

MOBILIZED 4 MOVEMENT

La Lucha Sigue

Latina and Latino Labor in the US Media Industries

Mari Castañeda

In December 2008, the National Latino Media Council, as part of the Multi-Ethnic Media Coalition,¹ shared encouraging news about minorities in the media during its ninth annual network television “report cards” press conference. After nearly a decade of reports had showed dismal employment rates for Latinos, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and African Americans as actors, directors, writers, program developers, and executives in television, the state of diversity at the major broadcast networks was finally improving (Rincon 2008, 28). At the press conference, the coalition even lauded the networks’ willingness to sign a Memorandum of Understanding, an agreement that would ensure that diversity initiatives and broadened access to broadcast television would continue for minority media workers.

Yet despite the promising findings, Alex Nogales, founder and director of the National Hispanic Media Coalition, noted in his final comments that due to “the significant lack of positive images of Latinos in the US and [in]sufficient access to the airwaves, the American Latino community [was] at great risk” (National Latino Media Council Report Card 2008, 5). The anti-immigrant reactions and ICE deportations that emerged in the wake of “La Gran Marcha” and the immigrant-rights rallies from the last seven years have sparked a barrage of hate speech on the radio as well as a rise in hate crimes against Latinos. Undocumented immigrants are especially under siege and at great risk across the United States (see Mead 2006; Azriel 2007; Reyes 2008; Jones 2009; German 2008, Brand 2008; Harrington and Marcus 2008). Consequently, by increasing Latina/o media representation in both content and conduit, immigrant rights

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activists, media justice advocates, and critical scholars believe that mass communications can work as powerful tools. They have the potential to reshape the negative stereotypes and misinformation about Latinos that circulate in the entertainment and news environments and create dangerous situations for immigrant communities (Bollinger and Crites 2007; Jing, Saenz, and Takei 2009; Félix, González, and Ramírez 2008; Roy 2008; Castañeda 2008; Federico, Fennelly, and Ilias 2008). The recent MOU between the major television networks and the Multi-Ethnic Media Coalition may be a step in the right direction, but it is clear there is still more work to do to overcome the media's discriminatory practices against Latinos.

Herman Gray (2000, 284) writes that the growing presence of African American images and media workers in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s indeed “introduced different approaches and placed existing aesthetic and production conventions in the service of blackness and African American cultural perspectives. . . . [These Black] producers offer[ed] not only different stories, but alternate ways of negotiating and realizing them.” The battle for inclusion by African American voices—albeit tenuous and conflicted, as the work by Jhally and Lewis (1992), Bobo (1992), Gray (2005), and Smith-Shomade (2008) attests—nevertheless produced the context in which filmic and televisual images of US presidents, generals, ER heads, and the Heavenly Father himself could be Black, intelligent, and strong.

Latinos, on the other hand, continue to wage a battle against the “institutionalized racism by US mass media,” which is persistently expressed by the system's “symbolic distortion” and segregation of Latina/o media labor (Maciel and Racho 2000, 94; Ramírez Berg 2002, 179). People of Latin American and Caribbean descent continue to be a very small minority in the English-language media industry, one of the most influential and dominant forces in the US cultural landscape and worldwide (H. Schiller 2000). In the Spanish-language media sector, the majority of the labor force is from Latin America; therefore, US-reared, English-speaking Latinos and the concerns unique to their life experiences are largely invisible from this sector as well (Dávila 2001). As a result, the employment and representation of multigenerational US Latinos are disproportionately absent from both the mainstream Spanish-language and the English-language media sectors, while at the same time young Latinos will be the most coveted consumer demographic of the next decade (Winslow 2006).

Given the present contradictions in which Latinos are both celebrated as the next top consumers and reviled as the least-wanted citizens, this article examines the state of Latina and Latino labor in the US media industry and the ways in which we continue to be an invisible and fragmented workforce. By understanding the ways in which capitalist practices divide cultural labor into disparate parts in order to benefit industries while simultaneously producing negative consequences for not only workers but also the sociocultural milieu, we

are better able to recognize the role of Latina/o labor in communications. The fact that Latina/os are nearly nonexistent in the English-language media sector—and in the Spanish-language sector, executives prefer Latin American professionals with excellent Spanish literacy skills—is not inconsequential. These material conditions communicate something important about how Latino labor is valued differentially according to the needs of the media sector, the imperatives of the global economy, and the cultural politics of media in the United States. These issues must be examined closely if all Latino Americanos, from the United States, the Caribbean, and Latin America, are to be full participants in the dismantling of media exploitation.

