this terrible dystopian place, *The Purge* has become legalized by a right-wing political party known as the New Founding Fathers of America (NFFA). They believe the *Purge* allows Americans to release their rage during the 12-hour event in the hopes of reducing crime rate and unemployment. *The Purge* instead creates a bigger disparity from the rich and the poor, showcasing how “disadvantaged groups are reduced to the state of bare survival to adapt to dominate socioeconomic structures” created by the NFFA (Alexandrescu 562). Since the *Purge* films have multiple psychotic killers who hunt down innocent victims with a multitude of weapons in a disturbing dystopian world, these films fit within the categorization of the slasher subgenre.

The *Purge* franchises discuss the complexities of the “classist system in America and racial tensions” in each film (Alexandrescu 566). Each film offers a different story with a diverse cast and different setting to give a larger view of the United States within this dystopian futuristic society. The first film *The Purge* (2013) focuses on an upper-classes family’s discomfort during purge night after they are threatened with violence when they save a Black man from purge participants. The first instalment of the franchise was written by James DeMonaco, who was also

the writer and director of *The Purge*, *The Purge: Anarchy* (2014), and *The Purge: Election* (2016). The second film in the franchise, *The Purge: Anarchy* focuses on a mother and daughter who are targeted by NFAA government police that is tasked with killing working class Black, Latinx, and other marginalized tenants as a way of controlling POC populations. When they are violently dragged out of their home by police, a grief ridden police officer named Leo who is “on mission to avenge his son’s death from a drunk driver who wasn’t prosecuted for his crime” aids the family during *Purge* night. The third film, *The Purge: Election Year* (2016) is one of the only films in the franchise with returning main character Leo who is tasked with protecting a “female senator who is running for president” against the NFAA with “plans to abolish *Purge* night” (Alexandrescu 566). Both *The Purge: Election Year* and the franchise’s fourth film *The First Purge* (2018) discuss how the NFAA uses *The Purge* to disenfranchise marginalized communities through violence and upkeep of the cycle of white supremacy. The fifth instalment of the *Purge* franchise, *The Forever Purge* (2021) offers a diverse representation of Latinx life and racial tensions in Southwest Texas as Juan, an undocumented Mexican immigrant, aids a white rancher’s family from disgruntled white ranch workers who want to continue the violence of *Purge* night after the event is over.

Purge films have always coincided with American politics with *The Purge*, *The Purge: Anarchy*, *Purge: Election* releasing while President Barack Obama was in office. The films follows a group of individuals who are brought together by chance and defend their homes in suburban or urban areas during one night of terror. *The First Purge* (2018) and USA Network’s *The Purge* (2018-2019) series coincide with Trump’s first Presidential term and his policies that limited gun control regulations and widened the socio-economic disparities between the rich and

the poor through The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA)¹⁵. Although *The Forever Purge* was released during the Biden Administration, the film speaks about violence at the border and the dehumanization of immigrants and Latinx individuals in America due to the rise of conservatism in politics. The fifth *Purge* film also expands the defending the home archetype seen within earlier *Purge* films since the main characters are met with violence in broad daylight and navigate through border towns to get to safety.

In an interview with actor Josh Lucas (Dylan Tucker) about *The Forever Purge*, he describes that the film was “a Latin-forward *Purge* film” that contained Mexican director, Everardo Gout and “a primarily Mexican cast of actors that aren’t very familiar in American cinema, but very familiar in South American cinema.” Lucas states that when he “spoke to Everardo Gout,” he discussed that he wanted the movie to be “centered around the clash of cultures and the border.” He claims that “originally the movie was called “Borderline” because the story was about the conflicts that exist on the Mexican American border through the genre of horror (Thompson). Director Everardo Gout in an *Associated Press* interview discussed his specific choices of actors for *The Forever Purge*, saying that Ana de la Reguera and Tonoch Huerta were his first choice to “portray strong Latinx main characters.” Gout discusses how he wanted to use the horror film to “portray strong women” who mimicked his mother who was “complex and strong.” The director also discusses how he chose Huerta to also star in the horror film, saying “he always had him in mind” because of his “very vocal stance against the violation of immigrant rights and racism” in America (Bautista). *The Forever Purge* was created to bring

¹⁵ TCJA was expected to give a “\$4,000 boost to household incomes” but instead research shows that “workers who made less than \$114,000 in 2016 saw no change in earnings” and salaries for top executives increased greatly (Marr, Jacoby, and Fenton). This showcases how Trump’s tax cut for corporations was a trickle-down failure.

positive Latinx representation to American cinema and open a discussion about the complexities of immigration, borders, and the clashing of cultures in the American Southwest region.

