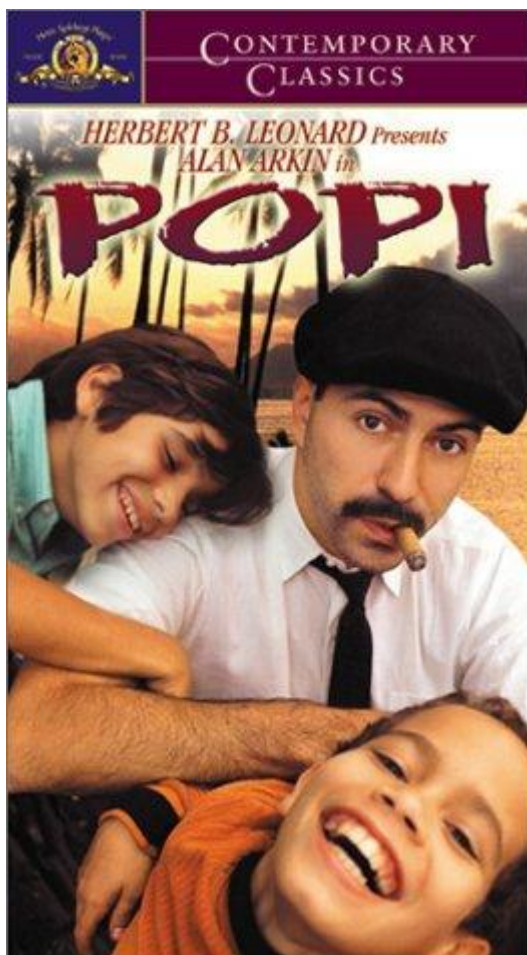


Popi

US : 1969 : dir. Arthur Hiller : United Artists : 115 min
 prod: Herbert B Leonard : scr: Tina & Lester Pine : dir.ph.:
[Miguel Alejandro](#); [Ruben Figueroa](#)
 Alan Arkin; Rita Moreno; John Harkins; Joan Tompkins; Anthony Holland; Arny Freeman

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	KBytes	Ω □ ∅ Z ∞	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
3688b	5½	13	5		3 3 3 - -	No	Unseen



Source: Amazon.com

Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide
 1996 review:

"Charming story of poverty in the ghetto, focusing on one man's often zany antics in securing a better life for his children. An odd ending for a far-fetched story. *** "

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review - identical to above, but altering the final sentence to:

"..An odd ending for a well-made film with a brilliant performance by Arkin. ***½ "

Halliwell's Film Guide review:

"Adventures of a cheerful inhabitant of New York's Puerto Rican ghetto. Ethnic comedy-drama of the kind that has since found its way in abundance into American TV series. Very competently done for those who like it, eg: Puerto Ricans. Scr: Tina & Lester Pine. * "

"An appropriately disenchanted view of an immigrant's struggling ambitions in the Promised Land." - Richard Combs

Movies on TV (1987) review:

"Alan Arkin's flawless, luminous performance as the New York Puerto Rican widower who wants a better life for his two sons is the film's main attraction¹. He will win your heart as he comes up with an outrageous plan to set his boys adrift in a boat off the Florida coast in hopes of their finding a better home with some wealthy people after being rescued. *** "

Rating the Movies (1990) review:

"A heartwarming story about the struggle of a Puerto Rican widower in Spanish Harlem trying

¹ ie: if you've no interest in kids at all

to secure a better life for his young sons. Arkin is extremely convincing in the title role, as a

gets. The undecided mood of the film works against it for any lasting impression on the



determined man who works at multiple

jobs and confronts the problems of ghetto life. The charming screenplay features an appropriate mixture of comedy and sentimentality. Miguel Alejandro and Ruben Figueroa perform in supporting roles. *** ”

The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television review:

“Tepid comedy which is meant to be terribly touching, about a Puerto Rican (Alan Arkin) who attempts to arrange a better life for his children by having them pose as Cuban refugees. Director Arthur Hiller does not convince. 77 ”

Variety Movie Guide 1993 review:

“Alan Arkin is cast as a Puerto Rican father, living in Spanish Harlem, whose fantastic plan to improve the lot of his two small sons backfires. Arkin is given too much free rein for his very personal style, and is sometimes guilty of working a scene, meant to be poignant or even dramatic, for a laugh, which he usually

viewer. The character played by Arkin is the little man vs the big odds and he does what he can with it but the story is too much for him.

Source: The United Artists Story

The script is riddled with illogical loopholes, some of which, hopefully, will only be apparent to those familiar with the Spanish Harlem scene. Moreno is dropped midway through the film, but makes a good impression while she's on scene. If any viewer believes that Arkin would turn down such a doll, they'll believe the rest of the story.”

