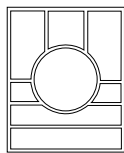


Missing in Action: Latinos In and Out of Hollywood



Report commissioned by
The Screen Actors Guild

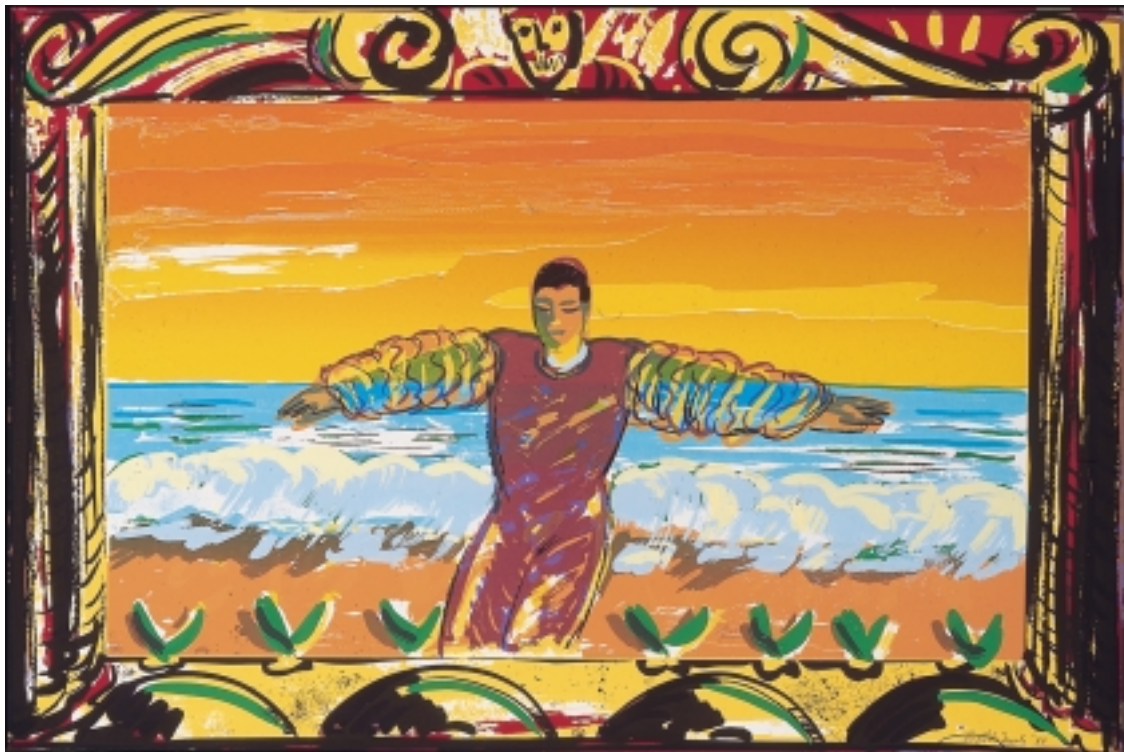
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Missing in Action: Latinos In and Out of Hollywood



Artwork by Robert Gil De Montes: "Movie House"

RESEARCH BY

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The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute

COMMISSIONED BY

Screen Actors Guild

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Acknowledgments

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President's Letter

When the Latino/Hispanic subcommittee of the Screen Actors Guild suggested that we commission a study on how Latino actors and actresses were doing in the entertainment industry, we saw a unique opportunity to examine an area never studied before. One of our commitments as a guild is to work at presenting an accurate reflection of America outside the world of film. To do so, we must work at increasing the employment of Latino SAG performers.



The findings described in *Missing in Action: Latinos In and Out of Hollywood*, by the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute, illustrates the importance of this task. Latinos are nearly absent from movie and television screens across our country. Analysis by TRPI indicates that Latino SAG members only worked 3.4 percent of the total work hours for SAG contracts as a whole. With the Hispanic population growing at accelerated rates, the need for parity becomes even more critical.

TRPI also discovered some very interesting information about the potential market for Latino actors and actresses and Latino-themed movies. Latino movie-goers spend over \$500 million a year on movie admissions. And they say they attend movies that star Latinos or that feature Latino themes more than other mainstream box office draws. In fact, the TRPI research demonstrates that Latinos were six times *more* likely to watch *The Mask of Zorro* than they were to watch movies of a similar genre without Latino themes.

One SAG member called the Latino movie-going audience an “exploding market.” There is no question that this audience will only get bigger in the next few years. By 2020 the U.S. Census Bureau predicts that one in every six people in America will be Hispanic. It’s time for the entertainment industry to wake up and take this audience seriously.

While the range of roles for Latino actors and actresses has improved, *Missing in Action* points out that more progress must be made. Latino actors and actresses still encounter limited and stereotypical roles. One SAG member put it this way, “I’ve played the whole range of Hispanic roles — killers, pimps, priests. . .” SAG members expressed concern about what is happening to the children who see these limited stereotypes over and over on television, video and at the movies.

It’s clear that we have a lot of work to do. But the rewards will be there for us as we address the problems revealed in this report. The American human landscape is beautiful, varied and changing and we need to increase our efforts to ensure that our work reflects that diversity.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Richard Masur". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Richard Masur
President, Screen Actors Guild

Executive Summary

A vast market remains largely untapped by Hollywood: Latinos,* who are active consumers of movies, television and video and represent a fast-growing audience with immense buying power. The key to reaching that market is already in the industry's hands: the national pool of Latino talent in front of the camera.

So far, Hollywood has had little information about Latinos' behavior or attitudes toward what they attend, watch or rent. This study is intended to overcome this dearth of information and to establish a baseline for future studies. It provides hard evidence to support the arguments that Hispanic Screen Actors Guild (SAG) members have made all along: raising the profile of Latinos in Hollywood is simply good business.

SAG commissioned the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute to conduct focus groups with SAG's Latino membership to assess the actors' attitudes about the employment and depiction of Latinos in the entertainment industry, and to come up with recommendations on how to improve the industry's ability to tap into this important community. SAG also asked TRPI to profile the Latino membership of SAG.

In order to frame these study results TRPI undertook an exploratory study of Latinos and their movie-going, video-renting and television-viewing habits in California. Among TRPI's survey findings, two stand out:


- ◆ The Latino audience for movies is split. U.S.-born Latinos are avid consumers of the movies, while foreign-born Latinos are less likely to see films in theaters (though a majority still go). Because foreign-born Latinos make up a significant share of the

Latino community, the industry has a great opportunity to expand its audience. To build the movie-going audience, the industry must find the content and language in films that will appeal to this portion of the community, who in California make up over 50 percent of the Latino adult audience.

- ◆ Latinos are more likely to see films that star Latino actors or actresses than they are to see films that are equally popular but that do not star Latinos. While Latinos do not acknowledge the importance of ethnicity in their movie choices, there may be a relationship in the viewers' minds between films that star Latinos or focus on the Latino community and films that present Latinos in a positive light. While Latinos do not place ethnicity at the top of the list of reasons to see a film, it clearly plays a role.

Latinos are of a mixed mind about their image in movies and television. A slight majority report that Latinos are overall presented in a positive light. But they also report that the most common image of Latinos and Latinas is negative. Many also see stereotypes in the presentation of Latinos.

This attitude is mirrored in comments by Latino SAG members who participated in TRPI focus groups in Los Angeles, New York and Miami. These Latino actors also said that they overwhelmingly feel that being Latino is an obstacle to their acting careers. As one respondent stated: "I feel like there is a label that we have to get around, being 'Hispanic.' Behind what that word means, there are other presumptions that don't apply, aren't true and are



false. Either we spend our time living up to those [presumptions] for the sake of getting a job, or we try and get around them.”

In the context of these findings, the industry should be concerned that the TRPI profile of SAG shows that the number of Hispanics in SAG remains relatively low, at 4,852 members, compared with 73,358 non-Hispanic whites and 9,566 African Americans.

When asked what the industry and SAG could do to bring about change, the Latino members were forthright and candid in their recommendations:

- ◆ Promote color-blind casting.
- ◆ Inform behind-the-camera decision-makers.
- ◆ Show the real American scene and increase Hispanic programming.
- ◆ Address pay and non-union work issues specific to Spanish-language TV.
- ◆ Play a more aggressive role in promoting Latino inclusiveness in the entertainment industry.

* We use the terms Latino and Hispanic interchangeably to refer to individuals who trace their origin or ancestry to the Spanish-speaking parts of Latin America or the Caribbean.

Latinos in American Cinema: A Historical Essay

In the United States, cinema has been an expression of our uniqueness as a nation as well as a form of commercial entertainment with international appeal. We usually think of our uniqueness in political, economic, and cultural terms summed up in the phrase “the American way of life.” The fact of our racial diversity rarely enters the picture, except through stereotypes.

For Latinos, the fact of stereotypes is matched by the general paucity of either good or bad Latino roles. To be sure, Latinos have been recurring stock characters in a handful of action genres since the beginning of cinema starting with Westerns and extending to urban crime films. Ironically, in the 1950s, the television Western resulted in three times as many Latino roles as exist today. These roles were minor and, in most Westerns, they were misleading. Westerns depict the period between the end of the Mexican War (1848) and the closing of the frontier (1890). The setting is the newly acquired territories of the Southwest. Mexicans who remained north of the new border became U.S. citizens or Mexican Americans. But in the Western they are described as “Mexicans” and depicted as distinct from the “American” gunfighter. Even when “Mexican” characters are depicted in a positive light they remain outside the nation, in other words, un-American.

