

The TeleVisions Project:

An Exploratory Project on U.S. Entertainment Television and 'Race'

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THE TELEVISIONS PROJECT: TV ENTERTAINMENT AND 'RACE'

Project Abstract

This exploratory project was carried out by scholars at the University of Texas at Austin in collaboration and consultation with scholars from UCLA, the University of Georgia and UC Santa Cruz from January through August 2002. It focused on the interplay between the entertainment television industry, minority-ethnic-oriented advocacy groups, and academic researchers with respect to efforts to improve the employment and representations of people of color in and by the industry. Such changes we see as crucial to the vitality of U.S. democracy. The history of these efforts in the last eleven years was chronicled through interviews with key players and through detailed analysis of industry trade reports and advocacy group studies. We concentrated on why particular efforts have been effective or ineffective and on surveying individuals from the industry and advocacy groups regarding initiatives that could have a productive impact. The project offers a number of recommendations to the Ford Foundation and other foundations regarding significant future policy initiatives. It also provides condensed biographies of those we interviewed, short descriptions of key organizations, and a select research bibliography.

Problem/Need Statement

A nation riven by 'racial' inequity cannot have a healthy democracy.¹ Everyday understandings of democracy and 'race,' in turn, belong to the imagination - itself fed in crucial ways over the past fifty years by entertainment television - at least as much as they do to government policy, rational argumentation, journalism, and documentaries. *Children Now* reports hammer home repeatedly the impact of prime-time television on future generations of Americans. The corporate sector is where entertainment television policies central to our culture are constructed and implemented, in a mesh of the creative and the bottom line, just as is news. Minority-ethnic groups are drastically underrepresented among industry executives and creative professionals, as well as often in prime-time programming, yet philanthropic foundations currently tend to shy away from initiatives that attempt to take on the "monolith" of the entertainment industries and/or question their programming and hiring decisions. We cannot avoid a focus on the commercial media industries, however, if we want to see constructive change.

In an effort to begin a step in a new direction, this project conceptualizes the problem of minority-ethnic employment and representation in U.S. entertainment television in a new way. We link 'race' and ethnicity, democracy, commercial television and its policy-making process, the industry-advocacy group dynamic, the role of specialist academic researchers,

¹ We have consistently put the term 'race' and 'racial' in quotation marks to underscore that while 'race' is a potent *social* issue, its usage to categorize human beings on the basis of biology or genetics is spurious.

and the attempt to engage with individual creative and business professionals in a variety of TV occupations.

The problems we foreground in this work include:

- ❖ The persistent, though not universal, difficulties within the industry of representing minority-ethnic America respectfully or imaginatively.
- ❖ The need for independent groups advocating change in this regard, yet the structural limits of what they can achieve.
- ❖ The complex role of private media firms in the US as cultural policy-makers.
- ❖ The uncharted prospects for researchers to engage *internally* with the entertainment television industry in this sphere.
- ❖ The challenges posed to the academy, from K-12 through universities, to contribute to solving these problems in its own house.

Project Activities

From January through August 2002, this project was undertaken by Principal Investigator Dr. John Downing, his research team at the University of Texas headed by Dr. Mary Beltrán (Jane Park, Jennie Phillips, Enrique Puente, Sharon Ross), and faculty colleagues at the University of Texas (Charles Ramírez Berg, Craig Watkins, Federico Subervi, and Andrea Panov), the University of Georgia (Horace Newcomb and Dwight Brooks), and UCLA (Darnell Hunt and Chon Noriega).

Goals of the Study:

- ❖ To gain in-depth knowledge of the business practices of the television industry and efforts of advocacy groups that impact on minority-ethnic employment and representation, as well as of roles academics could play in these efforts
- ❖ To establish relationships with industry professionals, advocacy group representatives, and other academics focused on ‘race’ and the commercial television industry
- ❖ Through this work, to set the first stage for a multi-year collaborative forum of industry professionals, media researchers, and advocacy group representatives

As we began to collaborate regarding activities to accomplish these goals, we elected to focus on certain ground-clearing work:

- ❖ To chart the history of advocacy groups’ activities and TV entertainment industry responses from 1992 through 2002

- ❖ To interview a range of industry executives whose jobs were directly focused on these issues, as well as advocacy group activists and guild representatives, to cull their perspectives and experiences (a) on the conflicts of the last decade, and (b) on strategies for further constructive change.

Interviews

- ❖ We interviewed 28 executives, guild officials, advocacy group activists, and creative professionals. We also held extended meetings with project team members Darnell Hunt and Chon Noriega, respectively Directors of the African American Research Center and the Chicano Studies Research Center at UCLA, who have worked closely with the Screen Actors Guild (Hunt and Noriega) and Latino research and advocacy groups (Noriega).
- ❖ Phone and face-to-face interviews were conducted with a number of other key individuals, including producer Michael Zinberg; Jordan Levin, WB Entertainment President; Félix Sánchez, president of the National Hispanic Foundation for the Arts; Josie Thomas, the diversity vice-president at CBS and UPN; Diane Medina of Disney; Mitsy Wilson, Wenda Fong and Gerald Alcantar of Fox's diversity team; Donna Mitroff, consultant to ABC Family and Chairperson of Mediascope; and Pancho Mansfield of Showtime. The executives focused on diversity at NBC were unable to schedule an interview during our research period, despite repeated efforts on our part to set this up.

Project Outcomes

With respect to the project team, we gained a great deal in terms of our own self-education as a result of this project, not the least that we confirmed our original intuition of how much is to be gained by academics *engaging* with individuals in the field in order to fully understand the complex dynamics at work. Among other results:

- ❖ We were able to talk with many individuals concerned to see constructive change, some energized, some rather drained, who in turn were connected with many more such individuals. We found that the industry is no more monolithic than any other branch of the economy.
- ❖ We now have a considerable series of contacts whom we have interviewed personally, which constitutes a very good basis on which to build. We have established a preliminary presence within the industry.
- ❖ In all, we gained immeasurably with respect to our knowledge of the day-to-day business practices of entertainment television and how cultural diversity within the industry has been affected by these practices.

