

LATINA/OS ON TV!

A Proud (and Ongoing) Struggle Over Representation and Authorship

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Of the myriad realms of U.S. popular culture in which Latina/o images and narratives circulate and Latina/os themselves serve as storytellers and creative practitioners, arguably none has had as profound an impact as television. As an entertainment medium that people watch daily in their own homes, television has played an instrumental role over the decades. In the case of English-language television, it has showcased, reinforced, and occasionally challenged popular notions regarding Latina/os and their place in the nation and national history. In addition, Spanish-language television has played an influential role in the lives of many Latina/os; as a diasporic medium, it has long contributed to the Latina/o imaginary, or Latina/os' understanding of the imagined Latina/o community, regarding discourses of race, gender, class, nationality, citizenship, and global politics. More recently, bilingual television has also found a small niche, catering to younger, acculturated Latina/os interested in media that connects with their culturally hybrid identities and lives. With regard to Latina/os and these three realms of television, English-language programming arguably has had a particularly substantial impact on U.S. popular culture, given the size of its audience and the way that these television story worlds come to stand in for idealized North American ideals. As my own area of expertise, both as a researcher and as a Latina who grew up "Spanish-impaired" because of lack of exposure, it will be the main focus of this chapter.¹

Latina/os unfortunately have been marginalized in English-language television story worlds, to a degree that's only beginning to be countered. We have often been invisible—simply not there—and misrepresented when we do appear in prime time programming. While limited progress can be seen in recent years in the form of a few more multidimensional and broadly appealing Latina/o roles, such as in the critically lauded *Jane the Virgin* (2014–) and the now cancelled *George Lopez* (2002–2007), Latina/o lead characters are still few and far between. In addition, there is a serious drought of Latina/o writers and producers as well. Few Latina/os were in any sort of creative position prior to the 1990s, while from 2010 through

2013 we comprised only 1 percent of employed producers, 2 percent of writers, none of the show runners, and 4 percent of directors in television (Negrón Mutaner, et al.).

In this regard, television has been viewed by some Latina/os as a hopelessly demoralizing realm of popular culture. There have been a few exceptions, however, with respect to portrayals and series that have been a source of pride. Progress can be seen also in the success of a few series with Latino/a leads and in the entrance of some Latino/a writers, producers, and creative executives into the industry. Series such as *George Lopez*, *Jane the Virgin*, *Ugly Betty* (2006–2010), and web-based series such as *Ylse* (2008–2010), *East WillyB* (2011–2013), and *East Los High* (2013–) offer the promise of more well written, culturally authentic, and empowering Latina/o-oriented TV narratives in the years to come.

The study of Latina/os and television is only a few decades old. Initially, the scholars doing this work were social scientists tallying the presence of and broad representational patterns for Latina/os in narrative television. They typically counted and coded recurring and non-recurring Latina/o characters in comparison to white and African American characters, for instance, regarding whether they played major or minor roles and whether these characters were professionals, criminals, or servants. A 1994 study commissioned by the advocacy group National Council of La Raza by S. Robert Lichter and Daniel Amundson, for instance, found that Latina/o characters comprised no more than one to two percent of prime time roles from the 1950s through the early 1990s, even while the Latino population grew from 2.8 to 11 percent of the population in these years. They also found Latina/os more likely to be criminal or servant characters in the first decades, with slight improvements by the 1990s. Subsequent studies found Latina/os making only slight gains in visibility. The most recent study looking at these questions, by Frances Negrón Mutaner and other researchers at Columbia University in 2014, found that the gap between our numbers in the general population and in television has, in fact, grown. While Latina/os comprised 17 percent of the population in 2013, there were no Latino or Latina lead characters on the top prime time television series that year. When they are part of the television landscape, characters such as Betty Suárez of *Ugly Betty* thus have the unenviable (and ultimately impossible) task of standing in for the vast diversity of Latina/os.

