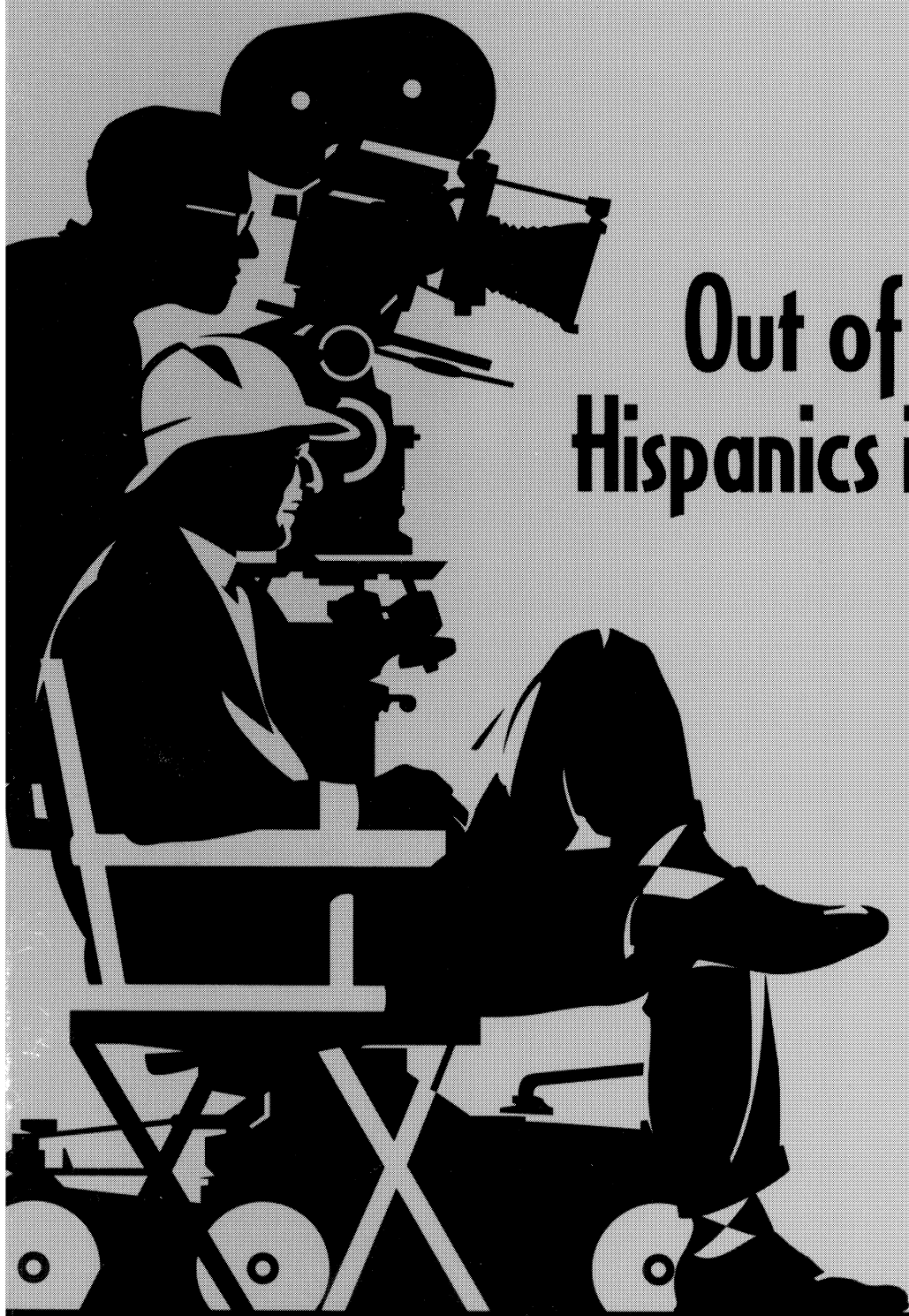
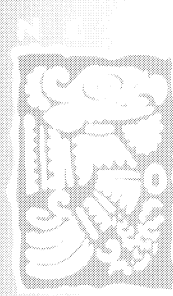


NCLR
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF LA RAZA



Out of the Picture: Hispanics in the Media

State of Hispanic
America 1994



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Executive Summary

The “mass media” wields power that shapes Americans’ attitudes toward each other and the world. Unfortunately, the media’s approach to Hispanic Americans — who constitute at least nine percent of the U.S. population — has been largely unscrutinized by the media itself, the federal government, or other independent groups. The following report describes the treatment of Hispanics in the media, assesses the impact of that treatment, examines the challenges the current situation presents, and suggests recommendations for ensuring that the media provide accurate and sufficient representation and portrayals of Americans of Hispanic descent.

Treatment of Hispanics in the Media

The first section of this report describes the findings of studies on the treatment of Hispanics in the media. Overall, this research has produced remarkably consistent findings, revealing that:

- ❖ **Hispanics are almost invisible in both the entertainment and news media.**
- ❖ **When Hispanics do appear, they are consistently and uniformly portrayed more negatively than other racial and ethnic groups.**

To millions of Americans whose principal views of Hispanic Americans are shaped by what they see on the television screen, the nation’s second largest ethnic minority is essentially “out of the picture.”

The Impact of Underrepresentation and Negative Portrayals

The second section of this report assesses how media treatment of Hispanics contributes to a negative image of Latinos within the broader society. Through an extensive review and analysis of relevant research, this section concludes that:

- ❖ **While media scholars disagree about exactly how societal perceptions of minorities are shaped by the media, they generally agree that underrepresentation and negative portrayals of such groups are harmful to these groups’ public image.**
- ❖ **Non-Hispanics are largely ignorant of the condition of Hispanic Americans and tend to hold negative views of Hispanics that are inconsistent with the facts. Moreover, these public perceptions are remarkably similar to stereotypical media portrayals of Hispanics.**
- ❖ **Negative stereotypes — which the media reinforces — directly contribute to actual discrimination against Hispanics.**
- ❖ **The media’s treatment of Hispanics undermines the ability and likelihood that the general public and policy makers will identify public policies that address Hispanic concerns, and undercuts support for such policies.**
- ❖ **The media may contribute to negative self-images within the Hispanic community, particularly among Hispanic children.**

Challenges

The third section of this report examines the ways in which powerful institutionalized conditions, both within and outside the media establishment, contribute to the problem. This section concludes that:

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- ❖ **Hispanics are underrepresented in employment in every media industry, and are particularly absent in positions of power.**
 - ❖ **“Watchdog” institutions, including those within the media, independent public interest groups, and government agencies have all failed to demonstrate a sustained interest in monitoring the treatment of Hispanics in the media.**

Recommendations

Assuring accurate, sensitive, and proportional portrayals and news coverage of Hispanics will require a multi-faceted, comprehensive, long-term program involving the government, the industry, and the Hispanic community. Some of NCLR’s recommendations for the various sectors with influence over the media are listed below.

A. Recommendations for Congress and the Federal Government

- ❖ **Congress should hold hearings to help call public attention to the problem. In addition, Congress should consider additional legislation to address the issue.**
- ❖ **The FCC should revise and strengthen its regulatory standards. The FCC should also impose severe fines and other penalties on licensees found to have violated equal opportunity guidelines.**
- ❖ **The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights should conduct a comprehensive study of media portrayals of minorities and women.**
- ❖ **The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission should place a high priority on the media.**
- ❖ **The Corporation for Public Broadcasting should aggressively seek out, produce, and promote high-quality Hispanic programming.**
- ❖ **The National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities should increase support for media-oriented Hispanic-focused projects.**
- ❖ **The federal government should increase the proportion of scientific research funding allocated to Hispanic-oriented media research.**

B. Recommendations for the News and Entertainment Industries

- ❖ **All sectors of the news and entertainment industry should voluntarily adopt — and widely disseminate — a set of principles or code of ethics that commits the industry to promoting equitable, accurate, and sensitive portrayals of Latinos and other minorities.**
- ❖ **The industry should adopt clear plans and strategies for hiring and promoting Latinos and other minorities.**

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- ❖ **Industry trade associations should increase cooperative efforts with Latino and/or minority caucuses of the various labor guilds and professional associations, and diversity clauses in standard collective bargaining agreements should be enforced more vigorously.**
 - ❖ **The entertainment industry should provide increased support for education and training programs for promising Hispanic actors, producers, writers, and directors.**
 - ❖ **The entertainment industry should provide increased support for Hispanic independent and community-based entertainment projects.**
 - ❖ **Each segment of the news industry should conduct a periodic self-assessment of its coverage of the Hispanic community and should develop more effective internal mechanisms for monitoring the comprehensiveness and accuracy of its news coverage.**

C. Recommendations for the Hispanic Community

- ❖ **Local community organizations and other Hispanic leaders should expand their advocacy agendas to include a media focus.**
- ❖ **Hispanic-owned businesses and Latino elected and appointed officials should use their influence to promote more accurate and sensitive media portrayals of Latinos.**

Foreword

For as long as I can remember, Hispanic community leaders have believed that media portrayals of Latinos are damaging not only to their own community, but to American society at large. For many years these concerns were largely ignored, perhaps because advocates lacked the hard evidence to support these claims, or because it was assumed that Latino issues had been redressed as part of the media's response to similar arguments put forth by African Americans and women, or because Hispanics were perceived to lack the political or economic clout to effectively press their claims.

The persistence of this problem in the face of the Latino community's rapid growth and increasing political clout demonstrates that reversing the situation is likely to be a formidable and long-term task. This reform effort has been and will continue to be hampered by the media's dismal Hispanic employment record. This process is likely to be complicated further by the rapid transformation and decentralization of the media industry, the growth of cable television and the concomitant proliferation of TV channels, the advent of the "information superhighway," and the growth of the practice known as "narrowcasting" to highly segmented audiences will all tend to increase the number of "players" whose cooperation will be necessary to improve the media image of Latinos.

However, there are reasons for optimism. First, as this report demonstrates, the evidence documenting the scope of the problem and its pernicious effects on all Americans is increasing; this evidence cannot easily be ignored or dismissed. Second, although much more progress remains to be made in this regard, Hispanic political and market clout is growing. In 1992, for example, the membership of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus grew by 50%, and four Latino Representatives now sit on the House Appropriations Committee. Increasingly, major corporations, who have been at the forefront of the effort to develop specialized marketing strategies targeting Hispanics, are beginning to understand their obligations to also examine the programming their advertising dollars are supporting. In addition, Hispanic-owned firms are becoming increasingly important in the nation's economy, and as sources of the advertising revenue which supports much of the media programming we see.

Third, there is a small but increasingly influential cadre of Latinos within and on the periphery of the entertainment industry itself. Notwithstanding the media's unacceptable employment record, there is a growing presence of Hispanic journalists, actors, directors, producers, and others who share a deep commitment to reforming the industry from within. This activism within the industry is increasingly being matched by Latino organizations. For many years, professional associations like the National Association of Hispanic Journalists, advocacy groups such as the National Hispanic Media Coalition, and nonprofit production companies such as the National Latino Communications Center, have worked hard to establish and promote a Latino-focused media agenda.

Although we have been interested in media issues for many years, this report represents the first step in a major new National Council of La Raza media reform initiative. As a part of this initiative, we intend to stimulate, carry out, and commission new, comprehensive research efforts to further document the scope of the problem, and to begin to assess previously neglected areas of the industry including the print media, public radio and television, cable television, and radio.

We intend to encourage responsible corporations to hold the industry accountable for the programming their advertising pays for — which, after all, is supported by the Hispanic community through its purchases of the goods and services produced by these corporations. We intend to vigorously advocate for the government to uphold its responsibility in this matter — to expose the pattern of discrimination against Hispanics through reports and hearings, to deny licenses to and impose penalties against those who have

demonstrated their unwillingness to take steps to resolve the problem, and if necessary to press for new legislation to require equity in programming. Most importantly, we intend to inform our own community of the situation, to help ourselves become more educated consumers, to understand that we need not accept the situation but can take positive steps to induce reform.

Fourth, I am optimistic because I know reform can occur. Like many Americans, I have seen with my own eyes, and heard with my own ears, how media coverage of African Americans and women has improved in the last three decades. I have seen how stereotypes like the infamous Steppin' Fetchit have been replaced by *The Cosby Show*. Like other Americans, I sat transfixed before my television, week after week, by the Public Broadcasting Service documentary of the Black civil rights movement, *Eyes on the Prize*. I have seen and read how media portrayals of women and the family have similarly evolved over the last three decades. I understand that the media's coverage and treatment of these groups is still far from perfect, but no one can deny the progress that has been made. I would not be honest if I did not admit to some frustration that the progress in improving media portrayals of these groups was not accompanied by similar improvements for my own community. However, I take comfort in the knowledge that while my colleagues in the civil rights movement have helped to show the way, it's now our turn.

Finally, I am optimistic because of my conviction that reform is not only possible, it is inevitable. I may not be a media expert, but I do know that the media, like every other sector of the American economy, respond to the bottom line. Hispanics are not only among this country's fastest-growing population groups, we are already among the nation's greatest consumers of the media. Over time, as our community "votes with its eyes and ears," the media will either be reformed or it will be replaced, replaced by new entertainment and news formats, by new programs, by new networks, that portray Latinos as we truly are — hardworking Americans who care about their families, their neighborhoods, and their country.

Raul Yzaguirre, President
National Council of La Raza
July 1994

I. Treatment of Hispanics in the Media

A. Overview

The “mass media” — an almost undefinable mix of television news and entertainment, feature films, and print materials of all kinds — constitutes an enormous “socializing force” in today’s society. The media wield power that shapes Americans’ attitudes toward each other and the world. Unfortunately, the media’s portrayal of Latinos* — who constituted at least nine percent of the 1990 U.S. population and are projected to become the largest minority in the country early in the next century — has been largely unscrutinized by the press, the federal government, or by other independent groups. Given the growing importance of the Latino population, and recent policy debates about the effects of violence in the media on society, it is appropriate that the media’s treatment of Hispanics be carefully studied and assessed.

