



Report prepared for the

National Association of Hispanic Journalists

Network Brownout 2003:
**The Portrayal of Latinos
in Network Television News, 2002**

*A Report Prepared by
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The NAHJ would like to extend a special note of gratitude to the **California Chicano News Media Association** for organizing the Los Angeles focus group. CCNMA's mission is to promote diversity in the news media by providing encouragement, scholarships and educational programs for Latinos pursuing careers in the news media. CCNMA seeks to promote the social, economic and professional advancement of Latino journalists, and to foster an accurate and fair portrayal of Latinos in the news media.

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Executive Summary

NAHJ's eighth annual *Network Brownout* report examined news stories about Latinos that aired on the evening newscasts of CBS, ABC, NBC and CNN during 2002.

As in prior studies, we first conducted a quantitative review of the number and length of stories about Latinos, as culled from the Vanderbilt University Television Archive. In addition, we conducted a qualitative analysis of a random sub-sample of tapes of actual stories. For the first time this year that analysis was expanded to include the results of focus groups that the researchers conducted with Latino television viewers in New York and Los Angeles. Focus group participants were provided with a random sample of news stories and asked to provide their impressions of the way those stories depicted Latinos.

The newscasts examined were the *CBS Evening News*, *ABC World News Tonight*, *NBC Nightly News* and *CNN NewsNight*.¹ Other network newscasts, including those on Fox and MSNBC, are not included in the study because they are not archived at Vanderbilt University.

Among the most troubling findings of the quantitative part of the study were:

- Latino-related stories continue to make up less than one percent of all stories that appeared on the network newscasts. Of the approximately 16,000 stories that aired on ABC, CBS, CNN and NBC in 2002, only 120 or 0.75 percent, were about Latinos. While that was an increase from 2001, when there were only 99 Latino-related stories, or 0.62 percent, it still remains a dismal record given the growing size and importance of the nation's Latino community. Latinos now make up more than 13 percent of the population.
- Crime, terrorism, and illegal immigration accounted for 66 percent of all network stories about Latinos last year. There were 47 news reports alone dealing with Latinos as either perpetrators or victims of crimes. Twenty-four stories were about kidnappings, including 18 on the kidnapping and murder of five-year-old Samantha Rynnion in California. In those stories, Alejandro Avila was a central figure. He was arrested and charged with the kidnapping and murder of Rynnion.
- The arrest of suspected terrorist José Padilla, for allegedly plotting to detonate a "dirty bomb," occupied a central role in the coverage of Latinos

last year with 21 network stories or 18 percent of all stories that aired on Latinos.

There were, however, some encouraging trends. Among them were:

- The use of Latinos as interview subjects increased. Out of 120 Latino-related stories, 89 (74 percent) featured interviews with Latinos, with ABC leading other networks by a noticeable margin.
- The average length of Latino-related stories increased significantly, from an average of two minutes and 25 seconds in 2001 to two minutes and 51 seconds in 2002. The length of CNN stories far surpassed the other networks and showed a significant improvement from its own newscasts from the previous year.
- Latino politics and the growing Latino vote was the topic of eight network stories (7 percent of all Latino-related reports). Those news accounts generally depicted Latinos more positively than others, though they averaged the shortest length of time.
- For the first time, several network correspondents covered the Latino community a number of times, allowing them to become more knowledgeable about issues affecting the Latino community. ABC's Judy Muller led the way with six stories.

Much more disheartening, however, were the results of the qualitative analysis of news tapes. It showed that:

- Latinos continued to be portrayed as a dysfunctional underclass that exists on the fringes of mainstream U.S. society.
- Latinos were once again typically portrayed as living in poverty and as criminals. The number of Latino-related crime stories in 2002 was grossly excessive when compared to statistics on crimes involving Latinos.
- Illegal immigration continues to be an important focus of network news coverage of Latinos. Illegal immigrants are often depicted as a security threat to the country. Stories rarely addressed the many positive contributions made by Latino immigrants or provided viewers with a greater

understanding of the causes and benefits of immigration.

- Of the four networks, ABC led the way with more balanced coverage of Latinos and with stories on a wide range of topics.

Findings from the focus groups revealed:

- Participants held a highly negative view of network news coverage of the Latino community. They identified an array of specific biases and factual errors in the coverage.
- The focus groups believed that poverty, anti-social behavior and the scapegoating of Latinos and immigrants were the elements most emphasized in stories about Latinos.

Conclusion

This year's "Network Brownout" report found that Latinos continue to remain virtually absent from network news coverage. When they are covered, the stories are usually unbalanced and provide a stereotypical portrayal of Latino life in the United States.

NAHJ is concerned about the effect this unbalanced news coverage will have on the majority of U.S. television viewers whose main source of news and information comes from watching television.

We believe the lack of Latinos working in network newsrooms and in broadcast management is a major reason for the poor coverage of the Latino community. For several years, NAHJ has called on the networks to report annually the racial and ethnic make up of their newsrooms. The networks have so far refused our request.

Background and Introduction

This is the eighth annual *Network Brownout* report issued by the National Association of Hispanic Journalists. We have tracked and documented the representation of Latinos on the evening network news in the United States since 1996.²

Beginning in 1996, the NAHJ *Network Brownout Reports* have been authored by Rod Carveth and Diane Alverio. In 2000, the report's data analysis and research, conducted by Dr. Serafin Mendez and Diane Alverio, followed the same overall parameters and methodology established in previous years but significantly enhanced the methodology to examine the qualitative dimension of the construction of Latinos in the news. The most significant finding of the report has been the consistent under-representation of Latinos on the evening newscasts of ABC, CBS, NBC and CNN. The number of Latino-related stories aired by the networks is dismal and insignificant when compared to the total number of stories

that air annually. What is troublesome, however, is that the vast majority of coverage consistently depicts Latinos as problem people who are contributing to societal ills.

Not only were Latinos marginalized, making up only 0.75 percent of all news stories that aired, but they were negatively depicted in those stories.