To that end, this article begins with a brief theoretical discussion of labor in the study of communication and a brief historical account of minority workers in the media industries. It then examines the current landscape of Latina/o media labor and discusses the barriers to entry that affect employment, ultimately noting the broader implications that this topic has for Latina/o communities, within and outside the United States. This article is by no means comprehensive and may actually provoke more questions than answers by its conclusion. However, the hope is that this small contribution will add another layer to understanding the reality of Latina/o invisibility in media (labor) markets. Without a doubt, the current trajectory cannot continue if Latina and Latino cultural and political agency are to make significant gains in the future. As Yúdice (2005, 105) affirms, “It is in taking hold of the instruments of image making and framing that one can challenge the truth of representations.”

Labor and Communication Industries

Labor, as a concept and a practice, is very important to the theoretical and empirical studies of the political economy of communication. Media and telecommunication, and even face-to-face communication, exist and function because of the labor of people. Yet, as Mosco (1996, 96) notes, “outside of political economic research, one typically finds scant attention paid to those who work in the mass media and telecommunication industries, to the general depiction of working people in the mass media, and to the coverage of labor issues.” Indeed, scholarly research on the labor of Latino professionals in the media and telecommunications industries, including investigations into the spatial and structural context of workers who construct sets, sew costumes, prepare meals, clean studio offices, or assemble communication technologies, are important but too few (see, for example, Castañeda Paredes 2002). Although studies examining the role of advanced technology in labor environments abound (Castells 2000; McKercher and Mosco 2008; Chakravartty and Zhao 2008), investigations of media discourses in relation to Latino labor are in short supply (Paulin 2007). Thus, the analysis of media labor and cultural work becomes more imperative

than ever as transnational communication and advanced technologies become powerful social forces in our lives while, in tandem, the educational, economic, and housing gaps for Latinos continue to widen.

Ironically, Latinos have been utilized strategically in the expansion of Spanish-language media and crossover Latino cultural products, even though they have been historically invisible and marginalized in English-language popular culture (Dávila 2001; Castañeda 2001). This fragmentation and social experience of mediascapes, including practices of production, distribution, and consumption, both imparts relations of agency to social subjects and obscures the unequal access to communication. In an era of digital capitalism, “the sectoral differences in an economy, the occupations and skills of a labor force, and the organization of tasks within a firm” (Miller 2011, 87) are exacerbated since they embody globally disparate forms that have the potential to “aggravate existing social inequalities,” weaken labor wages, and limit capacity building (D. Schiller 1991, xiv).

Maxwell and Miller (2006) further suggest that just as the historical models of production divided countries and industries between providers/consumers of raw materials and providers/consumers of highly skilled employment, the international division of cultural labor reveals how this is also occurring in media production. For instance, the lack of Latinos in English-language media and the overwhelming presence of Latin Americans in Spanish-language media are linked to this international division of cultural labor in which the cultural production of news, entertainment, and telecommunications is an expression of the intersections of market development, racial divisions, and gender/sexuality relations. As a result, media producers often argue that Latinos are indeed represented, in fact overrepresented in Spanish-language media (although Latinos are often conflated with Latin Americans), and thus do not need further representation in the English-language context. Yet interviews with Latinos and Latin Americans working in marketing and media content production sites confirm not only that their notions of *Latinidad* are different but also that because of class, race, language, and political dynamics, Latinos are not hired at the same rate as Latin Americans.

