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From Spic to Spice: Latinas and Latinos on U.S. Television¹

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1. A Conspicuous Absence

At a seminar series of the Museum of Television & Radio² in New York City, which was held in 1996, actress Lauren Velez contended that she and Michael DeLorenzo (both of whom had leading roles in the first three seasons of the detective show *New York Undercover*; FOX, 1994-98) were at that time the only Latino couple represented on U.S. network television. This comment underscores the decade-long relative invisibility of Latinas and Latinos on English-language television in the United States. Twelve years later, in 2008, Clara E. Rodríguez observed that this conspicuous absence of Latinas and Latinos from the small screen was both old and ongoing:

current empirical research indicates that the patterns of the past in which Latinos were underrepresented and misrepresented continue into the present. ... Study after study has revealed this chronic condition of Latino *underrepresentation* on television. Beginning with the Kerner Commission's 1968 examination of television characters during the 1960s, Latinos have consistently been recognized as the least likely to appear in television entertainment programs. ... [Several studies] found an all-too familiar picture of underrepresentation and negative portrayals. (“Census” 232).

Rodríguez reports that the percentage of Latino characters on prime-time English-language entertainment programming dropped from about 3% in the 1950s to 1% in the 1980s, rising again to 2% in 2001 and 4% in 2002.³ For the fall of 2004, UCLA's Chi-

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² I am grateful to the Museum of Television & Radio (MT&R) in New York City, where I was able to view many of the older materials discussed in this essay. I also wish to thank the School of Languages and Literatures at the University of Bielefeld for supporting my two research trips to the MT&R.

³ Cf. also Chon A. Noriega, who found in 1994 that although at the time Hispanics made up more than 10% of the U.S. population, they were “featured in only 1% of the roles of primetime television series, and even less in major films.” He also points out the lack of creative control by Latinas/os at the time: “The few Hispanic-themed shows have never had a Hispanic writing team, let alone writer in a key role” (“Numbers” 107, 108). For the situation in 2002, cf. Mastro/Behm-Morawitz. On parallels to the situation of “white con-

cano Studies Research Center also found that 4% of prime-time regular characters were Latina/o (cf. Avila-Saavedra, *Trend* 44). According to the National Hispanic Media Coalition (NHMC) and GLAAD,⁴ among the prime-time series regulars on ABC, CBS, NBC, and FOX in the 2012-13 season, the share of Latinas/os was again at 4% (down from 5.6% the previous year).⁵ Although, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, there are only one third as many Asian Americans as there are U.S. Hispanics, the major TV networks in the U.S. had more Asian recurring characters in prime-time series in 2012-13 than Latina/o recurring characters.

A cursory run through noteworthy programs on English-language television in the United States confirms the conspicuous absence of Latinas and Latinos. While *Star Trek* (NBC, 1966-69) made every effort to have an ethnically mixed cast, there was no Latina/o among the recurring characters on board the original Enterprise—ever. Also, no Latina or Latino has ever found his or her way into the bar of *Cheers* (NBC, 1982-93).⁶ Likewise, no recurring Latina/o figure has appeared on *The Simpsons* (FOX, 1989-) by 2013, although the introduction of a Latina brainchild (her voice being done by Eva Longoria) has been announced for the 2013-14 season—after 24 seasons without any leading Latina/o characters. One of the most recent successes in U.S. television, *Mad Men* (AMC, 2007-2015 [est.]), four-time winner of the Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Drama Series, has no recurring Latina/o characters either.

But we may be looking in the wrong direction if we expect television to duplicate the demographics of the United States in the ethnic composition of the cast of fictional series. Let us therefore consider a different approach, that of television not as a mirror of society but as a “cultural forum.” Horace Newcomb and Paul M. Hirsch proposed that “we might track the history of America’s social discussions of the past ... decades by examining the multiple rhetorics of television during that period” (586). Television, they maintain, serves as a discussion forum, a medium which presents viewpoints on current issues and which offers those viewpoints as the basis of discussions by viewers. On the other hand, television is not produced in a vacuum but has to be aware of what sells and what is of interest to producers, executives, advertisers, and viewers. Their worlds may end up being affected by the issues and positions presented in a television program. Although the dominant mode of television has often been described as

trol” over the representation of “black content,” cf. Hunt. Gender issues in TV representations are discussed by D’Acci.

⁴ Formerly: the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation.

⁵ Looking at the ethno-racial diversity on these four networks for the 2012-13 season, GLAAD found that a total of 22% of prime-time series regulars were people of color. Of the total of 701 regular characters 84 were black, 29 Latina/o, and 33 Asian or Pacific Islander. NHMC president Alex Nogales commented that “the incremental progress that we had seen for Latino regulars at ABC, NBC, CBS, and FOX is now regressing. On the other hand, cable networks are producing excellent hit shows such as *Dexter*, *Suits* and *Dallas* with multi-dimensional characters and featuring diverse actors” (GLAAD 13).

⁶ For typecasting and rituals in *Cheers*, cf. Raab, “‘Where’.”

aiming to preserve the status quo, Newcomb and Hirsch “are far more concerned with the ways in which television contributes to change than with mapping the obvious ways in which it maintains dominant viewpoints” (571). How, we may therefore ask, has the representation of Latina/o characters on U.S. television responded to historical developments and to changes in demography and published opinion? And how has this representation facilitated new perceptions of Latinas and Latinos and changes in public discourse about this largest ethnic minority group in the United States?

Stuart Hall stresses that the notion of representation is central to cultural and media studies.⁷ The word “representation,” he writes, implies that something was already there/present and is now being *re*-presented, which opens the door to distortions and misrepresentations.⁸ Media images stand in for a group, in our case the group of Latinas and Latinos in the United States as well as the geographic areas of the Americas that lie south of the United States. Representation, Hall believes, is the way in which meaning is given to the things depicted. He distinguishes between the *reflective, intentional* and *constructionist* approaches to representation (15). In our context of Latinas/os on U.S. television, we are mostly dealing with a *constructionist* approach that may tend to give the impression of being *reflective*. In other words, mostly non-Latino writers, newsmakers, directors, producers, and network executives construct Latina/o characters and corresponding traits for television and imply that these are not purely fictional but that they have some basis in the world outside the small screen. Actors and actresses are then asked to portray those pre-conceived images in believable scenarios. Only with the relatively recent (and still rare) entry of Latinas and Latinos into directorial, editorial, or executive control of TV representations of Latinas/os can we assume more of an *intentional* approach, where Latina/o individuals use TV programs to support a positive self-image, question stereotypes, or promote their own agendas. Representations and the way in which they are understood by audiences depend on what Hall calls “the conceptual system” or “the conceptual map” (17ff.) of a particular context.

This essay seeks to provide a history and categorization of Latinas and Latinos on U.S. television. Toward this purpose I argue that in the 1950s and 60s the televised representation of Latinos/as in the United States depended largely on a conceptual map that saw Latinas/os as erratic or impulsive people, as simpletons with a heavy accent, as underdogs, unskilled laborers, temptresses, or criminals. At that time we encounter the construction of early “spics”—on television as well as in film.⁹ The cultural forum

⁷ For an introduction to issues of representation on television, cf. O’Donnell.

⁸ Pierre Bourdieu reminds us that limits like time constraints and audience ratings impose onto television a measure of self-censorship, which prevents the exploration of certain topics and the in-depth treatment of any issue (13ff.).

⁹ Charles Ramírez Berg has established “six basic stereotypes [of Latinas/os in U.S. film]: *el bandido*, the harlot, the male buffoon, the female clown, the Latin lover, and the dark lady” (66, cf. ch. 3). His list of stereotypical portrayals of Latinas/os in film and television is expanded and updated by David Maciel and Susan Racho. They include the perpetual *bando-*

to which these depictions contributed was one that privileged whiteness and othered deviations from this norm. Reflecting the generally low social prestige and the scarcity of influential positions held by Latinos and Latinas in the 1960s, Latino roles on U.S. television were scarce and were often limited to weak or undesirable characters—despite noteworthy exceptions like the Montoyas on *The High Chaparral*. Moreover, news anchors and TV show hosts all tended to be Anglo. However, the conceptual system changed with the gradual spread of local Spanish-language television stations as well as the growing national visibility of Latinas/os in the United Farm Workers' strike, the grape boycott, and the Chicano movement, which facilitated the success of the TV series *Chico and the Man* in the 1970s, a show that—despite many shortcomings—reflects the growing ethnic pride, improved educational levels, and greater self-assurance of Latinos/as and whose popularity helped change the parameters of the cultural forum. With the growth of a Latino middle class and with rising numbers of college-educated Latinas/os, the conceptual system shifted again to make room for the representation of Latinos (primarily men) as urban professionals in TV series since the 1980s like *Miami Vice*, *L.A. Law*, *NYPD Blue*, *ER*, or *Six Feet Under*. For Latina women characters, the (partial) shift away from established stereotypes like the harlot, the temptress or the female clown only occurred about two decades later, with programs like *Desperate Housewives*, *Hot Properties*, and *Speak American*. Despite the continuation of clichés like that of the voluptuous temptress or of the shady *bandido* and despite associations of Latinos/as and Latin America with mystery and danger there have been numerous attempts—especially since Hispanics became the largest ethnic minority group in the United States in 2001—to readjust the conceptual map such that shows like *American Family*, *George Lopez*, and *The West Wing* could depict Latinas and Latinos as living the inter-ethnic “American experience.” Children’s television has supported that development toward interculturalism. Recent trends also include the conscious play with and interrogation of ethnic stereotypes, as found in *Freddie*, *Mind of Mencia* and *Ugly Betty*, and the staging of Latin glamor in all kinds of awards ceremonies. We have therefore reached, in many cases, a scenario in which the Latino element adds spice to non-Latino environments—sometimes reiterating clichés like Latina/o sexuality or the Latin uncanny, at other times playing in a post-modern manner with some of those stereotypes or adding a certain exoticism. We are also increasingly seeing shows where some of the creative and executive control is held by Latinas/os and where there is a stronger *intentional* representation (in Hall’s sense) of a positive and powerful Latina/o presence in the United States, or respectively, where a program’s *constructionist* approach is more strongly influenced by the eth-

lero, the *péon*, the drug dealer and drug user, the urban gang member, the prostitute, and the maid as additional prominent depictions on the big screen. Moreover, they point out that even in “mainstream films” set in areas that are heavily populated by Chicanas/os “Chicanas/os are [generally] invisible” (94-95). For an earlier assessment of Latino portrayals in film (including Mexican films featuring Chicanas/os) and early television up to the 1980s, cf. Treviño, “Portrayals.”

nic, political, gendered, or educational vision of Latina/o media personalities.¹⁰ Some of these approaches to representing Latinas and Latinos are also to be found in Spanish-language U.S. television. Although sketched here as a neat linear development, the six decade-long path from Ricky Ricardo to Betty Suárez has many bends and forks—and it is still only partially visible. Rather than trying to address every Latina/o appearance on U.S. television, I propose twelve categories that illustrate the larger trends. Of course I am well aware that quite a number of the programs discussed here fit into more than one category. For example, *Modern Family* can go in a section on “Latina Curves,” on intercultural “American” scenarios or on “Playing with Stereotypes.”

Latina/o representation on English-language U.S. television as a research topic has been of particular interest to media sociology, but has received less attention in cultural studies; its almost complete absence from the 525-page Routledge *Chicana/o Cultural Studies Reader* edited by Angie Chabram-Dernerseian is a case in point—a shortcoming which this essay seeks to remedy.

The trajectory from “spic” to “spice” falls on the fault lines of economic considerations: since the main objective of TV programming on commercial networks is to produce revenue through the sale of advertisement time. Consequently, the main goal of an individual episode or show is to attract the largest possible number of viewers (with a certain buying power). In order to attract mass audiences, TV productions tend to give the impression of presenting a slice of ‘real’ life rather than being artistic constructs. Nonetheless, they use what Roland Barthes has called the language of myth while trying to “hide [their] discursive nature” and appearing to be “an unmediated product of, or reflection of, an innocent reality” (qtd. in Hall 41). It will become clear that the on-screen realities of Latinas and Latinos are closely tied to off-screen developments in U.S. society, in viewing habits, and in approaches to ethnic difference.

2. Early “Spics”

As S. Robert Lichter and Daniel R. Amundson observed, the end of *Amos ‘n’ Andy* in 1953 “also signaled the end of a brief period of ethnic diversity that would not reappear in prime time for two decades” (57). Very few Latino representations made it onto U.S. television in the 1950s and 1960s, the most memorable being the Cuban-American band leader Ricky Ricardo in *I Love Lucy* and the Mexican cartoon mouse Speedy Gonzales in *Looney Tunes*. Bearing in mind that in the 1950s and 1960s the majority of television viewers in the United States as well as almost all the makers of

¹⁰ Of course words, signs, and images cannot be pinned down to only *one* meaning, as a purely *intentional* approach would imply. As Hall writes: “neither things in themselves nor the individual users of language can fix meaning in language” (25). However, Latina/o directors, producers, and network executives can exert some control over the *constructionist* approach toward Latinas/os on the TV screen. They are in more influential positions than actors and actresses, whose main task is to carry out and perform in front of a camera the artistic vision of others.