U.S. networks continue to depict Latinos as inhabiting a violent and mean-spirited fringe world. In 2002, Latinos ages 12 or older, made up 12 percent of all victims or perpetrators. Last year, however, 39 percent of all the stories that aired about Latinos were about crime.²

In 2002, when José Padilla was arrested for his alleged link to terrorism, he became a central figure in the network's coverage of Latinos. A total of 21 stories (18 percent) concentrated on his role as an Al-Qaeda operative, and for allegedly plotting a "dirty bomb attack" against the United States.

¹ Vanderbilt University indexes the three evening broadcasts aired by ABC, CBS and NBC. They only provide indexes for NewsNight, the nightly newscast broadcast by CNN and hosted now by Aaron Brown.

² US Department of Justice. Office of Justice Programs. Bureau of Justice Statistics Victims: Ethnicity During 2002—

- 637,000 Hispanic persons age 12 or older were victims of rape, sexual assault, aggravated assault and simple assault.
- Violence against Hispanics age 12 or older most often took the form of simple assault (58%).
- Hispanic persons age 12 or older experienced 12% of all violent crime and made up 12% of the population.
- Hispanics were victims of overall violence at about the same rate as non-Hispanics
- Hispanics were significantly more likely to be victims of aggravated assault as non-Hispanics.
- There were no differences between Hispanics and non-Hispanics for other violent crimes.

Trends, 1993-2002 —

- The rate of victimization against Hispanics fell 56 percent going from 55 to 24 victimizations per 1,000.

A Quantitative Look at the Representation of Latinos in Network News in the United States

Of the approximately 16,000 stories that aired on ABC, CBS, CNN and NBC in 2002, only 120 dealt with Latinos. This made up 0.75 percent of all network news stories. In 2001, 99 stories (0.62 percent) dealt with Latino-related issues. While there was a slight increase in the number of stories about Latinos, such an increase remains statistically insignificant. Less than one percent of the overall number of stories that aired last year were about Latinos.

In 2002, ABC, CBS, CNN and NBC aired approximately 728 hours of news during their prime-time broadcasts.³ Latino-related stories accounted for 5.68 hours or, 0.78 percent, of the total airtime (see Table 1). This is a 1.70 hours increase over the total time devoted to Latinos in 2001.⁴ Last year, out of 728 hours of news stories that aired, 3.98 or 0.55 percent, were devoted to Latinos. This is a positive finding that we hope continues in years to come.

Among other relevant findings:

- For the third year in a row, ABC aired the greatest number of stories. They aired 35 stories (29 percent). CBS broadcast 30 stories (25 percent), CNN 29 stories (24 percent), and NBC 26 stories (22 percent).
- Following a trend that began in 2001, this year's report recorded a significant increase in the average length for Latino-related stories. The story length increased from an average of two minutes and 25 seconds in 2001 to two minutes and 51 seconds in 2002.
- There were 11 stories (9.2 percent) dealing with illegal immigration. These stories dealt mostly with disruptions at the Mexican border, accounting for 32 minutes of television coverage. Latino illegal immigrants were the centerpiece of these stories.
- Latino-related stories that aired on CNN received the most airtime. The stories averaged 4 minutes and 33 seconds in 2002. This is a significant increase from 2001, when the average was two minutes and 54 seconds. In 2000, CNN stories averaged the shortest length of time of all the networks (See Chart 2). The format of the broadcast lends itself to the presentation of lengthier stories. The program, CNN NewsNight, is an hour-long program.

Table 1 — Number of Latino-Related Stories by Networks in 2002

Network	Number of Latino-Related Stories	Percentage of Stories by Network	Number of Seconds Devoted to Latino Stories	Average Story Length
ABC	35	29%	4,930	141
CBS	30	25%	3,510	117
CNN	29	24%	7,910	273
NBC	26	22%	4,110	158
TOTAL	120	100%	20,460	171

5.68 Hours of Programming / 728 Hours of Programming = 0.78%

³ This figure does not include the many special broadcasts presented by the networks such as special events, public affairs documentaries, or bonafide news programs.

⁴ The coverage of Latinos during 2001 also increased slightly from the previous year.

Story Topics

Crime, terrorism and illegal immigration accounted for 66 percent of the overall percentage of stories about Latinos that the networks aired. There was a dearth of stories examining the positive contributions made by Latinos to U.S. society.

- The networks aired 47 stories about Latinos dealing with crime. Stories about crime included 24 Latino-related stories involving kidnapping. Eighteen of these stories were about the kidnapping of five-year-old Samantha Runnion in California. Alejandro Avila was a central figure in those stories. He was arrested and charged with the kidnapping and murder of Runnion. There were six additional stories about the kidnapping of two young Hispanic girls who were later found alive.
- Coverage of the war on terrorism, specifically the arrest of José Padilla, the alleged terrorist who sought to detonate a “dirty bomb” in the United States, constituted the second largest number of stories with 21. These aired mostly on CBS and CNN. On average, these stories were 61 seconds longer than the average story length for other Latino-related issues.
- Illegal immigration once again became a central topic of interest for network news with a total of 11 stories (9 percent). The stories averaged 175 seconds in length and were longer than the overall average by 3.45 seconds. CBS aired the greatest number of stories about illegal immigrants.
- The growing importance of Latino politics and the Latino vote was reflected with eight stories (7 percent). While these stories portrayed Latinos more positively than other stories, they averaged 139 seconds in length, 32 seconds below the overall average. ABC and NBC featured the largest number of stories in this area.
- There was only one story about Latino business. It was covered by ABC, which in 2002 seemed to lead the way in the coverage of more positive stories about Latinos. The network also led in stories about health, voting and politics. These stories generally were more balanced.

