

National Latino Media Council 2009 Report Cards Released

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Los Angeles, CA . - We are celebrating the 10th anniversary of a national movement to change the face of television in this country. In 1999 - 2000, the Multi-Ethnic Media Coalition, a group comprised of the National Latino Media Council (NLMC), the National Asian/Pacific American Media Coalition, the NAACP and the American Indians in Film and Television, persuaded the four major television networks, ABC, CBS, Fox and NBC, to sign unprecedented *Memoranda of Understanding*. Before these memoranda were signed, we saw much fewer people of color on television than we do today.

The *Memoranda* serve to diversify the networks' workforce both in front and behind the camera and to open up procurement opportunities for people of color. These initiatives have incrementally increased diversity over the past ten years; however, the job is far from complete. In 1999, Greg Braxton, of the Los Angeles Times, wrote that out of the 24 new shows debuting at ABC, NBC CBS, and FOX, there was not one single person of color in a lead or regular role. Ten years later, the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) reports the following breakdown of film and TV roles for 2008: 72.5% Caucasian, 13.3% African-American, 6.4% Latino-Hispanic, 3.8% Asian & Pacific Islander, .03% Native American and 3.8% other/unknown.

The 9th annual "Report Cards" summarize the progress and/or shortfalls of the networks' efforts to diversify their workforce and increase minority vendor contracts in calendar year 2009.

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 submission of clear, statistical data utilized to accurately grade diversity performance. Because hours of primetime programming vary per network per week, the grades received are proportional to the number of hours of prime-time programming each network had on the air during the '08-'09 period.

ABC

ABC has a history of developing strong Latino actors that have become extremely successful thanks to the network exposure. Eva Longoria, America Ferrera and Sara Ramirez are a few of the Latinas that play ground-breaking roles that shatter traditional

stereotypes. ABC has preserved its strong numbers for American Latino actors in primetime. ABC also maintained a large total number of Writers/Producers, specifically writers. It is especially encouraging to see the increase of writers since this is a category of utmost importance to the NLMC. It is the writers that can depict the three-dimensional stories of real Latinos in the U.S. Not only is ABC committed to the NLMC Writers Program, investing time and money to develop writers, but it has shown commitment in placing these upcoming writers on their shows.

The area where ABC needs to improve on is with directors. The number was already low last year at 5, and that number has dropped down to 4, which is only half of the directors that they had in 2007, when they were at 8. Steve McPherson, ABC Entertainment President, has already moved to rectify that problem.

In terms of new program development, ABC has added “Modern Family,” a fresh and funny scripted show featuring Sofia Vergara and Rico Rodriguez as prominent regulars, and “V” with Morena Baccarin playing the leader of cosmic alien “visitors.”

The ABC mega-hit, “Ugly Betty,” has given girls of all ages and ethnic backgrounds a great role model to regularly watch on television. It is these types of roles that make a difference for our children, teens and young adults. This program shines as an example of one that employs a large number of Latinos and addresses issues that speak to and about the American Latino community in a unique and thoughtful way. We applaud Steve McPherson and his team for making this show such a great success - it will be a classic in years to come.

An area to improve on is Creative Executives, with only one Latina in this team. It’s essential that Latinos be at the table where decisions are being made about original content and talent. ABC continues to be the leader in awarding contracts to Latino businesses, both in terms of Latino entrepreneurs and actual spent.

The overall diversity grade that ABC Television earned for the 2008-2009 season is a B+.

NBC

NBC has successfully cast Latinos in regular supporting roles. Alana de la Garza in “Law & Order,” who joined the cast in 2006, has won accolades for her performance. Oscar Nunez in “The Office” breaks down stereotypes in his role as the ever-reasonable gay, Latino accountant, Oscar Martinez. Dania Ramirez has become a familiar face after being cast on the hit show, “Heroes.” NBC continues to add new Latino roles to its schedule, such as Aubrey Plaza of “Parks & Recreation,” who comically portrays an unusual young woman of Puerto Rican descent. The creative casting of Salma Hayek as Alec Baldwin’s love interest on “30 Rock,” and Rosie Perez on “Lipstick Jungle” showcase great Latino talent in a different setting. It is this type of casting that incrementally improves diversity on television. NBC moved from a B to a B+ in this category.

In the “reality” category, NBC improved greatly from last year, adding co-host Susie Castillo in “Superstars of Dance,” Alex Castro in a prominent role on “American Gladiators,” and a healthy representation of Latino contestants.

NBC has been very pro-active in the Writers/Producers category, promoting Danielle Sanchez-Witzel from Producer to Co-Executive Producer of cancelled show “My Name

is Earl,” and now retaining her as a behind the camera Latino talent. Additionally, it promoted Mick Betancourt from staff writer to story editor on “Law & Order: SVU.” In addition to supporting the NLMC Writers Program with mentoring time and money, NBC is also placing these Fellows on their shows. Avena, Lauren LeFranc of “My Own Worst Enemy,” and Jessica Lopez of “Kath & Kim” were named staff writers during the last season.

This season, NBC had fewer Latino Directors and episodes directed by those Directors. Norberto Barba led the field in episodes directed on the long-running hit show, “Law & Order.” Norberto is a past participant of the Film Makers Program administrated by Universal Studios and NHMC in the early 90’s.