U.S. television (with the exception of Desi Arnaz) were not Latina/o, we need to assume what Stuart Hall calls “a degree of *cultural relativism*” when it comes to the representation of Latina/o figures on the small screen (61, italics in the original). Latina/o subjects on TV did not have their own representational control but were largely subjected to the meanings assigned and interpreted by non-Latinas/os.¹¹

The year before Dezi Arnaz appeared on U.S. television screens, the half-hour western series *The Cisco Kid* (1950-56) was first broadcast by local stations across the country. Altogether 156 episodes of this show were made, the first ever to be filmed in color. Based on Hollywood films like *Cisco Kid and the Lady* (1940) and *Viva Cisco Kid* (also 1940; cf. Treviño, “Latino” 14), the series presented the righteous Cisco riding across the Southwest and saving the day for the oppressed and for those whose rights the authorities refused to defend. The heroic Latino protagonist was paired up with a comic sidekick, Cisco’s loyal helper Pancho. Pancho’s thick accent suggests the epithet “spic.” Often Cisco and Pancho have to fight a large number of evil Latino adversaries constructed in the *bandido* tradition. While in the eyes of the authorities the two heroes are outlaws wanted for an unspecified crime, they take on Robin Hood-like roles in defending the powerless. Sheriffs, ranch owners, and damsels in distress seek out the assistance and services of the pair—and their hopes are never disappointed. While the series drew on the cinematic tradition of the western movie as well as on the Don Quixote motif, it added a certain exoticism to the early television fare.

A similar exoticism—with fewer laughs and more action scenes—characterizes *Zorro*, broadcast by ABC from 1957 through 1959, the next TV version of the righteous Latino hero fighting mostly Latino villains (cf. Lichter/Amundson 58). 78 half-hour episodes and four one-hour specials were produced by Walt Disney Productions for the show’s two seasons on ABC. The riding swordsman Zorro is the alter ego of Don Diego de la Vega, a young man called back by his father from his university studies in Spain to his home near colonial Los Angeles. He is a clumsy intellectual by day and a skilled fighter by night and in disguise. Interestingly, while the two principal characters on *The Cisco Kid* were played by a Spanish and a Mexican-American actor, Zorro was portrayed by Guy Williams, of Italian and Catalonian parentage, while hardly any of the other figures on *Zorro*—although supposed to be Spanish or Mexican—were played by Latina/o actors. As Lichter and Amundson state: “Despite its ‘Hispanic’ characters, the show was not a generous portrayal of either the people or the culture” (59). Its “oppressors were evil, greedy Spanish governors and land-owners” (Lichter/Lichter/Rothman 339).

Both *The Cisco Kid* and *Zorro* were geared toward children, which explains some of their one-dimensionality. Laughs and thrills, rather than intercultural enlightenment, fueled the writers’ endeavors. The ethnic diversity and exoticism that Cisco,

¹¹ The codes used in encoding and decoding the representation of Latinas/os on English-language U.S. television depend, as Hall points out, on the “social conventions” of the time (62). Those had relegated Latinas/os (and their screen representatives) to subaltern, comical, or deviant positions.

Pancho, and Zorro brought to U.S. TV screens in the early years of the new medium soon subsided. Lichter and Amundson found that on U.S. television from 1955 through 1964 “only one character in ten [was] anything other than northern European” and only “one character in fifty was Hispanic” (59).¹²

The big exception to this general invisibility was the Cuban-born American musician, actor, and television producer Desi Arnaz¹³—especially in the role of the Cuban bandleader Ricky Ricardo on *I Love Lucy* (CBS, 1951-57). Having started as the CBS radio show *My Favorite Husband* and having been turned into a TV sitcom, *I Love Lucy* was a milestone in U.S. television history: for the first time audiences saw on the small screen a racially mixed couple (Arnaz and his real-life wife at the time, Lucille Ball) who had a baby together—an almost revolutionary stance for 1950s U.S. television. How noteworthy this situation comedy was is illustrated by the fact that the cover of the very first issue of *TV Guide* featured Lucille Ball with her and Desi Arnaz’s baby. Mary C. Beltrán writes that Arnaz “commonly criticized Cuba and expressed public appreciation for the many opportunities his life in the United States had brought to him,” which decreased his perceived otherness (58). His popularity allowed Arnaz to exert “a great deal of creative control over the development of his character and *I Love Lucy*” (58). What was particularly new about *I Love Lucy* is that Ball and Arnaz owned the production company Desilu Productions that made the show. However, since the program was conceived with mainstream audiences in mind, it may not be surprising that the fictional Ricky Ricardo reflects some of the old stereotypes of Latinos: he speaks with a strong Hispanic accent, he works as an entertainer, behaves impulsively, and when exasperated, switches from English into Spanish. Nonetheless, the three other main characters on the show—Ricky’s wife Lucy and the older neighbors Ethel and Fred—are likewise caricatures, and this relativizes the occasional stereotypical hot-blooded quality of Ricky, often making him appear as the most rational character in comparison. Despite the representation of Ricky Ricardo as middle class and always well dressed and despite the depicted camaraderie between him and the greats of Broadway and Hollywood, there is little exploration of his cultural background and the show did nothing for increasing the number of TV roles available to Hispanic actors.

A scene in the *I Love Lucy* episode “Redecorating” (season 2, 1952) illustrates the duality in Ricky’s depiction between rationality and impulsiveness. Lucy and Ethel had gotten carried away and entered their names a hundred times for a drawing at which furniture is to be given away as the first prize. Since Ricky wants to take his wife and neighbors to the opening night of a musical on Broadway and Lucy refuses to leave the house for fear of missing a call from the store that is having the drawing,

¹² The situation was little better for African American characters and actors. As Lichter and Amundson sum up the situation: aside from “occasional and insignificant roles, black characters were simply not a part of the early prime time world” (59).

¹³ In the 1940s, “RKO [had] marketed Arnaz as a Latin lover of the clean-cut variety; typical publicity photos showcased Arnaz with his conga drum, looking handsome, wholesome, and exuberant,” writes Mary C. Beltrán (46).

Ricky asks Fred to call Lucy, pretending to be a store representative who congratulates her on having won the furniture. After receiving a phone call that informs her that her name was drawn, Lucy, being her impulsive self, immediately sells their current furniture—to another caricature figure, a Mr. Jenkins, who reminds viewers of the cliché of the used car salesman. As Ricky realizes that his trick has backfired on him, he tries to get back their furniture, for which Mr. Jenkins had paid 75 dollars. Mr. Jenkins replies that he will gladly return ownership of the furniture (which is still all in place in the Ricardos' apartment), but that “certainly you don't expect to get three rooms of beautiful furniture like this for a measly 75 dollars.” He claims that he has to cover all his “overhead, electricity, rent, insurance, storage charges, advertisement...” When Ricky wants to make sure, he asks Lucy whether she signed anything, to which she answers: “no, only a bill of sales.” Now referring to their furniture as “valuable antiques,” Mr. Jenkins negotiates a price of 395 dollars for it, accompanied by his assurance “Well, I'm a lousy businessman, but I like the way you sing *babalu*, so I'll take it.” As he sits down to write the check, Ricky talks to himself in Spanish, complaining that “Mira, lo que pasa a mí no pasa a nadie en este país” and fearing that he will be the butt of jokes.

Despite this regression to a “spic” impulse the portrayal of Ricky expands and alters the position of Latinos in the 1950s conceptual map. In contrast to other Latino TV characters of the time, Ricky is no macho, alcoholic or criminal; he is middle-class, lives and works in an Anglo environment, has a steady job, dresses well, is clean and presentable. While the Hollywood tradition had established Latinos as the bumbling, ill-adept butts of jokes and had used cliché figures of the greasy desperado or the female Latina clown, *I Love Lucy* makes the Anglo Lucy the clown and her Latino husband Ricky the rational figure, who combines his dedication to his profession with the fun of entertainment, who is a faithful husband and a sober, dependable breadwinner, thus investing him with attributes of the Protestant work ethic.

By making the used furniture salesman a bigger caricature than Ricky, the episode discussed here diminishes the stereotypical qualities of the Cuban showman—like his gesturing, his switch of languages, and his role as an entertainer who “sings *babalu*.” Ricky seems much more “normal” than the deviant Anglo salesman. However, it is important for the show and for its popularity with white postwar audiences that a degree of otherness remains. While Lucy, as Steven D. Stark maintains, “was in unending revolt against the conventions of her age,” her rebellion was “less threatening [to viewers in the conservative 1950s] because its target was a Cuban immigrant” (37, 38).¹⁴

Starting in 1957, Desilu Productions also made the show *The Real McCoys* (ABC, 1957-62; CBS 1962-63). This half-hour sitcom deals with a variety of culture clashes, the main one being that of a West Virginia family getting to know the Cali-

¹⁴ Stark believes that the secret of Lucy's success was that she was “[c]onfined yet liberated, acquisitive yet generous, she was ambivalently enough at the center of American life to appeal to everybody” (42).

ifornia environment to which they move when they inherit a decrepit ranch there.¹⁵ Together with the ranch they inherit its Mexican foreman, Peppino, who functions as the good-willed but outlandish “spic” servant. The creation of this character is reminiscent of the strategy used for the Ricky figure on *I Love Lucy*: while Peppino is a caricature—a sweet and loyal simpleton who, like Ricky, tends to switch to Spanish when he gets exasperated or when his English fails him—, his strangeness fades in comparison to the strangeness of the West Virginian McCoys.

This strategy of multiple othering is illustrated a few minutes into the pilot episode. The McCoys arrive at the ranch and are greeted by Peppino in heavily accented English: “Welcome to Rancho McCoy!” The new owners are alarmed; Grandpa wants to get his shotgun but his newlywed grandson Luke tells the others: “I believe it’s a foreigner. Just keep calm.” Peppino, much shorter than the McCoys, is the subaltern, a version of the *bracero*, informing the newly arrived that the deceased owner of the farm had told him: “I leave them the ranch and I leave them you.” These words imply a sense of Peppino as the property or pawn of the Anglo characters.

Grandpa: You think it’s a Russian, judging from the language.

Luke: That there is English. He’s done something to it, but English is what it was.

As Grandpa and Luke are othering Peppino, the show is othering the McCoys, poking fun at their simple-mindedness. After Peppino explains that he is Mexican, Luke turns to Grandpa, telling him that Peppino “seems friendly-like” rather than threatening. Then Peppino switches to Spanish, wishing Luke’s wife all the best in their new marriage and showing his respects to Grandpa.

Grandpa’s reaction to Peppino speaking Spanish: I say he’s a Russian.

Luke: But he says he’s a Mexican.

Grandpa: Well, it’s his word against mine.

The West Virginian McCoys are presented as even bigger simpletons than Peppino. For example, two brothers are both called Luke, a fact that the older of the two, in a heavy Southern accent, explains to Peppino thus: “Well, you see, in the excitement of having him, Mom and Pa plum forgot they already had me.” Peppino just shakes his head and says to himself, “I should remember not to ask so many questions.”

Later in the pilot episode, when he learns that Grandpa is homesick for West Virginia and for the insults he used to exchange with his best friend there, Peppino tries to learn those insults in order to be able to serve as Grandpa’s new partner for verbal sparring. He says, “Grandpa, you got the ugliest face like I never did see,” to which Grandpa cheers up. The close-up of the two men trying to stare each other down reveals that Grandpa is almost a head taller than Peppino, which underlines the hierarchy in place. Grandpa returns the insult, which confuses Peppino, who does not realize that he is supposed to keep going, saying: “Oh, it’s my turn again?” When Peppino cannot think of another phrase with which to put Grandpa down, Grandpa tells him: “Now just forget it, son, you ain’t got it.” Try as he may, Peppino does not manage to

¹⁵ The same basic motif was later used for *The Beverly Hillbillies* (CBS, 1962-71).

stand his ground in the Anglo world. In this way *The Real McCoys* reflects the ethnic inequalities in place in the United States in the 1950s as well as the dynamics of the *bracero* program. Anglo dominance is uncontested, even as both the West Virginian McCoys and the Mexican Peppino are othered. Peppino is drawn as a character who is likeable, kind-hearted, hard-working, but deficient in language and social interaction. Likeable because of his eagerness to serve the McCoys, he confirms the conceptual map of the times. In the cultural forum in which the show participates, Peppino remains the subaltern whose subservience underlines Anglo leadership and the privileging of whiteness. Much later, in season 5 (1962), Peppino becomes an American citizen and takes the surname “McCoy,” which further stresses that Anglo-America is the norm to which he and all Americans of color should aspire. In the conceptual map of the show, Peppino needs to be Anglicized, whereas the world around him by no way needs to respect his difference and raise its level of intercultural competence. Even after his naturalization he presents no danger to the hierarchies in place; instead he remains a pawn in those established inequalities.

Surpassing Peppino in popularity and almost achieving the renown of Ricky Ricardo was the cartoon figure of the Mexican mouse Speedy Gonzales. 46 short films have been made since 1955 with appearances by the animated figure of Speedy Gonzales (derived from an earlier 1953 version of a mouse with a long gold front tooth) for inclusion in Warner Brothers’ *Looney Tunes* and *Merrie Melodies*. Speedy, as his business card proclaims, is “the fastest mouse in all Mexico;” he is sneaky, fun-loving, odd and violent, a ladies’ man who speaks English with an exaggerated Mexican accent and who wears an oversized yellow sombrero. The Mexican characters around him—as William Anthony Nericcio has shown in “Autopsy of a Rat”—are even more violent; they are lazy, stinking, lecherous, and dumb—thus reflecting the traditional typology of Latinos (or, as in this case, Mexicans) on screen.¹⁶ This typology, according to Nericcio, had been established “in the first two decades of the twentieth century ... in the early and remarkably popular ‘Greaser’ film series” (“Autopsy” 205; cf. Treviño, “Latino” 14). Nonetheless, Speedy is also a hero to those (on the Mexican side of the border) whom he helps in procuring food and resources.

