A Tale of Two Minorities:
Black and Hispanic Characters in TV Entertainment

By

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study describes the portrayal of minority characters on prime time television entertainment from the 1950's to the present day. The results are based on scientific content analyses of 12,593 characters who were depicted in 964 series episodes broadcast from 1955 through 1993. All characters were analyzed in terms of demographic and behavioral traits, as well as their overall function in the plotline.

The study finds that African Americans have made progress toward greater representation and more diverse portrayals, while Hispanic Americans still suffer from low visibility and negative stereotyping. In contemporary programming, the study finds little difference between network and syndicated fictional series. But the most negative portrayals of minorities occur in "reality-based" entertainment programs.

Among the major findings:

* The proportion of black characters has grown from one percent in the 1950's to seventeen percent in the 1990's. By contrast, Hispanics have dropped from three percent to one percent of all characters.

* Minority characters occupy lower status positions in society than do whites. Only one percent of all professionals and executives shown in the 1992-93 season were Hispanic.

* Hispanics have always portrayed villains and criminals far more often than either blacks or whites. In the 1992-93 season one out of six Hispanic characters committed a crime, compared to only one out of twenty-five blacks and whites alike.

* Minorities fared even worse in reality-based programs: 45 percent of Hispanics and 50 percent of blacks who appeared in these shows committed crimes.

Introduction

Since the earliest days of television there have been complaints and protests over the way the medium has portrayed racial minorities. The first battles were fought over "Amos and Andy", which was attacked by the NAACP and other black leaders for its stereotypical portrayals of blacks. This case also demonstrated the power of organized protest, as the controversy scared off skittish sponsors and the show lost its prime time spot in 1953.

This was to prove the opening salvo in a long line of protests, boycotts and conferences focusing on television's role in American race relations. The most notable of these activities was the Kerner Commission. Organized by President Johnson in 1967 to look into racial violence, the commission included the media's role in its analysis of the problem. The commission's report concluded, among other things, that television had underrepresented racial minorities and that its images of minorities were often negative or stereotypical. These central conclusions have become widely accepted by researchers in the field.

The main focus in the early days of the controversy was the plight of blacks on television. Latinos had a far lower profile in the public debate, often appearing as a footnote to the central debate over African American portrayals. Despite a string of negative portrayals in prime time, it was a commercial rather than an entertainment series that finally pushed Hispanic concerns into the public eye.

In the mid-1960's a portly, animated mouse named Frito Bandito drew the wrath of Mexican-American groups as he pitched Frito Lay brand corn chips. Frito Bandito revived the old stereotype of the Mexican bandito who stole whatever he wanted, while speaking in broken English. After four years of controversy, Frito Lay pulled the commercial from use.

The Frito Bandito controversy was a seeming victory for Latinos, but in the long term it did not affect this group's portrayals on television. In the years that would follow, several short- lived shows featuring more positive Latinos appeared, but negative images and stereotypes continued to dominate. Repeated studies by various scholars continued to show Latinos as a disadvantaged group on television.[1] Despite all the evidence, little attention has been paid to this issue.

This report lays the groundwork for a more comprehensive examination of Latinos on television, as they have appeared in both past and present prime time schedules. Our analysis includes newer program genres such as first-run syndication and reality-based series. These programs have not been widely studied, but they represent a significant part of the expanding universe of prime time entertainment. Combined with a retrospective study of prime time programming since the 1950's, this analysis presents a comprehensive picture of how Latino portrayals have changed over the years, while highlighting areas of future concern.

Study Methods

Our goal was not only to examine the contemporary portrayal of Hispanic and African American characters, but also to view this "snapshot" in the broader context of the entire gallery of minority portrayals throughout television's history. Accordingly, this report brings together the results of two separate studies of prime time television entertainment: a retrospective study of programs broadcast from the 1950's through the 1980's, and a more intensive contemporary study of programming from the 1992-93 season.

The historical study analyzed a sample of ABC, CBS and NBC fictional programs from the 1955 through 1986 seasons, which were selected randomly from holdings of the Library of Congress broadcast archive. After excluding non-fiction formats such as variety shows and documentaries, one episode was selected from each of twenty different series that were broadcast each season, creating a sample of 620 programs. Every character with a speaking part was counted and catalogued according to numerous characteristics, including race, gender, economic status, personal motivation, and function in the plot as a major or minor character, "good guy" or "bad guy" etc. This produced a statistical portrait of the demographic and behavioral traits of 7,369 characters.

The contemporary study examined a more extensive representation of prime time programming that was broadcast during a single recent season. We examined the first four episodes of every fictional series that aired during the fall of 1992 on the ABC, CBS, NBC

4,366 characters. For comparative purposes, we added samples from two recent prime time innovations -- reality-based series and first-run syndicated fictional programming. Reality-based programs derive their stories from real-life crimes or disasters. They proliferated on network schedules during the early 1990's after proving popular and inexpensive to produce. Our sample included such representatives of this genre as "America's Most Wanted," "COPS," "Rescue 911," and "Unsolved Mysteries."

First-run syndicated series have never been seen on the broadcast networks, but are produced for direct sale to individual stations across the country. Game shows and daytime talk shows have long been staples of the syndication market. The early 1990s, however, saw a boom in the number and quality of first-run fictional series that were syndicated for prime time viewing. including such well-known programs as "Star Trek: The Next Generation" and "Baywatch," as well as lesser-known entries like "Time Trax" and "Renegade".

The samples of syndicated and reality-based programs were taped during the spring of 1993 and subjected to the same content analysis as the fictional network series discussed above. We examined 476 characters who appeared in 29 episodes of syndicated series and 382 characters from 22 episodes of reality-based programming. Owing to reruns, the number of episodes varied among the series that were sampled. We tabulated the results separately, in order to isolate any unique contributions these new program genres may make to the portrayal of minorities on television.

The Past as Prologue

It takes diff'rent strokes to move the world.

--"Diff'rent Strokes" Theme Song

When Kingfish uttered his last "Holy Mackerel, Andy!" in 1953, it marked the end of television's most controversial depiction of blacks. Ironically, the departure of "Amos 'n' Andy" also signaled the end of a brief period of ethnic diversity that would not reappear in prime time for two decades. Several of the earliest family sitcoms were transplanted radio shows set in America's black or white ethnic subcultures. "The Goldbergs" followed the lives of a Jewish immigrant family in New York for twenty years on radio before switching to the new medium in 1949. It featured Gertrude Berg as Molly Goldberg, everyone's favorite Jewish mother. An even more successful series that premiered the same year was "Mama," which chronicled a Norwegian immigrant family in turn-of-the-century San Francisco. Theme music by Grieg added to the "ethnic" atmosphere, as did accents that made Aunt "Yenny" into a popular character. These white ethnic shows were soon joined by the all-black "Amos 'n' Andy" as well as "Beulah," which starred the black maid of a white middle-class family.

All these shows relied on stereotypical dialogue and behavior for much of their humor. But social standards were changing, and the new medium created its own demands and perceptions. For example, not only Amos and Andy but even Beulah had been portrayed on radio by white males. When the popular radio show "Life with Luigi" made the switch to TV in 1952, Italian-American groups protested its stereotyped portrayal of Italian immigrants. Black groups were equally outraged over "Amos 'n' Andy," which had been an institution on radio since 1929. As the program evolved, it centered on the schemes of George "Kingfish" Stevens, who combined the soul of Sgt. Bilko with the fate of Ralph Kramden. A small-time conman with big plans that never panned out, he became an immensely popular, lovable loser. His schemes usually pulled in the ingenuous cabbie Andy and the slow moving janitor Lightnin'.

From Kingfish's fractured syntax ("I'se regusted") to Lightnin's shuffle and falsetto "yazzuh," the series drew on overtly racial stereotypes. The NAACP blasted the portrayal of blacks as "inferior, lazy, dumb, and dishonest," and urged a boycott of Blatz beer, the sponsor. The pressure from civil rights groups probably helped bring the series to a premature end, since it attracted sizeable audiences throughout its two year run.