Scholars such as Chon Noriega, Isabel Molina Guzmán, and Gustavo Pérez-Firmat have more recently been exploring Latina/o representation and participation in television in qualitative research that has looked at these topics in relation to U.S. social history and that of the evolving television industry. Analysis of television narratives, production dynamics, and promotional efforts has also been centered in the work of scholars such as Molina Guzmán in research on *Ugly Betty*, of Guillermo Avila-Saavedra on network-era sitcoms, and of Mary Beltrán on *Chico and the Man*, while Latina/o-oriented children's programming has been the focus of Erynn Masi de Casanova, Angharad Valdivia, and Nicole Guidotti-Hernández, among others. Notably, *Ugly Betty* has inspired multiple studies, while little scholarship thus far has been conducted on television programming prior to the 1990s. A number of scholars, including Yeidy Rivero, Arlene Dávila, Mari Castañeda, and Diana Rios, have also conducted research specifically on Spanish-language television. Finally, Arlene Dávila, Vicki Mayer, Jillian Báez and others have focused on Latina/o reception practices in relation to television. As might be obvious from this brief summary, there are major gaps in this scholarship; there's much that still hasn't been explored with respect to Latina/o histories in U.S. television and in relation to Latina/os and contemporary television programming, networks, and trends.

To also begin to fill those gaps, this chapter provides a broad history of Latina/o portrayals and creative authorship in U.S. English-language television, from its inception as a national

medium in the late 1940s until the present day. I pause and expand on those series that have been especially popular or influential—among them *The Cisco Kid* (1950–1956), *I Love Lucy* (1952–1957), *The Nine Lives of Elfege Baca* (1958–1960), *Chico and the Man* (1974–1977), *Resurrection Blvd.* (2000–2002), *George Lopez*, and *Ugly Betty*. I conclude with discussion of some of the debates that persist regarding U.S. Latina/os and television; there are many, when it comes to this still-powerful medium that has often kept Latina/os in the wings of its national stage.

TV's Early Decades: Less Invisibility, but Ambivalent Portrayals

While Latina/os were not always found in TV story worlds in the late 1940s and early 1950s, their presence in fact more closely matched their numbers in the U.S. than is the case today. As noted above, Lichter and Amundson, in their study of television from the 1950s through the early 1990s, found that Latinos comprised no more than 2 percent of prime time characters in the 1950s—however, Latina/os were only 2.8 percent of the population at the time. They seldom appeared in family sitcoms or variety shows, two genres that factored in heavily to the new medium's imagining of the nation, however. An important exception was *I Love Lucy* (1951–1957). Desi Arnaz, a Cuban-born actor and musician, and Lucille Ball, his Anglo-American wife both in the series and in real life, became beloved stars when their family sitcom became a hit, and akin to “America's first family” when they integrated Ball's pregnancy and the birth of their son into the storyline. Gusavo Pérez-Firmat and Mary Beltrán have separately explored how Arnaz's fair skin, cross-cultural marriage, and professed love of the U.S. contributed to his treatment in the media as a white foreigner, rather than marginalization as an “ethnic” Latino. While Arnaz's role as Ricky Ricardo did demand that he exaggerate his accent, he was also portrayed as a successful musician and businessman and “straight man” to Lucy, his unpredictable wife. Arnaz and Ball also maintained creative control of the series throughout its run. Arnaz became executive producer of *I Love Lucy* and the first Latino television executive as president of their production company, Desilu, which subsequently produced a number of other popular television series.

A few Latino and Latina film actors, among them Ricardo Montalban, Katy Jurado, and Anthony Quinn, were also cast in anthology dramas in both Latina/o and non-Latina/o roles in this era. These were one-time teleplays, often written by famous playwrights and novelists, broadcast by anthology series that presented a different story and cast each week. More often, however, the genre in which Latina/o characters were to be found in this era was the TV Western. Mexican criminals and comic, bumbling cowboys, typically with broken English, low intelligence, and questionable morals, appeared as the villains, sidekicks, and servants in many popular Western series of the 1950s and early 1960s. On the other hand, fair-skinned and wealthy Latino cowboys and vigilantes, of great integrity and often of Spanish ancestry, also appeared in roles reminiscent of Hollywood's Latin Lovers of the 1920s. A clear coding of “white Latinos” as possessing idealized, heroic traits and a racialization of “ethnic Latinos” as inferior, comic sidekicks began to be a common paradigm of Latina/o representation in the early TV Western. As Lichter and Amundson noted in their study, the series that clearly established this dichotomy was one of U.S. television's first hits, *The Cisco Kid* (1950–1956). After success in radio and film, *The Cisco Kid* became a children's TV Western. It centered on its eponymous Spanish hero, played by Romanian American actor Duncan Renaldo, and his affable but less intelligent companion Pancho, played by Mexican American actor Leo Carrillo. Notably, this bifurcation of Latino types was repeated again in *Zorro* (1957–1959), and in *Walt Disney Presents The Nine Lives of Elfege Baca* (1958–1960). *The Nine Lives of*