The mouse’s first appearance in its current form came in the (slightly under seven minutes long) cartoon *Speedy Gonzales* (1955), which won an Academy Award for Best Animated Short Film. In this narrative, a cheese factory near the U.S.-Mexican border is guarded by Sylvester the Cat, who prevents the starving, sombrero-wearing Mexican mice from crossing the border and helping themselves to the cheese. The

¹⁶ Nericcio complains that “Americans of Mexican descent in U.S. popular culture have often resembled ugly marionettes in the service of mercenary puppeteers;” the “ubiquitous image of trashy, Mexican types,” he believes, has the potential to “‘infect’ the masses against particular ethnic groups” (193-94). All this stereotyping, while done for easy laughs, cements a negative view of Latinas/os: “The logic from which Warner Brothers profits and which it helps to sustain is basic: we have seen Mexicans as simple, lazy thieves before; we see them again, we laugh” (212).

mice enlist the help of the legendary runner Speedy, who gets past Sylvester, furnishes the Mexican mice with cheese stolen from the factory, and finally brings Sylvester to the point where he blows up all the cheese in despair. Throughout the series, the adept trickster Speedy outsmarts Sylvester, to whom he often refers as “El Gringo Pussygato.” Speedy is thus in the tradition of Joaquin Murrieta, the outlaw “Mexican Robin Hood” of mid-nineteenth-century California—variously seen as either an infamous bandit or a Mexican hero.¹⁷ While audience sympathies are clearly with Speedy, the cartoon figure does reinforce ethnic stereotypes and present Mexicans as illegal intruders, criminals, lazy, and violent. They are shown to upset the capitalist system and the Anglo-dominated hierarchies and to undermine the Protestant work ethic. Sylvester calls them “miserable little sneakin’ crooked cheese thieves.” Nericcio links this depiction of Mexico and Mexicans to “decades-long territorial disputes and wars with our Mexican *neighbor*” (“Autopsy” 204). Whereas Ricky Ricardo was the “good neighbor” who had moved in with Anglo-America and taken his place there and while Peppino acknowledges the desirability of an Anglo-America in which he will never be an equal, Speedy refuses the subaltern position to which his nationality would relegate him and instead upsets the system and its hierarchies. All three characters ostensibly portray difference. While Stuart Hall states that “the marking of difference and binary oppositions are crucial for meaning” (62), *I Love Lucy*, *The Real McCoys* and *Speedy Gonzales* offer various degrees of difference, which expand or question established norms. In this manner they complicate binaries, especially since the audience sympathies in these shows are with the Latino “spics.”

Recently there have been revisionist readings of Speedy Gonzales as a leader of his people, “Speedy, hero or Speedy, sub-altern with alacrity, or Speedy, Latino social justice advocate ... [Speedy as] a neo-Zapata or proto-Zapatista, resisting the Gringo domination of sly Sylvester and pathetic Daffy Duck ... fast, clever, erotically able” (Nericcio, “Autopsy” 212). Nonetheless, this Mexican mouse is certainly indebted to the history of negative portrayals of Latinos/as on big and small screens (chiefly the violent *desperado*)—whether continuing or ironically subverting this typology.

The figure of the mischievous, violent, criminal Latino (more greasy and alcoholic than Speedy) had been a staple of numerous Western series since the 1960s. Latino men tend to appear as the outlaws, the uncivilized, the cruel and dirty, greasy tyrants, while Latina women make appearances as dark, mysterious seductresses or as beautiful companions or victims of criminals, as women devoted to their children and to the man they adore. In this scenario, as Chon A. Noriega writes, there was little space for educated Hispanic professionals in the early decades of television: “From 1957 to 1987, whites played 94% of television’s educated professionals and business executives, while Blacks played 5% and Hispanics only 1%” (“Numbers” 107).

¹⁷ As Nericcio points out in his later *Tex{t}-Mex*, Speedy can also become the rival and enemy of his Mexican community: in *Gonzales Tamales* “it is Speedy’s ‘friends,’ the mice, who hire Sylvester the Cat to capture the masher/interloper, girlfriend-stealing, would-be Romeo, Señor Rat Gonzales” (126).

3. The Underdogs

By the mid-1960s some effects of the Civil Rights Movement could also be observed on television. For example, the number of roles played by African Americans rose to fourteen times the level of a decade earlier. The quantity and quality of roles for Latina and Latino TV actors, however, did not change significantly. Lichter and Amundson observed that “most Latinos who were cast during this period showed up in episodes of international espionage series that used Central and South American locales” (60).¹⁸ To be sure, not all Latin Americans were portrayed as evil in the late 1960s and 1970s, yet they often appeared either as perpetrators or as victims of crime, violence, unjust systems, or gender and class hierarchies. News like that of the 1973 coup d’état in Chile reinforced the othering of Latin America and Hispanics in the U.S. media. As John Fiske observed, while television does not aspire to be mimetic in its representations, it is nonetheless “an essentially realist medium” because it carries “a socially convincing sense of the real.” For television, realism “is not a matter of any fidelity to an empirical reality, but of the discursive conventions by which and for which a sense of reality is constructed” (21). In those discursive conventions and in the cultural forum in which they are embedded, Latinas and Latinos also came to be portrayed as underdogs, not just as villains.

The western series *The High Chaparral* (NBC, 1967-71) proved a noteworthy exception to the pattern of Latino villains. The program features the Mexican rancher family of the Montoyas, whose daughter marries the protagonist, the widowed Anglo rancher John Cannon. Don Sebastián Montoya helps John become successful as a rancher in the 1870s Arizona Territory. “Unlike most Mexicans shown in previous westerns, the Montoyas are rich, powerful, sophisticated, and benevolent. In most episodes, [Montoya’s daughter and John’s wife] Victoria attempts to civilize her more rustic husband and establish a proper home on the range” (Lichter/Amundson 60). In this way the series reverses the ethnic connotations of civilization and wilderness. It also makes the Montoyas the original Arizona residents (who have local knowledge) and Cannon the newcomer who needs to learn from them, thus introducing to the cultural forum a hint of the “gringo invasion” of the Southwest that the Chicano Movement was condemning at the time—the first Chicano Youth Conference taking place in Denver, CO in March 1969.

Latinas and Latinos play a far less prominent role in the longest-running western series, *Gunsmoke* (CBS, 1955-75), which was aired as a half-hour radio program from 1952 to 1961 before being turned into a television western series that stayed on the air for an unprecedented 20 seasons—as a half-hour program from 1955 to 1961 and as a full-hour program from 1961 to 1975 (cf. Barabas/Barabas). The episode “Zavala” (season 14, 1968), set in a Mexican town of that name, shows an interesting ambiva-

¹⁸ For example, *I Spy* “had many episodes set in Mexico, bringing the agents into contact with some positive and many more negative Hispanic characters” (Lichter/Amundson 60).

lence in its depiction of Latinos as either abusive criminals or timid underdogs in need of protection.

The stereotype of the lazy Latino sets the tone for the episode, whose action is completely set in Mexico. Rather than showing the busy hustle and bustle of Dodge City, the episode's opening shot is of a Mexican border guard in the middle of nowhere who is asleep in his hammock, while his wife is cooking on a campfire. The border guard quickly gets up, adjusts his uniform and looks up at the U.S. marshal, Matt Dillon on horseback, who hands him "a pursuit warrant from the Mexican government." The border guard becomes even more deferential, a reflection of the unequal might of the two nations represented by these two officials. However, unlike the United States that had, for example, provided assistance for the military coup d'état in Brazil in 1964, Matt Dillon portrays the model of non-intervention in a foreign nation's internal affairs (pursuing only U.S. American bandits initially). Respecting Mexico's sovereignty, he takes off his marshal star. Nonetheless, his role remains that of the righteous helper of a helpless nation and community that cannot protect itself, the savior to whom the Mexican official looks up.

The second scene of the episode, in which there is a switch to Mexican guitar music, shows a seemingly peaceful Mexican village with a nicely arranged, colorful fruit stand. But a close-up of a shady, sweating, overweight Mexican man laughing suspiciously, followed by a low-angle close-up of Matt Dillon—clean, lean, and high up (on horseback)—announces that trouble is ahead. The townspeople are depicted as shying away from the U.S. marshal. When the marshal is wounded while killing one of the U.S. American villains he came to bring to justice, none of the townspeople dare assist him for fear of the villain's brother. Only the young boy Paco, who admires the strong, tall, courageous gringo, brings Matt Dillon some fruit and helps him get well again. He explains: "[a]s long as anyone can remember, the *bandidos* have been here. ... Now there is the *norteamericano bandido* Ben Rawlins. ... The *bandidos* came here because they can take what they want from the people." Mexico is thus presented as the underdog, the victim of criminals, and a place where the adults are more afraid than a boy. Later Paco tells some men in town: "my friend will kill Ben Rawlins, too, and run the other *bandidos* from Zavala. ... He will help us be free of the *bandidos*." In the end, the Mexican blacksmith saves Dillon's life by shooting the wounded Rawlins, whom Dillon had mistakenly thought dead at the shootout and who would otherwise have killed the U.S. marshal. The implication is that the words of Paco and the example of the fearless U.S. marshal have given him the courage to rid his village of the outsiders victimizing it.

On the one hand, Mexico is the place of the abusive macho Mexican outlaws (the figure of Jurato, who had killed Paco's father and who is now terrorizing Paco and his mother) and of fugitive U.S. gangs; on the other, it is feminized here, since its main representatives are the young Paco and his devoted, suffering mother (who, tellingly, is two heads shorter than Dillon). The implication is that Mexico needs the help of the strong neighbor to the North to get along: for example, Matt builds a chicken coop and

fixes the shed together with Paco, he kills the abusive bandit Jurato (Paco tells him gratefully: “You were our one chance to be rid of him”), and his brave example helps the righteous villagers stand up to the villains after generations of abuse. The U.S. marshal’s masculinity and courage set the standard to which the Mexican men in town should aspire. By the end of the episode, the fearless, righteous *norteamericano* has saved the day, has given the Mexicans self-confidence, and assures Paco of his everlasting friendship:

Paco: I never had a friend before, Matt Dillon. I think it is a sad thing to have a friend.

Matt: Why is that?

Paco: Because the time will come when you will have to go away.

Matt: That doesn’t mean the end of the friendship, you know.

Paco [smiles]: That is so. I think we will always be friends.

Matt: I think so, too.

...

Paco: I did not want to say goodbye, I was afraid you would forget Paco.

Matt: Paco, I’ll tell you something. You and I are friends. Friends don’t forget. Not ever.

Paco gives him the cross from around his neck: It was my father’s and his father’s before him. I want it to be yours. Please, Matt Dillon.

Matt takes the cross. They embrace.

Matt: Good-bye, Paco, my friend.

Paco: Good-bye, Matt Dillon.

The representative of the United States does not leave until he has made the Mexican village a safe place, establishing order and eliminating dictators and foreign occupiers. If we put this episode’s plot in the context of historical developments in the 1960s, especially of the events in Korea, Cuba, and later in Vietnam, it is easy to see the episode as a staging of national values and self-reliance and as a black-and-white construction of Latin America as weak, suffering from dictatorial rule, and in need of foreign intervention. In this scenario, the official representative of the United States comes as the “good neighbor,” respectful, resourceful, and ready to expel the forces of evil and to lift up the underdogs, echoing President Woodrow Wilson’s dictum of “making the world safe for democracy.”

In othering and victimizing Latinas/os in the 1950s through the 1970s, English-language U.S. television reflected the nation’s sense of itself as a superpower and world leader built primarily on a white male European heritage. The creators of television participated in and reinforced this pre-Civil-Rights-Movement mindset. As John Fiske writes,

Television tries to construct an ideal subject position which it invites us to occupy, and, if we do, rewards us with the ideological pleasure that is provided by experiencing, once again, that our dominant ideological practice, apparently, *works*: the meanings of the world and of our subjectivities that it produces appear to make sense. It is, therefore, the pleasure of recognition. (51)

White male middle- and upper-class U.S. American leadership is implied in *Gunsmoke* as the model that works. We are invited to agree with this model and to recognize the

benefits it brings to the subaltern groups elsewhere. In the above-mentioned “Zavala” episode of *Gunsmoke*, our sympathies are with Matt Dillon right from the start—either because we know of his skill and heroism from previous episodes or because of how he is staged as moving above the others (on horseback and being taller than the townspeople) and as a contrast to the lazy Mexican border guard and the fearful villagers. The audience sympathies are rewarded in the course of the episode by a plot that confirms Dillon’s leadership and goodness and that has the marshal lead the way out of oppression for the Mexican community.

English-language U.S. television also used the kind of condescension toward Latinas and Latinos that appears in “Zavala” when staging Hispanics within the United States. On daytime soap operas, for example, stereotypical Latino roles remained the rule.¹⁹ *Santa Barbara* (NBC, 1984-93), according to Jenrette/McIntosh/Winterberger, is somewhat of an exception because it “became the first serial to debut with a Mexican-American core family, the Andrades,” who were, however, “destined to be secondary to the white core families” on the show (38).²⁰ To be sure, this daytime soap’s so-called “supercouple,” the blonde Anglo woman Eden Capwell and the Latino police detective Cruz Castillo, are shown to overcome their different ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds as well as the objections of Eden’s father and Cruz’s mother to their union and get married. This plot element serves to include in the conceptual map the device of the inter-ethnic, Latino-Anglo marriage, which *I Love Lucy* had brought onto television screens and which *The High Chaparral* continued.

A less inclusive approach, which links the topos of the underdog with that of a crisis is seen on the episode “The Hidden Aliens” (season 9, 1975) of the half-hour documentary show *New York Illustrated* (WNBC New York, 1967-), which investigates illegal immigration from Latin America to the United States. The voiceover by Edward Newman states: “The tide of illegal aliens grows and has now been officially termed a crisis. ... In the New York area 100,000 jobs are held by illegal aliens, according to the immigration service. ... The tide may well become a flood, and we had better decide in our 200th year what we intend to do about it.” Programs and proclamations like this one may offer a token recognition of the exploitation of illegal migrants, but they focus on creating an atmosphere of doom, presenting Latinas and Latinos as dangers to the nation rather than as underdogs exploited by the nation. Such programming took up and contributed to the cultural forum of public debate, as illegal entry into the United States became more common once the 1965 immigration reform had closed legal venues.