- ❖ We also came away with a renewed sense of our own roles as academic scholars and how much needs to be achieved by educators in order to contribute to constructive change.

There also are broader implications to this project. Lawyers, engineers and economists are necessary but inevitably insufficient, through being circumscribed by their respective definition of the issues, to conduct a comprehensive analysis of media policy. Our study, uniquely, defined U.S. entertainment television firms as cultural policy-makers of the highest significance nationally (and globally). We engaged with the human side of the technology interface, with a focus on politicized conflicts over minority-ethnic employment and representations.

As a result, we ended with richly detailed perspectives from multiple viewpoints on the recent history and likely short-term future of attempts to move the commercial television industry forward in this regard. We conclude that neither the industry by itself, nor the advocacy groups by themselves, nor the academy alone, can resolve these inequities. Nor could the efforts of Congress or the FCC be sufficient. Total harmony between these bodies would be chimerical, and yet collaboration of certain kinds, especially between academic specialists committed to change and industry professionals similarly engaged, could and would push forward the cause of ‘racial’ justice in commercial television.

The project was short-lived in this initial phase, and inevitably exploratory. Our ability immediately to deliver impacts and benefits to the public of color in the USA was necessarily slight under these circumstances. Nonetheless, by providing a fresh approach to a topic that leaves many concerned citizens frustrated but fatalistic, we hope to have turned over some fresh ground and opened up new perspectives on the possible.

Eleven Years of Strife: The Struggle for “Diversity”^{*} in Entertainment Television

Initial Observations

From 1992 through the time of writing this report in late summer 2002, relations between minority-ethnic advocacy groups and the commercial television industry have been mostly antagonistic. While the dialogue between these two groups has not been unproductive, neither has it come close to improving the level or quality of representations or behind-the-screen employment of people of color such that American citizens, the TV industry, or the advocacy groups could or should feel pleased or successful. These fairly sustained protests are nonetheless preferable in our view to the previous decades of only intermittent public critique. For the first time the issue has been *continually* on the table, and citizens have more opportunities than in the past to include their voice in feedback to the networks.

In Appendix A, the TeleVisions Project documents a selected history of significant moments in the advocacy groups’ assaults on the Hollywood citadel. Yet to speak in terms of the industry as a citadel, accurately as it may convey the feelings of alienated citizen-viewers longing for diverse and exploratory programming, fails to capture the complexity of its decision-making processes. This observation treads closely in step with another, that eleven years of strife have been insufficient to steer the Hollywood liner to a different course. To understand why, we need first to take into account some basic features of the commercial television industry, which we have ascertained through our qualitative analysis

^{*} “Diversity” is the current accepted terminology used in the commercial television industry to describe efforts to improve the employment or representation of people of color. It is a term of doubtful value at this point in time in analysis of television content and policy, however

of its business practices, as they relate to the employment and representation of people of color in commercial television.

Patterns and Trends Impacting People of Color

The Television Industry

- ✳ The intensely personal nature of the creative work of entertainment television production, combined with the utter centrality of television watching in the U.S., points to the importance of a diversity of cultural perspectives in the industry. Previous studies, such as those by Children Now, have established the importance of media portrayals to the development of aspirations and self-esteem, for example. The industry, however, is necessarily concerned with the economic bottom line.
- ✳ There is a lack of ethnic diversity among network executives, particularly with respect to Latino and American Indian executives.
- ✳ Structural patterns in the industry make it difficult for real change to occur, especially because people do not want to hold each other accountable. It can be difficult to pin down even one team of people responsible for the portrayals on one series, for example. Series production is an amoeba-like process, contracted out to hundreds of production companies, with the result that hiring and script decisions may not depend on the same people even within the same season.
- ✳ A TV series also must pass through multiple filters before it sees the light of day as a pilot, which still may or may not be aired. As such, securing a

development deal does not assure long-term employment. Even shows that do make it on the air often are quickly killed (this is known as “the quick yank”) on the basis of executives’ hasty interpretations of initial ratings.

- ✳ The industry has become even more competitive since the advent of the Fox Channel in 1985 and the arrival of subsequent cable channels and mini-networks, combined with successive mergers and acquisitions in the media industries.
- ✳ More tenacious than specific acts of racial discrimination, of which there are plenty, are professional and organizational routines that reinforce an industry mindset that often is racially exclusive.
- ✳ Given these parameters of intense uncertainty, informal relationships among professionals, who supply each other with information and employment, are vital. Industry professionals who are able to hire a work staff, such as show-runners, tend to hire people with whom they have a prior history. Such cronyism tends to privilege the hiring of professionals who attended the same universities and who socialize in the same informal circles.
- ✳ The consequence of all these vectors for people outside such informal networks – historically and currently generally including people of color and women – is that access to jobs and the establishment of a career can be much more difficult than for the average white male professional.
- ✳ Given the fierce competitiveness of the industry, there also is a great deal of resistance to any sort of “leg-up” in employment perceived to be not based on merit or success. Thus anything that could be labeled “affirmative

action” is strongly resisted. Cronyism, however, is not perceived as affirmative action, despite its significant role in perpetuating ‘racial’ inequalities in the industry.

- ✳ In addition, there is a signal lack of accurate information about the viewing patterns and consumer habits of particular ethnic groups. Even while there is increasing knowledge that Latinos are the most quickly growing U.S. market, they are significantly under-counted at present by the Nielsen ratings system.
- ✳ There is an “interactive” problem of the Spanish-language networks claiming all Latino viewers, and of major network executives assuming that Latinos fundamentally only watch those channels. This lets network executives off the hook from taking Latino audiences seriously and developing more programming for the U.S. Latino audience.