Until very recently, relatively little research has been conducted on the treatment of Hispanics in the media. However, the number of such studies is growing, and existing research has produced remarkably consistent findings. These studies, described in the following section of this report, reveal that:

- ❖ **Hispanics are almost invisible in both the entertainment and news media.** Hispanics are virtually absent as characters in the entertainment media and as correspondents and anchors in news media.
- ❖ **When Hispanics do appear, they are consistently and uniformly portrayed more negatively than other race and ethnic groups.** Latinos are more likely than other groups to receive portrayal in the media that reinforces crude and demeaning cultural stereotypes. Positive media portrayals of Latinos are also uncommon.

Although most of the research described and analyzed below refers to the television medium, similar studies covering feature films and print media are also included where appropriate. As this report demonstrates, to the millions of Americans whose principal views of Hispanic Americans are shaped by what they see on the television screen, the nation’s second largest ethnic minority is essentially “out of the picture.”

B. Absence of Hispanic Portrayals in the Media

1. Entertainment

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, spurred by the findings of the Kerner Commission that criticized the role of the media in the race riots of the 1960s, a number of researchers began to systematically study media portrayals of minorities. Most of these studies focused on African Americans and women; almost none included Hispanics. In the late 1970s, a few studies began to examine portrayals of Latinos. These studies found that, while both Blacks and Hispanics were underrepresented among television entertainment characters, Hispanics were the least likely to appear in these programs.

For example, the Annenberg School of Communications’ Cultural Indicators Project found that between 1969 and 1978 only 2.5% of prime time television characters were Hispanic compared to 8.5%

* The term “Hispanic” is used by the U.S. Bureau of the Census to identify persons of Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, and Spanish descent. Throughout this report, it is used interchangeably with the term “Latino.”

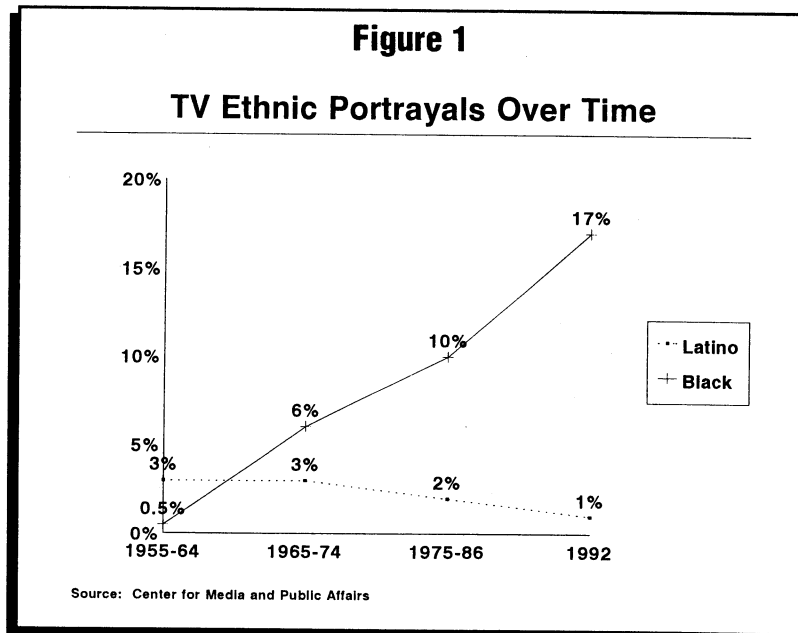
who were African American.¹ A follow-up Annenberg study of the 1977-1979 television seasons found the proportion of weekend Black characters (6.5%) and Hispanic characters (1%) significantly smaller than those on prime time.²

Similarly, in a three-season (1975-1978) study of fictional commercial television series characters, researchers at Michigan State University concluded that “Hispanic Americans are significantly underrepresented in the TV population.” Out of a total of 3,549 characters, the study found only 53 Latinos — or 1.5% of the total population of TV characters — with speaking roles. Hispanic American females were especially scarce and no Hispanics appeared on Saturday morning shows. The study showed that in a typical week of watching television (total of 21 hours), the average viewer would only see five or six Hispanic American characters.³ In a decade-long (1971-1980) study of television’s portrayal of minorities and women in drama and comedy drama, Brigham Young University researchers concluded that “the relatively powerless ‘other’ minorities [including Hispanics] have become virtually excluded” from such programming.⁴

While the number of African Americans on television has increased in recent years, Latinos are still largely absent from the screen. The emerging research in the 1970s provided “ammunition” to groups seeking to increase the number of minorities on television. As a result, the number of African Americans on television grew dramatically in the 1980s. By the 1990s, according to one study, the percentage of African American characters seen on television exceeded their percentage of the population.⁵ However, recent studies document that the number of Latinos on television and in film remains persistently small.

The Center for Media and Public Affairs, a Washington, D.C.-based public interest research organization, has monitored the proportion of Hispanic characters on TV over the years. In *Watching America*, an analysis of programming from 1955 to 1986, the Center revealed that Hispanics hovered around the two percentage point mark of television characters throughout the 30-year period. Even more disturbing was the Center’s finding that the trend was going in the wrong direction. For example, the Center found that the proportion of Hispanics on television had actually *decreased* from about three percent in the 1950s to around one percent in the 1980s.⁶

According to more recent studies, this negative trend continued through the late 1980s and early 1990s. For example, in a 1992 study, Pitzer College researchers surveyed a week of network television



programming during the fall of 1992. Out of 569 characters appearing in speaking parts on ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox, Latinos accounted for just 1.6% or 9 of the 569 characters.⁷ Another study covering a week of network, Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), and selected cable programming in the spring of 1992 concluded that “Hispanic characters are particularly absent from commercial entertainment television,” and that Latinos and other ethnic minorities “are practically excluded as actors, actresses, or even caricatures in mainstream commercial programs.”⁸

The absence of Latinos in prime time — when TV viewing is at its peak — is even worse than in the aggregate. In a 1993 study of minorities and women in television from 1982 to 1992, the Annenberg School found that Latinos averaged only 1.1% of prime-time characters over the ten years of the study, compared to 10.8% for African Americans. Moreover, while the percentages for African Americans have fluctuated over the ten seasons from 6% to 16%, Hispanics were within 1% of the 10-season average each year,⁹ suggesting that underrepresentation of Latinos on television was a chronic, essentially permanent condition over this decade.

The Annenberg report further noted that “people of color” make up less than five percent of the Saturday morning program population. African Americans averaged 2.9% during the 10-year period, although they reached 6.9% by the 1991-92 season. However, Hispanics are seen, on the average, only once every two weeks (0.5 percent). The report concluded that “despite changes in styles, stars, and formats, prime-time network dramatic television presents a remarkably stable cast,”¹⁰ confirming the notion that the absence of Latino portrayals on Saturday morning programming during any single chronological time period cannot be attributed to year-to-year variation.

Another method of assessing the presence of Hispanics “on-screen” is to measure the proportion of total roles — regardless of whether such roles portray an identifiably ethnic character — which are held by Latino actors. A 1993 study by the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) and the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA) documented highly disturbing employment patterns covering all SAG-sanctioned dramatic TV productions including episodic series, mini-series, and movies made for television.

According to the SAG/AFTRA study, Whites receive 82% of all roles (Whites constitute 76% of the U.S. population), and Blacks hold 13% of roles (approximately the same as their proportion of the general population). Asian/Pacifics and American Indians are underrepresented by one percentage point. However, Hispanics, who constitute at least nine percent of the population, receive only three percent of on-screen roles; in other words, Latinos are underrepresented in on-screen television roles by a full six percentage points.¹¹ These data demonstrate that, in order to reach parity, Hispanic employment on-screen would have to increase immediately by 300%!

Feature Films

Although NCLR's literature search did not reveal comprehensive research studies of feature film portrayals of Hispanics, the limited available evidence strongly suggests that trends similar to those found on television exist with respect to feature films. For example, the 1993 Screen Actors Guild/American Federation of Television and Radio Artists study found massive levels of underrepresentation of Hispanics in film roles. According to the study, while White and Black performers are two percentage points *ahead* of their numbers in the U.S. population, and Asian/Pacific Americans and American Indians are hired proportionately to their population size, the percentage of Latino/Hispanic performers hired is five percentage points *below* their proportion of the U.S. population. The representation of Hispanic actors would thus have to more than double for Latinos to be proportionately represented in feature films.

Source: Screen Actors Guild, *Employment in Entertainment: The Search for Diversity*, 1993.

Overall, the available data conclusively demonstrate that, by every standard, Hispanics have been severely and chronically underrepresented in TV entertainment programming for nearly 40 years. Moreover, Latinos do not appear to have shared in the gains made by African Americans and women in recent years with respect to increased representation as characters on television entertainment programs.

2. News

Television viewers are presented with fewer news and public affairs programs than entertainment shows; similarly, the reading of news-oriented print materials occupies a shrinking percentage of the typical American's recreational or leisure time. Notwithstanding these trends, the extent to which ethnic minorities are portrayed in news and public affairs programs on television and in print is of vital interest to society. News programs by definition are supposed to portray reality, while much of the other media are fictional in nature. Newspapers and television's public affairs programming help shape public opinion on policy issues — and may have an even greater effect on views of policy makers. Finally, the nation's "Fourth Estate," which enjoys unique protections under the Constitution, has a correspondingly unique ethical responsibility to assure equitable, accurate portrayals of all minority groups in its news coverage. Although there has been relatively little research on this issue, available data strongly suggest that the mainstream news media have failed to assure such equitable coverage.

As with television entertainment portrayals, coverage of issues with Latino themes is extremely rare in the broadcast news media. The 1983 Project CASA study found that only 18% of television stories and 17% of radio stories qualified as Hispanic-focused. Moreover, the vast majority of these stories focused on crime and other "hard" news; less than 14% of television and 4% of radio stories dealt with minority social or economic policy issues.¹²

Inadequate broadcast news coverage of Hispanics is particularly obvious when measured by the number and proportion of Latinos who appear on screen as correspondents, anchors, and other "newsmakers." For example, Hispanics historically have been severely underrepresented as on-screen correspondents in the broadcast news media. The landmark U.S. Commission on Civil Rights study, *Window Dressing on the Set: Women and Minorities in Television*, found **no Hispanics**, male or female, among the 85 TV network correspondents in 1976.¹³

Nearly two decades later, it appears that the situation has improved only marginally. A 1992 *Vista* magazine article reported on a study which found that, of all the television stories on network newscasts in 1989, 91% were filed by White reporters, 5% by Black reporters, 3% by Asian reporters, and only 1% by Hispanic reporters.¹⁴ The 1993 Annenberg study found that Latinos make up 1.5% of television network "news deliverers," i.e., correspondents and anchors, a percentage lower than any other group studied. By contrast, African Americans are 14.2 percent of news deliverers.¹⁵

The print media do not appear to fare much better. While comprehensive, longitudinal research in this area is particularly scarce, anecdotal evidence strongly suggests that major newspapers frequently fail to adequately present Hispanic perspectives in their coverage of the news. One early study of three daily newspapers in San Antonio, a city which at that time was almost half Hispanic, found that Hispanics were underrepresented in all categories of news coverage when compared with Whites of similar socioeconomic status. The researcher noted:

The results of the study are similar to the findings of studies of media treatment of other minority groups. They indicate that the newspaper image of

Mexican Americans in San Antonio is inaccurate. Mexican Americans are not explicitly labeled, directly stereotyped, or otherwise discriminated against. They are neglected. At almost all occupational and income levels they are underrepresented in the news.¹⁶

A 1983 Project CASA study examined local daily newspapers over a two-week period in six southwestern cities in which Hispanics represented 20% to 65% of the population. The authors concluded that:

[P]rimary Hispanic coverage (Hispanics as the focus of the story) was well below population proportions.... As for Spanish surname citations in newspaper bulletins, if Mexican Americans are born, wed, and die in numbers equivalent to their presence in the population, the newspapers don't report it. Such citations of Mexican Americans appear less than half as often as Hispanic population proportions would predict.¹⁷

Latinos also appear to be underrepresented in newspaper coverage of civil rights issues. For example, an NCLR analysis of 626 articles on civil rights issues — an area in which one might expect Latinos to be significantly overrepresented — in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* from January 1989 through November 1990 revealed that only 50, or 7.9%, even mentioned Hispanics.¹⁸

Even when print news coverage includes Latinos, it appears that this coverage is inadequate. Specifically, such coverage appears to focus on Latinos as “objects” of the news to be commented on by others, rather than as “subjects” of the news who have an authoritative or legitimate perspective to share. One 1980 study of six southwestern newspapers, for example, found that only one-third of the sources cited in stories relating to Hispanics were themselves Hispanic.¹⁹ A more recent analysis revealed that about one-half of identifiable sources cited in Hispanic-related broadcast news stories had Spanish surnames.²⁰

The Annenberg School also examined the proportion of Hispanics on major network news that are either delivering the news, making news, or cited as sources or authorities. According to the study, Latinos make up 1.5% of all newsmakers, only 0.3% of news deliverers, and were not cited at all as sources, spokespersons, or authorities — by far the lowest proportion of any other group.²¹

Based on the available data, it appears that Hispanics are seriously underrepresented as on-air correspondents and personalities in the broadcast news media, and perhaps in the print media as well. Moreover, even when Latinos appear in the news, they do so very infrequently as experts, authorities, or newsmakers.