Regarding business procurement with the American Latino community, NBC this year outdid itself by posting truly impressive total spent numbers. For their remarkable procurement performance we are happy to award NBC an A in this important category. In the category for Creative Executives NBC, however, received an F. This network is the only one that has not included at least one Latino in its creative team for several years. Although it has done well in the past in other areas of the work force, it is essential that NBC include Latinos at the table where decisions are being made regarding original content and talent. We have waited long enough to see progress in this arena and are no longer willing to wait. NBC’s overall grade is thus a C+.

CBS

CBS has a track record of promoting Latino actors in prominent regular roles on hit shows such as Michael Irby in “The Unit,” Eva La Rue and Adam Rodriguez in “CSI: Miami,” Enrique Murciano and Roselyn Sanchez in “Without a Trace,” and Danny Pino in “Cold Case.” All of these actors provide honest depictions of Latinos. However, CBS continues to struggle in the representation of Latinos in its reality programs. This year the network had the lowest number of Latino contestants on popular reality shows in the past three years. CBS must be creative to attract more Latinos to respond to their reality casting. There are, undoubtedly, many qualified Latinos seeking reality spots.

Comparatively speaking, CBS is the network with the second highest number of Latino Writers. NLMC applauds CBS for providing Danny Pino with the opportunity to be a regular writer on “Cold Case.” As far as NLMC is concerned, writers are key players when it comes to enhancing diversity. Although having less than a handful of Latino writers for primetime series is inexcusable, we continue to grade by comparison in hope that we will see substantial progress in the near future.

On the other hand, CBS excels in the director category, with higher numbers than each of the other three networks. Not only are Latino directors getting the opportunity to direct CBS’ hit shows, but they also direct multiple episodes. CBS is enabling Roxann Dawson, Felix Alcala, Marcos Ciega, Emilio Estevez, Nick Gomez and Gloria Muzio to excel in the profession.

CBS’s unprecedented Daytime Diversity Initiative launched in February unveiled a completely new approach to creating opportunities for actors of color in the high profile Daytime Drama arena. This exemplifies Nina Tassler’s mandate to create “points of entry” for people of color. Already there have been a total of 12 bookings of people of

color since the program began. Although this report card doesn't grade daytime diversity, it is well known that many of the successful prime time actors (such as Eva Longoria) have come from Daytime shows. Bravo to CBS for thinking outside of the box and finding a new pipeline for people of color.

CBS continues to have the most visible and highest ranking Latinos in their Creative Team, with Nina Tassler at the helm. This is a very important category that networks need to strive to be inclusive in, as it is this group that can make the biggest impact in regards to diversity on television.

CBS gets an overall grade of a B.

FOX

In recent years FOX has included more Latino regulars on its shows such as "Prison Break," "24" and "Fringe." Amaury Nolasco, for example, thrived in his regular role as a kind-hearted but conflicted young father on "Prison Break," and Carlos Bernard played a regular role on the wildly-popular "24." In addition, FOX has had major success in reality shows such as "American Idol" and "So You Think You Can Dance." This past season we were introduced to Jorge Nuñez and Allison Iraheta on Season 8 of American Idol, this series has launched many promising careers and we are pleased to see Latinos included prominently.

However, FOX continues to falter in providing transparent data in its reports. Although there has been progress throughout the years in the format of its reporting, it is essential that the network have a goal of being as transparent as possible in providing the names of the talent they would like to get credit for.

In the Writers/Producers category, FOX has remained consistent in its total number of American Latino on primetime. Highlights include Manny Coto and Carlos Bernard as executive producers on "24" and Kalinda Vasquez, story editor on "Prison Break" and Valentina Garza story editor on "The Simpsons" As for directors, FOX has the second-highest number of Latinos with, among others, Norberto Barba who directs "Fringe," Juan Campanella, who directs "House," and pioneer Chicano filmmaker Jesús Treviño on "Mental."

We applaud FOX for its inclusion of Latinos in its executive creative team and the network has established a pro-active outreach initiative to recruit Latinos throughout its workforce.

In the last couple of years we have seen great improvement at FOX Television in regards to Latino Americans included in front and behind the camera, however, the network's business procurement efforts continues to lag. It remains with a C- in this category. As such, we will continue to work with the network and closely monitor its efforts in the very important area of business procurement.

FOX'S overall grade remains at B+.

SUMMARY

In summary, the NLMC 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, who are now over 15% of people in this country. The network diversity programs at the time the Memoranda were executed are now bearing fruit and it is reasonable to expect that the present numbers will continue to climb without any backsliding.

An important area that all networks need to look at is casting. During our meetings this year it became apparent that there is a lack of diversity in the casting teams of each of the networks. Predictably, a diverse casting team will be better at reaching people of color through their networks and relationships. We have identified this as an area that requires greater focus, and we look forward to working with the networks in bringing more diversity into their casting teams.

To reiterate what we said last year, we continue our on-going efforts to combat hate speech in the media. In the last couple of years we have seen countless reports of vicious hate crimes against Latinos that result in death and great bodily harm. Indeed, the FBI has reported that there was a 40% increase in hate crimes against Latinos in just the past few years. We are certain that this is a direct result of the “immigration hysteria” fueled by irresponsible TV and radio talk show hosts that spread inaccurate and hateful messages about Latinos. As such, hate speech in the media continues to be an important issue for the NLMC and a top priority for the NHMC. Mainstream media needs to do a better job at covering the stories on hate crimes to raise awareness of this problem. And 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 be a tremendous disservice to Latinos and non-Latinos across the country, who hear anti-Latino speech and may assume the information being disseminated is correct.

We need more Latinos on television and throughout the entertainment industry as well as on 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.

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