Figure 1.1 NBC's *The High Chaparral*

Elfego Baca, a children's mini-series, was loosely based on the exploits of a real-life Mexican American gun fighter and lawyer well known in New Mexico for standing up for the rights of Mexican Americans, and nationally, for having survived a lynch mob of armed Anglo cowboys. Baca, played by Italian American actor Robert Loggia, was portrayed as a brave and intelligent man willing to do whatever it took to combat lawlessness and to protect the innocent, and the series and its merchandising did well with Disney's child audience (Telotte). Baca's ethnicity was glossed over, however, to the extent that it's unclear whether late 1950s audiences thought of Baca as Mexican American or as a generic Anglo hero. The paradigm of "good" and "bad" Latina/os in these Western narratives ultimately expressed ambivalence toward Latina/os and whether they fit within the accepted history and constructed ideals of cultural citizenship of the United States.

With the waning of the TV Western, Latina/os were seldom featured in narrative television of the 1960s and 1970s. So few Latina/o characters were seen on television by the early 1960s that José Jiménez, a Mexican character played by Hungarian Jewish actor Bill Dana, stood out. A dim-witted and bumbling bellhop, José Jiménez first appeared as a comic character on *The Danny Thomas Show* (1953–1965) in 1961, and then was reprised in Dana's spin-off series, *The Bill Dana Show* (1963–1965). The actor, in Phillip Rodriguez's documentary *Brown is the New Green: George Lopez and the American Dream* (2007), shared that he finally retired the character after Chicana/o activists called it out as demeaning and demanded that he do so.

Two additional series that included major Latina/o characters in the late 1960s and early 1970s were *The High Chaparral* (1967–1971) and *The Man and the City* (1971–1972). *The High Chaparral*, a Western set in the Arizona territory of the 1870s, focused in part on a marriage of convenience between "Big John" Cannon (Leif Erickson), an Anglo-American settler who had recently been widowed, and a Mexican—now Mexican American—family at a neighboring ranch (see Figure 1.1).

The growing romance between John and his Mexican American wife, Victoria (played by Italian-Argentinean Linda Cristal), is shown to develop into a more meaningful bond

throughout the show's run. While *High Chaparral* still tended to develop its Anglo characters more fully, it attempted to bring in some historical accuracy about Mexican Americans in this period as well. *The Man and the City* was also unique for showcasing Mexican Irish film star Anthony Quinn as Thomas Alcalá, the Mexican American mayor of a Southwestern city. While the series was not renewed after one season, it was an important milestone as the first TV series featuring a Latino professional and political leader as protagonist.

1970s Activism and Television: Shifts as Latina/os Take the Mic

The 1970s marked an important shift, as Latina/o activists, writers, and producers began to have an impact. During the peak of Chicano/a and Puerto Rican activism in the late 1960s and early 1970s, some activists agitated for media industry reforms. As Chon Noriega documents in *Shot in America: Television, the State, and the Rise of Chicano Cinema*, they fought for more visibility and “positive” Latina/o representation, for the hiring of Latino/as, and for opportunities to provide feedback on scripts, utilizing such tactics as sit-ins, challenges to public television station licenses, and letters to networks and major newspapers. Among their successes was the entrance of the first Latino/as in film schools and in entry-level production positions, and the launching of Latino/a public affairs series, with names like *Ahora!*, *Acción Chicano* and *Realidades*, on public television in cities with large Latina/o populations. Bilingual children's programs such as *Villa Alegre*, *Qué Pasa, USA?* and *Carrascalendas* also found a home on public television in this period.

