
Don't Blink: Hispanics in Television Entertainment

Prepared by:

**S. Robert Lichter
Chairman**

**Daniel R. Amundson
Research Director**

**Center for Media and Public Affairs
2100 L Street, N.W.
Suite 300
Washington, D.C. 20037**

**John Thomas Sheehan
Executive Director**

**for:
The National Council of La Raza (NCLR)
1111 19th Street, N.W.
Suite 1000
Washington, D.C. 20036**

**Raúl Yzaguirre
President**

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Executive Summary*

This study updates our 1994 monograph *Distorted Reality*, the first scientific content analysis of how prime time television portrays Hispanic characters. Our earlier study painted a dismal picture of a group that was barely visible on America's television screens and was all too often confined to stereotypical roles.

Compared to both Anglos and African-Americans, television's Hispanics in 1992 were low in number, low in social status, and lowdown in personal character, frequently portraying violent criminals. The worst offenders were "reality" shows, whose version of reality often consisted of white cops chasing black and Hispanic robbers.

To find out whether Hispanics have been admitted into Hollywood's melting pot, we examined a composite month of prime-time entertainment programs broadcast throughout the 1994-95 season on the four major broadcast networks and in first-run syndication. As in the earlier study, we separated out the reality-based programs from fictional entertainment. The results reflect our analysis of 5,767 characters who appeared on 528 different episodes of 139 prime-time series.

We found some welcome progress in television's portrayal of Hispanics, combined with some lingering sins of both omission and commission. The proportion of Hispanic characters was up but still far below the proportion of Hispanic-Americans in the real world. Latinos were "ghettoized" in a handful of series, few of which are still on the air, and few portrayed prosperous, well-educated, authoritative characters. The most striking and hopeful result, however, was a dramatic decline in the portrayal of Hispanics as criminals. Among the major findings:

- ◆ **VISIBILITY** Although TV's Hispanic presence was up sharply, as their proportion of all characters doubled from 1992 levels and these characters were more likely to play major roles when they appeared, the rise was from only one to two percent of all characters, far below the 10 percent of Americans with Hispanic ancestry in real life. And a majority appeared in only two series, one of which has been canceled.
- ◆ **CRIMINALITY** Hispanic characters were less likely to play villains than they were in the 1992 network prime time schedules. The drop in criminal portrayals was especially sharp — down 63 percent (from 16 percent of all Hispanic characters in 1992 to six percent in 1994). But even this level of criminality was higher than the four percent we found among whites and two percent among blacks.
- ◆ **NEW "REALITIES"** The most striking changes appeared in the cops-and-robbers "reality" shows, such as "COPS" and "America's Most Wanted." In 1992 a staggering 45 percent of all Hispanics and 50 percent of African-Americans who appeared in these shows committed crimes. In 1994-95, the "crime rate" for both minorities plummeted to less than half the previous levels — down from 45 percent to 16 percent of Latinos and from 50 to 20 percent of blacks portrayed.

* This report was made possible in part by a grant from the Ford Foundation.

Network Television in 1994

The 1994-1995 television season included some breakthroughs for Latinos, although it did little to change longstanding patterns in television portrayals. Several new series, like "House of Buggin'" (Fox), "My So Called Life" (ABC) and "New York Undercover" (Fox), offered some of the most interesting and intriguing Latino characters to date.

"House of Buggin'" had the distinction of being the first Latino sketch comedy show on the air — sort of a Hispanic version of "In Living Color." Led by comedian John Leguizamo, the predominantly Latino cast rolled through a series of satirical skits. For instance, the recurrent "Chicano Militant Minute" sketch lampooned militant calls for racial pride. Despite some very creative work, the show failed to survive.

Another ratings failure was "My So Called Life," which offered one of the most complicated and controversial portrayals of Latinos in Ricky Vasquez. Ricky was a very confused high school student wrestling with his possible homosexuality and a neglectful dysfunctional family. Before audiences could learn how Ricky resolved his problems, ABC canceled the show.

One of the few new shows with Latino characters to survive the season was "New York Undercover." This urban cop drama focuses on an interracial pair of detectives: Eddie Torres is Puerto Rican and J.C. Williams is black. Generally their partnership is free of racial tensions, but some cases open a rift between them. The series is particularly good at exploring the social and personal pressures confronting minorities in everyday life. For instance, Eddie Torres has a host of problems with his family, who do not approve of his work. He is frequently made uncomfortable by their traditional demands on him. J.C. Williams is divorced but tries to maintain a close paternal relationship with his young son. The series, now in its second season, has remained one of the top ten-rated shows on Fox.