In the history of American cinema, there have been just four clusters of films in which Latino protagonists and their travails were the center of the narrative: silent “greaser” films (1908-1918), social problem films (1935-1962), gang exploitation films (late-1970s),

and, since the 1980s, Latino-directed feature films. All told, these films encompass about three dozen feature-length titles. What makes them unique is that they represent the few examples of American film that presumes and concerns itself with the citizenship of Latinos in the United States.

Starting with D.W. Griffith’s *Greaser’s Gauntlet* (1908), the greaser film quickly emerged as a standard staple of the silent Western with its major stars: Bronco Billy Anderson, Tom Mix, William S. Hart. The greaser character first appeared in dime Westerns in the 19th century where he represented an unlawful and licentious threat to the hero and/or his love interest as they settled the new frontier. By the early 1900s, greaser films expressed more contemporary concerns about the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917), increased immigration to the Southwest, and the recent statehood of New Mexico and Arizona, whose large Spanish-speaking populations could impact the electoral process. These films slowly started to decline as Hollywood entered the Latin American market after World War I. Then, in 1922, the newly-constituted Mexican government instituted a ban on all films by any U.S. studio that released a derogatory film about Mexicans and Mexican Americans. Rather than reforming the portrayal of Latino characters, the entertainment industry simply stopped including them in films.

In the decade after World War II (with one precursor in the 1930s), social problem films consciously addressed the place of Latinos in American society. In these films, that place was either in the barrio, offering a defense of segre-

gated communities (“We’re from different tribes, savage” in *Bordertown*, 1935), or with ethnic working-class whites, where the titulations of “interracial” romance remained class-bound (“Girls!!! Would you do what June Allyson did?” in reference to her romance with Ricardo Montalban in *Right Cross*, 1950). In almost all films, however, the judicial system determines the fate of the lead character. His ambition to rise above his situation is portrayed as lawless.

In the late-1970s, following in the footsteps of the Blaxploitation genre, film and television producers attempted to exploit the Chicano civil rights movement and its “market potential” with a series of Chicano-themed gang films, most notably *Boulevard Nights* (1979) and *Walk Proud* (1979). Chicano community groups, however, successfully protested these films. Rather than leave the barrio altogether, Hollywood simply shifted the narrative point of view from that of Chicano youth as protagonist to the cops, robocops and vigilantes who kept them in their place.

Strikingly, “interracial” romance and marriage unites all three periods, suggesting a underlying common approach to issues of assimilation. As is common in U.S. melodramatic narratives, the political, social and economic issues raised are either explained or resolved through sexual relations. In the “greaser” films, intermarriage between the Anglo hero and “Mexican” woman offered a symbolic resolution to increased Mexican immigration as well as statehood for New Mexico and Arizona. These marriages “feminized” assimilation, so that the Mexican American characters had neither economic power (as wife), nor the right the vote (as woman). In fact, intermarriage drops out of the greaser film after women obtained the vote in 1920. In the 1950s, Ricardo Montalban portrayed the first

Mexican American male character to marry outside his “race” as part of the narrative resolution (in *Right Cross* and *My Man and I*, 1952). In gang films, these sexual relations occur before the fact as an explanation of character motivation. In *Walk Proud*, for example, the “good” Chicano turns out to be part Anglo, played by Robbie Benson in brown contact lenses. Nearly half the films center on an accusation of interracial rape or crimes of passion. If sex sells, here it helped sell the postwar intervention of the state as a surrogate “parent” for Latino male adolescents. These films end with the accused Latino acquiring an institutional father figure: the journalist in *The Lawless* (1950), the lawyer in *Trial* (1955), and the priest in *Bordertown*.

Beginning in the late-1970s, Latino filmmakers entered into feature film production. Initially, these directors attempted to reform the very genres that had stereotyped Latinos in earlier eras: the Western (*The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez*, 1982) and the gang film (*American Me*, 1992). Other films offered an alternative by way of family melodrama (*My Family*, 1995), bio-pics (*La Bamba*, 1987; *Stand and Deliver*, 1988; and *Selena*, 1997), and comedy (*Born in East L.A.*, 1987; and *A Million to Juan*, 1994). Some films even manage to be unique and universal in a way that Hollywood itself has not imagined. Studio films such as *Zoot Suit* (1981) and *Born in East L.A.* have been recognized abroad as exemplars of Latin American cinema, even as they engagingly reveal the complexities of U.S. society. These films represent a small first step toward new and entertaining models that can incorporate Latinos into our ongoing depiction of the American way of life.

by Chon A. Noriega, Ph.D.

UCLA Department of Film and Television

Report Background

The Latino/Hispanic subcommittee of the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) brought a formal proposal to the Screen Actors Guild for a multiphase research project to investigate the challenges and concerns of Latino SAG members in the entertainment industry and to examine the Latino entertainment market. SAG, in turn, commissioned the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute (TRPI) to conduct the research and *Missing in Action: Latinos In and Out of Hollywood* is the result.

A June 1998 Screen Actors Guild report determined that Latinos are dramatically underrepresented on prime time television. They appear only 2.6 percent of the time during prime time and 3.7 percent of the time on daytime serials, despite the fact that they comprise over 10 percent of the population. And they are much more likely to play minor rather than major parts.

TRPI scholars focused on a number of issues facing Latino actors and actresses in *Missing in Action*. They analyzed SAG data on the number of Hispanic actors and actresses, where they work, how many hours they work, what they earn, and what parts they play in productions. The scholars also held a series of round table discussions in Los Angeles, New York City and Miami in order to talk directly with SAG actors and actresses and find out what they thought are the major issues they deal with in their work. The final part of the research for this report was a pilot telephone survey of the Hispanic movie-viewing audience in California. Coupled with data on the Latino entertainment market, TRPI surveyed California Latinos between the ages of 18 and 40 to determine Latino movie-going and television-viewing preferences in an initial attempt to determine the existence of a market for Hispanic-themed movies.

This is the first report resulting from this research. Volume two, to be published this fall, will include results of a national survey of all Latino SAG members based on issues raised during the Latino SAG round table discussions. The second report will also include results from interviews held with industry influentials and decision-makers to find out how they view the issues raised in *Missing in Action*.

The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute is a nonpartisan nonprofit research organization that focuses on issues of concern to the nation's Hispanic community. TRPI is affiliated with the Claremont Graduate University, and the Department of Government at the University of Texas.



Harry P. Pachon, Ph.D.
President
The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute



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Vice President for Research
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The Latino community — a huge potential market

Latinos are a movie-going community, an immense market for consumer goods and the fastest-growing segment of the U.S. population.

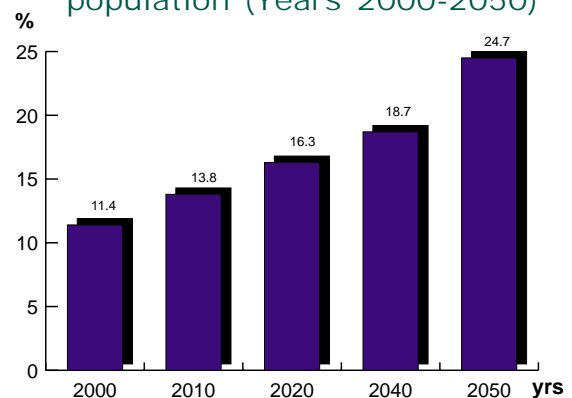
At the close of the 20th century, one out of five Americans trace their ancestry to non-European roots. And that number will continue to grow throughout the first decades of the 21st century.

Latinos make up the fastest growing and soon to be largest segment of that non-European population. In 1999 Latinos accounted for one out of nine Americans. And due to immigration from Latin America and higher birth rates, this number will continue to increase. One generation from now—in the year 2020—one out of six Americans will be of Hispanic descent (see Figure 1).

With this surge in population comes enormous buying power. National Latino buying power in 1997 was \$332 billion annually, making the U.S. Latino consumer market the 14th largest consumer market in the world (see Figure 2).

Even though their annual per capita income is significantly less than the national average (\$29,976 vs. \$39,926), Latino families spend about 4 percent of their after-tax income on entertainment (e.g., movies, sporting events, family recreational activities), according to the Consumer Expenditure Survey (CES) of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. In the past four years for which data is available (1994-1997), Latino families

Figure 1
Projections of U.S. Latino Population percentage compared to total population (Years 2000-2050)



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996.

Figure 2
A Comparison of the U.S. Latino Market vs International Markets (1997)

Rank		GNP (Millions \$)
1	United States	6,137,367
2	Japan	4,321,136
3	Germany	2,075,452
4	France	1,355,039
5	Italy	1,101,258
6	United Kingdom	1,069,457
7	China	630,202
8	Canada	569,949
9	Brazil	536,309
10	Spain	525,334
11	Russia	392,496
12	Mexico	368,679
13	Korea, South	366,484
14	U.S. Latino Market	331,517
15	Netherlands	328,484

Source: TRPI analysis of data from The Illustrated Book of World Rankings 1997 and the Current Population Reports, "Money Income in the United States: 1997," September 1998.

increased their spending on entertainment by 20 percent, while entertainment spending by non-Hispanic white families increased only by 16 percent.

Latinos spend on average about \$1,055 a year on entertainment (see Figure 3). While this is only 58 percent of what non-Hispanic white families spend, this figure represents an average of \$200 more a year than what black families spend on entertainment. And

Latino family entertainment expenditures seem to increase during good economic times. Latino families spent over \$10 billion a year on entertainment in 1997! (see Figure 4).

On average annually, Latinos spend \$74.28 per person per year on admissions (movies, theater, opera and ballet), compared with \$51.60 per person for blacks and \$91.46 for non-Hispanic whites (see Figure 5). We assume, given the socio-economic characteristics of this population, that 80 percent of the \$660 million total (see Figure 6) admissions expenditures are for movies. Therefore, the Latino community represents a \$528-million annual movie admissions market. In fact, if one looks at admissions as a percentage of overall entertainment expenditures, Latinos spend the largest share: they spend 6.5 percent of their entertainment expenditures on admissions, while blacks spend 5.9 percent and non-Hispanic whites spend 4.7 percent.