¹⁹ For the representation of Hispanic women on *All My Children* (ABC, 1970-2011; revival 2013-), *One Life to Live* (ABC, 1968-2012; revival 2013-), and *General Hospital* (ABC, 1963-), cf. Jenrette/McIntosh/Winterberger.

²⁰ Jenrette/McIntosh/Winterberger argue that “*SB* maintained the vestiges of the old stereotypes, simply repackaging them to appear more positive. [The Andrades] were cast as servants to the dominant white family, the Capwells” (38).

The “conceptual map” drawn up on these parameters of illegality and fear, coupled with a feeling of U.S. superiority and alleged Latino otherness, also informs a sketch from the early years of the comic variety program *Saturday Night Live* (NBC, 1975-). In the show that was aired on February 17, 1979, Bill Murray appears as a guest star to play a role in the parody of a Latin American game show called *¿Quién es más macho?!*. Styled as a Hispanic playboy and speaking Spanish, Murray plays show host Paco Valenzuela. The contestants are Jorge and Graciela. They have to decide which man is most macho. The fictional filming of the game show is interrupted by Detective Elliot Ness coming in to arrest everyone as illegal immigrants. As the officers search the studio and the décor, numerous stereotypical Latino workmen emerge from their hiding places on the set and are apprehended.²¹ When Ness slams his hand down on the counter, Graciela comments admiringly: “Señor Ness es muy macho” and Bill Murray, in the role of the game show host, concludes: “Sí, pero el servicio de inmigración es lo más macho de todos.” Apart from poking fun at the stereotype of the Latin American macho and at the genre of the game show, the sketch reflects the increased numbers of deportations of Latin Americans that occurred as a consequence of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, which had reduced the number of prospective immigrants from Latin America to the United States in favor of immigration from Western Europe. It also adds a typecasting as “illegal” to the existing “negative and stereotyped portrayals of Latinos” which Wober and Gunter enumerate for the 1950s through 1970s: “bandit, faithful servant, mustachioed overweight slob, and the woman with dark eyes, a low-cut blouse and loose morals” (153).

4. Chicano Pride

While immigration reform, the spread of illegal migration into the United States, and the instability of Latin American governments impacted the depiction of Latin America and Latinos on English-language U.S. television in the 1970s, so did the Civil Rights Movement and the Chicano Movement. As Stuart Hall writes: “all meanings are produced within history and culture. They can never be finally fixed but are always subject to change, both from one cultural context and from one period to another” (32).²² The new legal reality created in the United States by the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1968 and the new cultural reality of minority voices thus had an impact on media representations of Latinas/os in the United States and on the cultural forum in which they participated. The “forms of knowledge” which television contributed to the

²¹ On the continuing media depiction of Latinas/os in general as illegal immigrants and as a danger to the United States, cf. Leo R. Chavez’s *The Latino Threat* as well as his essay in this volume.

²² Hall summarizes the conviction that lies behind Michel Foucault’s demand for historicizing representation and discourse as follows: “in each period, discourse produced forms of knowledge, objects, subjects and practices of knowledge, which differed radically from period to period, with no necessary continuity between them” (46).

“conceptual map” responded to those historical shifts in a variety of ways. While television is generally considered a conservative medium that privileges the status quo and whiteness, the realism of television, as John Fiske points out, is not necessarily “reactionary;” it can also contain what he calls “radicalism.” He explains that by “radicalism” he means,

a critical interrogation of the dominant ideology and of the social system which it has produced and underpins; this entails an awareness of the inequalities and of the arbitrariness of late capitalism, which in turn produces the desire to hasten social change and the willingness to work for it. (33)

While, in response to a changed cultural and ethnic climate, African American-themed sitcoms like *The Honeymooners* (CBS, 1955-56), *The Bill Cosby Show* (NBC, 1969-71), and *The Jeffersons* (CBS, 1975-85) gave a voice and visibility to black issues, the character of Archie Bunker on *All in the Family* (CBS, 1971-79)²³ revealed a deep-rooted racism in the nation. Ridiculing Archie’s ethnic slurs and his stubborn ways contributed to *All in the Family* becoming “the top-rated show within five months of its 1971 premiere” (Lichter/Amundson 62).

While the ethnic Other in *All in the Family* was African American, Latino issues and (resistance to) ethnic slurs against Latinas/os inspired the half-hour sitcom *Chico and the Man* (NBC, 1974-78). This show followed somewhat in the footsteps of the short-lived drama series *Man and the City* (ABC, 1971-72), which was set in an unnamed southwestern city with a Latino mayor and which was frequently “asserting the dignity and rights of Latinos” (Lichter/Amundson 60).²⁴ Guillermo Avila-Saavedra calls *Chico and the Man* “the second Latino comedy milestone” (after *I Love Lucy*): “Regardless of its imperfections and idealism, the show represented a serious effort from the networks to respond to the changing demographic landscape in the United States, an effort that was inexplicably abandoned later on” (*Trend* 61). The show was part of a new trend of ethnic sitcoms in the early and mid-1970s.²⁵

However, despite the figure of a self-reliant Chicano who has no trouble standing his ground against white America and confronting racism head-on, the show elicited harsh criticism, especially from Chicano activists. Complaints that it portrays “Mexican Americans as non-contributors to our society by its innuendos, slurs and cheap

²³ On family and social relevance in 1970s programming, cf. chapter four in Lichter/Lichter/Rothman.

²⁴ For example, in one episode of *Man and the City*, the mayor (played by Anthony Quinn) has to remind the Anglo police chief (played by Mike Farrell) that Hispanics have rights, too, and that the police cannot just incarcerate Hispanics as potential suspects in a murder case with which they have nothing to do. “This seems to be the only series that attempted to derive socially relevant plotlines from the barrio,” conclude Lichter and Amundson (61).

²⁵ Most of these had African American themes. As Lichter and Amundson observe, the “ethnic wave crested during the 1974-75 season, when a remarkable six of the seven top-rated shows were ethnic sitcoms—*All in the Family*, *Sanford*, *Chico*, *Jeffersons*, *Rhoda*, and *Good Times*” (64).

petty statements,” that it “reinforces or elicits racist Anglo-American feelings of superiority over Chicanos by ridiculing the character of Chico,” that it is “detrimental to the self-image of Chicano children,” that the Chicano protagonist is not played by a Chicano actor, and that no Chicano script-writers were hired for the program were often launched (qtd. in Beltrán 100).²⁶

The pilot episode, however, illustrates that *Chico and the Man* takes up common stereotypes of Latinos in order to debunk them. Aired on Sept. 13, 1974, i.e. once the Chicano Movement was in full swing, the pilot opens with the disgruntled, aged Anglo garage owner Ed Brown pumping gas for an impatient customer while voicing his and his ethnic group’s prejudices (Archie Bunker style): “You know, this used to be a nice neighborhood, a lot of nice people with nice homes, green trees, no taco stands. In those days Mexicans knew their place: Mexico! People in this neighborhood don’t need a garage: if they run out of gas, they just syphon it out of somebody else’s tank; and if their car breaks down they just leave it where it is and steal another one.” This monologue establishes the two major thematic issues of the show: on the one hand, the ethnic change of East L.A., on the other, prejudice against non-Anglos.

Through the character of Chico Rodriguez, a tall, quick-witted, well-spoken Chicano in his twenties, the validity of anti-Latino clichés is questioned. The closing song—with its visual backdrop of graffiti, murals, and various Mexican American neighborhoods in East L.A.—mentions Chico’s origins and his desire to improve his situation at a time when things are difficult not only for him but also for the garage owner:

Chico was born en el barrio,
 spent much of his time in the street,
 his mind was craving for knowledge,
 his belly for something to eat.
 But times are hard for Chico and the man,
 But times are hard for Chico and the man.

By including Chico’s name in the title of the show while referring to Ed only as “the man,” the series foregrounds Chico and the forces of change that he represents. The program, as writes Chon A. Noriega, was “the first network television series centered on a Chicano character” (*Shot 70*). Chico is the young, upbeat, optimistic, educated, politically conscious Chicano with a future ahead of him, while Ed is the aged, grumpy, pessimistic garage owner who is nostalgic for the past. Both have good hearts, and their growing respect and affection for each other represents a kind of “symbolic action” (à la Kenneth Burke) proposed for the cultural forum.²⁷ The show’s theme song, performed by José Feliciano, announces that “a new day has begun” and that “things will be better”:

²⁶ Beltrán adds that “[b]oycotts of the series and its advertisers also were threatened by a number of Chicana/o organizations. Much of the focus of protest, notably, was whether Chico was an appropriate or positive Chicano role model” (101).

²⁷ It is no accident that Ed’s last name is “Brown,” which already suggests a certain affinity to his Mexican American surroundings.

Chico, don't be discouraged,
 the man, he ain't so hard to understand.
 Chico, if you try now,
 I know that you can lend a helping hand
 because there's good in everyone
 and a new day has begun.
 You can see the morning sun if you try.
 And I know things will be better,
 oh yes, they will,
 for Chico and the man,
 yes, they will,
 for Chico and the man,
 even though it's funny he don't understand.

Chico is the one to “lend a helping hand,” which puts him in the position of servant or assistant, while Ed initially “don't understand” that he will not be able to stop the change of his neighborhood and that his stereotypes of Mexican Americans do not hold up.

Chon A. Noriega, however, takes a critical view of *Chico and the Man*, arguing that by coopting Ray Andrade, an actor and leader of the Chicano activist group Justicia, as an associate producer on the series “in an attempt to defuse Chicano protest and reassure network executives that Justicia would not cause problems ... *Chico and the Man* transformed the concurrent Chicano movement into a domestic comedy located in someone else's house-cum-business” (*Shot 70*). Even Andrade himself said: “Freddie [Prinze, in his role as Chico] is too servile to [Jack] Albertson [in his role as Ed], he is looking for the white father. There is a certain lack of machismo in Freddie; he doesn't have it on the show. I tried to tell my ideas to the producers, but it was zilch—I got nowhere” (qtd. in Noriega, *Shot 71*). Indeed, the Spanish word “chico,” meaning “little boy,” emphasizes the character's subservient position rather than reflecting the ethnic pride of the Chicano Movement to the degree that Andrade would have liked to see it presented. Andrade resigned from *Chico and the Man* when he realized that his input had little effect on the show's creative control.

Lacking in radicalism, as it may be, *Chico and the Man* still seemed considerable improvement over Zorro, Cisco, Speedy, and other “spics.” In their first meeting in the pilot episode, Ed tells Chico to “[g]et out of here and take your flies with you, ... go back to your own neighborhood.” Chico's answer is: “This is my neighborhood. I grew up watching this garage run down. You need me.” After talking at first with a strong Chicano accent, Chico effortlessly switches to Received Pronunciation British English. He then sets the record straight with Ed (in standard American English), reminding him of the social and legal changes that have taken place: “Hey, in this neighborhood you're a minority. And I'm an equal opportunity employee.” Next, we get into a discussion of Latino stereotypes, which ends up becoming a critique of the official U.S.A.: Ed tells his sparring partner Chico: “Ah, everybody knows you people are lazy. Even if I did give you a job, you wouldn't show up. You'd be too busy taking a siesta.” Chico answers: “Not me, man, I'm all gong-ho. I was in Vietnam. I won a sil-

ver star.” Ed: “How, in a craps game?” Chico: “No, trying to save the world from democracy.” A little later in this first encounter Chico tells Ed that it is not just a job that he wants but equality. Chico: “I told you, I don’t want a job. ... I want to be part of something, I want to belong. I want my place in the sun.” So Chico is staged as the voice of the ethnic minorities who “want to belong” fully to the U.S.A. and the voice of the Chicano Movement that refuses meager handouts.

Another challenge to established typologies (linking Latinos to crime) follows, as the police arrive at the garage the next morning. Chico, the representative of new powers taking charge, has cleaned up the run-down business, moved in, and put up a sign that reads: “SE HABLA ESPAÑOL.” The two Anglo detectives question him and Ed, looking for clues and suspects:

Detective 1 [to Ed]: Someone knocked off a couple of appliance stores last night. We’re investigating. This kid fits the description. Same age, same height, same mustache.

Chico: We all look alike, don’t we. Maybe it was my mother.

Detective 2: All right, Pancho, we go downtown.

Chico: Ahah, we go downtown and I bring you up on charges of police harassment, intimidation, and illegal arrest. You never read me my rights. That’s the law, the Miranda law.

Det. 2: Where did you learn that?

Chico: In school. I was born here.

Det. 1: Why, do you got papers to prove where you were born?

Chico: I’m a Chicano, man, I was born in this country. And what’s more, we had it first. ... You people are the outsiders. I habla your English. Why can’t you habla a bit of my Español?

Unlike earlier screen Latinas/os, Chico (like the figure of the attorney Victor Sifuentes on *L.A. Law* twelve years later) knows his rights and stands his ground in discussions with the racist authorities. Through his answer the show integrates into the “public forum” the Chicano Movement’s position of the prior claim that Mexican Americans have to the Chicano homeland of Aztlán. The norms of whiteness and English-only that *I Love Lucy* did not touch are at least made explicit here. Yet as a situation comedy *Chico and the Man* shies away from realism in terms of the likely reaction of the policemen to Chico’s challenge: The killing of Mexican American journalist Rubén Salazar by a Los Angeles County Sheriff’s deputy during the National Chicano Moratorium March against the Vietnam War in 1970 or the police brutality with which the Mexican American high school students participating in the 1968 East L.A. walkouts had met suggest the implausibility of the confrontation’s outcome on the show. That the TV policemen back down once they realize that Chico has the law on his side is less an attempt at realism and more an instance of wishful thinking or of wanting to improve the image of law enforcement in East Los Angeles.

