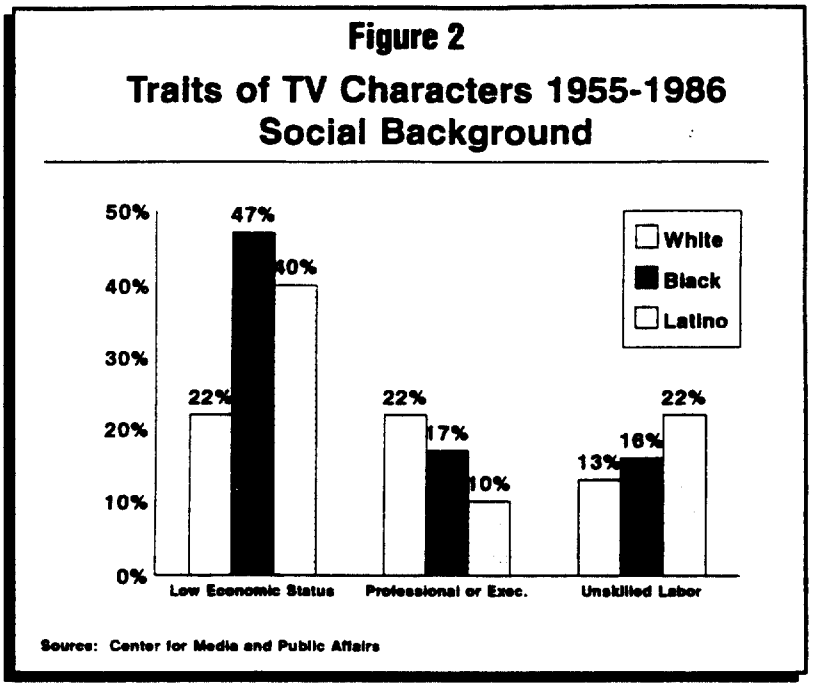
One scholar found cartoon portrayals targeted at children to be particularly offensive. In a 1983 study, for example, Barcus observed that:

> Cartoon comedy programs contain the most blatant ethnic stereotypes. These programs...frequently provide cruel stereotypes of ethnic minorities. And cartoon comedies alone amount to nearly one-half of all program time in children's TV.[29]

One common media stereotype is that Hispanics are poor, of low socioeconomic status, and lazy. The Michigan State study noted that "half [of Hispanic characters] are lazy, and very few show much concern for their futures. Most have had very little education, and their jobs reflect that fact."[30] The Lichters' analysis revealed similar results; according to the Center for Media and Public Affairs, Hispanics on TV in the 1955-86 period were nearly twice as likely as Whites to be of "low socio-economic status," half as likely to be a "professional or executive," and 50% more likely to be portrayed as an "unskilled laborer."[31] (See Figure 2.)



More recent studies suggest that portrayals of Hispanics as poor or lazy have not improved significantly since the 1955-86 period. The Pitzer College study, which examined a week of TV network programming in 1992, showed that 75% of [Hispanic] characters studied were in the lower socioeconomic status category vs. 24% of Blacks and 17% of Whites. According to the study's authors, "In general, African Americans are portrayed positively on prime-time TV.... Latinos were more likely described as powerless and stupid."[32] Given these research findings, it is not surprising that one researcher has concluded that Hispanics and other minorities "have replaced Blacks in the lower social classes on television."[33]

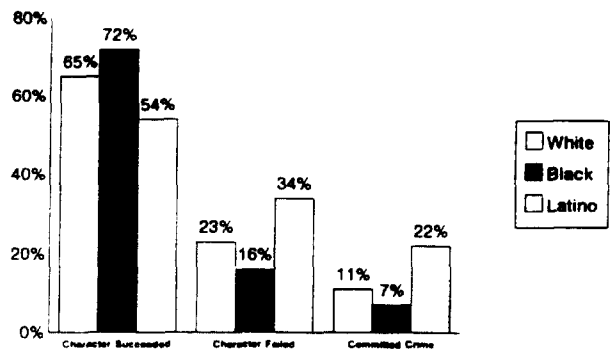
A second common stereotype casts Hispanics as "failures"; the two major studies in the field both confirm the media's tendency to equate Latino characters with a lack of success. According to the Center for Media and Public Affairs, the "failure" rate of Hispanics was more than double that of Blacks and 50% higher than that of Whites during the 1955-86 period. This high failure rate was compounded by a low success rate of Hispanic characters; according to the Lichters' research, Latino characters were less likely to have succeeded in achieving their objectives than either Whites or Blacks.[35] (See Figure 3.) Similarly, the

Annenberg study covering the 1982-92 period found that, in terms of "outcome," Latino/Hispanic and Asian/Pacific American characters have higher relative failure rates than other groups.[36]

Another variant of this theme involves portrayals of Hispanics as people who do not have to be taken seriously. According to the Pitzer College study of the 1992 season, fully 44% of Latinos on TV were "condescended to or patronized" on screen, compared to 30% of Blacks and only 21% of Whites.[37] Yet another variation of the stereotype portrays Hispanics as untrustworthy. Over the 1955-86 period, the Lichters' research found that 20% of Hispanic characters were "deceivers or tricksters," compared to 13% of White characters and 12% of Black characters.[38]

Figure 3

Traits of TV Characters 1955-1986
Plot Functions



Source: Center for Media and Public Affairs

Perhaps no issue has been more explosive — and exploited — in recent years than crime; in fact some political analysts have attributed the outcome of a recent Presidential election in part to a single series of television advertisements. In this context, portrayals of Hispanics as criminals are particularly damaging. The Center for Media and Public Affairs study found that Hispanic characters were twice as likely as Whites, and three times as likely as Blacks, to commit a television crime. Fully 22 percent of Hispanic characters portrayed on TV during the 1955-86 period were criminals, compared to 11% of Whites and only 7% of Blacks. The report noted that "despite being outnumbered three to one, Hispanic characters have committed more violent crimes than Blacks" on television.[39]

In sum, Hispanics in television entertainment programs are both more likely to be portrayed negatively and less likely to be portrayed positively than any other group. In addition, TV portrayals tend to reinforce derogatory stereotypes of Latinos as people who are poor, of low status, lazy, deceptive, and criminals.

2. News

Hispanics appear to have been portrayed negatively in the "objective" news media as well. One of the first studies conducted on Latino portrayals in the news media was a 1969 analysis of Puerto Ricans in the *New York Times* and *New York Post*, which revealed that the English-language dailies showed little interest in Puerto Ricans, who were referred to with negative attributes and covered primarily in terms of their social disadvantages and problems. The authors found that three-fourths of a total of 64 stories dealing with Puerto Ricans centered on intergroup relations and that 85 percent of these were "problem-oriented" stories. The authors concluded that:

> Puerto Ricans are discussed and reported in the English-language press primarily in the context of the problems or difficulties that they pose for Anglo society, whereas their cultural activity and creativity is by and large overlooked.[40]

Hispanics, like other minorities, are highly susceptible to stereotyping by the news media. Journalism scholars Felix Gutierrez and Clint C. Wilson have observed that the coverage of minority issues during the 1970s often focused inordinate attention on the more bizarre or unusual elements of minority communities, such as youth gangs, illegal immigration, or interracial violence (see box). While these are legitimate news topics, the emphasis on such coverage and the near absence of other news stories or dramatic themes involving minorities resulted in a new stereotype of racial minorities as "problem people," groups either beset by problems or causing them for the larger society.[41]

Although there is a paucity of comprehensive survey research in this area, some empirical research has been carried out which verifies the characterization of Hispanics in the news as "problem people." For example, in a 1989 study of the *Albuquerque Journal* and *San Antonio Express-News*, researchers found that although:

> ...Hispanics and Hispanic issues are present in the newspaper newshole in proportion to their presence in the population...; Hispanics were much too prominently reported as 'problem people,' for example, in judicial and crime news and news of riots.[42]

A 1990 San Francisco State University study of local news coverage in the Bay Area found that:

> [P]eople of color, Latinos in particular, were most frequently depicted in crime stories. Conversely, no Latinos were depicted in lifestyle stories, no Asians in business, and no people of color of any stripe in obituaries.

