

AMERICAN PACHUCO

A Film By David Alvarado



Production Company: Insignia Films

2026 | USA | 92 mins

English • Color • 5.1 • 1.85:1 (U.S. Theatrical) • 24 Virtual DCP Flat
Not Encrypted • Downloadable MP4

Website: IMDb Page



Press Contact:

Lauren DeFilippo
Insignia Films
lauren@insigniafilms.com

Sales Contact:

Amanda Lebow
CAA Film Sales
filmsales@caa.com

Festival Distribution:

Jeffrey Winter
The Film Collaborative
jeffrey@thefilmcollaborative.org

Logline

Against political resistance and industry skepticism, Luis Valdez pushes Chicano storytelling from the fields to the film screen with *Zoot Suit* and *La Bamba*, crafting iconic works that challenge, celebrate, and expand America's story.

Synopsis

An auteur emerges from America's underclass: from migrant farmworker to revolutionary artist, Luis Valdez changed American culture. In the 1960s, his *El Teatro Campesino* performed on flatbed trucks and helped mobilize workers to win the first farmworker union contract. His *Zoot Suit* was the first Chicano play on Broadway. Despite critical rejection that killed the show, he persevered, creating *La Bamba*—a breakout blockbuster that authentically depicted Mexican American life to the world. Now in its 60th year, El Teatro continues to be a beacon for Latino/a creators. This is the story of an artist who gave voice to the overlooked and opened pathways for generations.

Read director David Alvarado's December 15, 2025 Time Magazine article, [Who Looks Like They Belong in America?](#)

Director's Statement

I met Luis Valdez when I was 21 years old. As an aspiring filmmaker and son of an immigrant, his speech at my university gave me an unexpected jolt of confidence. He spoke about creating art in a world that didn't want to hear what he had to say. His final plea that day still resonates with me: he slammed both hands on the lectern and declared, "The only way to begin your career as an artist is to simply do it. Do the thing. Now."

Twenty years later, I'm a documentary filmmaker, and I owe much of that early ambition to Valdez's words. Now I'm telling his story—but this isn't just a film about Mexican-Americans. It's about who gets to be American.

For six decades, Valdez has proven that Chicanos aren't marginal to America—they ARE America. From César Chávez's grape strikes to Broadway's first Chicano production to La Bamba, his work insists on one truth: When power structures say we don't belong, cinema becomes our most powerful tool to insist that we do.

The attack on our film proves its necessity. Our NEH grant was terminated. Our CPB funding, eliminated. The same forces trying to erase Chicano families from Los Angeles are erasing our ability to tell this story. Yet this film exists because of the power of public media—through American Masters, Latino Public Broadcasting, ITVS, and Firelight Media—institutions that champion stories other media outlets won't fund. As public media itself faces unprecedented threats, our project stands as testament to why these platforms matter: they preserve and amplify voices that would otherwise be silenced. We've rescued 80,000 feet of deteriorating 1970s Teatro Campesino celluloid from literal destruction—American history being passively lost, now digitized in 4K for the first time and will be publicly free and available through the Internet Archive.

As ICE raids terrorize the neighborhoods around us, Valdez's assertion that Chicanos are the original inhabitants of this continent transforms from cultural history to urgent resistance. This film asks the question many Chicanos face daily: If we don't belong in America, who does?

In this political moment, AMERICAN PACHUCO isn't just preservation. For me, it's a reclamation. It's proof that our stories, like our presence, have always been here.

A Statement About César Chávez

AMERICAN PACHUCO arrives at a moment when the public conversation around César Chávez has been upended, and the film is built to meet it. Chávez appears as an antagonist in Luis Valdez's story as the figure who pushed *El Teatro Campesino* out of the United Farm Workers union. Post-screening conversations have shown what this can do in a room: audiences using the theater as a civic space to work through the contradictions together, and the film continues to win awards as it travels.

For programmers, this is the moment Latino stories matter most. One individual's abhorrent actions cannot be allowed to erase a movement, a culture, or a history that shaped this country. AMERICAN PACHUCO insists on the legacy of the labor movement and Chicano storytelling at exactly the time that legacy demands to be seen, heard, and protected — not sidestepped.

Director Filmography

FEATURE DOCUMENTARIES

American Pachuco (2026) – Director/Producer/Writer – Documentary about Luis Valdez

We Are As Gods (2022) – Director/Producer/Cinematographer – Theatrical release

Bill Nye: Science Guy (2017) – Director/Producer/Cinematographer – Netflix, Theatrical

True Conviction (2017) – Producer/Cinematographer – PBS Independent Lens

The Immortalists (2014) – Director/Producer/Cinematographer – Netflix, Theatrical

TELEVISION

Blood Sugar Rising (2020) – Director/Producer/Writer – PBS

Matter of Mind (2023-2025) – Producer – PBS Independent Lens three-part series

Secrets in Your Data (2024) – Director/Producer – PBS NOVA

Who's in Control (2023) – Director/Producer – PBS NOVA

Director Bio

David Alvarado is an award-winning documentary filmmaker who brings to life stories of trailblazers in science, the arts, and human rights. His journey began as a high school dropout interning at Dallas PBS affiliate KERA, where he climbed from marketing to production, discovering his calling behind the camera. He co-founded Structure Films in New York City with Jason Sussberg.

His work as Director/Producer/Cinematographer includes four feature documentaries: The Immortalists (2014), Bill Nye: Science Guy (2017), Blood Sugar Rising (2020), and We Are As Gods (2022). He has directed and produced for PBS's NOVA series with Who's in Control (2023) and Secrets in Your Data (2024) and produced Independent Lens' three-part series Matter of Mind (2023-2025). He also hosted and produced an eight-part Audible Original podcast on environmental technologist Stewart Brand.

Alvarado has pioneered innovative funding methods—from record-breaking Kickstarter and branded funding campaigns with Stripe, Inc. to successful NFT initiatives. A Stanford Documentary Film MFA graduate, he has earned fellowships at WGBH Producers Academy, Sundance's Producers Workshop, and recognition in DOC NYC's "40 Under 40 Filmmakers to Watch."

As a decade-long NALIP member and Chicano filmmaker, Alvarado has dedicated his career to making the world more thoughtful through documentary storytelling—a mission that began eighteen years ago when Luis Valdez showed him what was possible, at an event that ultimately culminated in this film.

Writer & Director

David Alvarado

Producers

David Alvarado, Lauren DeFilippo, Everett Katigbak, Amanda Pollak

Executive Producers

Stephen Ives, Michael Kantor, Loira Limbal, Carrie Lozano, Stanley Nelson, Marcia Smith, Sandie Viquez Pedlow

Editor

Daniel Chávez-Ontiveros

Cinematographer

Zachary Fink

Sound

Peter Albrechtsen, MPSE

Music

Eduardo Arenas

Cast

Luis Valdez, Lupe Trujillo-Valdez, Edward James Olmos, Cheech Marin, Lou Diamond Phillips, Dolores Huerta, Linda Ronstadt, Jorge A. Huerta, Luis C. Garza, Taylor Hackford, Rose Portillo, Sal Lopez, Phil Esparza, Socorro Valdez, Daniel Valdez