Later episodes of this sitcom continue to question stereotypes and to challenge established modes of discourse, behavior, and representation. In “Chico’s Cousin Pepe” (season 2, 1976), for example, Chico’s relative is a blind Latino rock star in a Rolls Royce looking for a new chauffeur; in “Too Many Crooks” (season 3, 1976) it is an

utterly incompetent white man (rather than a person of color) who attempts a robbery at the garage; and in “The Dress” (season 3, 1977) Chico holds an auction for the Mexican Art League to enable “barrio kids [to] learn to paint.” As guidance for viewers, Ed says in “The Dress”: “I learned you can’t judge people just because they’re different. All that counts is what kind of a person they really are.” While his ethnic slurs continue, they seem increasingly merely performative. When, in the episode “Chico Packs His Bags” (season 3, 1976), Chico is not back from a party by morning, Ed tells his best friend, the African American Louie:

Ed: That kid should know time. His people steal enough watches.

Louie: You better put a safety belt on your mouth, man. We ain’t no more thieves than you. Trash like that make my Mexican blood boil.

Ed: Mexican blood? You are about as Mexican as Ingrid Bergman.

Louie: I’ll have you know that I am an honorary Chicano. Ed, you’re looking at a genuine Chicanorary.²⁸

Through scenes like this one the othering of Latinas/os and especially of Chico is undercut, as is the basis for racial segregation and ethnic slurs.

Of course we do not expect the cultural critique voiced in a TV comedy show to be especially nuanced. But mainstream audiences very much took to *Chico and the Man*, the depiction of a changing Los Angeles neighborhood, and the encounter of the old and the new. As Lichter/Amundson write:

Like the black sitcoms, *Chico* used minority culture as a spark to enliven a middle class white world that seemed bland or enervated by comparison. Minority characters of the early 1970s prided themselves not on their similarity to mainstream culture, but on their difference from it. ... But the thrust of the ethnic sitcom was not to ridicule minority cultures. Instead, racial and ethnic backgrounds were used as an educational tool. The religious, cultural, and other traditions that differentiate minorities from the mainstream were now treated as beneficial rather than problematic. (63)

This new attitude toward ethnic difference had in part been facilitated by the Chicano Movement’s proclamation of ethnic pride, to which *Chico and the Man* responds. With this show the Latino element on English-language U.S. television is moving away from the old “spic” typecasting and from the underdog topos toward an appreciation of Latinas and Latinos as the “spice” needed to renew outdated worlds and conventional television genres. Another big factor responsible for the success of *Chico and the Man* with general audiences was the performance of actor and comedian Freddie Prinze, who played Chico. Born in New York City, Prinze was the son of a Puerto Rican mother and a German immigrant father. After his suicide at the age of 22, the creators of the show paired the grouchy Ed with a Mexican boy who becomes Ed’s foster son. But audiences never really took to this new casting, which pretty much abandoned Chicano pride in favor of the earlier underdog typology.

²⁸ The use of the made-up word “Chicanorary” is also an allusion to “chicanery,” i.e. artful deception or trickery.

Prinze's character had altered the conceptual map: it took the Latino out of the rural environment (of Cisco and Zorro), largely left behind the underdog role (of the Mexicans in *Gunsmoke*) and the criminal or illegal air of earlier depictions and presented instead an educated and justifiably proud, well integrated figure, to whom the future belongs and who wishes to advance his ethnic group. Hints at older typologies like that of the Latin lover give the figure an alluring exoticism.

5. Urban Professionals

Starting with Ricky Ricardo on *I Love Lucy* and continuing with Chico Rodriguez on *Chico and the Man*, Latina/o urban professionals have generally been appearing in ethnically mixed environments on English-language TV rather than as members of an all-Latino cast. Through inter-ethnic casting, television producers were aiming for an inter-ethnic appeal of their shows. As John Fiske observed:

Television is, above all else, a popular cultural medium. The economics that determine its production and distribution demand that it reaches a mass audience, and a mass audience in western industrialized societies is composed of numerous subcultures, or sub-audiences, with a wide variety of social relations, a variety of sociocultural experience and therefore a variety of discourses that they will bring to bear upon the program in order to understand and enjoy it. For its own purposes television attempts to homogenize this variety so that the one program can reach as many different audiences as possible. It tries to work within what these different audiences have in common, but it also has to leave a space for their difference to come into play in their readings of the program. (37)

Chico and the Man relied heavily on difference, but the show also homogenized difference by putting values, human decency and inter-ethnic friendship ahead of ethnic difference.

As ethnic pluralism and interculturalism became more accepted in U.S. society by the 1980s, they became less interesting to U.S. television since they had lost their sense of newness and exoticism. Lichter and Amundson therefore believe that

the 1980s offered little that was new to racial or ethnic minority portrayals in the wake of TV's ethnic revival. These groups continued to be presented more or less as they were in the late 1970s. Despite the continuing presence of racial and ethnic diversity, however, racial themes were no longer in vogue. Integration was assumed as a backdrop, as the prime time world became less polarized. The age of pluralism had arrived, but the thrill was gone. (65)

This is only part of the story, however. The figure of the attorney Victor Sifuentes on *L.A. Law* (NBC, 1986-94) does indeed take a new approach in the portrayal of Latinas/os.²⁹ The slapstick of Ricky Ricardo and the documentation of illegal Latin Ameri-

²⁹ For other aspects in which the show has innovated the television genre of the legal drama, cf. Thompson (121-30), who labels *L.A. Law* "quality television" but fails to address issues of ethnicity, although the show's first two episodes put much emphasis on them.

can immigration have yielded to a fictional exploration of how Chico's Chicano pride can be transferred into the business world of an ethnically mixed law firm.

The figure of the Chicano lawyer on *L.A. Law* remains far more indebted to the car mechanic Chico than to the Chicano lawyer of Oscar Zeta Acosta's *Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* (1972) and of Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1971) or to the Mexican American East L.A. lawyer in the 1935 film *Border-town*, starring Paul Muni. Victor Sifuentes (played by Jimmy Smits) is equally self-reliant and outspoken about issues of race and class as Chico Rodriguez. He is college-educated and has a law degree.

The pilot episode stages Sifuentes' transition from outsider to insider. At first he is working for the public defender's office. An earring marks him as cool and outside the norms. In his capacity as a public defender he is at the Hollywood police station, where he is kept waiting to speak to his client. When he becomes impatient, the Anglo police sergeant calls him "José."

Sifuentes: Whoa, you show me some respect. The name is Sifuentes, Victor Sifuentes.

Sergeant McClosky: I don't care if your name is Pancho fricking Villa.

Sifuentes refuses to be searched; McClosky grabs him by the arm and throws him out. Later on Sifuentes gets the case dismissed on grounds that he was denied access to his client by the police department. He then talks to his client in both English and Spanish and tells him to stay away from drugs. Later he explains that the client is going into a drug rehabilitation program. Victor Sifuentes, self-assured and caring, becomes nonetheless the victim of racism. Although he is on the inside of the legal system, he is on the outside of power hierarchies. When asked why he went into the law, he answers that part of his motivation was to "give something back, ... do a little good for the people." Therefore he wants to take on cases that matter to his community: "pro bono stuff, class actions, immigration stuff, Indian Affairs, stuff like that." Like Chico Rodriguez, Victor Sifuentes has a strong sense of community and ethnic difference.

When the law firm around which the show revolves wants to hire him (in the second episode of the first season), he rightly suspects that the reason for this job offer is less the firm's attempt to present itself as diverse and more the wish to have a hard-boiled colleague take care of unpleasant cases and jail visits. At the job interview, Victor tells his future employers: "you sure ain't looking for a little Third World color to brighten up your office décor. What I do think is that you're tired of picking up the snails yourself, so you're bringing in the Mexican gardener to do it for you." When he later accepts the offer, he says: "Where I come from guys like you were always the enemy. I don't know. Just like even having lunch [with you] was like selling out." The show thus takes on the more overt as well as the more veiled forms of racism and it focuses less on Latino criminals and more on the principled, educated, no-nonsense Latino who is eager to help those whom the legal system tends to disadvantage.

Another focus on Latino urban professionals was launched two years after *L.A. Law*, in the short-lived half-hour sitcom *Trial and Error* (CBS, 1988), of which only a total of eight episodes were aired. Lichter and Amundson write that the "show re-

volved around a free-wheeling entrepreneur who ran a souvenir T-shirt company and his upwardly mobile roommate, who was a newly minted lawyer” (67). Actor Jimmy Smits went on from *L.A. Law* to play the role of Detective Bobby Simone on *NYPD Blue* (ABC, 1993-2005). On that show, he is assumed to be of Puerto Rican origin, but reveals in one episode that, while he was born in Belize, his parents were actually French and Portuguese.

However, the one-hour medical drama *ER* (NBC, 1994-2009) included a number of Latinas and Latinos working as paramedics and nurses in the show’s fictional hospital in Chicago, later on also briefly a Latino doctor. It continued placing the type of the urban Latina/o professional (now both male and female) on the conceptual map. In “The Healers” (season 2, 1996), for example, paramedic fireman Raul Melendez and his Anglo partner Shep go into a burning building without proper equipment in order to rescue three children. The children are saved from the burning house, which had caught on fire when its inhabitants were heating drugs on open flames. Upon news of the rescue, Raul and Shep are celebrated as heroes, but then we find out that Raul got severely burned in the rescue operation. He is taken to the emergency room, where nurses and paramedics sit around his bed all night, remembering their favorite moments with him and how special he is. Raul is not expected to make it through the night, though. The ethnic background of this character is not foregrounded; he is seen less as distinctly Latino and more in his profession as a paramedic at the fire department—more “American” than “Latino.”

The episode “Ambush” opened season 4 (1997) of *ER*. It features a self-assured Latina nurse who talks to the camera team filming a documentary for PBS, while many of the other staff members feel uneasy about being filmed. When a severely beaten young Latino is brought in and his fellow gang members want to check on him, the nurse stops them, telling them, “No, no, no, ustedes no pueden entrar por allá. I’m gonna see if your friend is okay. ... ¡En las sillitas por favor!” The victim’s sister is portrayed as equally self-assured, telling the “homies” to stay away from her brother. These two resolute urban Latina characters direct some of the viewers’ attention away from the Latino gang world and toward those who actively fight it. Still, their self-confident postures are paired with the old stereotype of the Latino criminal, now in the guise of the urban gang member.

It took until season 12 for a Latino doctor to be introduced as a regular character on *ER*—and he is anything but a positive figure. Dr. Victor Clemente first appeared on the show in October 2005, but he stayed on for only twelve episodes. Avila-Saavedra summarizes that “Dr. Clemente is portrayed as a troublemaker, plagued with personal problems including drug use and domestic violence” (*Trend* 157). His role recalls the typology of the Latino macho and alcoholic. Eventually he is fired, and no other Latina/o doctors have appeared in the remaining seasons.

While Dr. Clemente is portrayed on *ER* as ill-fit for his profession, the character of Federico (“Rico”) Diaz, a mortician of Puerto Rican descent raised in Los Angeles, is represented as very skilled, professional, and upwardly mobile. He appears on the cable

television drama *Six Feet Under* (HBO, 2001-05). The show is centered around a Southern California, family-owned funeral home. Rico's story on this family drama is something like a parable of the rise of Hispanics into the U.S. middle class: having been tremendously impressed by how Nathaniel Fisher, Sr. restored his father's face after a fatal accident, Rico learned the trade of embalming from Mr. Fisher, who also paid for his college education. After completing his studies in Mortuary Science, Rico was hired by Mr. Fisher. When Nathaniel Fisher, Sr. dies in the pilot episode of the show, Rico leaves the firm but is urged to come back by the mortuary's new owners, Nathaniel Sr.'s sons Nate and David. Realizing that his skill as an embalmer gives him 'professional capital,' he is intent on turning this professional capital into social and economic capital. So he only comes back on the condition that "Fisher and Sons" Mortuary becomes "Fisher & Diaz" Mortuary and he is made a full partner in the business. Later on he buys a mortuary in the area, which he runs as a family business until his retirement 35 years later. While some scenes and episodes explore Federico's heritage and circumstances as specifically Latino, others treat him as just a central character on the show whose ethnicity is irrelevant. Although Rico has a brief extramarital affair and is temporarily thrown out by his Latina wife Vanessa, a nurse, and although Vanessa is temporarily addicted to medication after her mother's death, the two of them and their two sons come across as the happiest and most goal-oriented characters on the show. They successfully pursue their dream of home ownership and a family business, adding to the "cultural forum" the notion of upwardly mobile Latinas/os. All principal characters on this program have their own markers of distinction, which makes ethnicity just one factor among many. For David and his partner Keith, their homosexuality may be more important than their shared religiosity; for Keith, his profession and temperament may be more important than his blackness; and for Rico his skill as an embalmer and his dream of having his own business may be more important than his Latino identity. *Latinidad* still matters on *Six Feet Under*, but it is not addressed as frequently and as explicitly as on *I Love Lucy* or *L.A. Law*. It is accepted neutrally as a given and competes with other markers of distinction, which reduces the otherness of Latina and Latino urban professionals and paves the way for Latinas/os as participating in the "American experience," which is discussed in section 10 below.

6. The Latin Uncanny

While Rico is portrayed in *Six Feet Under* as a Latino who blends in effortlessly with his intercultural environment, other TV productions in past decades have stressed the distinctiveness (often the deviance) of *latinidad*. In part, a deviant *latinidad* is constructed by investing either Latina and Latino characters or Latin America or "Latin" culture with a dose of the uncanny and threatening. This imaginary of deviance can be found across various television genres.