The author, Professor Erna Smith, notes that "the results echo every study of press coverage of non-whites dating back to the 1950s."[43]

The Annenberg study of TV programming over the 1982-92 period found that women make news as government officials and business persons combined 9.9 times as much as in crime-related stories; the ratio for men is 8.2, and for Latinos 5.0. In other words, according to the Annenberg researchers, for one woman in crime news there are 2.6 in business news; for one man in crime news there are 1.7 in business news; but for each Latino in crime news there is only one in business news.[44]

Hispanic TV Stereotypes in the 1980s

Ironically, television's multicultural world of the 1980s provided an updated version of the stereotypical Hispanic banditos who populated the westerns 30 years earlier. Crime shows like Miami Vice, Hill Street Blues, and Hunter presented Hispanic drug lords as a major nemesis. As scriptwriter Ben Stein observed, "any time a Cuban or Colombian crosses the tube, he leaves a good thick trail of cocaine behind."

In a widely noted 1982 episode of Hill Street Blues, Lt. Calletano (the late Rene Enriquez) was chosen by the department as "Hispanic Officer of the Year." At the award banquet, however, the Colombian Calletano was identified as a Puerto Rican, and Mexican food was served. Angered, he launched into a denunciation of continuing prejudice among his self-satisfied co-workers: "I look around this room...and the only other Hispanics I see are waiters and busboys." He might have been speaking on behalf of all Hispanic characters in the television industry.

Sadly, the highest profile Latino characters of the most recent television season have been Eric and Lyle Menendez, whose murder trial was featured in two made-for-television movies.

Source: Center for Media and Public Affairs, *A Tale of Two Minorities*, forthcoming 1994.

Based on these types of studies, Wilson and Gutierrez concluded that in recent years mainstream press reporting has:

> ...emphasized ethnic minorities on "welfare" who live in crime-infested neighborhoods; lack educational opportunity, job skills, and basic language skills; and in the circumstance of Latinos and Southeast Asians, are probably not legitimate U.S. citizens.[45]

These negative portrayals are exacerbated by the fact that they are rarely counter-balanced by Hispanics who appear in more positive settings in the news. As documented above, Latinos are severely underrepresented as spokespersons, expert authorities, or "newsmakers." Thus, rather than helping to overcome the negative image of Latinos fostered by entertainment programming, the news media appear to reinforce this image through often stereotypical news coverage.

D. A Contemporary View

1. Overview

In order to collect the most complete and recent data available, the National Council of La Raza recently commissioned the Center for Media and Public Affairs to conduct a special analysis of two groups of programs aired during the 1992-93 television season. The first set of programs analyzed consists of a sample of network fictional programming; this is es-

Newspaper Coverage Over Three Decades

The NCLR magazine, **Agenda**, published during the 1970s and early 1980s, devoted much space to the issue of Hispanics and the media. Excerpted below is a 1978 article by Felix Gutierrez, then a professor of journalism at California State University at Northridge, which made note of several instances of inaccurate and stereotypical coverage of Hispanics from the nation's top media outlets.

For many years, Chicanos were the "invisible minority" in the news media. When news organizations began to wake up to the existence of Chicanos in the mid-1960s they often rushed to cover the group with simplistic overviews and facile headlines that revealed more of their own biases than the reality of the people they sought to cover.

Francisco J. Lewels, head of the Mass Communication Department of the University of Texas at El Paso, wrote in his 1974 book, *The Use of the Media by the Chicano Movement*:

> Until recently, daily newspapers have given little coverage to the Spanish-speaking community. In the Southwest, Mexican Americans have been traditionally left out of the news columns except when involved in crimes or accidents. In the society pages, Spanish names did not appear unless they were in reference to visiting dignitaries or to the wealthiest Mexican families. In the late 1950s and early 1960s papers began using small pictures of Mexican American brides on the back page of the society section for the first time, but even then, Anglo marriages were given much larger play.
>
> *The Atlantic* headlined a 1967 overview article on Chicanos as "The Minority Nobody Knows," indicating that if the existence of Chicanos was news to the editors of *The Atlantic* it must be news to everyone else who mattered. A *Time* magazine reporter riding through East Los Angeles in 1967 wrote about "tawdry taco joints and rollicking cantinas," the reek of cheap wine," and "lurid hot rods." A 1969 Los Angeles television documentary was titled "The Siesta is Over," implying that the area's two million Chicanos had been taking it easy for decades.
>
> [More recently], a *Washington Post* series on Chicanos (March 20-24, 1978) said the group lives in a part of the United States they call "MexAmerica," the title of the series. The term "MexAmerica" is not used by Chicanos, but was invented by *Washington Post* staffers to catch the eyes of editors and readers.

Source: Agenda: A Journal of Hispanic Issues, November/December 1978

sentially an update of the sample included in the Center's long-term study covering the 1955-86 period. The second set of programs examines two genres that are increasingly popular but rarely analyzed — reality-based shows and first-run syndicated series. The sample was assessed both from the perspective of the extent to which Hispanics appeared in such programming, as well as the types of roles portrayed by Hispanic characters. Summary findings of this special analysis are reported below.[46]

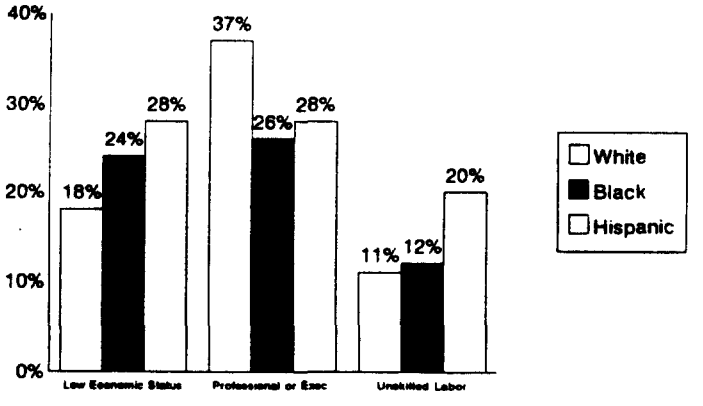
2. Network Fictional Programming

Perhaps the most striking single finding is how little has changed for Latinos in network entertainment in recent years. At a time when Black representation on television nearly *tripled* — from 6% over the 1955-86 period to 17% in 1992-93 — Hispanic portrayals *dropped* from 2% to 1%, according to the Center's study.