C. Negative Portrayals

1. Entertainment

Not only are Hispanics severely underrepresented in entertainment programming, those that do appear in such programs tend to be portrayed negatively. These negative portrayals fall into two broad categories. The first category involves general “good vs. evil” or “successful vs. unsuccessful” roles. On the one hand, Latinos are less likely than other groups to be cast in positive roles; on the other hand, Hispanics are more likely than other groups to be portrayed negatively. The second category involves characterizations that are stereotypical — often crudely and blatantly so.

Content Analysis

Over the past several decades, scholars have been able to refine both quantitative and qualitative media research techniques, grouped together under the term "content analysis," to assess the subject content of media programming. At its most basic level, content analysis involves the viewing of television programs (or reading of printed material) by trained "coders," and the recording of various quantitative and qualitative observations about such material in a uniform manner. One aspect of such analysis consists of "headcounts," which can verify the numbers of times racial and ethnic groups appear on television. Other quantitative techniques involve the systematic classification of program content into pre-designed, discrete categories, e.g., the social backgrounds of characters and their functions in the story plot. Another technique, used to assess the qualitative nature of program content, develops categories and identifies illustrative examples based on common themes, symbols, and other program attributes to specifically accommodate the research material. Most of the studies cited in the preceding section and this section are based on some combination of each of these types of content analysis.

Although the first study to systematically examine Hispanic television portrayals was not published until 1980, an impressive body of evidence has emerged in recent years. Using a standard research technique known as "content analysis" (see box), a number of scholars have documented the extent to which television entertainment programming tends to portray Hispanics negatively; these studies are described below.

One major study by Robert and Linda Lichter of the Center for Media and Public Affairs analyzed a sample of 620 fictional entertainment programs involving 7,639 individual characters with speaking roles from the 1955 through 1986 seasons. The study, published in 1989, found that only 32% of Hispanics on television from 1955-1986 were portrayed positively, compared to 40% of Whites and 44% of Blacks. By contrast, 41% of Hispanics were portrayed negatively, compared to 31% of Whites and only 24% of Blacks.²² Subtracting the percentage of negative characters from that of positive characters produced overall measurements of "+20" for Blacks, "+9" for Whites, and "-9" for Hispanics.²³

Similar findings were reported in a 1993 study by the Annenberg School of Communications covering the 1982-92 period, which grouped characters into simple "hero" vs. "villain" categories. According to the Annenberg report, although positively valued ("good") characters outnumber evil ("bad") by a factor of between two and three to one overall, foreign, young, and Latino/Hispanic men were found to have the least favorable "hero/villain" ratios.²⁴ Citing its

20 year-old database of 21,000 total characters on television, the Annenberg School has found that for every 100 "good" White characters, there were 39 villains, yet for every 100 Hispanic "good" characters, there were 75 villains.²⁵

Not only are Hispanics portrayed negatively in a traditional "good vs. evil" sense, they frequently appear on television as stereotypes and caricatures. In the Michigan State University study covering fictional programming over three TV seasons, Greenberg and Baptista-Fernandez found that "[Hispanic characters are mostly] males, of dark complexion, with dark hair, most often with heavy accents. Women are absent and insignificant."²⁶ Based on this research, the authors concluded that, when cast, Hispanics tend to wind up in stereotypical roles, "usually as crooks, cops, or comics."²⁷

Similarly, a 1992 University of Texas study examined a week of programming on the networks, PBS, and selected cable outlets. After noting the severe underrepresentation of Hispanics, the study concluded, "If they [Hispanics] appear, they are mostly token or stereotypical characters in secondary roles with few lines or with minimal contributions to the story plots."²⁸

One scholar found cartoon portrayals targeted at children to be particularly offensive. In a 1983 study, for example, Barcus observed that:

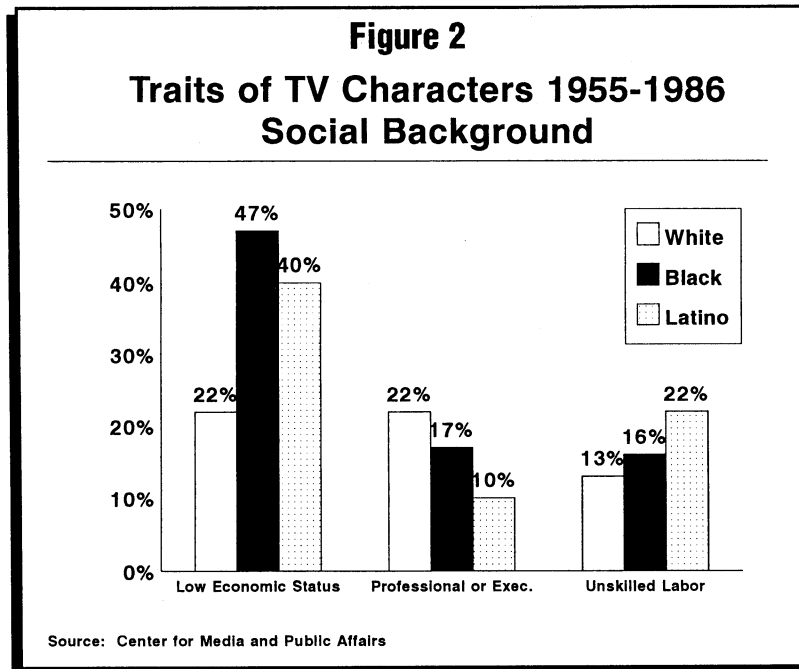
Cartoon comedy programs contain the most blatant ethnic stereotypes. These programs...frequently provide cruel stereotypes of ethnic minorities. And cartoon comedies alone amount to nearly one-half of all program time in children's TV.²⁹

One common media stereotype is that Hispanics are poor, of low socioeconomic status, and lazy. The Michigan State study noted that "half [of Hispanic characters] are lazy, and very few show much concern for their futures. Most have had very little education, and their jobs reflect that fact."³⁰ The Lichters' analysis revealed similar results; according to the Center for Media and Public Affairs, Hispanics on TV in the 1955-86 period were nearly twice as likely as Whites to be of "low socioeconomic status," half as likely to be a "professional or executive," and 50% more likely to be portrayed as an "unskilled laborer."³¹ (See Figure 2.)

More recent studies suggest that portrayals of Hispanics as poor or lazy have not improved significantly since the 1955-86 period. The Pitzer College study, which examined a week of TV network programming in 1992, showed

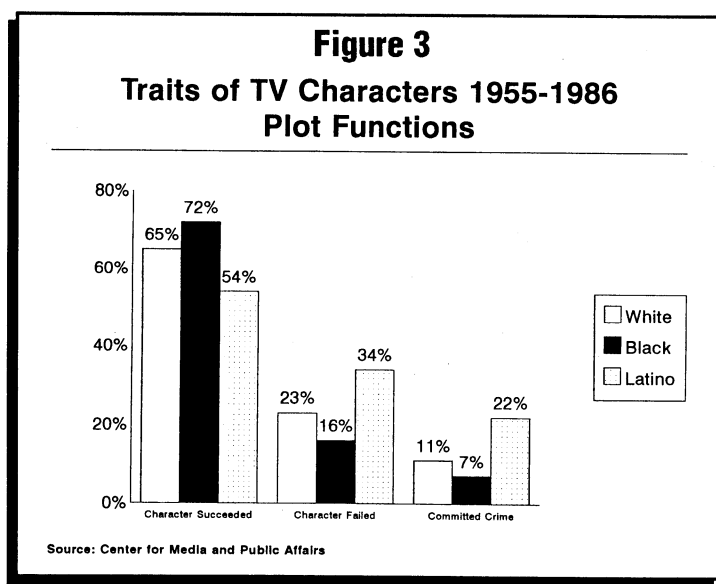
that 75% of [Hispanic] characters studied were in the lower socioeconomic status category vs. 24% of Blacks and 17% of Whites. According to the study's authors, "In general, African Americans are portrayed positively on prime-time TV.... Latinos were more likely described as powerless and stupid."³² Given these research findings, it is not surprising that one researcher has concluded that Hispanics and other minorities "have replaced Blacks in the lower social classes on television."³³

A second common stereotype casts Hispanics as "failures"; the two major studies in the field both confirm the media's tendency to equate Latino characters with a lack of success. According to the Center for Media and Public Affairs, the "failure" rate of Hispanics was more than double that of Blacks and 50% higher than that of Whites during the 1955-86 period. This high failure rate was compounded by a low success rate of Hispanic characters; according to the Lichters' research, Latino characters were less likely to have succeeded in achieving their objectives than either Whites or Blacks.³⁵ (See Figure 3.) Similarly, the



Annenberg study covering the 1982-92 period found that, in terms of “outcome,” Latino/Hispanic and Asian/Pacific American characters have higher relative failure rates than other groups.³⁶

Another variant of this theme involves portrayals of Hispanics as people who do not have to be taken seriously. According to the Pitzer College study of the 1992 season, fully 44% of Latinos on TV were “condescended to or patronized” on screen, compared to 30% of Blacks and only 21% of Whites.³⁷ Yet another variation of the stereotype portrays Hispanics as untrustworthy. Over the 1955-86 period, the Lichters’ research found that 20% of Hispanic characters were “deceivers or tricksters,” compared to 13% of White characters and 12% of Black characters.³⁸



Perhaps no issue has been more explosive — and exploited — in recent years than crime; in fact some political analysts have attributed the outcome of a recent Presidential election in part to a single series of television advertisements. In this context, portrayals of Hispanics as criminals are particularly damaging. The Center for Media and Public Affairs study found that Hispanic characters were twice as likely as Whites, and three times as likely as Blacks, to commit a television crime. Fully 22 percent of Hispanic characters portrayed on TV during the 1955-86 period were criminals, compared to 11% of Whites and only 7% of Blacks. The report noted that “despite being outnumbered three to one, Hispanic characters have committed more violent crimes than Blacks” on television.³⁹

In sum, Hispanics in television entertainment programs are both more likely to be portrayed negatively and less likely to be portrayed positively than any other group. In addition, TV portrayals tend to reinforce derogatory stereotypes of Latinos as people who are poor, of low status, lazy, deceptive, and criminals.

2. News

Hispanics appear to have been portrayed negatively in the “objective” news media as well. One of the first studies conducted on Latino portrayals in the news media was a 1969 analysis of Puerto Ricans in the *New York Times* and *New York Post*, which revealed that the English-language dailies showed little interest in Puerto Ricans, who were referred to with negative attributes and covered primarily in terms of their social disadvantages and problems. The authors found that three-fourths of a total of 64 stories dealing with Puerto Ricans centered on intergroup relations and that 85 percent of these were “problem-oriented” stories. The authors concluded that:

Puerto Ricans are discussed and reported in the English-language press primarily in the context of the problems or difficulties that they pose for Anglo society, whereas their cultural activity and creativity is by and large overlooked.⁴⁰

Hispanics, like other minorities, are highly susceptible to stereotyping by the news media. Journalism scholars Felix Gutierrez and Clint C. Wilson have observed that the coverage of minority issues during the 1970s often focused inordinate attention on the more bizarre or unusual elements of minority communities, such as youth gangs, illegal immigration, or interracial violence (see box). While these are legitimate news topics, the emphasis on such coverage and the near absence of other news stories or dramatic themes involving minorities resulted in a new stereotype of racial minorities as "problem people," groups either beset by problems or causing them for the larger society.⁴¹

Although there is a paucity of comprehensive survey research in this area, some empirical research has been carried out which verifies the characterization of Hispanics in the news as "problem people." For example, in a 1989 study of the *Albuquerque Journal* and *San Antonio Express-News*, researchers found that although:

...Hispanics and Hispanic issues are present in the newspaper newshole in proportion to their presence in the population...; Hispanics were much too prominently reported as 'problem people,' for example, in judicial and crime news and news of riots.⁴²

A 1990 San Francisco State University study of local news coverage in the Bay Area found that:

[P]eople of color, Latinos in particular, were most frequently depicted in crime stories. Conversely, no Latinos were depicted in lifestyle stories, no Asians in business, and no people of color of any stripe in obituaries.

The author, Professor Erna Smith, notes that "the results echo every study of press coverage of non-whites dating back to the 1950s."⁴³

The Annenberg study of TV programming over the 1982-92 period found that women make news as government officials and business persons combined 9.9 times as much as in crime-related stories; the ratio for men is 8.2, and for Latinos 5.0. In other words, according to the Annenberg researchers, for one woman in crime news there are 2.6 in business news; for one man in crime news there are 1.7 in business news; but for each Latino in crime news there is only one in business news.⁴⁴

Hispanic TV Stereotypes in the 1980s

Ironically, television's multicultural world of the 1980s provided an updated version of the stereotypical Hispanic banditos who populated the westerns 30 years earlier. Crime shows like *Miami Vice*, *Hill Street Blues*, and *Hunter* presented Hispanic drug lords as a major nemesis. As scriptwriter Ben Stein observed, "any time a Cuban or Colombian crosses the tube, he leaves a good thick trail of cocaine behind."

In a widely noted 1982 episode of *Hill Street Blues*, Lt. Calletano (the late Rene Enriquez) was chosen by the department as "Hispanic Officer of the Year." At the award banquet, however, the Colombian Calletano was identified as a Puerto Rican, and Mexican food was served. Angered, he launched into a denunciation of continuing prejudice among his self-satisfied co-workers: "I look around this room...and the only other Hispanics I see are waiters and busboys." He might have been speaking on behalf of all Hispanic characters in the television industry.

Sadly, the highest profile Latino characters of the most recent television season have been Eric and Lyle Menendez, whose murder trial was featured in two made-for-television movies.