Prime-Time Portrayals

- ✳ In 2002, quantitatively speaking, African Americans appeared on the screen in approximate ratio to their percentage in the public. However this, though welcome, has no necessary bearing on the significance of their roles within the show or to the quality of the script. There is a strong tendency to bunch African Americans into sitcoms, comic roles, and stand-up comedy shows, as previous research has shown. Quantitatively, the other minority-ethnic groups are not even within hailing distance of African American televisual representation, the situation being numerically most objectionable of all for

Latinos, given their 13% membership of the U.S. public. This has definite implications for the work of the various advocacy groups, whose constituencies' immediate needs vary from basic inclusion (Native Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans) to the quality of representation (African Americans).

- * If included at all, Latino, Asian American and Native American actors are typically hired as ensemble or guest actors rather than leading roles. This was particularly the case in 2001 and 2002, as the Timeline appended to this report shows. While these roles are at times significant and/or foreground issues of 'race,' they also sometimes involve simply "window dressing" otherwise White-centric story worlds.

The "Pipeline" into the Industry

- * High school dropout and related problems of college education attainment among Latino and Native American young people have an overall negative impact on access to jobs in the industry.
- * Only some university, community college and K-12 programs offer structured assistance in the form of training, practical information, financial assistance, mentorships, or other bridges into the industry to contribute to a diverse industry labor force. In addition, no formal mechanism exists through which educational programs can share such information and resources. A critical national evaluation of this seeming dearth has yet to be undertaken. Similar programs targeting the journalism industry could

provide models for such an initiative. The group of major programs feeding into the industries is actually rather small; this could be a place for foundations to make a major, observable commitment, with practical consequences.

- * At the same time, the roles of the industry's own training programs, and of networking opportunities, are vital beyond the initial entry point. Industry programs are highly vulnerable to cost cutting, and depend greatly on energetic outreach to minority-ethnic publics to ensure equal access for all in practice. Some that began by being targeted to people of color, no longer are.

The Pressure From Outside: The Advocacy Groups

- * The NAACP has held a dominant role, both as the oldest and as the single African American advocacy group.
- * There are multiple and sometimes mutually conflicting Latino media advocacy groups, despite the recent establishment of the National Latino Media Council, through which some cooperative efforts have been launched. As one result, network executives have been able to choose which group with whom to work. It is not immediately evident that the NLMC has managed so far to create a single effective voice. No universally acknowledged leadership is forthcoming for Latino interests, despite the particularly sharp contrast between the proportion of Latino citizens and their meager representation on the TV screen or behind it.

- * Native American, Asian American, and Arab American advocacy groups have a relatively weak voice.
- * Asian American advocacy is dominated for the most part by Pacific Asian Americans.
- * The threat of channel boycotts by one or more of the advocacy groups has been a major weapon that advocacy groups have deployed.
- * In-house or commissioned reports documenting the quantitative under-representation, and sometimes the qualitative misrepresentation, of people of color in entertainment television have also been a primary tool of the advocacy groups.
- * In 2000 the Multi-Ethnic Coalition was established, consisting of advocacy groups representing African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans and Native Americans, and with the chair rotating every six months between these groups. In our assessment, the coalition seems an advance. It also has the characteristic problems of a coalition, however, with the NAACP tending to act as older brother and sometimes unilaterally. In news media and industry perception the coalition in fact tends to be dominated by the NAACP.
- * The MEC now regularly releases public “report cards” on industry performance in this regard. However, the NAACP recently withdrew from endorsing these, thereby reducing their significance in some industry executives’ eyes. (The NAACP’s reason was, plausibly, that simple inclusion statistics no longer served its constituency’s purpose.)

- ✱ Advocacy groups are under-funded, especially regarding the resources needed to conduct effective public relations and advertising. Some, e.g. the Media Action Network for Asian Americans, receive zero funding.
- ✱ Advocacy groups focus for the most part on reactive strategies, in part because of lack of funding.
- ✱ Evaluations of advocacy group activities, especially of a more public and confrontational type, vary widely. Some activists see them as foolish if not dangerously counterproductive. Others consider them not only necessary but pivotal. Others again, such as the TeleVisions Project team, see them as useful, not least because of their Congressional links, but as limited in scope.
- ✱ There are also several advocacy groups intent on working quietly behind the scenes or with the intention of involving the political establishment, such as the Imagen Awards Foundation and the National Hispanic Foundation for the Arts.

The report's initial conclusion is that, even though it plays a key role, advocacy group pressure is not and never will be *sufficient* to substantially influence how Hollywood conducts its business, precisely because of the industry's structural characteristics and lack of 'racial' and ethnic diversity among its most powerful echelons. Advocacy groups for the most part are not a part of the daily decision-making and organizational process and are therefore compelled to be reactive.

Other External Vectors

- ✧ The role of the federal government is also important. Links have been forged between advocacy groups and the Congressional Black and Latino caucuses. The TV entertainment industry from time to time needs favorable Congressional attitudes on regulatory issues, and individual legislators can play a pivotal role in Committee votes.
- ✧ FCC Chair Kennard and Labor Secretary Herman during the Clinton Administration made efforts to push the industry toward increasing the employment and improving the representation of people of color despite increasing deregulation of the industry.
- ✧ The industry guilds (the Directors Guild of America, the Screen Actors Guild, the Writers Guild of America) have expended a variety of efforts with respect to diversity issues. The guilds have limited powers to affect change, however, as the DGA found out when the courts refused it permission to lead a class action suit on ethnic diversity employment issues. Their concerns institutionally are related to jobs rather than quality of representation. They have offered different programs, such as networking and the publication of minority-ethnic employment figures (the DGA), training workshops (the WGA), and – more spottily – sponsored content research (SAG).
- ✧ The roles of the advertising industry - either by silence or intervention, a huge potential influence - must be included in any assessment of the

prospects for constructive change. This, however, was an area our research was unable to plumb.