Additionally, the mass-media industry has a long tradition of “importing cultural producers.” Therefore, the importation of Spanish-language media into the US landscape is tolerable as long as it does not challenge the status quo. Yet despite the notion that Latinos are desirable as consumers but not necessarily as citizens, it is the tensions, contradictions, and attractiveness of Latino labor that disrupt the insensitivities of capital: as Maxwell and Miller (2006, 5) write, “There are cultural aspects to all that is labor, and there are labor aspects to all that is culture.” Holvino (2008, 8) argues that “the lack of awareness of a dominant cultural paradigm and its negative impact on the Latino workforce” is one of the reasons Latino media and cultural workers are often not hired and

retained in either English-language or nonprofit public media. Therefore it is critical to understand the present and historical positionality of Latino media labor in a moment where over 51 percent of Latinos are employed in the construction, customer service, or manufacturing industries, while only 6.6 percent are engaged in management and professional occupations. In 2050, when Latinos constitute 28 percent of the US population (Cohn and Passel 2008), will these occupational trends look any different?

Since the late 1960s, scholars, policymakers, and nonprofit media groups have tracked the media's employment of ethnic minorities as well as their representation in English-language news media and entertainment programming (see NY State Governor's Committee 1969; Office of Communication United Church of Christ 1970; Gannett Urban Journalism Center 1978; Foote 1978; US Commission on Civil Rights 1979; Beam 1989). Unfortunately, the conclusions from many of these studies are depressingly dire. In one important study, Mapp (1979) found that in 1969, in the afterglow of the Civil Rights Movement, there were only one hundred African American journalists working in English-language newspapers across the United States, despite the fact that African Americans were the largest minority group at the time and constituted a significant portion of the US population. Their employment, Mapp concluded, was often limited to the Black press, and thus these cultural workers were a tiny fraction of the overall media workforce. Similarly, Latinos have not constituted a large portion of the English-language media labor pool and have historically been relegated to the Spanish-language media industry for employment (Veciana-Suarez 1987; Gutiérrez and Clint 1995). For many outfits, the financial incentives and marketing efficacy were too vague to warrant much investment in minority training and professional development (Petrof 1968).

The politics of the Civil Rights Movement and the growing number of minority populations, however, pressed media outlets to address the employment disparity. Collaborations between media outlets, community organizations, and universities, although at times fragile, helped establish an array of internships, training programs, recruitment initiatives, and policy changes (Roepke 1978). Unfortunately, results were slow to arrive. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, for instance, the NAACP and the Multi-Ethnic Media Coalition were calling for a boycott of the national television networks for their lack of minority employment and programming representation; a "brownout" is how they described the absence of people of color across news and entertainment (McClellan 1999; Shepard 1999; Alverio and Méndez Méndez 2001). The challenges to affirmative action programs and the industry's disapproval of EEO policies for broadcast renewal, as proposed by the Federal Communications Commission in the 1990s, further hindered the development of structural adjustments necessary to improve diversity hiring. Writing at a time of fiercely contested changes, Mapp believed that the role of minority employees in many media

institutions was often stigmatized and minimized because these very institutions were challenged, and in some cases forced, to diversify their workforce and programming. Such pressure has created an underlying resentment and belief that minorities are only employees because they fulfill some sort of quota, rather than having the meaningful skills necessary to perform successfully and across color lines (Shalit 1995; Schmidt 2007).

In addition, the historically unenthusiastic treatment of Latinos, African Americans, Asians, and Native Americans as media employees has dampened the desire of talented people of color to remain in the industry. No one wants to be viewed as a quota, as a concession, or as lacking in qualifications. Once minority employees are given entrance to a media space, they are consistently questioned both directly and indirectly about their abilities, their reporting techniques, and their commitment to objectivity, especially as it pertains to stories about communities of color (Rodríguez 1999; Pritchard and Stonbely 2007; Anderson 2008). Recently, I interviewed a Latina journalist who left an English-language metropolitan daily newspaper because despite the fact that the publisher publicized his commitment to diversity, he would not hire more journalists of color (she was the only one). Furthermore, her assignments were related to only communities of color, which were often considered low-priority stories unless they involved crime or scandal. Although she was deeply committed to covering stories about Latinos and other ethnic communities, her editor's limited perspective of what she could do as a journalist exasperated and demoralized her. Ironically, twenty years ago, African American journalists complained that there should be no distinction between the reporting tasks given to them and those given to Caucasian journalists, but despite raising awareness about this issue such complaints continue to occur. Pritchard and Stonbely (2008, 232) argue that although some progress has been made, media work environments "reinforce white dominance in newsrooms and shed light on the social processes by which white dominance is perpetuated." Thus it is not enough to claim an authentic and meaningful commitment to creating a diverse workforce in communications; we must also examine the ways in which race and ethnicity, especially whiteness, also shape the cultural division of labor.