In 1988, for example, the ad agency Chiat/Day created for the Nissan Pathfinder, a sport utility vehicle, a six-part series of commercials, which started airing in October

of that year and which helped boost sales of the vehicle by 25 percent compared to a year earlier (cf. Adelson, no pag.). Taking a new approach to advertising a sport utility vehicle, the series does not highlight a powerful engine, a shiny exterior, or driving stunts. Instead, it shows a couple, Kurt and Marty Anderson, driving their new Nissan Pathfinder from Chicago to Rio de Janeiro for a thrilling adventure.³⁰ The series won Ad Age's 1989 award for best commercial—whether that was despite or because of its reaffirmation of stereotypes about Latin America is open to debate.

The second spot in the series is set in Mexico and is supposed to be “Day 9 On the Road to Rio.” We see a map of Mexico with the town of Botatulan marked on it. The voiceover in Kurt's voice describes the road conditions this way: “I guess when they ran out of asphalt, they used bricks. When they ran out of bricks, they used cobblestones. When they ran out of cobblestones, they used gravel. When they ran out of gravel stones, they used dirt. They never run out of dirt.” This voiceover is accompanied by a sequence of clips showing the Pathfinder going over the types of surface being described. Mexico is thus portrayed as backwards and exotic, while the Pathfinder remains robust and its Anglo drivers retain their Frontier spirit. The next spot, set in the Yucatán, adds to this exotic backwardness the magical feeling of being lost in the jungle in an “incredible place” full of mysteries.

In the fourth spot of the series, we see a superimposed map of Belize, showing Belize City and the image of the Pathfinder driving on flooded dirt roads.

Voice of Marty: In Belize we ran into Hurricane Gilbert.

Voice of Kurt: And an even bigger problem.

Then they are shown in an airport terminal. A stereotypically cast fat Latino in uniform is sitting behind a desk, just shakes his head, and says “No way.” Next, the pathfinder is seen driving into a plane onto which it is being loaded. Kurt explains: “The State Department strongly advised us not to drive through Central America. So we're hopping this plane to Belem, Brazil. Let's not kid ourselves: the Pathfinder's tough, but it ain't bullet proof.” Political instability, military rule, potential violence, and extreme weather are thus called up in this Latin American imaginary.

In the final commercial of the series, “Day 35 On the Road to Rio,” the couple arrive in Rio de Janeiro, dress up, and go dancing, while a group of Brazilian boys are seen scrubbing the Nissan Pathfinder clean. These images of a subservient and partying *latinidad* conclude the series' representation of a dirty, backward, mysterious, magical, dangerous, and somewhat uncanny Latin America.

A similar kind of othering occurs in Johnny Carson's opening monologue on *The Tonight Show* (NBC, 1954-) the night after the U.S. military intervention in Panama in December 1989. Says Carson:

³⁰ As the *New York Times* wrote: “The customary promotion for cars of this type uses contrived images of power and prowess, like trucks bouncing over railroad ties and flying over crevasses. Instead, Nissan's ads try to reach a mid-30's, higher-income group with a believable couple who seek out the unpredictable” (Adelson, no pag.).

Did you follow that news down in Panama? Same thing happened here today: I foiled an attempted coup in the *Tonight Show* offices. I came in, Fred ... was sitting there, wearing a general's cap, smoking a Havana cigar, saying, "Wee don't need no steenkin' hoost."

This kind of typecasting of Latin America as the space of political instability, military dictatorships and as prone to revolutions is partly indebted to the television reporting on the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 and on the failed U.S. attempt at invading the Bay of Pigs.³¹

Mystery series are, of course, particularly attractive to television makers who wish to convey a sense of the Latin uncanny. One example is the episode "El Mundo Gira" (season 4, 1997) of the series *The X-Files* (FOX, 1993-2002). While Latinas/os generally appear at best sporadically on *The X-Files*, a few episodes have focused on *latinidad*. In "El Mundo Gira," Agents Mulder and Scully go to the San Joaquin Valley in California to investigate the death of an illegal immigrant farm worker named Maria Dorantes, whose face is partially eaten away, reportedly after yellow rain fell from the sky as Maria was trying to catch three runaway goats. Two brothers, Eladio and Soledad Buente had been wooing Maria. As the woman in the frame tale telling the story comments: "Dos hermanos y una mujer. Problema." The locals at the farm worker camp, for the most part illegal Latino immigrants, believe that El Chupacabra, a mythical goatsucker creature, is responsible for Maria's and one of the goats' deaths:

Mulder: Does anybody know what happened to Maria Dorantes? Did anybody see anything?

Woman [who narrates the frame tale]: El Chupacabra, that's what happened to Maria Dorantes.

Scully: El Chupacabra?

Mulder: Yeah, it's a Mexican folk tale. El Chupacabra. The goat-sucker. It's a small grey creature with a big head and small body and big bulging eyes.

Woman: Sí. Light, then rain, then el Chupacabra. It comes and eats away Maria's eyes and face.

Mulder: Did you see the Chupacabra.

Woman: No, but everyone here knows this is the truth.

Soledad: This woman is a liar. There is no Chupacabra. Chupacabra is nothing but a story told to children. I know the killer of Maria Dorantes.

Scully: Who would that be, sir?

Soledad: It's my brother, Eladio Buente. He killed Maria because she loved only me.

Mulder: How do you explain the yellow rain and the dead goat over the hill?

Soledad: It is a trick. For fools who believe in fools' superstitions.

...

Scully: Two men, one woman, trouble. ... Mulder, what we've walked into here is a Mexican soap opera and one for the local cops.

Mulder: Local cops don't care. And I don't know who does.

Especially Scully's comment about the case resembling "a Mexican soap opera" invites audiences to chuckle at the love triangle, at Latino passion, and at Latino super-

³¹ For more on the subject, cf. Barnouw 290-98.

stitution, while voyeuristically relishing the fantasy of Latino deviance. Soon Scully discovers through a medical analysis of Maria's dead body that the disfiguration was caused by a rapidly growing fungus. She concludes that Eladio must be the carrier of an unidentifiable enzyme which causes the abnormal rapid growth of the lethal fungus. Meanwhile, adding another aspect to Latino deviance, INS agent Conrad Lozano attempts to spur Soledad on in killing his brother Eladio, whereas the FBI agents are trying to apprehend Eladio in order to stop the spread of the fungus. In the end, the two brothers are on the run toward Mexico, disfigured by the fungus, which does not kill them because they apparently have "an anti-enzyme gene." Associating illegal immigrants with excessive passion, superstition (Mulder: "These people sure love their stories."), and disease, presenting them as a threat to their environment as well as having the figure of a U.S. Latino INS agent advocate murder has led to widespread criticism of this episode. It others Latinas and Latinos as deviant and presents their world as uncanny.

However, the episode also criticizes the exploitation of illegal immigrants and of U.S. immigration policy. When FBI agent Mulder asks INS agent Lozano what would happen to Eladio if he were apprehended by the INS, Lozano answers: "He'll get his 45 seconds before the judge and then he's going to be put on a bus to Mexico, like all the others." Sympathy for the Latino characters is also created in a play on the term "illegal alien" and on Mulder's belief in threatening alien life forms. Scully tells him: "Mulder, I know you don't want to hear this, but I think the aliens in this story are not the villains; they are the victims." When Mulder is struck by how Eladio Buente keeps eluding them, agent Lozano replies: "These people are invisible. You look at them and you don't see them. As workers, they're cheap labor to pick crops and clean houses. To most people they're aliens in the true sense of the word." The criticism implied here is that U.S. America sees and treats the illegal immigrants only as anonymous workers, not as human beings. This is underlined by the very last words spoken in the episode, as Mulder explains to FBI chief Skinner: "The truth is: nobody cares."

The episode's subtext of Latinos/as as mysterious and potentially deadly continues the mood created in the *X-Files* episode "Teso Dos Bichos" of the previous season, first aired in March 1996. The plot of that episode revolves around a burial urn of a female shaman excavated by U.S. archeologists in Ecuador and taken—against the wishes of the local indigenous population—to the Boston Museum of History. A series of mysterious deaths there reveal that rats and ferocious cats must have been affected by the urn, which turned them into killers. It is not until the urn is returned to Ecuador that the deaths stop. In this way, the "Teso Dos Bichos" episode already portrayed Ecuador, and by implication *latinidad*, as uncanny, uncontrollable, and potentially pernicious.

Less serious than these two *X-Files* episodes but still feeding on the Latin uncanny is the "Got milk?" commercial featuring the mythical figure of La Llorona, first aired on English-language TV in California in 2002 and later also shown on Spanish-

language television throughout the United States.³² To the background sound of mysterious music and wailing, and wrapped in a bluish light, a long-haired woman ghost in a white dress enters a house at night, sees first two children and then a couple sleeping. The man has apparently fallen asleep while reading; a large old-looking book entitled *La Leyenda de La Llorona* is lying on his chest. The ghost moves on into the kitchen, opens the fridge door, sees a carton of milk, and the music and wailing stop, as the ghost says “leche,” starts to smile, takes a bite of the pastry she is carrying, and puts the milk carton to her lips. When she discovers that it is empty, the wailing starts again to the voiceover question “Got milk?” Rebecca Elena Mansfeld has observed that this commercial use of La Llorona “can be categorized as both ethnic and mainstream . . . , a transcultural text” (no pag.). For both Hispanic and non-Hispanic viewers, the spot calls up the Latin uncanny, inviting either recognition (for those familiar with the legend of La Llorona) or laughter (for those who enjoy the incongruence of the uncanny Llorona figure and the product being advertised) or both.

The tradition of the Latin uncanny continues with a figure like the “brujo” Jesus Velasquez from the Mexican state of Veracruz in seasons 3 and 4 of the supernatural fantasy drama *True Blood* (HBO, 2008-14 [est.]), which revolves around vampires, witches, werewolves and shapeshifters in a fictional small town in Louisiana. While Jesus is portrayed rather positively, working as a nurse at a mental institution, the uncle whom he visits in Mexico is a major source of terror and evil witchcraft. Although Latinos are integrated into the ethnically mixed cast of characters on *True Blood*, they are linked to a transnational threat, a factor that contributes to the idea of Latinas and Latinos—on- and off-screen—as a lurking danger that may be impossible to control.

7. The Sons of *el bandido*

Apart from the uncanny, another long-standing typology of Latinas and Latinos on English-language U.S. television links them to crime. As Clara E. Rodríguez reminds us, the NCLR reported in 1994 that “Latino characters were twice as likely as White, and three times as likely as Black characters to commit a television crime” (“Census” 237). Guillermo Avila-Saavedra refers to two studies which have likewise shown that “African-Americans and Latinos are more likely to be portrayed as criminals and law-breakers than European-Americans on television news” and that out of the roughly 3% Latino characters on primetime television in the year 2000, 77% appeared on crime shows (*Trend* 45). Another study, published in 2002, concludes that “Latino characters serve more negative story purposes and are perceived less positively than any other group and that Latino characters score lowest in a personality variable that measures likeability” (cf. Avila-Saavedra, *Trend* 45). The Hollywood figure of *el bandido* and its modern-day successors are alive and well on English-language (as well as on Spanish-language) TV in the United States.

³² The commercial is available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=erhsuXTyDww>.

The ensemble of news coverage (of U.S. Latinos and of Latin America), crime shows, TV dramas, sitcoms, and so-called “reality shows” solidifies the connection between *latinidad* and crime. In the 1970s, as Lichter/Lichter/Rothman have pointed out, a “steady stream of minority characters began to show up as criminals in cop shows like *Kojak*, *Baretta*, and *Barney Miller*” (349). In the 1980s, programs like *America’s Most Wanted* (FOX, 1988-2012; LIFE, 2011-12), which profiles crimes and suspects, and *COPS* (FOX, 1989-2013; SPIKE, 2013-), which uses embedded camera teams to document police patrols, searches, raids, arrests, and other activities, have long been criticized for presenting a higher number of Latina/o and African American suspects or criminals than the crime statistics suggest, thus reinforcing negative associations (cf. Oliver). The FOX network did react to those charges. As Lichter and Amundson found, from 1992 to 1994 the rates of Hispanic and African American criminals on those shows dropped significantly: “In 1992 a staggering 45 percent of all Hispanics and 50 percent of African Americans who appeared in these shows committed crimes. In 1994-95, the ‘crime rate’ for both minorities plummeted to less than half the previous levels—down from 45 to 16 percent of Latinos and from 50 to 20 percent of blacks portrayed” (72). On the other hand, television news coverage of the civil unrest in Los Angeles in 1992, apart from highlighting African Americans, often focused on Latino neighborhoods and on looting by Latinos.

Profiling Latinos as criminals is, however, also a popular strategy on Spanish-language television in the United States, as evidenced by programs like *Noticias y Más* (1991-94) on Univision (later to become *Primer Impacto* [1994-]) and *Ocurrió Así* (1990-) on Telemundo. Silvana Paternostro describes these programs as “*Hard Copy* meets CNN’s *Headline News*, plus salsa” (11). Crime sells—also on Spanish-language U.S. television and when the portrayed perpetrators are Hispanic.

Sitcoms have used the cliché of the Latino or Latin American *bandido* and its variants for easy laughs. Examples include the above-mentioned rants of Ed Brown in *Chico and the Man* about petty theft by Latinos. Another instance is the figure of the South American anti-communist revolutionary Carlos “El Puerco” Valdez on the controversial sitcom *Soap* (ABC, 1977-81). “El Puerco” (“the pig”) kidnaps one of the show’s protagonists (Jessica) but later falls in love with her. In this fictional Connecticut environment he stands out; through his criminal record he is characterized as deviant (in the *bandido* tradition); his amorous advances make him a Latin lover; and his personality characterizes him as the buffoon (cf. Lichter/Amundson 66). Through this combination of typologies, the show illustrates that while the old images will not go away, they have come to be taken less as elements in a realistic depiction and more as topoi used for laughs.