From an historical perspective, Black characters were actually less prevalent than Hispanic characters in the 1950s and early 1960s. From 1965 to 1974, Blacks outnumbered Hispanics on television by a two to one margin (6% vs. 3%). However, this gap widened in the 1970s and 1980s, as the Black-to-Hispanic ratio of TV characters grew to more than three to one. By the 1992-93 season, the ratio was a staggering 17 Black characters for every Hispanic character on television.[47]

Figure 4

Traits of TV Characters 1992
Social Background



Source: Center for Media and Public Affairs

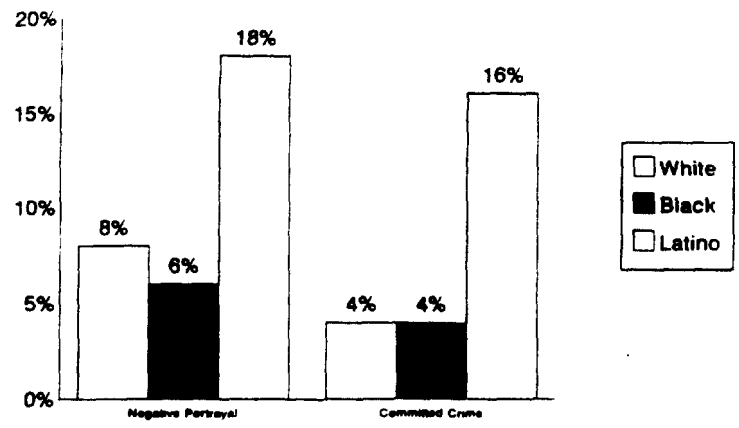
Hispanics also continue to be portrayed in a negative manner on network TV. For example, Latino characters were more likely than either Whites or Blacks to be portrayed as being of low socioeconomic status. At the opposite end of the economic ladder, while almost as many African Americans as Whites are portrayed as being wealthy (16% and 18%, respectively), the proportion of wealthy Hispanics has fallen over the years until none remained in the sample by the 1975-86 period; this lack of Latino representation among the wealthy continued during the 1992-93 period. The one piece of good news revealed by the study is that the proportion of Hispanic characters in professional occupations (25%) equalled that of Blacks (24%), although both minority groups continued to fare less well than Whites (33%) in this respect. (See Figure 4.)

This partial advance notwithstanding, negative portrayals of Hispanics in the 1992-93 season were considerably higher than those of other groups; Latinos were twice as likely as Whites and three times as likely as Blacks to be portrayed in negative roles (18% vs. 8% and 6%, respectively).

Hispanics also continued to portray criminals more frequently than other groups. During the 1992-93 season, Latino characters were four times more likely to commit a crime than were either Whites or Blacks (16% for Latinos vs. 4% for both Whites and Blacks; see Figure 5). Similarly, 9% of Hispanic TV characters engaged in violent behavior — more than double the proportion of Whites and Blacks (4% and 3%, respectively).

Figure 5

Traits of TV Characters 1992
Plot Functions



Source: Center for Media and Public Affairs

3. Syndicated and Reality-Based Programming

Among the fastest-growing and most popular program genres on television are so-called 'reality-based' shows such as *Cops*, and first-run syndicated series such as *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. While such programs may well offer TV viewers greater diversity in some respects, the Center's analysis revealed that, if anything, these shows paint an even more negative portrayal of Latinos than the networks.

For example, out of a total of 472 characters analyzed from a sample of syndicated series, only six or 1% were Hispanics. Although this figure is so low that it limits the researcher's ability to draw statistically reliable inferences, three of the six Hispanic characters were portrayed negatively and two engaged in criminal activity. For comparison purposes, out of the overall sample only about one of five characters were portrayed negatively.

Reality-based shows in the 1992-93 season were notable for containing a relatively

"Law and Order"

Even shows that strive for a socially relevant message can end up reinforcing television's decades-old stereotype of Hispanics as violent criminals. For example, a 1992 episode of *Law and Order* focused on the murder of a wealthy White college co-ed who was beaten to death. Suspicion falls on her Mexican American boyfriend, a scholarship student named Tommy. The defense team tries to portray the boy as the victim of a society that won't admit to its class distinctions and prejudices. Appealing for a verdict of temporary insanity, Tommy's lawyer describes him as a "wetback, a beaner, a greaser..." trying to break into a wealthy Cadillac and country club set. The lawyer argues that he killed his girlfriend when her attempt to leave him activated his pent-up rage against a lifetime of social slights and discrimination. But the Black prosecutor strongly challenges these claims, even criticizing his own White colleagues for going easy on Tommy because of his background. The jury finds Tommy guilty of murder.

Source: Center for Media and Public Affairs, *A Tale of Two Minorities*, forthcoming 1994.

high proportion of Latino characters; unfortunately, nearly half of these characters were criminals. According to the Center's data, Hispanics accounted for eight percent of the characters in these programs. However, a stunning 45% of Latinos portrayed on these shows committed crimes, compared to 10% of the Whites who were shown. Lichter and Amundson conclude that:

> These findings reflect the topical focus of these programs, most of which are real-life cops and robbers shows. For the most part, our study found, they show Whites enforcing the laws and minorities breaking them.[48]

Measured by both the number and proportion of characters, or the quality of roles portrayed, Hispanics on TV network shows appear to have made little progress since the 1950s. In the context of the 1990s, this absence of progress is quite remarkable: it has taken place at a time when Hispanics are among the fastest-growing population groups in the U.S., when rapid demographic change is focusing increasing attention on multicultural themes and issues, and against a backdrop of significant improvement in the proportion and quality of portrayals of African Americans and perhaps other minorities as well. As the Center concluded, "Steppin' Fetchit may be a distant memory, but 'Jose Jimenez' seems alive and well."

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17. Greenberg, Bradley et al., "Local Newspaper Coverage of Mexican Americans," *Journalism Quarterly*, Vol. 60, No. 4, 1983.

18. Internal NCLR analysis previously cited in Claire Gonzales, *The Empty Promise: The EEOC and Hispanics*. Washington, D.C.: National Council of La Raza, 1993. Of some note is the fact that a significant proportion of the articles mentioning Hispanics centered on a single event — a speech by then-President George Bush to the NCLR Annual Conference in July 1990 that focused in part on the pending Civil Rights Act of 1990.

19. Greenberg, Bradley, Michael Burgoon, Judee Burgoon, and Felipe Korzenny, *Mexican Americans and the Mass Media*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishers, 1983.

20. *Minorities and Women on Television: A Study in Casting and Fate, op. cit.*

21. *Ibid.*

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45. *Minorities and Media*, op cit.

46. All data in this section, unless otherwise noted, come from S. Robert Lichter and Daniel R. Amundson, *A Tale of Two Minorities: Black and Hispanic Characters in TV Entertainment*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Media and Public Affairs, and National Council of La Raza, forthcoming 1994.

47. Lichter and Amundson note, however, that Black characters on television are not uniformly distributed. Most Black characters are concentrated on a handful of shows; in 1992, for example, 10 series accounted for nearly two-thirds of all Black characters.