Source: Center for Media and Public Affairs, *A Tale of Two Minorities*, forthcoming 1994.

Based on these types of studies, Wilson and Gutierrez concluded that in recent years mainstream press reporting has:

...emphasized ethnic minorities on "welfare" who live in crime-infested neighborhoods; lack educational opportunity, job skills, and basic language skills; and in the circumstance of Latinos and Southeast Asians, are probably not legitimate U.S. citizens.⁴⁵

These negative portrayals are exacerbated by the fact that they are rarely counter-balanced by Hispanics who appear in more positive settings in the news. As documented above, Latinos are severely underrepresented as spokespersons, expert authorities, or "newsmakers." Thus, rather than helping to overcome the negative image of Latinos fostered by entertainment programming, the news media appear to reinforce this image through often stereotypical news coverage.

D. A Contemporary View

1. Overview

In order to collect the most complete and recent data available, the National Council of La Raza recently commissioned the Center for Media and Public Affairs to conduct a special analysis of two groups of programs aired during the 1992-93 television season. The first set of programs analyzed consists of a sample of network fictional programming; this is es-

Newspaper Coverage Over Three Decades

The NCLR magazine, **Agenda**, published during the 1970s and early 1980s, devoted much space to the issue of Hispanics and the media. Excerpted below is a 1978 article by Felix Gutierrez, then a professor of journalism at California State University at Northridge, which made note of several instances of inaccurate and stereotypical coverage of Hispanics from the nation's top media outlets.

For many years, Chicanos were the "invisible minority" in the news media. When news organizations began to wake up to the existence of Chicanos in the mid-1960s they often rushed to cover the group with simplistic overviews and facile headlines that revealed more of their own biases than the reality of the people they sought to cover.

Francisco J. Lewels, head of the Mass Communication Department of the University of Texas at El Paso, wrote in his 1974 book, *The Use of the Media by the Chicano Movement*:

Until recently, daily newspapers have given little coverage to the Spanish-speaking community. In the Southwest, Mexican Americans have been traditionally left out of the news columns except when involved in crimes or accidents. In the society pages, Spanish names did not appear unless they were in reference to visiting dignitaries or to the wealthiest Mexican families. In the late 1950s and early 1960s papers began using small pictures of Mexican American brides on the back page of the society section for the first time, but even then, Anglo marriages were given much larger play.

The Atlantic headlined a 1967 overview article on Chicanos as "The Minority Nobody Knows," indicating that if the existence of Chicanos was news to the editors of *The Atlantic* it must be news to everyone else who mattered. A *Time* magazine reporter riding through East Los Angeles in 1967 wrote about "tawdry taco joints and rollicking cantinas," the reek of cheap wine," and "lurid hot rods." A 1969 Los Angeles television documentary was titled "The Siesta is Over," implying that the area's two million Chicanos had been taking it easy for decades.

[More recently], a *Washington Post* series on Chicanos (March 20-24, 1978) said the group lives in a part of the United States they call "MexAmerica," the title of the series. The term "MexAmerica" is not used by Chicanos, but was invented by *Washington Post* staffers to catch the eyes of editors and readers.

Source: *Agenda: A Journal of Hispanic Issues*, November/December 1978

essentially an update of the sample included in the Center's long-term study covering the 1955-86 period. The second set of programs examines two genres that are increasingly popular but rarely analyzed — reality-based shows and first-run syndicated series. The sample was assessed both from the perspective of the extent to which Hispanics appeared in such programming, as well as the types of roles portrayed by Hispanic characters. Summary findings of this special analysis are reported below.⁴⁶

2. Network Fictional Programming

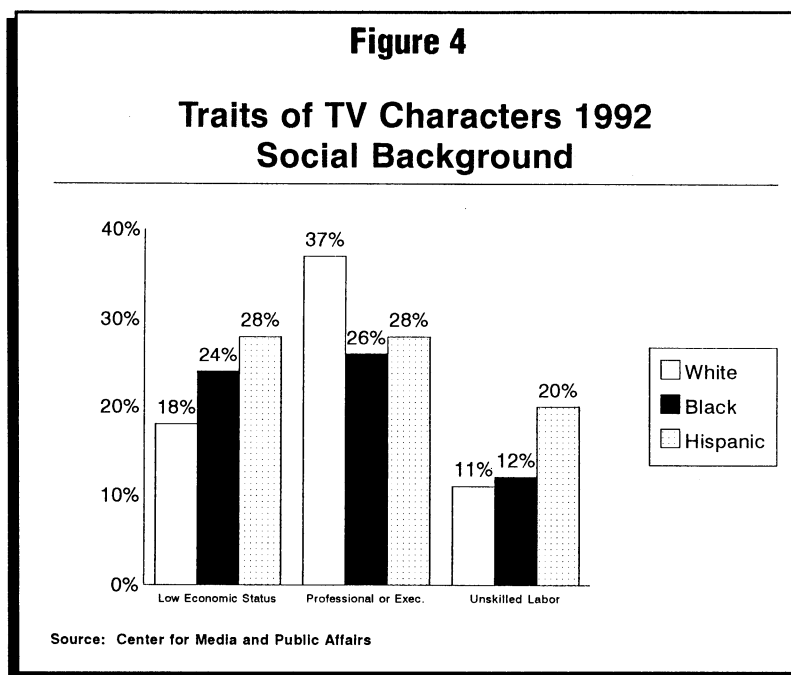
Perhaps the most striking single finding is how little has changed for Latinos in network entertainment in recent years. At a time when Black representation on television nearly *tripled* — from 6% over the 1955-86 period to 17% in 1992-93 — Hispanic portrayals *dropped* from 2% to 1%, according to the Center's study.

From an historical perspective, Black characters were actually less prevalent than Hispanic characters in the 1950s and early 1960s. From 1965 to 1974, Blacks outnumbered Hispanics on television by a two to one margin (6% vs. 3%). However, this gap widened in the 1970s and 1980s, as the Black-to-Hispanic ratio of TV characters grew to more than three to one. By the 1992-93 season, the ratio was a staggering 17 Black characters for every Hispanic character on television.⁴⁷

Hispanics also continue to be portrayed in a negative manner on network

TV. For example, Latino characters were more likely than either Whites or Blacks to be portrayed as being of low socioeconomic status. At the opposite end of the economic ladder, while almost as many African Americans as Whites are portrayed as being wealthy (16% and 18%, respectively), the proportion of wealthy Hispanics has fallen over the years until none remained in the sample by the 1975-86 period; this lack of Latino representation among the wealthy continued during the 1992-93 period. The one piece of good news revealed by the study is that the proportion of Hispanic characters in professional occupations (25%) equalled that of Blacks (24%), although both minority groups continued to fare less well than Whites (33%) in this respect. (See Figure 4.)

This partial advance notwithstanding, negative portrayals of Hispanics in the 1992-93 season were considerably higher than those of other groups; Latinos were twice as likely as Whites and three times as likely as Blacks to be portrayed in negative roles (18% vs. 8% and 6%, respectively).



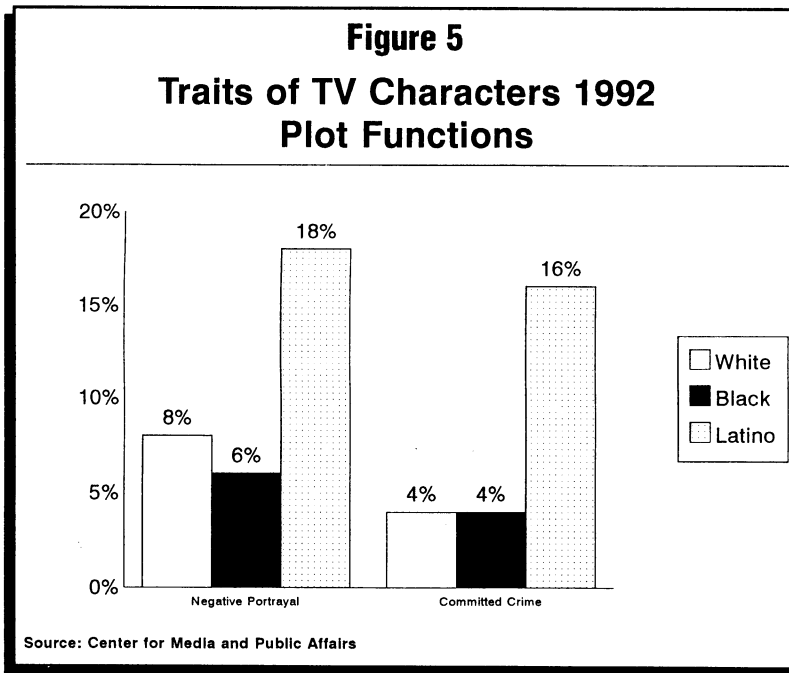
Hispanics also continued to portray criminals more frequently than other groups. During the 1992-93 season, Latino characters were four times more likely to commit a crime than were either Whites or Blacks (16% for Latinos vs. 4% for both Whites and Blacks; see Figure 5). Similarly, 9% of Hispanic TV characters engaged in violent behavior — more than double the proportion of Whites and Blacks (4% and 3%, respectively).

3. Syndicated and Reality-Based Programming

Among the fastest-growing and most popular program genres on television are so-called 'reality-based' shows such as *Cops*, and first-run syndicated series such as *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. While such programs may well offer TV viewers greater diversity in some respects, the Center's analysis revealed that, if anything, these shows paint an even more negative portrayal of Latinos than the networks.

For example, out of a total of 472 characters analyzed from a sample of syndicated series, only six or 1% were Hispanics. Although this figure is so low that it limits the researcher's ability to draw statistically reliable inferences, three of the six Hispanic characters were portrayed negatively and two engaged in criminal activity. For comparison purposes, out of the overall sample only about one of five characters were portrayed negatively.

Reality-based shows in the 1992-93 season were notable for containing a relatively



“Law and Order”

Even shows that strive for a socially relevant message can end up reinforcing television's decades-old stereotype of Hispanics as violent criminals. For example, a 1992 episode of *Law and Order* focused on the murder of a wealthy White college co-ed who was beaten to death. Suspicion falls on her Mexican American boyfriend, a scholarship student named Tommy. The defense team tries to portray the boy as the victim of a society that won't admit to its class distinctions and prejudices. Appealing for a verdict of temporary insanity, Tommy's lawyer describes him as a “wetback, a beaner, a greaser...” trying to break into a wealthy Cadillac and country club set. The lawyer argues that he killed his girlfriend when her attempt to leave him activated his pent-up rage against a lifetime of social slights and discrimination. But the Black prosecutor strongly challenges these claims, even criticizing his own White colleagues for going easy on Tommy because of his background. The jury finds Tommy guilty of murder.

Source: Center for Media and Public Affairs, *A Tale of Two Minorities*, forthcoming 1994.

high proportion of Latino characters; unfortunately, nearly half of these characters were criminals. According to the Center's data, Hispanics accounted for eight percent of the characters in these programs. However, a stunning 45% of Latinos portrayed on these shows committed crimes, compared to 10% of the Whites who were shown. Lichter and Amundson conclude that:

These findings reflect the topical focus of these programs, most of which are real-life cops and robbers shows. For the most part, our study found, they show Whites enforcing the laws and minorities breaking them.⁴⁸

Measured by both the number and proportion of characters, or the quality of roles portrayed, Hispanics on TV network shows appear to have made little progress since the 1950s. In the context of the 1990s, this absence of progress is quite remarkable; it has taken place at a time when Hispanics are among the fastest-growing population groups in the U.S., when rapid demographic change is focusing increasing attention on multicultural themes and issues, and against a backdrop of significant improvement in the proportion and quality of portrayals of African Americans and perhaps other minorities as well. As the Center concluded, "Steppin' Fetchit may be a distant memory, but 'Jose Jimenez' seems alive and well."

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 48. The authors note that the reality-based format was the only one in which African Americans fared worse than Hispanics. According to the Lichter analysis, 50% of all Black characters, compared to 45% of all Latino characters, committed crimes in reality-based TV programs.

II. The Impact of Underrepresentation and Negative Portrayals

A. Overview

The combination of severe underrepresentation and negative media portrayals of Hispanics contributes to a decidedly negative image of Latinos within the broader society. Although the precise causal relationships involved remain the subject of considerable academic debate, on balance the research clearly demonstrates that the media coverage and portrayals both foster and reinforce negative public images of Hispanics. Furthermore, in its failure to portray Latinos positively, the media have neglected to take any affirmative steps to reverse negative stereotypes of Hispanics.

The following section describes the theoretical and empirical evidence regarding the overall impact of the media on public attitudes and perceptions; assesses public attitudes toward and opinions of Hispanics; and discusses the larger implications for Latinos and American society.

B. How Media Portrayals Shape Public Attitudes

The question of how and to what extent media portrayals, images, and news coverage affect public opinion, attitudes, and behavior is highly controversial. There is currently, for example, a highly visible public debate regarding the extent to which TV violence can be linked to apparent increases in violent behavior within society in general, and among youth in particular. Similarly, the question of whether — and to what extent — negative and sexist media portrayals of women are related to individual acts of violence against women is a matter of considerable public controversy.

In addition, underlying much of the public debate is a classic “chicken and egg” problem. At one extreme, some argue that the media serve almost exclusively as a “mirror” of society at-large. These observers assert that opinions and behaviors attributed to the media are, in fact, already present in society and are due largely to factors unrelated to media portrayals and coverage. At the opposite extreme, others tend to portray the media as a kind of “magic bullet” which has the ability to consistently and precisely shape opinions and attitudes largely irrespective of other societal or individual factors.