While controversy surrounded "Amos and Andy", little debate attended television's earliest and most high profile Latino portrayal. From 1950 through 1956 Ziv productions sold 156 episodes of "The Cisco Kid" in syndication to individual stations across the country. Resplendent in his heavily embroidered black costume, Cisco rode across the southwest

was loyal and brave, but his English was every bit as fractured as the Kingfish's. Further, although Cisco and Pancho were positive and even heroic characters, they were often outnumbered by evil and frequently criminal Latino adversaries. In its simplistic presentation that combined positive and negative ethnic stereotypes, "Cisco" set the tone for the "Zorro" series that would follow it on ABC from 1957 through 1959. Thus, these early high profile representations of Latinos proved a mixed bag, as television's conventions of the day were applied to both network and syndicated fare.

The All-White World

"Cisco" and "Zorro", which were aimed at children, outlasted the first generation of ethnic sitcoms for general audiences. By the 1954 season "Mama" was the only survivor of this once-thriving genre. Thus, by the time our study period began, TV's first era of ethnic humor had already come and gone. The urban ethnic sitcoms were replaced by homogeneous suburban settings. There was nothing Irish about the life of Chester Riley, nothing Scandinavian about Jim and Margaret Anderson. The new family shows were all-American, which meant vaguely northern European and carefully noncontroversial. The few remaining ethnics were mostly relegated to minor roles or single episodes.

Just how homogeneous was this electronic neighborhood? From 1955 through 1964, our coders could identify only one character in ten as anything other than northern European on the basis of name, language, or appearance. Such a small slice of the pie got cut up very quickly, and many groups got only crumbs. Just one character in fifty was Hispanic, fewer than one in a hundred was Asian, and only one in two hundred was black.

The departure of "Amos and Andy" and "Beulah" all but eliminated black stars. Jack Benny's valet Rochester was one of the few major roles still held by a black in the late 1950s. Black characters didn't even show up in the backgrounds of early shows. Urban settings might feature a

black delivery man, porter, or waiter, but black professionals and businessmen were virtually nonexistent. Some westerns like "Rawhide" and "Have Gun, Will Travel" presented a few black cowboys riding the range with their white counterparts. Aside from such occasional and insignificant roles, black characters were simply not a part of the early prime time world.

Other groups did little better in this monochromatic world. Hispanics had virtually no starring roles. For most Hispanic characters, life consisted of lounging in the dusty square of a sleepy Latin town, waiting for the stars to come on stage. Occasionally Hispanics would show up as outlaws in the Old West, but even then mostly as members of someone else's gang. Their comic roles were epitomized by Pepino Garcia, a farmhand for "The Real McCoys," who functioned mainly as a target of Grandpa Amos McCoy's tirades. Pepino and "The Real McCoys" were replaced in 1963 by Jose Jimenez in the "Bill Dana Show".

Like their black colleagues, a few stars stood out in a sea of marginal and insignificant roles. A notable exception was Cuban band leader Ricky Ricardo in "I Love Lucy," played by Desi Arnaz. As the co-star of one of the most popular shows on TV (and co-owner of Desilu Productions, along with wife Lucille Ball), Arnaz was a prominent figure in Hollywood. When exasperated by Lucy's schemes and misadventures, Ricky added a comic touch with displays of "Latin" temper and lapses into Spanish. "I Love Lucy" made its mark on television comedy and TV production in general, but it did little for Hispanic characters. The same could be said of another early show with a Hispanic setting, which nonetheless cast Anglos in the major roles. Guy Williams played Don Diego, alias Zorro, the masked champion of the poor and oppressed in old Los Angeles. Their oppressors were

evil, greedy Spanish governors and landowners. In one episode Annette Funicello, fresh from the Mickey Mouse Club, showed up as the singing senorita Anita Cabrillo. Despite its "Hispanic" characters, the show was not a generous portrayal of either the people or the culture.

The Return of Race

In the mid-1960s, the portrayal of ethnic and racial minorities underwent major changes. The proportion of non-northern European roles doubled over the next decade. Before 1965, all racial and ethnic groups to the south or east of England, France, and Germany had scrambled for the one role in ten available to them. Now nonwhite characters alone could count on better than one role in ten. From the first to second decade in our study, the proportion of English characters was cut in half, while Hispanics became half again as numerous and the proportion of Asians doubled. Blacks were the biggest winners, gaining a dramatic fourteen-fold increase in what had been virtually an all-white landscape.

Not only did the proportion of black characters jump to 7 percent between 1965 and 1975, but the range and quality of roles expanded even more dramatically. In adventure series like "I Spy" and "Mission: Impossible," blacks moved into their first starring roles in over a decade. Not only were these roles more prominent, they offered a new style of character. Alexander Scott of "I Spy" and Barney Collier of "Mission: Impossible" were competent, educated professionals. These men were highly successful agents whose racial backgrounds were clearly secondary to their bravery and skill. They opened the way for blacks to appear in roles that did not require the actor to be black. There was no more use of poor English, servile shuffling, or popeyed double takes for comic effect. Instead, Collier was presented as an electronics expert and Scott as a multilingual Rhodes Scholar.

The new visibility of blacks quickly moved beyond the secret agent genre. In 1968 the first of television's relevance series managed to convert a negative stereotype into a positive one by casting a young black rebel as a member of "The Mod Squad." Linc Hayes' militant credentials included an afro haircut, aviator sunglasses, and an arrest during the Watts riots. Not to worry, though. This brooding black rebel was working with the good guys on the L.A.P.D.'s undercover "youth squad," where the dirty dozen met the counterculture every Tuesday at 7:30.

While ABC was coopting the Black Panthers into the establishment, NBC looked to the black middle class for "Julia," the first black-oriented sitcom in fifteen years. As a dedicated nurse and loving mother in an integrated world, the Julia Baker character looked ahead to "The Cosby Show" rather than backward to "Amos 'n' Andy." She certainly had more in common with Claire Huxtable than with Kingfish's nagging wife Sapphire. Unfortunately, she also lacked the vitality and wit of either Sapphire or future mother figures who would be more firmly rooted in black culture, like "Good Times'" Florida Evans.

"Julia" suffered from the dullness of being a prestige series, just as "The Mod Squad" labored under the hype that attended the relevance series. What they had in common with better-written shows like "I Spy" and "Mission Impossible" was a tendency to replace the old negative black stereotypes with new positive ones. The authors of Watching TV wrote with a touch of hyperbole, "They were no longer bumbling, easy-going, po' folk like Beulah, but rather articulate neo-philosophers just descended from Olympus, though still spouting streetwise jargon."[2] Having discovered that blacks didn't have to be cast as valets and janitors, white writers turned them into

James Bonds and Mary Tyler Moores. Thus, as blacks suddenly began to appear on the tube after a decade's absence, they remained invisible in Ralph Ellison's sense. The frantic search for positive characters smothered individuality with good intentions.

By contrast, the invisibility of Hispanics during this period remained more than metaphorical. They were simply not part of television's new ethnic "relevance." Latinos had few continuing prime time roles of any sort during in the late 1960s, and certainly no major star parts like Bill Cosby's Alexander Scott. In fact, most Latinos who were cast during this period showed up in episodes of international espionage series that used Central and South American locales. "I Spy" had many episodes set in Mexico, bringing the agents into contact with some positive and many more negative Hispanic characters. In other espionage shows such as "Mission Impossible", the action often centered on a fictitious Central American country, which was inevitably run by a jack-booted junta that could only be stopped by the enlightened Anglo-led team from north of the border.

