

TV's Hispanic heritage (clockwise from center): Arnaz; Prinze (with Jack Albertson); a *Death Valley Days* actor, circa 1953; *Zorro's* Guy Williams (born Armando Catalano); and singer Charo

PHOTO COLLAGE: MARGARET REISZ; CLOCKWISE FROM CENTER: TV GUIDE ARCHIVES (2); PHOTOFEST (3)

BY JOSEPH HANANIA

WHITE OUT: LATINOS ON TV

The biggest Spanish-speaking star on TV these days doesn't play a doctor, a lawyer, or even a streetwise criminal. Her expressive eyes are unmistakable, her line readings hilarious. And she has the best sheen since Lassie: Such is the sorry state of Latinos on network television that the most recognizable Spanish accent belongs to the Taco Bell Chihuahua.

Infuriated by the absence of minority stars on the 26 new network shows premiering this fall, an alliance of Latino groups (including the National Hispanic Foundation for the Arts and the National Council of La Raza) is calling for a "brownout" during the week of September 12, urging Hispanic viewers to tune out the four major networks. The boycott,

Part 1 of a two-part series

WHERE ARE PRIME TIME'S HEIRS TO DESI ARNAZ? FREDDIE PRINZE? OUTRAGED HISPANIC VIEWERS ARE DEMANDING ANSWERS, AND NETWORKS ARE FEELING THE PRESSURE



which follows recent protests by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, is the opening salvo in what promises to be a hard-fought campaign to pressure the networks into better representing the country's fastest-growing population.

"They say Latino shows don't really sell," says actor Edward James Olmos, an outspoken member of Hollywood's Hispanic community. "But it's got everything to do with marketing. The person who does finally get [a Latino-based series] on the air will become a hero to all of us."

For now, such heroes are

which has publicly defended its minority track record, has cast Latino actor Cristián de la Fuente as Dixie Carter's assistant—and potential love interest—on the upcoming drama *Family Law*.

"We are developing a number of Latino-based projects," says Leslie Moonves, CBS Television president. "I think we're doing better than our competitors. We still can do better." Doug Herzog, president of entertainment for Fox Group, echoes Tarses's argument, noting that even though Fox's upcoming season might not be as ethnically diverse as in past years ("Things are cyclical in this business," he says), the network

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hard to come by. The Latino profile on TV

has always been limited to a few prominent exceptions—Desi Arnaz on *I Love Lucy*, Freddie Prinze on *Chico and the Man*—and such groundbreakers have had little effect on changing that landscape. Today's Latino TV stars could be counted on two hands, with fingers to spare (*Jesse*'s Bruno Campos, *Chicago Hope*'s Hector Elizondo, *That '70s Show*'s Wilmer Valderrama and *Nash Bridges*' Cheech Marin and Jaime P. Gomez, among the very few). And with the departures of two major Hispanic leading men from prime time (*NYPD Blue*'s Jimmy Smits and *Law & Order*'s Benjamin Bratt), the networks are scrambling to broaden their ethnic spectrums. Several new supporting roles for minority actors have been added to prime-time lineups, including a Latino character (played by Jon Huertas) on ABC's *Sabrina, the Teenage Witch*. "There are other [shows] where we're making that exact same effort," promises Jamie Tarses, president of ABC Entertainment. CBS,

maintains a "fairly decent representation" of on-air minorities.

But virtually every network executive interviewed for this article concedes there is vast room for improvement. Says Garth Ancier, president of NBC Entertainment, "It's an area that needs to be addressed." The Latino audience, he continues, "is not being served on television very well by any of the networks." But Ancier adds that NBC's dramas have done a "good job" of casting Latinos—he cites former soap actor Eddie Cibrian on the upcoming *Third Watch*—and says that he would like to develop a Hispanic family series. "I know some of the talent deals that we are making," he says. "It is certainly not a lily-white list of talent."

Veteran executive producer Dick Wolf, who is white, says the newfound focus on Latino audiences and actors is long overdue, despite his own efforts to cast Latino actors in his shows (Lauren

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ON video

BY ELEANOR RINGEL GILLESPIE



Diagnosis Murderer

Though it may suffer from comparisons to HBO's

The Sopranos, "Analyze This" (Warner, available now) has an awful lot of fun with the odd coupling of a Mob boss (Robert De Niro, left) coping with panic attacks and the mild-mannered New York shrink (Billy Crystal, right) who treats him.