The Current State of Latina and Latino Labor in the Media

For many executives in the media industry, the imperative to diversify labor pools is not an inherent priority. However, it becomes most pressing when fiscal incentives insist on such diversification. An editor from Gannett News Service states that "if the financial health of companies is jeopardized, then companies do what companies do best—respond to economic imperatives" (Wenger and Nicholson 2004, 34). Advertisers, he later suggests, drive the industry; if there

are large consumer populations that marketers want to reach, then the industry will adjust to some extent. Historically, however, Latino consumers have not been prized as audiences, and as a result, the labor of Latinas and Latinos in the media industry has not been perceived as valuable (Cowie 1999; Soldatenko 2000). These perceptions manifest in the total advertising/marketing budgets that are allocated by media companies to reach Latino consumers, and the per-dollar value of Spanish-language outlets versus the greater value granted to English-language media.

For instance, KLVE-FM (107.7), a Spanish-language, pop-contemporary radio station in Los Angeles, is frequently ranked as one of the region's top three stations by Nielsen. Yet its ranking drops when comparing advertising revenue dollars. This is largely due to the fact that the "advertising rate multiplier," which calculates the ratio between the shares of listeners and the shares of market revenue, is lesser for Spanish-language radio than for English-language radio. Thus, a Spanish-language radio station may have "a 3.8 share of listeners in a market [but] only get a 4.37 share of market revenues" rather than 5.8, which is what an English-language radio station would receive with the same listener share (Crowe 2006).² According to some marketers, the socioeconomic conditions of Latinos produce less disposable income and lower levels of education, and therefore only particular advertisers will target Latinos. Yet Spanish-language media outlets believe this is a reflection of an advertiser bias against Latina/o communities (Mundy 1998). This affects not only the revenues of media outlets but also the labor of Latinos working in those markets. The following review of different media sectors demonstrates why this is the case.

Print Media

In 1978, the American Society for Newspaper Editors announced that by the year 2000, newsrooms across the country would reflect the demographics of the US Census, thus realizing the Society's goal to increase the number of minority journalists in the industry (Mellinger 2008). Since ASNE did not meet its goal fourteen years ago, it is now hoping to reach newsroom parity by 2025, when minorities, especially Latinos, will comprise an even greater portion of the US population. Unfortunately, a study by the Society in 2004 found that print newsrooms were still largely comprised of white Caucasians, while journalists of color were often perceived and treated as "outsiders" (Christian 2004). As a result, the few journalists of color that were employed by newspapers faced increased pressure; this is not uncommon in other professions as well (Nerone and Barnhurst 2004). Lastly, the study also found that smaller newspapers had less diversity and also provided less job satisfaction for journalists of color, largely because these newspapers were located in smaller, rural, and largely Caucasian communities. Thus despite efforts to develop minority employment goals and

to demonstrate diversity as a compelling interest in the print media industries, the hiring and retention of Latina/os, in particular, have not been entirely successful (FCC 2004). The persistent racial and ethnic inequalities as well as the dominance of whiteness in professional work environments have often created hardship for minority cultural workers in this sphere, most notably when the financial future of an outlet is at stake.

Currently, the newspaper industry is facing one of the worst economic and technological challenges it has ever seen, and as a result, it is shrinking its workforce like never before. In the wake of media layoffs and corporate restructuring, the president of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists wrote an open letter to industry leaders stating that

when a Latino journalist is involuntarily bought out, involuntarily laid off or otherwise dismissed, this erodes already inadequate Latino representation in the nation's newsrooms. . . . We fear that the Latinos forced to join the exodus from the nation's newsrooms will have lasting consequences on how you cover the fastest growing segment of the US population. (Pimentel 2008)

Thus, the political economy of the print industry is creating negative labor conditions for Latinos, and deeply affecting their state of employment in an era where media diversity in both labor and content is still something that must be worked towards in policy and practice (Mariano 2007). If the demographics of newspaper and broadcast newsrooms are nowhere near those of the United States, then the future of print media stemming from this historical moment looks unfortunately dim (Rivas-Rodriguez 2008). The broadcast news and radio industries are not any better.