One of the few exceptions to this pattern was the western "High Chaparral". Rancher John Cannon had settled in the Arizona territory to found a cattle empire. When his first wife is killed by Apaches, John married Victoria Montoya, the daughter of a wealthy Mexican rancher. The marriage was as much a business move as a romance, since it united the two families. Once tied by marriage, Don Montoya helped John build his herds and produce good breeding stock. Together the two families fought off Apaches and other marauders. Culture clashes between the two families occurred, but usually as a minor part of the plot. Unlike most Mexicans shown in previous westerns, the Montoyas were rich, powerful, sophisticated, and benevolent. In most episodes, Victoria attempted

to civilize her more rustic husband and establish a proper home on the range. To be sure, this series still presented semiliterate Hispanic ranchhands, but these portrayals were overshadowed by the Montoyas.

The other exception was the short-lived social relevancy series "Man and the City". This series presented more contemporary problems of Latinos in an unnamed southwestern city. The show was notable for frequently asserting the dignity and rights of Latinos. For example, in a 1971 segment, a cop is killed in the city's barrio. The police department pulls out all the stops to catch the killers, imposing a curfew and holding suspects incommunicado without legal counsel. All the suspects are Hispanics from the barrio who have little connection to the case. The mayor is forced to intervene and remind the police chief that the city has laws. He demands that all suspects, including minority groups, be given their full rights. The police are reluctant, believing this will impede their investigation. The mayor insists and the police obey his order. They eventually capture a key suspect who helps them catch the killers. There is no indication that racial tensions in the city have ended, merely that one violent episode is over. The groups involved have not learned to like each other; nor are they presented as peacefully coexisting. The point here is that all people have rights and deserve to be treated with dignity and equality. This seems to be the only series that attempted to derive socially relevant plotlines from the barrio.

Let A Hundred Flowers Bloom

In the early 1970s TV began to broadcast a different message about minorities. The unlikely agent of change was an equal opportunity bigot named Archie Bunker, who excoriated "spics," "jungle bunnies," "chinks," "yids," and every other minority that ever commanded an epithet. When "All in the Family" became the top rated show within five months of its 1971 premier, it attracted a barrage of criticism for making the tube safe for ethnic slurs. The producer of public television's "Black Journal" found it "shocking and racist."[3] Laura Hobson, who wrote "Gentlemen's Agreement," an attack on anti-semitism, decried its attempt to sanitize bigotry, "to clean it up, deodorize it, make millions of people more comfy about indulging in it."[4] Of course, the point of the show was to poke fun at Archie and all he stood for, as the script and laugh track tried to make clear.

Norman Lear's strategy was to educate audiences by entertaining them instead of preaching at them. So he created a kind of politicized Ralph Kramden, whom audiences could like in spite of his reactionary views, not because of them. He intended that the contrast between Archie's basic decency and his unattractive rantings would prod viewers to reexamine the retrograde ideas they permitted themselves. As Lear put it, the show "holds up a mirror to our prejudices. . .We laugh now, swallowing just the littlest bit of truth about ourselves, and it sits there for the unconscious to toss about later.[5] As a tool for improving race relations, this approach may have been too subtle for its own good. Several studies suggest that liberals watched the show to confirm their disdain for

Archie's views, while conservatives identified with him despite his creator's best intentions.[6] But another legacy of the program was to pioneer a more topical and (by television's standards) realistic portrayal of ethnic relations.

An immediate consequence of "All in the Family" was to introduce the first sitcoms populated by black families since "Amos 'n' Andy." A year after demonstrating the audience appeal of a white working class milieu not portrayed successfully since "The Honeymooners," Lear and his partner Bud Yorkin transferred the setting to a black ghetto in "Sanford and Son." Unlike the integrated middle class world of TV blacks in the late 1960s, "Sanford and Son" revolved around the foibles of a junk dealer in a poor black section of Los Angeles. "Sanford" proved so popular that it soon trailed only "All in the Family" in the Nielsen ratings.

Meanwhile, in an irony Archie would not have appreciated, "All in the Family" spawned not one but two additional black family sitcoms. "The Jeffersons" featured Archie's one-time neighbor George Jefferson as an upwardly mobile businessman whose snobbishness and inverted racism made him almost a black Archie Bunker. "Good Times" was actually a second generation spinoff. When Archie's liberal nemesis Maude got her own show in 1972, the scriptwriters gave her a quick-witted and tart-tongued black maid named Florida Evans. Two years later the popular Florida got her own show as the matriarch of a family living in a Chicago housing project. This series developed the "Sanford" technique of finding sometimes bitter humor among lower status characters trying to cope with life in the ghetto while looking for a way out of it. Scripts featured ward healers, loan sharks, abused children, and other facets of life on the edge, in sharp contrast to the comfortable middle class

world of "Julia" or the glamorous and exotic locales of "I Spy."

By this time, other producers, stimulated by Norman Lear's enormous success, were providing sitcoms that drew their characters from minority settings. "What's Happening!!" followed the adventures of three big city high school kids. "Diff'rent Strokes" created an unlikely "accidental family" in which a wealthy white man raised two black kids from Harlem in his Park Avenue apartment, without any serious clash of cultures. This trend almost never extended from the ghetto to the barrio. The great exception was "Chico and the Man," a generation gap sitcom that paired an ebullient young Mexican-American with an aging Bunkerish Anglo garage owner. This odd couple clicked with audiences, but the show's success was cut short by the suicide of comedian Freddy Prinze (Chico) in 1977.

Like the black sitcoms, "Chico" used minority culture as a spark to enliven a middle class white world that seemed bland or enervated by comparison. Minority characters of the early 1970s prided themselves not on their similarity to mainstream culture, but on their differences from it. Assimilated characters like Alexander Scott, Barney Collier, and Julia Baker gave way to the racial pride of George Jefferson, Fred of "Sanford and Son," and Rooster on "Starsky and Hutch." Where would Fred Sanford or George Jefferson be without their jive talk and street slang? Language was just one way of stressing the differences between racial and ethnic groups.

Minority characters also picked up flaws as they took on more complete roles. Fred Sanford was domineering and could appear foolish. George Jefferson could be as stubborn and narrow-

minded as his one-time next door neighbor. By badgering the interracial couple living upstairs and labelling their daughter a "zebra," he left no doubt about his views. But the thrust of the ethnic sitcom was not to ridicule minority cultures. Instead, racial and ethnic backgrounds were used as an educational tool. The religious, cultural, and other traditions that differentiate minorities from the mainstream were now treated as beneficial rather than problematic. Removed from the confines of the melting pot, these groups offered new approaches to old problems. Television charged them with the task of teaching new ways to the often obstinate world around them. Blacks and Hispanics participated in this era of racial and cultural re-education. It was Chico Rodriguez who taught Ed Brown to relax and be more tolerant on "Chico and the Man." Benson, the sharp-tongued butler, tried to maintain order amidst the chaos of "Soap," while steering his employers onto the right track. In one episode he even saved young Billy from the clutches of a religious cult.

The most spectacularly successful effort to combine education with entertainment was a hybrid of the miniseries and "big event" genres. Indeed, "Roots" became the biggest event in television history. This adaptation of Alex Haley's best-selling novel traced the history of four generations of a black family in America, beginning with Kunta Kinte, an African tribesman sold into slavery. It ran for eight consecutive nights in January 1977. When it was over, 130 million Americans had tuned in, including 80 million who viewed of the final episode. Seven of the eight episodes ranked among the all-time top ten at that point in television's history. "Roots" created a kind of national town meeting comparable to the televised moon landing or the aftermath of President Kennedy's assassination. It was blamed for several racial disturbances but credited for stimulating a productive national debate on the history of American race relations.

While blacks could look to the high profile presentation of African-American history presented by "Roots", there was no similar presentation of Hispanic history. If Anglos relied exclusively on Hollywood for information on Latino contributions to American history, their knowledge would extend little further than John Wayne's defense of "The Alamo" against the Mexican "invaders." Illustrations of Latino culture were equally rare. In fact, the only high profile Hispanic character during this period was Chico Rodriguez. Despite its popularity, "Chico and the Man" was not known as a series that explored Latino culture or Hispanic contributions to American history and culture.