Figure 3
Hispanic, Black, & Non-Hispanic White
Family Entertainment Expenditures
(1994-1997)

	Hispanic	Black	Non-Hispanic white
1994	\$937	\$767	\$1,668
1995	1,058	\$926	1,701
1996	1,087	882	1,963
1997	1,137	872	1,940
Average Annual Expenditures (4 yrs)	1,055	862	1,818

Source: Data compiled by TRPI from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, National Consumer Expenditure Survey (1994-1997)

Figure 4
Total Latino Family
Expenditures on Entertainment*
(1997)

$$\begin{array}{r}
 \text{Average Family Entertainment Expenditures} \\
 (\$1,137) \\
 \times \\
 \text{U.S. Latino Families} \\
 (8,905,000) \\
 = \\
 \$10,124,985,000
 \end{array}$$

Source: Data compiled by TRPI from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, National Consumer Expenditure Survey (1994-1997)
*Entertainment expenditures include movies, family recreation, and attendance at sporting events.

Movie-going patterns

In TRPI's survey of young adult California Latinos (18-40 years of age), two-thirds of respondents reported that they go to movies in theaters. Of those Latinos who go to the movies, many go frequently. Almost one-third of Latino movie-goers see a movie in a theater more than once a month. Moreover, they do not go to the movies alone. Over half (56 percent) go to the movies with two or more other people (see Figure 7). About 88 percent of respondents also reported that they rented movies to watch at home at least once in

the last year, and 40 percent rent movies to watch at home at least once a week (see Figure 8).

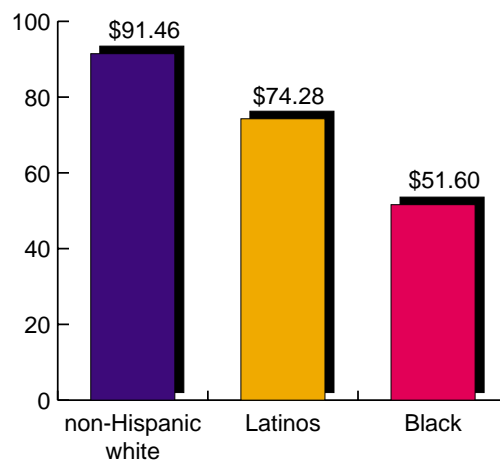
However, not all Latinos are equally likely to go to the movies in theaters. U.S.-born Latinos—who make up approximately one-third of California Latinos between the ages of 18 and 40—are much more likely to attend movies in theaters than are Latinos who were born abroad¹ (see Figure 9). Among U.S.-born Latinos, almost 88 percent attend movies in theaters. Among the foreign-born, the rate of movie attendance drops to 55 percent. Although almost all Latinos rent movies, nativity also plays a role in that decision. Households with foreign-born respondents are almost twice as likely as households with U.S.-born respondents to report not having rented a movie in the past year.

The movie industry is missing a large potential audience: foreign-born Latinos who are much less likely to go to the movies than their U.S.-born counterparts. The movie industry should be concerned about the long-term loss of a potential audience because ongoing large-scale immigration guarantees a large population of recent immigrants with limited English skills for the foreseeable future.

Over one third (37 percent) of U.S.-born Latinos see 13 or more movies each year, or more than one per month. Only 27 percent of the foreign-born see that many movies. Slightly less than half (45 percent) of the foreign-born who do go to the movies, see only between one and six movies each year compared to 31 percent of the U.S.-born.

Interestingly, the foreign-born, for the most part, do not see movies in Spanish, either. Only 10 percent (and 11 percent of the U.S.-born) have seen Spanish-language movies in theaters in the past year. These gaps in movie-going

Figure 5
Non-Hispanic White, Latino, & Black
Annual Expenditures on Admissions*
(1997)



Source: Data compiled by TRPI from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, National Consumer Expenditure Survey (1994-1997)
*Admissions to movies, theater, opera, ballet

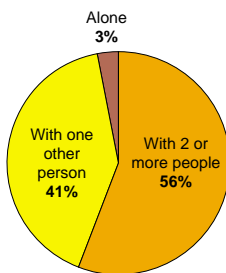
Figure 6
Total Latino Family Annual
Expenditures on Admissions*
(1997)

$$\begin{aligned}
 &\text{Average Latino Family Admissions Expenditures} \\
 &\quad (\$74.28) \\
 &\quad \times \\
 &\text{U.S. Latino Families} \\
 &\quad (8,905,000) \\
 &\quad = \\
 &\quad \$661,463,000
 \end{aligned}$$

Source: Data compiled by TRPI from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, National Consumer Expenditure Survey (1994-1997)
*Movies, theater, opera, ballet

can be partly explained by linguistic differences. Approximately 63 percent of respondents who answered the questionnaire in Spanish reported that they could not understand English either very well

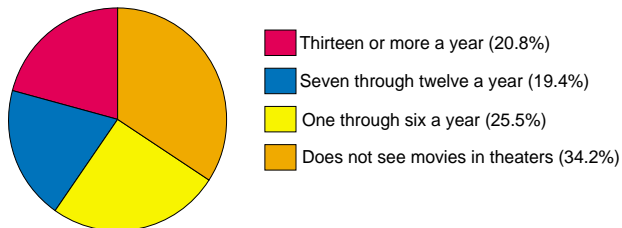
Figure 7
Latino Movie-going Attendance
With Others



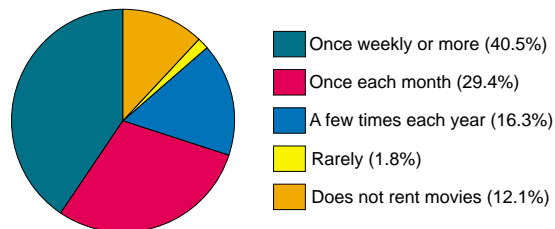
Source: TRPI California survey, 1999.

Figure 8
Movies Seen and Videos
Rented Annually

Movies



Video Rentals



Source: TRPI California survey, 1999.

or at all. These Spanish-exclusive Latinos were almost all immigrants, and many were recent arrivals.

The wide range of rental videos available in Spanish somewhat compensates for the linguistic gap in movie theater attendance. As already mentioned, 88 percent of Latinos rent movies at least once a year. While few respondents (approximately 4 percent) rent movies primarily or exclusively in Spanish, nearly one-third rent movies in both English and Spanish at roughly equal levels. The remaining 63 percent rent primarily or exclusively English movies. Renters of both English and Spanish movies are made up in large part of foreign-born Latinos who do not go to theaters. This behavior should concern producers of theatrical features. This audience has found that they don't have to go to theaters to see films.

Movie selection

A movie's casting and content influence Latino movie-going behavior among a sizeable minority. Most Latino movie-goers say, however, that ethnic considerations are not the most important factors in deciding what movie to see.

Of those who reported going to movies in the theater, approximately 40 percent said they had gone to a movie in the past year because it had a Latino actor or Latina actress. Thirty-seven percent reported that they had gone to a movie in this same period because the movie was about the Latino community.

A similar pattern is repeated when Latinos are asked to identify their rea-

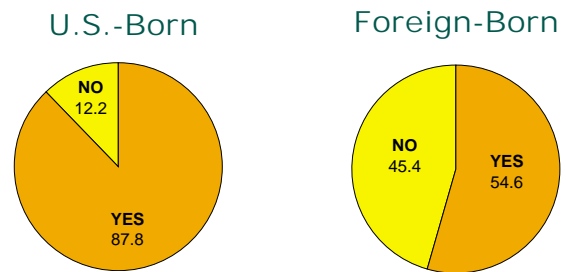
sons for renting a specific video. Some 42 percent of respondents reported that they had rented a movie in the past year because it had a Latino actor or actress, and 40 percent reported that they had rented a movie because it featured the Latino community (see Figure 10).

It should be pointed out that, although Latinos like to see movies with Latino actors and actresses or films about the Latino community, they select films based more on subject matter than on ethnic considerations. When asked to identify the *single* most important reason for selecting a film to see in a theater, nearly one-third of survey respondents identified “liking that kind of film” as the most common reason. The next most common reason (offered by 14 percent of respondents) was publicity for the movie. When asked about the *most* important reason for selecting a film, few respondents said they based their decisions on explicitly ethnic considerations.

When respondents were asked about the *most* important factor in deciding which movie to rent, they again seldom cited ethnic factors. The single most important reason given for renting a film was “liking the story or subject matter” (35 percent). Next in importance was a good review from someone the respondent trusts (13 percent).

Several questions in TRPI’s survey demonstrate that Latinos are substantially more likely to see a movie with a Latino or Latina star than they are to see a similar movie that sold as many tickets, but that did not feature a Latino star. In order to determine whether Latinos were more likely to attend movies with Latino

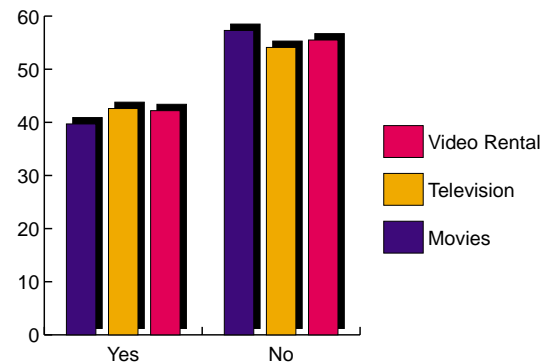
Figure 9
Latino attendance at movies in theaters, U.S.-born and foreign-born



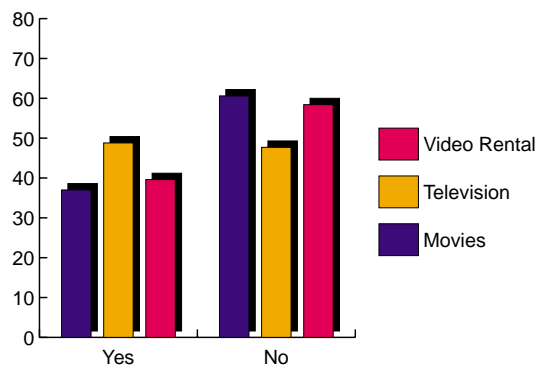
Source: TRPI California survey, 1999.