48. The authors note that the reality-based format was the only one in which African Americans fared worse than Hispanics. According to the Lichter analysis, 50% of all Black characters, compared to 45% of all Latino characters, committed crimes in reality-based TV programs.

II. The Impact of Underrepresentation and Negative Portrayals

A. Overview

The combination of severe underrepresentation and negative media portrayals of Hispanics contributes to a decidedly negative image of Latinos within the broader society. Although the precise causal relationships involved remain the subject of considerable academic debate, on balance the research clearly demonstrates that the media coverage and portrayals both foster and reinforce negative public images of Hispanics. Furthermore, in its failure to portray Latinos positively, the media have neglected to take any affirmative steps to reverse negative stereotypes of Hispanics.

The following section describes the theoretical and empirical evidence regarding the overall impact of the media on public attitudes and perceptions; assesses public attitudes toward and opinions of Hispanics; and discusses the larger implications for Latinos and American society.

B. How Media Portrayals Shape Public Attitudes

The question of how and to what extent media portrayals, images, and news coverage affect public opinion, attitudes, and behavior is highly controversial. There is currently, for example, a highly visible public debate regarding the extent to which TV violence can be linked to apparent increases in violent behavior within society in general, and among youth in particular. Similarly, the question of whether — and to what extent — negative and sexist media portrayals of women are related to individual acts of violence against women is a matter of considerable public controversy.

In addition, underlying much of the public debate is a classic "chicken and egg" problem. At one extreme, some argue that the media serve almost exclusively as a "mirror" of society at-large. These observers assert that opinions and behaviors attributed to the media are, in fact, already present in society and are due largely to factors unrelated to media portrayals and coverage. At the opposite extreme, others tend to portray the media as a kind of "magic bullet" which has the ability to consistently and precisely shape opinions and attitudes largely irrespective of other societal or individual factors.

In general, the research demonstrates that, within significant limitations, the media have considerable influence on public opinions and attitudes. These limitations relate principally to how media messages are received and interpreted by different audiences; according to Wilson and Gutierrez:

> Rather than a mere target for a bullet, the mass audience is more accurately described as a complex set of groups and individuals who make selective decisions about which media to use, what information to retain from the media, and how to interpret what they see and remember.... Because of the wide range of social and psychological factors affecting how a person thinks and acts, it is difficult to pinpoint specific effects of media on how people think and act.[1]

Although social science research has yet to definitively answer these questions, a broad consensus appears to be emerging among experts in the field, particularly with respect to media portrayals of minority groups.

Summaries of Theoretical Research

Legitimation Theory

In 1972, the U.S. Surgeon General released a landmark study, *Television and Social Behavior*, which among a number of findings, made the first linkages between viewing violence on television and aggressive behavior. Stanford University Professor Cedric Clark also explored the issue of race and television. Clark noted that in a society as large as the United States, the media confer social "legitimation" in two ways — through recognition and respect. Clark concluded that, through underrepresentation in programming, racial and ethnic minorities were not "recognized" by the media.

Clark argued that minorities are not afforded respect by the media as well, the other key component to legitimation. Respect manifests itself in how behavior is defined, assessed (whether it is "good" or "bad"), and accounted for by the media and the audience. For example, Clark noted that when Indians won a battle, it was termed a "massacre," but when non-Indians won, it was a "victory."

Cultivation Analysis

George Gerbner, of the Annenberg School of Communications' Cultural Indicators Project, posited the "cultivation analysis" theory in the 1972 Surgeon General report. Cultivation analysis recognizes that television has become the primary source of everyday information and socialization, and for many the only source of entertainment and information. Gerbner theorizes that continual, long-term exposure to television's messages reiterates, confirms, and nourishes, in other words "cultivates," its own values and perspectives. Therefore, the more one watches television, the more likely it is that one's opinions and attitudes on certain subjects or groups, such as minorities, are shaped by television. For example, Gerbner noted that there is considerable evidence that heavy exposure to television cultivates exaggerated perceptions of the number of people involved in violence in any given week.

The cultivation process has adversely affected groups who are absent from or portrayed badly on television. In 1980, Gerbner found that television produced no positive images at all of the elderly, and that the more people, especially young people, watch television, the more negatively they perceive the elderly. Heavy viewers were found to believe that the elderly are not adaptable, alert, or competent. In a 1982 report, the Annenberg School expressed concern over the "cultivation of a relatively restrictive view of women's and minority rights among [television] viewers."

The "Drench Hypothesis"

More recently, Michigan State Professor Bradley Greenberg has taken issue with the idea that attitudes and beliefs about minorities gleaned from television are shaped gradually and incrementally. Greenberg notes that there are several examples where one program or series has been compelling, forceful, challenging, dramatic, and/or popular enough to substantially change attitudes. He cites *The Golden Girls* as profoundly changing attitudes towards older women and *The Cosby Show* changing attitudes about African Americans. He contends that media research and advocacy should focus more on critical or influential portrayals than on sheer numbers.

C. Theoretical and Empirical Evidence

A number of media scholars have developed theories regarding how the media shapes public attitudes toward minority groups (see box). While there is disagreement within the scholarly community with respect to precisely how societal perceptions of minorities are shaped by the media, there is widespread

agreement that underrepresentation and negative portrayals of such groups are, in fact, harmful to these groups' public image.

Notwithstanding the continuing theoretical debate on this subject, the weight of the empirical evidence demonstrates quite conclusively that the media have substantial influence in shaping attitudes toward and opinions of minority groups in several key respects. First, researchers have found that media portrayals tend to have their strongest effects in shaping attitudes towards groups, such as minorities, with which the audience has little direct contact or knowledge. According to the American Psychological Association:

> Television portrayals...may cultivate attitudes and beliefs about minorities among the wider population. Images of status inequality can both create and maintain inequality in the broader society. The less real-world information viewers have about a social group, the more apt they are to accept the television image of that group.[2]

In their extensive assessment of televised portrayals of Hispanics, Faber, O'Guinn, and Meyer note that:

> Communications researchers have long believed that an absence of other sources of information can lead to situations where the media have large and powerful effects. Therefore, the members of the host society who have the least direct contact with minority groups may be the most influenced by media portrayals.[3]

Other researchers have linked this overall tendency to public perceptions of the Latino community. For instance, in his overview on Hispanics in the media, University of Texas Professor Federico Subervi explained that:

> ...messages presented by the media may have significant effects on the audience, especially regarding events, topics, and issues about which the audience has no direct knowledge or experience. Thus, for millions of people in this country, a significant part of the information they receive and the notions they develop about Hispanics may often be products of mass media messages.[4]

This phenomenon appears to have particular influence on children and young adults. For example, in an American Jewish Committee survey of several hundred high school students in New York City, the Lichters note that television exercises its greatest influence on:

> ...those who do not hold strong opinions or who have no opinion or information about a particular subject. In dealing with socially relevant topics like racial and ethnic relations, TV not only entertains, it conveys values and messages that people may absorb unwittingly. This is particularly the case with young people.[5]