Jame DeMonaco, the original writer and creator of *The Purge* films, discuss in a *Fangoria* interview how for the fifth instalment of the franchise he wanted “to write a love story” about “this couple coming from Mexico, immigrating to America, and seeking the American Dream, wondering if the American Dream was even alive.” He also wanted to explore “*The Purge* and how it’s violence was no longer able to be contained,” equating *The Purge* to a virus that “couldn’t be stopped” while exploring “immigrants’ journey’s toward achieving the American Dream.” When asked about what political event inspired his fifth *Purge* film, DeMonaco stated that “all *Purge* films are inherently political,” because he is always inspired by the current “climate at any given time” in America when writing a *Purge* film. DeMonaco acknowledges that although “the border crisis was already happening when he wrote the film,” he wanted to further explore “the socio-political climate of America and America’s relationship with our neighbors.” He also states that both him and “Everardo Gout are both politically passionate people” who had to convince the “studio to help them create one of the most pollical *Purge* movies” in the franchise. James DeMonaco also emphasized that for *The Forever Purge* it was important for him to hire a “Mexican filmmaker to direct the film.” He admitted as an “Italian American man from New York,” he felt as if he could only bring “research toward the film” and wanted to have Gout’s “personal knowledge of growing up in Mexico” and border life to be brought into the film’s perspective. When asked if there was anything they had to cut from the movie, DeMonaco claims that he was explicitly told by the studio that “they couldn’t use the word Trump” in the film, since he wanted to reference his right winged policies for the border wall but was told not to mention his name in the script’s dialogue (Wax). DeMonaco and

Everardo Gout showcase how the film was created in response to the discourse around Trump's immigration policies and exploring immigrant experiences near the Mexican American border.

The Forever Purge (2021) begins its film by introducing their main character's Adela (Ada de la Reguera) and Juan (Tenoch Huerta), who are striving to make a life in Southwest Texas as undocumented Mexican immigrants during their first year of experiencing *The Purge*. During the film they speak Spanish to one another, but Adela persuades Juan to practice English because he is hired at the Tucker ranch where his employers only speak English. Dylan Tucker (Josh Lucas) is the heir to the Tucker ranch that is expecting a child with his wife, Cassie. At a cookout with friends, one of Cassie's friends asks if she would want extra help around the house because their Latina nanny, Anna has a sister who would be interested in working for them. When Dylan overhears this conversation, he quickly dismisses the idea, saying that he "doesn't want the kids to speak Spanish in this house," displaying his racism towards Latinx individuals in their community.

When Dylan makes fun of Juan during the morning of *The Purge*, he discusses with Caleb Tucker (Will Patton), Dylan's father, about his son's dislike for him. Juan says that he can tell that Dylan doesn't see him as a respected ranch hand because he is Mexican. Dylan's father admits that "he always taught his son to be a proud American, but he didn't teach him what that really meant." The film showcases the complexities of how some white Texans are welcoming and kind to Mexicans, while others like Dylan feels as if they are superior to him. Caleb also questions what it means to be an American, saying he doesn't know anymore because "everyone is at each other's throats" because of their hate towards undocumented immigrants and other Latinx individuals.

In the “twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the image of the Latinx migrant” has been used to “conjure, depict, and isolate social problems in the U.S. white imagination.” During these times, policy makers and others considered Mexican immigrants who “failed to assimilate into normative white culture,” as a problem. Native activists and conservative politicians have used this “nativist rhetoric to frame migrants as societal drains, carriers of disease, bringers of crime, and individuals who are bent on the reconquest of the U.S. southwest” (Bebout and Goldsmith 147). Multiple Indigenous populations that settled within Texas thousands of years before white settlers were forced to leave through the violence of conquest. Many Texan Indigenous tribes like “the Wichita that lived near North Texas, Apache’s, Caddo’s, Tonkawa’s, and many others faced decline and even near extinction” due to Texan and United States conquests to remove them from their ancestral lands. Beforehand, Indigenous groups were persecuted when “the Spaniards entered Texas and also explored the Panhandle and northeastern woodlands around 1541” (Anderson 4). Around this period, there were only around “five thousand Spaniards in Texas, and several large populations grew along the Rio Grande River from Matamoros to Laredo,” creating profitable lifestyle through agricultural farms and ranches. Due to these growing communities’ separation from Spanish government oversight, “the result of this isolation developed a sense of independence” and began to see “themselves as Tejanos rather than Spaniards.” As white settlers came to Texas in the 1820s when Mexicans fought for their independence from Spain, “each Anglo settler was given nearly five-thousand acres of land for free” (5).

The Republic of Texas was created in 1836 because white settlers and other Tejanos “desired to expand slavery within Texas, an institution that Mexico outlawed, because they wanted to use slave labor to increase profits made from cotton production” (Anderson 5). During

this time, Multiple Texas Indigenous tribes “fought against an onslaught of settlers coming into their ancestral lands,” but were forced to flee. White settlers and other Texans remained in a “virtual state of war for nearly fifty years” with Mexicans and Indigenous individuals that “resulted in the “loss of thousands of lives (7). This “culture war” against Mexicans and Indigenous populations resulted in a “persisting belief that violence against these people was necessary for nation building” that continues to impact the state today (5). Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and other marginalized groups continue to be threatened with violence because of Texas’s history of using genocide and ethnic cleansing to obtain land and upkeep the capitalistic installments imposed by the ranching economy.