Despite occasional failures, ethnic comedies became the hottest new programming trend of the 1970s. "All in the Family" was the top-rated show for an unprecedented five straight seasons, surpassing previous megahits "I Love Lucy" and "Gunsmoke." Other top twenty regulars included "Sanford and Son," "The Jeffersons," black comic Flip Wilson's variety show, and "Chico and the Man". The ethnic wave crested during the 1974-75 season, when a remarkable six of the top seven rated shows were ethnic sitcoms -- "All in the Family," "Sanford," "Chico," "Jeffersons," "Rhoda," and "Good Times."

If the new decade offered an unaccustomed array of new roles for minorities, it contained some traps as well. Ethnic characters gained more prominent and desirable roles, but also more unflattering ones. Bumblers, buffoons, and bimbos took their place alongside heroes and sages. For example, Vinnie Barbarino and Juan Epstein were two of the uneducated underachievers on "Welcome Back Kotter." Barbarino's Italian heritage added ethnic color to his machismo image,

while Epstein's ethnic background was contrived for comic effect. He was presented as Buchanan High School's only Puerto Rican Jew. "Good Times" created some negative black characters, such as insensitive building supervisors and abusive politicians. In "What's Happening," the Thomas family made do without their con man father after he walked out on them. His occasional visits home were usually in search of money for some new scheme. A steady stream of minority characters began to show up as criminals in cop shows like "Kojak," "Baretta," and "Barney Miller."

The late 1970s retained a mix of ethnic heroes and fools in some of the most popular shows of the day. But ethnic characters were beginning to lose their novelty. During the 1979 season, three dramatic series were launched with black leads, but none came close to the ratings necessary for renewal. "Paris" starred James Earl Jones as a supercop who ran the station house during the day and taught criminology at night. "The Lazarus Syndrome" featured Louis Gossett as the chief of cardiology in a large hospital. "Harris and Company" focused on the problems of a single parent raising a family. The twist was that this black family was held together not by a matriarch but a middle-aged widower. Thus, Hollywood was at least trying to create some positive role models for black males. But no such efforts extended to Latinos. There were no network series built around a Latino family, Hispanic high school kids, or any of the other patterns found in sitcoms featuring blacks. It would be several years before the short-lived ABC series "Condo" would prominently cast Latinos as middle class characters.

Overall, the 1980s offered little that was new to racial or ethnic minority portrayals in the wake of TV's ethnic revival. These groups continued to be presented more or less as they were in

the late 1970s. Despite the continuing presence of racial and ethnic diversity, however, racial themes were no longer in vogue. Integration was assumed as a backdrop, as the prime time world became less polarized. The age of pluralism had arrived, but the thrill was gone. The riots were over, the battles won, and characters got back to their other plot functions. Among these were crime and other wrongdoing. Comedies like "Taxi," "White Shadow," and "WKRP in Cincinnati" continued to present integrated casts, but ethnic characters in dramatic series were often on the dark side of the law.

Ironically, television's multicultural world of the 1980's provided an updated version of the stereotypical Hispanic banditos who populated the westerns thirty years earlier. Crime shows like "Miami Vice," "Hill Street Blues," and "Hunter" presented Hispanic drug lords as a major nemesis. Trafficking in human misery made these characters rich enough to own cities and sometimes even small countries. They were among the nastiest criminals on TV in the 1980s. There were also petty Hispanic criminals in the slums of "Hill Street Blues" and "Cagney & Lacey." These small-time hoods, drug addicts, and pimps were less flamboyant than their big-league counterparts, but no less unsavory. Altogether, TV's latest crop of Hispanics included a cruel and vicious group of criminals.

There were occasional attempts to base shows on Hispanic casts, but all proved unsuccessful. In 1983 the Lear-wannabee sitcom "Condo" briefly pitted a bigoted WASP against his Latino next-door neighbors. The following season, the equally short-lived "A.K.A. Pablo" dealt somewhat more seriously with ethnic questions. Focusing on struggling young comic Pablo Rivera and his extended family, the series wrestled with questions about ethnic humor and the preservation of Hispanic

culture. Pablo made many jokes about his family and his Mexican-American heritage in his nightclub act. This frequently offended his traditionalist parents, who expected him to treat his heritage more respectfully. Despite its brief run, this series was one of the few to deal explicitly with aspects of Latino culture.

A more mixed portrayal appeared in the 1987 series "I Married Dora." In this fractured fairy tale, Dora Calderon was the housekeeper for widower Peter Farrell and his family. When faced with deportation, Dora and Peter joined in a marriage of convenience. Like many television housekeepers before her, Dora was the voice of wisdom and compassion in the household, but her own illegal status gave her role an ambiguous twist. In 1988, a series called "Trial and Error", was based on Latino characters from the barrio in East Los Angeles. The show revolved around a free-wheeling entrepreneur who ran a souvenir T-shirt company and his upwardly mobile roommate, who was a newly minted lawyer. This series had a lighter touch with less attention to Hispanic culture, but it met with the same quick demise as after its predecessors.

Both "A.K.A. Pablo" and "Trial and Error" sprang from the efforts of comedian Paul Rodriguez. It is not uncommon for bankable stars to get their own television series. This is particularly true for stand-up comics, who have taken their nightclub acts into successful series like "Roseanne", "Home Improvement", "Grace Under Fire" and "Seinfeld". This approach has proven to be a very important avenue onto the screen for blacks. Several exclusively black shows currently on the air are the result of the work of a bankable star. Among those who have followed in the

footsteps of Bill Cosby are Keenan Ivory Wayans of "In Living Color", Martin Lawrence of "Martin", Mark Curry of "Hangin' with Mr. Cooper" and Charles Dutton of "Roc." Unfortunately, this approach has so far been a dead end for Latinos.

Blacks fared better in the 1980s, largely escaping the criminal portrayals of other minorities. When black characters did turn to crime, they were usually small-time criminals driven by desperation. There were even times when their criminal acts were presented as social commentary. For instance, in an episode of "Hill Street Blues," a black militant occupies a housing project and takes hostages. He threatens to kill them unless the city agrees to keep the project open and fix it up. The man is frustrated and angry that weeks of negotiating led to nothing. The city simply set a new closing date and moved on. Rage and desperation drive him to act and a tense standoff ensues. In the end, he is mistakenly shot by a police sniper. Everyone is shocked by his desperate act and his tragic death.

Meanwhile, TV turned out numerous positive black role models as diverse as "The Cosby Show's" Heathcliff Huxtable, Mary Jenkins of "227," Rico Tubbs on "Miami Vice," and Bobby Hill of "Hill Street Blues." These shows suggest the diversity of major roles that were at last becoming available to blacks. "227" and "Amen" continued the sharp-tongued tradition of 1970s sitcoms, without the abrasive or objectionable images that had brought criticism. Tubbs and Hill both carried on the tradition of "salt and pepper" law enforcement teams. Hill also represented the educative function of minorities by helping to wean his partner Renko, a southerner, away from residual racist tendencies.

Of course, "Cosby" was the biggest hit of all. This series further developed the low-key humanistic colorblind approach that Bill Cosby has popularized over two decades as "I Spy's" Alexander Scott, high school teacher Chet Kincaid on "The Bill Cosby Show," and finally in a black version of "Father Knows Best." The enormous success of this venture led some critics to snipe at Cosby for playing black characters in whiteface to maximize audience appeal. Black psychiatrist Alvin Pouissant, retained by the show to review scripts for racial authenticity, notes that the criticisms come from white reporters more often than black viewers: "Sometimes it seems they want the show to be 'culturally black'... and sometimes it seems they would be happier to see them cussing out white people, a sort of protest sitcom. Some seem to feel that because the family is middle class with no obvious racial problems, that constitutes a denial or dismissal of the black person."[7]

Compared to the plight of TV's Hispanics, debates over whether the Huxtables are divorced from the black experience may seem a luxury, a sign that a one-time outgroup has reached a mature phase in its relationship with the Hollywood community. In 1979 organized opposition even persuaded Norman Lear to withdraw a new comedy series at the last minute. "Mister Dugan," a sitcom about a black Congressman, was scheduled to premier on CBS a week after Lear arranged a special screening for the Congressional Black Caucus. The screening was a disaster, with Congressman Mickey Leland calling the lead character "a reversion to the Steppin' Fetchit syndrome."