Broadcast News and Radio

According to the FCC (2004), ethnic and racial diversity in broadcasting is critical if the United States is to compete successfully in an increasingly global information economy. Due to the persistent legal attacks on the constitutionality of EEO and affirmative action policies, however, the agency has not been able to enforce employment diversity measures. Not surprisingly, a study by the Radio-Television News Directors Association, based on survey data from 838 TV stations and 435 radio stations, found that the TV-newsroom workforce was overwhelmingly white. Over a ten-year period, employee diversity had not changed much, with people of color accounting for twenty percent and white media employees making the remaining eighty percent (Albiniak 2004; Papper 2004).

The slight growth of Latino broadcast labor that did occur was almost en-

tirely due to Spanish-language television, which meant that Latino professionals remained practically nonexistent within English-language television outlets although they are the largest ethnic group in the US population (US Census 2013). Although the broadcast industry claims that nearly 22 percent of its workforce is people of color, it does not explain that this includes Spanish-language broadcasting as well. According a report on employment trends in media, if Spanish-language news is excluded from the labor data, the percentage becomes more striking (Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, 2006). Consequently, Latinos are largely employed within a broadcast news and radio system that possesses a second-class status and is often viewed as a foreign entity (Subervi-Velez 1999; Castañeda 2008). In fact, the majority of non-Spanish speakers (especially non-Latinos) rarely engage with this media system, and many Latino youth who desire a career in media but do not speak Spanish very well will find it difficult to work in this setting (Muñoz 2008). Therefore, pointing to Spanish-language media as a logical alternative to the dearth of Latina/o labor in English-language media is problematic since specific language, cultural, and educational skills often limit the employment of multigenerational US Latinos. Consequently, young Latinos are turning to online digital media as the space in which their voices, skills, and life experiences can potentially flourish.

Ironically, the application of advanced telecommunications technologies is also bypassing the hundreds of Latina and Latino actors or potential broadcasters available in the United States by allowing companies to dub their advertisements, TV programming, and films from English to Spanish in Latin America. Hunt and Valenzuela (2002) reported that only 14 percent of Spanish-speaking broadcasters are from the United States; the remaining broadcasters are largely from Mexico and Central/South America. One executive I interviewed said that some US Latinos sound too much like non-native speakers or do not speak Spanish correctly, and therefore actors from Latin America or Spain are increasingly preferred; even their version of the “Latin American–accented English” is believed to be a bit more stylish, exotic and educated than the version spoken by Latinos reared in the United States. According to Valdivia (2000, 93), “Many Latina women in the United States speak ‘accentless’ English as their first language. In large part, the endurance of the accent the stereotype stems from the mistaken and recurrent characterization of all Latinos as recent and quite often [undocumented] immigrants.” Consequently, the way in which language is spoken determines the value of US Latina and Latino labor in the media, as the next section will demonstrate. Although the industry does not question (in fact, it swoons at) the heavily accented English spoken by Arnold Schwarzenegger, Heidi Klum, Antonio Banderas, Salma Hayek, and Gael García Bernal, it pokes fun at the English spoken by working-class immigrants or people from East Los Angeles, for instance.