In general, the research demonstrates that, within significant limitations, the media have considerable influence on public opinions and attitudes. These limitations relate principally to how media messages are received and interpreted by different audiences; according to Wilson and Gutierrez:

Rather than a mere target for a bullet, the mass audience is more accurately described as a complex set of groups and individuals who make selective decisions about which media to use, what information to retain from the media, and how to interpret what they see and remember.... Because of the wide range of social and psychological factors affecting how a person thinks and acts, it is difficult to pinpoint specific effects of media on how people think and act.¹

Although social science research has yet to definitively answer these questions, a broad consensus appears to be emerging among experts in the field, particularly with respect to media portrayals of minority groups.

Summaries of Theoretical Research

Legitimation Theory

In 1972, the U.S. Surgeon General released a landmark study, *Television and Social Behavior*, which among a number of findings, made the first linkages between viewing violence on television and aggressive behavior. Stanford University Professor Cedric Clark also explored the issue of race and television. Clark noted that in a society as large as the United States, the media confer social "legitimation" in two ways — through recognition and respect. Clark concluded that, through underrepresentation in programming, racial and ethnic minorities were not "recognized" by the media.

Clark argued that minorities are not afforded respect by the media as well, the other key component to legitimation. Respect manifests itself in how behavior is defined, assessed (whether it is "good" or "bad"), and accounted for by the media and the audience. For example, Clark noted that when Indians won a battle, it was termed a "massacre," but when non-Indians won, it was a "victory."

Cultivation Analysis

George Gerbner, of the Annenberg School of Communications' Cultural Indicators Project, posited the "cultivation analysis" theory in the 1972 Surgeon General report. Cultivation analysis recognizes that television has become the primary source of everyday information and socialization, and for many the only source of entertainment and information. Gerbner theorizes that continual, long-term exposure to television's messages reiterates, confirms, and nourishes, in other words "cultivates," its own values and perspectives. Therefore, the more one watches television, the more likely it is that one's opinions and attitudes on certain subjects or groups, such as minorities, are shaped by television. For example, Gerbner noted that there is considerable evidence that heavy exposure to television cultivates exaggerated perceptions of the number of people involved in violence in any given week.

The cultivation process has adversely affected groups who are absent from or portrayed badly on television. In 1980, Gerbner found that television produced no positive images at all of the elderly, and that the more people, especially young people, watch television, the more negatively they perceive the elderly. Heavy viewers were found to believe that the elderly are not adaptable, alert, or competent. In a 1982 report, the Annenberg School expressed concern over the "cultivation of a relatively restrictive view of women's and minority rights among [television] viewers."

The "Drench Hypothesis"

More recently, Michigan State Professor Bradley Greenberg has taken issue with the idea that attitudes and beliefs about minorities gleaned from television are shaped gradually and incrementally. Greenberg notes that there are several examples where one program or series has been compelling, forceful, challenging, dramatic, and/or popular enough to substantially change attitudes. He cites *The Golden Girls* as profoundly changing attitudes towards older women and *The Cosby Show* changing attitudes about African Americans. He contends that media research and advocacy should focus more on critical or influential portrayals than on sheer numbers.

C. Theoretical and Empirical Evidence

A number of media scholars have developed theories regarding how the media shapes public attitudes toward minority groups (see box). While there is disagreement within the scholarly community with respect to precisely how societal perceptions of minorities are shaped by the media, there is widespread

agreement that underrepresentation and negative portrayals of such groups are, in fact, harmful to these groups' public image.

Notwithstanding the continuing theoretical debate on this subject, the weight of the empirical evidence demonstrates quite conclusively that the media have substantial influence in shaping attitudes toward and opinions of minority groups in several key respects. First, researchers have found that media portrayals tend to have their strongest effects in shaping attitudes towards groups, such as minorities, with which the audience has little direct contact or knowledge. According to the American Psychological Association:

Television portrayals...may cultivate attitudes and beliefs about minorities among the wider population. Images of status inequality can both create and maintain inequality in the broader society. The less real-world information viewers have about a social group, the more apt they are to accept the television image of that group.²

In their extensive assessment of televised portrayals of Hispanics, Faber, O'Guinn, and Meyer note that:

Communications researchers have long believed that an absence of other sources of information can lead to situations where the media have large and powerful effects. Therefore, the members of the host society who have the least direct contact with minority groups may be the most influenced by media portrayals.³

Other researchers have linked this overall tendency to public perceptions of the Latino community. For instance, in his overview on Hispanics in the media, University of Texas Professor Federico Subervi explained that:

...messages presented by the media may have significant effects on the audience, especially regarding events, topics, and issues about which the audience has no direct knowledge or experience. Thus, for millions of people in this country, a significant part of the information they receive and the notions they develop about Hispanics may often be products of mass media messages.⁴

This phenomenon appears to have particular influence on children and young adults. For example, in an American Jewish Committee survey of several hundred high school students in New York City, the Lichters note that television exercises its greatest influence on:

...those who do not hold strong opinions or who have no opinion or information about a particular subject. In dealing with socially relevant topics like racial and ethnic relations, TV not only entertains, it conveys values and messages that people may absorb unwittingly. This is particularly the case with young people.⁵

UCLA Professor Gordon Berry, in his review of research done on children and multicultural portrayals on television, found that, "children's beliefs and feelings about [isolated] minority groups frequently are influenced by the way they are portrayed on television."⁶ A study by University of Wisconsin Professor Blake Armstrong and Cleveland State University Kimberly Neuendorf confirms the point. In a survey of

several hundred college students from 1980-86, they determined that the level of media exposure of White college students strongly influenced their beliefs about the social and economic standing of Black and White Americans, particularly among those students who have had few opportunities for direct interracial contact.⁷

Second, expert opinion and empirical research confirms that the media play a powerful role in reinforcing pre-existing stereotypes. After reviewing a number of research studies on this question, Wilson and Gutierrez determined that:

...the studies that have been done show that negative, one-sided, or stereotyped media portrayals and news coverage do reinforce racist attitudes in those members of the audience who have such attitudes and can channel mass actions against the group that is stereotypically portrayed. The studies also show that bigoted persons watching television programs ridiculing bigotry interpret such programs as reinforcing their pre-existing beliefs.⁸

Similarly, in a study of high school students in New York City, the American Jewish Committee found that although television has no magical power to change firmly-held beliefs, it can powerfully reinforce stereotypical attitudes about minorities that are already held by the audience.⁹

Empirical research has shown that television exposure can lead to the development and strengthening of stereotypes, particularly with audiences that have minimal direct contact with or knowledge of Latinos and other minority groups. For example, in a report on children and gender stereotypes, researchers from Georgetown University and the University of Kansas examined a series of studies and found they support the premise that heavy television exposure is associated with high levels of gender stereotyping. Elementary school children who remained heavy viewers over time became increasingly “gender-typed,” while those who were stable light viewers became less “gender-typed.”¹⁰

Third, there is considerable evidence that media portrayals can have the effect of reducing certain stereotypes, apparently confirming the role the media can play in counter-acting pre-existing beliefs. Furthermore, the evidence strongly suggests that positive media portrayals of minorities can change attitudes and beliefs of non-minorities. In an evaluation of the show, *Freestyle*, Johnston and Ettema indicated that children who watched the series had less stereotyped views about appropriate behavior for girls and boys than nonviewers and were more tolerant of nontraditional activities, occupations, and family roles.¹¹ Similar results were reported by Davidson, Yasuno, and Tower, who found that five- to six-year-old girls who saw a cartoon showing women as good athletes subsequently gave less-stereotyped responses on a gender attitudes measurement than those who saw a neutral or gender-stereotyped cartoon.¹²

Another example involves educational programs such as *Sesame Street*, which appear to have generated more positive attitudes of Blacks and Latinos in White children. In a study of children’s viewing habits, Hunter College Professor Sherryl Browne Graves found that there was a positive attitude change for Black children who saw any type of portrayal of Blacks and for the White children who saw a positive portrayal. However, White children exposed to a negative portrayal changed the most and in a negative direction. Overall, Graves stated “these results suggest that while the mere presence of Black TV characters may have a positive impact on Black children, the type of characterization of Blacks is critical in terms of the potential negative impact on White children.”¹³

Based on their college student survey, Armstrong and Neuendorf found that, on the one hand, the greater the amount of television entertainment exposure students had, the better off economically they

thought Blacks were as compared to Whites.¹⁴ On the other hand, the greater the amount of TV news exposure the students had, the lower they perceived Black socioeconomic status relative to those of Whites. These beliefs are completely consistent with television portrayals of African Americans during this period.¹⁵

Thus, the research shows that the media play an influential role in shaping public perceptions of groups like Hispanics with which non-Hispanics have little contact. The research further demonstrates that the media play an even more important role in reinforcing pre-existing negative stereotypes of Latinos and other minorities. Taken together, these studies strongly suggest that current public perceptions of Latinos are at least partially attributable to media images and portrayals, which in the case of Hispanics are overwhelmingly negative. Moreover, a number of empirical studies show that positive portrayals of minority groups can partially reverse pre-existing negative images, suggesting that the media's failure to portray Latinos in positive roles — or to even include Hispanics at all — has at a minimum resulted in many lost opportunities that could have been used to improve the Latino community's public image. The extent of the damage to the image of the Hispanic community — as measured by research on public perceptions of Latinos — is discussed below.

D. The Extent of the Damage: Public Perceptions of Latinos

Extensive public opinion research has documented public attitudes towards Latinos in the United States. These data demonstrate that non-Hispanics are largely ignorant of the condition of Hispanic Americans. Furthermore, the data show that non-Latinos have extremely negative views of Hispanics, views that are often wildly inconsistent with the facts. Finally, the research suggests that public perceptions of Hispanics are remarkably similar to stereotypical media portrayals of Latinos.

Recent research shows that non-Hispanics are strikingly unaware of the facts regarding the status of Latinos in this country. The most compelling evidence on this point comes from a massive opinion poll conducted for the National Conference (formerly the National Conference on Christian and Jews), which was released in 1994. According to the National Conference Survey on Inter-group Relations, 65% of Whites feel that Latinos have equal opportunities to obtain a quality education, 57% believe that Hispanics have an equal chance to get skilled jobs, 55% perceive that Latinos receive an equal opportunity to obtain decent housing where they want to live, 55% feel that Hispanics have the same chance as Whites to obtain equal justice under the law, and 54% believe that Latinos are offered equal pay for the same work as Whites. By 46% to 41%, a plurality of Whites feel that Latinos can get equal treatment as Whites in obtaining credit loans and mortgages.¹⁶

These perceptions are substantially at odds with the latest social science research. The data clearly demonstrate that Latinos receive unequal educational opportunities,¹⁷ experience enormous levels of discrimination in the labor market,¹⁸ encounter massive levels of housing discrimination,¹⁹ are likely to receive disproportionately greater sentences than non-Hispanics in the criminal justice system,²⁰ fail to obtain equal pay for equal work,²¹ and are less likely to obtain mortgages than equally- or less-qualified White loan applicants.²²

Commenting on their findings, the authors of the survey concluded that:

A serious problem for Latinos emerges in the relatively low 51% of non-Latinos who feel that this group really suffers from discrimination.... Substantial numbers (of non-Latinos) feel that Latinos are paid as well for the same work as Whites. The facts, directly from the Census, of course, sharply

contradict this assessment, graphically showing that Latinos receive more than one-third less compensation for comparable work to Whites. Clearly, the facts about discrimination against Latinos are not well known in non-Latino America, especially among Whites and Asians.²³

Other opinion research shows that the perception of Hispanics by non-Latinos is not only inaccurate, it is overwhelmingly negative. For example, in a 1989 survey for the American Jewish Committee focusing on the perceived 'social standing' of 58 different ethnic groups, Hispanic groups including Mexicans, Guatemalans, Nicaraguans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans were ranked forty-ninth or lower; only Gypsies were ranked below Mexicans and Puerto Ricans. In fact, a fictitious group ("Wysians") was ranked above five Latino subgroups in the survey.²⁴

Similarly, a December 1990 National Opinion Research Center poll examined public opinions and perceptions of six major American cultural groups — Whites, Jews, Blacks, Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Southern Whites. The survey showed that Hispanic Americans are ranked last or next to last on almost every characteristic measured (wealth, work ethic, violence, intelligence, dependency, and patriotism). Over 80% of respondents rated Hispanic Americans lower than Whites on one or more of the six characteristics.²⁵ In commenting on the findings, one Hispanic leader wrote:

We have learned from public opinion polls that many of our fellow Americans perceive Latinos to be lazy [and unpatriotic].... It is ironic that a community with proportionately more Congressional Medal of Honor winners than any other ethnic group is considered unpatriotic; [and] that a group with the highest male labor force participation rate is seen as lazy....²⁶

In sum, in part because many non-Hispanics receive most of their information about Latinos through the media, or because stereotypical media images reinforce pre-existing prejudices against Hispanics, or because the media have failed to accurately counteract negative perceptions of Latinos through accurate and positive portrayals, the Hispanic community has an extraordinarily negative image in the eyes of most Americans. Some of the consequences this negative image has for Hispanic Americans are explored in the following section.

E. Implications

Although media portrayals are not entirely responsible for the largely inaccurate and negative perceptions of Hispanics by much of American society, the evidence demonstrates that the media plays an important role in shaping that image in at least two important respects. The overwhelmingly negative and stereotypical media image of Hispanics both contributes to the formation of negative public perceptions of Latinos and reinforces pre-existing Hispanic stereotypes. In addition, the failure to balance these negative portrayals with positive Latino role models or accurate information about the condition of Hispanics, promotes opinions about Hispanics that are inconsistent with the facts.