UCLA Professor Gordon Berry, in his review of research done on children and multicultural portrayals on television, found that, "children's beliefs and feelings about [isolated] minority groups frequently are influenced by the way they are portrayed on television.[6] A study by University of Wisconsin Professor Blake Armstrong and Cleveland State University Kimberly Neuendorf confirms the point. In a survey of

several hundred college students from 1980-86, they determined that the level of media exposure of White college students strongly influenced their beliefs about the social and economic standing of Black and White Americans, particularly among those students who have had few opportunities for direct interracial contact.[7]

Second, expert opinion and empirical research confirms that the media play a powerful role in reinforcing pre-existing stereotypes. After reviewing a number of research studies on this question, Wilson and Gutierrez determined that:

> ...the studies that have been done show that negative, one-sided, or stereotyped media portrayals and news coverage do reinforce racist attitudes in those members of the audience who have such attitudes and can channel mass actions against the group that is stereotypically portrayed. The studies also show that bigoted persons watching television programs ridiculing bigotry interpret such programs as reinforcing their pre-existing beliefs.[8]

Similarly, in a study of high school students in New York City, the American Jewish Committee found that although television has no magical power to change firmly-held beliefs, it can powerfully reinforce stereotypical attitudes about minorities that are already held by the audience.[9]

Empirical research has shown that television exposure can lead to the development and strengthening of stereotypes, particularly with audiences that have minimal direct contact with or knowledge of Latinos and other minority groups. For example, in a report on children and gender stereotypes, researchers from Georgetown University and the University of Kansas examined a series of studies and found they support the premise that heavy television exposure is associated with high levels of gender stereotyping. Elementary school children who remained heavy viewers over time became increasingly "gender-typed," while those who were stable light viewers became less "gender-typed."[10]

Third, there is considerable evidence that media portrayals can have the effect of reducing certain stereotypes, apparently confirming the role the media can play in counter-acting pre-existing beliefs. Furthermore, the evidence strongly suggests that positive media portrayals of minorities can change attitudes and beliefs of non-minorities. In an evaluation of the show, *Freestyle*, Johnston and Ettema indicated that children who watched the series had less stereotyped views about appropriate behavior for girls and boys than nonviewers and were more tolerant of nontraditional activities, occupations, and family roles.[11] Similar results were reported by Davidson, Yasuno, and Tower, who found that five- to six-year-old girls who saw a cartoon showing women as good athletes subsequently gave less-stereotyped responses on a gender attitudes measurement than those who saw a neutral or gender-stereotyped cartoon.[12]

Another example involves educational programs such as *Sesame Street*, which appear to have generated more positive attitudes of Blacks and Latinos in White children. In a study of children's viewing habits, Hunter College Professor Sherryl Browne Graves found that there was a positive attitude change for Black children who saw any type of portrayal of Blacks and for the White children who saw a positive portrayal. However, White children exposed to a negative portrayal changed the most and in a negative direction. Overall, Graves stated "these results suggest that while the mere presence of Black TV characters may have a positive impact on Black children, the type of characterization of Blacks is critical in terms of the potential negative impact on White children."[13]

Based on their college student survey, Armstrong and Neuendorf found that, on the one hand, the greater the amount of television entertainment exposure students had, the better off economically they

thought Blacks were as compared to Whites.[14] On the other hand, the greater the amount of TV news exposure the students had, the lower they perceived Black socioeconomic status relative to those of Whites. These beliefs are completely consistent with television portrayals of African Americans during this period.[15]

Thus, the research shows that the media play an influential role in shaping public perceptions of groups like Hispanics with which non-Hispanics have little contact. The research further demonstrates that the media play an even more important role in reinforcing pre-existing negative stereotypes of Latinos and other minorities. Taken together, these studies strongly suggest that current public perceptions of Latinos are at least partially attributable to media images and portrayals, which in the case of Hispanics are overwhelmingly negative. Moreover, a number of empirical studies show that positive portrayals of minority groups can partially reverse pre-existing negative images, suggesting that the media's failure to portray Latinos in positive roles — or to even include Hispanics at all — has at a minimum resulted in many lost opportunities that could have been used to improve the Latino community's public image. The extent of the damage to the image of the Hispanic community — as measured by research on public perceptions of Latinos — is discussed below.

D. The Extent of the Damage: Public Perceptions of Latinos

Extensive public opinion research has documented public attitudes towards Latinos in the United States. These data demonstrate that non-Hispanics are largely ignorant of the condition of Hispanic Americans. Furthermore, the data show that non-Latinos have extremely negative views of Hispanics, views that are often wildly inconsistent with the facts. Finally, the research suggests that public perceptions of Hispanics are remarkably similar to stereotypical media portrayals of Latinos.

Recent research shows that non-Hispanics are strikingly unaware of the facts regarding the status of Latinos in this country. The most compelling evidence on this point comes from a massive opinion poll conducted for the National Conference (formerly the National Conference on Christian and Jews), which was released in 1994. According to the National Conference Survey on Inter-group Relations, 65% of Whites feel that Latinos have equal opportunities to obtain a quality education, 57% believe that Hispanics have an equal chance to get skilled jobs, 55% perceive that Latinos receive an equal opportunity to obtain decent housing where they want to live, 55% feel that Hispanics have the same chance as Whites to obtain equal justice under the law, and 54% believe that Latinos are offered equal pay for the same work as Whites. By 46% to 41%, a plurality of Whites feel that Latinos can get equal treatment as Whites in obtaining credit loans and mortgages.[16]

These perceptions are substantially at odds with the latest social science research. The data clearly demonstrate that Latinos receive unequal educational opportunities,[17] experience enormous levels of discrimination in the labor market,[18] encounter massive levels of housing discrimination,[19] are likely to receive disproportionately greater sentences than non-Hispanics in the criminal justice system,[20] fail to obtain equal pay for equal work,[21] and are less likely to obtain mortgages than equally- or less-qualified White loan applicants.[22]

Commenting on their findings, the authors of the survey concluded that:

> A serious problem for Latinos emerges in the relatively low 51% of non-Latinos who feel that this group really suffers from discrimination.... Substantial numbers (of non-Latinos) feel that Latinos are paid as well for the same work as Whites. The facts, directly from the Census, of course, sharply

> contradict this assessment, graphically showing that Latinos receive more than one-third less compensation for comparable work to Whites. Clearly, the facts about discrimination against Latinos are not well known in non-Latino America, especially among Whites and Asians.[23]

Other opinion research shows that the perception of Hispanics by non-Latinos is not only inaccurate, it is overwhelmingly negative. For example, in a 1989 survey for the American Jewish Committee focusing on the perceived 'social standing' of 58 different ethnic groups, Hispanic groups including Mexicans, Guatemalans, Nicaraguans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans were ranked forty-ninth or lower; only Gypsies were ranked below Mexicans and Puerto Ricans. In fact, a fictitious group ("Wysians") was ranked above five Latino subgroups in the survey.[24]

Similarly, a December 1990 National Opinion Research Center poll examined public opinions and perceptions of six major American cultural groups — Whites, Jews, Blacks, Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Southern Whites. The survey showed that Hispanic Americans are ranked last or next to last on almost every characteristic measured (wealth, work ethic, violence, intelligence, dependency, and patriotism). Over 80% of respondents rated Hispanic Americans lower than Whites on one or more of the six characteristics.[25] In commenting on the findings, one Hispanic leader wrote:

> We have learned from public opinion polls that many of our fellow Americans perceive Latinos to be lazy [and unpatriotic].... It is ironic that a community with proportionately more Congressional Medal of Honor winners than any other ethnic group is considered unpatriotic; [and] that a group with the highest male labor force participation rate is seen as lazy....[26]

In sum, in part because many non-Hispanics receive most of their information about Latinos through the media, or because stereotypical media images reinforce pre-existing prejudices against Hispanics, or because the media have failed to accurately counteract negative perceptions of Latinos through accurate and positive portrayals, the Hispanic community has an extraordinarily negative image in the eyes of most Americans. Some of the consequences this negative image has for Hispanic Americans are explored in the following section.