Film and Television Industries

The politics of language and speech are not trivial issues for Latina and Latino media cultural workers: they in fact have material consequences that reinforce workers' positionality within the global media landscape. In 2000, for instance, when television and film actors were on strike due to contract negotiations over "pay-per-play" commercials on cable television, Latino actors working for Spanish-language media producers were left out of the final contract. Not only are Latina and Latinos struggling with limited job opportunities for voiceovers, advertisements, and acting roles in television and film, but the Screen Actors Guild and AFTRA, which negotiated the contract, argued that the dual system is a result of language differences and the belief that Spanish-language media audiences are fewer and poorer than English-language audiences. Although in an interview a representative from the actors unions' said that Latino actors should "be happy" with the current system because it ensures higher wages in the long run, many Latino actors actually argued that the Latino "contract is still predicated on the assumption that we must get less money because our audience is just a few Hispanics in east LA" (Porter 2000). Adding insult to injury, the increased outsourcing of television and film production to Latin America is also hurting US Latino actors. Porter (2000) notes that the usage of non-union labor for Spanish-language advertising and programming makes it more difficult for Latino actors to find work since they are often left out of English-language production. For Latina/o cultural workers, Spanish-language media is often their bread-and-butter.

Thus the media's hierarchies of race and ethnicity, especially in film and television, devalue the labor of Latina and Latino cultural workers such as actors and actresses. A 2006 study by the UCLA César Chávez Center for Chicano Studies demonstrated that white Caucasian males are overwhelmingly preferred in leading roles, "leaving a small proportion of roles open to actors of color and to women" (Robinson 2006, 1). The analysis showed that only 5.2 percent of character breakdowns (casting announcements) utilized in Hollywood for film and television called for a Latina/o actor whereas 69 percent of the announcements either specified "white" or by default had an understood designation of whiteness as the racial/ethnic background that the acting role embodied. The actual employment of lead actors was even more dismal than what casting announcements initially required; only 1.2 percent of lead actors were Latinos, whereas 81.9 percent were white.

According to Robinson (2006, 1), "These rigid set-asides stand in sharp contrast to employment opportunities in virtually every other industry, where the law authorizes that all races/ethnicities [must] be allowed to compete for every available job." The fact that film and television lie at the intersection of industry and the creative arts makes it difficult to challenge a writer's or director's choice

in actors. Since creativity should not be dictated by labor mandates or public policy, people are hired according to the requirements of the creative form. In fact, EEO policy states that occupational differentiation can occur “insofar it is ‘necessary for the purpose of authenticity or genuineness’” such as in acting roles (quoted in Robinson 2006, 2). Thus the media industry utilizes defenses such as EEO policy (bona fide occupational qualification), the First Amendment, and audience/market desires in order to continue with the status quo.

These practices reinforce structures of racial/ethnic hierarchy and power through the collective failure to acknowledge how the creative arts and pop culture industries are deeply informed by socially constructed notions of what kind of person a lead actor or actress should be, notions that include racial/ethnic background. Consequently, Robinson (2006, 3) argues that “by virtue of their race/ethnicity or gender, actors of color and female actors are presumptively relegated to the margins of the film industry, where they must grapple with a double bind: if they refuse stereotypical roles, they face economic hardship; if they accept stereotypical roles, they increase damage to self- and group identity.”

According to Noriega (2002, 1), “The entertainment industry has not kept pace with changing demographics [and] employment opportunities for racial minorities have actually decreased relative to the level of the 1970s. In other words, there are nearly twice as many people of color encountering roughly the same rate of employment.” In his study of prime-time network television in 2001–2002, Noriega found that Latinos on average had 5.9 percent of recurring and regular roles whereas minorities as a whole had an average rate of 28.2 percent. While the former percentage demonstrates progress, the rate of representation for Latinos and Native Americans is actually “less than half of their population. Furthermore, minority actors tend to be concentrated in a limited number of series [for example, *The George Lopez Show*]” (2). The cancellation of this show, although it is now in syndication, translates to a decrease in overall minority, and especially Latina/Latino, employment in network television today.