On *Purge* night, the Tuckers have the most expensive security for their ranch that is enforced with steel walls to await out the dangerous night, while Adela and Juan seek refuge in a warehouse where hundreds of Mexican American community members hide out together and protect one another from purge participants. During the night, an onslaught of participants that call themselves the “*Purge Purification*” group try to intimidate Mexican American community members with fear as they blast through an intercom microphone that they “plan to eliminate foreigners” in the country. Luckily, the warehouse remains safe throughout the night, allowing for Juan and Adela to return to their jobs where they see the chaos and dead bodies left on the streets during the night before. Compared to other *Purge* films, the film’s setting throughout the narrative is full of sunlight, showcasing how *The Purge* isn’t containable during one night of violence. Instead, *The Purge* continues on to the next day and threatens everyone within Juan and Adela’s Texas community. When Adela goes to work the following morning, she is attacked by *Purge* participants in bunny suits, claiming that they are enacting in *The Forever Purge*. She

is saved by her boss, Darius, and they are both arrested by police officers who assume they were instigating violence after the day of *The Purge*.

The Tuckers also survive the night, but in the next morning the family is held hostage by Kirk, a white worker at the ranch. He assembles a group of *Forever Purgers* in black cowboy attire to kill every member of the Tucker family to steal their ranch and money. Caleb tries to reason with these attackers, telling them that although they feel the need to oppress his family that in the reality “life in America, the rich will always get rich on the backs of the poor, the way it has been for years since we stole land from Native Americans.” He says that by “sanctioning *The Purge*,” Kirk and his group are “complaining about the very system they are supporting.” Caleb tells Kirk that he is “the rich men in Washington D. C’s lackey and hypocrite” for being a participant in *The Forever Purge*.

Kirk and the *Forever Purgers* fear that the “dominate or master narrative of the white male is in decline” within America.” They feel as if the “disenfranchised white man has become the symbol for the decline of the American way,” forgetting that economic and sociological shifts within the country affect every marginalized community (Robinson 5). White men like Kirk feel embolden to complain about the economic struggles they are facing, not realizing that most of their concerns stem from the “anxiety over loss of privilege” and created a desire “to forge a collective of white men around the claims of victimization” (7). Caleb Tucker’s words remind Kirk and his own family how they have both benefited from stolen Indigenous land by using its resources as a worker and owner to profit from the land.

The ranching system is a part of the “settler complex,” where white settlers used stolen Indigenous land acquired by violence and government policies to create a system that is beneficial for their families for generations without settler guilt (Lippard 118). “The settler

complex is based on historically derived legal and cultural alienation from other humans in the form of expropriation” of Indigenous land through property ownership (Lippard 119). By giving away stolen Indigenous land to white settlers, Indigenous communities faced “warfare, displacement, incarceration, and labor exploitation” that was purposefully done to “enrich settlers at Indigenous individuals’ expenses” (Justice and O’Brian xxii). Due to the dispossession of these lands, owners of ranches often hired “Mexicans and other minorities because of their “willingness” to work for lower wages” (Foley 131). To appease their settler guilt, white settlers “defamed their victims as prone to steal,” and “developed stories that “Mexicans, Indigenous, and other minorities” were “unintelligent, lazy, or cowardly” to legitimize their exploitation of Indigenous land and people (Lipsitz 65). The ranching system creates an economic and social caste system where white landowners and other beneficiaries of land privatization can exploit Latinx, Indigenous, and other minorities for labor and remain superior within America’s capitalistic society.

The Forever Purge uses its villain Kirk and other *Purgers* to display how disenfranchised white men anger does not advocate for white working-class men, but instead acts as an agent of white supremacy within their community. These *Purgers* advocate how they want the benefits of white supremacy by following the three pillars of slavery through “slavery, finding a form of logic behind genocide, and using the logic of orientalism” (Smith 68). These pillars allowed for them to define themselves as a superior race within stolen land. Through the “first pillar of slavery these rendered Black, Latinos, and other marginalized people as slavable” because through working low paying labor intensive jobs, they have become the” anchor of capitalism and its exploitive system.” It creates a system of “racial hierarchy that tells people that as long as you are not Black,” Latino, or from another marginalized community, white individuals “might

have the ability to escape the commodification of capitalism” (Smith 68). “The second pillar of white supremacy is the logic of genocide” which demands for “Indigenous people to disappear to enable non-Indigenous people to “rightfully” claim the land.” The last pillar of white supremacy is “the logic of orientalism, which is how” the white race sets itself as a “superior race or civilization by constructing itself in opposition to “exotic” groups of people.” *The Forever Purgers* utilizes all these pillars to other “any other particular group of immigrants of color that reside in the United States and target them as “foreign threats” to justify their continued actions of enslavement, genocide, and orientalism (Smith 69). Kirk and his *Purgers* feel as if they are excluded from the benefits of white supremacy because they did not own the Tucker ranch, which was built on stolen Indigenous land. They are using *The Purge* to gain privileges they feel they are entitled to.



