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Brandon Wagner
Illinois Wesleyan University

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Contact: Brandon T. Wagner, 309/556-3181

Edward James Olmos: Emmy Award-Winning Actor to Visit IWU

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--Multi-talented actor, producer, director, and community activist Edward James Olmos, whose new drama "American Family" premiered Jan. 23 on PBS, is coming to Illinois Wesleyan University on Feb. 6.

Olmos will address issues of multiculturalism and social change in the new Hansen Student Center, 300 E. Beecher St., Bloomington at 7 p.m. The actor is also scheduled for a short period of media availability at 6:15 p.m., also in the Hansen Student Center.

Olmos, known as the "Olivier of the Latino World," was born and raised in East Los Angeles and spent several years in theatrical roles until his breakthrough performance in the musical play "Zoot Suit," which led to a Tony Award nomination. The nomination led to a series of popular roles in films such as "Blade Runner," "Saving Grace," "My Family/Mi Familia," "12 Angry Men," "The Limbic Region," "Menendez: A Murder in Beverly Hills," and "Selena."

In 1988, Olmos received an Oscar nomination for his portrayal of dedicated math teacher Jaime Escalante in "Stand and Deliver," which he also produced. His role as Lt. Castillo in the popular television program "Miami Vice" garnered him both an Emmy award and a Golden Globe.

Olmos marked his directorial debut and starred in the feature film "American Me" for his production company, Olmos Productions in 1992. He was executive producer on the award-winning NBC documentary "Lives in Hazard," and was honored with a Golden Globe Award and Emmy nomination for his work in HBO's "The Burning Season," which chronicled the story of Brazilian political activist Chico Mendes.

In April 1999, Olmos launched a nationwide media project called "Americanos: Latino Life in the United States," a celebration of Latino culture through photography, film, music, and the printed word. The project, co-sponsored by Time-Warner Inc., is meant to inspire Latino pride and to build bridges among Latinos and others. "Americanos" includes a five-year traveling photography exhibition organized by the Smithsonian Institution, a music CD featuring Latino artists, a documentary to air on HBO, and a book of essays, photos, and commentary by today's most notable figures in the Hispanic community, co-edited by Olmos.

Olmos also makes the time to participate in several humanitarian efforts. He is the U.S. Goodwill Ambassador for UNICEF, and a national spokesperson for the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation. He has worked with David Rockefeller of the Rockefeller Foundation and serves on the boards of many groups and organizations. Olmos serves as executive director of the Lives in Hazard Educational Project, a national gang prevention program funded by the United States Department of Justice.

He speaks at an average of 150 institutions each year, and played an instrumental role in the cleanup efforts after the L.A. riots, the 1994 Los Angeles earthquake, and Hurricane Andrew in Florida.