Another interesting development in the 1994-95 season is the inclusion of deracinated Latino characters. These characters may have a Hispanic appearance or drop some vague clues as to their ethnicity, but their background remains murky. Examples included Dr. Philip Watters on "Chicago Hope" (played by Hector Elizondo), Mr. Shepherd in the canceled "Heaven Help Us" (played by Ricardo Montalban), and Detective Bobby Simone of "NYPD Blue" (played by Jimmy Smits).

Overall, the proportion of Latino characters doubled from the 1992-93 season to the 1994-95 season. Unfortunately, this involved a rise from only one percent to two percent of all characters. Within this small group, however, the percentage of starring roles for Latinos has also risen (from 24 to 34 percent). The addition of shows like "House of Buggin'," "Medicine Ball" (Fox), "New York Undercover", "Chicago Hope" (CBS) and "My So Called Life" created several new continuing roles. Unfortunately, only "New York Undercover" and "Chicago Hope" survived the ratings war. These new series joined shows like the "John Larroquette Show" (NBC), "NYPD Blue" (ABC), and "seaQuest DSV" (NBC) in boosting the prime time visibility of Latinos.

This seeming progress masks the concentration of Latino characters in a few series. Slightly more than one quarter (27 percent) of all episodes included a Latino character in some role, but only 11 percent of regularly scheduled series included a Latino in a continuing role. In fact, the majority (51 percent) of all Latino characters in our sample appeared in just two series: Fox's "House of Buggin'" and "New York Undercover." By contrast over nine out of ten (92 percent) episodes included a black character, and

57 percent of these series included an African-American in a continuing role. Thus, the rise in Latino portrayals is evidence of niche programming rather than increasing integration in prime time television entertainment.

The most positive sign of change, however, is not the sheer number of Latino characters, but the manner in which they are portrayed. The increase in Hispanic visibility has been accompanied by a decrease in the proportion of negative characters generally and in criminal activity specifically. Negative roles for Latinos fell by almost half from 1992 to 1994 (from 18 percent to 10 percent of characters portrayed). The proportion of Latino characters committing crimes fell dramatically, dropping from 16 percent to 6 percent. (The portrayals of non-Hispanic characters were largely unchanged in these contexts.)

Despite this evidence of progress, Latino criminality continued to outpace that of whites and African-Americans. Six percent of Latino characters committed a crime, compared to four percent of whites and two percent of blacks. An episode of "New York Undercover" provides an illustration. A Puerto Rican girl accuses a black member of a rival high school football team of raping her. Detectives Williams and Torres split along racial lines as they investigate the crime, with Torres supporting the girl and Williams backing the player. Eventually they discover that the girl filed false charges as part of a scheme with a local bookie, who planned to clean up on bets when the player was suspended due to the rape charges. In the end Torres and Williams overcome their own biases to exonerate the young man and close down an illegal gambling operation. The girl is put on probation for her part in the scheme. (9/8/94)

Despite the continuing existence of such plotlines, positive Latino characters could be found in many other shows. Indeed, they outnumbered negative characters by more than two to one. For example, an episode of "Chicago Hope" provided a rare opportunity for the Dr. Watters character to exhibit his ethnic heritage to positive effect. A young Honduran girl is brought to the hospital for surgery to fix a severely cleft palate. Prior to surgery Dr. Watters visits the girl to reassure her. Speaking in Spanish, he comforts her and tells her that she will be beautiful. Unfortunately, another more serious birth defect (involving malformed blood vessels) threatens her life. As the surgeons try to fix the problem, Dr. Watters is called in to comfort the girl's mother. Speaking in English and Spanish, he explains what is wrong and reassures her that they are doing everything they can. Sadly, despite Dr. Watters' expertise and compassion, the young girl dies.

Although Hispanic characters were shown more positively in 1994, they were not seen as particularly successful. In fact, the percentage of Latino characters who failed to achieve their goals doubled, rising from 10 percent to 21 percent between 1992 and 1994. (The outcomes for both white and black characters were unchanged.) This increase in the portrayal of failures can be traced to two factors: the continuing criminality among Latino characters and the structure of "House of Buggin." Since criminals don't usually succeed on television, Latino involvement in crime lessens their chances of success. And a sketch comedy format like "House of Buggin" creates many characters during short vignettes who inevitably fail to achieve their goals. For example, at least one character in each sketch is the butt of the joke and so doomed to failure.

In addition, the social and economic status of Latino characters seemed to slip in the '94-'95 season. The proportion who were poor or working class increased from 28 percent to 55 percent. (However, the total number of Latino characters with an identifiable economic status dropped significantly.) In con-

trast, the proportion of poor and working class whites and blacks on network television declined from 1992 to 1994. This shift in the economic status of Latinos may be due to the cancellation of shows such as "L.A. Law," which often featured wealthy and middle class Hispanics.