Figure 8: Kirk, the disenfranchised man, holding the Tucker family hostage.

When Kirk murders the senior member of the Tucker family, Juan and his Latinx friend Trinidad intervene to help save the rest of the Tucker family. As the group tries to leave town, Juan decides that he needs to find his wife Adela. Juan tells Dylan that he doesn’t expect him to wait for him, knowing that although he saved his family, it doesn’t alleviate the racism he has for

Mexicans and other Latinx individuals. Harper, Dylan's sister, decides to help Juan and Trinidad find Adela, making Dylan stay and wait within the getaway car. After they find Adela, the group learns through the radio that Mexico and Canada have opened their borders to fleeing Americans for six hours. The group decides to drive to El Paso to cross into the Mexico border to become asylum refugees.

Although *The Forever Purge* is categorized as a horror film, it also a Latinx migration film because it humanizes migration crossings between borders. The film also humanizes people who are affected by the geopolitical policies that other Latinx migrants who make these border crossings. Latinx migration films often “offer a sympathetic depiction of Latinx migrant lives” and “deploys a “good immigrant” model to counter dominant, anti-immigrant discourses that dehumanize them.” Although most Latinx migration films “depict a Northbound migration journey,” the fifth *Purge* film instead reverses the conventional migration story by displaying how violence and geopolitical policies push their own citizens to flee the United States to avoid the terror of white supremacy (Bebout and Goldsmith 150). The film demonstrates how horror films “have a long tradition of invoking political social commentary as the source of its terror” (151). The film's migration story is filled with horror because it represents the real horror happening today at the Mexican American Border since “many migrants due to U.S border policies today have been pushed into desert areas for crossing” and other dangerous landscapes that have harmed and killed many whom have made the journey. Migrants are also “susceptible to robbery and abandonment by coyotes they pay and entrusted to guide them to the United States.” The Mexican American border is also dangerous for “cisgender women and transgender migrants since they face the potential of being sexually assaulted” (155). *The Forever Purge* demonstrates an American dystopia were the violence that occurs during border migration is

experienced by all citizens, humanizing the conflicts that migrants face while crossing the border. The film also resisting problematic Native rhetoric that labels immigrants as a social and economic drain on America. *The Forever Purge* takes a stance against borders that separate groups of people due to geopolitical policies and contest the violence that is met at the Mexican American border and many borders across the world.

The Forever Purge also humanizes Latinx migrants by humanizing Latinx men without stereotypical representations on the big screen. Juan's portrayal as a Latinx hero who saves the Tucker family, and his wife breaks the "dominant masculinity associated with Latino representation on screen that are typically one-sided and stereotypical" (Alcalde 537). Most Latino men in film are often represented as a "stereotypical macho man" that who are portrayed to be "violent, irresponsible, disrespectful, and selfish." In *The Forever Purge*, Juan is displayed to have "the positive of machismo aspects known as *caballerismo*, which is a code of masculine chivalry" that provides a positive representation of Latinx men who are "respectful, nurturing, and family oriented" (538). Although Juan is portrayed as an undocumented Mexican man who "portrays a Latino with a low status occupation," he is not seen as a "stereotypical criminal that commonly depicts Latinos as ruthless *bandidos* that are out to kill white men or harm white women." Although Juan uses his physical strength to protect his wife and other people from purge participants, the film "tears away the stereotype of the violent macho to reveal a more human and complex core underneath the tough man façade" (542). This showcases how Juan uses *cabellerismo* chivalry to protect others over his own safety.

The Purge franchise has been known for promoting "excessive cartoonish violence" and "glorifying gun culture," often leading audiences to miss the anti-gun violence message within the film because of its gory kill scenes. Although the franchise contains main Black and other

marginalized characters there are scenes where POC individuals are portrayed through a stereotypical lens. For example, in *The Purge: Election Year*, a group of young “Black teenage girls are hypersexualized and depicted as being psychotic predators” as they use *Purge* night to attack a grocery store owner¹⁶ (Alexandrescu 572). *The Forever Purge*, Juan, Adela, and Trinidad are displayed as heroes who defy the problematic *bandito* stereotype when they aid a white family to safety and are not given thanks or praise for their kindness. While driving, Juan opens a discussion with Dylan about his racism, asking why he hates Mexicans. Dylan sighs saying that he “doesn’t hate Mexicans, but that he doesn’t understand them or their culture,” saying that “it would be best if they stuck with their own people.” This makes Juan laugh since without him and Trinidad, two Spanish speaking Mexican men, Dylan’s family would be dead, but he is unable to see past his racism.