Table 2
Subject of Latino-Related Stories Covered by Network News in 2002

Topic	Number of Stories	Percentage	Total Number of Seconds	Average Story Length
Arts & Entertainment	4	3%	680	170
Business	1	1%	130	130
Crime	47	39%	6,220	132
Cuban American Issues	8	7%	2,270	284
Education	3	3%	430	143
Ethnic Discrimination	1	1%	180	180
Health and Medicine	7	6%	1,160	166
Human Interest	3	3%	520	173
Illegal Immigration	11	9%	1,930	175
Politics and Voting	8	7%	1,110	139
Poverty and Welfare	2	2%	430	215
Sports	2	2%	480	240
Terrorism	21	18%	4,880	232
Transportation	2	2%	40	20
TOTAL	120	100%	20,460	171

Table 3
Number of Latino-related Stories Covered by Networks in 2002

Topic	ABC	CBS	CNN	NBC	Total
Arts & Entertainment	3	1	0	0	4
Business	1	0	0	0	1
Crime	11	11	15	10	47
Cuban-American Issues	1	2	4	1	8
Education	0	1	0	2	3
Ethnic Discrimination	1	0	0	0	1
Health and Medicine	5	0	0	2	7
Human Interest	2	0	1	0	3
Illegal Immigration	2	6	1	2	11
Politics and Voting	4	1	0	3	8
Poverty and Welfare	2	0	0	0	2
Sports	0	1	1	0	2
Terrorism	3	6	7	5	21
Transportation	0	1	0	1	2
TOTAL					120

Chart 1
Latino-related Stories by Network

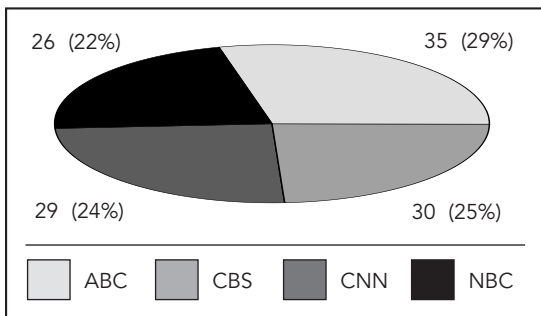


Chart 3
Average Number of Seconds Devoted to Latino-Related Stories

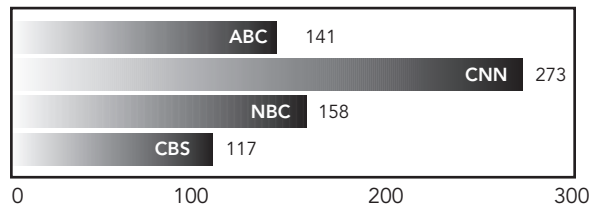


Chart 2
Percentage of Latino Stories in Network Evening News: 2000-2002

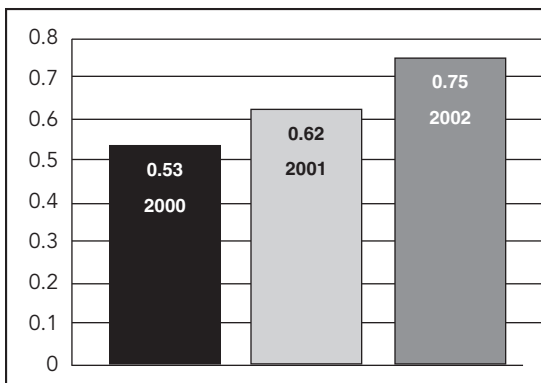
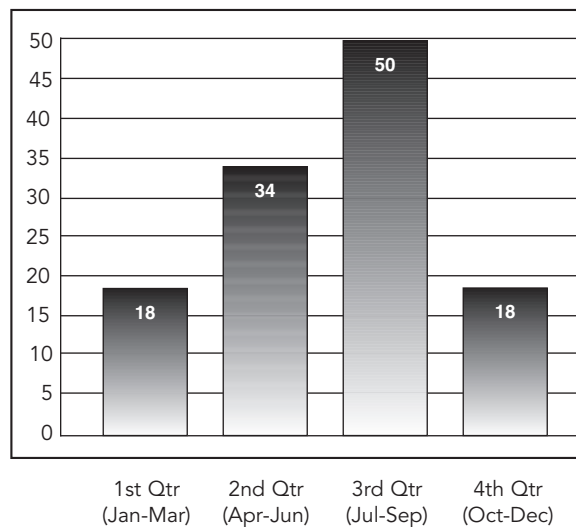


Chart 4
Number of Latino-Related Stories by Quarter



Geographical Peg

There were 38 stories that originated in the studio and did not include reports from other locations. The remaining 82 stories originated from various U.S. cities, several of them included multiple locations.

The greatest number of stories originated from Washington, D.C. (24), followed by Los Angeles (21) and New York (8). Cities across Texas accounted for eight stories.

Table 4
Geographic Distribution of Latino-Related Stories in 2002

City	Number of Stories	City	Number of Stories
Abilene, TX	3	Inverness, FL	1
Atlanta, GA	1	Los Angeles, CA	21
Austin, TX	1	Miami, FL	3
Buckeye, AZ	1	New York, NY	8
Chicago, Ill	1	Oregon City, OR	1
Dallas, TX	2	San Antonio, TX	1
Denver, CO	1	San Diego, CA	1
El Paso, TX	1	San Francisco, CA	1
Erfurt, Germany	1	Santa Ana, CA	2
Hartford, CT	1	Stanton, CA	1
Havana,	3	Tucson, AZ	1
Hilsboro, WV	1	Washington, DC	24
		Studio	38

Use of Reporters

This year's study found a positive trend with several reporters covering the Latino community a number of times. NAHJ welcomes this trend. As reporters cover the Latino community more frequently, they will become more knowledgeable about the issues that

confront it. Judy Muller covered the largest number of stories about Latinos with six. She is followed by Sandra Hughes, Shellee Smith and Pete Williams who each covered five stories apiece.