Lear promptly pulled the show from the schedule. He remarked at the time, "We have a high social conscience, and we want to get the story right. We do not favor the short-term gain over the

long-term public interest. Dropping the show was an exercise in that commitment."[8] This was an extraordinary episode in a business often excoriated for caring only about the bottom line. When the medium's most successful producer is willing to withdraw a series on the eve of its broadcast, writing off a $700,000 investment, it shows the power of social commitment in television. The only question is the strength and direction of that commitment.

Moreover, such criticism is belied by the top ten ratings obtained by such diverse families as the Sanfords, Jeffersons, and Evans, not to mention Kunta Kinte and his kin. The success of upper and lower class, matriarchal and patriarchal black family series suggests that television has gone beyond using black characters as a sign of racial diversity. It has begun to show diversity within the black community as well, at last recognizing both the cultural distinctiveness and the universal humanity of this group of Americans. Unfortunately, Hispanics have never played a significant role in television's debate over race relations. When television has explored discrimination, prejudice or the appropriateness of inter-racial relationships, it has almost always staged them as a black versus white issue. Whatever racial tensions exist between Latinos and other groups in American society, they have very rarely made it to the small screen.

A Tale of Two Minorities

Our content analysis of prime time characters from the 1950's through the 1980's can help quantify the trends we have sketched in this historical overview. Some of the key comparisons are summarized in table one. Before 1965, as we have seen, prime time was a nearly all-white world populated mainly by generic northern Europeans, save for the occasional black servant or Mexican bandito. Soon thereafter, the spectrum widened to embrace an array of ethnic and cultural traditions. However, various minority groups shared unequally in television's new search for ethnic roots. The disparities can be illustrated by comparing the roles available to blacks and Hispanics over the years. Both these minority groups have been underrepresented, but three times as many blacks as Hispanics have appeared on the small screen. Perhaps more importantly, blacks have gradually progressed from invisibility to integration in TV's fantasy world. After 1975, nearly one in ten characters were black, while Hispanic representation hovered around the two percent mark throughout the three decades that were studied. (In real life, about 12 percent of Americans are black and seven percent are Hispanic.)

The two groups have been portrayed as about equally socially disadvantaged. TV's blacks were only about half as likely as whites to have high school diplomas and middle-class incomes. Hispanics held upper-status occupations less than half as often as whites, and they were half again as likely to portray unskilled laborers. These occupational figures seem to

Table 1
Traits of TV Characters 1955-1986

	White	Black	Latino
All Characters	89%	6%	2%
Social Background *			
Attended College	72%	44%	**
Lacked high school diploma	25%	49%	**
Low economic status	22%	47%	40%
Professional of executive	22%	17%	10%
Unskilled laborer	13%	16%	22%
Plot Functions			
Starring Role	17%	15%	8%
Character Succeeded	65%	72%	54%
Character Failed	23%	16%	34%
Positive portrayal	40%	44%	32%
Negative Portrayal	31%	24%	41%
Committed crime	11%	7%	22%

* Characters were coded only if their backgrounds were clearly indicated by the script.
** Too few characters were coded for meaningful comparisons.

provide ammunition for those who see TV as reinforcing a white power structure. During the three decades studied, whites portrayed 94 percent of the educated professionals and business executives, blacks played five percent, and Hispanics one percent. Ironically, though, these discrepancies stem partly from television's recent efforts toward sympathetic social realism. The tube turned to the ghetto and the barrio in the 1970s to affirm minority cultures, not to disparage their social status.

On television, at least, demography is not destiny. What blacks on TV lacked in social status, they made up in starring roles and positive portrayals. Meanwhile, Hispanic characters spanned a narrow spectrum from villains to second bananas. Our sample didn't contain a single black character in a major role before 1965. Thereafter the proportion of blacks in starring roles nearly equaled that of whites, at a rate double that of Hispanics. The same discrepancy showed up in the functions characters played. Overall, relatively few characters on television appear in a negative light. Out of every ten characters in our study, about four were good guys, three were partly or wholly negative, and another three played neutral background roles. But blacks wore the most white hats and Hispanics the fewest. Forty-four percent of black characters were portrayed positively, compared to 40 percent of whites and only 32 percent of Hispanics. Conversely, only 24 percent of blacks were shown in a negative light, compared to 31 percent of whites and 41 percent of Hispanics. To highlight these differences, we subtracted the percentage of negative from positive characters for each group. That yields figures of +20 for blacks, +9 for whites, and -9 for Hispanics. These relative rankings remained constant across the three decades that we studied, except that Hispanics moved up to the level of whites (+4) after 1975, although still well behind blacks (+14).

Further, the more villainous the character, the sharper the group differences that emerged. Hispanic characters were twice as likely as whites and three times as likely as blacks to commit a crime. Over one out of every five Hispanic characters (22 percent) portrayed a criminal, compared to one out of nine whites (11 percent) and only one out of fourteen blacks (seven percent). Thus, despite being outnumbered by three to one, Hispanic characters have committed more violent crimes than blacks . Once TV's roster of Hispanic stereotypes included the grinning bandito criss-crossed with ammunition belts. More recently, as scriptwriter Ben Stein has observed, "any time a Cuban or Colombian crosses the tube, he leaves a good thick trail of cocaine behind."[9]

Because of their negative and criminal roles, Latinos stood apart from other characters in the methods they adopted to attain their goals. They were more likely than either whites or blacks to use violence and deceit. One out of eight Latino characters (13 percent) used violence, compared to one in ten whites and one in fourteen African Americans (seven percent). Similarly, one out of every five Latino characters (20 percent) turned to trickery and deceit, placing them well ahead of both whites (13 percent) and blacks (12 percent). If Latinos were distinctive in the means they used to pursue their goals, they also differed in their motivations. Hispanic characters were much more likely to be driven by greed than other characters. Almost one third (31 percent) of Latinos have been driven by greed. By comparison one in five whites (21 percent) and one in six blacks (17 percent) acted out of avarice. More broadly, black characters managed to attain whatever they strive for more often than either whites or Hispanics. In fact, the failure rate among Hispanics was more than double that of blacks.

Perusing these figures, it is difficult to resist the conclusion that Hollywood has cracked open the door to black concerns while letting Hispanics serve as window dressing. Our content analysis provides considerable evidence that writers and producers have been more sensitive to issues of representation and stereotyping in casting black roles than Hispanic roles since the mid-1960s. TV Guide reached a similar conclusion in a 1987 article entitled, "There's Lt. Castillo, Sifuentes, . . .and Little Else."[10] The "Miami Vice" cop and "L.A. Law" attorney were not only exceptional for portraying continuing series characters, they were noteworthy among Hispanics simply for being on the right side of the law. Of course, "Miami Vice" was also one of television's most reliable suppliers of Hispanic criminals. In Stein's pithy phrase, "To viewers of 'Miami Vice,' 'Cuban = Gangster' is the iron law of immigration."[11] In a widely noted 1982 episode of "Hill Street Blues," Lt. Calletano 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 coworkers: "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. Steppin' Fetchit may be a distant memory, but "Jose Jimenez" seems alive and well.