In a similar vein, the proportion of Latinos seen in professional occupations or as business executives declined from 25 percent to 17 percent.¹ For white and black characters, on the other hand, their occupational proportions remained largely unchanged across the two seasons. Latinos were most heavily represented in law enforcement occupations. One out of every four Latino characters with a census-coded occupation worked in law enforcement, versus one out of eight of whites and one in six blacks. In this respect Latinos seem to be following the course set earlier by African Americans in prime time entertainment. Police and espionage dramas were among the first to show signs of integration in prime time. So-called "salt and pepper" teams of detectives or secret agents opened the doors for later black characters to be featured in a broader range of roles.

¹ These percentages are calculated for characters with census coded occupations only.

Syndicated and Reality Shows in 1994

Our 1994 analysis of first-run syndicated programming included the offerings of two new broadcast networks, United Paramount Network (UPN) and Warner Brothers (WB). These proto-networks are outgrowths of earlier syndicated operations by their parent companies. In important ways, they resemble the first-run syndication market more closely than traditional networks. The parallel to syndicated shows is particularly clear for WB programming, which aired in different periods across the country. This flexible scheduling is common with syndicated fare, but not with true network programming. Similarly, UPN offered its affiliates the right to broadcast its shows twice per week. Finally, UPN and WB still offer only one or two nights of programming a week. Therefore, our analysis grouped these programs in with true syndicated offerings.

Latinos occupied a slightly larger role in syndication than on network shows, accounting for three percent of all characters. This makes a sharp increase from the 1992 figure of one percent, which represented only six Hispanic characters. Several syndicated offerings, such as "Heaven Help Us," "Robin's Hoods" and "Sirens," included continuing roles for Latinos. During the season, however, the sole Latino in "Robin's Hoods" was replaced by a black character, suggesting that there was room for only one minority character in the series.

Because syndicated fare is weighted heavily toward dramas and action/adventure shows, criminal behavior occurs more frequently there than on the major networks' lineups. Thus, 15 percent of Hispanic characters on syndicated shows committed a crime. This figure was only two percentage points higher than the 13 percent criminality found among whites, although it more than doubled the seven percent rate among blacks. (Unfortunately, the small number of Latino characters in the 1992 syndication sample precludes meaningful comparisons over time.) Offsetting the slightly higher rates of Latino criminality, this group also received the highest proportion of positive portrayals - 39 percent, compared to 31 percent positive figures for whites and 29 percent for African Americans.

An episode of "Vanishing Son" offered examples of both positive and negative Latino characters. In this episode a brave young Guatemalan woman is trying to organize a union in a sweatshop run by a sleazy Latino manager. The sweatshop is unsafe, and the workers are abused and taken advantage of at every turn. Acting under the orders of his Vietnamese boss, the manager tries to block the union by issuing threats, hiring armed thugs to beat up the organizers, locking out the union sympathizers, and even conspiring to murder a labor department official. All his efforts fail as the union eventually gains a foothold. (1/22/95)

In the syndicated world, unlike its network counterpart, Latinos achieved their goals more often than did whites (64 percent success vs. 58 percent). Achieving goals, however, did not translate into social or economic success. Only one in ten Latinos were seen in professional or business occupations, compared to one in five black and one in four white characters. Only three percent of Latinos had attended college, compared to eight percent of whites and 13 percent of blacks. (There were too few Latino characters with an identifiable economic status for meaningful comparisons.)

Perhaps the most interesting character among the new offerings was B'Elanna Torres on "Star Trek: Voyager" (UPN). As a Klingon-Hispanic hybrid, her integration into the crew is initially rocky. Lt. Torres is both emotionally volatile and technically brilliant, making her simultaneously an asset and a

liability. However, her character has become more controlled and well-balanced since the premiere episode. We cannot know whether it was a deliberate decision to combine two races stereotypically portrayed as hot-tempered in this character.

In our previous report, we remarked on the dearth of Latinos in television's world of the future, as portrayed by science fiction series. Two years ago Ensign Ortiz from "seaQuest DSV" was one of very few Latinos who appeared in a science fiction format. By 1994 Ortiz's role had been expanded, Lt. Torres had been added to the Voyager crew, and the syndicated series "Babylon 5" made mention of a President Santiago who was killed in a coup. It would appear that Latinos are beginning to gain a foothold in television's fictional future.

The only genre in which the Hispanic presence decreased since our last report is that of reality-based entertainment programming. The proportion of Latinos appearing on these shows dropped from eight percent in 1992 to five percent in 1994.