Table 5
Network Correspondents Covering Latino Stories in 2002

Network	Reporter	Number of Stories	Network	Reporter	Number of Stories
NBC	Andrea Mitchell	1	CBS	Jerry Bowen	1
ABC	Brian Ross	1	NBC	Jim Avila	1
CBS	Byron Pitts	1	CBS	Jim Axelrod	2
NBC	Campbell Brown	1	NBC	Jim Cummins	1
ABC	Carole Simpson	1	NBC	Jim Miklaszewski	4
ABC	Cynthia McFadden	1	CBS	Jim Stewart	4

Table 5 (continued)
Network Correspondents Covering Latino Stories in 2002

Network	Reporter	Number of Stories	Network	Reporter	Number of Stories
CNN	David Mattingly	2	CBS	John Blackstone	1
ABC	David Wright	1	CNN	John King	1
ABC	Dean Reynolds	1	ABC	John Quinones	1
CNN	Deborah Feyerick	1	CBS	John Roberts	1
ABC	Deborah Roberts	1	ABC	John Yang	1
NBC	Don Teague	1	CNN	John Zarrella	2
CNN	Ed Lavandera	1	CBS	Joie Chen	1
NBC	George Lewis	2	ABC	Judy Muller	6
CBS	Gretchen Carlson	1	CNN	Kate Snow	1
ABC	Jackie Judd	2	CNN	Kathleen Koch	1
ABC	James Walker	1	CNN	Keith Olbermann	1
CNN	Jamie McIntyre	1	CNN	Kelli Arena	3
ABC	Jeanne Meserve	1	CNN	Kelly Wallace	1
CNN	Jeff Greenfield	1	ABC	Lisa Stark	1
CNN	Jeffrey Toobin	1	CNN	Lucia Newman	1

Interview Subjects

Latinos were interviewed in 89 of the 120 stories (74 percent) about Latinos that the networks aired last year. Of the 297 people interviewed in those stories, 80 were Latinos (27 percent). ABC was the most inclusive network in terms of the percentage of interviewees that were Latino. Latinos made up 33.7 percent of all interviewees in stories about Latinos that aired on ABC.

Latinos made up less than 25 percent of all those interviewed in stories about Latinos that aired on CBS, CNN, and NBC.

In examining how many Latinos were interviewed in

news stories last year, there appears to be a growing trend in the number of Latinos interviewed in non-Latino related stories.

As presented in Table 7, interview subjects came from a variety of specializations and interests. Thirty-four of the interviewees were not identified by profession. There were 10 crime-related victims and perpetrators and seven law enforcement officials. There was good representation of Latino academic consultants (5), activists (5) and politicians and voting experts (6) compared to previous *Network Brownout* reports.

Table 6
Number and Percentage of Latinos Interviewed in Latino-Related Stories

Network	Number of Stories that Interviewed a Latino	Total Number of People Interviewed	Number of Latinos Interviewed	% of Latinos Interviewed
ABC	29	98	33	34%
CBS	21	59	14	24%
CNN	19	62	14	23%
NBC	20	78	19	24%
Total	89	297	80	27%

Table 7
Labels Affixed to Latino Interview Subjects

Label	Number	Label	Number
Academics and Consultants	5	Law Enforcement	7
Activist/Advocates	5	Media Personalities	2
Attorney/Judge	2	Musician/Artist	2
Clerical	1	Politicians and Voting	6
Crime Victims/Perpetrators	10	Priest	1
Educators	2	Social Workers	1
Executives	1	Total	79
General Non Professional Labels Or Not Identified	34		

Chart 5
Number of Latino Stories by Network from 2000-2002

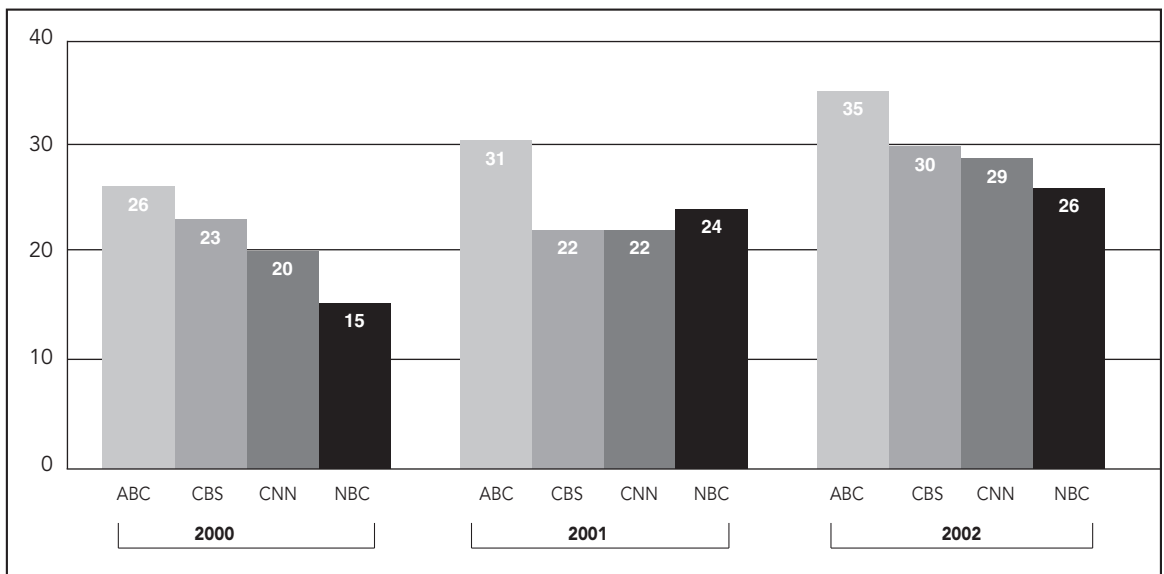
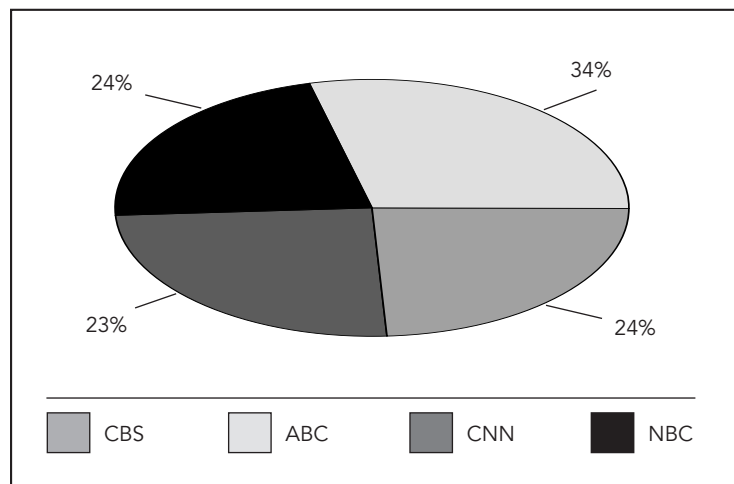