A Contemporary View

The 1990s marked some major changes for the networks, as new sources of competition emerged, new program genres developed, and many shows took greater risks to lure audiences. For instance, "Twin Peaks" fascinated the country for a season with perhaps the most convoluted plotline in television history. Later, "Northern Exposure" and "Picket Fences" would raise controversies in episodes that raised once-taboo topics ranging from homosexual marriage to the possibility of virgin birth. "In Living Color" shocked and amused audiences with a radical new approach to irreverent, streetwise comedy. Most recently "NYPD Blue" made headlines with explicit language and nudity that went beyond anything previously broadcast in prime time.

However, few of these changes have altered the portrayals of racial minorities. In fact, some of the most-discussed shows of recent years have had little minority presence. The biggest change in this regard concerns the number and prominence of black characters found on TV. Black representation continues to increase during the 1990s, as the number of shows with all-black or mostly black casts has jumped. Driven largely by the Fox network's quest for new audiences and trademark shows, these new series drew heavily on the struttin' and jivin' characters of the 1970s. Both the 1992 and 1993 seasons featured ten such series, including hits like "Hangin' With Mr. Cooper", "Family Matters", "Martin," and "Fresh Prince of Bel Air". Intense debate has ensued over the quality of these roles and portrayals, which critics disparage as latter-day minstrel show stereotypes. Such complaints have not diminished the popularity of these shows, however, particularly among black audiences.

Despite continuing controversy, television's portrayal of blacks is in many ways more diverse and substantative than ever before. For instance, on Monday night viewers can contrast the wealthy Banks family on "Fresh Prince of Bel Air" with the working class Cumberbatches in "704 Hauser Street." On Tuesday, they can see the struggles of a single mother in "South Central", followed by the stable two parent extended family in "Roc". Then there are the Winslows, a comfortably middle class black family that has been a cornerstone of Friday night viewing for years. In addition there are numerous black characters in integrated series such as "L.A. Law", "Law & Order", "Evening Shade", "Love & War", "NYPD Blue", "In the Heat of the Night" and "seaQuest DSV". African Americans are seen as lawyers, judges, police captains and a host of other roles in these shows.

Symbolically, at least, television's treatment of blacks came full circle with the premiere of Norman Lear's "704 Hauser Street" in 1994. Set in Archie Bunker's old house, the lovable bigot this time is Ernie Cumberbatch, a liberal black mechanic and veteran of the civil rights movement. Like Archie, however, he is surrounded by people who disagree with him. His son is a conservative college student with a liberal Jewish girlfriend. His wife is a successful caterer who refuses to see the world through the same lens of discrimination and prejudice that Ernie attributes to whites. However imperfectly, this series has attempted to reassess perspectives that have progressed from cutting edge to conventional wisdom in television's ethnic neighborhoods. Meanwhile, viewers who might question the authenticity of this vision of black life can choose from a variety of series produced and written by African Americans.

If television has broadened and deepened the roles for blacks in the 1990s, it has done little

to change the portrayal of Hispanics. While shows that are exclusively or mainly about blacks now comprise about one eighth of the prime time schedule, only one series in the past three seasons has been based on a Latino family or character. Moreover, that series -- the shortlived "Frannie's Turn" -- mainly used Hispanic traditions as a comic foil for feminist putdowns. This series revolved around the marriage of a Cuban emigre named Joseph Escobar and his wife Frannie, an Anglo of unclear ethnic origins. Whatever ethnic and cultural differences may have existed between them were rarely played upon, since most of the plots dealt with Frannie's quest for equality. However, when aspects of heritage did come up, they frequently reflected poorly on Latinos. For instance, the first episode dealt with Frannie's discovery that Joseph has been sending money to a Cuban liberation movement while telling her to cut the household budget. At one point in the ensuing argument, she suggests sarcastically, "who knows, maybe they'll send you the Bay of Pigs decoder ring." In the few episodes that aired, the couple's children seemed oblivious to their heritage, and no effort was made teach them about their father's culture. Overall, this series made no greater use of ethnicity than "I Love Lucy" did almost forty years earlier.

Otherwise, Latino characters remain largely supporting players or background figures in the current prime time schedule. The highest profile is enjoyed by Daniel Morales, who replaced Victor Sifuentes on "L.A. Law". Most other recent Latino roles involved lower status jobs or far less airtime in low-rated series. Examples include Chuy Castillo, the cook at the "Golden Palace;" Jennifer Clemente, a very junior attorney in the U.S. Justice Department on "The Round Table;" and detective Rafael Martinez on the "Hat Squad". Currently, there is Mahalia Sanchez, a bus station cashier in the "John Larroquette Show," rookie detective James Martinez in "NYPD Blue," and Paco Ortiz in

"Nurses," none of them starring roles.

The cultural diversity within the Latino community is almost completely absent from prime time. Most Hispanic characters on television come from a "generic" background without reference to national origin or past. Television has rarely pointed out the cultural, historical or economic differences among different groups within the Latino community. The few shows to make such distinctions, from "Miami Vice" to "Frannie's Turn," usually did so to place a particular nationality in a negative light. In "Miami Vice" differing national origins were connected with different types of illegal activities, while in "Frannie's Turn" a Cuban heritage was not a badge of honor. 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.

Our analysis of contemporary programming confirms that many of television's long standing practices have continued into the 1990s, as table two indicates.

Table 2
Traits of TV Characters 1992 *

	White	Black	Latino
All Characters	75%	17%	1%
Social Background **			
Attended College	56%	65%	79%
Lacked high school diploma	37%	31%	***
Low economic status	18%	24%	28%
Professional of executive	37%	26%	28%
Unskilled laborer	11%	12%	20%
Plot Functions			
Starring Role	23%	19%	24%
Character Succeeded	55%	59%	61%
Character Failed	16%	12%	10%
Positive portrayal	24%	25%	33%
Negative Portrayal	8%	6%	18%
Committed crime	4%	4%	16%

* Network fictional programming only, excludes syndicated and reality based series.
** Characters were coded only if their backgrounds were clearly indicated by the script.
*** Too few characters were coded for meaningful comparisons.

Foremost among these is the dearth of Latino roles. While black representation on television increased to 17 percent in the 1992 sample, Hispanic portrayals dropped to one percent of all characters. This continues the upward trend in black roles over the past 40 years, as well as the stability of Hispanic representation at very low levels. Our retrospective study found that black characters were actually less prevalent than Hispanics in the 1950's and early 1960's. From 1965 to 1974, blacks outnumbered Hispanics by a two to one margin (six percent vs. three percent). This gap widened in the 1970s and 1980s, as blacks outnumbered Hispanics by more than three to one (ten percent vs. three percent). (While black representation has increased over the years, it should be noted that black characters are not uniformally distributed. Our studies and others have found most black characters to be concentrated in a handful of shows on the prime time schedule.[12] In 1992, for instance, ten series accounted for nearly two-thirds of all black characters.)

On several measures of social status, minority characters remain disproportionately at the bottom of the ladder. For example, blacks and Hispanics are still more likely than whites to be portrayed as working class or poor. Almost one in four blacks (24 percent) and 28 percent of Hispanics were presented as working class or poor compared to 18 percent of whites in 1992. But blacks made had strides into the ranks of the wealthy to almost the same extent as whites (16 and 18 percent rich characters respectively). On the other hand wealthy Latino characters have become scarcer over the years. In the 1950s Hispanics were heavily represented at both the top and bottom of the economic ladder. Prior to 1965 40 percent of characters were wealthy, while 50 percent were presented as working class or poor. The proportion of wealthy Hispanics fell over the years until, by the 1975-86 period, none remained in the sample. This lack of representation in the ranks of the

wealthy continued into the 1992 sample.