Unfortunately, the employment rates of minority writers and directors in prime-time television are even lower than those of minority actors. In his 2001–2002 study of prime-time television, Noriega (2002, 2) found that on average, Latinos constituted 0.8 percent of all network directors and 1.7 percent of all network writers. Furthermore, only one network—CBS—hired Latinos as department directors or higher-level executives during the period of the study. This is extremely troubling and problematic, as Noriega (2002, 1) notes, since network TV is “one of the most powerful bases for a common national culture.” People in the United States spend almost as much time in front of their television sets as they do working; many studies have shown that mass media are critical forces in shaping dominant perceptions of the importance, invisibility, and character of communities. Thus, the employment of Latina/o actors, writers, directors, producers, and executives is absolutely necessary to address the lack

of nuanced representation, equal opportunity, and access to television that has plagued minority cultural workers for years. Informal interviews with various Latino media employees have revealed that the situation for television actors, writers, directors, and executives is improving slightly, in large part through the importation of Mexican, Latin American, and Spanish media workers who have successfully crossed over into the global Hollywood industry. For the most part, however, employment in the entertainment and news media is still difficult to attain, especially for US-born and/or US-raised Latinos. Latino-run organizations that provide these opportunities, such as Teatro Luna and NALIP, are therefore more important than ever.

Making and Demanding Space for Latina/o Creative Labor

Latina actresses and Latino actors have noted that it is difficult to find roles that go beyond the clichéd roles of housekeeper, nanny, prostitute, gang member, undocumented immigrant, or overall societal menace. The Latinas of Teatro Luna, a Chicago-based, all-Latina troupe, began their theater company as a response to being “tired of auditioning for the same tired stereotypes about Latina women. Another maid! Another sexy *mamacita*! Another generic Latina named Maria! We wanted to build a space where we could tell the truth about our lives” (Teatro Luna; Puente 2002). Although the year 2000 brought proclamations of the awakening of the “Latino giant” (Beltrán 2010) it became clear to the founders of Teatro Luna that sincere and more nuanced representations of Latinas were not necessarily what the marketing analysts had in mind. Thus, they decided to challenge the notion of the “generic Latina” as represented in Hollywood and English-language media. Mitchell and Latorre (2006, 22) “point to the lack of broad creative control and the low numbers of Latina/os behind the camera, writing the scripts, and in the production office as [some] of the reasons for the inadequacies for Latina/o images.” This is exactly what Teatro Luna hoped to improve by showcasing Latina stories written, directed, acted, and produced by Latinas and Latinos.

The world of online digital media is another venue that Latina/os are increasingly claiming as their own space, using it to challenge the boundaries of creative work and the definition of Latina/o cultural workers. Natalia Muñoz founded *La Prensa del Oeste de Massachusetts*, which began as a community newspaper in western Massachusetts and quickly transformed into an online forum for local, regional, and (trans)national news content, community discussions, and creative work. *La Prensa.com* does not have a professionally trained or paid staff, but its content is produced by people who work and volunteer in community-based organizations, educational institutions, government or social-service agencies, agricultural groups, and immigrant-rights organizations. These contributors provide much-needed information to a Massachusetts community that is in-

creasingly the bedrock of the service-sector and agricultural workforces, but is still invisible in the largely white Anglo social spaces of New England.

Not only are the personal, creative, and news stories on *La Prensa.com* forwarded to Latinos and non-Latinos alike, but the online community has also produced “brick-and-mortar” creative cultural productions that have brought together the Latino and non-Latino communities in the area. The most successful was “Nuestras Abuelas,” a storytelling and photo exhibit that was posted online and also displayed at public schools, libraries, museums, and government buildings. The exhibit brought a group of multigenerational Latinas together with Latin American women of various immigrant backgrounds and developed a reclamation of space that expanded within and outside the digital world in a region where Latinos are viewed with suspicion and fear.

Another organization that aims to provide a supportive space for the development of Latina/Latino film and media production is the National Association for Latino Independent Producers. NALIP also emerged at the crest of the “Latino boom” at the new millennium when Latino actors and musical artists such as Marc Anthony, Jennifer Lopez, and Ricky Martin were successfully crossing over between mediascapes. Advertisers were eager to reach Latino consumers, especially with the expansion of Spanish-language radio and print. Ironically, it was also a moment when the Corporation for Public Broadcasting announced that it would cut funding to the National Latino Communications Center, the nonprofit minority consortium that commissioned and distributed Latina and Latino programs for PBS (Noriega 2000). For many Latina/Latino independent media workers, media activists, and media scholars, the crisis pointed to the contradictory and tenuous relationship that English-language media, corporate businesses, and policymakers have with the growing Latino population, in which they are both desired and dismissed. Consequently, NALIP and the first Latino Producers conference began with the goals to “1) Organize ourselves as a creative constituency, 2) Take an active role in defining our institutional needs within public television, and 3) Look beyond public television and to the new media environment within which independent programming might find other outlets” (Nieto 2000, 149). Since its inception, NALIP has become a strong organization that aims to broaden the venues available to Latina/Latino cultural workers in media and film, but there is still much work to do.

