

# Authenticity in Remakes: The Cultural Politics of Latinx-led TV Remakes

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The televisual space of remakes is an area in which we can notably see an increase of Latinx representations, as remakes provide new opportunities for Latinx actors, writers and producers. Currently, there are two separate types of remakes that have become a visual platform for Latinx representation on the small screen. First, various American networks have adapted popular Spanish-language telenovelas into the English-language television landscape, such as *Ugly Betty* (2006-2010), *Devious Maids* (2013-2016), *Jane the Virgin* (2014- ) and most recently, *Queen of the South* (2016- ). Additionally, there is a recent surge of nostalgic 1970s to 2000's TV remakes and reboots that once featured all white families, characters, and storylines that now showcase Latinx representation in these roles. Norman Lear's remake of *One Day at a Time* (2017-), for instance, is centered around the everyday life of a Cuban-American family. In addition, the highly anticipated remake of *Charmed* (2019-) coming this fall features three Latina witches. For the purpose of this paper, I will be focusing on nostalgic American remakes to discuss the precarious position of Latinx representation in these series. Using *One Day at a Time* and *Charmed* as case studies, this position paper explores how claims to authenticity are marked by the cultural and racial politics that comes with recycling previously white centered shows with Latinx characters and storylines.

Generally, remakes rely on the familiar nostalgia and affect of the original texts to persuade audiences to watch the remake. Viewers, in this case, want a slight variation of the "same thing" to validate the quality of the "original." Latinx representation in the televisual space of remakes has special bonds that tie the "original" text to the remake, as Latinx casts are compared to white casts of nostalgic American shows. For example, the *Charmed* remake has received a heightened level of scrutiny since CW confirmed a new cast of witches. Popular internet outlets have published headlines such as "Stars of the 'Charmed' Reboot Wants Fans to Know That This Is Not a Copy" and "'Charmed' Cast Says Show is Not a Rip-Off: 'It's a New Set of Witches.'" While claiming indebtedness to the original, the three Latina leads visibly challenge how the remake will stay "true" to the original with their brown and black bodies on the screen and contemporary narratives. Although the *Charmed* remake will be a new series, it cannot escape the legacy of the original cast and storylines, which places Latinx representation in a precarious position, one where the Latina leads are being setting up to fail before the series even airs.

On the other hand, the remake of *One Day at a Time* is critically acclaimed for its representation of a Cuban American family. In part, the success of the show is due to Norman Lear, prolific television writer and producer of the 1970's-1980's, who resumed his role as an executive producer for *One Day at a Time*. Lear's presence, along with

his commitment to producing socially relevant programming that speaks to the political-cultural moment, provides authenticity and a platform for Latinx representation, one that addresses issues that are significant to the community. While Lear's legendary career elevates the quality of the remake, it is co-showrunner Gloria Calderon Kellett and other Latinx writers who supply cultural authenticity to the Cuban American family and storylines on *One Day at a Time*. Furthermore, more than forty years exist between the original and the remake which makes TV audiences less likely to compare the original cast to the new one. Lear's authorial image along with Latinx talent and the temporal distance between the original and remake creates a formula where Latinx representation can flourish without being vehemently critiqued and compared to the original.

TV remakes, in these instances, celebrate diversity, but a diversity that is problematically filtered through the lens of these familiar nostalgic white-centric shows, rather than increasing diversity by writing new series for the Latinx community. As we saw in the case of *Charmed*, Latinx actors and characters are restrained by the shadow of the "original" cast members, which underscores the limitations of Latinx representation in remakes. *One Day at a Time* proves how difficult it is for these series to be read as authentic remakes, as they need multiple markers of authenticity, quality, and temporal distance. Latinx-led remakes are here to stay, as one sees when looking to upcoming television projects: Freeform is developing a remake of *Party of Five* and the CW is collaborating with Gina Rodriguez for a remake of *Dr. Illegal*, both of which will be centered around deportation and family separation. At a time in which the Latinx community, specifically the undocumented community, itself is in such a precarious position with our current administration, it is imperative that we understand the cross-cultural and racial politics embedded in these remakes, as they attempt to represent the lived experiences of millions in this country.