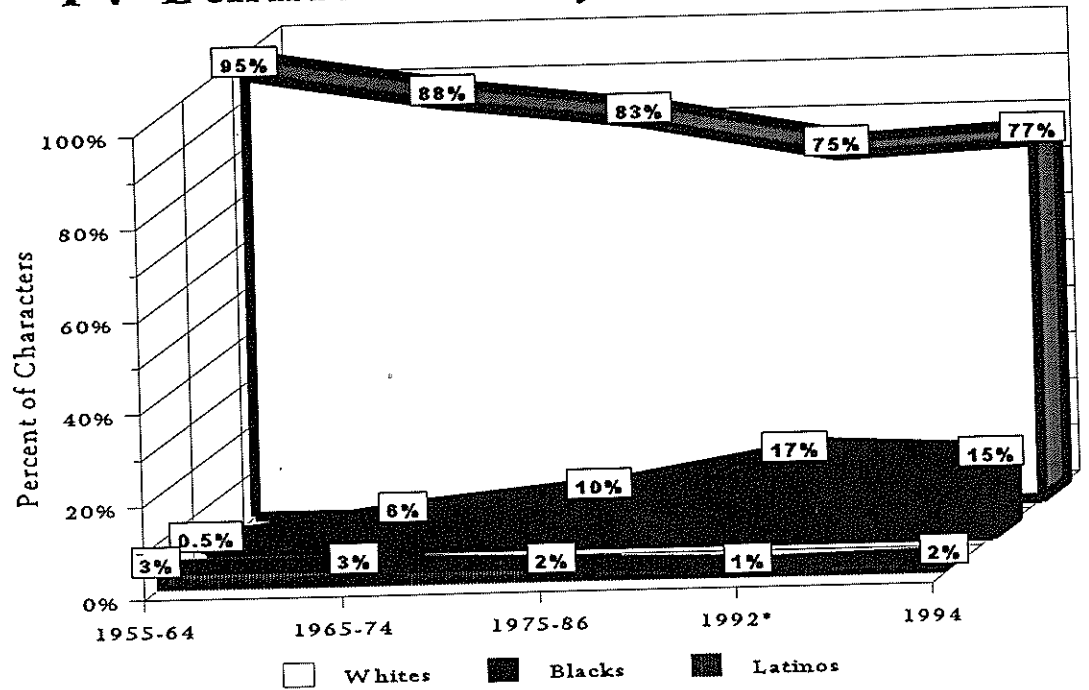
In the case of this real life cops-and-robbers genre, however, it is more desirable to be less visible. In 1992 nearly half (45 percent) of all Latinos on these shows committed crimes. In a striking development, the proportion of Latino criminals plummeted to one in six (16 percent) for the 1994 sample. A similar drop occurred among African Americans, whose "crime rate" fell from 50 percent to 20 percent of those shown. The rate also fell slightly among whites, from ten to seven percent.

These results mean that minorities still commit crimes more often than whites on reality shows - about twice as often in the case of Hispanics. But the ratio of Latino to white criminals two years earlier was nearly five to one. This shift largely reflects the presence of more Hispanic victims and bystanders in these shows. For example, one segment of "America's Most Wanted" presented a case in which both the perpetrator and his victims were Latinos. It told the story of Juan Baptista Sierra Omini, a Peruvian national wanted for assault and murder, who became obsessed with Rosemarie Martinez after they began dating. He attempted to control every aspect of her life until, in frustration, she broke off their relationship. A few days later, unable to control his anger, he attacked Rosemarie and her father. Rosemarie was severely wounded and her father was killed in the attack. Mr. Omini remains a fugitive. (9/17/94)

But we also noted episodes in which a Hispanic police officer is portrayed. For example, a segment of "COPS" (11/12/94) followed the work of the Street Crime Unit in New York City. After stopping a group of young people who are suspected of armed robbery, Officer Joey Arroyo discovers that one of them is concealing a .357 Magnum revolver loaded with hollow point bullets.

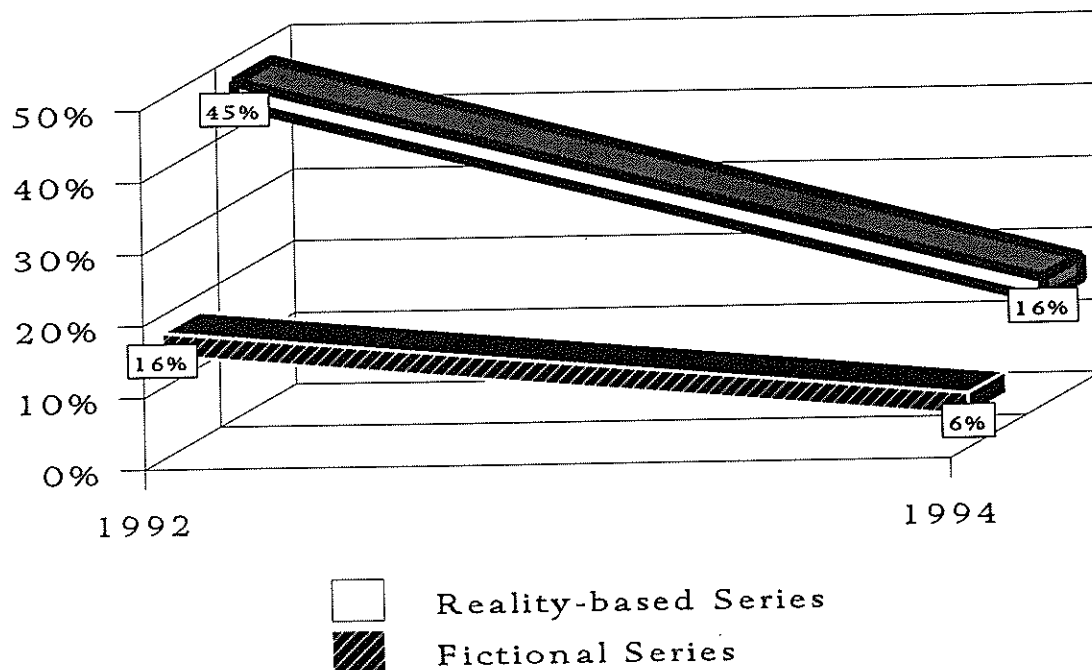
He arrests the possessor and confiscates the weapon. Thus, it appears that reality shows are at least beginning to portray Latinos as upholding the law instead of just breaking it.