Chart 6
Percentage of Latinos Interviewed on Latino-Related Stories

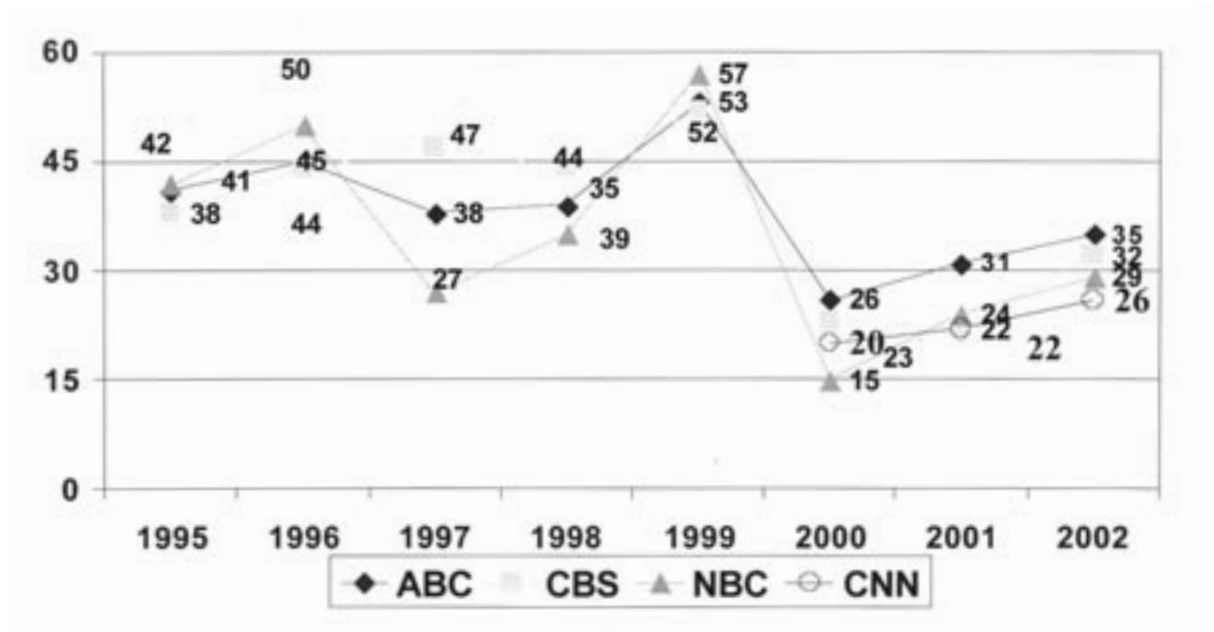


Trends

Charts 7 represents the most significant historical trends revealed by the longitudinal plotting of the quantitative data. When compared with last year's data, there is an across the line increase in the

number of stories covered by the networks. These numbers, however, seem to be somewhat lower than the general trends presented during the first four years of the study.

Chart 7
Latino Stories: Longitudinal Trends, Number of Stories Covered by the Networks



Critical Reading of Television News

Latino under-representation of Latinos in network news is well documented. Latinos continue to be portrayed as a dysfunctional underclass that exists on the fringes of mainstream U.S. society.

In an attempt to monitor these portrayals, the *Network Brownout* report now includes an in-depth examination of the network's representation of Latinos in their newscasts. This critique relies on the examination of 64 stories about Latinos that appeared on the networks in 2002. This represents more than half of all Latino stories that aired and a substantial increase in our sample from previous reports. The stories are examined to assess commonalities, subject and theme development and

how images are constructed. Once again, these stories depict Latinos in both a stereotypical and biased manner that widely diverges from the rich and diverse roles that Latinos play in U.S. life and society.

Crime

Latinos make up 13 percent of the U.S. population. In comparison, 12 percent of all criminals or victims of crime are Latinos. As the report has indicated, the 47 Latino-related stories about crime were widely exaggerated within the universe of all Latino-related stories aired by the networks. The stories portrayed Latinos as kidnappers, plane

hijackers, reckless drivers, drug smugglers, child molesters, murderers, guerrilla leaders, gang members and rape offenders. The spectrum of Latino crime was wide, negative, and vast. It encompassed almost every realm of delinquent behavior. Unfortunately, these were generally the only Latino-related stories featured in the newscasts on the nights they aired. The stories placed special emphasis on linking criminal activity with Latinos by inter-viewing heavily accented acquaintances of the subject matter to visually establishing a shot of a heavily populated Latino neighborhood. One of the more disturbing trends in this category was the number of stories about Latinos and kidnapping. News coverage of Alejandro Avila's arrest for the kidnapping and murder of Samantha Runnion dominated news coverage. His arrest, along with the arrest of suspected terrorist Jose Padilla, accounted for more than a third of all stories about Latinos.

NAHJ is concerned about the impact these stories will have on the public's perception of the Latino community. These stories not only portrayed Latinos as a threat to the innocent, but as a threat to the masses as well.

Immigrants and the Border

The television networks portrayed Latino immigrants as a threat to the social and economic fabric of U.S. society. The border, particularly the role it plays in Mexican immigration into the United States, continues to be a defining news story about Latinos. It has been since the introduction of the qualitative dimension of the study in 2000. There was a significant increase in the number of stories about immigrants trying to cross the border. There was also an escalation of the negative depiction of immigrants. The stories included images of immigrants trying to cross a swamp to come to the United States, to a tunnel used by drug smugglers and illegal immigrants to enter the country illegally. These stories failed to provide the viewers with a greater understanding for the causes of illegal immigration.