E. Implications

Although media portrayals are not entirely responsible for the largely inaccurate and negative perceptions of Hispanics by much of American society, the evidence demonstrates that the media plays an important role in shaping that image in at least two important respects. The overwhelmingly negative and stereotypical media image of Hispanics both contributes to the formation of negative public perceptions of Latinos and reinforces pre-existing Hispanic stereotypes. In addition, the failure to balance these negative portrayals with positive Latino role models or accurate information about the condition of Hispanics, promotes opinions about Hispanics that are inconsistent with the facts.

The inaccurate and stereotypical image of Hispanic Americans portrayed by the media is disturbing on many levels. Not only does it undermine the character and reputation of the 25 million Americans who will soon become the nation's largest ethnic minority, it also has harmful and tangible implications for Latinos and the entire society.

One tangible effect of the perpetration of Hispanic stereotypes is increased discrimination. To the extent that the stereotype of Latinos as lazy, untrustworthy, unintelligent, unpatriotic, and violent is widespread, it is not unreasonable to expect that such attitudes would stimulate behavioral responses by those who hold such beliefs. The existence and propagation of these stereotypes is particularly important at a time when overtly or blatantly discriminatory attitudes are increasingly socially undesirable, because the stereotypes provide socially "acceptable" excuses for such discrimination.

Researchers who study the nature of discrimination have described the phenomenon of "aversive racists," i.e., people who, like most Americans, believe themselves to be free of prejudice but who act in ways that are unquestionably discriminatory. After analyzing a series of behavioral experiments involving word-association tests, mock jury trials, and employee performance evaluations, a Colgate University research team found that factors such as language, speech accent, and culture — characteristics that are often emphasized by media stereotypes — frequently explain discriminatory behavior toward Latinos. According to the researchers:

> In situations in which...a negative response can be justified or rationalized on the basis of some factor other than race, sex or ethnicity, the negative beliefs and feelings will be expressed; under these conditions, aversive racists will discriminate against traditionally disadvantaged groups, but subtly and in ways that will not challenge their non-prejudiced self-concepts.[27]

Moreover, empirical research has begun to establish clear causal links between employer stereotypes regarding ethnicity and race and unlawful, discriminatory practices by such employers. For example, a 1989 University of Chicago study based on a series of interviews with 185 employers in Chicago found that 70% of those surveyed made distinctions among employees based on racial and ethnic stereotypes. According to these employers, Blacks and Hispanics were viewed as "lower class" and thus less desirable employees, regardless of their actual personal social and economic characteristics. The study confirmed the tendency of employers to generalize about racial and ethnic employees, and to rely on these generalizations in their hiring practices.[28]

Another study by University of Puerto Rico Psychology Professor Alba Rivera-Ramos has documented the existence of a number of negative stereotypes concerning the attributes of productivity of Puerto Rican women, and the harmful effects of such perceptions on their employment opportunities.[29]

A second perhaps less tangible but no less important result of the media's treatment of Latinos is that it severely undermines the ability and the likelihood of the general public and policy makers to identify appropriate public policies to address Hispanic concerns. This phenomenon takes place at many levels. On one level, the underrepresentation of Latinos in the media and the failure to cover Hispanic themes and perspectives effectively prevents such issues from even reaching the policy arena. It is highly unlikely, for example, for the public or policy makers to understand the need to address widespread employment or housing discrimination against Latinos if the media fail to report — and thus the public fails to perceive — that such discrimination is a serious problem.

On another level, negative media portrayals of Hispanics tend to undercut public support for policies to address such concerns when they do become the focus of policy debates. This is especially true at a time when, as discussed above, much of the basis for discrimination — which presumably affects attitudes toward public policy proposals — is far more subtle than in the past. For example, media scholar Erna Smith has noted that:

> Most social scientists agree that the media can influence racial attitudes by reinforcing racial fears. Recent studies suggest a link between news coverage and the modern racist, who believes discrimination is a thing of the past, and that any problems...non-Whites face in American society are of their own making.[30]

Ironically then, the very phenomenon that stimulates discriminatory behavior — the absence and stereotypical portrayals of Latinos — tends to undermine public support for policy interventions to address such discrimination. On yet another, perhaps even more subtle level the virtual absence of Latino "newsmakers" in broadcast news documented by the Annenberg School study has another powerful effect — it undermines the credibility and prestige of Hispanics seeking to influence public policy. According to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights:

> Television not only reports on the events of the day but also plays a role in setting the national agenda. In addition, it confers status and importance on those individuals and events that make the news.... Mass media audiences draw the following conclusions about those selected by the press, radio, and television: 'If you really matter, you will be at the focus of mass attention, and if you are at the focus of mass attention, then surely you must really matter.'[31]

This phenomenon is furthered by the media's tendency to cite non-Hispanics more frequently than Hispanics, even in news coverage of stories with predominantly Latino themes. To much of society, then, the media's message is: "Hispanic issues rarely matter, and even when they do, Hispanics' perspectives on these issues don't matter much."

It is unfortunate that the public image of Latinos remains both negative and inaccurate. It is a serious problem when many current public policy debates affecting Hispanics are so badly skewed by inadequate and negative media coverage. What is perhaps even more frightening is that these effects are likely to last long into the future. The finding that those who have limited contact with Hispanics, particularly children, are especially likely to be influenced by media portrayals is extremely disturbing at a time of growing school segregation; recent social science research has found that Latinos are the most "racially isolated" ethnic group in the country.[32] Furthermore, non-Hispanic children not only have limited contact with their Latino peers, it is highly unlikely that they have much exposure to adult Hispanics due to the severe underrepresentation of Hispanic school teachers and administrators; according to the latest statistics, Hispanics constitute less than 3% of all teachers and administrators.[33]

Finally, there is some support in the research for the belief — long-held by some Latino leaders — that the media are contributing to negative self-images within the Latino community itself, particularly among Latino youth. This belief is based on several factors. First, research demonstrates that because they are heavy television viewers, Hispanic children may be unduly influenced by what they see on television. In one study of 5th and 10th graders in six southwestern cities, Latino youngsters consistently reported that they watch more television than do other youth — before school, after school, and before going to bed. Moreover, according to this study, 48% of the Hispanic children believed that what they see on television is "true," compared to 41% of the White children.[34] The Lichters in the 1988 American Jewish Committee study of high school students reported similar results.[35]