TV Ethnic Portrayals Over Time



* Excluding reality based and syndicated series

Criminality of Latino Characters



1994 - 95 Fictional Series *With Continuing Latino Characters*

Network	Show	Character
FOX	Beverly Hills 90210	Jesse Vasquez
Syn	California Dreams	Lorena Costas
CBS	Chicago Hope	Dr. Philip Watters*
ABC	Commish	Ron Lopez
Syn	Heaven Help Us	Mr. Shepherd*
FOX	House of Buggin'	the entire cast
NBC	John Larroquette Show	Mahalia Sanchez
FOX	Martin	Gloria Rodriguez
FOX	Medicine Ball	Dr. Elizabeth Vasquez
ABC	My So Called Life	Ricky Vasquez
FOX	New York Undercover	Eddie Torres
ABC	NYPD Blue	Bobby Simone* & James Martinez
Syn	Robin's Hoods	Maria Alvarez
NBC	seaQuest DSV	Miguel Ortiz
Syn	Sirens	Lt. Gonzalez
UPN	Star Trek: Voyager	B'Elanna Torres
Syn	Sweet Valley High	Manuel Lopez
CBS	Under Suspicion	Elena

*Portrayed by known Hispanic actors.

1994 - 95 Fictional Series *Without* Continuing Latino Characters

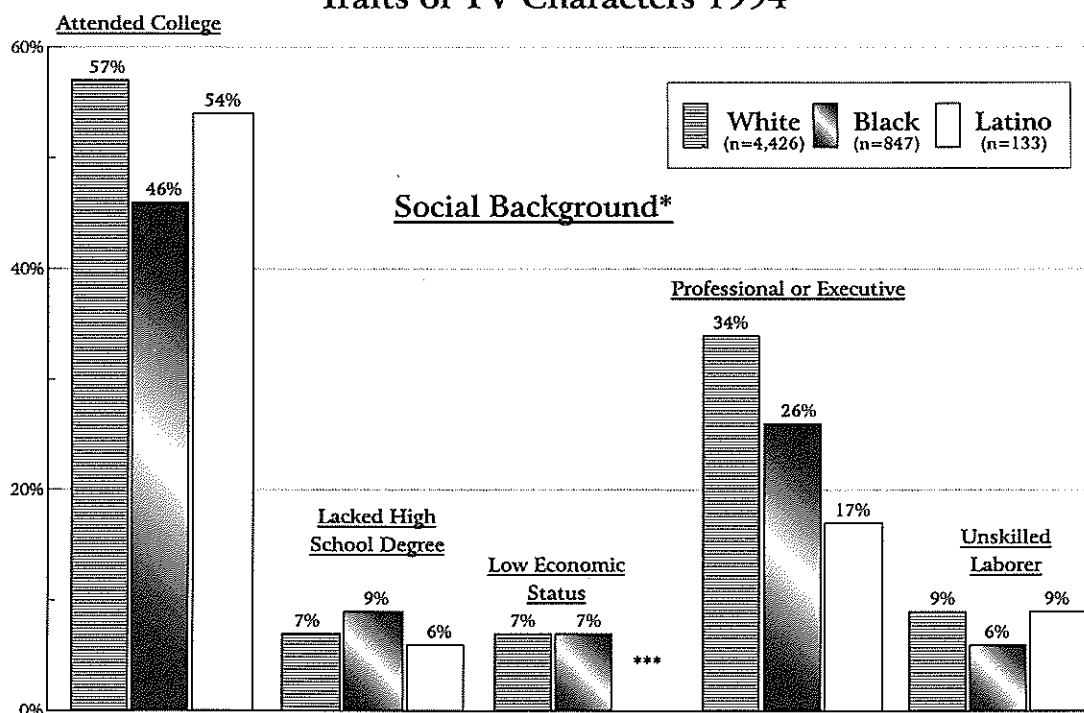
Net.	Show	Net.	Show	Net.	Show
ABC	Adventures of Lois & Clark	ABC	Hangin' with Mr. Cooper	CBS	Office, The
ABC	All American Girl	FOX	Hardball	ABC	On Our Own
Syn	Babylon 5	Syn	Hawkeye	WB	Parent Hood
Syn	Baywatch	CBS	Hearts Afire	FOX	Party of Five
NBC	Blossom	Syn	High Tide	CBS	Picket Fences
Syn	Boogie's Diner	Syn	Highlander: the Series	UPN	Pigsty
ABC	Boy Meets World	ABC	Home Improvement	Syn	Pointman
CBS	Boys Are Back	NBC	Homicide: Life on the Streets	NBC	Pride & Joy
CBS	Burke's Law	NBC	Hope and Gloria	Syn	Renegade
CBS	Christy	Syn	Kung Fu: the Legend Continues	Syn	Robocop: the Series
ABC	Coach	NBC	Law and Order	ABC	Roseanne
NBC	Cosby Mysteries	Syn	Legendary Journeys of Hercules	NBC	Seinfeld
FOX	Critic, The	FOX	Living Single	FOX	Simpsons
CBS	Cybill	Syn	Lonesome Dove: the Outlaw Years	ABC	Sister, Sister
CBS	Daddy's Girls	CBS	Love & War	NBC	Sisters
CBS	Dave's World	NBC	Mad About You	FOX	Sliders
CBS	Diagnosis Murder	NBC	Madman of the People	NBC	Something Wilder
CBS	Double Rush	FOX	MANTIS	Syn	Space Precinct
CBS	Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman	UPN	Marker	Syn	Star Trek: Deep Space Nine
FOX	Dream On	FOX	Married with Children	ABC	Step by Step
CBS	Due South	ABC	Marshal, The	NBC	Sweet Justice