Industry Responses

Industry executive responses to efforts to improve diversity in employment and/or on-screen representations have ranged over a considerable spectrum, including:

- * Dismissing or simply ignoring specific advocacy group claims.
- * Promising to run a minority-ethnic themed show and not doing so.
- * Striking development deals with actors and producers of color, which generally never made it out of the development stage. This includes deals struck by Olmos Productions, producer Nely Galán, and director Spike Lee. While media makers of all ethnic backgrounds experience series “development hell,” the under-representation of people of color among the ranks of creative professionals in the television industry makes this a more serious problem.
- * Funding a minority-ethnic themed show and programming it in order to reduce advocacy group pressure.
- * Often, not giving these ethnic-oriented shows adequate time or promotion to build a sizeable audience.
- * Announcing or repeating the corporation’s unwavering commitment to the employment and proper representation of people of color.
- * Taking part in special seminars on minority-ethnic issues.

- ✧ The appointment of Diversity Vice-Presidents and other executive officers, the estimation of whose efficacy is a matter of continuing debate among advocates of change. This difference in evaluation may correlate with activists' overall adhesion to confrontational or to "honey" tactics.
- ✧ Setting up training and recruitment programs for minority-ethnic writers and directors, and more recently, business executives. A particular example is the energetic outreach activity to high schools and communities nationally by ABC's Carmen Jean Smith.
- ✧ Over the last year, the networks have established talent searches and showcases through which to promote the hiring of Latino, Asian American and Native American actors.
- ✧ ABC/Disney and Fox are advanced with respect to long-range diversity plans and a variety of initiatives to this end. Cable channels such as Showtime, HBO and Nickelodeon also are far advanced. Currently, CBS is widely regarded by advocates as least organized with regards to promoting constructive change (while it also enjoys the most financial success).

Interventions from the Academy

Aside from the significant contributions to analysis and knowledge in books, journal articles and chapters (e.g. by Daniel Bernardi, Jannette Dates, Arlene Dávila, John Downing, Bob Entman, Herman Gray, bell hooks, Darnell Hunt, Jacquelyn Kilpatrick, Chon Noriega, Charles Ramírez-Berg, Federico Subervi,

Kristal Brent Zook), there are two more active forms of intervention from the academy:

- ✳ Authorship of research reports commissioned by advocacy groups, such as Darnell Hunt's work for the Screen Actors Guild, and the work by the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute for the National Council of La Raza. We would especially flag the public interventions since 1998 of Children Now, a research organization based in Oakland, California, which has issued reports annually on how people of color are depicted on television with respect to their numbers, and with respect to such factors as gender, class and age.
- ✳ Education by universities, community colleges, trade schools, some local ["hardly-for-profit"] media training ventures, and performing arts high schools, in the art and business of video and film. These academic programs collectively constitute a significant though certainly not exclusive part of the pipeline into the industry. Sometimes, particularly on the administrative side of the industry, law schools, business schools and advertising programs will provide a generic foundation on which industry entrants will base their specific expertise acquired on the job.
- ✳ All indications are that the various branches of the academy could and should outperform their overall current level of achievement in preparing minority-ethnic students for television and film industry careers, as well as for preparing all students to work effectively within an increasingly diverse

workforce and marketplace. This does not mean the industry is devoid of responsibilities in this regard, however.

- * There is a dearth of discussion and/or collaboration between academics and TV industry professionals, as well as between academia and advocacy groups, despite goals held apparently in common. Misperceptions, mistrust and a certain mutual scornfulness are common. Structured opportunities for mutual debate and education would be of great advantage.

Industry professionals variously estimate the roles of university researchers with commitment and experience in this area. Some think their primary mission should be to attend to their own house and improve their Communication programs. Others see academics as able to carry out useful specific research, which can then be applied by the industry. There are fewer, to date, who see the potential in closer industry-academy collaboration, but that does not mean that minds are closed to the possibilities if they can be organized practically and with respect for those working in the industry. Despite the industry's complexity and ingrained routines, the various contradictions we have noted and the industry's constant churn mean that opportunities for new initiatives should be boldly seized and active cooperation fostered.

In the following section, we summarize key moments in advocacy group activity in the last eleven years focused on minority-ethnic employment and representation in entertainment television. This history is listed in more detail in the Timeline appended to the Ford Foundation's official report of the TeleVisions study.

Key Moments in Advocacy Group Activity, 1992-2002

Let us begin by highlighting these in summary form, year by year. More detail and subsidiary actions are provided in the Timeline, Appendix A to this report.

1992: The tendentially maverick Hollywood NAACP chapter issued a public 16-point proposal for improving minority-ethnic employment and on-screen image; and the National Hispanic Media Coalition tried to block the sale of Univisión to a consortium representing Mexican TV interests. That attempt, although it failed, pinpointed the failure of *all* television channels to represent US Latinos, since Univisión was - and largely still is - using the USA as an after-market for Mexican programs.

1993: The NAACP publicly protested media coverage of Michael Jackson and other Black celebrities and announced it would conduct a study of media representations of African Americans; the Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee protested a CBS show lampooning a wealthy Gulf Arab.

1994: The NAACP attacked News Corp owner Murdoch's right to a US broadcast license; Jesse Jackson founded the Rainbow Coalition Commission on Fairness in the Media, and called for boycotting networks with a negative record of employing people of color and/or of minority-ethnic representations; the National Council of La Raza issued a report tracking Latino under-representation in TV since the 1950s; the Directors Guild of America founded its African American Advisory Steering Committee.

1995: 45 Latino organizations announced a boycott of ABC for its failure to include Latinos in its programs, focusing on its president's failure to deliver on a promise to include a Latino-themed show the previous fall season; criticism of the Rainbow Coalition's inadequate efforts surfaced among other advocacy groups.