Occupational status also shows disparities between Hispanics and other groups, although this indicator shows stronger evidence of upper status portrayals. While Latinos have been slowly climbing into professional ranks over the past 40 years, our research shows that they have never had a significant role in business occupations. The good news is that Hispanic characters broke into the professional ranks in 1992. Among Latinos 25 percent of characters with census-coded occupations were educated professionals such as lawyers, doctors or teachers.[1] This fell behind the proportion of professionals found among whites (33 percent), but equalled that of blacks (24 percent professional). While Latinos frequently occupied professional positions, however, they were conspicuously absent from business fields. Out of 63 Hispanic characters in the 1992 sample, only one was a business manager or executive, compared to 15 percent of blacks and 16 percent of whites. Overall, only one percent of all characters in professional and executives positions were Hispanic.

Any partial advance in the occupational status of Latinos did not translate into improvement in their overall portrayals. Hispanics were still more likely than either blacks or whites to play the heavies in the storyline. They were presented in negative roles more than twice as often as whites and three times as often as blacks (18 percent vs. eight and six percent respectively). Latinos also continued to portray criminals more frequently than other groups. Hispanic characters were four times more likely to commit a crime than were either whites or blacks (16 percent vs. four percent

[1] Census coded occupations refers to occupations that exist in the real world as catalogued by the Census Department. It omits such unusual occupations as professional criminals, Indian chiefs, etc.

Similarly, nine percent of Latinos engaged in violent behavior, more than double the proportion of whites and blacks (four and three percent respectively).

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, our sample contained a "Law & Order" episode about the murder of a wealthy white college co-ed who was beaten to death. Suspicion falls on her Mexican American boyfriend, a hardworking 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 racial prejudices. Appealing for a verdict of temporary insanity, Tommy's lawyer describes him as "an orphaned wetback, a beaner, a greaser..." trying to break into a wealthy Cadillac and country club set through iron will and incredible effort. 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. After a vigorous prosecution of the case, the jury finds him guilty of murder.

A Broader Picture of 1992

To obtain a more complete view of television in 1992, we examined two program genres that are increasingly popular but are rarely analyzed in studies such as this one -- reality-based shows and first-run syndicated series. By including these program types, our analysis encompasses virtually all types of entertainment programming broadcast during prime time. If anything, the results of this broader analysis yield an even more negative portrayal of Latinos.

First-run syndicated programs look much like their network counterparts in their treatment of Latinos. Only one percent of all characters in our sample of syndicated series -- six out of 472 -- were Hispanic. This number is so low that it limits our ability to draw reliable inferences comparing their portrayal with non-Latino characters. However, It is worth noting that three of the six were portrayed negatively and two engaged in criminal activity. Overall, about one out of five characters in syndicated series played "bad guys," most of whom were criminals, with blacks somewhat less likely than whites to fall into either category.

The most memorable portrayal of Hispanics occurred in a two-part episode of "Baywatch." In the opening episode, a convicted felon was broken out of police custody by members of his gang who waylaid the police van taking him to prison. The gang fled to a cruise ship headed for Mexico, planning to slip onto a Colombian trawler and eventually land in Cartegena. One of the henchmen,

Carl Cortez, first shot up the police van as part of the escape and then proceeded to help his boss cover his tracks. Unfortunately for Mr. Cortez, his boss lost faith in his discretion and had him killed before the first hour was over.

It is unlikely that the current crop of syndicated shows presents a more positive portrait of Latinos. For instance, episodes of "The Untouchables" from the 1993 fall season focused on mob attempts to establish a base of operations in Cuba. Among the major characters was Cuba's president, who was shown trying to rape his stepdaughter before killing her in a rage. This decidedly unsympathetic character was joined by a host of corrupt Cubans who were cooperating with Al Capone's mobsters. (Not all the Cuban characters were negative. For example, Colonel Fulgencio Batista was seen leading a popular revolt against the corrupt political regime.) In a more contemporary setting, a "Baywatch" episode featured Latino gang members bringing their turf war to the beach. A recent entry into first run syndication, "Acapulco H.E.A.T.", uses few Latinos in key roles despite its Mexican setting. Among the ensemble cast of secret agents featured in the series, only one is Latino, and his role is that of a supporting player in most episodes.

If syndicated series offered portrayals quite similar to traditional network entertainment fare, reality-based programs cast an even more negative image of Latinos. Reality-based shows were notable for containing a comparatively high proportion of Latino characters. Hispanics accounted for eight percent of the characters in these series, compared to the minuscule one percent seen in traditional entertainment programming on the network and syndicated prime time offerings. Few details about personal background are ever given in these shows, but the criminality of minority

characters was clearly evident.

A stunning 45 percent of Latinos portrayed in these shows committed crimes, compared to 10 percent of whites who were shown. For example, an episode of "America's Most Wanted" carried the case of three armed robbers named Jose Santien, Luis "Bugsy" Velarde, and Ramon "Suicide" Reyes. During the robbery of a grocery store, Reyes walked up behind a man using the telephone and demanded that he put it down. When the man refused, Reyes shot and killed him. This was the only program format in which blacks fared even worse than Hispanics. Half of all black characters (50 percent) featured in these shows committed a crime. 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.

Conclusion

This content analysis reveals a mixed record for television entertainment's progress in portraying minorities. In the early days of television, few minority characters appeared during prime time, and those who did tended to play villains or provide comic relief. Over the years, in response to frequent criticism, the industry has gradually provided a more diverse picture of African Americans, while leaving Hispanics mired in the stereotypes of a previous generation. Some key comparisons, involving the number and tone of minority portrayals, are summarized in figures one and two.

In studies of prime time entertainment reaching from the 1950's to the 1990's, we found that black representation has gradually increased and negative stereotypes have decreased. Despite continuing debate over particular characterizations, blacks are more likely to be portrayed positively than are whites, and they engage in proportionately less violent and criminal behavior. An exception to this general pattern is the newly popular genre of reality-based programming, which frequently casts minorities in criminal roles.

By contrast, Latinos are even less visible in prime time today than they were in the 1950's. Nor have their portrayals improved markedly since the days of Jose Jimenez and Frito Bandito. Throughout television's history, Hispanics have been cast as heavies proportionately more often than

either blacks or whites. Their depictions are notable for the high proportion of criminals and violent characters and the absence of starring roles and successful role models. In an age of heightened sensitivity to both the importance of ethnic diversity and the influence of popular culture in shaping social images, it is remarkable how little has changed in television's treatment of this growing segment of the population.

In light of this pattern of findings, one last characteristic of prime time's fantasy world carries symbolic significance. Across the hundreds of series we examined over the past several decades, we encountered not a single Latino character in a show about the future. This is especially surprising in light of the tradition of multiculturalism that has characterized television's science fiction genre at least since Gene Rodenberry's original "Star Trek" series premiered in 1966. When television has gazed into the crystal ball to predict mankind's future, the usual scenario is a peaceful multicultural world, but one without Latinos. These shows have portrayed blacks, Asians, Russians and alien beings working together, but Latinos have been notably absent from the mix. Even in the 1990's this picture has changed little. Despite the current vogue for sci-fi programming, the only futuristic series that includes a Latino in a continuing role is "seaQuest, DSV," which is set only twenty years in the future. In the real world, this country's future will inevitably include a greater role for Hispanic Americans. In television's fantasy world, however, Latinos are as invisible in the future as they have been in the past.

Appendix

A Note on Methodology

Our analysis of television entertainment programming relied on the social science method of content analysis. Content analysis is a technique which allows researchers to classify statements objectively and systematically according to explicit rules and clear criteria. The goal is to produce valid measures of program content, and the hallmark of success lies in reliability. Other investigators who apply similar procedures to the same material should obtain similar results, although their interpretations of those results may differ. Clear rules and standards have to be set for identifying, measuring, and classifying each program. In making each decision, researchers are applying these rules, not expressing their own opinions. If the rules are sufficiently clear, two investigators working independently will come to similar conclusions, regardless of their personal opinions about the subject matter.

