



September 23, 2020

Hon. Jerrold Nadler
Chair, House Committee on the Judiciary
U.S. House of Representatives
2132 Rayburn HOB
Washington, D.C. 20515

Hon. Mary Gray Scanlon
Vice Chair, House Committee on the Judiciary
U.S. House of Representatives
1535 Longworth HOB
Washington, D.C. 20515

Hon. Jim Jordan
Ranking Member, House Committee on the Judiciary
U.S. House of Representatives
2056 Rayburn HOB
Washington, D.C. 20515

Statement for the Record

**By Brenda Victoria Castillo President & CEO, National Hispanic Media Coalition
Hearing: Diversity in America: The Representation of People of Color in the Media**

Dear Chairman Nadler, Vice Chairwoman Scanlon, Ranking Member Jordan, and the honorable members of the House Committee on the Judiciary,

The National Hispanic Media Coalition (NHMC) applauds the Committee for holding a hearing to evaluate the state of diversity and representation of people of color in the media. Shortly after being founded thirty-five years ago, NHMC has dedicated its time and resources to the advancement of Latinx representation in mainstream media, as well as the elevation of authentic stories about the Latinx community and experience. After nearly three decades of this



work, we are still rolling up our sleeves to take on studios, networks, and media conglomerates who refuse to include Latinx programming, talent, stories, and consumers in their decisions.

How people and classes of people are depicted in the media have a direct impact on how the world sees them. Despite being eighteen percent of the overall population of the United States, Latinx represent less than six percent of all television and film characters, news anchors, producers, directors, and writers even after the rise of online streaming and hundreds of cable and satellite channels.¹ From the rise of television, Latinx were depicted as untrustworthy, mischievous, the “other”, and overly-sexualized. It is through this uncharitable and false portrayal of Latinx that limits us in so many ways in our everyday lives, as told in the 2013 documentary film *Latinos Beyond Reel*, “television has historically worked as an ideological tool that limits the representation of Latinos as change agents.”² This is something particularly and painfully ironic, as Latinx, specifically Mexican American Women, were the backbone of TV manufacturing along the US-Mexico border for decades.³ The impact of this fact is tenfold: thousands of Latinas worked tirelessly to build TV sets that would never tell their story and would instead make them a caricature.

According to a study released last year by the University of Southern California, that of the 100 top-grossing films each year from 2007 to 2018, only three percent featured Latino

¹ Castañeda, Mari, Television and its Impact on Latinx Communities, *The Oxford Handbook of Latino Studies* (rel. 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190691202.013.28>.

² *Id.* at 5 (citing *Latinos Beyond Reel*, (2013)).

³ *Id.* at 8.



actors in lead or co-lead roles.⁴ However, a majority of those three percent of roles going to Latino actors in lead or co-lead roles went to three top tier Latina actors: Cameron Diaz, Jennifer Lopez, and Jessica Alba.⁵ Beyond that, of those three percent of roles with a speaking part, nearly a quarter of Latinx actors were depicted as criminals.⁶ Again, the incredible (and painful) irony here is that Latinx are among the highest frequency moviegoer demographics, with one in every four movie tickets being purchased by Latinx.⁷

It's important to reiterate the impact of representation in the media, or the lack thereof. As NHMC continues to advocate, this is not just about the prosperity of Latinx actors, filmmakers, and the like, nor is it just about having more familiar entertainment options for our community. The urgent need for increased Latinx representation in media is a tool to combat hate, overcome stereotypes, and increase acceptance of and improve treatment of Latinx people. The power of storytelling is immense and has long-lasting effects on the psyche and wellbeing of those who are systematically excluded from mainstream narratives or misrepresented and stereotyped. Television studies have found that if a certain demographic is not shown in a certain light in programming, there is an overwhelming sentiment among viewers that limits the achievements and abilities of that demographic, whether or not the depiction is rooted in truth.⁸ This boils down to the common saying, "if you can see it, you can be it." If Latinx are rarely

⁴ Dr. Stacy L. Smith, et. al, *Latinos in Film: Erasure On Screen & Behind the Camera Across 1,200 Popular Movies*, University of Southern California Annenberg Inclusion Initiative (rel. Aug. 2019), <http://assets.uscannenberg.org/docs/aii-study-latinos-in-film-2019.pdf>.

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ Dave McNery, *Latinos Still Have Highest Moviegoing Rate in U.S., but Asians Are Close Behind*, *Variety* (Apr. 4, 2018), <https://variety.com/2018/film/news/latino-asian-moviegoers-mpaa-study-1202743713/>.

⁸ Franklin D. Gilliam Jr. and Shanto Iyengar. "Prime Suspects: The Influence of Local Television News on the Viewing Public," *American Journal of Political Science* 44, no. 3 (2000): 560–573



portrayed as successful business people, scholars, politicians, or even middle-class, a heartbreaking story and bias is being told to young audiences, including young Latinx, who will carry that with them throughout their lives.

For far too long Latinx have lived in the shadows both in real life and in media. As our moment gains supporters and momentum, I am increasingly reminded that the media and its systems were not built for us, and will be resistant to change. I am also reminded of the words of the late journalist Ruben Salazar, underscoring the ongoing need to shift public opinion through authentic, hard-to-tell stories:

“The media, having ignored the Mexican Americans for so long, but now willing to report on them, seem impatient about the complexities of the story . . . It’s as if the media, having finally discovered the Mexican American, is not amused that under the serape and sombrero is a complex Chicano...”⁹

Indeed, much like any other people on this planet, Latinx are complex beings with a multitude of unique cultures, languages, and traditions under our umbrella identity. Our complexity is part of our adaptability and resilience, and is part of what has kept us silenced for so long. When our stories are told in real, true, and meaningful ways, we are humanized, and by humanization, the livelihood of safety, livelihood, and prosperity of our community is given a fighting chance in the country which we helped and continue to help build.

⁹ Felix F. Gutierrez, *Latinos and the Media in the United States: An Overview*, Report to the U.S. Department of Health (1980).



Yours in the Movement,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Brenda Victoria Castillo', is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Brenda Victoria Castillo
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