

NATIONAL LATINO MEDIA COUNCIL

55 South Grand Avenue, Pasadena, CA 91105 • Tel: (626) 792-6462 • Fax: (626) 792-6051

Esteban Torres, National Latino Media Council

Good morning ladies and gentlemen, it's a pleasure to have you all here.

The National Latino Media Council is made up of sixteen of the largest Latino advocacy civil rights organizations in the nation. They are: the Cuban American National Foundation; League of United Latin American Citizens, also known as LULAC; Mexican American Legal Defense & Education Fund; National Association of Hispanic Publications; National Association of Latino Independent Producers; National Council of La Raza; National Hispanic Media Coalition; Nosotros; Latino Justice, formerly known as the Puerto Rican Legal Defense & Education Fund; National Association of Latino Elected Officials; the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute; Mexican American Opportunity Foundation; Latino Literacy Now; the National Institute for Latino Policy, MANA and the Arizona State University Center for Community Development and Civil Rights.

This report and the grades earned by the four major networks are based on information provided by them. The report focuses on the primetime scripted programs from Fall of 2007 to Fall of 2008 as well as the Reality programs on the air during the same time period. It grades the networks in eight categories, on numbers reflective of where they are as of this date. Given that we are in the ninth year of the diversity initiatives, the National Latino Media Council (NLMC) has set the bar high with expectations that diversity performance in the eight categories should be much better by this time. It is also important to note that all four networks were extremely challenged by the WGA Writers Strike during the 2007-2008 TV season, so our assessment of their diversity efforts includes this factor.

Let me start by saying that there has been incremental progress at all four networks in terms of American Latinos. There are three criteria areas that we measure. The three criteria are: Institutional programs and measures taken to bring Latinos into the employment ranks both in front and back of camera; out and out performance, that is, actual hiring that is concrete and measurable; and the third criterion is the clear submission of statistical data utilized to accurately grade diversity performance. Please also note that there are varied hours of primetime programming per network per week, therefore the grades received are proportional to the number of hours of prime-time programming each network had on the air during the '07-'08 period. Allow me to now go through the networks one at a time.

ABC

Despite the WGA Writers Strike that nearly crippled network television, ABC still managed to increase its total number of American Latino actors in primetime by 6.4%, driven primarily by a significant increase of Latino actors in ABC's Unscripted "Reality" programming (35). ABC also increased its total number of Writers/Producers by 7%, but fell short in its total number of Directors with only 5 American Latino Directors in 2008, versus 8 Directors in 2007. We attribute this shortfall to the Writers strike and have confidence that this number will turn around in the new Television Season.

In terms of new program development, ABC is currently developing new Scripted shows that will feature 4 American Latino series regulars: Monique Curen (“The Unusuals”); Rick Gomez (“Cupid”); Camile Guaty (“Cupid”) and National Hispanic Media Coalition Impact Award winner, Judy Reyes (“Scrubs”). ABC also reports that early in the new season, it has 9 Latino writers employed, 2 of which are alumni from the NLMC Writers Program, Rafael Garcia and Leslie Valdes. And of course we have to mention the continued success behind the ABC mega-hit, “Ugly Betty.” This award-winning show continues to demonstrate several Latinos in positive and empowering roles and we look forward to more programs like “Ugly Betty” from ABC and the other networks. In order to have hits like “Ugly Betty,” Latino projects must be looked at and developed, and ABC is doing an incredible job doing precisely that. I congratulate Steve McPhearson and his team for their foresight and commitment to including Latinos at all levels of their operation.

In the important area of business procurement, ABC continues to be the leader in awarding contracts to Latino entrepreneurs, both in terms of Latino entrepreneurs and actual spend. What is very significant for us is that ABC continues its attempt to bring to the screen American Latino themed programming as well as increasing deals with Latino producers and attaching Latino actors to new projects that don’t necessarily have a Latino theme to them. This is exactly what you do if you’re going to increase employment numbers and diverse programming. We thank ABC for their forward thinking and their openness in providing all relevant data to judge their diversity performance. The overall diversity grade that ABC Television earned for the 2007-2008 season is a B+.