The socially conscious climate of the 1970s also spurred network interest in comedies that addressed racial diversity and social issues, but Mexican Americans and other Latino/as strangely seldom appeared in these story worlds. NBC tried to fill this gap with *Chico and the Man* (1974–1977), which featured Freddie Prinze and Jack Albertson as Francisco “Chico” Rodríguez and Ed Brown, a young Mexican American man and an embittered white garage



Figure 1.2 NBC's *Chico and the Man*

store owner who come to work together and care for each other despite their culture clash and Ed's initial mistreatment of Chico. As I note in *Latina/o Stars in U.S. Eyes*, *Chico and the Man* elicited complaints from viewers regarding Chico's depiction as subservient to Ed and the casting of Prinze, who was Hungarian and Puerto Rican, as Mexican American. Despite this, the series proved to be a ratings success (see Figure 1.2).

The producers also retooled the series in hopes of appealing more to Latina/a and other viewers, making the character of Chico less Mexican American and softening Ed's behavior toward Chico, but these difficulties were never fully overcome. The all-white writing team likely was a major factor; Prinze did not receive writing or producing credit even while some of his standup comedy material was included in the scripts. Ultimately, *Chico and the Man* was irreparably altered by the loss of Freddie Prinze; he died by drug overdose in 1976. The show continued for a year after his death but never regained its earlier success.

A few other comedy series featuring Latina/o lead characters were produced and aired briefly in the 1970s, but none was as successful as *Chico and the Man*. These included *Viva Valdez* (1976), about a Mexican American family; *On the Rocks* (1975), a prison comedy about an ethnically diverse group of inmates; *Popi* (1976), based on the 1969 film about a Puerto Rican dad who tries to pass his sons off as Cuban so that they can receive better treatment, and *AES Hudson Street* (1978), a comedy starring Gregory Sierra as a doctor leading a ramshackle emergency room team. While they did not last long, their existence signals that at least a small handful of television producers felt Latina/os needed to be represented in a more substantial way.

1980s and 1990s Television: Well-Meaning Attempts, But False Starts

African American characters increased dramatically on prime time in the 1980s and 1990s, both because writers and producers seeking to diversify their casts often thought only in "black and white" in this period, and because of the immense success of *The Cosby Show* (1984–1992). There was no Latina/o equivalent to encourage industry professionals regarding the financial viability of Latina/o-led programming, however. The most prevalent form of Latina/o representation in this era was on ensemble shows set in law enforcement and medical work settings such as *Miami Vice* (1984–1990), *Law and Order* (1990–2010), and *New York Undercover* (1994–1998). These roles ultimately earned the first Emmy awards for Latina/os in supporting actor roles. Edward James Olmos earned the Emmy for *Miami Vice* in 1986, while Jimmy Smits won it for *L.A. Law* (1986–1994) in 1990 and a Golden Globe for *NYPD Blue* (1993–2005) in 1996.

In the meantime, audience members and media advocates continued to agitate for series centered on well-developed Latina/o characters and narratives. A few series were produced and broadcast, but none lasted longer than a season. These series in the 1980s included *a.k.a. Pablo* (ABC, 1984), a Norman Lear-led comedy starring Paul Rodriguez as a Mexican American comedian living with his boisterous extended family, and *I Married Dora* (ABC, 1987–88), about a wealthy white American who marries his children's Salvadoran nanny (played by the late Elizabeth Peña) so that she can stay in the U.S. In the 1990s, these efforts included *Union Square* (NBC, 1997–98), featuring Constance Marie among its ensemble as an aspiring actress in New York City; *Common Law* (ABC, 1996), which starred comedian Greg Giraldo as a free-spirited lawyer, and *House of Buggin'* (Fox, 1995), a sketch comedy series led by John Leguizamo. These series, like *Chico and the Man*, lacked Latino writers and producers and were not well marketed. Their failure nevertheless contributed to network

reluctance to invest in new shows with Latina/o leads, as did widespread misunderstanding regarding whether Latina/o viewers could be enticed to watch any series on English-language television. A common misconception was that Latina/o viewers consumed all of their media in Spanish (a myth Spanish-language networks understandably also promoted). Numerous studies then and since have documented that the majority of U.S. Latina/os watch at least some English-language television—Nielsen’s 2010 study, for example, found that 78 percent of English-dominant, 44 percent of bilingual, and 19 percent of Spanish-dominant Latina/os do so.² However, misperceptions on language preferences and media consumption resulted in little motivation on the part of networks to target Latina/o viewers in the 1980s and 1990s.

