

ASPIRA Alumnus Spotlight: Luis Reyes



Born and raised on 119th Street in Manhattan's Upper West Side, Luis Reyes grew up in a vibrant yet challenging neighborhood. His greatest inspirations were his hardworking and kind parents, who instilled in him the values of honesty, perseverance, and compassion.

As a teenager, Luis was searching for cultural identity and purpose during a turbulent time in the nation's history. He found both at ASPIRA. The friendships and camaraderie he discovered there, along with the guidance of counselors just a few years older than himself, left a lasting impact. "They taught us about proper discourse, organizing, and parliamentary procedures," Luis recalls. "But more than that, ASPIRA gave us a sense of self-awareness, cultural pride, and purpose."

From ASPIRA, Luis learned the importance of reflection, goal setting, cultural values, and respect for others. Most importantly, he learned how to work with diverse people and ideas and how to find and use his voice. These lessons became the foundation for his professional and personal journey.



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With the support of ASPIRA and Model Cities scholarships, Luis attended the University of the Pacific's Elbert Covell College in Stockton, California, the only bilingual (Spanish/English) college in the U.S. at the time. After graduating in 1976 with a degree in Education and Inter-American Studies, he moved to Los Angeles, where he built a remarkable career.

Luis began as an actor and director with Ricardo Montalbán's NOSOTROS Theater activist group before moving into film publicity, working with major Hollywood studios on projects in Mexico. He became a pioneer in U.S. Hispanic marketing and public relations, later establishing himself as a published author of six books on film history, including a seminal work on Hispanics in Hollywood.

Today, although retired, he continues to inspire as a co-host and guest programmer for Turner Classic Movies and as a lecturer on Latinos in film at universities and cultural centers across the country.



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Leadership, for Luis, means speaking your mind, acting when you know you're right, and leading by example, while also encouraging others to think for themselves. He describes himself as proud of his Puerto Rican heritage, deeply American, and, at this stage of life, "a citizen of the world and of humanity."

Outside of his professional work, Luis enjoys collecting movie memorabilia and vintage salsa records. And when asked what advice he has for today's ASPIRANTES, his words are powerful: "Embrace life. Study and work hard. Never let anyone or anything stop you from going for your dreams. Take advantage of every opportunity, and know it won't be easy, but with dedication, diligence, and perseverance, you can achieve anything."

ASPIRA proudly celebrates Luis Reyes, an alumnus whose journey reflects resilience, creativity, and the power of cultural pride.