The inaccurate and stereotypical image of Hispanic Americans portrayed by the media is disturbing on many levels. Not only does it undermine the character and reputation of the 25 million Americans who will soon become the nation's largest ethnic minority, it also has harmful and tangible implications for Latinos and the entire society.

One tangible effect of the perpetration of Hispanic stereotypes is increased discrimination. To the extent that the stereotype of Latinos as lazy, untrustworthy, unintelligent, unpatriotic, and violent is widespread, it is not unreasonable to expect that such attitudes would stimulate behavioral responses by those who hold such beliefs. The existence and propagation of these stereotypes is particularly important at a time when overtly or blatantly discriminatory attitudes are increasingly socially undesirable, because the stereotypes provide socially “acceptable” excuses for such discrimination.

Researchers who study the nature of discrimination have described the phenomenon of “aversive racists,” i.e., people who, like most Americans, believe themselves to be free of prejudice but who act in ways that are unquestionably discriminatory. After analyzing a series of behavioral experiments involving word-association tests, mock jury trials, and employee performance evaluations, a Colgate University research team found that factors such as language, speech accent, and culture — characteristics that are often emphasized by media stereotypes — frequently explain discriminatory behavior toward Latinos. According to the researchers:

In situations in which...a negative response can be justified or rationalized on the basis of some factor other than race, sex or ethnicity, the negative beliefs and feelings will be expressed; under these conditions, aversive racists will discriminate against traditionally disadvantaged groups, but subtly and in ways that will not challenge their non-prejudiced self-concepts.²⁷

Moreover, empirical research has begun to establish clear causal links between employer stereotypes regarding ethnicity and race and unlawful, discriminatory practices by such employers. For example, a 1989 University of Chicago study based on a series of interviews with 185 employers in Chicago found that 70% of those surveyed made distinctions among employees based on racial and ethnic stereotypes. According to these employers, Blacks and Hispanics were viewed as “lower class” and thus less desirable employees, regardless of their actual personal social and economic characteristics. The study confirmed the tendency of employers to generalize about racial and ethnic employees, and to rely on these generalizations in their hiring practices.²⁸

Another study by University of Puerto Rico Psychology Professor Alba Rivera-Ramos has documented the existence of a number of negative stereotypes concerning the attributes of productivity of Puerto Rican women, and the harmful effects of such perceptions on their employment opportunities.²⁹

A second perhaps less tangible but no less important result of the media’s treatment of Latinos is that it severely undermines the ability and the likelihood of the general public and policy makers to identify appropriate public policies to address Hispanic concerns. This phenomenon takes place at many levels. On one level, the underrepresentation of Latinos in the media and the failure to cover Hispanic themes and perspectives effectively prevents such issues from even reaching the policy arena. It is highly unlikely, for example, for the public or policy makers to understand the need to address widespread employment or housing discrimination against Latinos if the media fail to report — and thus the public fails to perceive — that such discrimination is a serious problem.

On another level, negative media portrayals of Hispanics tend to undercut public support for policies to address such concerns when they do become the focus of policy debates. This is especially true at a time when, as discussed above, much of the basis for discrimination — which presumably affects attitudes toward public policy proposals — is far more subtle than in the past. For example, media scholar Erna Smith has noted that:

Most social scientists agree that the media can influence racial attitudes by reinforcing racial fears. Recent studies suggest a link between news coverage and the modern racist, who believes discrimination is a thing of the past, and that any problems...non-Whites face in American society are of their own making.³⁰

Ironically then, the very phenomenon that stimulates discriminatory behavior — the absence and stereotypical portrayals of Latinos — tends to undermine public support for policy interventions to address such discrimination. On yet another, perhaps even more subtle level the virtual absence of Latino “newsmakers” in broadcast news documented by the Annenberg School study has another powerful effect — it undermines the credibility and prestige of Hispanics seeking to influence public policy. According to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights:

Television not only reports on the events of the day but also plays a role in setting the national agenda. In addition, it confers status and importance on those individuals and events that make the news.... Mass media audiences draw the following conclusions about those selected by the press, radio, and television: ‘If you really matter, you will be at the focus of mass attention, and if you **are** at the focus of mass attention, then surely you must really matter.’³¹

This phenomenon is furthered by the media’s tendency to cite non-Hispanics more frequently than Hispanics, even in news coverage of stories with predominantly Latino themes. To much of society, then, the media’s message is: “Hispanic issues rarely matter, and even when they do, Hispanics’ perspectives on these issues don’t matter much.”

It is unfortunate that the public image of Latinos remains both negative and inaccurate. It is a serious problem when many current public policy debates affecting Hispanics are so badly skewed by inadequate and negative media coverage. What is perhaps even more frightening is that these effects are likely to last long into the future. The finding that those who have limited contact with Hispanics, particularly children, are especially likely to be influenced by media portrayals is extremely disturbing at a time of growing school segregation; recent social science research has found that Latinos are the most “racially isolated” ethnic group in the country.³² Furthermore, non-Hispanic children not only have limited contact with their Latino peers, it is highly unlikely that they have much exposure to adult Hispanics due to the severe underrepresentation of Hispanic school teachers and administrators; according to the latest statistics, Hispanics constitute less than 3% of all teachers and administrators.³³

Finally, there is some support in the research for the belief — long-held by some Latino leaders — that the media are contributing to negative self-images within the Latino community itself, particularly among Latino youth. This belief is based on several factors. First, research demonstrates that because they are heavy television viewers, Hispanic children may be unduly influenced by what they see on television. In one study of 5th and 10th graders in six southwestern cities, Latino youngsters consistently reported that they watch more television than do other youth — before school, after school, and before going to bed. Moreover, according to this study, 48% of the Hispanic children believed that what they see on television is “true,” compared to 41% of the White children.³⁴ The Lichters in the 1988 American Jewish Committee study of high school students reported similar results.³⁵

Second, at least one major study found that Latino children had more positive opinions of Hispanic media portrayals than were warranted by the portrayals themselves. In their study of several 5th and 10th graders in the Southwest, Greenberg and his colleagues unexpectedly found more positive responses from Hispanic youngsters regarding newspaper and television portrayals of their own ethnic group than from White children. While both groups agreed that there were more negative than positive portrayals of Hispanics in the media, the Hispanic children judged the images to be more positive than did the White youngsters.³⁶

Although there are many possible explanations for this phenomenon,³⁷ perhaps the clearest and most salient is what sociologists refer to as “internalized oppression,” the condition that occurs when media portrayals encourage disadvantaged groups to accept the “superiority” of their oppressors. Other studies have found similar counterintuitive results in other areas that could be explained by the same phenomenon. For example, both the National Conference and the Latino National Political Survey report that although Hispanic respondents believe that Latinos as a group encounter discrimination, the proportion of Hispanic respondents who agree with this statement, or of those who report personal incidents of bias are lower than the social science research would suggest.³⁸

Again, although other factors could account for this disparity,³⁹ the evidence is consistent with the notion that irrespective of the social science research and even their own personal experiences, some Latinos are “conditioned” by the media to either accept discrimination or to deny its existence entirely. It is truly ironic that, as seen above, media images both encourage discrimination and discourage appropriate responses to such discrimination on the part of the broader, non-Hispanic society; it would be an even crueler irony if those same media images also led Latinos to accept such discrimination. Thus, some incidents of bias may be the result of both the perpetrator and the victim of discrimination “acting out” a media-induced self-fulfilling prophecy. One Hispanic leader has explained it this way:

[Media coverage] can condition a supervisor to pass over a Latino in favor of an Anglo, because media stereotypes have taught the supervisor to expect neither too much initiative nor too much resentment from his Latino employee. On the other hand, Latinos have been conditioned not to expect too much from employers. The prophecies fulfill themselves....⁴⁰

The relative absence and the negative portrayals of Hispanics in the entertainment and news media have powerful and profound — if not precisely quantifiable — effects. Media images directly foster and reinforce stereotypes that form the basis for discrimination. They undermine public understanding and support for policy interventions to address such discrimination and other Latino concerns, and may continue to do so far into the future due to their disproportionate influence on children. And they may even have the effect of distorting Hispanics’ perception of themselves and their own community.

This situation is not only harmful to the Latino community, but has serious implications for the broader society at well. As a previous NCLR report noted:

Hispanics will account for more than one-fifth of all new workers between 1984 and 2000, and a growing percentage in the early decades of the 21st century. As the White population ages, minorities — especially Hispanics — are becoming an increasingly large segment of the workforce.... [Improving the condition of] Hispanics can no longer be viewed as merely addressing a “special interest”; clearly, it is in the national interest.⁴¹

As the data reported and analyzed in this section demonstrate, prospects for improving the condition of the Hispanic community are endangered by the media's treatment of Latinos. All Americans thus have a shared interest in reversing the negative media image of Hispanics. The following section addresses the challenges that need to be overcome in order to do so, as well as recommendations for increasing the proportion of and improving the status of Hispanic media portrayals.

Endnotes

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14. *TV Entertainment, News, and Racial Perceptions of College Students*, *op. cit.*
15. See, for example, S. Robert Lichter, Linda Lichter, and Stanley Rothman, *Watching America*. New York, NY: Prentice Hall Press, 1991.
16. Harris, Louis, *Taking America's Pulse: The National Conference Survey on Inter-Group Relations*. New York: National Conference, 1994. Notably, the survey found virtually even divisions of opinion in four areas: by 46% to 44% pluralities, Whites feel that Latinos do not receive "equal opportunities" and do not have an equal chance to be promoted into managerial jobs; a 45% to 43% plurality believes that Hispanics do not have fair and unbiased media portrayals; and a 45% to 44% plurality feels that Latinos are not treated equally by the police.
17. See, for example, Denise De La Rosa, and Carlyle Maw, *Hispanic Education: A Statistical Portrait, 1990*. Washington, D.C.: National Council of La Raza, 1990. The 109-page report concludes that:

By any standard, Hispanics are the least educated population in the United States; Hispanic students are more likely to be enrolled below grade level, more likely to drop out, less likely to enroll in college, and less likely to receive a college degree than any other group.... Increasing school segregation and disparities in school financing systems combine to produce a second-class education even for those Hispanics who manage to complete high school.... Moreover, the educational disadvantages facing Hispanics are widespread, and occur in every region of the country and across all Hispanic subgroups.

18. See, for example, Claire Gonzales, *The Empty Promise: The EEOC and Hispanics*. Washington, D.C.: National Council of La Raza, 1993. The report cites extensive social science research, including results of "hiring audits" which document extensive labor market discrimination against Latinos. Two hiring audits showed that more than *one in five* Hispanic job applicants encountered discrimination by employers.
19. See, for example, "Fact Sheet on Hispanics and Housing," National Council of La Raza, 1994. The Fact Sheet reports the findings of the *Housing Discrimination Study*, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, which showed that Hispanic renters and homebuyers were likely to encounter discrimination in *more than one-half* of their encounters with landlords and real estate agents.
20. See, for example, "The Death Penalty and Hispanics," National Council of La Raza, April 1986. The Issue Brief summarizes several studies regarding unequal sentencing outcomes for Latinos.
21. *The Empty Promise, op. cit.* According to an NCLR analysis described in the report, employment discrimination accounts for perhaps \$11.7 billion in lost wages to the Hispanic community each year.
22. See "Fact Sheet on Hispanics and Housing," *op. cit.* According to analyses of the 1990 Home Mortgage Disclosure Act (HMDA) data:

...within each income category and for every type of loan — government-backed, conventional, refinancing, home improvement — Hispanics were significantly less likely to receive loan approvals than Whites with similar incomes. In fact, a greater percentage of **low-income** Whites obtained conventional mortgage loans than **moderate-income** Hispanics. Furthermore, **low-income** Whites had significantly greater approval rates than **upper-income** Hispanics for refinancing and home improvement loans.
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 30. Smith, Erna, "The Color of the News," in Don Hazen, ed. *Inside the L.A. Riots*. New York: Institute for Alternative Journalism, 1992.
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 33. These studies are reported in *Hispanic Education: A Statistical Portrait, 1990*, *op. cit.* Even these data may overstate the extent of contact that non-Latino children may have with Hispanic teachers and administrators who are typically overrepresented in courses and tracks in which Latino children are concentrated.
 34. Greenberg, Bradley, Michael Burgoon, Judee Burgoon, and Felipe Korzenny, *Mexican Americans and the Mass Media*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishers, 1983.
 35. *Television's Impact on Ethnic and Racial Images: A Study of Howard Beach Adolescents*, *op. cit.*
 36. *Mexican Americans and the Mass Media*, *op. cit.*
 37. For example, the authors posit that a greater proportion of positive portrayals that might be found on Spanish-language television, which was not included in the study, could explain some of the disparity. The authors further hypothesized that traditionally underrepresented groups such as Latinos might be so desperate to see themselves on television that they will positively judge *any* portrayals.
 38. *Taking America's Pulse*, *op. cit.* The National Conference survey found bare majorities of Latinos who believe that Hispanics encounter significant discrimination. See also, Rodolfo de la Garza et al., *Latino Voices: Mexican, Puerto Rican, & Cuban Perspectives on American Politics*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992. The survey found that, although most Latino groups encounter "a lot" or "some" discrimination, relatively small numbers reported personal encounters with discrimination.
 39. These other explanations could include, for example, lack of knowledge regarding the types of acts that constitute unlawful discrimination, or a reluctance to report discrimination due to psychological or cultural factors. For a discussion of these factors, see "Testimony of Raul

Yzaguirre on the Fair Housing Act of 1987," *Senate Hearings*, Subcommittee on the Constitution, Committee on the Judiciary, March 31, 1987. See also, Mali Michelle Fleming, "The Faces of Discrimination," *Hispanic*, June 1994.