NBC

NBC maintained its overall diversity report card grade of “B,” which is no small feat considering the challenges realized by the Writers Strike. The Peacock network managed to maintain its total number of American Latino actors in Scripted primetime programming (10 in 2007 and 10 in 2008), but fell significantly short in its total number of American Latino actors featured in Unscripted “Reality” programming (0). Considering the increasing popularity of the “Reality TV” genre, this is very unfortunate. On a brighter note, NBC increased its total number of American Latino Writers/Producers by 25% and also maintained its total number of Latino Directors in the 2007-2008 TV season (9).

Regarding business procurement with the American Latino community, NBC demonstrated less spending with Latino vendors for CY 2007 versus its spending with other minority vendors. This is unfortunate, considering the significant buying-power of the American Latino population and the increasing number of Latino entrepreneurs across the country. As such, we were forced to assign NBC a letter grade of “B,” for its diversity efforts in business procurement (the same letter grade earned last season), and will continue to work with the network to make improvements in this important area of diversity. The network does, however, anticipate a Hispanic supplier spend increase of about 53% for CY 2008, so we remain hopeful that NBC will increase its report card grade for business procurement next year.

On a more positive note, NBC continues to support network diversity for American Latinos with its continued open casting calls around the country for Latino acting talent for both NBC and its

Spanish-language, sister-station, Telemundo. Additionally, NBC also reports positive developments for the 2008-2009 TV season that would include American Latino actors as series regulars on “The Listener” (Lisa Marcos), and “LAPD” (Kevin Alejandro). NBC also reports a talent holding deal with Jose Compré, the “Best Actor” winner in NBC’s Comedy Short Cuts competition. The NLMC is also pleased to report that NBC continues to strengthen its diverse work force with executive American Latino talent and has added Jackie Hernandez, the former editor of “People en Español” magazine, as COO for Telemundo. We congratulate NBC for its continued improvements and commitment to network diversity throughout the organization.

CBS

Under the leadership of Nina Tassler, President of CBS Entertainment, CBS is the only network that demonstrated an increase in American Latino actors in Scripted primetime programming over the past TV season. We applaud the 83% increase (22 actors in 2008 vs. 12 actors in 2007) and look forward to even more increases in the coming years. I am also pleased to tell you that CBS also increased its total number of American Latino actors in “Recurring” roles for primetime Scripted shows. However, the network fell short in its American Latino representation on its Unscripted “Reality” programming with no featured Latino actors reported. Once again, this is unfortunate considering the growing popularity of the “Reality” television genre. Like ABC and NBC, CBS also increased its total number of American Latino Writers/Producers by 50%, but came up short in its total number of Latino Directors. Once again, we attribute this shortfall of American Latino Directors to the Writers Strike and have full confidence that CBS will address this issue in the new TV season.

The overall grade of “B+” for CBS did not change from last year, but with the network’s current programming development we have high expectations that CBS will achieve an “A” next year. CBS is currently developing a project with Cynthia Cidre, a Latina, and the creator of “Cane.” The proposed series would have a Latina in one of the lead roles. Additionally, CBS is also developing a Miami-based project set in the 1960’s with a significant Cuban story-line.

CBS has the largest number of American Latino creative executives of all four networks. We believe that the important inclusion of these Latino creative executives has resulted in the addition of “Cane,” and the other Latino-themed programs that are currently under development. And despite the fact that “Cane” was cancelled due to low ratings, we would still like to take this opportunity to applaud Nina Tassler and her team at CBS for their vision and commitment to bring the Latino experience to the American consciousness during primetime. We are convinced that when Latino executives are part of a network, Latino projects have a more sympathetic ear, as wonderfully demonstrated by CBS this past year.

In Procurement, CBS improved their grade from a “B” to a “B+,” thanks to their VP of Diversity, who has made this category a priority for the network. We sincerely appreciate the network’s new frame of mind and for the speed with which they are increasing their procurement total spend as well as their pool of American Latino entrepreneurs.