Latina/o media advocacy continued in the work of groups such as the National Hispanic Media Council (NHMC), the National Hispanic Foundation for the Arts, and Imagen, all of which lobbied for greater visibility and dimensionality of Latina/os on screen. While each group took a slightly different approach, all pushed for more employment of Latino/as in the television and film industries, served as watchdogs with respect to portrayals, and called attention to media projects and professionals seen as signs of improvement. In 1998, the NHMC, representing all of the Latina/o groups, collaborated with other ethnic media advocacy groups to form the Multi-Ethnic Coalition, which negotiated for improvements at the networks with respect to ethnic diversity. The coalition forged agreements with ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox that established the first network executive positions charged with working on diversity issues, including Latina/o representation and employment.³ The NHMC and other groups in the Multi-Ethnic Coalition issued annual “report cards” in order to gain regular news coverage for issues of diversity in television; in the case of the NHMC this meant grading networks on their progress and lack of progress in improving Latina/o inclusion on screen and in the industry. It also began to oversee a writers’ trainee program with a focus on television. A small number of Latino/a writers and producers were also beginning to enter the industry, the impact of which wouldn’t be fully felt until the 2000s.

Meanwhile, projected demographic shifts were likely motivating the television industry to improve their outreach to Latino/as. In the 1990s the Census Bureau projected that by 2000 Latino/as would surpass African Americans as the largest non-white ethnic group, then at 12.5 percent of the U.S. population. Appeal to Latina/o viewers thus was becoming more integral to the success of series and networks more broadly. As Arlene Dávila has aptly documented, Latino/a advertising agencies were also educating the public and media industries regarding Latino/a buying power and its future growth.

2000s+: Gaining Numbers and at Times, a Voice

While Latina/os were still substantially underrepresented in the 2000s and in more recent years, the rising numbers of Latina/os in the television audience arguably has had an impact. Latina/o guest and recurring characters are at times more visible, while occasional moments of now-subtitled Spanish and an inclusion of a Latina/o point of view has become less rare, signaling a broadening of the national imaginary to begin to include Latina/o Americans. A continuation of earlier patterns of marginalization and ambivalence can also still be felt, however.

In the 2000s, narrative series more often attempted to include Latina/o characters and to portray them in a multidimensional light. Diverse ensemble cast shows, a programming trend in this decade, often featured one or a few Latino/a character or characters among its

ensemble and sporadically focused on these characters. Popular series that did so included *Lost* (2004–2010), *Desperate Housewives* (2004–2012), *Modern Family* (2009–), *CSI Miami* (2002–2012), and *Grey's Anatomy* (2005–), to the benefit of actors such as Jorge Reyes on *Lost*, Eva Longoria on *Desperate Housewives*, Sofía Vergara on *Modern Family*, and Adam Rodriguez on *CSI Miami*. Another, more troubling trend was the resurgence of Latino criminal roles in popular dramas, for example on *Breaking Bad* (2008–2013) and *Weeds* (Showtime, 2008–2012), which featured Latino characters as frightening thugs, drug dealers, and hit men.