40. Yzaguirre, Raul, "Stereotypes: Self-Fulfilling Images," *Agenda: A Journal of Hispanic Issues*, National Council of La Raza, January/February 1978.

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III. Challenges

A. Overview

As the evidence cited above shows, the problem of underrepresentation and negative media portrayals of Latinos is not a new one; Hispanic scholars, leaders, and organizations have long decried the problem (see box). The persistence, indeed, the deterioration of the situation in many respects over the past 30 years suggests that powerful institutionalized conditions, both within and outside the media establishment, contribute to the problem; some of these institutions and conditions are briefly assessed below.

First, conditions within the industry, particularly with respect to employment of Latinos, are examined. A major institutional challenge to the media within every industry and at all levels of each industry is the virtual invisibility of Latinos in employment overall, and particularly in positions of power. This is more than just an equal employment opportunity issue. Without increases in Hispanic employment at every level in every industry, the internal advocacy for — and the technical and cultural capacity to produce and sustain — more accurate, sensitive, and non-stereotypical Latino media portrayals simply will not exist.

Second, institutions within and outside the industry that might be expected to help address the situation are identified and discussed. With rare exceptions, the evidence demonstrates that such “watchdog” institutions, including those within the media, independent public interest groups, and government agencies have all failed to demonstrate a sustained interest in monitoring Latino media portrayals. Unless these institutions begin to take a more active role in promoting a greater number of, and more accurate, portrayals of Hispanics in the media, improvements in Hispanics’ media image are unlikely.

B. Underrepresentation in Employment

As bleak as the picture is for on-screen employment and portrayals of Hispanics in the motion picture and broadcast industries, the situation for behind-the-scenes Hispanics is even worse. Within the entertainment industry, for example, Hispanics are most notable by their absence as producers, writers, and

NCLR on the Media

The media simply do not deal with Latino issues. If there is no media coverage, then one may well conclude that there are no problems. If there are no problems then it follows that there is no need to evolve any solutions.... The media in general and the movie industry in particular, with an able assist from television broadcasts of movies, constantly portray Latinos in negative stereotypes.... The images hurt. But much more than wounded pride is at stake. The distortions create the attitudes that are the basis for discrimination.

Raul Yzaguirre, *Agenda Magazine*,
January/February 1978

Consciously and unconsciously, viewers tend to adopt many of the perspectives presented on the screen, and to see the nation as it is portrayed not only on the evening news but also in situation comedies, detective shows, and other fictional programming. It is widely accepted — at least by experts in the field — that the current portrayals of minorities tend to reinforce ethnic and cultural stereotypes. Hispanics have been severely victimized by such portrayals.... Hispanics rarely appear on prime time television, and when they do, they are usually cast as low status persons, figures of fun, or juvenile delinquents.

Raul Yzaguirre, testimony before the House
Subcommittee on Telecommunications,
September 1983

A 1987 [television] study concluded that...Hispanics are the only group with a mainly negative TV image. We believe that three years later this problem has gotten worse and, for a number of reasons, we feel this negative trend is likely to continue if left unchecked.... The growing media focus on illegal immigration, the ‘underclass,’ and the drug problem presents both a danger of perpetuating the inaccurate and negative stereotypes of Hispanics, as well as the opportunity to improve the portrayals of Hispanics by the media.

Raul Yzaguirre, letter to
Congressman Don Edwards,
May 15, 1990

directors. This is true even on shows with predominantly minority themes. For instance, a 1989 study by the National Commission on Working Women of 30 television shows featuring minority characters found that out of a total of 162 producers working on these shows, there was *one* Hispanic producer.¹

With respect to screenwriters, a 1993 Writers' Guild of America (WGA) report on minority writers in Hollywood from 1987-1991 found that minorities still accounted for just 2.6% of those employed in feature films in 1991; minority writers accounted for 3.2% of employment in 1991 at the major studios. The report also showed that while minority writers' share of employment in television increased steadily from 2.9% in 1987 to 3.9% in 1990 and 1991, minority writers comprised just 5% of writers working in episodic television that season. Minority writers are most underrepresented in cable, where only one received writing credit.² While the 1993 WGA report combines all minorities into one category, there is no question that the situation for Hispanic writers, who were only 1% of WGA members in 1991, is much worse than that of minority screenwriters overall. An attorney representing Latino writers estimates that Latinos, one-third of the guild's minority writers, earn just one-third of 1% of the total earnings of such writers.³

The Directors Guild of America (DGA) released its 1994 report on Women and Minorities from 1983 to 1993 which "reveals a woeful record of employment for DGA women and minorities." The percentage of total days worked by minority directors in 1993 (4%) is lower than in 1983 (5%). Latinos are even more seriously underrepresented than are other minorities, according to the DGA report. While a mere 1.8% of DGA's members are Hispanic, only 42% of these members are actual directors. The rest are concentrated in less prestigious — and less well-paying — positions such as production associates, state managers, and associate directors.⁴

According to a 1993 report by the National Association of Hispanic Journalists (NAHJ), Hispanics are underrepresented within every occupational category and across the entire spectrum of the news industry. For example, the NAHJ report shows that Hispanics constituted 4% of total newspaper newsroom employees overall, including 2.4% of all newsroom managers, 3.6% of total copy editors, 4.8% of all reporters, and 6.9% of photographers and artists.⁵ A 1992 study by the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) revealed even lower Latino newsroom employment — about 3% of employees overall.⁶ Yet these dismal numbers represent substantial gains in recent years; according to ASNE, the number of Hispanic journalists increased by 67% between 1987 and 1992.

A 1993 University of Missouri study of minorities in television and radio reveals that while Latinos made up six percent of the total TV news force in 1992 — an increase of three percentage points or 100% — since 1976, there are only two Hispanic males and only three Hispanic females among television network correspondents. In radio, moreover, Hispanics represent only 3.3% of the total workforce, representing a scant one-half of one percentage point increase since 1976.⁷

The Missouri study also found that while 4.2% of television news directors are Hispanic, 76% of those news directors worked for independent stations, many of which are affiliated with the two Spanish-language television networks in the U.S.⁸ These data strongly suggest that much of the growth in broadcast news staff found in the Missouri study — including correspondents and other on-screen figures — reflects hiring by the Spanish-language networks.

It is clear that Latinos are severely underrepresented in every sector of the entertainment and broadcast media. Moreover, Hispanics within the media are particularly unlikely to hold managerial, supervisory, or other positions of power.

C. Absence of Vigorous Oversight

There are relatively few truly independent institutions — inside or outside the government — that oversee and report on media practices on a consistent basis. The most frequent commentators on media coverage are themselves members of the media, including media critics (both entertainment and news), reporters and editors who frequently appear on television and radio talk shows to discuss media coverage, and the few “ombudsman” offices established by some major newspapers.

Anecdotal evidence shows that Latino commentators and Hispanic themes are as rare in this key sector of the news and entertainment industry as they are in regular programming. For example, a June 1994 *Chicago Tribune* article noted that out of the more than 500 film critics in the U.S., fewer than 10 are Black, Hispanic, or Asian.⁹ Similarly, a search of *Washington Post* columns over two years by the newspaper’s ombudsman revealed not a single article addressing coverage of the Latino community. Furthermore, an informal search of recent, critically acclaimed books covering the histories and role of the media revealed almost no references to Latinos at all, and most of those that did appear were cursory at best.¹⁰

Moreover, there has been little interest in Latinos and Latino concerns from self-styled mainstream media “watchdog” groups. With one exception notable for its rarity, neither the conservative Accuracy in Media (AIM) nor the left-leaning Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) appear to have addressed media coverage of Hispanics.¹¹

At least two major Hispanic-focused watchdog efforts have played important roles in monitoring the media. The first is the California-based National Hispanic Media Coalition, which specializes in challenging radio and television station license renewals in administrative proceedings before the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). The Coalition has become increasingly active in this area in recent years, and in partnership with other minority organizations has filed more than 200 such challenges since 1990.¹² In addition, the National Association of Hispanic Journalists, in cooperation with other Latino organizations, has for five years issued reports on the number of Hispanic journalists in the nation’s 100 largest circulation daily newspapers; in its 1993 report, *No Room at the Top*, the Association also included a survey of Hispanics in broadcast news and addressed a series of other issues.¹³ Yet both of these efforts focus principally on employment, and neither organization researches the content of entertainment programming and news coverage on a consistent basis.

Government bodies with jurisdiction over the media have been similarly unwilling to review the status of media coverage of Latinos. Perhaps the most logical candidate within the federal government to undertake a vigorous “watchdog” role — the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights — has updated its landmark 1977 study, *Window Dressing on the Set* only once, in 1979. After an effort by Latino advocates in 1990 to encourage the Commission to renew its historic focus on the media, and to emphasize portrayals of Latinos, the Commission held a single hearing in 1993. Since that time, no major study or project on minorities and the media has been announced by the Commission and prospects for future Commission action are unclear.¹⁴

The FCC, principally through its authority to review and approve licensing of local radio and television stations, has an important regulatory function in monitoring the equal employment opportunity compliance of its licensees.¹⁵ Although actual license revocations on equal opportunity grounds are extremely rare, the Commission does have the authority to impose fines of up to \$250,000. Since 1988, it is estimated that the FCC has fined about 20 stations and imposed license conditions on several dozen others;

apparently, few of these have involved Latinos. Moreover, the FCC's own guidelines use a "50% of labor force parity" standard in assessing equal opportunity efforts of licensees, and frequently relies on outdated demographic data in its determinations of compliance.¹⁶

Through its power to enforce Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and other equal employment opportunity statutes, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) also has jurisdiction over the hiring and promotion practices of much of the broadcast industry. However, it does not appear that the Commission has yet exercised its authority to systematically investigate the impact of employment practices in the broadcast industry on Hispanics. In addition, the EEOC historically has an extremely poor record of addressing Latino concerns.¹⁷

The Congress also has considerable power in this area which it has recently exercised both through its oversight authority and through legislation, such as the Children's Television Act of 1990. In addition, a number of Congressional Committees have aggressively pursued the impact of violence in the media through high profile oversight hearings and proposed legislation. Despite substantial Congressional interest in portrayals of minorities and women overall, however, there does not appear to have been even a single hearing in recent years focusing exclusively or primarily on the media's treatment of the Hispanic community.

Hispanics are thus rarely among those who make the decisions about or evaluate what Americans see, hear, and read in the media. Those who are in such positions do not appear to include Latino perspectives on a sustained, consistent basis. Given the scope of the problem as documented in Chapter I of this report and the considerations discussed above, it is clear that addressing this issue will require considerable effort. Nevertheless, NCLR believes this effort will be necessary given the serious consequences of failing to address the situation, as documented in Chapter II of this report. Recommendations to guide such an effort are discussed in the following chapter.

Endnotes

1. National Commission on Working Women, *Black, Hispanic, and Asian Characters on Entertainment TV*. Washington, D.C.: National Commission on Working Women, 1989.
2. Bielby, William T. and Denise Bielby, *The 1993 Hollywood Writers' Report*. West Hollywood, CA: Writers Guild of America, 1993.
3. Letter regarding the Writers' Guild Report from David Dantes, attorney for the Latino Writers Group.
4. Directors Guild of America, *DGA Report on Women and Minorities*. Los Angeles: Directors Guild of America, Inc., 1994.
5. Arocha, Zita and Roberto Moreno, *Hispanics in the News Media, 1993: No Room at the Top*. Washington, D.C.: National Association of Hispanic Journalists, National Council of La Raza, and Hispanic News Media Association of Washington, D.C., 1993.
6. As reported in *Hispanics in the News Media, 1993, op. cit.*
7. Stone, Vernon, "1993 University of Missouri Study of Minorities in Television and Radio," in *Hispanics in the News Media 1993: No Room at the Top, op. cit.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. Lovell, Glenn, "A Narrow Spectrum," *Chicago Tribune*, June 26, 1994.
10. These searches were conducted by NCLR based on materials available in NCLR files. While hardly definitive, they are at least illustrative of the point. For example, among the recent books on the media reviewed by NCLR was Howard Kurtz, *Media Circus*. New York, NY: Random House, 1993. This widely acclaimed book by the *Washington Post's* respected press critic, which exposes media "bungling" of a variety of stories including several which explicitly address issues of race and ethnicity, does not include a single anecdote focusing on media coverage of Hispanics, although it includes several passing references to individuals who are Latino.
11. Cited in Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting Press Release, "FAIR Raises Questions about Source in Immigration Debate," July 27, 1993.
12. See "Bias Challenges Against Stations' Licenses Soaring," *Los Angeles Times*, July 7, 1990. See also, "NMHC Seeks to Block Radio Licenses," *California La Raza Newsletter*, December 1990.
13. *Hispanics in the News Media, 1993, op. cit.*
14. See, for example, Senate Report 101-515, Committee on Appropriations, October 10, 1990, which stated in pertinent part:

...the Committee encourages the Commission to consider a follow-up of the 1977 study, "Window Dressing on the Set," to focus on the fair representation and treatment of minorities in the media, with an emphasis on Hispanics and women.

See also, the Commission's proposed "Project Concept" dated February 6, 1991, which proposed an extensive study, modified by Commission memoranda dated May 15, 1992, and May 20, 1992, proposing a far more limited effort (available on file at NCLR).

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15. Although the Commission has expressed some concern about the issue of on-screen underrepresentation and negative portrayals of minorities, it has relatively little direct authority to regulate the content of programming.
 16. See FCC rule 73.2080, which calls on licensees to refrain from employment discrimination and to carry out positive and continuing efforts to recruit, employ, and promote qualified women and minorities. See also, "Bias Challenges Against Station Licenses Soaring," *op.cit.*
 17. See *The Empty Promise, op. cit.*

IV. Recommendations

With respect to both the entertainment and news media, Americans of Hispanic descent are truly “out of the picture.” Assuring accurate, sensitive, and proportional entertainment portrayals and news coverage will require a multi-faceted, comprehensive, and long-term program involving the government, the industry, and the Hispanic community.