Figure 10
Importance of having Latino actors/Latina actresses and Latino community content in films, television, and videos in Latino decision to attend or watch

Go to movies, watch television, or rent video just because of presence of Latino actors or Latina actresses



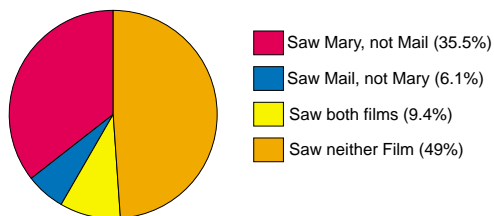
Go to movies, watch television, or rent video just because of Latino community focus



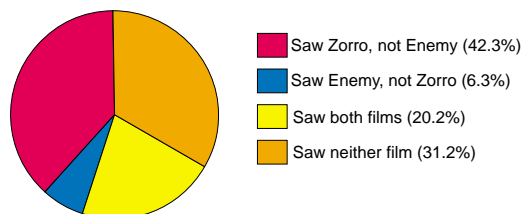
Source: TRPI California survey, 1999.

Figure 11
Latino reactions to paired movies with and without Latino and Latina stars

There's Something About Mary and You've Got Mail



The Mask of Zorro and Enemy of the State



Source: TRPI California survey, 1999.

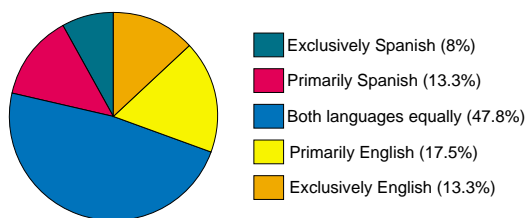
or Latina stars, TRPI devised a test question which compared 1998's highest-grossing action-adventure film with a male Latino actor, *The Mask of Zorro*, with a similar kind of film with similar box-office draw, but without a Latino star, *Enemy of the State*. We also compared the highest-grossing 1998 romantic-comedy film with a Latina actress, *There's Something About Mary*, with a similar, comparably successful film without a Latina actress, *You've Got Mail* (see Figure 11). We selected these four films since, at the time of the survey, these films had not yet been released on video. Because of this, we would only capture respondents' movie attendance behaviors.

Latinos who saw just one of these films were six times as likely to see *There's Something About Mary* than they were to see *You've Got Mail*: 36 percent had seen *Mary* and not *Mail*, while just 6 percent had seen *Mail* and not *Mary*. About half the respondents had seen neither film; 10 percent had seen both.

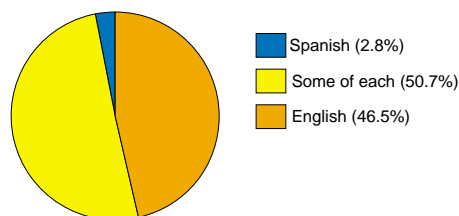
A more dramatic pattern appeared in the comparison between *The Mask of Zorro* and *Enemy of the State*. Latinos were seven times as likely to see the film with the Latino actor than the comparable film without a Latino star: 42 percent had seen *Zorro* and not *Enemy*; only 6 percent had seen *Enemy* and not *Zorro*. About 20 percent had seen both movies and 31 percent had seen neither.

Figure 12
Language(s) of usual television viewership

Adults



Children



Source: TRPI California survey, 1999.

Television-viewing patterns

TRPI also conducted a survey of California Latinos to find out television-

watching habits. Those surveyed said they watch a lot of television in both Spanish and English. More than 95 percent of Latinos surveyed watch some television each day, and almost two-thirds watch between one and three hours daily. At the high end of daily viewership, 8 percent watch more than five hours daily.

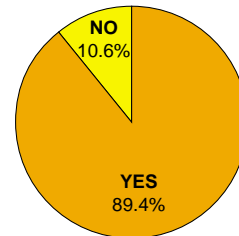
Nearly half the respondents watch approximately equal amounts of English- and Spanish-language television (see Figure 12). Of those who watch more of one language than the other, a few more watch English-language television primarily or exclusively (31 percent) than watch Spanish-language television primarily or exclusively (21 percent). As we noted in an earlier study,² programming options are greater in English.

Children in Latino households are somewhat more likely to watch English-language television than are the adults. Again, approximately half watch equal amounts of Spanish and English television. Of those who watch primarily in one language, almost all watch English television. Just 3 percent of the children in Latino households watch Spanish television primarily.

Almost half of the respondents reported that they have watched television programs in the past year because they featured Latino actors or actresses or because they focused on Latino communities. Almost 43 percent reported watching a show because of Latino stars and 49 percent because the show focused on the Latino community. It's worth noting that these percentages are comparable, though slightly higher, than the answers to similar questions about

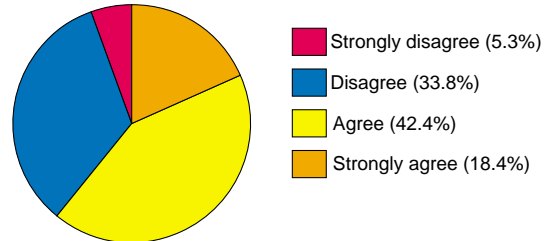
choosing a movie or a video because of Latino stars or a Latino theme. It is remarkable, and supports our hypothesis that Latinos are drawn to Latino-based

Figure 13
Latinos who have seen La Bamba



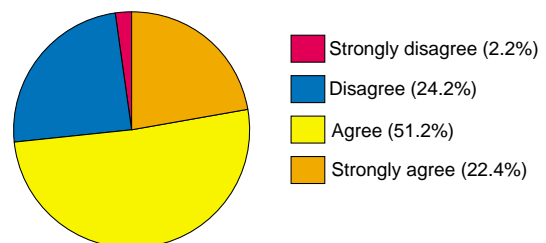
Source: TRPI California survey, 1999.

Figure 14
Latino agreement with the statement that "my favorite actors and actresses are Latino"



Source: TRPI California survey, 1999.

Figure 15
Latino agreement with the statement that "I prefer seeing movies and entertainment programs on television that focus on the Latino community."



Source: TRPI California survey, 1999.

Latino SAG members speak out

The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute conducted confidential focus groups with Latino SAG members in Los Angeles, New York and Miami. The following themes emerged. All quotes are actual statements by Latino SAG members and not from the authors of this report.

What it means to be identifiably Latino

“If I don’t see the words, ‘Maria, a beautiful Hispanic girl from the hood,’ I get discouraged. I know that means I’m not going to get a call back. Sometimes I sit in front of the mirror and say, ‘I don’t want to look Hispanic today...’”

Latina SAG member
Los Angeles

What’s in a name?

“In New York, my agent wanted me to change my name so that I wouldn’t be typecast. I did. It afforded me the access to casting situations. It’s amazing that the best part I’ve ever gotten in my life had to be in an Australian film playing a Latino.”

Latino SAG member
Los Angeles

The “Latin look”

“These casting directors called my manager and said, ‘We told you we wanted somebody who was Mexican. We wanted somebody dirty. He was white as far as we were concerned.’”

Latino SAG Member
Los Angeles

“Every Mexican American has to be Eddie Olmos. Every Puerto Rican has to look like Raul Julia. Every Spaniard has to be Antonio Banderas.”

Latino SAG member
Los Angeles

“They said I had freckles and white skin. They said, ‘What kind of Latin girl is going to have freckles, white skin, thin lips and blond hair?’”

Latina SAG member
Miami

“The role models (females) of the Latina community are Jennifer Lopez, Daisy Fuentes, Elizabeth Peña and Salma Hayek. That’s it.”

Latina SAG member
Los Angeles

You don't sound like a Latino . . .

"I've lost out on work because I don't have a Spanish accent."

Latino SAG member
New York

"I was sent on a call as an 'American mom' but they said they thought I had an accent. I think because of my name, it was a preconceived notion. I told them, I do have an accent ... a New York accent! I either have to change my name or change my accent!"

Latina SAG member
Miami

"I was very embarrassed when I was interviewed in Spanish and answered in English. I'm just an American."

Latino SAG member
Los Angeles

"I was told that I was reading my hooker role very 'white.' She said to me, 'You're Spanish or Mexican or whatever you are. We need to hear the accent.'"

Latina SAG member
Los Angeles

Crossing over and typecasting

"I was building a lovely resume playing 'Maria, the Latina maid.' It is very frustrating to not even be considered for other roles."

Latina SAG member
Los Angeles

"I peaked as a Colombian drug lord."

Latino SAG member
Los Angeles

"Like Maria, the maid, I'm Jose, the busboy! Or Jose, the drug dealer."

Latino SAG member
Los Angeles

"I've only gotten roles playing a nanny or housekeeper. There is prejudice but then even your agent is responsible for that."

Latina SAG Member
Los Angeles

"The call was for poor white trash or Latino."

Latina SAG member
Los Angeles

Being Latino on the Set

"I usually have a problem with the catering service. They don't want to serve me."