FOX

Now we come to FOX. FOX is the only network that improved its “overall” grade from last year, earning a “B+” for its diversity efforts in the 2007-2008 TV season, versus its overall grade of “B-“ last season, and we happily applaud the effort. FOX achieved an 82% increase in its total number of American Latino actors in primetime, driven primarily by the 21 Latino actors featured in the FOX hit, “Prison Break” (5 Regular/16 Recurring). However, there was a decrease in the total amount of American Latino series regular actors in Scripted programming (7 this season, versus 10 last season). Like the other networks, FOX also increased its total number of American Latino Writers/Producers (+44%) and also “doubled” its total number of Latino Directors (10 this season, versus 5 last season)! This is a tremendous effort and I am also pleased to report that FOX significantly increased its total number of episodes directed by American Latino Directors – a whopping 68 episodes this season, versus only 7 episodes last year.

In terms of program development, FOX reports that one of its upcoming new dramas, “Lie to me,” will feature a Latino as a series regular cast member; and that 3 to 5 new FOX pilots have been cast with American Latino series regulars, including “The Emancipation of Ernesto.” The Emancipation of Ernesto is a comedy that follows the odyssey of a young Latino man born in a Mexican prison, who comes to the United States in search of his father. The series lead will be played by “That 70’s Show” star, Wilmer Valderrama, and the “Emancipation” cast is almost entirely Latino. FOX has also developed a comedy script with NHMC Impact Award winner and “Culture Clash” front man, Richard Montoya, that is currently under consideration and we hope this script comes to fruition.

As I’ve just reported, FOX Television has definitely stepped up its network diversity efforts, but we are still somewhat concerned about the network’s business procurement efforts. In fact, this is the only area of the report card that FOX decreased its grade, moving from a “C” last year to a “C-” this year. As such, we will continue to work with the network and closely monitor its efforts in the very important area of business procurement.

SUMMARY

In summary, the National Latino Media Council strongly believes that after nine years of assessing the diversity efforts of ABC, NBC, CBS and FOX, that network television diversity is finally taking hold. The number of American Latinos both in front and back of camera has increased, but we also realize that they are incremental numbers in proportion to the American Latino population. The network diversity programs that were begun seven and eight years ago are now bearing fruit and it is not unreasonable to expect that the present numbers will continue to climb and that there will be no backsliding. I also want to emphasize that diversity programs are fine, but we grade on performance, not simply on good intentions. Our confidence in the networks’ diversity efforts is also increased by the fact that each network still demonstrated diversity improvements, despite the devastating writers strike – so we have even greater expectations going into the 2008-2009 television season.

I would also like to take this opportunity to address our on-going efforts to combat hate speech in the media. We consistently receive reports about acts of violence against Latinos and the Latino immigrant community in particular; and we are certain that this is a direct result of the “immigration hysteria” fueled by irresponsible TV and Radio talk show hosts. More and more evidence suggests that the media has played a role in the rise of hate crimes against Latinos, documented by the FBI. As such, hate speech in the media continues to be an important issue for the NLMC and a top priority for the National Hispanic Media Coalition.

Because of the significant lack of positive media images of Latinos in the U.S., and because we do not have sufficient access to the airwaves, the American Latino community is at great risk. If hate speech is allowed to continue, it will continue to be a tremendous disservice to Latinos and non-Latinos across the country, who hear anti-Latino speech and assume the information being disseminated is correct.

Ladies and gentlemen, we simply need more Latinos on television and throughout the entertainment industry as well as on the News and Public Affairs programs. All Americans across this nation need to understand that we have the same aspirations and preoccupations as everyone else - we want to provide for our families, we want to keep them safe, and we want what every other American in this great nation of ours enjoys: equity, fairness and justice. I thank you very much for your presence this morning and your continued interest in this very important endeavor.

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2008 National Latino Media Council "Report Card" on Television Diversity

	ABC	NBC	FOX	CBS
Actors: On-air Primetime <i>Scripted</i> Shows	C	B	B	A
Actors: On-air Primetime <i>Reality</i> Shows	A	C-	A	C
Writers and Producers: Primetime	A	B	A	A
Directors: Primetime	C	A	A	C
Program Development	A	C+	A	A
Procurement	A	B	C-	B+
Entertainment Creative Executives	B	B	A	A
Network Commitment to Diversity Initiatives and submission of Statistical Data	A	A	A	A
OVERALL GRADE FOR 2008	B+	B	B+	B+
OVERALL GRADE FOR 2007	A-	B	B-	B+