Video Movie Guide 1993 review:

“Alan Arkin is Popi (Pappa), a hard-working if somewhat irresponsible Puerto Rican immigrant who comes up with a plan to provide his two young boys with new lives as Cuban refugees. Offbeat dramatic comedy, recommended only for families with older children. Rated "G", although there is some violence and partial nudity. **½ ”

The United Artists Story review:

"**POPI**" was a Puerto Rican living in the slums of Spanish Harlem and despairing for the future of his two small sons. He has the clever idea (supplied by screenwriters Tina and Lester Pine) of setting the boys adrift in a small fishing boat off Miami Beach, in the hope that they will be picked up and adopted by a wealthy family if they claim to be Cuban refugees. They are indeed rescued, and gain nationwide publicity, but when the hoax is discovered, the boys return joyously to New York. Director Arthur Hiller managed to extract some bitterly funny ethnic comedy from the first half, but poured too much syrup over the second. However, Herbert B Leonard's De Luxe Color production was redeemed by Alan Arkin as the nervously disenchanted father. Other roles went to Rita Moreno, cute kids Miguel Alejandro and Ruben Figueroa, John Harkins, Joan Tompkins, Anthony Holland and Arny Freeman."

[no listing in "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "The Time Out Film Guide", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

Radio Times notes:

"Drama in which a poor Puerto Rican father tries to give his children a better life."

"The poor Puerto Rican father of two sons hits upon a bizarre scheme that should give them all the things he never had."

"A father tries to provide for his sons. **** "

"Drama starring Alan Arkin as a poor Puerto Rican father who goes to desperate lengths to secure a better life for his two young sons."

"Drama. A single father living in the ghetto struggles to provide a better life for his children."

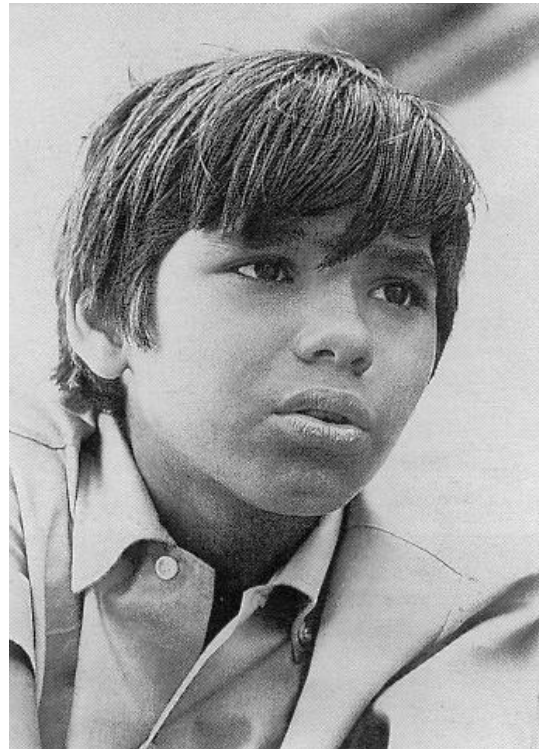
What's On TV note:

"Alan Arkin stars as a single father living in the ghetto and trying hard for a better life for his children. Co-starring Rita Moreno."

Miguel Alejandro Source: *The Moving Picture Boy*

The Moving Picture Boy entry on Alejandro:

"In "**POPI**" a poor Puerto Rican father in New York - magnificently played by Alan Arkin -



takes his two boys to Miami Beach and sets them adrift in a fishing boat, so that they can be picked up in the Gulf Stream, pretending to be refugees from Cuba, and adopted by rich Americans. The plan nearly works, but is wrecked by Popi's paternal devotion. The spirited Miguel Alejandro plays the elder son. In his mid-teens he appeared in "**BADGE 373**" (73). The younger brother in "**POPI**" was played by the curly-haired Ruben Figueroa, who went on to roles in Mexican films and in "**SANTIAGO'S ARK**" (US 73). Both he and Alejandro were actual Puerto Ricans."



Partial nudity! The viewers must be warned!



Source: Movieboys website

Perhaps "PUPPIES" would have been an equally appropriate title. The children once again little more than cherished pets for whom "a good home" must be found. Their own reactions to dad's hare-brained scheme do not rate a mention, but kittens and puppies don't expect to get a vote. Pity the American TV station that might have scheduled this film for airing in 2000, with the Bush/Gore election underway, when a six-year old Cuban boy became the focus of an acrimonious and highly publicised between Cuban reactionaries in the US and his father, after the boy's mother attempted to abduct him to the US, but drowned in the crossing. Truth is stranger than fiction, and a good deal less funny. As for this being a "contemporary classic", as the video label proudly boasts, I doubt more than a handful of Arkin fans would agree to that.

Alejandro was 12, and showed up the following year as Julio - 9th on the cast list - in the British film (set in 1641), "THE LAST VALLEY" with Michael Caine and Omar Sharif, and in 1971 he made the Western "YUMA" with Clint Walker. Nothing else is known of Figueroa, who was 11.

See subject index under **COMEDY, ORPHANS / ADOPTION** and **REFUGEES / EVACUEES / IMMIGRANTS**.