Terrorism

The arrest of José Padilla, also known as Abdullah al-Muhajir, dominated in the coverage of Latinos in the news. Padilla was depicted as a New York Puerto Rican brought up in the ghettos of Chicago. He was labeled as a petty criminal. His role in Al Qaeda's plan to acquire and detonate a dirty bomb in the United States was widely explored in several broadcasts. Padilla represented the quintessential threat to the nation. From his former neighbor depicting him as a "nice person" in heavily accented English to the characterization of his past record of minor criminal infractions, Padilla embodied the image of the Latino

terrorist. The relevance of Padilla's story can not be contested. The networks had to cover the story. However, several of the stories emphasized Padilla's ethnicity. Moreover, there is a symbolism in Padilla's story. Even though he is a U.S. citizen, he was also indirectly framed as an immigrant. The name "al-Muhajir" in Arabic means immigrant. This fact was highlighted on some reports, which further contributes to a negative depiction of immigrants.

Poverty

Coverage of Latinos in the news carried a subtle but powerful undertone. According to the networks, Latinos are poor and live in worse conditions than most people in the country. Latinos continue to be depicted as living in ghetto-like communities, run down neighborhoods, and overall poor conditions. An example of this was a report about a Texas community. The reporter states that Latinos were so poor that they had to eat the cactuses in their backyards. The cactus, in fact, is a delicacy of Mexican cuisine called "Nopal" and is food cherished by Mexicans and Mexican-Americans alike. This demonstrated the reporter's lack of understanding of the Latino community and culture. The issue of welfare and access to social services also continues to play a significant role in portraying Latinos as poverty-stricken. But the stories failed to address many of the root causes of Latino poverty. Conversely, there is a dearth of stories about Latino businesses and the central role that such businesses play in the U.S. economy.

Latinos in Politics

Latinos were covered most positively in stories about contemporary U.S. politics.

The networks clearly acknowledge that Latinos are playing a more visible and important role in the political process. These stories tend to be balanced.

Ghettoization of Latinos

Ghettoization continues to be a vivid trend in the portrayal of Latinos by the networks. A disproportionate number of stories establish Latinos living within the confines of extremely poor neighborhoods and enclaves. Barrios from throughout the United States continue to be one of the best ways for the networks to visually establish the Latino community. This stereotypical image does not accurately reflect the totality of life for Latinos in the United States. The reality is that the majority of Latinos live in suburbs rather than in central cities, and Latinos are migrating throughout the United States faster than any previous ethnic group in U.S. history.

Latino Brown-Ins

Since 2000, we have documented the network practice of showing Latinos as brown masses or herds walking down crowded streets. This shot often takes place in the context of a Latino neighborhood or barrio. It is commonly accompanied by the colorful presence of

Spanish-language advertising. This shot continued to be highly present in the coverage of Latinos in 2002. Once again, this image too narrowly defines life for Latinos in the United States. While many Latinos live in larger U.S. cities, many more live in suburbs and residential areas.

A Critical Reading by Television Viewers

Since 2000, the study has included an in-depth critical reading of stories airing on the networks. This edition enhances this qualitative analysis by including a viewer-generated critical reading of network news stories about Latinos. As it is described in the methodology section, television viewers in both Los Angeles and New York were asked to participate in a focus group and shared with us their views and opinions about the way that Latinos and Latino-related subjects are covered by the networks.

Focus Groups Participants

A total of 20 Latinos were asked to participate in the focus groups. Thirteen of those were in New York and seven were in Los Angeles. Their ages ranged from 15 to 84 with an average age of 41.6 years. Participants came from all types of career backgrounds. They included students, blue collar and white collar workers and retirees. About half of the participants had college degrees. On average, they reported watching about 3.18 hours of television every day. They represented several countries of origin including Puerto Rico, Bolivia, Colombia, Cuba, Chile, Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Mexico. Participants on the East Coast were predominantly Puerto Ricans and those in the West Coast were mostly Mexican Americans. Ten percent of the respondents said that they trusted the media "A lot," 20 percent said they trusted it "Substantially," 55 percent said they trusted it "Some." Fifteen percent said they did not trust the media at all.

Reaction to Newscasts

Focus group participants were shown a taped compilation of 13 randomly selected Latino-related stories that represented the entire array of topical areas that the networks aired in 2002. In total, participants watched approximately 37 minutes of airtime and were asked in a guided discussion to react to the images and portrayals that they had seen.

General View of the News: Leading Themes

Television viewers in New York voiced strong feelings about the story topics and themes in the news stories. They believed that poverty, anti-social behavior, the scapegoating of Latinos, and immigration were the elements most emphasized in stories about Latinos. Viewers in Los Angeles had a more holistic approach in their critiques and tended to focus on the overall dynamics of the stories, their inconsistencies and any perceived biases.

Negativity, Accuracy and Selectivity

Latinos in the group thought that their depiction in network news was extremely negative. In the views of New York participants, "Hispanics are poor, we are cheaters, gang members, and rapists." Another said, "I did not see one positive thing about Latinos." One New York participant said that the networks "still perceive us as funny, colorful clowns or terrorists, or gangsters." They believed that the reports were negative and the broadcasts were disturbing and sensationalist. In the words of some viewers in Los Angeles, the coverage of Latinos was "disgusting" and "disturbing." In the opinion of a viewer, the West Coast Latinos are "being portrayed as 'the scapegoat.'" While some participants were extremely critical of the networks, others were more guarded and said that there were obvious problems with the representation of Latinos and their issues. Some thought that the stories were not intentionally biased but reflected a lack of understanding of Latino society.

The accuracy of the stories was questioned by the participants. One said, "Facts are flipped." The depiction of Nopal, or cactus, as poor people's food demonstrated how little knowledge producers have of Latino culture. "I think we all chuckled with 'el Nopal.' We all thought, Give me that any day."

There was a feeling of hopelessness among participants. One said, "I guess it's the manipulation

that caused me to lose respect for what was once fairly good journalism. There is so little left.”