It comes as no surprise that U.S. crime shows have also long relied on (usually male) Latino screen criminals. Some examples include the gang leader Jesus Martinez on *Hill Street Blues* (NBC, 1981-87), the night stalker on the TV movie *Manhunt: Search for the Night Stalker* (1989, based on the life of serial killer Richard Ramirez), the Mexican drug trafficker Miguel Cadena and his family on *Kingpin* (NBC, 2003,

cancelled after six episodes), and the members of the Mala Noche Gang on *CSI: Miami* (CBS, 2001-12).

A significant number of shady Latino characters also appeared on the stylish police drama *Miami Vice* (NBC, 1984-89). John Fiske has commented on the “carnival style” and the cool fashion used in this series:

These images of style in *Miami Vice*, in music video, title sequences, or commercials open the viewer to a postmodernist pleasure. The fast editing, the dislocation of narrative sequence, the disruption of the diegesis may produce the sensation of fragmentariness, of images remaining signifiers, of the signifieds being not sold, but swamped, by the sensualities, of the physical uniqueness of experience rather than its meaning. (260)

But Fiske fails to mention the series’ ethnic aspects. In fact, *Miami Vice* makes such an oversight understandable: the opening credits are accompanied by a montage of images, none of which suggest any Latino presence in Miami—contrary to the city’s demographics.³³

Miami Vice sets up a number of oppositions, among them stylish–unstylish, U.S. American–foreign, white–non-white, law-abiding–criminal. The various characters are positioned along those and other parameters, which helps the creators construct various shades of deviance (cf. Fiske 43). In this framework Latinas and Latinos are not only portrayed as criminals but also as police officers and upholders of the justice system. A few minutes into the pilot episode, “Brother’s Keeper,” two police detectives are talking: the Latino Eddie and his Anglo partner Sonny. They discuss Eddie’s supposedly typical Latino personality:

Sonny: So, anyway, you lost your temper, right? Did the hot-blooded machismo number and stomped out of the house, right?

Eddie: Yeah, yeah, something like that.

Then they talk about Eddie not wanting his pregnant wife to work outside the home. In his patriarchal mindset, he makes it clear that “No wife of [his] ought to have to work to make a living.” Eddie gets killed by a car bomb before he can call his wife to tell her how much he loves her. This opening of the series thus presents Latinos as different (“hot-blooded” and patriarchal), but caring and sympathetic. Later on in the pilot episode, there is another positive portrayal of a Latino: Lieutenant Rodriguez is the boss of Sonny and his new partner, the Afro-Latino Ricardo Tubbs, who is of Jamaican descent. Rodriguez sends his son to an expensive Catholic school, is suspected by Tubbs of leaking information to the Colombian drug lord, but turns out to be righteous after all. These positive portrayals of Latinos on the side of law enforcement are offset by the figures of the drug lord Calderone³⁴ and of the assassin he hires, a Latino who

³³ Concerning the setting of the show, Fiske observes that it is ruled by a “pleasure in resisting and scandalizing the forces of social control.” The show’s Miami is “the ‘scandalous’ place where pleasure rules in opposition to the work ethic of traditional capitalism: the city is the representation of a pleasure-centered consumerist society” (260).

³⁴ Lichter and Amundson write that “[c]rime shows like *Miami Vice*, *Hill Street Blues*, and *Hunter* presented Hispanic drug lords as a major nemesis. Trafficking in human misery

dresses as a woman when he is out to kill other figures involved in the drug business. Sonny and Tubbs joke that this assassin “gives a whole new meaning to the word *alien*.”

The *Miami Vice* episode “Duty and Honor” (season 3, 1987) focuses on Hispanics as potential communists, adding another facet to the ‘revolutionary’ typology already ingrained in the conceptual map. The danger of communism is epitomized in that episode by the politician Espinoza, who ends up being killed by an assassin hired by the chief of the security firm that was employed to protect Espinoza. This Anglo chief of security is the real villain of the episode, not the Latino politician. While he refers to Espinoza as “a dangerous agitator,” viewer sympathies are with Espinoza, with the Latina prostitute Angel Velasquez, who is also killed, and with the Latino Lt. Castillo, who uncovers the plot. Through such narratives *Miami Vice* questions the stereotypical classification of Latinos as *bandidos*, portraying them also as the victims of crime or as the upholders of justice and attributing the “real” deviance to characters who may be white, stylish, U.S. American.

The final episode of *Miami Vice*, “Freefall” (season 5, 1989), presents a mix of positive and negative Latino portrayals. Much of its action takes place in the fictitious Latin American Country of Costa Morada, which is under military dictatorship. The drug cartel in that country is combatting the dictator, as is a group of rebels in whose ranks we find a courageous nun in a guerilla outfit. She is killed fighting for a better future for her country. But the real corruption, as we find out, reigns back home in Miami, where the detectives uncover that the police chief Highsmith and the district attorney Baker are on the payroll of the drug cartel. While Latina/o and Latin American clichés are used in *Miami Vice*, they are not necessarily confirmed.³⁵ Spice is added to the show by deviant *and* by righteous Latina and Latino characters as well as by stylish clothes, cool talk, fast cars, and action scenes—precursors of the Latin glamor discussed in section 12 below.

While *Miami Vice* reflects the strong demographic presence of Latinas and Latinos in Miami, the one-hour police procedural and legal drama *Law & Order* (NBC, 1990-2010) has no Latinas/os in recurring major roles, although the show is set in New York City, which has of course a sizeable Latino population (24% in 1990; 29% in 2010). *Law & Order* always devotes the first half of an episode to a police investigation and the apprehension of a suspect and the second half to the efforts of the district attorney to prosecute the case. In the episode “Heaven” (season 2, 1991) the deaths of 53 Latin American immigrants in a fire are tracked to a Latin American green card

made these characters rich enough to own cities and sometimes even small countries. They were among the nastiest criminals on TV in the 1980s” (66).

³⁵ Lichter and Amundson agree that “*Miami Vice* was not only a source of criminal Hispanics—after all the squad was led by the enigmatic Lieutenant Martin Castillo and on the distaff side of the unit was detective Gina Navarro. However inconsistently, the show did attempt to sow successful law-abiding Latinos mixed in with the criminal crop. For all its flaws *Miami Vice* at least attempted to reflect the presence of Latinos in Miami” (66).

scam, in which a U.S. government official is also involved. In “Angel” (season 6, 1995), a devout Anglo Catholic woman tries to frame a Puerto Rican man for allegedly stealing her baby from the carriage she had left outside the confessional. It turns out that she had earlier on killed the baby herself after hearing voices and believing that a divine command was telling her to do so. This small sample reveals that in *Law & Order* Latinas/os are not only represented as perpetrators of crime but also as victims.

The same holds true for *NYPD Blue* (ABC, 1993-2005).³⁶ In the episode “Thick Stu” (season 4, 1996), for example, there is, on the one hand, the upright and upwardly mobile detective Martínez, who runs for union delegate against the much older, more experienced, but less competent Italian-American Vince Gotelli. Martínez hands out campaign mugs with his self-description as “honest, hard-working, interested.” But on the other hand, there is the Puerto Rican Ricardo Garza, who reports his baby daughter missing after accidentally killing her when she was not quiet. And there is the known drug dealer Nene López. López, however, is an ambiguous figure because, despite his drug dealing record, he elicits the audience’s sympathy when he is beaten by the Italian-American detective Gotelli for the alleged baby kidnapping, with which he has nothing to do. With these sons of *el bandido* there is far less black-and-white type-casting by the turn of the century than had been the case in earlier decades.

One of the recurring main characters in *Prison Break* (2005-09), a crime series about a group of prisoners trying to break out of Fox River State Penitentiary, is Fernando Sucre. He is of Puerto Rican descent, grew up in Chicago, and has had several run-ins with the law. When the series starts, he is the prison cellmate of the white protagonist. While this protagonist, Michael Scofield, is presented as admirable for his ingenuity and for wanting to free his unjustly convicted brother, Sucre is cast in a positive light through his devotion to the woman he loves and through the comic relief that he often contributes. We learn that Sucre was apprehended for holding up a liquor store with an unloaded gun so that he could afford to buy an engagement ring for his girlfriend and that his cousin—interested in the same woman—reported him to the police. The motivation for his crime puts Sucre in a positive light; also he is a kind of model prisoner. Through the creation of his character as a criminal with many good values (as well as through the general premise of a man awaiting execution on death row for a murder he did not commit) *Prison Break* complicates rash and unequivocal categorizations.

The same applies to *Breaking Bad* (AMC, 2008-13), one of the most watched cable television shows by its fifth and final season. Set in Albuquerque, NM, its central character, Anglo chemistry teacher Walter White, morphs from family man to drug dealer when he is told that he has inoperable lung cancer and decides that he needs to make money fast to provide for the financial security of his family after his death. So he turns to making and selling methamphetamine, becoming increasingly villainous as the show progresses. A similarly two-faced character is the Chilean Gustavo (“Gus”)

³⁶ Robin Nelson has spoken of the show’s “communitarian 1990s ethos, including a multi-ethnic mix in its casting” (187).

Fring, owner and manager of a chain of fast-food chicken restaurants and of a laundry business. While he appears to be a caring businessman and a community model, making large donations to the Albuquerque branch of the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), he is also a major distributor of drugs for the Mexican cartel. Yet his background history triggers some audience empathy despite his involvement in the drug trade. We find out that he left Chile together with a friend during the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet to set up a chicken restaurant in Mexico. When the friend is killed by the Juárez drug cartel, Gus moves on to Albuquerque but ends up in league with the cartel, making crime his major business. Such explanations and ambivalence were largely missing from the early *bandidos* on Hollywood screens; in *Breaking Bad* they help question ethnic typologies. By associating the Chilean Gus with the Anglo-American Walter as two ambivalent, initially good-hearted criminals of different ethnic backgrounds the show moves beyond ethnicity and beyond easy categorizations. While it does feature Latino criminals in the transnational space of the desert and in the urban setting, there is also a Latino working for the DEA who dies in the line of duty.

Neat distinctions are likewise questioned in the cable television crime drama *The Bridge* (FX, 2013-), set in the El Paso–Juárez border area and based on the premise that a white female El Paso detective has to work with a male Latino Juárez detective in order to solve the mystery of a find at the national border on the Bridge of the Americas connecting the two cities: the upper dead body of a U.S. American white woman judge attached to the lower dead body of a Mexican woman. In this scenario it is difficult to single out Latino characters as different or deviant, as all the action is cross-border and cross-ethnic. The sons of *el bandido* blend in with law-enforcing, law-abiding, and law-breaking Latinas and Latinos as well as with the good, the bad, and the ugly from other ethnic groups.

Generally, however, on the commercial English-language networks (most notably on FOX), news reports that focus on criminal activity at and across the U.S. border with Mexico, tend to present Latino men as illegal immigrants or as people involved in the drug trade and in other illegal activities. When complementing reports on border crossers with commentaries by members of the border patrol or of self-appointed militia groups like the Minuteman Project, there seems to be a general bias not for human rights and immigration reform but instead for “protection” from outside threats.

While old images of *bandidos* and *desperados* still resonate with contemporary audiences and have been diversified into the burglar, the murderer, the rapist, the gang member, the smuggler, the drug dealer, and the dictator—combined at times with the alcoholic, the drug user, or the macho—, the lines of demarcation on the conceptual map are increasingly blurry in more recent TV productions, as typologies have become cross-ethnic and as portrayals of Latinas and Latinos are increasingly diversified.

8. Latina Curves

Like the figure of *el bandido* and its variations, the Latina temptress has a long history on U.S. screens. That this tradition is alive and well is illustrated, for example, by a new cable show, *Devious Maids* (LIFE, 2013-). Based on the Mexican *telenovela* *Ellas son la alegría del hogar*, co-produced by Eva Longoria, and co-written by Tanya Saracho, this comedy drama combines the sex appeal of four Latina maids in Beverly Hills with a mother's attempt to solve the murder of one of their friends, also a Latina housemaid. That mother is Marisol Suarez, Ph.D., a college professor who goes undercover as a maid in order to find clues that could prove her son's innocence in the murder case. Through these five very attractive women characters the show also plays with the old cliché of the 'hot' Latina.

The combination of Latina curves and crime also serves as the basis for *Killer Women*, an upcoming crime drama series that is expected to air on ABC during the 2013-14 television season. The show is based on the Argentine crime drama *Mujeres asesinas*, which was adapted into a U.S. setting, where a woman rises to the top ranks of the Texas Rangers.

Eye-catching Latinas have frequently appeared on the big and small screens since the days of Anita Page, Carmen Miranda, Dolores del Río,³⁷ and Rita Hayworth (cf. Rodríguez, *Heroes*). On television, this image of sexual allure was taken up, for example, in the short-lived sitcom *I Married Dora* (ABC, 1987, cancelled after 13 episodes). In that show the illegal immigrant Dora Calderon from El Salvador works as a housekeeper for the widower Peter Farrell and his two children. When she is faced with deportation, she and Peter enter into a marriage of convenience. More daring appearances include that of the lesbian Eva "Papi" Torres, who joined *The L Word* (SHOW, 2004-09) with the start of season four. Continuing the cliché of the Latina temptress or whore, she is the character who is said to have had the highest number of sexual encounters in the series. The figure of Eva Torres followed that of the more traditional Carmen de la Pica Morales from seasons two and three.³⁸ Carmen, writes Shauna Swartz, was created as a character to whom "family is very important ... — perhaps to bolster the notion of the character's Latina identity." Nonetheless, her "good daughter demeanour doesn't preclude her from being sex-positive" (178).³⁹

A longer-lasting take on the figure of the sexy Latina was the one-hour drama series *Desperate Housewives* (ABC, 2004-2012). Running for eight seasons, the show

³⁷ On the evolving star image of Dolores del Río, cf. chapter 1 in Beltrán.

³⁸ It is interesting to note here that neither of the two Latina characters in *The L Word* is played by a Latina actress.