1996: the National Council of La Raza publicized a report it had commissioned showing a fractional if stereotyped improvement in Latino representation, but an ongoing drastic under-representation; Alex Nogales, director of the National Hispanic Media Coalition, publicly demanded a high-placed Latino executive on diversity issues at ABC/Disney reporting directly to its President, before the NHMC would reduce its public critiques.

1997: the Hollywood NAACP chapter protested the representation of African Americans on the Fox, WB and UPN channels, but without clearing its protest with the rest of the NAACP, and was forced to retract some of its initial positions; the National Hispanic Media Coalition announced a boycott of ABC/Disney, but was only joined by some other Latino advocacy groups; the National Hispanic Foundation for the Arts was founded in Washington DC by members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus and some prominent Latino actors, with a mission defined differently from the other advocacy groups, namely one of working within the industry rather than attacking it from the outside, a strategy equally pursued by the Imagen Awards Foundation, started in 1985; and conflict surfaced between different Latino advocacy groups over the right stance to take toward ABC/Disney.

1998: A federal appeals court threw out FCC EEO rules dating back to 1968 that had encouraging industry hiring of women and people of color. Despite FCC Chairman Kennard's efforts to repair the damage, neither the courts nor the National Association of Broadcasters showed interest in supporting him. Reports were issued both by Emeritus Annenberg School Dean George Gerbner, and by the new organization Children Now,

documenting serious failures in the quantity and quality of minority-ethnic representation on television.

1999: The NAACP publicly attacked the industry for the absence of minority-ethnic actors. The NAACP threatened a boycott of a network channel, which it later withdrew, and Latino organizations called for a one-week “brown-out” of the networks. With the NAACP garnering the most media attention, the Multi-Ethnic Coalition began to be formed. Two further studies were published, one by TN Media showing a numerical over-representation of Black characters on TV in ratio to their proportion of the public, and a huge under-representation of Latino characters; and the other by the Directors Guild, indicating a fall in the number of minority-ethnic directors. A major *Los Angeles Times* article (9/11/99) by Greg Braxton on the industry’s shortcomings in this area drew considerable attention.

2000: ABC, CBS, Fox and NBC announced agreements with the Multi-Ethnic Coalition that they would hire more minority-ethnic individuals, ratifying these in separate memoranda of understanding. Diversity Vice-Presidents and similar roles began to be established at the networks. Nearly all the individuals appointed were African American women. U.S. Labor Secretary Alexis Herman met with studio heads to discuss improving ‘racial’ diversity in entertainment. Children Now issued its second report, indicating that African Americans were most likely to be featured in sitcoms, Asian Americans in dramas, and Latinos in secondary roles (when individuals belonging to either of the two latter groups appeared at all). The report also noted that minority-ethnic characters were not so well developed as majority-ethnic ones. TN Media published a study indicating sharp differences between black and white television viewing patterns. The Screen Actors Guild

released 1999 data indicating that while generally jobs were fewer, the proportion of minority-ethnic actors hired rose that year. The Directors Guild of America published statistics indicating a drop in the number of minority-ethnic directors the previous year.

2001: the NAACP and the NCLR presidents publicly criticized the networks' continued failures to improve 'racial' representation on television. The Multi-Ethnic Coalition expressed its dissatisfaction with the Fall 2001 programming. 24 network executives met with MEC leaders. SAG and ABC instituted the first showcase for minority-ethnic actors. Former SAG affirmative action official Peter Nguyen filed suit against the Guild alleging racial discrimination, and former affirmative action director Patricia Heisser Metoyer also filed suit alleging she was placed on leave when she complained the Guild's statistics of its own 'racial' demographics were being falsified. Later in the year the SAG human resources director, targeted in these suits, was fired. Reports during the year in *Variety*, the *Los Angeles Times* and from Children Now concurred on the networks' continuing failures to improve their diversity.

2002 (through the end of August): ABC, Fox and NBC instituted new minority-ethnic talent programs. ABC "greenlit" a \$30 million miniseries on American Indian myths and legends. The Multi-Ethnic Coalition issued its report cards, but without the NAACP's participation. Some executives interpreted this rupture in the ranks as downgrading the attention they needed to pay to the MEC report cards.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Below we begin by setting out a number of initiatives targeting the sector of Research/Education that could be productively funded by the Ford Foundation or other donors, followed by recommended initiatives that fall under the realms of Advocacy, and Industry/Practice.

Research/Education

A variety of collaborative projects between academics and the industry could bring about demonstrable, short-term and long-term positive change with respect to the employment and representation of people of color in entertainment television, as well as collaboration among individuals and organizations working toward these goals. Some of these might perhaps be best undertaken through the formation of a Los Angeles-based and nationally focused NGO, while others would benefit from duplication in regions throughout the country. These initiatives fall under four major headings: collaborative mechanisms between the industry and the academy; programs aimed at improving the pipeline of professionals into the industry; research; and internet-based resource sharing and dialogue. Such initiatives include:

- ❖ **Developing a collaborative forum of professionals from the creative and business sections of the industry and from the academy.** Industry representatives would consist predominantly of individuals who do not have official responsibility for diversity initiatives at the networks. Representing the academy would be university researchers concerned with and expert on these issues. The role of the academics would be to provide a company-neutral forum for these professionals. Such a site would be helpful because of the highly

competitive character of the industry. The group would be charged with the collaborative creation of an ongoing resource network and of a location within which to evaluate industry practices and strategize social action (e.g. short ‘retreats’), in addition to the other initiatives, grouped under numbers 2-4 below.