NBC	Earth 2	NBC	Martin Short Show	Syn	Thunder in Paradise
ABC	Ellen	ABC	Matlock	ABC	Thunder Alley
NBC	Empty Nest	ABC	McKenna	CBS	Touched by an Angel
NBC	ER	ABC	Me & the Boys	CBS	Under One Roof
ABC	Extreme	FOX	Melrose Place	WB	Unhappily Ever After
ABC	Family Matters	FOX	Models Inc.	Syn	University Hospital
CBS	Five Mrs. Buchanans	NBC	Mommies	Syn	Vanishing Son
FOX	Fortune Hunter	CBS	Murder She Wrote	FOX	VR 5
NBC	Frasier	CBS	Murphy Brown	CBS	Walker Texas Ranger
NBC	Fresh Prince of BelAir	WB	Muscle	UPN	Watcher, The
NBC	Friends	CBS	Nanny	WB	Wayans Brothers
ABC	Full House	NBC	Newsradio	ABC	Whole New Ballgame
CBS	George Wendt Show	CBS	Northern Exposure	FOX	Wild Oats
FOX	Get Smart			NBC	Wings
ABC	Grace Under Fire			CBS	Women of the House
				FOX	X-Files

1994-95 Fictional Series with Latino Characters by Network

Show	Role of	Network
Commish	Continuing	ABC
Ellen	Single Appearance	ABC
Marshal, The	Single Appearance	ABC
My So Called Life	Continuing	ABC
NYPD Blue	Continuing	ABC
Thunder Alley	Single Appearance	ABC
Burke's Law	Single Appearance	CBS
Chicago Hope	Continuing	CBS
Love & War	Single Appearance	CBS
Under Suspicion	Continuing	CBS
Walker Texas Ranger	Single Appearance	CBS
Beverly Hills 90210	Continuing	FOX
Hardball	Single Appearance	FOX
House of Buggin'	Continuing	FOX
Martin	Continuing	FOX
Medicine Ball	Single Appearance	FOX
Models Inc.	Single Appearance	FOX
New York Undercover	Continuing	FOX
X-Files	Single Appearance	FOX
Cosby Mysteries	Continuing	NBC
ER	Single Appearance	NBC
Friends	Single Appearance	NBC
Homicide: Life on the Streets	Single Appearance	NBC
Hope & Gloria	Single Appearance	NBC
John Larroquette Show	Continuing	NBC
Law & Order	Single Appearance	NBC
seaQuest DSV	Continuing	NBC
Something Wilder	Single Appearance	NBC
California Dreams	Continuing	Synd
Heaven Help Us	Continuing	Synd
High Tide	Single Appearance	Synd
Pointman	Single Appearance	Synd
Renegade	Single Appearance	Synd
Robin's Hoods	Continuing	Synd
Sirens	Continuing	Synd
Star Trek DSN	Single Appearance	Synd
Sweet Valley High	Continuing	Synd
Thunder in Paradise	Single Appearance	Synd
Vanishing Son	Single Appearance	Synd
Star Trek: Voyager	Continuing	UPN
Watcher, The	Single Appearance	UPN