Crystal also has a wedding and an impatient fiancée (Lisa Kudrow) to worry about, but the core of this comedy is the opposites-attract chemistry between Crystal and De Niro. Pushing his client to get in touch with his inner wise guy, Crystal is professionally reassuring and scared out of his wits.

Meanwhile, De Niro delivers a pitch-perfect parody of

a De Niro gangster role. Consider "Analyze This" good therapy for couch potatoes during the dog days of summer.

Four East End lads have one week to pay off a debt in "Lock, Stock and Two

Smoking Barrels" (USA Home Entertainment, now), a whip-smart lark from Great Britain that piles on the characters, co-incidences and plot twists until your head is spinning. But you'll probably be too busy laughing to worry if you're up to speed.

Eleanor Ringel Gillespie reviews movies for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

quicktakes

- "Edtv" (Universal, now) OK, so "The Truman Show" did it first and better. Ron Howard's film still has its moments. Matthew McConaughey stars as a regular joe who agrees to have his life televised 24/7 by a cable network.
- "Go" (Columbia TriStar, August 24) From Doug Liman, the director of "Swingers," comes this energetic ensemble comedy that

ping-pongs from a botched drug deal to a Vegas road trip to a very unusual dinner party.

- "The Dreamlife of Angels" (Columbia TriStar, August 24) Two women (Elodie Bouchez and Natacha Régnier) become friends in the depressed town of Lille, France, but their relationship shifts as their differences surface. The stars shared the best-actress prize at Cannes. In French, with subtitles.

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WHITE OUT: LATINOS ON TV

(Continued from page 32)

Velez on *New York Undercover*, Sandra Santiago and Olmos on *Miami Vice*, and *Law & Order's* Bratt). "We should accurately reflect the racial makeup of the country," Wolf says, adding that prime time's exclusion of Latinos is predictable: "Most producers are white males."

Olmos agrees, charging that network executives "often won't give Latinos the chance to compete for positive roles." Despite his breakthrough as a cop on *Miami Vice*, the actor says, he typically is offered roles that are "subservient and antagonistic."

And despite network attempts at fence mending, prime-time TV has a long way to go before it fully reflects the ethnic makeup of America. While Latinos constitute about 11 percent of the U.S. population, they appear as less than 1 percent of television's lead characters, according to the Hispanic coalition calling for the boycott.

Elsewhere on the remote control—cable TV, daytime soaps, Spanish-language channels—the evidence suggests significant inroads being made by Latin-American performers. Soaps, in particular, have aggressively courted Latino viewers—ABC's *One Life to Live* and *All My Children* are only two examples of programs with major Hispanic characters. Music sensation Ricky Martin, who will star in his own CBS special later this year, got his television start on *General Hospital*.

But even the soaps were relatively slow to catch on to the significant population trend: Latinos are the fastest-growing segment of the U.S.—at 31 million, they represent one out of

every nine Americans, according to the Census Bureau, and that number is expected to grow to one out of six by 2020. If that doesn't grab the entertainment industry's attention, the economic impact certainly could: Various studies place the annual spending on consumer goods by Latin-Americans at \$350 billion to \$390 billion—the 14th-largest market in the world. Yet despite the spending, a recent Screen Actors Guild report found that the percentage of TV roles going to Latinos has actually declined since 1997. The drop has been even harsher since the 1950s, when TV offered nearly three times the employment opportunities available to Latinos today. The reason?

LATINOS RATE PRIME-TIME TV

TV Guide commissioned this telephone survey of Hispanic adults. Of the respondents who correctly named a Latino prime-time network personality (question No. 3), 25 percent cited Jimmy Smits and 5 percent named Benjamin Bratt. Others mentioned were Cheech Marin, Bruno Campos, Hector Elizondo and Nestor Carbonell.