The focus groups were also concerned about selectivity in reporting. The coverage of a gang-related story that happened close to the homes of two participants led them to say that the reporter had missed important facts in understanding the concept of gang violence in that particular setting. Another viewer stated that the broadcasts were “One sided...didn’t depict the community at large.”

Crime

The coverage of crime was problematic for the focus group participants. They believed the networks failed to put crime in a proper social context and that the subject was narrowly covered. They believed Latinos were scapegoated and were blamed for society’s ills. However, the network’s inability to explore deeper causes and meanings to these problems was even more troubling for them.

Poverty

The degree of poverty portrayed in the stories was a matter of concern for participants. One of the viewers said that, “I am sure none of us really lives that way.” Viewers questioned the accuracy of these portrayals. One viewer was visibly upset about the images of Mexico presented in the broadcasts. She said, “They paint this picture of Mexico in extreme despair.” She stated that there is undue emphasis on Latino poverty and while poverty does exist, it is exaggerated. In the words of a New York participant, “Everyone was poor. I am poor, but the slant becomes too reductive.” One participant went as far as to say that the depiction of poverty is part of a culture of fear sponsored by the networks where people are lead to be afraid of the poor. The implication of this coverage is to portray Latinos as an economic drain on society.

Terrorism

The coverage of José Padilla, an alleged Al Qaeda operative, elicited strong reaction by the viewers. New York audiences objected that the networks had called him a “known terrorist.” They

stated that: “They didn’t say he had committed an act of terror, (They said) he was trying, but they called him a known terrorist.” A participant said that as the coverage of the story progressed, the portrait of Padilla grew murkier. “I thought he became more assuredly the enemy, little by little.” The terms used were [changed from] “former gang member to terrorist.” They quickly painted a completely different picture. One day to next.” They also noticed that the networks underscored that his name meant immigrant in Arabic: “the terrorist was the immigrant.” Viewers in Los Angeles found that the Padilla stories were the most powerful.

Illegal Immigration

Focus group participants in Los Angeles were not as worried about the stereotypes and particulars of the stories about immigration. They were more concerned about the network’s lack of understanding of the history and process of migration. However, they expressed concerns about the negative connotations in network news coverage of immigration since Sept. 11. They stated that these stories portrayed immigrants as potential terrorists.

Brown Herds

The often used visual of hordes of people walking toward the camera was noticed by the focus group of New York. One participant remarked, “My boyfriend listens to Michael Savage and he is always saying ‘Latinos/brown people are taking over the United States. That image looks like a herd of people.’” Another stated that stories about Whites relied on more wholesome images. But stories about Latinos portrayed them in a more threatening manner. Some participants in Los Angeles did not find this type of shot problematic but stated it only reflected one segment of Latino life in the United States. On the contrary, they stated, “If you know Broadway or Whittier, they are really our neighborhoods; they know what streets to go to: McArthur Park. People do their research on where to go. Not disturbing, it’s a reality. We are everywhere; I don’t find it negative. Even though it goes back to what most of us have said. Lopsided, not a full reflection.”

Conclusion

News coverage plays a critical role in shaping how the American people understand our increasingly complex world. For the past eight years, NAHJ's *Network Brownout* report has found that Latinos continue to be virtually absent from network news coverage. When they are covered, the stories are usually unbalanced and reinforce stereotypes about Latino life in the United States.

This year's report is no exception.

NAHJ is concerned about the effect this unbalanced news coverage will have on the majority of U.S. television viewers whose main source of news and information comes from watching television.

Network executives must digest the inescapable reality that Latinos currently number more than 39 million and make up 13 percent of the U.S. population. By 2050, Hispanics will make up 25 percent of the population. And by the end of this century, if current demographic trends continue, half of all U.S. residents will be of Latino origin. In short, Latinos are a huge and growing part of America's future.

While we are concerned about the overall findings of this year's report, we also want to acknowledge and applaud several positive trends. The use of Latinos as interview subjects increased; the average length of Latino-related stories climbed significantly, and for the first time, several network correspondents covered the Latino community a number of times, allowing them to become more knowledgeable about issues affecting the Latino community.

But these small improvements cannot obscure the overall dismal progress. We believe the lack of Latinos working in network newsrooms and in broadcast management is a major reason for poor coverage of the Latino community.

For several years, NAHJ has called on the networks to report annually the racial and ethnic make up of their newsrooms. The networks have so far refused our request.

As an organization of Latino journalists, we found their refusal troubling. NAHJ is committed to improving the overall quality of journalism in our country. This will not happen without diversifying our nation's newsrooms. We believe it is in the public interest for them to improve their coverage of the Latino community and to disclose their employment numbers.

The American Society of Newspaper Editors conducts an annual study on the racial and ethnic make up of our nation's daily newspapers. The Radio and Television News Directors Association also releases an annual survey of the racial and ethnic make up of our country's local television and radio stations. Why the networks refuse to do the same baffles us.

Joe Foote, author of the annual study *Network Correspondent Visibility* and director of the international program at the Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Arizona State University, noted in his report this year that, "Despite enormous gains in the Hispanic population during the past 20 years, the number of Hispanic network correspondents remains today at almost the same level as in 1983."

His study found that there were three Hispanic correspondents in 1983 and only four in 2002, and that "There have never been more than four Hispanic correspondents at any one time."

He also found that Hispanic correspondents had the highest turnover rate of any ethnic or racial group, averaging just 4.07 years of work as a network correspondent compared to 7.47 for white males.

Another concern for NAHJ is the decline in the percentage of Latinos working at local radio and television newsrooms. RTNDA's annual newsroom studies have found that the percentage of Latino reporters working at local English-language television stations dropped from 7.3 percent in 2000 to 5.2 percent in 2002. Overall, the make up of journalists of color dropped from 24.6 percent to 18.1 percent during the same time frame.

The lack of Latino journalists working at local stations undermines coverage of the Latino community locally. It also makes it more difficult to increase the representation of Latinos at the network level where many of the most important and coveted jobs in television exist. This is why UNITY: Journalists of Color called on RTNDA to hold a diversity summit to address the rapid decline of journalists of color working at local stations. The summit is scheduled to take place this January and will include many of the nation's local broadcast station groups and networks as well.