At the same time, however, Latino/a writers, producers, and executives began to have a limited impact. Important milestones included the first series with a predominantly Latina/o cast and production team, *Resurrection Blvd.* (2000–2002), about a Mexican American family with several brothers competing in the world of boxing, which aired on Showtime. Writer-producer Dennis Leoni, of Mexican and Italian descent, created and was show runner for the series, while the episodes were written, produced, and directed by a team that was mostly Latina/o. Other Latina/o-led series included *American Family* (2002–2004), created by Gregory Nava; *Ugly Betty* (2006–2010), helmed by producer Silvio Horta and executive producer Salma Hayek; and *The George Lopez Show* (2002–2007), a family sitcom co-created, co-produced and starring comedian George Lopez. Pancho Mansfield, who has now overseen scripted programming at Showtime, Fox TV Studios, and Spike TV, and Nina Tassler, President and now Chair at CBS, the first Latino/a network executives in this era, were influential as well. Mansfield, for instance, greenlit *Resurrection Blvd.* while he was at Showtime.

Progress was also evident in children's programming, where series focused on Latino/a youth began to flourish. These have included *Taina* (2001–2002), about a Puerto Rican girl at a New York City school of performing arts, and *The Brothers Garcia* (2004), about two boys and their family experiences in Los Angeles. Long-running series catering to younger children include the phenomenally popular *Dora the Explorer* (2000–), its spin-off, *Go Diego, Go!* (2005–2011), and the animated series *Handy Manny* (2006–). Meanwhile, Latina/os are a growing and young population in relation to other U.S. media consumers (the median age for U.S. Latina/os is 27, while for the average North American it is 37). In a related trend of outreach to bicultural and bilingual young adult viewers, bilingual cable networks targeting a young adult audience were also launched. These networks have included *Sí TV* (now *Nuvo TV*), *Mun2*, a sister network to *Telemundo*, and *MTV Tr3s* (since rebranded *NBC Universo*). All targeted young Latino/as and other young Americans with a mix of syndicated programming, such as reruns of *George Lopez*, and original reality programming. They have provided some competition to the English-language networks and the most popular and quite successful Spanish-language networks reaching U.S. audiences, *Univisión* and *Telemundo*.

While series such as *Ugly Betty* and *George Lopez* proved the potential profitability of series with Latina/o leads, by the 2010s the trend for Latina/o-oriented shows had waned. However, the CW dramedy *Jane the Virgin* (2014–) and ABC's *Cristela* (2014–2015) are signs of progress. Both center on complicated, relatable, and empowered Latina characters working toward their professional goals; in *Jane the Virgin*, Jane Villanueva pursues her dream to become a writer, while *Cristela* is a law intern in the last stage of her education to become a lawyer.

Jane the Virgin has been both a critical and a ratings success; in 2014 it was recognized with Golden Globe and Critics' Choice nominations and with a Peabody, as the American Film Institute's Television Program of the Year, and as Favorite New TV Comedy by the

People's Choice Awards. Gina Rodriguez, its star, also won a Golden Globe for Best Actress in a comedy or musical television series. *Cristela*, while cancelled after one season, also was a remarkable first for launching Cristela Alonzo, the first Latina show runner and star of her own show.

However, it may be that the networks will not be seen as a necessary ingredient of future Latina/o-oriented series, as production and exhibition increasingly moves beyond the television set in the 2010s. Part of this trend is the rise of online/cable networks and channels with a Latina/o flavor such as NuvoTV and Robert Rodríguez's *El Rey*, and sites streaming television episodes such as Hulu. These online forums are successfully showcasing original content with a focus on Latina/os communities, led by Latina/o writers and producers working outside traditional models who are interested in serving the Latina/o audience. The genesis of rising numbers of the Latina/o web series in the 2010s is linked to these developments. These series represent a diverse milieu of Latina/o subjectivities and include dramatic and especially comedic serial narratives that run the gamut from tales of Latina feminist superheroes to poignant satire about the real-life stresses of being undocumented. These series include *Los Americans* (2011–), starring Esai Morales, about a suburban Mexican American family; *East WillyB*, about a young Puerto Rican man running a bar in a North Brooklyn neighborhood; and *East Los High* (2013–), an angsty teen drama with a cast of young Latina/o performers. Many of these series, much lower budget productions than seen on network and cable television, have been funded at least in part by Latina/os themselves. This has been enabled through crowdfunding mechanisms such as Kickstarter and fundraising campaigns that have reached out to Latina/o communities for support ranging from \$5 individual contributions to larger donations.