1 Do you think there are too many, too few or about the right number of Latinos on network TV shows?

- | | |
|-----------------------|-----|
| 1. Too many | 2% |
| 2. Too few | 71% |
| 3. About right amount | 17% |
| 4. No answer | 10% |

2 Do you think Latinos on most network TV shows are represented...

- | | |
|--------------------|-----|
| 1. Realistically | 22% |
| OR | |
| 2. As stereotypes? | 66% |
| 3. No answer | 12% |

3 Can you name one Latino character on prime-time television?

- | | |
|-----------------|-----|
| 1. Yes | 25% |
| 2. No/No answer | 75% |

4 Which one of the following do you think is the major reason there are not more Latinos on network TV shows?

- | | |
|--|-----|
| 1. Racism on the part of TV executives | 24% |
| 2. Too few Latino TV executives | 34% |
| 3. Racism on the part of the TV audience | 7% |
| 4. Advertiser belief that Latinos don't spend enough money | 13% |
| 5. The small percentage of Latinos in the U.S. population | 8% |
| 6. No answer | 14% |

This telephone poll of 425 adults was conducted for TV Guide by Sam & Wapner Associates Inc. August 4, 1999. There is a margin of error of plus or minus 4.5 percent.

Stereotypical *bandido* roles, once prevalent on Western programs, have long since fallen from favor, leaving nothing to fill the void.

The lack of TV presence is particularly odd, given the growing number of Latinos watching TV. Demographic studies indicate that Latinos watch as much as 45 minutes more TV per day than the general U.S. population. In the key 18- to 34-year-old audience, Spanish-language channels in Los Angeles, Miami, Dallas, Fresno, Houston, San Francisco and Phoenix have, on occasion, beaten—during prime time—the ABC, CBS, NBC and Fox affiliates.



THERE IS AMPLE SPACE IN THE BROADCAST SPECTRUM FOR AT LEAST ONE AND PROBABLY SEVERAL [SPANISH-LANGUAGE] NETWORKS

—HENRY CISNEROS, PRESIDENT OF UNIVISION

Those numbers haven't been lost on advertisers. Miller Brewing, Nike, Ford and other top-tier companies not only target the audiences of Spanish-language channels, but have begun to air commercials in Spanish on some English-language stations. In one such ad for Chevron, a mariachi band cruises around town in a car fueled with the sponsor's gasoline. Originally intended to air solely on the Spanish-language networks Univision and Telemundo, the commercial proved so popular that Chevron added English subtitles for wider broadcast in Los Angeles.

With Latino culture increasingly filtering into mainstream American life, the Spanish-language channels are poised for serious growth. From the 1997-98 to the 1998-99 seasons, Miami-based Univision (by far the largest Spanish channel) saw its audience climb 26 percent, from 1.4 million to 1.7 million, making it the country's fastest-growing network—cable or broadcast.

"Our estimate is that 67 percent of the Latino population, no matter how

long in this country, will continue to watch some Spanish-language TV," says Henry Cisneros, president of Univision Communications. "There is ample space in the broadcast spectrum for at least one and probably several [Spanish-language] networks."

A distant second to Univision, Telemundo is attempting to stake its own claim on the U.S.'s 20 million Spanish-language viewers (and 400 million worldwide) by creating its own programs (Univision mostly airs imports from Mexico and Venezuela). The strategy has yet to pay off: Telemundo lost 14 percent of its adult prime-time

viewers (from 213,000 to

183,000) from 1997-98 to 1998-99.

A third Latin-oriented cable network, Si TV, is due for a July 2000 start-up. But unlike Univision and Telemundo, Si TV will broadcast in English. Jeff Valdez, cochairman of the L.A.-based channel, says that "more than 75 percent of American Latinos are either bilingual or English-speaking."

The four major broadcast networks, as even their executives seem to agree, have yet to serve that audience effectively. When the American Latino Media Arts (ALMA) awards, celebrating Latino artistic achievement, were broadcast on ABC in June, the show didn't feature a prize for best female performer in a sitcom. There was no one to nominate. ■

Next week: a look at how Latino stories and performers have fared on prime-time TV and what the future may hold.

Joseph Hanania is a frequent contributor to the New York Times and the Los Angeles Times. TV Guide's Ted Johnson contributed to this report.



ILLUSTRATION: MARGARET REEGL