Second, at least one major study found that Latino children had more positive opinions of Hispanic media portrayals than were warranted by the portrayals themselves. In their study of several 5th and 10th graders in the Southwest, Greenberg and his colleagues unexpectedly found more positive responses from Hispanic youngsters regarding newspaper and television portrayals of their own ethnic group than from White children. While both groups agreed that there were more negative than positive portrayals of Hispanics in the media, the Hispanic children judged the images to be more positive than did the White youngsters.[36]

Although there are many possible explanations for this phenomenon,[37] perhaps the clearest and most salient is what sociologists refer to as "internalized oppression," the condition that occurs when media portrayals encourage disadvantaged groups to accept the "superiority" of their oppressors. Other studies have found similar counterintuitive results in other areas that could be explained by the same phenomenon. For example, both the National Conference and the Latino National Political Survey report that although Hispanic respondents believe that Latinos as a group encounter discrimination, the proportion of Hispanic respondents who agree with this statement, or of those who report personal incidents of bias are lower than the social science research would suggest.[38]

Again, although other factors could account for this disparity,[39] the evidence is consistent with the notion that irrespective of the social science research and even their own personal experiences, some Latinos are "conditioned" by the media to either accept discrimination or to deny its existence entirely. It is truly ironic that, as seen above, media images both encourage discrimination and discourage appropriate responses to such discrimination on the part of the broader, non-Hispanic society; it would be an even crueler irony if those same media images also led Latinos to accept such discrimination. Thus, some incidents of bias may be the result of both the perpetrator and the victim of discrimination "acting out" a media-induced self-fulfilling prophecy. One Hispanic leader has explained it this way:

> [Media coverage] can condition a supervisor to pass over a Latino in favor of an Anglo, because media stereotypes have taught the supervisor to expect neither too much initiative nor too much resentment from his Latino employee. On the other hand, Latinos have been conditioned not to expect to much from employers. The prophesies fulfill themselves....[40]

The relative absence and the negative portrayals of Hispanics in the entertainment and news media have powerful and profound — if not precisely quantifiable — effects. Media images directly foster and reinforce stereotypes that form the basis for discrimination. They undermine public understanding and support for policy interventions to address such discrimination and other Latino concerns, and may continue to do so far into the future due to their disproportionate influence on children. And they may even have the effect of distorting Hispanics' perception of themselves and their own community.

This situation is not only harmful to the Latino community, but has serious implications for the broader society at well. As a previous NCLR report noted:

> Hispanics will account for more than one-fifth of all new workers between 1984 and 2000, and a growing percentage in the early decades of the 21st century. As the White population ages, minorities — especially Hispanics — are becoming an increasingly large segment of the workforce.... [Improving the condition of] Hispanics can no longer be viewed as merely addressing a "special interest"; clearly, it is in the national interest.[41]

As the data reported and analyzed in this section demonstrate, prospects for improving the condition of the Hispanic community are endangered by the media's treatment of Latinos. All Americans thus have a shared interest in reversing the negative media image of Hispanics. The following section addresses the challenges that need to be overcome in order to do so, as well as recommendations for increasing the proportion of and improving the status of Hispanic media portrayals.

Endnotes

1. Wilson, Clint and Felix Gutierrez, *Minorities and Media*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1985.

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5. Lichter, S. Robert and Linda Lichter, *Television's Impact on Ethnic and Racial Images: A Study of Howard Beach Adolescents*. New York, NY: American Jewish Committee, 1988.

6. Berry, Gordon L., "Multicultural Portrayals on Television as a Social Psychological Issue," in Berry L. Gordon and Joy Keiko Asamen, *Children and Television: Images in a Changing Sociocultural World*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1993.

7. Armstrong, G. Blake and Kimberly A. Neuendorf, "TV Entertainment, News, and Racial Perceptions of College Students," *Journal of Communication*, Summer 1992.

8. *Minorities and Media, op. cit.*

9. *Television's Impact on Ethnic and Racial Images: A Study of Howard Beach Adolescents, op. cit.*

10. Calvert, Sandra L. and Althea Huston, "Television and Children's Gender Schemata," *New Directions in Child Development*, No. 38, Winter 1987.

11. Johnston, J. and J.S. Ettema, *Positive Images: Breaking Stereotypes with Children's Television*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1982.

12. Davidson, E.S., A. Yasuno, and A. Tower, "The Effects of Television Cartoons on Sex-Role Stereotyping in Young Girls," *Child Development*, Vol. 50, 1979.

13. Graves, Sherryl Browne, "Television, the Portrayal of African Americans, and the Development of Children's Attitudes," in *Children and Television: Images in a Changing Sociocultural World, op. cit.*

14. *TV Entertainment, News, and Racial Perceptions of College Students, op. cit.*

15. See, for example, S. Robert Lichter, Linda Lichter, and Stanley Rothman, *Watching America*. New York, NY: Prentice Hall Press, 1991.

16. Harris, Louis, *Taking America's Pulse: The National Conference Survey on Inter-Group Relations*. New York: National Conference, 1994. Notably, the survey found virtually even divisions of opinion in four areas: by 46% to 44% pluralities, Whites feel that Latinos do not receive "equal opportunities" and do not have an equal chance to be promoted into managerial jobs; a 45% to 43% plurality believes that Hispanics do not have fair and unbiased media portrayals; and a 45% to 44% plurality feels that Latinos are not treated equally by the police.

17. See, for example, Denise De La Rosa, and Carlyle Maw, *Hispanic Education: A Statistical Portrait, 1990*. Washington, D.C.: National Council of La Raza, 1990. The 109-page report concludes that:

> By any standard, Hispanics are the least educated population in the United States; Hispanic students are more likely to be enrolled below grade level, more likely to drop out, less likely to enroll in college, and less likely to receive a college degree than any other group.... Increasing school segregation and disparities in school financing systems combine to produce a second-class education even for those Hispanics who manage to complete high school.... Moreover, the educational disadvantages facing Hispanics are widespread, and occur in every region of the country and across all Hispanic subgroups.

18. See, for example, Claire Gonzales, *The Empty Promise: The EEOC and Hispanics.* Washington, D.C.: National Council of La Raza, 1993. The report cites extensive social science research, including results of "hiring audits" which document extensive labor market discrimination against Latinos. Two hiring audits showed that more than *one in five* Hispanic job applicants encountered discrimination by employers.

19. See, for example, "Fact Sheet on Hispanics and Housing," National Council of La Raza, 1994. The Fact Sheet reports the findings of the *Housing Discrimination Study*, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, which showed that Hispanic renters and homebuyers were likely to encounter discrimination in *more than one-half* of their encounters with landlords and real estate agents.

20. See, for example, "The Death Penalty and Hispanics," National Council of La Raza, April 1986. The Issue Brief summarizes several studies regarding unequal sentencing outcomes for Latinos.

21. *The Empty Promise, op. cit.* According to an NCLR analysis described in the report, employment discrimination accounts for perhaps $11.7 billion in lost wages to the Hispanic community each year.

22. See "Fact Sheet on Hispanics and Housing," *op. cit.* According to analyses of the 1990 Home Mortgage Disclosure Act (HMDA) data:

> ...within each income category and for every type of loan — government-backed, conventional, refinancing, home improvement — Hispanics were significantly less likely to receive loan approvals than Whites with similar incomes. In fact, a greater percentage of **low-income** Whites obtained conventional mortgage loans than **moderate-income** Hispanics. Furthermore, **low-income** Whites had significantly greater approval rates than **upper-income** Hispanics for refinancing and home improvement loans.