When Dylan Tucker tries to persuade Juan that it’s best to “stick with their own people,” he is arguing for a racist ideology of naturalization, which white individuals use to “explain away racial phenomenon by suggesting” that the separation of their communities is a “natural occurrence.” Dylan uses his conversation with Juan to claim that whites assume this “segregation” is natural because people from all backgrounds “gravitate toward likeness.” Worse he is unable to see this ideology as racist because “his tastes for whiteness in friends and partners are perceived by him to be “just the way things are,” when indeed it is not. His ideology of naturalization emphasizes how similar he is to Kirk and other *Purgers* because “this logic reinforces the myth of non-racialization” (Bonilla-Silva 56). Dylan Tucker is unable to see how his racism others Juan, Adela, and Trinidad within their community, assuming this toxic form of “Individualism defends his right to live and associate primarily with whites” and promote the

¹⁶ A group of Black teenage girls would more likely be victims of a violent crime instead of being willing participants during *Purge* night.

segregation of whites and Mexicans within the Texas landscape (63). Juan is disgusted with Dylan's refusal to apologize for his past racism toward him and his Latinx friends, but he shows he is a better person by aiding his family to safety across the Mexican border. Although Dylan Tucker is unrelenting to change his racist thinking, Juan, Adela, and Trinidad use their acts of kindness to help defy racist ideologies of Naturalism and Individualism that discriminate Latinx and other marginalized communities in the United States.

As the group of survivors arrive at El Paso, TX, they run into a large group of *Purgers* who are going after fleeing American citizens who are trying to get to the border before Mexico closes off the admittance of American refugees closes at midnight. The group realizes they will have to cross on foot to the border and walk through war torn El Paso to safety. The group is ambushed by *Purgers* who are targeting them because of their white supremacy bigotry. Luckily Adela and Dylan's Tucker's wife, Cassie are separated from the group. Cassie fears that she is unable to protect herself from violent *Purgers* without the help of her husband, but Adela quickly displays her prowess with weaponry and guns. When Cassie asks how she became knowledgeable about guns, Adela tells her about her previous life in Mexico and how she joined a female army to fight off cartels who invaded her home. Most Latinas in film are "restricted to roles as saintly matriarchs, as domestic servants or hypersexual exotic seductress." "The stereotype of the feisty and sexy Latina spitfire," the Latina clown, and Dark Lady are common stereotypes for Latina women in horror and action films (Brown 105). Adela is portrayed as a strong kick-ass Latina woman who is not defined by her sexuality nor trauma, but instead *The Forever Purge* recognizes her strength and bravery to fight against oppressors. Adela also destigmatizes stereotypical tropes of Mexican immigrants, humanizing her experiences that lead her to cross the Mexican American border after her and Juan were forced to flee their home.

Adela's story is the same as Tucker family's experiences since they were forced off their land due to the threat of violence. The difference is that Adela and Juan's border crossing was dehumanized within the Tucker ranch and their Texan community because their undocumented status was othered by Native rhetoric and policies. Juan and Adela show compassion for the Tuckers who now seek refuge through border crossing into Mexico even though the couple was met with disgust and anger from the Tuckers for border crossing into Texas for safety.

As Adela and Cassie reunite with their group, they are ambushed by the "*Purge Purification*" group who intimidated Adela and Juan's Mexican American community during *Purge* night and followed the group to El Paso. The leader of the group, Elijah, tries to make Dylan and his family turn on their Latinx allies, advising them to kill Adela, Juan, and Trinidad to escape death. Surprisingly Cassie, Dylan, and his sister, Harper go against their demands, realizing that their Latinx allies could have easily decided to let *Forever Purgers* kill off their family in the fear of violent repercussions. They fight together as one to escape to safety, although their friend, Trinidad dies at the hands of the *Purification Purgers*. The group realizes that they will not be able to get close to the border check points due to the *Purgers* and decided to escape to a safe house where Indigenous activist, Chiago Harjo (Zahn McClarnon) persuades the group to cross Navajo land to get into Mexico.

Harjo in the beginning of the film was seen as an advocate against *The Purge* on a news segment, saying that this type of violence is unable to be contained. He is proven right since *Purge* participants are violently attacking their community members and other citizens throughout the United States without the backing of the NFAA. When Harjo offers the group to cross into Navajo land, Dylan is perplexed at their kindness and acknowledges that "this isn't their fight." Surprisingly, Harjo tells him that "they have been dealing with this for over 500

years,” insinuating that they are fighting racism against Indigenous individuals and other marginalized groups of people who are being targeted by white supremacy through *The Purge*.