Latina SAG member
Los Angeles

“Because I don’t look Latino, generally I overhear comments about ‘those Latinos over there...’”

Latino SAG member
Los Angeles

“It’s sad that we take these comments and say, ‘Gee, I’d rather not make a stink because I need the money.’”

Latino SAG member
Los Angeles

Why are Latinos invisible on the American screen scene?

“I believe that there are ignorant casting directors. They think that Latino is Puerto Rican. We have to educate them. That is part of the reason that we aren’t getting anywhere.”

Latino SAG member
New York

“The thing is that you are dealing with producers who are just interested in money. They say, ‘This is not going to sell in middle America.’”

Latino SAG member
New York

“They are all Caucasian. All they do is watch the news at night. Then they say, ‘Look at what that Mexican or black person did.’ The media is a major influence on what we think today.”

Latino SAG member
Los Angeles

“They have to open up and realize what America is right now. It is not what is being shown. The corporate world is not seeing it for what it is; they are seeing it from the height of their helicopters. There is an America that is not being reflected at any level.”

Latino SAG member
Los Angeles

“They either watch the news or all they know is their neighbor’s maid or gardener. They assume every Hispanic person speaks with an accent.”

Latino SAG member
Los Angeles

How can change be brought about?

“Diversify to bring in Latinos to non-traditional Latin roles. Casting Latin actors for non-specific roles as the district attorney, the doctor, the day player. Then we would begin to see ourselves on television more. Then people would become accustomed to it. It would feel more like what our country looks like.”

Latina SAG member
Los Angeles

“What I would like to see for the Hispanic American actor. . . where we are not longer Latino actors. We are actors. We should be able to compete and have the same opportunities that a western kid has, that a guy from New York has, or a guy from London has. That is the ultimate dream. . . not to be labeled. You don’t call Lawrence Olivier an English actor. . . just an actor. Sidney Poitier. . . you don’t call him a black actor. That is the direction we should be trying to get to... where we are not labeled any more.”

Latino SAG member
Los Angeles

“Stop labeling ‘Caucasian male’ or ‘Caucasian female.’ Leave it open. Let us compete on the same ground that Caucasian and even black actors get to.”

Latino SAG member
Los Angeles

“Why are we only called for the stereotypical Latino roles? Let us read. Open the doors so that at least a few people can be seen.”

Latino SAG member
Miami

“All I want is for it to be left up to my talent. I don’t want to walk in and because you think I’m Hispanic, you think it’s going to change the role or the fact that I can play the role.”

Latino SAG member
Los Angeles

Educating decision-makers behind the camera

“They should look into including Latino writers in their projects. They should be invited to pursue them and let them see that there really are talented writers out there. I would encourage them to take advantage of the actors’ programs that the WGA makes available to them. The WGA has negotiated access programs with all of the networks. They recommend, and they can only recommend, to the production companies that produce their shows to give Latino writers access, to give them a job, or to include them on their writing rosters. A lot of them haven’t done it because it is *only* a recommendation.”

Latino SAG member
Los Angeles

“Somehow SAG must educate writers and producers as to what we (Latinos) are all about. They need to see our differences, our similarities and learn about writing Hispanic characters in order to make the character credible. Once that is accomplished, many other things will fall into place.”

Latina SAG member
Miami

“Maybe SAG could do some educational programming by giving them stats about consumers and the Latin dollar and population.”

Latina SAG member
Los Angeles

“I’ve never thought of myself as one of 30 million. I think of myself as an American citizen — who happened to come from Cuba. Hispanics in the U.S. are comprised of all kinds of nationalities and races! Can somebody PLEASE UNDERSTAND THAT!?!”

Latina SAG member
Miami

“We are very unrepresented in the production end in producing, directing and writing. It trickles down. There isn’t a lot of flow because there isn’t a lot of representation at those levels.”

Latino SAG member
Los Angeles

Reflecting the face of America and increasing Hispanic programming

“Networks have to take a chance on a Hispanic sitcom.”

Latina SAG member
New York

“[A cable network] is so afraid to even take a baby step in that direction. I’m only one actor. I can’t change that.”

Latino SAG member
New York

“We want to see the happy, successful Latin family in television and film. The joy and wonders of the Latin culture have still not been touched.”

Latina SAG member
Miami

“We need to create positive images and images that show we are regular people. We might have a few cultural differences, but we work, we fall in love, we get married, we have children...I feel like in their eyes we don’t live normal lives.”

Latina SAG member
Los Angeles

Spanish TV and Spanish commercials

“There are companies that run two commercials. The English version has SAG members and the Spanish commercial does NOT have SAG members. They can run that commercial for six years. That has to be stopped.”

Latina SAG member
Miami

“Get more union contracts on Spanish TV.”

Latino SAG member
Los Angeles

“If one corporation does union English commercials and non-union Spanish commercials, someone has to say, ‘You can’t do that!’”

Latina SAG member
Los Angeles

“It’s a SAG contract issue. [Spanish television] should be paying us more. That is something that has to be re-worked as far as SAG is concerned.”

Latino SAG member
Los Angeles

SAG’s role

“My recommendation is that SAG should have an annual meeting with the Latino membership to inform them of the Screen Actors Guild policies and bylaws and contracts and any activity that the union is doing so that those members can be informed on what the union has to offer. They need to be informed on the Spanish contracts as to what they should get paid. It would be an informational meeting. Instead of only a few people knowing what is going on, the entire Latino SAG membership will know. They can be involved in the politics and administration of the union.”

Latino SAG member
Los Angeles

“Bitch and complain. SAG represents us! They need to do whatever [necessary]. This needs to be a focal point at their meetings. Advise as many Latino actors about the issues and what has been discussed and agreed upon.”

Latina SAG member
Los Angeles

“I think of SAG as a very powerful union, which is why I have felt protected and well represented. If SAG had a way of linking up a group of producers even within the Latino community, that would be helpful.”

Latino SAG member
Los Angeles

“We need to let the union be more aggressive in fighting for us. The casting agents don’t want to be aggressive because they don’t want to disturb the waters. We (actors) are not aggressive because we will lose work and will be blacklisted.”

Latino SAG member
Miami

“They need to make an effort to work with other unions ... to create an intra-union of Latinos. If we can do that then we can have the [unity we’ve] been talking about. Get the writers, actors and directors in a forum to work on constructive role models. That becomes a strong base.”

Latino SAG member
Los Angeles

movies, that almost 90 percent of our sample had seen or rented *La Bamba* (see Figure 13).

Approximately 15 percent reported that they had purchased a product or become interested in one because the advertiser had featured a Latino actor or used a Latino character in the ad. This finding is all the more surprising since most respondents did not report regularly seeing Latino characters in television commercials. Just 8 percent reported that Latino characters always appeared in ads. On the other hand, more than 51 percent of respondents reported that Latino characters rarely or never appeared in television commercials. The absence of Latinos in television commercials was observed more widely than in the movies and television.

Attitudes toward the portrayal of Latinos

Latinos reported that they generally don't see themselves portrayed in movies and television entertainment programs. While a slight majority of respondents report that Latinos overall are most often presented positively in movies and television, many respondents also reported that Latinos are often presented negatively. The foreign-born, more than the native-born, believe that Latinos are portrayed positively.

Few respondents reported that Latinos were "always" present in movies and entertainment programs on television. Almost 47 percent, on the other hand, said that Latinos were "rarely" or "never" present.

When asked to identify the most

common image of Latinos in movies and television, respondents distinguished between the images of men and women. Approximately 70 percent felt that the most common image for Latino men was negative: a criminal, a gang member or a drug dealer. For women, positive images were more common (though far from universal). Forty percent said that women were presented positively, compared to just 20 percent who reported that they were presented negatively. Approximately 10 percent said that women were most often presented as sex objects; another 10 percent reported that women were most often presented as maids or servants.

Despite these perceptions of the portrayal of Latinos on television and the movies, most respondents said that the overall presentation of Latinos was positive. Only 16 percent thought that overall Latinos were presented negatively and 34 percent reported that the overall presentation was neutral. However, important differences in perceptions exist between native-born and foreign-born Latinos. Native-born Latinos are much more critical and aware of negative stereotypes in the movies and on TV.

Latino preferences for movie and television content

Latinos prefer movies and television entertainment programs that have Latino actors and Latino content. (These preferences must be balanced by the seemingly contradictory findings presented earlier in this report that the majority of Latinos did *not* attend or rent a film in the past

year because a Latino starred in the film or the film focused on the Latino community.)

Over 60 percent of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that their favorite actors on television and in the movies were Latino (see Figure 14). Respondents also agreed with statements that only Latino actors should play Latino roles. This position was held by over half of the respondents (depending on the question). Despite the belief that Latino roles should be limited to Latino actors, an overwhelming majority (89 percent) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that Latino actors and actresses should be able to play any role.

Nearly three-quarters of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they prefer seeing movies or television programs that focus on the Latino community (see Figure 15). When we probed respondents about what they meant by Latino content, nearly four in five reported that Latino content meant focusing on the Latino community broadly and not just on one Latino national-origin group (e.g. Mexican Americans) (see Figure 16).

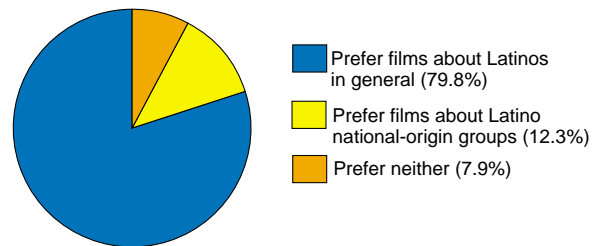
The majority of respondents also reported that they liked movies about U.S. Latinos and about Latin America equally. While more than six in 10 liked both equally, 18 percent preferred movies about U.S. Latinos and 12 percent preferred movies about Latin America. Although the majority of respondents report that they have no preference between movies about Latin America and movies about Latinos, this finding should be balanced with the fact that

only a minority (39 percent) has actually rented a film from Latin America within the past year.

