Studies based on a director often follow a common model, generally resorting to an overview of that director’s films and examining shared aesthetic qualities and themes. This sort of study was grounded in the auteur theory—following authorship approaches in literature—and was invested in a consistency that justified the place of film authorship as a worthy pursuit in academia. In this study, however, I examine Mexican-American filmmaker Robert Rodriguez through a discursive analysis, unencumbered to textual analysis or even a chronological approach, with a look at the media discourse, Rodriguez’s own writings and interviews, and the pertinent scholarship. His debut award-winning debut feature, El Mariachi (1992), as well as the production diary that would soon follow, Rebel Without a Crew: Or How a 23-Year-Old Filmmaker with $7,000 Became a Hollywood Player, inspired a generation of filmmakers into making ultra-low (or microbudget) films. With films often released through Miramax/ Dimension, Rodriguez has continued to make films that primarily cater to action (Sin City [2005], Machete [2010]), horror (The Faculty [1998], Planet Terror [2007]), and children’s (the Spy Kids films [2001-2011], Shorts [2009]) audiences, all outside of Hollywood at his Troublemaker Studios in Austin, Texas. While still directing films, his most recent venture was founding the El Rey Network, which promotes itself as the first network for English-speaking Latinos. After a brief introduction to the auteur theory in addition to contemporary approaches to authorship that suggest a move away from text-based analyses, I consider four broad areas that point to Rodriguez’s growth from the director of the microbudget El Mariachi to his renown as the most prominent Latino media figure: social contexts (i.e., his Mexican-American identity), labor, economics, and technologies. I conclude that while Rodriguez’s career has evolved significantly over the last twenty-plus years of his professional career, he has steadfastly retained his adherence to his Mexican-American identity, his penchant for taking on many of the tasks of filmmaking (cinematography, editing, composing, etc.) despite having larger budgets, his parsimonious approach to budgets, and his technophilia.
The Sunday Conversation: ‘El Mariachi’ director Robert Rodriguez is launching the El Rey Network because he wants young English-speaking Latinos to have a network that speaks to them. March 07, 2014|By Meredith Blake. Filmmaker Robert Rodriguez in Univision Offices in Manhattan, NY. (Jennifer S. Altman / For…) Robert Rodriguez helped ignite an independent film movement in the 1990s with his film “El Mariachi,” shot for a mere $7,000, before moving on to blockbuster fare such as “Sin City” and the “Spy Kids” franchise. Now the restless filmmaker, 45, is t