The Forever Purge is one of the few horror films to advocate for Indigenous sovereignty with their character Harjo’s advocacy to help others safely migrate across the Navajo and Mexican border. Indigenous sovereignty advocates for the “legal, social, political, and cultural rights to reverse continuing experiences of colonialism.” This could include the “redemption of ancestral lands, resources, self-governance, and the preservation of Indigenous cultural practices” (Shrinkhal). By helping a group of American citizens to cross the Mexican American border, Harjo showcases Indigenous resistance against colonialism land ownership and refuses to be subordinate to governmental policies that try to control migration through Indigenous tribal land. Many Indigenous individuals and tribes believe “people do not own land, nor does land belong to a people” because it shouldn’t be “reduced as a commodity” (Jamieson 8). By advocating for the non-ownership of land, *The Forever Purge* takes a stance against the implementation of an arbitrary separation of people due to border lines. This “abstraction of land into property” that is owned by different government seeks to refuse the human relationship with nature, other living things, and landforms” (Foley 119). Indigenous communities are moved to conserve land and its natural resources through stewardship and activism because of their belief “that they are a part of the land.” This stewardship also includes the conservation of animals and other all living beings because “they are also a part of a united family” with the land (Jamieson 7). By advocating for border crossing, the fifth *Purge* film advocates against the division that separates Indigenous and multiple groups of people’s connection to the land. This advocacy also respects Indigenous stewardship and activism to preserve their cultural beliefs in protecting

all life that is connected to the land. This highlights the film's stance against borders which uphold the colonial settler structures that deny Indigenous sovereignty.

As Juan, Adela, and the Tucker family arrive near the Mexican border while traveling through Navajo tribal land, they are ambushed by the *Purge* Purification group. The group realizes that only the few people in their group can fight and will have to hold them off to give Cassie and other Latinx asylum seekers time to get to safety. Harper chooses to lead her sister-in-law and other POC asylum seekers to safety, knowing that Adela, Juan, and Dylan are no match to defeat the *Forever Purgers*. As the three try to arm themselves against the white supremacists *Purgers*, Harjo and his Indigenous friend also help defending the group of asylum seekers. They work together to kill all the *Purge* Purification assailants, showcasing that the collective allyship between Latinx, Indigenous, and other marginalized people are needed to fight white supremacy in their country. As Juan, Adela, and Dylan cross into Mexico, they are thrilled to see that Cassie, who was in active labor while crossing the border, has given birth to a healthy girl. Dylan is grateful for both Juan and Adela's help in keeping his family safe that he thanks them, purposefully speaking Spanish, "Gracias Juan." This scene demonstrates the growth Dylan Tucker makes throughout the movie, who was previously a racist who was unable to see the commonalities between Juan and himself. Dylan realizes through his migration journey that him and Juan both value family and honor. The film demonstrates how he was able to change his ideologies about naturalization and is able to see Latinx and other POC individuals as people instead of racist stereotypes. *The Forever Purge* ends with a message of hope, advocating that white individuals need to realize how stereotypes and naturalization ideologies other and uphold the structures of white supremacy. The film also advocates for Americans to destroy the borders that seek to divide our diverse communities against one another. The film advocates that allyship

with Latinx, Indigenous, and other marginalized individuals to break the cycle of white supremacy violence and hatred that spreads like *The Forever Purge* throughout the United States.



Figure 9: Juan and Adela Survive the final Onslaught of the Forever Purgers.

The Forever Purge allows viewers to see the dangers of white supremacy and advises us not ignore the violence and racism that Latinx, Indigenous, and other marginalized people experience today in America. Although many individuals might assume Americans would never become a country that condemns *The Purge*, in truth, The United States was a sight were public killings and lynchings happened. In America’s history, many white citizens gathered to watch to see dying bodies of Latinx, Black, Indigenous, and other marginalized people. “Many of these public killings were guided by anti-immigration sentiments” and The United States has tried to “erase this history from our national consciousness” (Gonzales-Day 3). Although mobs did lynchings and other acts of violence, many “accused were often held in a jail cell for a period of time before they were lynched,” demonstrating how police and law enforcement allowed for these acts of violence to happen (97). Lynch mobs often “argued that the legal system wasn’t fully established” and became the judge, jury, and executioner of many marginalized individuals

(Gonzales-Day 100). These acts of horrendous crimes led to many Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and other POC individuals to lose their “legal and civil rights.” Sympathizers of lynching victims “were also perceived to be in opposition” to white supremacy ideals and beliefs, which endangered their lives (111). Although viewers might consider horror films like *The Forever Purge* to be based in fiction, America has a dark history of condoning public killings that were sanctioned by law enforcement and American citizens to uphold the structures of white supremacy.

The Forever Purge was “released in theaters on July 4th, 2021, by Universal Pictures and grossed worldwide over \$76 million dollars” in the box office (IMDb). Although the film was financially successful, many critics felt as if the film’s message about border migration and white supremacy violence was too direct. Anya Stanley *AV Club*’s review claims the film discussion about “immigration and class warfare are too heavy handed” and has been “told on countless social media feeds over the last few years.” Although the critic praised the film’s unique Texan setting, she discusses that the film’s “fights are overwrought variations on what you’d find in the comments section under any article about immigration.” Stanley also comments that *The Forever Purge* “sound an alarm that people of color have been ringing for years” (Stanley). Although this is true, James DeMonaco and Everardo Gout also envisioned an America that we are seeing today. Currently, the United States has elected Donald Trump, a known criminal and racist into the white house for a second term, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) have raided multiple cities and deported hundreds of Mexican immigrants and other marginalized people without due process, and revived the use of Nazi salutes by billionaire Elon Musk.