Films, television, social harmony, and stereotypes

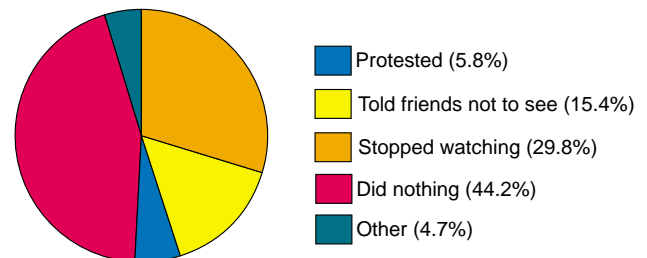
When asked for an overall evaluation of the role that movies and television entertainment programs play in American society, a slight majority (52 percent) reported that they built bridges between groups. One quarter felt that television

Figure 16
Preference for Latino films or films about Latino national-origin groups



Source: TRPI California survey, 1999.

Figure 17
Reactions to stereotypes seen in movies or on television



Source: TRPI California survey, 1999.

and movies perpetuate stereotypes and 18 percent thought that they achieved some of each. Here again, the foreign-born were more likely to take a positive view. Fully one-third of the U.S. born believed that movies and entertainment programs perpetuate stereotypes.

Finally, we asked respondents whether they had seen a movie or a television program in the past year that stereotyped Latinos. They were divided in their perceptions of the presence of stereotypes, with 40 percent reporting that they had seen a stereotype and 44 percent saying that they had not.

Of those who reported that they had seen a Latino stereotype, the majority acted in some manner to show their indignation. Nearly 30 percent stopped watching the movie or show; almost 6 percent protested; and over 15 percent told friends not to watch (see Figure 17). These findings, reinforcing the findings of earlier studies, demonstrate that there is a cost in perpetuating negative stereotypes of Latinos on television and in the movies.

SAG members on being Latino in Hollywood

Given the ever growing Latino movie and television audience, how do Latino SAG members feel about being a Latino in Hollywood? TRPI conducted eight focus groups with a total of over 100 SAG Latino actors in three cities—Los Angeles, New York and Miami—to find the answer.

Focus group participants said that being Latino is a two-edged sword. Although there was widespread expres-

sions of ethnic pride in the rich, artistic heritage from Latin America in poetry, novels and theater, there was also a definite downside to being identified as “Latino.” However, many expressed great optimism about the future growth and increasing clout of the Hispanic community.

Some SAG members shared one member’s opinion that having a Latino surname “got me in through the door or because of your last name you get more specific calls for the Latin work.” Others expressed the opinion that they had more opportunities since they could audition for Latino as well as non-Latino roles. Overwhelmingly, however, across the three cities, most SAG Latino respondents felt that being Latino was an obstacle in their acting careers.

The first of these perceived obstacles was the Latino surname itself. “They weed you out because you have Z’s on the end of your name,” one respondent said. Feelings were so strong that several respondents had changed their names to eliminate “sounding Latino” (as did Rita Hayworth and Raquel Welch). “I understand that my name has a lot to do with that. I have been told that my name is pigeon-holing me into the Latino market,” said another respondent.

A Latino surname was not the only perceived obstacle. Latino SAG members said that having “a Latino look” could hinder or help their careers, depending on the circumstances. “Down here they just come to find the Latin look,” said one Miami Latino member. “They think that we are all the same.” Added a Latina member from New York: “They told me I was too tan. I was told that I was too

dark to put in the Hispanic file.”

Accent and speech patterns can also affect employment, the members said. Curiously, it was the lack of an accent that caused problems for some SAG members. “I’ve lost out on work because I don’t have a Spanish accent,” said a Latino New York member. Added a Latina member from Los Angeles: “It’s hard to go after roles that are labeled ‘Hispanic’ because they want to hear an accent.”

“I get prejudice ... because I don’t speak Spanish,” said a Latino member from New York. “I finally learned that it is just a game. I had to learn to play the game. I got a job in a [fast food chain] commercial and didn’t even have to speak Spanish. I got to look like me and talk like me. Didn’t have to play a drug dealer to do it.”

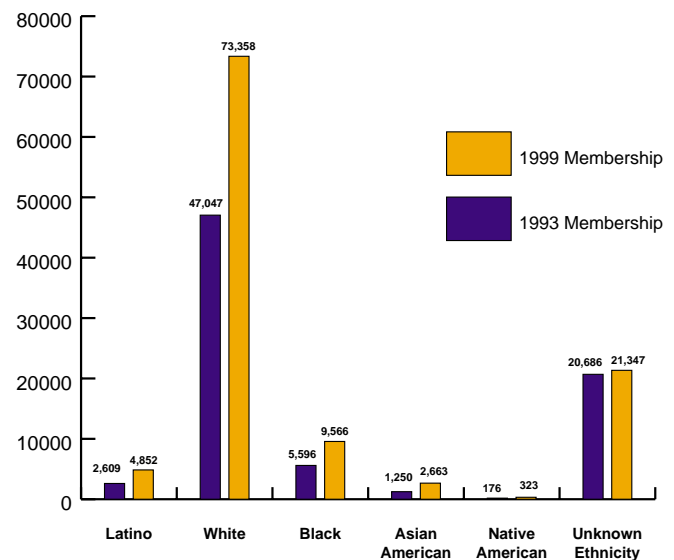
Typecasting was also a problem for respondents, despite the crossover success of such Latino actors as Andy Garcia, Cameron Diaz, Anthony Quinn, Ricardo Montalban and Jimmy Smits. “The system dictates that we are the prostitutes, maids, waitresses, gardeners, valet parkers—the ‘bootie shakers,’” said a Latino member from Miami.

Added a Latino member from Los Angeles: “The director said, ‘You know what? It is not necessary for you to audition. Let’s not waste your time or my time. Obviously you are a person with culture and education, but what we are looking for is a Puerto Rican.’ I said, ‘I don’t know if you realize what you just said is insulting. You’re saying a Puerto Rican can’t have an education and culture.’”

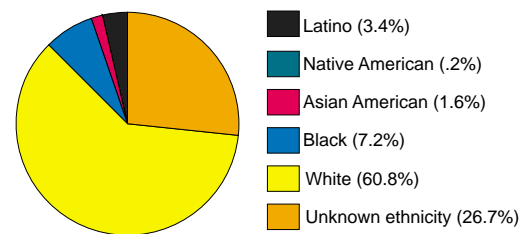
Once on the set, a minority of

respondents recounted experiences with discrimination and ethnic slurs. “I was

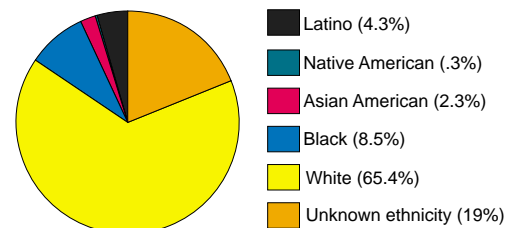
Figure 18
SAG membership base,
by race-ethnicity
(1993-1998)



Share of total membership 1993



Share of total membership 1999



Source: TRPI calculations based on Screen Actors Guild membership data.

asked in a general casting call if I had my ‘papers,’” said a Los Angeles Latino member. “I said, ‘If you are asking me if I crossed under the fence last night in Tijuana, no. I’ve been doing this for twenty-some years.’” Added a Latina member from Los Angeles: “I went to sign a contract after I had gotten a role. The secretary said to me, ‘Are you a real Mexican?’”

Latino SAG members across the three cities expressed the feelings that there was a “disconnect” between producers, writers and directors and the reality of the Latino community. According to Latino SAG members the entertainment industry continues to see the Latino community as predominantly poor, Spanish-speaking and of recent immigrant origin. This perspective, in their opinion, is further reinforced by the television news media and the demographics of Hollywood’s Southern California location, where, according to Latino SAG members, the contact industry officials have with Latinos is limited to housekeepers, nannies, valets and

restaurant help.

Moreover, Latino SAG members perceive that the industry has idealized a “middle America” audience that is not yet ready for Latino characters in movies and television. The cliché, “How will it play in Peoria?” is alive and well in Hollywood, according to Latino SAG members. “I believe that there are ignorant casting directors,” said a Latino member from New York. “They think that Latino is Puerto Rican. We have to educate them. That is part of the reason that we aren’t getting anywhere.” Added a Latina member from New York: “One-time shows seem to stay in the minds of producers, and that gives them a false sense of a Latino presence.”

A profile of Latino SAG members

The perceptions of Latino SAG participants in the TRPI focus groups are confirmed when one looks at what the data shows about how they have been treated by the entertainment industry.

Figure 19
Branch offices with more than 5 percent of ethnic/racial group members

	Non-Hispanic			Asian American	Native American	Unknown Ethnicity
	Latino	White	Black			
Los Angeles	57.6%	52.9%	52.6%	61.2%	65.3%	49.8%
New York	20.1%	23.6%	25.3%	16.7%	11.8%	29.4%
Florida	6.7%					
Hawaii				5.8%		
San Francisco				5.7%		
Total membership	4,852	73,358	9,566	2,663	323	21,347

Source: TRPI calculations based on Screen Actors Guild membership data.

Latino membership in the Screen Actors Guild has boomed over the past six years as all racial and ethnic groups have seen their SAG membership grow (see Figure 18). But despite an 86 percent increase in the number of Latino members between 1993 and 1999, the Latino share of SAG has increased only 0.9 percentage points to 4.3 percent.