23. *Ibid.*

24. Smith, Tom W., *Working Papers on Contemporary Anti-Semitism: What Do Americans Think About Jews?* New York, NY: American Jewish Committee, December 1991.

25. Smith, Tom. W., *Ethnic Images*, General Social Survey Topical Report No. 19, National Opinion Research Center. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, December 1990.

26. The statement comes from Raul Yzaguirre in the Foreword to the report, *State of Hispanic America 1991: An Overview.* Washington, D.C.: National Council of La Raza, 1992.

27. Dovidio, John F. et al., "Cognitive and Motivational Bases of Bias," in Stephen B. Couse, Paul Rosenfeld, and Amy L. Culbertson, eds., *Hispanics in the Workplace*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1992.

28. Kirshenman, Joleen and Kathryn M. Neckerman, "'We'd Love to Hire Them, But...': The Meaning of Race for Employers," in Christopher Jencks and Paul E. Peterson, eds., *The Urban Underclass*. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1991.

29. Rivera-Ramos, Alba N., "The Psychological Experience of Puerto Rican Women at Work," in *Hispanics in the Workplace*, *op. cit.*

30. Smith, Erna, "The Color of the News," in Don Hazen, ed. *Inside the L.A. Riots*. New York: Institute for Alternative Journalism, 1992.

31. U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Window Dressing on the Set: Women and Minorities in Television*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1977.

32. Orfield, Gary, *The Growth of Segregation in American Schools: Changing Patterns of Separation and Poverty Since 1968*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 1994. In addition, even those non-Hispanic children who attend integrated schools are unlikely to have much contact with Latinos due to extensive "within-school" discrimination. See, for example, U.S. General Accounting Office, *Within-School Discrimination: Inadequate Title VI Enforcement by the Office of Civil Rights*. Washington, D.C.: July 1991.

33. These studies are reported in *Hispanic Education: A Statistical Portrait. 1990*, *op. cit.* Even these data may overstate the extent of contact that non-Latino children may have with Hispanic teachers and administrators who are typically overrepresented in courses and tracks in which Latino children are concentrated.

34. Greenberg, Bradley, Michael Burgoon, Judee Burgoon, and Felipe Korzenny, *Mexican Americans and the Mass Media*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishers, 1983.

35. *Television's Impact on Ethnic and Racial Images: A Study of Howard Beach Adolescents*, *op. cit.*

36. *Mexican Americans and the Mass Media*, *op. cit.*

37. For example, the authors posit that a greater proportion of positive portrayals that might be found on Spanish-language television, which was not included in the study, could explain some of the disparity. The authors further hypothesized that traditionally underrepresented groups such as Latinos might be so desperate to see themselves on television that they will positively judge *any* portrayals.

38. *Taking America's Pulse*, *op. cit.* The National Conference survey found bare majorities of Latinos who believe that Hispanics encounter significant discrimination. See also, Rodolfo de la Garza et al., *Latino Voices: Mexican, Puerto Rican, & Cuban Perspectives on American Politics*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992. The survey found that, although most Latino groups encounter "a lot" or "some" discrimination, relatively small numbers reported personal encounters with discrimination.

39. These other explanations could include, for example, lack of knowledge regarding the types of acts that constitute unlawful discrimination, or a reluctance to report discrimination due to psychological or cultural factors. For a discussion of these factors, see "Testimony of Raul

Yzaguirre on the Fair Housing Act of 1987," *Senate Hearings*, Subcommittee on the Constitution, Committee on the Judiciary, March 31, 1987. See also, Mali Michelle Fleming, "The Faces of Discrimination," *Hispanic*, June 1994.

40. Yzaguirre, Raul, "Stereotypes: Self-Fulfilling Images," *Agenda: A Journal of Hispanic Issues*, National Council of La Raza, January/February 1978.

41. *Hispanic Education: A Statistical Portrait, 1991, op. cit.*

III. Challenges

A. Overview

As the evidence cited above shows, the problem of underrepresentation and negative media portrayals of Latinos is not a new one; Hispanic scholars, leaders, and organizations have long decried the problem (see box). The persistence, indeed, the deterioration of the situation in many respects over the past 30 years suggests that powerful institutionalized conditions, both within and outside the media establishment, contribute to the problem; some of these institutions and conditions are briefly assessed below.

First, conditions within the industry, particularly with respect to employment of Latinos, are examined. A major institutional challenge to the media within every industry and at all levels of each industry is the virtual invisibility of Latinos in employment overall, and particularly in positions of power. This is more than just an equal employment opportunity issue. Without increases in Hispanic employment at every level in every industry, the internal advocacy for — and the technical and cultural capacity to produce and sustain — more accurate, sensitive, and non-stereotypical Latino media portrayals simply will not exist.

Second, institutions within and outside the industry that might be expected to help address the situation are identified and discussed. With rare exceptions, the evidence demonstrates that such "watchdog" institutions, including those within the media, independent public interest groups, and government agencies have all failed to demonstrate a sustained interest in monitoring Latino media portrayals. Unless these institutions begin to take a more active role in promoting a greater number of, and more accurate, portrayals of Hispanics in the media, improvements in Hispanics' media image are unlikely.

NCLR on the Media

The media simply do not deal with Latino issues. If there is no media coverage, then one may well conclude that there are no problems. If there are no problems then it follows that there is no need to evolve any solutions.... The media in general and the movie industry in particular, with an able assist from television broadcasts of movies, constantly portray Latinos in negative stereotypes.... The images hurt. But much more than wounded pride is at stake. The distortions create the attitudes that are the basis for discrimination.

Raul Yzaguirre, *Agenda* Magazine,
January/February 1978

Consciously and unconsciously, viewers tend to adopt many of the perspectives presented on the screen, and to see the nation as it is portrayed not only on the evening news but also in situation comedies, detective shows, and other fictional programming. It is widely accepted — at least by experts in the field — that the current portrayals of minorities tend to reinforce ethnic and cultural stereotypes. Hispanics have been severely victimized by such portrayals.... Hispanics rarely appear on prime time television, and when they do, they are usually cast as low status persons, figures of fun, or juvenile delinquents.

Raul Yzaguirre, testimony before the House
Subcommittee on Telecommunications,
September 1983

A 1987 [television] study concluded that...Hispanics are the only group with a mainly negative TV image. We believe that three years later this problem has gotten worse and, for a number of reasons, we feel this negative trend is likely to continue if left unchecked.... The growing media focus on illegal immigration, the 'underclass,' and the drug problem presents both a danger of perpetuating the inaccurate and negative stereotypes of Hispanics, as well as the opportunity to improve the portrayals of Hispanics by the media.

Raul Yzaguirre, letter to
Congressman Don Edwards,
May 15, 1990

B. Underrepresentation in Employment

As bleak as the picture is for on-screen employment and portrayals of Hispanics in the motion picture and broadcast industries, the situation for behind-the-scenes Hispanics is even worse. Within the entertainment industry, for example, Hispanics are most notable by their absence as producers, writers, and