A major advantage of a foundation-backed initiative of this kind would be that – in a constructive, not an ostrich-like sense – its work could be impervious to the political weather. That is to say, that whether the advocacy groups or the guilds blow hot or blow cold, whether television companies choose to offer programs for a short while to indicate their concern without building them into the permanent fabric of what they do, the fora and networking this project could organize would be ongoing and cumulative.

This project would likely require the formation of a 501.c.3 NGO with a full-time coordinator/convenor, located in Los Angeles, with office assistance, working for and with a coalition-based governance and advisory board. Members of that board should likely include selected representatives from the industry whom we have already interviewed, or individuals they themselves recommend, who have a long track-history of commitment to improving television entertainment in the direction of inclusiveness, diversity and quality of representation of people of color. Other entities that should be involved in some fashion include Children Now, the African American Research Center and the Chicano Studies Research Center at UCLA, the Radio-Television-Film Department at the University of Texas, and the Peabody Center for Media and

Society at the University of Georgia. Such a collaboration might be best initiated through the convening of a group of 12-15 industry professionals, academics and advocacy representatives, including a representative from Children Now, for a two full day brainstorming session led by the lead researchers of the TeleVisions project team to explore fruitful industry/academy collaboration projects of the kind outlined here. Position papers would be pre-circulated by the academics to form an initial base for discussion, but the assumption would be that phase 1 of discussion would be their constructive critique by the non-academics present.

❖ **A second charge of such an entity: To improve the education pipeline of professionals of color into the entertainment industries, as well as the education of all new professionals with respect to the increasingly diverse marketplace.** This could include a number of initiatives:

- Initiatives to encourage students of color, and Latino and Native American high school and college students in particular, to enter the industry and be prepared to do that. This is needed not just in film & television programs, but also in business, law, and other areas which are a part of the entertainment industry. Scholarships, internships, and mentoring programs are needed, among other supports.
- The establishment of collaborative partnerships between colleges, high schools, ethnic communities, and industry entities, particularly in Southern California, but also in Austin, Chicago, NYC, etc.

➤ Research into the role that academics and university courses play – and could play better - in “feeding the pipeline” of the television industry. Studies are needed as well on primary education-related issues, particularly with respect to Latino and American Indian students. Funding partners for the university level might include the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education. This research could involve:

- Studies of how entertainment business students and young professionals are being prepared to work effectively in the media industries with respect to the increasing diversity of the audience.
- Evaluations of selected university programs that have communications, media studies, and film/TV programs.
- Other, exploratory studies of pipeline issues and potential solutions. For example, the creation of more high schools of the performing arts in California, Texas, and other non-NYC locations, established in districts accessible to minority-ethnic communities, would also encourage a bigger pool of young people who would consider television as a career field.

❖ **This entity also could encourage other research promoting efforts to increase and improve ‘racial’ diversity in front of and behind the small screen.** This would be accomplished through the formation of an advisory group of researchers with some industry professionals as consultants or participants. This could include:

- Studies that advance multi-ethnic audience reception and market research, particularly regarding viewing and consumer habits and the market potential of genuinely diverse programming, as well as analysis of Nielsen methodologies.
 - Evaluations of specific industry programs and strategies, e.g. a comparison of the ABC/Disney training and mentorship programs with Fox's across-the-board approach.
 - Studies of particular industry roles with pivotal effect on minority-ethnic outcomes, in particular that of show-runners (writer/executive producers), casting directors, marketing professionals, ratings analysts, talent agencies, attorneys, standards and practices departments, and publicists.
- ❖ **This entity also could have as one of its goals the construction and coordination of an internet-based collaborative mechanism.** This could include:
- The creation of a website of ongoing news on industry and advocacy efforts on all fronts throughout the country. This could take the form of relatively unevaluative short reports, and also assertive think pieces, with the opportunity for ongoing public dialogue concerning the issues raised.
 - The creation of a website on which some of the documents we have created in the course of this project could be made available, and/or the production of a short documentary based upon our interviews and research, which could also be put on the same website for distribution.

Advocacy

- ❖ It would be beneficial to establish initiatives through which advocacy groups could plan and carry out a communications strategy to publicize their efforts and encourage citizen participation. At this point only the NAACP has a strong national image and clout. Collaborations with non-profits that have public relations assistance as their focus could be established for this purpose.
- ❖ A large-scale campaign of the Multi-Ethnic Media Coalition, first targeting the news media to educate media correspondents, film critics and cultural commentators on the intricacies of this issue, would assist advocacy groups in gaining coverage that goes beyond head counts.
- ❖ Some groups need more funding in general. Some, such as the Media Advocacy Network for Asian Americans, operate on a zero budget.
- ❖ It would be helpful to provide funding to revamp advocacy group web sites, to create one site for the Multi-Ethnic Coalition, and to link web sites to one another.
- ❖ Mechanisms need to be created through which citizens of color and indeed all citizens can more easily lend their voice to the discussion of television employment and representation. Such mechanisms could be set up on groups' web sites, or through other means by which letters could easily be sent to networks.
- ❖ A potential advocacy-academia collaboration could take the form of having graduate student interns from University media studies, ethnic studies, and public policy departments and law schools, with salaries paid by foundation

grants, work summers or semesters with advocacy groups, especially on their public relations and advertising strategies.

Industry/Practice

- ❖ There is a need for more training, access and professional networking opportunities for both incoming and veteran creative professionals and executives of color. This includes internships and particularly mentorships with established working professionals.
- ❖ On the other hand, current internships, mentorships and training programs need to be evaluated with respect to how far they are effectively promoting increased diversity in the industry, and how they might be strengthened.
- ❖ Training opportunities could be established through having foundation initiatives substantially underwrite initial programs as training grounds, given bankable industry assurances they will use this funding as seed capital.
- ❖ More collaborations need to be established with K-12 schools, colleges, professional organizations, etc.