De Monaco and Gout’s messages about the fears of white supremacy needed to be direct and didactic because America’s national consciousness forgets that violence toward Latinx,

Black, Indigenous, and other marginalized individuals are steadily increasing today with the rise of white supremacy. In the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) 2023 Hate Crime Statistics report, states that "hate crimes incidents have increased by 228 crimes" since 2022, which estimates to the total of "11,634 hate crimes documented." In 2023, the number of "hate crimes has increased to 11,862 cases." The report also states that most of these "hate crimes are rooted in race, ethnicity, or ancestry" and more "than half of these incidents" were against Black and other marginalized individuals (U.S Department of Justice). With the rise of hate crimes in America, DeMonaco and Gout's *Forever Purge's* direct message is necessary for the America's national consciousness to stop ignoring as white supremacy and negate anti-migration policies that promote hate towards Latinx and other marginalized individuals today.

During post-COVID19 times, an increase of white individuals and organizations have been working with marginalized communities as allies to promote diversity and inclusion within work and communal spaces, but some have also complained about "the challenges of racial equity fatigue." Some have felt that "the progress toward racial equity is frustratingly slow or even stalled" or worried "about the politic backlash" for promoting pro-inclusivity and equity. "After the killing of George Floyd, the 50 largest companies in the US pledged over \$50 billion dollars to racial justice efforts" and a "third of Fortune 1000 companies made public statements in support for racial equity" along with thousands of other companies. Although one year later, there was little to no change implemented in these companies to promote racial equity. Some white individuals and organizations feared backlash to any of their changed policies and "the people who were recruited into DEI positions didn't have strong expertise into anti-racism or how to manage change in organizational cultures and policies." Other companies also have "numerous leaders who don't have the genuine willingness to act beyond statements," because

they lack willingness to change (Abtan). Some individuals might act as allies toward causes that help POC individuals fight racial inequality and social justice, but many of their concerns demonstrate their frustration against white criticism and the fatigue of implementing real change in their communal and work cultures.

Some white individuals also complained about “feed fatigue, also known as social media fatigue” which is defined as “users feeling overwhelmed with the content they are consuming” that discuss issues related to racial social justice and diversity. Social media content that discusses “police brutality and memes calling out white privilege have made them feel *exhausted* to the point of running back into their safe spaces of complicity.” This showcases how “white people make emotional excuses for choosing to remain racist” or ignore issues that uphold white supremacy in America. This fatigue fights “the call for empathy” that leads to real action, instead “white people try to prove how much they understand” issues that affect marginalized communities. They do not understand that “remaining silent” perpetuates the cycle of white supremacy violence (Owens). The fatigue and criticism of whiteness demonstrates how messages about racial diversity and inclusivity are important to promote within media and films like *The Forever Purge*. The fifth *Purge* film advocates for Americans to not be ignorant to the silence that is hiding the hate crimes and racism that is happening within the United States.

Another form of fatigue that affects how critics and audiences view *The Forever Purge*'s message is American audiences' fatigue with movie franchises. According to a “fandom survey, 84% of Marvel fans claim that they are overwhelmed with the amount of MCU content” that is released by Disney. The survey discovered that audiences are more likely “to attend screenings of character driven titles,” meaning that films with changing cast members might also drive audiences to not watch new sequels within *The Purge* franchise (Roberts). *Scream 5 and 6*

exemplifies how horror franchises use character driven narratives to pave its way to success with Final Latina Girl's Sam and Tara Carpenter. Although the films lack any messages within its narrative that discuss social commentary about Latinx experiences and white supremacy violence compared to *The Forever Purge*. Instead, the *Scream* sequels cater to anti-elevated horror fans who want the horror genre to focus on white fears and anxieties. Although movie fans might be fatigued with franchise films, many "franchises and major motion picture studios are creating waves of content to capitalize on franchises until its demise," catering to "the subsequent diversification of fandom" (Roberts). *The Forever Purge's* critics were unable to understand that most horror franchises focus on white experiences and advocate for traditionalist horror films that exclude narratives with social commentary about race and equality.

The summer of 2020 advocated for the resurgence of Black Lives Matter (BLM) activism "grew larger during a siege of interest in George Floyd's public murder by white officer Derek Chauvin," questioning how white supremacy is implemented through police violence (Johnson and Edgar 5). BLM "strived to highlight and dismantle anti-Black racism and white supremacy and the ways these systems target Black lives" (11). This led to multiple protests in advocacy with the movement to promote change in America, but there was an inevitable backlash to anti-racism activism by white individuals. This "inevitable backlash lead for white individuals to dismiss the efforts of civil rights leaders and groups" that tried to push for "progress in America while whites demonstrated their unhappiness by actively fighting to reverse those gains." After the murder of George Floyd, it took "two months for white Americans to support BLM activism and which peaked in June." Not long afterwards white involvement and social media activism "tumbled back toward pre-protest levels" (166). *Scream 5* and *The Forever Purge's* screenplays were written during the pandemic, both reacting to BLM activism and diversity within multiple

sectors of business and industry. *The Forever Purge*'s narrative focused on advocating for border migration and showcased how the Texan landscape was built on white supremacy violence and capitalist structures like the ranching economy that othered Latinx and other marginalized communities. *Scream 5 and 6* included multiple Latinx and other POC cast members and used their narratives to advocate for traditionalist slasher films that demonstrate white fatigue against elevated horror with social commentary about diversity and inclusion.