We applaud RTNDA for organizing the summit and those network executives who have

agreed to participate. We look forward to discussing ways to improve the quality and accuracy of the news our industry produces and the critical role a diversified newsroom plays in achieving those goals.

Some network executives have questioned whether the quantitative and qualitative methodologies used in this Brownout report are appropriate ways to measure news content. They correctly point out that most news stories affect a cross-section of the public, so numerical "quotas" for stories that are based on ethnic subject matter do not accurately reflect their coverage. We acknowledge that such an approach has its limitations. We have used the quantitative or statistical approach as just one

way of measuring whether news coverage of Latinos is moving in a better or worse direction.

But we also believe it is possible to chart trends in news coverage by statistical analysis, just as the networks measure so many other aspects of viewership statistically. In addition, we have adopted a qualitative analysis of coverage precisely because we recognize the limitations of the purely quantitative analysis. This is why we conducted two focus groups for the first time this year to help supplement our findings.

We invite all of the networks, if they are dissatisfied with our approach, to work with the NAHJ to develop a more comprehensive method.

Methodological Framework

As in previous years, the data for our study came from the Vanderbilt University Television News Archives.⁵ Since 1968, the archives have videotaped each story aired by the networks during their evening newscasts. The stories are then indexed and summarized by the archives. The archives prepare abstracts for each story and each newscast aired during the calendar year. Each abstract contains "story level summaries" of the evening news which provide the following descriptors: 1) network the story aired on; 2) broadcast date; 3) running title or topic of the story; 4) beginning and ending time of the story; 5) the city where the story originated; 6) the name of anchor or studio correspondent that introduced the story; 7) the field correspondents who were part of the reports; 8) the names and title of any person interviewed for the story; and 9) a brief summary of the story. The archives have a powerful search engine, available through the World Wide Web that allows users to search stories by date or by imputing keywords. Through the use of a boolean search engine, the archives identify each story containing the keywords. An abstract is shown on-screen with the keywords in each story. The unit of analysis for this study is not the story aired by the network but the "summarized abstracts" prepared by Vanderbilt.

In order to identify the stories portraying Latinos, we replicated the sampling method that has been used since 1996. The sampling consists of the

following procedures:

- 1) Searches for stories containing the general and most important Latino designations were used. These were "Latino," "Latin-American," "Hispanic," and "Hispanic-American." Approximately 80 percent of the stories were found through this procedure.
- 2) A broad list of specific Latino subgroups was prepared. These included "Cuban," "Cuban American," "Puerto Ricans," "Colombian," "Ecuadorians," "Chileans," etc. Approximately 10% of the stories were found through the procedure.
- 3) A comprehensive list of keywords such as "bilingual education," "crime," "undocumented laborers," "border," "health," "business," "education" and the like was prepared. This list consisted of more than 100 descriptors associated with Latino society in the U.S., Latino surnames, etc. They yielded approximately 10 percent of the stories found and used.
- 4) The criteria used in the selection of the stories were narrowed so that they had to focus on issues affecting Latinos in the United States.

⁵ <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu>

For example, there was extensive coverage of the election of Mexican President Vicente Fox in previous years. If the story was centered on politics in Mexico, it was excluded from the study. If the story focused on Fox talking about immigration and Mexican Americans in the United States, it was included as part of our sample.

- 5) In order to verify the integrity of the process, we selected 20 stories at random from the total universe of stories available in the archive for the year 2002. We examined those stories to verify if any Latino issues were covered in them that had not been identified by the procedures outlined above. No additional stories were found.

The sampling procedures this year yielded 120 stories that contained at least one of the keywords.

The story abstracts were categorized according to the descriptors available in the summaries and stored into a computerized database management program. Each story was sequentially numbered according to date of airing and later sorted by the descriptors that characterized them. All the frequency distributions and statistics presented here were achieved by analyzing these descriptors.

This is the second time that the *Network Brownout* study has had an additional level of analysis. Using the list of 120 abstracts dealing with Latinos and Latino issues, 64 stories were selected at

random. Videotaped copies of the broadcasts were ordered from Vanderbilt and submitted to an in-depth critical reading to examine the qualitative dimension of the Latino portrayals in U.S. networks. The guiding question was: How are Latinos portrayed by the networks? This approach assessed the selection of interviewed subjects, the level of understanding that reporters demonstrated about Latinos, the settings of the field stories, the statistical data used to substantiate the arguments, the symbolic properties of the stories, the tone of the story and the themes that were selected and a broad range of theory commonly used in the analysis of media texts. These theories will be explained later in our guided readings.

This year, we added a new dimension to the analysis by building a "viewer-oriented" critique of the nightly newscasts dealing with Latino topics. We selected 13 reports randomly (35 minutes) from the actual newscasts aired by the networks. These stories were compiled into a tape that was shown to two groups of television viewers from the New York and Los Angeles television markets.⁶ The two focus groups totaled 20 participants. The participants in the groups were guided through a process of reading and reacting to the news stories. They were shown with a representative sample of narratives and images showcased in the stories. We were particularly interested in having them react to the stories and identify particular areas of biases and misrepresentations. The reactions of our focus groups are incorporated in the study.

Limitations of Study

One of the limitations of this study is that the unit of analysis used for the quantitative content analysis portion was the story index rather than the story itself. The qualitative component helps offset this limitation as it gives the researcher access to a limited amount of actual stories. However, in order to continue assessing the nature of the media coverage about Latinos,

there is a need to increase the survey of actual broadcasts. Another limitation is the dearth of network data about the personnel involved in the process of manufacturing the news. It will be important to have data that will help us to assess the role of those gatekeepers that may be involved in this process.

⁶ We selected these two markets because they constitute two of the largest Latino television markets in the United States. Since the 2002 broadcasts made a strong emphasis on Mexican Americans as illegal immigrants, we decided to request the participation of Mexican Americans from Los Angeles in the focus groups.

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