{Note: these recommendations may usefully be read in conjunction with the recommendations presented on pp. 13-14 of the 2001 *Report* of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute's Issues Conference held in 2000. While many of these are targeted very specifically to legislators and regulation, a number overlap with some of our own recommendations.}

INTERVIEWEES

NETWORK EXECUTIVES

Disney/ABC

Diane Medina

Director, Diversity Programs
Disney Company

Donna Mitroff

Independent Consultant to ABC Cable Networks Group
Chair of Advisory Board, Mediascope
Former executive, Fox Family and Fox Kids

Carmen Jean Smith

Vice President
Talent Development Programs and Community Initiatives
ABC Network

William J. Wilkinson

President, Wilkinson Associates
Former Senior Vice President, Human Resources, Walt Disney Company

Jonathan Ávila

Attorney
Disney

CBS Television and UPN (Divisions of Viacom)

Josie Thomas

Senior Vice President, Diversity
CBS Television and UPN

Fox Entertainment Group

Gerald Alcantar

Director for Diversity Development
Fox Entertainment Group

Wenda Fong

Vice President, Diversity Development

Fox Entertainment Group

Mitsy Wilson

Senior Vice President, Diversity Development
Fox Entertainment Group

NBC Television

Paula Madison, Former-Senior Vice President of Diversity, and Michael Jack, Senior Vice President of Diversity, were unable to schedule an interview with project researchers within the timeline of the project.

Showtime Networks, Inc.

Pancho Mansfield

Senior Vice President, Development, Original Programming
Showtime Networks

WB Television (A division of Time Warner)

Jordan Levin

President of Entertainment

ADVOCACY GROUPS

Guy Aoki

Co-founder and Former President
Media Action Network for Asian American (MANAA)

David Chavez

Director of Marketing
National Council of La Raza (NCLR)

David Damien Figueroa

Associate State Director, AARP California
Former Director of Public Relations & Creative Marketing, Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF)

Bel Hernandez

Founder, Latinos in Entertainment Media Institute (LEMI)
Co-founder and Editor-in-Chief, Latin Heat magazine

Helen Hernandez

Founder
The Imagen Foundation

Karen Narasaki

Spokesperson, Multi-Ethnic Coalition
President and Executive Director
National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium (NAPALC)

Lisa Navarrete

Deputy Vice President of Public Information
National Council of La Raza

Alex Nogales

National Chair
National Hispanic Media Coalition

McCrae Parker

Senior Associate
Children Now, Children and Media Program

Felix Sánchez

Chairman
National Hispanic Foundation for the Arts (NHFA)

Sonny Skyhawk

Founder, American Indians in Film and Television
Chairman and CEO, Amerind Entertainment Group.

Esteban Torres

Chairman
National Latino Media Council

Jerry Velasco

President, Nosotros
Liaison to the Latino Caucus, Screen Actors Guild.

Raul Yzaguirre

President
National Council of La Raza

PROFESSIONAL GUILDS

Regina Render

Special Assignments Executive

Director's Guild of America (DGA)

Zara Buggs Taylor

Director, Employment Access & Human Resources
Writers Guild of America West (WGAW)

CREATIVE PROFESSIONALS

Bill Boulware

Producer and writer

Julie Cho

Screenwriter/ director
Recipient, ABC New Talent Development Scholarship/Grant

Nancy De Los Santos

Writer and Producer

Stacey Lyn Evans

Writer, *The Parkers*

Sara M. Fitzgerald

Writer, *The Parkers*

Gary Goodrich

Writer, *The Parkers*

Sara Finney Johnson

Co-Executive Producer and Writer, *The Parkers*

Sara M. Fitzgerald

Writer, *The Parkers*

Dornita R. LeCount

Writer, *The Parkers*

Dennis Leoni

Executive Producer, Creator, and Writer, *Resurrection Blvd*

Michelle Listenbee-Brown

Writer, *The Parkers*

Danny Mora

Writer, Actor

Nancy Sprow

Co-producer, *Girlfriends* and *The Parkers*

Jeff Valdez

Executive Producer and Co-creator, *The Brothers García*

Founder, Sí TV

Andrea Wiley

Co-producer and Writer, *The Parkers*

Michael Zinberg

Director

The Alphabet Soup of Minority-Ethnic Media Advocacy:

Organizations that Advocate for Improved ‘Racial’ and Ethnic Diversity in U.S. Entertainment Television

The following organization descriptions were excerpted from organization web sites and printed materials, and thus should not be considered the evaluation of the TeleVisions Project.

The Multi-Ethnic Coalition

The Multi-Ethnic Coalition consists of the NAACP, the National Latino Media Council, the Asian Pacific American Media Coalition, and American Indians in Film and Television. The chairmanship of the coalition rotates. Karen Narasaki, chair of the Asian Pacific American Media Coalition, is the current chair, while Kweisi Mfume of the NAACP, Esteban Torres of the National Latino Media Council, and Sonny Skyhawk of American Indians in Film and Television all have served in this position as well.

The National Latino Media Council consists of The Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund (PRLDEF), the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), the National Hispanic Media Coalition (NHMC), the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), the National Puerto Rican Coalition (NPRC), the Mexican American Grocers Association (MAGA), Nosotros, and the National Association of Hispanic Publications (NAHP). Former Congressman Esteban Torres is chair of the council.

The Asian Pacific American Media Coalition, founded in 1999, is a group of 19 organizations working to ensure that Asian Pacific Americans are accurately portrayed on network television and that APAs have fair and equal access to program development, writing opportunities, management positions and casting. The Media Action Network for Asian Americans (MANAA), National Asian Pacific Legal Consortium (NAPALC), East West Players, National Coalition of Asian Pacific Americans, and Organization of Chinese Americans are among its constituent organizations. Karen Narasaki, executive director of NAPALC, is the chair of the coalition.