In 1993, Latino members numbered 2,609 compared to 47,047 non-Hispanic whites and 5,596 blacks.³ By 1999, Latinos had increased their overall membership in SAG to 4,852. Whites had increased to 73,358, an increase of approximately 56 percent, and blacks had increased to 9,566, an increase of approximately 71 percent. The most

Figure 20
Share of Total Days Worked By Race and Ethnicity, By Year - 1993-1998*

	1993		1994	
	Total Worked	% of Total	Total Worked	% of Total
Asian/Pacific	4,460	1.8	5,484	2.1
Black	29,000	11.7	29,313	11.5
Non-Hispanic white	200,692	80.9	209,314	81.9
Latino	7,279	2.9	8,375	3.3
Native American	3,680	1.5	1,699	0.7
Other/Unknown	3,065	1.2	1,537	0.6
Total	248,176		255,722	
	1995		1996	
	Total Worked	% of Total	Total Worked	% of Total
Asian/Pacific	4,272	1.5	4,718	1.5
Black	33,498	11.9	42,738	13.4
Non-Hispanic white	227,168	81.0	256,527	80.1
Latino	10,148	3.6	11,643	3.6
Native American	1,977	0.7	1,274	0.4
Other/Unknown	3,291	1.2	3,203	1.0
Total	280,374		320,109	
	1997		1998*	
	Total Worked	% of Total	Total Worked	% of Total
Asian/Pacific	5,472	1.7	5,717	2.0
Black	40,561	12.9	35,794	12.6
Non-Hispanic white	251,920	80.1	230,078	81.1
Latino	11,641	3.7	8,226	2.9
Native American	1,373	0.4	696	0.2
Other/Unknown	3,364	1.1	3,236	1.1
Total	314,353		283,788	

Source: TRPI calculations based on Screen Actors Guild casting report data.

* 1998 data are not for the complete year.

substantial increase in this period was seen among Asian American actors, who increased their numbers by 113 percent to 2,663.

In terms of overall membership, whites continued to dominate the membership. In fact, their share increased from 60.8 percent in 1993 to 65.4 percent in 1999. It should be noted that the share of Latino, black, Asian American, and Native American members also increased in this period, so the increase in the white share of the SAG membership results from the decline in members who did not state their racial or ethnic identity. Some of this change probably reflects the retirement of older actors who had never been asked to identify themselves by race or ethnicity and their replacement by new members of SAG who did identify their ethnicity. It may also reflect more complete data collection among members who had not previously identified their race or ethnicity.

Latino actors are slightly more geographically concentrated than other racial or ethnic groups, except Asian Americans (see Figure 19). Nearly 78 percent of Latino actors reside in Los

Angeles or New York. An additional 7 percent reside in Florida. Among Asian American actors, slightly more than 89 percent reside in one of four regions—Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco or Hawaii. For other racial and ethnic groups, New York and Los Angeles are home to more than 75 percent of members, but the remainder is spread throughout the rest of the country.

Race and ethnicity in acting opportunities and roles among SAG members⁴

Latinos continually work less than their SAG membership numbers would indicate (see Figure 20). In 1993, for example, Latinos made up 3.4 percent of the organization’s membership, yet worked only 2.9 percent of the days worked overall in the industry. In early 1999, Latinos made up 4.3 percent of the membership, yet partial data for 1998⁵ indicate that they again worked only 2.9 percent of the days worked by all SAG actors under union contracts. (It should be noted that although work days vary from year to year (see Figure 21), Latino actors never worked more than 3.7 percent of days worked by actors

Figure 21
Year-to-Year Changes in Days Worked Under SAG contract (all members)

93-94	+3.0%
94-95	+9.6%
95-96	+14.2%
96-97	-1.8%
97-98	Data not yet available

Source: TRPI calculations based on Screen Actors Guild casting report data.

under SAG contracts.)

Non-Hispanic white actors worked more than 80 percent in each of the years under study. Black actors accounted for the second highest share of days worked. Their share of days worked increased from approximately 12 percent per year in 1993, 1994 and 1995 to approximately 13 percent each year in the next three years. Asian American and Native American actors work a negligible amount of the total days worked each year.

Latinos are consistently more likely to be cast in supporting roles and less likely to be cast in leading roles than are

black and white actors (see Figure 22). It should be noted that these designations are made by the production companies themselves and, as a result, might be inconsistent from one job to another and may overstate the number of actors in lead roles. Across the six years under study, Latino actors were cast as leading roles 44 percent of the days they worked. The comparable rates for white and black actors were 54.8 percent and 53.1 percent of the days worked, respectively.

Latinos and Asian American actors were more likely to be hired for daily roles than were white, black or Native American actors (see Figure 23). Of the

Figure 22
Days Worked by Lead or Supporting Role, By Race and Ethnicity (1993-1998)

	1993		1994		1995	
	Lead/ Support	%	Lead/ Support	%	Lead/ Support	%
Asian/Pacific	37.1	62.9	43.4	56.6	47.8	52.2
Black	46.5	53.5	51.7	48.3	52.7	47.3
Non-Hispanic white	50.7	49.3	55.8	44.2	55.1	44.9
Latino	41.2	58.8	44.9	55.1	35.5	64.5
Native American	37.0	63.0	46.6	53.4	48.3	51.7
Unknown/Other	22.4	77.6	33.5	66.5	57.2	42.8

	1996		1997		1998*	
	Lead/ Support	%	Lead/ Support	%	Lead/ Support	%
Asian/Pacific	42.5	57.5	33.0	67.0	40.9	59.1
Black	54.5	45.5	55.8	44.2	57.5	42.5
Non-Hispanic white	54.7	45.3	55.0	45.0	57.3	42.7
Latino	46.5	53.5	44.0	56.0	51.8	48.2
Native American	53.6	46.4	46.0	54.0	55.1	44.9
Unknown/Other	45.6	54.4	43.4	56.6	46.8	53.2

Source: TRPI calculations based on Screen Actors Guild casting report data.

* 1998 data are not for the complete year.

days worked by Asian American actors in the six years under study, 61.2 percent were employed on daily contracts. The comparable rates for Latino actors were 55.7 percent of days worked. Less than half of the days worked by whites, blacks and Native Americans were for daily contracts—49.3 percent, 45.0 percent, and 45.5 percent respectively. These, of course, are averages. As a result, they mask some variation across the specific years under study.

At the other extreme, white actors

are considerably more likely than any of the other racial and ethnic populations to be hired for series work. Of the days worked by white actors in the six years under study, slightly more than 30 percent were employed for an entire series. Just 25 percent of the days worked by black actors went to series work. Latinos, Native Americans, and Asian Americans saw an even lower share of their days worked going to series work—18.7 percent, 15.9 percent, and 10.9 percent, respectively.

Figure 23
Percentage of Hires, By Racial or Ethnic Group, by Type of Hire (1993-1998)

	1993			1994			1995		
	Daily/ Weekly/ Series			Daily/ Weekly/ Series			Daily/ Weekly/ Series		
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Asian/Pacific	63.7	30.2	6.1	60.0	26.2	13.9	58.6	28.3	13.1
Black	48.4	23.3	28.3	44.3	24.6	31.1	46.2	26.4	27.4
Non-Hispanic white	50.1	26.0	23.9	46.4	25.9	27.8	48.7	27.7	23.6
Latino	55.5	22.6	22.0	55.8	24.8	19.4	59.2	29.8	11.0
Native American	45.3	35.9	18.9	47.5	27.5	25.0	45.1	47.7	8.3
Unknown/Other	72.3	27.4	0.4	75.3	20.0/	4.8	55.5	23.2	21.3
	1996			1997			1998*		
	Daily/ Weekly/ Series			Daily/ Weekly/ Series			Daily/ Weekly/ Series		
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Asian/Pacific	64.7	23.1	13.1	63.1	31.9	5.0	57.3	28.7	14.0
Black	44.7	25.1	30.1	42.4	25.8	31.9	44.0	23.2	32.7
Non-Hispanic white	48.4	26.6	25.0	50.8	25.1	24.1	51.5	24.6	23.9
Latino	54.2	26.0	19.8	52.9	27.5	19.6	56.3	23.2	20.5
Native American	46.8	42.2	11.0	44.4	41.5	14.1	44.1	37.8	18.1
Unknown/Other	62.9	21.0	16.0	65.9	28.3	5.7	62.6	29.0	8.4

Source: TRPI calculations based on Screen Actors Guild casting report data.

* 1998 data are not for the complete year.

Earnings⁶

The widely varying opportunities for work translate into disparities in the average earnings levels for SAG members of different racial and ethnic groups (see Figure 24). In all cases these averages are low and give credence to the stereotype of the starving actor who holds other jobs to survive. But it is important to note that even in this profession where many earn very little, there is variation in average earnings by racial and ethnic group. The ethnic and racial groups that are most likely to be cast in leading roles and employed for weekly and series commitments earn higher average salaries.

In 1993, for example, the average Asian American SAG member earned just \$7,396 while the average Native American earned \$18,688. Black and white members earned at average levels in between these extremes—\$12,239 and \$11,725, respectively. The average earnings of Latino SAG members were closer to the levels of Asian Americans than to those of the other groups, at \$9,101.

The differences between the average income by racial or ethnic group have narrowed somewhat since 1993. In 1997, Asian Americans continued to have the lowest average income, at \$8,684. At the other extreme, the average black actor earned \$15,727. The average Latino continued to be nearer to the lowest than the highest average annual income, at \$10,841. When the 3,027 SAG members for whom there are racial and ethnic data but who had no income in 1997, are excluded from the analysis, average incomes among working actors and actresses increased by

approximately 4 percent.