The horror genre showcases our country's worst fears, demonstrating how traditionalist horror slasher narratives use color-blind casting to other Latinx, Black, Indigenous, and marginalized individuals through stereotypes. With color-blind casting, Latinx Final Girls Melissa Barrera, and Jenna Ortega's Latinx bodies are objectified by the white male gaze when violently attacked by Ghostface. The Latina Final Girls are deemed as outcasts compared to *Scream*'s white Final Girl Sidney Prescott. By stereotyping *Scream*'s Latina Final Girl's, the franchise showcases how their advocacy for anti-elevated horror is rooted in white fears and anxieties. The franchise also reverts to whiteness by hiring Neve Campbell to reprise her role as Sidney Prescott after Barrera's firing. *The Forever Purge* showcases diverse representation of Latinx and marginalized characters by defying problematic stereotypes of violent Latino *bandidos* with Juan who uses an honorary code of *caballerismo*. The fifth *Purge* film also demonstrates their main Latinx character Adela as strong women who isn't defined by their sexual prowess or trauma. Instead Adela is portrayed as a kick-ass Latina women who can hold her own during *The Purge*. *The Forever Purge* uses its narrative to destigmatize immigration and advocate for the end of geopolitical violence at the border. *The Forever Purge* showcases how behind and in front of the camera Latinx representation destabilize stereotypes and allow more nuanced stories about Latinx and other marginalized communities within the horror genre.

Conclusion

Latinx Representation and Advocation for Change

The #OscarsSoWhite hashtag was one of the biggest movements to gain traction from filmmakers and audiences to advocate for diversity within Hollywood to decenter their focus on whiteness. After this campaign advocated for change in 2015 and 2016, the following years resulted in multiple Oscar wins and nominations for POC filmmakers and actors. During the COVID 19 pandemic, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement advocated for Black civil rights and diversity within multiple sectors of entertainment. This reckoning influenced multiple filmmakers and studios to diversify their casts by using color-blind casting to meet quotas to include diversity as a check mark within a list of must-haves on set. Diversity should not be something studios or filmmakers are forced to do as a way to appease audiences who want to see their diverse communities represented within the medium. Filmmakers and studios need to promote in front and behind the camera diversity to bring to life nuanced stories about Latinx and POC lives to their future projects. This form of diverse representation is how Latinx and POC filmmakers can be able to work behind the camera as directors, writers, producers, and more who could create real change within Hollywood.

Spyglass Media and *Scream 5 and 6's* directors chose to hire Melissa Barrera and Jenna Ortega to diversify their cast, but their Latinx identity, culture, and experiences are whitewashed within these films. *Scream's* Latina Final Girl's are stereotyped as monstrous, and their bodies are objectified by violence to appease the male gaze. *The Forever Purge* exemplifies how the inclusion of in front and behind the scenes Latinx representation helps portray nuanced stories without stereotypes. The film also advocates for causes that benefit Latinx communities nationwide by promoting positive border migration and the end of geopolitical violence at the Mexican American border. The creator of the *Purge*, James DeMonaco hired Mexican director

Everardo Gout to ensure that *The Forever Purge* would tell a nuanced story about Southwest Texas. DeMonaco knew as an Italian American man that he lacked the experience to tell a Latinx story and hired a Mexican director to create a story without stereotypical Latinx tropes. Although most Latinx filmmakers and actors are grateful to be included in big budget film projects within Hollywood, they must be voices of reason that advocate for all-inclusive diversity behind and in front camera representation. Latinx filmmakers must not be afraid of angering top studios and executives when trying to implement change within the industry. *Scream 5*, *6*, and *The Forever Purge* demonstrate the importance for diverse audiences and communities to advocate for more Latinx talent within the industry and help Latinx filmmakers be able to find opportunities to tell nuanced stories about their cultures and experiences.

Latinx communities and POC audiences have the power with social movements and campaigns like #OscarsSoWhite to influence studios and filmmakers to include more diversity within their films. It is ongoing battle that all movie goers and audiences need to be a part of to implement long-lasting change when it comes to the industries protocols and standards about diversity. By using social media campaigns and promoting Latinx filmmaking talent, Latinx and other POC individuals can advocate for less color-blind casting and whitewashed POC representation within Hollywood to implement real change in how we see ourselves reflected on the big screen.

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