The problem lies in the ways in which Latina/o citizens, audiences, workers, and cultures are valued overall. Although Latinos are increasingly valued as consumers, this is not true of their cultural citizenship and labor. This in fact permits the kind of outsourcing that was mentioned previously as well as the scant hiring of Latinos in US media outlets, while at the same time consumer marketing efforts towards Latinos are rapidly increasing. Thus, the invisibility of Latinos in English-language media and their presence in Spanish-language media reflect more than simple differences of language. Rather, these trends in-

dicating the ways in which historical, political-economic, and cultural conditions have created contemporary media divisions and assumptions about the value of Latina/o labor in the communications sector.

Conclusion

Where do we go from here? Many people, especially people of color, believe that the presidency of Barack Obama is a watershed, ushering in an age of greater inclusion, respect, and equal treatment of marginalized groups that are often negatively portrayed in business, education, and mass media. The president, his family and his cabinet represent a new era of possibilities in which people's ethnic, racial, socioeconomic, gender, and sexual identities will no longer be viewed as limitations but instead as assets that empower a credible claim to American culture and a voice in the politics of recognition. Yet this hope does not negate the fact that the English-language media is a business; with the aid of advertisers, it depends on audiences that are happy to consume and accepting of the status quo. Latina and Latino cultural workers who become part of the new digital future of mass media need to be aware of how companies also view their inclusion—not as a movement towards social justice, but as a gesture to address the growing gaps in Latino marketing and their imperative to make money. As one consultant noted, having more Latinos and a diverse workplace overall “is a bottomline business issue. It has to do with customers and the increase in market share, revenues, income and profits they bring” (Owens 1997, 3). Furthermore, the deeply rooted (negative) perceptions of minority communities are difficult to overcome, as Seymour (2009) noted in an article documenting the decline of African American cinema despite the success of Black filmmakers. Unfortunately, white Caucasian executives, primarily men, have conceived of Black audiences in a stereotypical manner that has pigeonholed the community, transforming it into a product that is apparently marketable only when sports, rap, or crime are involved.

Consequently, there remain many barriers that need to be overcome if minority cultural workers are to thrive in the media. Paradoxically, it is becoming progressively clear that entertainment and news industries will depend on communities of color, especially Latinas and Latinos, if they intend to be relevant in the twenty-first century. Although efforts may be underway to expand and deepen the invisibility of Latina/o communities, we must continue to challenge the international division of cultural labor and utilize non-dominant spaces to make our voices heard.

NOTES

1. The Multi-Ethnic Media Coalition was formed in 1999 and includes the National Latino Media Council (NLMC), the Asian Pacific American Media Coalition, and the organization American Indians in Film and Television. The National Latino Media Council was also

formed in 1999 with the specific intent to increase Latina/o media employment, advocate for more positive representations of Latinos, and promote media policies that benefit Latino communities. The following organizations participate in NLMC: Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute, Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, Latino Literacy Now, LatinoJustice PRLDEF, League of United Latin American Citizens, Latino Theater Company, Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Mexican American Opportunity Foundation, National Association of Latino Arts and Cultures, National Association of Latino Elected Officials, National Association of Latino Independent Producers, National Council of La Raza, National Hispanic Media Coalition, National Institute for Latino Policy, Nosotros, and United States Hispanic Leadership Institute (see “National Latino Media Council,” *NHMC*, <http://www.nhmc.org/about-us/national-latino-media-council/>).

2. The “advertising rate multiplier” is the calculation that translates listener market share into revenue market share. The “advertising rate multiplier” for Spanish-language radio is set at a lower percentage than English-language radio, which means a Spanish-language station receives lesser revenue even if its listener market share is equal to that of an English-language radio station.

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