Clearly, these average incomes mask a great disparity in incomes within each racial and ethnic group. Some highly publicized stars earn 20 million dollars for a single film while others show small incomes for residuals for a brief screen appearance many years earlier. The SAG pension system, on which these data are based, excludes some earnings from high-earning stars who are not required by the union contract to record all their theatrical fees for pension purposes. It also fails to include racial or ethnic data for approximately 20 percent of SAG members. The SAG membership includes many members of other theatrical unions whose income includes SAG-covered productions as well as productions covered by other unions' contracts.

Focus Group Recommendations

As Hollywood enters the 21st century, it will be forced to confront the changing American scene for economic reasons if nothing more. Hispanics are a fast-growing segment of the audience for movies, television and home video. But the industry is still not reaching all of its potential Hispanic audience.

When asked what the industry and what SAG could do to bring about change, Latino SAG members were forthright and candid in their recommendations:

◆ **Promote color-blind casting.** SAG Latino members adamantly urged the industry to allow Latinos to be seen

in the full gamut of roles that Latinos now play in American society—from teachers to lawyers, from physicians to soldiers, from soccer moms to nurses. As one veteran Latino SAG member put it, “Stop pigeon-holing Latino actors into the Latino file.”

◆ **Inform decision-makers behind the cameras.** SAG Latino members felt that the gap between creative personnel, decision-makers and the Latino community needs to be bridged. This will require a substantive commitment from both SAG and the industry as well as community groups. At each of the SAG focus groups, members noted that the Latino community did not yet have an organization like the black community’s NAACP or a national figure like Jesse Jackson pressuring the industry to educate and police itself. Specifically mentioned was the need to educate writers or

to bring in Latino writers who would portray more credible Latino characters. They also suggested setting up mentorship programs for Latino actors who want to go into directing or producing. Latino SAG members also cited a need for Latino venture capital to finance Latino productions.

◆ **Show the real American scene and increase Hispanic programming.** SAG Latino members vehemently expressed the need for the industry to more accurately reflect the face of America, and felt that SAG should hold the industry accountable. One SAG member felt that the lack of Hispanic faces in positive role models was a “crime. [Look] what it’s doing to our Hispanic youth.” Recommendations ranged from insuring that background actors reflect the true diversity of cities like Los Angeles or New York, to en-

Figure 24
Average Earnings of SAG Members, by Race and Ethnicity
(1993 and 1997)

	1993	1997	1997
	All Members	All Members	Members with Earnings
	Average	Average	Average
Non-Hispanic white	\$11,725	\$13,103	\$13,623
African American	\$12,239	\$15,727	\$16,272
Latino	\$9,101	\$10,841	\$11,328
Asian American	\$7,396	\$8,684	\$9,193
Native American	\$18,688	\$9,211	\$9,534

Source: TRPI calculations based on Screen Actors Guild Pension Data.

This table excludes the earnings of SAG members for whom there is no record of the member’s race or ethnicity.

1997 is the last year for which there are complete data.

couraging networks to take a chance on a Latino sitcom.

◆ **Address pay issues and non-union work especially related to Spanish-language TV.** SAG Latino members said they were very dissatisfied over the low pay scales on Spanish TV and for Spanish commercials.

◆ **Have SAG play a more aggressive role in promoting Latino inclusiveness in the entertainment industry.** SAG members do not know about the efforts SAG is undertaking to promote Latino inclusiveness in the industry. Members in all three cities clearly called on SAG to work harder at linking producers with Latino actors and ensuring that Latinos are represented accurately on the screen. SAG should also take steps to inform the Latino SAG membership about its activities in this area. SAG should institute programs that recognize producers and programs that portray Latinos in a positive light. Conversely, SAG should meet with producers and directors who produce the most egregious stereotypes. SAG should also establish a confidential hotline that Latino and other minority actors could call to report casting directors who ask for the performer's ethnicity during auditions.

Conclusion

Latinos are avid entertainment consumers, and are the fastest-growing segment of the population. They represent massive buying power and are an untapped resource for the entertainment industry.

Findings of this study show that the industry has an opportunity to capitalize on this important market by increasing the representation of Latino and Latina actors in productions; mounting more projects keyed to the Latino community and Latino themes; and being sensitive to its portrayals of Latinos in all of its work.

Latinos, as has been shown, are not an uncritical audience. To keep the present generation of moviegoers coming to the theaters and television-watchers viewing television—as well as to reach out to new audiences—the entertainment industry must pay attention to the concerns raised in this study. As Latinos become a larger share of the national audience, their preferences will increasingly shape the success or failure of the entertainment industry.

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Endnotes

1 For the purposes of this analysis, we treat the few native Puerto Ricans in the survey as foreign-born. Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens by birth and, hence, are U.S.-born. In previous analysis, however, we have found that their behaviors in terms of television are more like those of the foreign-born than the U.S.-born and so we treat them here as “foreign-born.”

2 *Talking Back to Television: Latinos Discuss How Television Portrays Them and the Quality of Programming Options*. September 1998. The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute, Claremont, CA.

3 SAG does not maintain race and ethnicity data on all members. In 1993, 20,686 had not reported their race or ethnicity, making up approximately 27 percent of members. By 1998, the members with no racial or ethnic identifier had increased slightly to 21,347. Due to the dramatic increase in membership, these non-ethnically identified members made up a smaller share of the overall membership—19.0 percent.

4 Data in this section is derived by TRPI analysis of Casting Data Reports submitted by SAG sinatory productions to SAG.

5 At this writing, SAG has not compiled complete casting report data for 1998. Although we do not yet have a final measure of the number of days worked overall in 1998, the figures that

we report here represent approximately 90 percent of the number of days worked in 1996 and 1997, suggesting that these data are nearly complete.

6 These data are calculated based on SAG pension records.

California Survey Methodology

In an effort to measure how Latinos engaged television and film and how they reacted to their portrayals in those media, the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute undertook an exploratory study of Latinos in California. Our study sought to establish baseline data on Latino film going, television viewing, film rental, and attitudes toward the images of Latinos presented in these media. Since there is little research publicly available on these questions, we undertook this study with twin objectives. First, we wanted to ascertain whether such a survey could be successfully undertaken among Latino communities prior to conducting such a survey nationwide. Second, we wanted to measure the connections between audience perceptions of the products of the film and television industries and the perceptions of Screen Actors Guild members measured through the focus groups reported elsewhere in this report.

as this—509 respondents — this study was narrowly targeted to California Latino adults of the ages most likely to see films and who are most sought out by the film and television industry. Our respondents were all between the ages of 18 and 40. Thus, we can only hypothesize about the behaviors and attitudes of older Latinos and of Latinos outside of California. That said, the survey allows us to identify several important patterns of interaction between Latinos and television and film that we did not previously know. Further, the results are baseline data that allow for more rigorous comparisons when further studies are conducted of older Latinos or of Latinos in states other than California. Finally, we were able to see that the Latino film-going audience is somewhat divided along nativity lines, with the U.S.-born generally more engaged in film and the foreign-born less so.

The survey was conducted by telephone during March 1999 from a statewide telephone list of households with Spanish-surnamed members. The average survey took 13 minutes to complete. All interviewers were fully bilingual and slightly less than two-thirds of respondents chose to be interviewed in Spanish. A discussion of the demographic characteristics of the sample is presented at the end of this report, though it is important to remember throughout that our respondents are all between the ages of 18 and 40 and are all from California.

Sample Characteristics


The survey consisted of 509 respondents from California. A survey of this

size has a 4.4 percent margin of error for questions that were answered by all or most respondents to the survey.

All respondents resided in households with a Spanish-surnamed householder and self-identified as Latino. This sample is relatively unique, so it is important to examine the demographic characteristics of survey respondents to get a sense of the types of people who were answering survey questions. It should be noted that the sample is broadly representative of California Latinos between the ages of 18 and 40.

A slight majority (51 percent) were women. Three-quarters of households had children under 18 in the household. Household incomes tended to be low, though this might be in part a result of limiting the respondent pool to individuals between 18 and 40 (thus excluding households with one or two older workers with commensurately higher incomes and no young adults). Among respondents who provided household incomes, the average fell between \$10,000 and \$20,000. Just 14 percent of respondents had household incomes exceeding \$40,000 annually. Approximately 20 percent of respondents refused to provide information on household incomes. The average respondent had completed 12 years of education and had earned a high school degree. Considering that this is a younger than average population, these education levels are broadly representative of Latinos in California. Slightly more than 18 percent had earned a post-high school diploma.

We limited the respondent pool to Latinos between the ages of 18 and 40 in



order to target respondents who were the most likely to attend movies on a regular basis. As a result, the average age of respondents was 29.

Approximately one-third of respondents were born in the United States. More than four in five of these U.S.-born respondents trace their ancestry to Mexico. Among the foreign-born, which made up two-thirds of respondents, Mexico was by far the most common place of birth. Respondents born in Central America made up approximately 10 percent of respondents. The average foreign-born respondent had resided in the United States for approximately 12 years.

This nativity data explains a final characteristic of the sample. Approximately 64 percent completed the questionnaire in Spanish. Of these Spanish speakers, approximately 63 percent report that they cannot understand English very well or at all. It is this audience, with weak English-language abilities, that does not see films in English. Among the respondents who answered the questionnaire in English, fully three in four report that they can understand Spanish, either well or very well.

Methodology for SAG Focus Groups

The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute research team conducted eight focus groups with Latino SAG members: five in Los Angeles, two in New York and one in Miami during February and March 1999. An average of 12 participants attended each group session. Participants ranged in age and in countries of origin. SAG participants were asked a series of industry-related and occupational-experience questions. Confidentiality of attribution was assured. In addition, individual interviews were held with higher visibility SAG members and members of the Writer's Guild.