Table 1			
Traits of TV Characters 1994*			
	White 77% (n=5,767)	Black 15% (n=4,426)	Latino 2% (n=133)
All Characters			
Social Background**			
Attended College	57	46	54
Lacked High School Diploma	7	9	6
Low Economic Status	7	7	***
Professional or Executive	34	26	17
Unskilled Laborer	9	6	9
Plot Functions			
Starring Role	19	19	34
Character Succeeded	39	52	25
Character Failed	17	12	21
Positive Portrayal	27	31	34
Negative Portrayal	8	4	10
Committed a Crime	4	2	6
* Network fictional programming only, excludes syndicated and reality based series.			
** Characters were coded only if their backgrounds were clearly indicated in the script.			
*** Too few characters were coded for meaningful comparisons.			

Traits of TV Characters 1994*

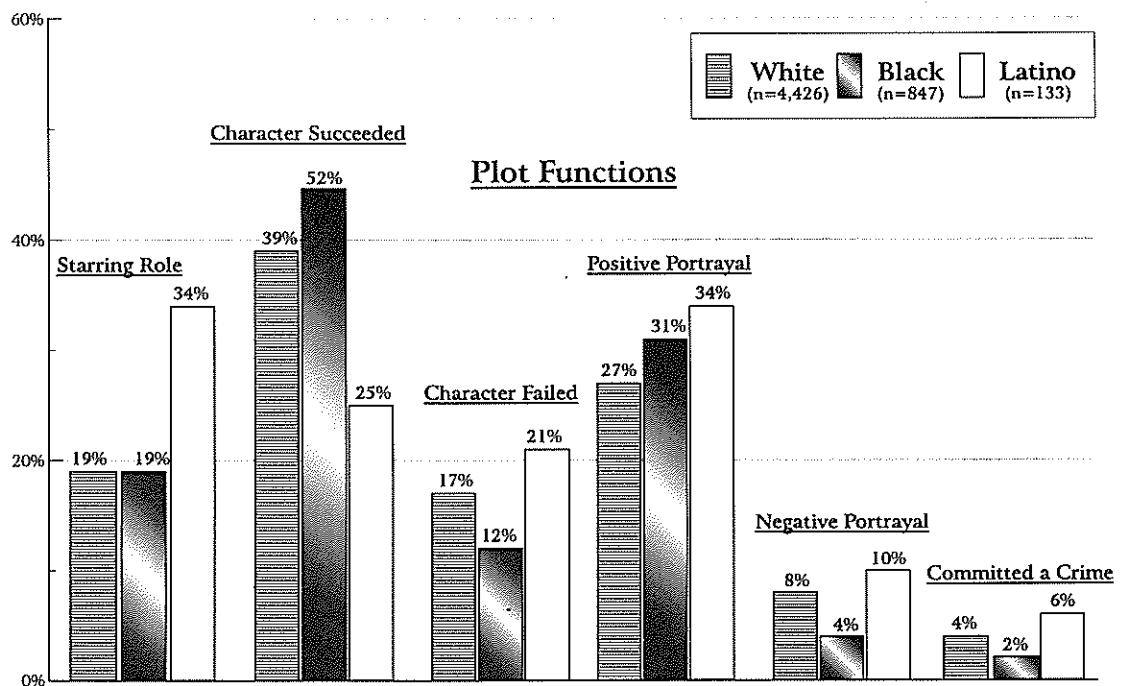


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***Too few characters were coded for meaningful comparisons.

Traits of TV Characters 1994*



*Network fictional programming only, excludes syndicated and reality based series.

TABLE 2
Traits of Latino Characters 1992 vs. 1994*

	1992 1% (n=74)	1994 2% (n=133)
OVERALL PROPORTION OF CHARACTERS		
SOCIAL BACKGROUND**		
Attended College	79	54
Lacked High School Diploma	***	6
Low Economic Status	28	***
Professional or Executive	28	17
Unskilled Laborer	20	9
Plot Functions		
Starring Role	24	34
Character Succeeded	61	25
Character Failed	10	21
Positive Portrayal	33	34
Negative Portrayal	18	10
Committed a Crime	16	6

* Network fictional programming only, excludes syndicated and reality based series.