In recognition of the magnitude of the task of reforming an industry that is both ubiquitous and diverse, the recommendations listed herein are intended to be illustrative, rather than comprehensive. Specific recommendations, by sector, are listed below.

A. Government

1. **Congress:** The Congress should exercise both its oversight and legislative authority to address the issues raised in this report; specifically, NCLR recommends that:
 - ❖ **Congress help call public attention to the problem**, by holding hearings to address the underrepresentation of Latinos in the media, negative and stereotypical media portrayals of Hispanics, and the industry’s efforts to improve Latino employment.
 - ❖ **Congress consider additional legislation to address the problem.** Protective legislation, such as the Children’s Television Act of 1990, or remedial legislation analogous to the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) which governs the nation’s financial institutions, should be explored, particularly with respect to the broadcast media.
2. **Federal Communications Commission (FCC):** As the federal government’s telecommunications enforcement arm, the FCC has primary jurisdiction on matters related to minorities in the media, authority which it has not vigorously exercised on behalf of the Hispanic community. NCLR believes that the FCC should begin to exercise such authority immediately; specifically, NCLR recommends that:
 - ❖ **The FCC revise and strengthen its regulatory standards.** In particular, the Commission should use a “100% of parity” standard to measure equal employment opportunity compliance, rather than the current “50% of parity” guideline; to do otherwise is tantamount to a Commission endorsement of employment policies and practices that lead to underrepresentation of Hispanics and other minorities. In addition, the Commission should use updated demographic data from the Census and other sources to hold licensees to the highest possible standard; this is especially important given rapid Hispanic population growth.
 - ❖ **The FCC impose severe fines and other penalties on licensees found to have violated equal opportunity guidelines.** The Commission should use the authority granted in 1990 to impose fines of up to \$250,000 where warranted. Chronic violators, or those with particularly egregious records, should have their licenses revoked.
3. **Other Federal Agencies:** A number of other federal or quasi-federal agencies have the capacity to address the problem through vigorous oversight, enforcement, or support of

positive programming efforts. Each function is important, and all must be pursued; specifically, NCLR recommends that:

- ❖ **The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights conduct a comprehensive study of media portrayals of minorities and women**, with a special focus on Hispanics and other previously neglected groups, consistent with previous Congressional recommendations.
- ❖ **The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission place a high priority on the media**. Among the activities the EEOC should carry out are hearings on Hispanic employment in the entertainment and news industry. The EEOC should also consider affirmative “pattern and practice” investigations of, and where appropriate, litigation against media entities under its jurisdiction.
- ❖ **The Corporation for Public Broadcasting aggressively seek out, produce, and promote high-quality Hispanic programming**. As a quasi-federal agency which receives public funding, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) has a special obligation to provide programming which fairly and accurately portrays all groups in American society. Programs on public television such as the landmark documentary series, *Eyes on the Prize*, have had a significant positive effect on public understanding of the experiences of African Americans; similar Latino-focused programming should be supported.
- ❖ **The National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities increase support for media-oriented Hispanic-focused projects**. Hispanic Americans contribute to the artistic and cultural projects supported by these agencies — many of which eventually become documentaries and feature films — through their tax dollars; however, with a few notable exceptions, such as *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez*, these agencies rarely invest proportionately in Latino-focused projects. These agencies should increase their support for such projects through enhanced outreach efforts, special competitions, and similar affirmative efforts.
- ❖ **The federal government increase the proportion of scientific research funding allocated to Hispanic-oriented media research**. Much of the research cited in this report was supported by various federal agencies including the National Institute of Mental Health, the Office of the Surgeon General, and the Administration of Aging at the Department of Health and Human Services; the National Academy of Sciences; and other research institutions. However, few of these federally-funded studies focused principally, much less exclusively, on Hispanics; this must change. NCLR recommends that such federally-supported, media-related research be required to include Hispanic samples and emphases consistent with the growing proportion of the population that is Latino.

B. News and Entertainment Industry

Changing the situation of Hispanics in the media will require commitment and leadership at all levels — and within each sector — of the vast media industry. NCLR believes that all sectors of the industry should immediately accept two broad sets of principles governing news and programming content and employment. In addition, NCLR recommends certain industry-specific actions, as described below.

1. **Content Standards:** NCLR believes that clearly articulated, voluntary standards and codes of ethics are one means of promoting increased and more sensitive portrayals of Latinos, consistent with the need for artistic freedom and the protections of the First Amendment. NCLR believes that guidelines set forth by UCLA Professor Gordon Berry governing portrayals of ethnic and racial groups provide a solid basis from which industry officials can work (see box). Specifically, NCLR recommends that:

❖ **All sectors of the news and entertainment industry voluntarily adopt — and widely disseminate — a set of principles or code of ethics that commits the industry to promoting equitable, accurate, and sensitive portrayals of Latinos and other minorities.** These principles, which could be based on the Berry Guidelines or other similar standards, should not only be disseminated to media “watchdog” organizations, civil rights organizations, and community

Berry Guidelines for Ethnic Group [Gender] Portrayals

1. Program content portrays various ethnic groups [both males and females] evenly in society, including depictions of historical, cultural, and current events.
2. Program content portrays various ethnic groups [both genders] evenly in their contributions to the arts and sciences.
3. Program content shows a diversity of professional and vocational roles and careers among various ethnic groups [each gender].
4. Program content does not define or limit occupational aspirations in terms of ethnicity [gender].
5. Program content portrays various ethnic groups [both genders] throughout the range of socioeconomic conditions and life-style situations.
6. Program content portrays both traditional and nontraditional activities performed by characters, regardless of ethnicity [gender].
7. Program content portrays active, creative, and problem-solving roles proportionally among various ethnic groups [males and females].
8. Program content uses dialogue between various characters that is free of stereotypical language, demeaning labels, and/or race-related [gender-related] retorts.
9. Program content portrays emotional reactions such as fear, anger, aggression, excitement, love, and concern regardless of ethnicity [gender].
10. Program content does not stereotype personality traits based on ethnicity [gender].

groups, they should be incorporated into annual performance standards and reviews that such entities conduct in the normal course of business.

2. ***Increased Latino Employment:*** The news and entertainment industries should also take other proactive steps to help remedy the underrepresentation of Hispanics in the industry — particularly in decision-making positions — which NCLR has identified as a major cause of unacceptable Hispanic media portrayals. Specifically, NCLR recommends that:

- ❖ **The industry adopt clear plans and strategies for hiring and promoting Latinos and other minorities.** Each segment of the media should immediately prepare and adopt specific plans and strategies to assure parity in Hispanic employment within a reasonable period, perhaps under the auspices of some of the media’s major trade associations such as the National Association of Broadcasters, the Motion Picture Association of America, the National Cable Television Association, or the Association of Newspaper Publishers. These plans should provide for Latino-specific hiring and promotion goals for all occupational categories, and should include specified milestones and timelines. As a show of good faith, broadcasters covered by FCC rules should voluntarily adopt the “100% of parity” employment standard discussed above in the development of their plans and strategies.
- ❖ **Industry trade associations increase cooperative efforts with Latino and/or minority caucuses of the various labor guilds and professional associations.** The management side of the entertainment industry should use the expertise and resources of the various minority caucuses of the Guilds in the entertainment field. As demonstrated by the frequency with which their reports are cited herein, these groups, including the Screen Actors Guild, the Directors Guild of America, and the National Association of Hispanic Journalists, have made this issue a priority for many years. For too long, these groups’ fine work has gone unheralded and their recommendations unheeded; this situation must change.
- ❖ **Diversity clauses in standard collective bargaining agreements be enforced more vigorously.** In all collective bargaining agreements signed by production companies or advertisers with the Screen Actors Guild (SAG), for example, the company agrees to “realistically portray the American scene” in its full diversity, and “to provide all qualified performers with equal access to auditions and casting.” As part of that contractual agreement, the production company voluntarily provides SAG with data on the age, ethnicity, and gender of performers hired. While these data are helpful in identifying problems, the violations of the diversity clauses themselves are rarely acted on. All reasonable legal steps should be taken to impose civil penalties and other sanctions against violators of these diversity clauses.

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3. **The Entertainment Industry:** In addition to minimizing negative portrayals through content standards, affirmative steps should be taken to produce special Latino-focused programming. Recent critically and commercially successful films such as *Stand and Deliver*, *Like Water for Chocolate*, and *La Bamba* unequivocally demonstrate that such programming appeals to broad audiences. Specifically, NCLR recommends that:
- ❖ **Production studios and independent producers aggressively seek out promising Latino-focused programming material.** Much of this material can be found in traditional Hispanic folklore (*Like Water for Chocolate*), contemporary fiction (*Milagro Beanfield War*), both historical and contemporary biographies of noted Hispanics (*Ballad of Gregorio Cortez*, *Stand and Deliver*), and among today's headlines (*El Norte*).
 - ❖ **The industry provide increased support for education and training programs for promising Hispanic actors, producers, writers, and directors.** A key void for the Latino community in the entertainment industry is a dearth of persons in decision-making positions who have the ability to "green-light" projects. In order to expand the pool of Hispanic "players," NCLR urges the development of and support for film school scholarship programs, entry-level career-track development efforts, and on-the-job training programs.
 - ❖ **The industry provide increased support for Hispanic independent and community-based entertainment projects.** Much of the entertainment industry's most innovative and creative efforts, especially from women and African Americans, originated with the independent and community-level arts and entertainment communities. NCLR encourages the industry to support similar Latino community-based efforts, including theaters and production companies, to help develop and nurture creative talent. In addition, the major film festivals should seek out more minority entrants, especially from Latinos and other underrepresented groups.
4. **The News Industry:** There are a number of proactive steps that the news industry can take in order to improve accuracy in covering issues affecting or involving Hispanics. NCLR recommends that:
- ❖ **Each segment of the news industry conduct a periodic self-assessment of its coverage of the Hispanic community.** Such self-assessments should include commissioning content analyses of its news coverage by independent organizations or scholars, organizing community forums and symposia to obtain input from the Latino community, and determining the extent to which Hispanic perspectives are included in stories on "non-Hispanic" themes, i.e., the economy, business, and the arts.
 - ❖ **The news industry develop more effective internal mechanisms for monitoring the comprehensiveness and accuracy of its news coverage.** In addition to increased employment and more effective retention and promotion of

Latino journalists, the news media should take steps to assess and correct its own performance. Actions as simple as retaining and disseminating to all editors and reporters lists of trustworthy Latino sources or technical experts on Hispanic issues would greatly improve most media coverage. Making an affirmative effort to include Hispanic views on “mainstream” stories, as well as investing resources in special series and features on Hispanic themes, would substantially improve the “inclusiveness” of news coverage. In addition, the industry should institutionalize self-assessments, and make these evaluations public. Finally, newspapers and network news organizations could hire or retain distinguished Hispanic scholars, perhaps on a rotating basis, to fill a special “ombudsman” role to monitor and comment on the organization’s coverage of Latino issues.

C. The Hispanic Community

The Hispanic community must play a more aggressive and effective role in promoting increased, non-stereotypical Latino portrayals in the entertainment media, and more complete and accurate coverage of Hispanics by the news media. As noted in the foreword to this report, NCLR intends to launch a major new media initiative. Initially, this initiative will include two broad elements:

- ❖ **Stimulating or Conducting New Research:** Major gaps remain in the existing research literature on Hispanics and the media; NCLR intends to fill some of these gaps. Among the areas in need of further research are content analyses of portrayals of Hispanics in feature films, in broadcast and print news coverage, advertising, and public radio and television. In addition, there is an enormous need for further studies which directly measure the effects of media portrayals on public opinion and on Hispanic self perceptions.
- ❖ **Conducting Aggressive Media Advocacy:** Major reform rarely occurs in a vacuum, or simply because a problem has been identified. Assuring broad public awareness of the problem, promoting effective responses, and monitoring the implementation of solutions are essential elements of any long-term reform effort; NCLR intends to be an active participant in this effort. NCLR’s media advocacy activities will include: promoting the prompt and effective implementation of the recommendations included in this report, particularly those which relate to the federal government; encouraging responsible corporations to limit their advertising support only to those programs and entities which assure equitable and accurate Hispanic portrayals; supporting and facilitating the work of existing Latino media organizations and associations; creating new forums and vehicles for recognizing both positive and negative media portrayals of Latinos; and directly monitoring and calling public attention to egregious entertainment portrayals and news coverage of Hispanics.

In addition to those efforts carried out by NCLR and other national Hispanic organizations, a number of other entities within the Hispanic community have important roles to play in addressing the media’s treatment of the Hispanic community; specifically, NCLR recommends that:

- ❖ **Local community organizations and other Hispanic leaders expand their advocacy**

agendas to include a media focus. Local Latino leaders have both the responsibility and the unique ability to significantly influence local media portrayals and coverage of Hispanics. Not only should they identify and call attention to negative portrayals, they should make an affirmative effort to support those elements of the media — including the Spanish-language media — which cover Latinos and Latino issues in a responsible manner.

- ❖ **Hispanic-owned businesses and Latino elected and appointed officials use their influence to promote more accurate and sensitive media portrayals of Latinos.** Hispanic-owned firms, and their non-Latino vendors and customers, can exercise considerable clout with the media through their advertising budgets; they should use this influence aggressively. Similarly, Latino government officials should use their growing power to promote more accurate Hispanic media portrayals, as their African American counterparts have done so effectively in other contexts, e.g., South Africa.

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