Content analysis is not a panacea. The quality of the study depends on the way the coding categories are constructed, the clarity and appropriateness of the rules that guide coders, and the skill of the coders in applying them. Nonetheless, the difference between content analysis and casual monitoring is akin to the difference between scientific polling and man-on-the-street interviews.

There are two basic forms of content analysis. Quantitative analysis measures specified messages in numerical terms. It presupposes the existence of well defined, mutually exclusive categories which are used to examine the data. Qualitative analysis, sometimes referred to as thematic or emergent analysis, lacks numerical precision, but is more sensitive to the nuances and differences between programs. It usually lacks the specified or defined categories of quantitative analysis. These two forms of research complement and supplement each other.

Researchers first employ qualitative techniques when exploring new territory where existing coding categories may not apply. This involves canvassing the universe of content to be examined. Extensive notes are taken on each item dealing with substance, style, and format. After this is completed, the notes are compared to see what common themes, symbols, and attributes emerge. From this information, the researchers develop categories that are eventually used in the qualitative analysis. These qualitative techniques help research become "data sensitive" by developing categories that specifically accommodate the research material. Emergent analysis also allows researchers to record qualitative examples that can be used later to illustrate the quantitative categories.

Our research strategy combined these two approaches. The first phase employed a qualitative emergent analysis which conceptualized and operationalized the system, based on prior examination of a wide range of programs. Rather than imposing preordained categories on the material, our coding scheme emerged from an extensive pilot study of programs. Once the analytic categories were developed and pre-tested, they became the basis of the second research phase, the quantitative analysis presented in this report. This involved the systematic classification of program content into

discrete categories that are subject to numerical representation and, hence, quantitative data manipulation.

A minimum reliability of 80% was achieved for all variables retained in the final analysis. Throughout the coding process, coders were assigned programs randomly, which further reduced systematic error. The analyses presented here were conducted over several years using three different groups of coders. Each group was carefully tested against the work of previous coders to insure that datasets were comparable across time. The results of this analysis provide the basis for the report that follows.

Our analysis began with recording descriptive information to identify each program, such as its broadcast date, network affiliation, length and genre of programming. Each character who had a speaking part in the episode was identified and catalogued. We noted such characteristics as race and gender as well as attributes relating to economic and educational status. To round out this analysis we examined the function each character served in the plot. Positive characters exhibited friendly, helpful or heroic behavior, while negative characters acted in foolish, selfish, or malicious ways. Our analysis also examined the motivations for characters actions and the methods they chose to use in pursuing their goals.

1. Several of these early studies are discussed in Window Dressing on the Set: Women and Minorities in Television A Report of the United States Commission on Civil Rights (Washington, D.C:U.S. Government Printing Office August 1977)

2. Harry Castleman and Walter Podrazik, Watching TV: Four Decades of American Television (McGraw-Hill Book Co. 1982), p. 208.

3. Ibid., p. 226.

4. Laura Z. Hobson, quoted in Christopher Lasch, "Archie Bunker and the Liberal Mind," Channels, Oct/Nov 1981, p. 34.

5. Quoted in Watching TV, p. 227.

6. See Richard Adler, ed., All in the Family: A Critical Appraisal (Praeger).

7. Quoted in William Raspberry, "Cosby Show: Black or White?" Washington Post, November 5, 1984.

8. Quoted in Time, March 19, 1979, p. 85.

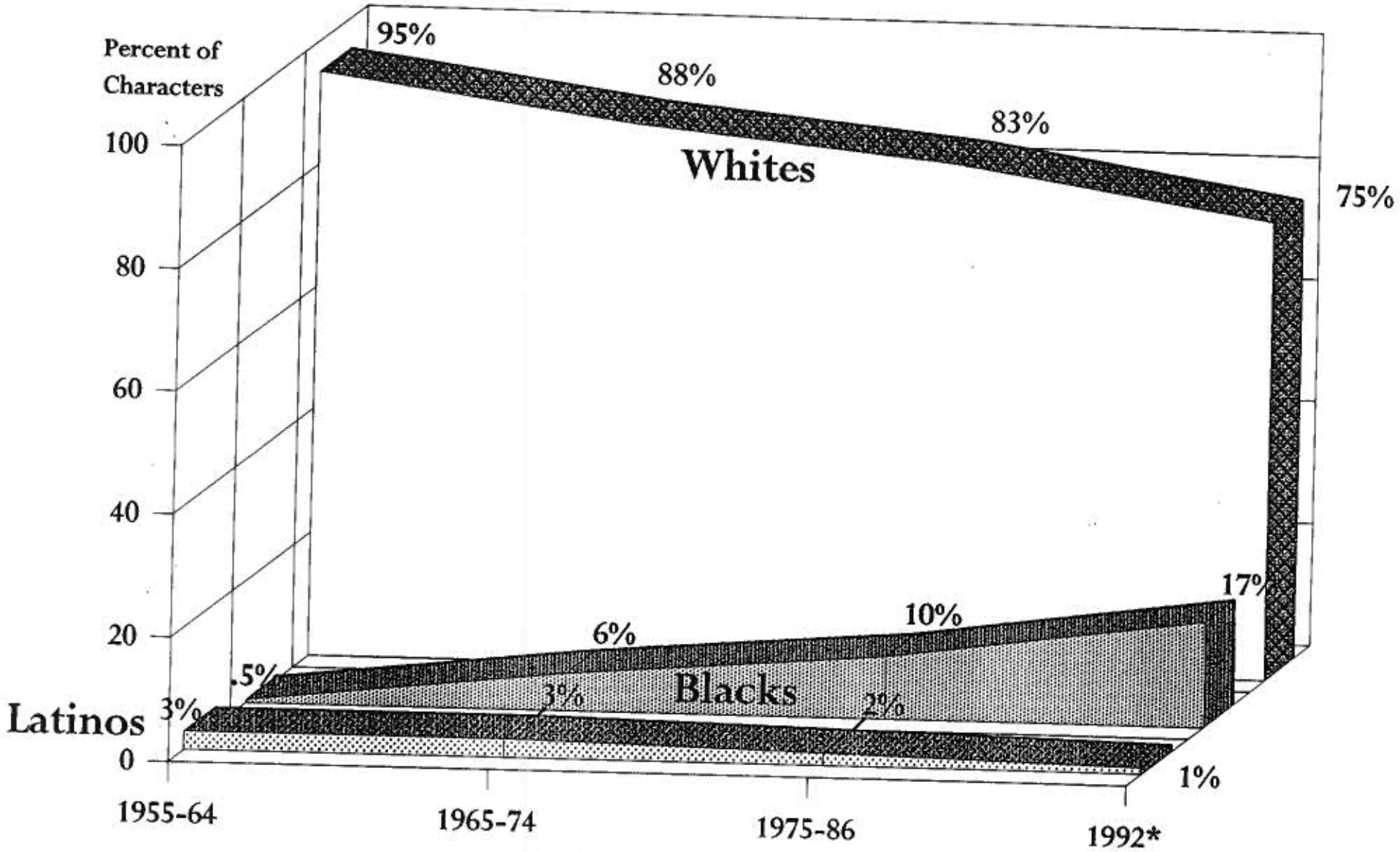
9. Ibid.

10. Geraldo Rivera, "There's Lt. Castillo, Sifuentes...and Little Else, " TV Guide, April 18, 1987, pp. 40-43.

11. Ben Stein, "Miami Vice: It's So Hip You'll Want to Kill Yourself," Public Opinion, Oct/Nov 1985, p. 42.

12. S. Robert Lichter, Linda S. Lichter and Stanley Rotham, Prime Time: How TV Portrays American Culture (Regnery Publishing, in press). Additional discussion of previous studies can be found in Window Dressing on the Set: Women and Minorities in Television A Report of the United States Commission on Civil Rights (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office August 1977).

TV Ethnic Portrayals Over Time



* Excluding reality based and syndicated series.

Criminality of TV Characters