** Characters were coded only if their backgrounds were clearly indicated in the script.

*** Too few characters were coded for meaningful comparisons.



Table 3

**Latino Characters in Fictional Programs
1994 - 95 Season**

	ABC	CBS	FOX	NBC	Synd	UPN
Continuing Characters	2%	<1%	8%	1%	3%	7%
Attended College	20	100	57	0	17	0
Lacked High School Diploma	80	0	43	0	83	0
Low Economic Status	50	0	56	0	38	0
Professional/executive	0	38	16	0	10	0
Plot Functions						
Starring Role	15	25	46	0	27	0
Character Succeeded	25	33	23	33	70	40
Character Failed	6	33	26	8	20	20
Positive Portrayal	50	25	35	18	41	29
Negative Portrayal	10	17	10	6	19	14
Committed a Crime	5	17	5	6	15	14
Total Number Latino Characters	24	12	84	21	33	7

"Best Shows"

NYPD Blue

The addition of the Bobby Simone character in the '94-'95 season makes this series a stand-out with two continuing Latino characters. Only the short-lived "House of Buggin'" had more. Both detectives Simone and Martinez are intelligent, compassionate, competent and helpful characters. Neither man is the one-dimensional hero of days gone by. They display a complex blend of emotions, ambition, biases and shortcomings that make their characters more believable and vivid.

New York Undercover

Detective Eddie Torres is the hipper side of the NYPD. Torres is competent, brave, loyal and compassionate but more emotional and headstrong than his counterparts on "NYPD Blue". In the 1994-95 season the series went to considerable lengths to explore Torres' relationships with his family, adding considerable insight into his background.

John Larroquette Show

Mahalia Sanchez is the only sitcom character to make the list of "best shows". Ms. Sanchez is a single mother raising children on her own while working in a bus depot. Despite this tough situation, Mahalia is one of the most optimistic characters in the show. She is kind, compassionate and generally competent in her job. She is one of the few characters in television to exhibit a strong religious faith and rely on it in difficult situations.

Star Trek: Voyager

This is the latest entry from the "Star Trek" franchise and the flagship series of the new United Paramount Network. The crew of this new starship is very diverse, including B'Elanna Torres (a Klingon-Hispanic hybrid) as chief engineer. Torres was initially hot tempered and somewhat irresponsible, but over the course of the first season her character became more responsible and dependable. As the show enters its second season, her character has become more central to the series and emotionally well-rounded. The first officer, Commander Chakotay, is also played by a Hispanic actor. However, this character is clearly identified, by dialogue and action, as a Native American rather than a Latino.

seaQuest DSV

Although this underwater sci-fi adventure is more than a little waterlogged, Lt. Miguel Ortiz is still a noteworthy Latino character. The 1994-95 season saw Ensign Ortiz become Lt. Ortiz and his role in the series expand. He remained a loyal, brave and trusted crewmember through every adventure, no matter how farfetched.

"Worst Shows"

Pointman

This show featured no continuing Latino characters despite its setting in Florida. One episode that did include Latinos cast one as an assassin.

Walker, Texas Ranger

This show is noteworthy for the lack of continuing Latino characters despite its Texas setting. In lieu of continuing roles, the show has offered neutral and criminal roles to Latinos.

Renegade

This syndicated series featured no continuing Latino roles, but presented two Latinos as criminals in the episodes we viewed. This series is typical of crime dramas that casually throw Hispanic bad guys into an otherwise white landscape.

Thunder in Paradise

This syndicated show (based in Florida) offered no continuing Latino characters, but in one episode the heroes took on the Cuban navy to rescue the family of a human rights activist. Needless to say the Cubans came off badly. This pattern of action is an old plot device dating back to the TV westerns of the 1950's.

Baywatch

A series still worth mentioning for the lack of continuing Latino characters despite its Southern California setting.

STUDY METHODS

The sample of programming from the 1994-95 season consisted of four episodes of each series that aired during the season. Any series premiering before March 31, 1995 was included in the sample. This strategy allowed us to include many replacement series that arrived on the airwaves in the spring. The episodes were drawn from four separate periods throughout the season to maximize the variety of plotlines and casts. We viewed the premiere episode of each series (most shows premiered in September or October, but later premieres were also included). A second episode was taped during the week of November 6th through 12th during a television rating "sweeps" period. ("Sweeps" periods occur three times per year and help to set advertising rates for the coming months. We selected two of the four episodes from these periods, since they are the most heavily promoted and frequently include gimmicks designed to increase viewership.) The third episode was taped during the week of January 8th through 14th. The fourth episode was drawn from the week of February 5 through 11th during a rating "sweeps" period. For series that premiered in the spring, additional episodes were taped as necessary to accumulate a sample that included four episodes of each series. (For a few short-lived series, only three episodes could be obtained for analysis).

The final sample included 495 unique episodes drawn from 126 fictional series, which contained 7,397 speaking characters. Our analysis of reality shows identified additional 826 characters drawn from 33 episodes of nine different series.