Ongoing Questions and Debates

There are a number of ongoing debates and conundrums when it comes to assessing progress with respect to Latina/os portrayals and authorship in U.S. English-language television, however. One is that surveys of progress by advocacy groups and the networks themselves typically tally numbers of characters, actors, and creative professionals that are Latina/o, while the quality of portrayals is much more difficult to assess and has often gone unquestioned. As I have noted previously on the increasing numbers of mixed Latina/o stars in recent decades, we are also witnessing what might be termed a "whitewashing" of Latina/o TV characters. This is true particularly in children's series such as *The Wizards of Waverly Place* (2007–2012). Light-skinned actors of mixed Hispanic heritage are increasingly being cast, while Latina/o characters are often portrayed as unable to speak Spanish and with no clear connections to a Latina/o community or identity.

There are also ongoing debates regarding whether a focus on "positive" images should be sought by advocates lobbying for television narratives and characters that will be empowering for Latina/os. The fear of stereotyping arguably has had a chilling effect on Latina/o representation on network and cable television. Images of middle-class Latina/os in professional positions have typically been viewed by advocates as more desirable than presenting Latina/os as working class, in manual labor jobs, or as not fluent in English. Given the fact that a third of U.S. Latina/os are currently first-generation immigrants and that many Latina/o families still struggle with issues of socioeconomic disadvantage, it's useful to consider what it means to push to never see these images on television. Previous studies, such as those by Children Now, have shown that children from all socioeconomic backgrounds benefit from seeing families like their own portrayed sensitively in television

and other media, as well as from viewing aspirational images. The *diversity* of images, including diversity with respect to phenotype and class, is important to keep in mind in these discussions. On the other hand, if the only images that we see of Latinas are of Latina maids (for example, on *Devious Maids*), then that clearly is a problem. However, if this is balanced with a Latina *Pretty Little Liars*, Latina/os living and working on a futuristic *Battlestar Galactica*, and as a suburban *Modern Family*, then it becomes a different thing to also include a series featuring Latina maids in a pulpy soap opera.

These trends beg in-depth thought and discussion on the part of Latina/o communities and scholars. While blatantly stereotypical Latina/o characters with exaggerated characteristics such as broken English, heavy accents, and wildly colorful costumes are less often included in television story worlds, we now seldom find culturally marked Latina/o characters. In other words, less assimilated, working class, or brown Latina/os are now seldom seen. Has focus on the eradication of stereotypes had the indirect consequence of encouraging television producers to only depict Latina/o characters as completely assimilated to American mainstream culture and to erase Latina/o communities altogether? This evolution begs further interrogation, particularly regarding the kinds of representations that will be most empowering to Latina/os and our communities.

As Vittoria Rodriguez and I note in research on Latina/o web television, the rise of streaming series such as *East Los High* raises new questions for us to grapple with as well. Even the most successful online series have had a hard time continuing beyond a few seasons because of lack of sustained funding, pointing to an important topic of future discussion, that of financial support of Latina/o television production. During the height of the Chicana/o and Puerto Rican civil rights movements, there was a call for community-supported arts efforts, particularly for productions that would counter Hollywood narratives. Does a new call need to be sounded to ensure that Latina/o television will flourish with community support as well? Only time will tell whether we're witnessing a renewed emphasis on Latina/o support of Latina/o media production, as digital media tools have enabled communities and individuals to take media representation once again into their own hands.

Notes

- 1 Publications that address how U.S. Latina/os are served by Spanish-language television include Mari Castañeda, "The Importance of Spanish Language and Latino Media," 2008; and Vicki Mayer, "Living Telenovelas / Telenoveling Life: Mexican American Girls' Identities and Transnational Telenovelas," 2003. Juan Piñon and Viviana Rojas's essay, "Language and Cultural Identity in the New Configuration of the Latino TV Industry" is also a useful primer regarding the rise of bilingual and Latina/o-oriented networks.
- 2 See Pardo and Dreas, "Three Things You Thought You Knew about Hispanics' Engagement with Media... And Why You May Have Been Wrong," 2011.
- 3 See Beltrán et al, "Pressurizing the Media Industry," 2005. 160–93.

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