Organizations with a focus on a specific ethnic group:

African American

Formed in 1909, by a multiracial group of progressive thinkers, the **National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)** is a non-profit organization established with the objective of insuring the political, educational, social and economic equality of African American and other minority-ethnic groups. The NAACP has as its mission the goal of eliminating racial prejudice and removing all barriers of racial

discrimination through democratic processes. The NAACP works at the national, regional, and local level to secure civil rights through advocacy for supportive legislation and by the implementation of our Strategic Initiatives. The NAACP also stands poised to defend civil rights wherever and whenever they are threatened.

The NAACP has held the NAACP Image Awards for 34 years. Founded more than thirty years ago in the home of Sammy Davis Jr., the Image Awards honor projects and individuals of all races who have helped promote “positive images of people of color.”

Latino/Hispanic

The Imagen Foundation, founded in 1983 by Helen Hernandez and Norman Lear, recognizes producers, directors, writers and actors in the entertainment industry who contribute to the visibility and positive portrayal of Latinos from behind the scenes. The Imagen Foundation pursues this goal through annual job fairs, talent searches, and an annual awards show. The 17th Annual Imagen (Spanish for “image”) Latino Media Awards were held in June 2002. The Imagen Awards exemplify the best of what Hollywood can produce in portraying the image of Latinos and Latino cultures in the entertainment industry.

The **Latino Entertainment Media Institute (LEMI)**, founded in 1995, provides training and networking opportunities to Latino producers, writers, directors and other creative professionals attempting to work within Hollywood. In addition to its trade publication *Latin Heat*, which provides in-depth information on commercial projects and Latinos working within the industry, LEMI hosts an annual entertainment industry conference.

The **National Council of La Raza (NCLR)**, founded in 1968, is a national, non-profit organization with the mission of reducing poverty and discrimination and improving life opportunities for Latino Americans. NCLR advocates for more and improved representations and employment of Hispanics on entertainment television. The organization also hosts the American Latino Media Award (ALMA) Awards, which honor Latino performers in film, music videos, and television for their outstanding artistic achievement, impact, and enhancement of the image of Latinos.

The **National Hispanic Foundation for the Arts (NHFA)**, founded in 1997 by actors Jimmy Smits, Sonia Braga, and Esai Morales and attorney Felix R. Sánchez, aims to increase access to opportunities for Hispanic artists and professionals in the entertainment industries while fostering the emergence of new Hispanic talent. It advocates for change through legislative means and the commissioning of research, as well as offering scholarships to Latino university students entering the five leading “pipeline” programs for film and the performing arts.

The **National Hispanic Media Coalition (NHMC)**, founded in 1986, is a coalition of Hispanic-American organizations that have joined together to address a variety of media-related issues that affect the Hispanic American community across the nation. Its goals are 1) to improve the image of Hispanic Americans as portrayed in the media; and 2) to

increase the number of Hispanic Americans employed in all facets of the media industry. This is accomplished through negotiation, relationship building, legal efforts, and boycotts. In fall 1999, it coordinated the Latino “Brown Out” boycott of network television, which was the first such coordinated effort among Latino civil rights groups.

Nosotros was founded in 1970 by actor Ricardo Montalbán to improve the image of Latinos/Hispanics as they are portrayed in the entertainment industry, both in front and behind the camera; to expand employment opportunities in the industry; to train members to become better actors and industry professionals; and lastly, to reach out to the community and encourage youth to enter the acting profession. Nosotros holds workshops and offers employment referrals. The organization stages its own theatrical productions to familiarize casting agents and other industry executives with Latino talent. The Nosotros Golden Eagle Awards, held now for 32 years, recognize the outstanding work of Latinos/Hispanics in front of and behind the camera who impact the community and encourage the positive portrayal and image of Latinos in the entertainment industry.

Asian Pacific American

The **Media Action Network for Asian Americans (MANAA)**, founded in 1992, is dedicated to monitoring the media and advocating for balanced, sensitive, and positive coverage and portrayals of Asian Americans. Their objectives include: To monitor media depictions of persons of Asian Pacific descent; to educate the public and provide reinforcement for fair, accurate, sensitive, and balanced depictions; to support, encourage, and promote Asian Pacific American talent in both the media and the arts, and advocate their increased employment in these fields; to develop a national presence as a media watchdog/advocacy organization capable of representing the concerns of the Asian Pacific American community; and to foster an environment of increased sensitivity toward, and respect for, the dignity of the Asian Pacific community.

The **National Asian Pacific Legal Consortium (NAPALC)**, incorporated in 1991, opened its Washington, DC office in 1993. NAPALC, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, works to advance the legal and civil rights of Asian Pacific Americans through litigation, public education and public policy. A nationally recognized voice on behalf of Asian Pacific Americans, NAPALC focuses its expertise on anti-Asian violence prevention and education, voting rights, immigration, naturalization, affirmative action, language rights and the census.

American Indian

American Indians in Film and Television is a national advocacy organization in alliance with and representing 22 American Indian organizations and countless tribes throughout the United States and Canada. They advocate to increase the visibility of American Indians in U.S.-based film and television, and to improve the employment and representations of American Indians.

Multi-Ethnic

Children Now is a research and action organization dedicated to assuring that children grow up in economically secure families, where parents can go to work confident that their children are supported by quality health coverage, a positive media environment, a good early education, and safe, enriching activities to do after school. Recognized for its expertise in media as a tool for change, Children Now designs its strategies to improve children's lives while at the same time helping America build a sustained commitment to putting children first. Children Now is an independent, nonpartisan organization.

Mediascope is a nonprofit research and policy organization working to promote issues of social relevance within the entertainment industry. Founded in 1992, a principal objective is to encourage responsible portrayals in film, television, the Internet, video games, music and advertising. The organization addresses a variety of youth and media-related topics, including violence, teen sexuality, diversity, and substance use. Mediascope provides tools and information to assist the creative community to be more socially responsible without relinquishing creative freedoms.