Customers' reviews from **Amazon.com** (spelling / grammatical errors remain intact):

"Before there was Elian Gonzalez, there was **"POPI"**. In a amazing and convincing performance, Alan Arkin plays Abraham Rodriguez, a Puerto Rican father of two small boys living in New York's Spanish Harlem. Working three jobs with only five hours of sleep a night, Abraham only wants the best for his kids as he struggles to provide them a roof over their heads and food on the table, especially after the death of his wife. However, the mean streets of the city and the poverty-stricken neighborhood he resides only causes him to worry about his children's welfare.

After his children suffer a series of violent attacks, Abraham gets fed up with life in "El Barrio" and devises his plan in trying to give his children a better life he can't provide them. By doing research and educating the boys, Abraham sets his sons adrift in a rowboat off the coast of Miami, hoping that the Coast Guard picks them up as Cuban refugees. After they are rescued, his ultimate goal is that a wealthy family adopts them to give them an upbringing that would give the greater opportunities than they would have if they lived in the ghetto. However, the human heart is a powerful weapon, and after the boys long for their "Popi," Abraham starts to miss them and tries to see them by all means necessary, leading to a hilarious chase, and finally an emotional ending to a scheme-gone wrong.

Arkin's performance as Abraham is convincing and amazing in every sense. His mastering of an English accent with hints of Spanish is incredible, seeing that Arkin is not Puerto Rican. Rita Moreno is excellent as Lupe, although her appearance in the film is rather limited. Newcomers Miguel Alejandro (Junior) and Ruben Figueroa (Luis) are excellent as Abraham's two sons. Alejandro's role reminded me a lot of Thomas Melly's role of Lil' Chino in another Puerto Rican movie filmed in New York City, **"I LIKE IT LIKE THAT"**.

This film will pull many emotional strings, especially when Abraham parts with his children on a dark Floridian beach. There are many memorable lines and scenes throughout the scene, however my favorite one has to be Abraham's accidental appearance at a Cuban democracy rally at a New York hotel. At the rally, Abraham who is waitering, is brought to

the stage by a few Cubans, who think he is one of the six men who participated in the Bay of Pigs invasion fiasco. After a roll call of the names of the veterans and their chanting "Que Vive Cuba Libre" (Long Live a Free Cuba!) Abraham is faced with a crowd anxious to hear him talk. His line which is probably the funniest pro-Puerto Rican chant to ever heard in a film is a must see for anyone who is Puerto Rican or an admirer of the island and its' people.

The film which was rated "G" back in 1969 is far too intense for a child. With today's standards this film would have received a PG-13 rating due to violence, nudity, and powerful scenes of child discipline. If this film was released before the Elian Gonzalez conflict started, then many, especially many ignorant politicians in the United States might have understood the feelings a child has for their parents. Ignorance is bliss, and as we saw in this film and real life, not all the toys in the world can buy a child's love over that of their love for their parent(s). **"POPI"** is definately a contemporary classic in American cinema.

The film gives an accurate portrait of life among Latinos living in New York's toughest neighborhoods. Director Arthur Hiller (**"LOVE STORY"**) did an excellent job of depicting life in the ghetto with sensitivity and grace. The film's beautiful score and charming theme song by Dominic Frontiere are captivating and memorable. I recommend this film to everyone, and especially to anyone wanting to understand the effects of the Puerto Rican diaspora in the United States."

- Luis Hernandez, New York

"A good film and indeed timely in regard to the Elian case. But for the life of me I can't imagine how it received a "G" rating. There is one scene in particular in which the two boys have been beaten up and striped naked and I mean totally naked with everything showing! **"SOUTH PARK"** was rated R due to some bad language. Can someone please explain this?"

- Anon, Palo Alto, California

"This is a wonderful movie, and I'm so happy it is being re-released on video. I have been looking for it for years. It is a moving story of an immigrant who wants to provide the best for his two children. The theme of this movie,

made in the 1970's, is strikingly relevant today -
Think Elian!"

- McLean, Virginia

"Surprisingly timely look at inequality and political expediency in the United States during the late 20th century. Abram Rodriguez is a day laborer and handyman of Puerto Rican descent struggling to raise two young sons alone in the squalor and danger of "Spanish Harlem" in New York City. When he discovers that members of another Latino group (Cuban exiles) are treated very differently because of political consideration, he makes a dreadful and selfless decision. No viewer will ever forget his cries of "I'm going to do it! I'm going to do it! " For a short time, the boys become famous "symbols" of the Cuban liberation struggle, and are inundated with toys, prayers, and promises of a new and wonderful life. A problem arises, though, when

the boys clearly love their "Popi" more than the consumer goods America can offer to some of its citizens. While the film is leavened with memorable humor, the truths it reveals are painful, and sadly still relevant today. One more note. The theme song is adorable, and most touching in light of current events involving another boy found in waters off the coast of south Florida and separated from his own "Popi." "

- Dr Robin Markowitz, Calif