³⁹ While the figure of Carmen on *The L Word* does display a Latin sense of family as well as "barrio credibility," Swartz believes that her "ethnicity is relegated to a fashion statement, tacked onto her like a costume" (179). This perceived shortcoming, I would argue, can also be seen as a post-race approach, in which other identity markers outweigh ethno-racial distinctions.

focused on four suburban women residing on the fictitious suburban Wisteria Lane, Fairview, in the “Eagle State.” While ethnicity is not the major issue on this program, one of the four women, Gabrielle Solís is a Mexican American, born in Texas to parents from Guadalajara. Played by Eva Longoria,⁴⁰ Gabrielle is in the tradition of Latina curves: she used to be a model, is very attractive, and finds it easy to make men fall for her. She is married to the wealthy, shady and macho Carlos Solís, an immigrant from Guadalajara, who works in finance, imports slave labor goods, goes to jail, and has to do community service. Both Gabrielle and Carlos have a series of affairs. In this and other respects, *Desperate Housewives* borrows heavily from the tradition of the *telenovela*,⁴¹ with its emphasis on complicated romances, extramarital affairs, intrigues, melodrama, sensationalism, and surprise twists. In turn, the formula for *Desperate Housewives* was exported to Latin America. By 2007 the Walt Disney Company had found production companies to produce no less than four South American versions of the show: there was to be one for Argentina (titled *Amas de Casa Desesperadas* and set in a suburb of Buenos Aires), one for Colombia, one for Brazil (titled *Doñas de Casa Desesperadas*) and one for Ecuador. Eventually, the Colombian and Ecuadorian versions were combined into one (also titled *Amas de Casa Desesperadas*). In addition, a second U.S. version was developed in Spanish for Univision.

With their focus on style and looks, the residents of Wisteria Lane are not at all the “housewives” suggested by the show’s title. Their priorities and their affairs call traditional American family values into question and render the show a tongue-in-cheek comment on a world in which only status and image count. The series goes in the direction of a postmodern play with symbols and signifiers (as discussed with reference to *Ugly Betty* and other shows below, in section 11). Astrid Fellner astutely commented that

[t]hrough the employment of a dead character as a voiceover who interrupts the diegesis and ironically comments upon the other characters’ actions, the show not only develops the necessary self-reflexivity to point to its own construction but also criticizes the characters’ obsessive struggle to maintain order and normality. (5)

A Latina character fits well into this setup because of the screen tradition of depicting Latinas as dark beauties and temptresses. This allure is increased—in the cases of numerous screen Latinas from Gabrielle Solís on *Desperate Housewives* to Carmen De La Pica Morales on *The L Word* and Lola Hernández on *Hot Properties*—through styl-

⁴⁰ According to Avila-Saavedra, Eva Longoria “is perhaps one of the most prominent celebrities to come out of the recent Latino trend” (*Trend* 161). The actress joked that on *Desperate Housewives* she played “the first Latina ever with a white gardener” (qtd. in Avila-Saavedra, *Trend* 166).

⁴¹ Diane I. Rios sees two main reasons why *telenovelas* are attractive especially to U.S. Latina and Latino viewers. While *telenovelas* in Spanish or from Latin America “aid them in maintaining aspects of Latino culture (cultural maintenance),” *telenovelas* in English and set in U.S. environments are helpful in “learning more about or keeping in touch with the dominant European American culture (assimilation)” (64).

ishness and fashion-consciousness (cf. Fellner 2). Gabrielle Solís is the exotic, sexy Latina, while her husband Carlos fits the tradition of both the *bandido* and the Latin lover, and while their affairs, their passionate outbursts, and the gossip of their world are indebted to the genre of the *telenovela*. Gabrielle and Carlos add an element of Latin spice to their white-dominated neighborhood. But their ethnic spice is complemented by other attributes—like stylishness, deviant behavior, and wealth—through which ethnic identity becomes just one identity marker among many.⁴²

In the individualization of Latina characters as well-defined, complex, multi-faceted figures on the screen that we are seeing on television in the 21st century, ethnicity loses some of its power of distinction. Increasingly, as on *Desperate Housewives*, Latinas are presented as not fundamentally different from their non-Latino surroundings but as blending into their professional and social contexts while *also* retaining an element of ethnic identity that spices up their intercultural interactions. This approach is exemplified by shows like *Hot Properties*, *Scrubs*, and *Grey's Anatomy*.

Hot Properties (ABC, 2005, canceled after 13 episodes) was a short-lived comedy series centering on four women working in a New York City real estate office. Often compared to *Sex and the City* (HBO, 1998-2004), the show invests all four protagonists with very distinct personalities but also with shared characteristics like their profession, their difficulties in the dating scene, and their passion for *Oprah*. One of the protagonists is Lola Hernández, whom Avila-Saavedra describes as “an attractive Latina, played by the voluptuous Colombian-born model and actress Sofia Vergara, trying to pull her life together after divorcing a gay husband. ... Lola is completely oblivious to the attention her good looks receive and never consciously exploits her body” (*Trend* 160). She is defined as much by her attraction to gay men (for which she is in therapy) as she is by other markers like her professional identity or her ethnicity. Ethnicity does not *define* who she is, but *adds to* who she is.

The half-hour sitcom *Scrubs* (NBC, 2001-08; ABC, 2009-10) makes ethnicity an issue more often than do *Hot Properties* or *Grey's Anatomy*. The show focuses on a group of first-year interns in a hospital, where they work with the head nurse Carla Espinosa, who is of Dominican descent. The sassy, attractive Carla, a regular character on the first eight seasons, stands up for herself and for any intern who has made a mistake, is self-assured and funny, and ends up marrying one of the hospital's doctors, who is African American. Frequent humorous situations arise from her being misidentified by others (especially by her future husband) as Mexican or Puerto Rican. Those situations and the fact that the tones of skin color of the Latina Carla and her African

⁴² Astrid Fellner mentions an episode in which Gabrielle openly states her belief that their wealth will outweigh their ethnicity: an Anglo woman does not want to give up her child for adoption by Gabrielle and Carlos once she is told that they are Latino. Gabrielle's reaction is to try to change the woman's mind by showing her their financial situation, as evidenced by their tax returns. Fellner concludes that “here the show works through the presentation of a postmodern image culture in which identity is constructed through appearance and style—that is money—rather than race/ethnicity or gender” (7).

American husband are very similar contribute to relativizing the extent of distinction attributed to ethnicity on the show.

The one-hour medical drama *Grey's Anatomy* (ABC, 2005-) offers an even more complex Latina character. Set in a fictional Seattle hospital and focusing on the lives of a number of interns and residents there, the show was consciously devised as ethnically diverse. In a color-blind casting process, each role is cast without predetermining the character's "race" or ethnicity. Dr. Callie Torres (played by the Mexican-born singer, songwriter, and actress Sara Ramirez) was introduced in the show's second season as a senior orthopedic resident and has since developed from an awkward resident to a confident orthopedic surgeon, a wife, a mother, and a self-assured personality. Torres is first married to a man, then she becomes romantically involved with a female colleague, next she has a child as the result of a one-night stand with a male colleague and friend, and subsequently she marries a woman. Her bisexuality, her role as a mother, and her professional identity outweigh her ethnic identity. While she is (also) an impulsive "hot Latina" with curves, she is a much more complex character, whose ethnicity is intertwined with other markers of difference. For example, the strain on her relationship with her parents is caused primarily by her bisexuality, but cannot be separated from their ethnicity and its alleged norms concerning sexuality and family.

In her study of Latina bodies in the media, Isabel Molina-Guzmán argues that "the symbolic values assigned to and associated with Latinas in news, film, and television are informative of preexisting hierarchical social relationships and in turn inform contemporary social and political realities" (8). The privileging of whiteness (cf. my introduction to this volume) and of masculinity has impacted the representation of Latinas since their first celluloid appearances in the early 20th century. And the spotlight on Latina curves in English-language (and even more so in Spanish-language) U.S. television continues. For example, FOX Television will reportedly start airing the immigrant comedy *Speak American* in the 2013/14 season. This forthcoming show is described as a half-hour series revolving around a young Latina accent-reduction teacher.⁴³ Fittingly, she is named America.

9. Latin Spice on Children's Television

In the 1950s, *The Cisco Kid* and *Zorro* were primarily targeting children and teenage audiences, presenting the American Southwest as exotic and the Latino presence there as a matter of the past. After a long period of general Latino invisibility on shows for children and teenagers, there has been a stronger Latino presence on PBS Kids, Nickel-

⁴³ Reyes and Rios caution us not to look in media depictions for "realistic assumptions, perceptions, or interpretations about what a Latina/o teacher is or can be. Though there are some exceptions," they contend, "mediated manifestations of the teaching profession are more often problematic and dangerous than inspiring and honorable" (4).

odeon, and the Disney Channel since the beginning of the 21st century.⁴⁴ Generally, Latino characters on these current programs are portrayed in ethnically and culturally mixed environments. Their *latinidad* is not necessarily made explicit. For example, although Selena Gomez and Demi Lovato were part of the ethnically diverse cast of children on *Barney & Friends* (PBS, 1992-2010) around the year 2000, no comments were made about their ethnicity. *Sesame Street* (PBS, 1969-), on the other hand, made its efforts at cultural and linguistic diversity more explicit: a pioneer show in representing Spanish-speaking and bilingual characters as early as the 1970s, the program also commonly includes elementary Spanish lessons (cf. de Casanova 457).

The two other educational children's shows on PBS that commonly included Latina and Latino characters as well as some Spanish were *The Electric Company* and *Zoom*. *The Electric Company* (PBS, 1971-77), of which a total of 780 half-hour episodes were broadcast over the course of its six seasons, was geared toward child audiences who had outgrown *Sesame Street* and who were now in elementary school. Many of its sketches, parodies, and other segments used entertaining content to foster the viewers' reading and grammar skills and to increase their range of vocabulary. Apart from African American actors like Morgan Freeman and Bill Cosby who had by that time established themselves as stage actors, the original cast included Puerto Rican-born actress, singer, and dancer Rita Moreno. In the sketch "Pedro's Plant Place," for example, Cuban-born actor Luis Ávalos plays the owner of a gardening store and introduces new vocabulary by inserting the words into his planting tips. Ávalos also had a recurring role in *The Electric Company* as "Dr. Doolots" (a parody of Doctor Dolittle), who uses words as cures for his patients.

Zoom (PBS, 1972-78), also a half-hour educational and variety program, was largely unscripted and much of the show's creative control was in the hands of the ethnically mixed cast of children, who presented quizzes, language games, poems, movies, sketches, science experiments, recipes, and leisure activities that were geared toward making child viewers active investigators, problem solvers, and researchers. The show also included chat segments that addressed topics like racial prejudice.

Integrated into the imaginary adventures of its protagonists, the pre-schooler series *Dragon Tales* (PBS, 1999-2005) continued the inter-ethnic focus, the use of Spanish, and the educational aspect of those earlier PBS shows. In that animated show, two Anglo children, in possession of an enchanted dragon scale, escape into a fantasy world of dragons, with whom they can fly and have adventures. The young dragons attend "The School in the Sky," where they are taught by the dragon Quetzal (his name

⁴⁴ As Clara E. Rodríguez stated in 2008, "[i]n recent years, there have been some significant innovations in Latino programming for children and youth. But most of these initiatives have occurred in alternative spaces, i.e., on cable or non-network television and with notable exceptions have not had long runs" ("Census" 234-35). In view of the ongoing success of shows like *Dora the Explorer* or *Wizards of Waverly Place*, five years after Rodríguez's assessment, I deem the Latino presence on children's television more noticeable and more lasting in 2013.

taken from the brightly plumed Mexican and Central American bird of that name), who greets the dragon and human children with “hola amigos,” speaks with a Hispanic accent, and frequently inserts Spanish phrases into his conversations. In the show’s third season, the two Anglo children are joined by the six year-old Enrique, who has moved into their neighborhood from Colombia—a bilingual child who gets to come along on the subsequent adventure trips into the fantasy world. These PBS shows consciously disassociate *latinidad* from low social class, poor education, crime, and deviance, presenting it instead as one of many elements that spice up their intercultural worlds.

Especially the animated *Maya & Miguel* (PBS, 2004-07), which was shown as *Maya y Miguel* on Univision in Spanish from 2011 to 2013, stresses the importance of community. Maya and Miguel Santos are ten year-old twins; their mother is from Mexico, their father from Puerto Rico. They live in an ethnically mixed neighborhood and have many non-Latina/o friends. While Maya is passionate and impulsive, Miguel is reflective and practical, thus going against any pigeon-holing of Latinas and Latinos. Both are bilingual (as is their parrot Paco), which helps the show promote the values of multiculturalism.⁴⁵ It introduces Spanish words, and whenever Maya has an idea, she says “¡Eso es!”

Latinidad and Spanish on children’s television are prominent in the animated series *Dora the Explorer* (NICK, 2000-). This show is a cross-over both in terms of the central role which *latinidad* plays in it and in terms of the Spanish-dubbed version of the program being aired on Telemundo (through 2006) and Univision (since 2008). The protagonist, Dora Marquez, is a Latina girl (originally seven years old, now in middle school) equally fluent in English and Spanish living “in what the show’s creators call a ‘magical world’ with vaguely Latin American features,” at times “tropicalized,” at times “quasi-Mexican” (de Casanova 462). She and her companion, the monkey Boots, go on an adventurous quest in each episode. Often the quest involves riddles that have to do with the Spanish language⁴⁶ or with Hispanic cultures. As Nickelodeon spokesperson Dan Martinsen explained, Dora “was developed to be pan-Latina to represent the diversity of Latino cultures” (qtd. in Friedman, no pag.). In that approach the show is geared toward Latino and non-Latino children alike. Nicole M. Guidotti-Hernández has examined the program’s commercialization and its marketing of *Latinidades*, arguing that

Dora the Explorer provides a post-modern model of globalized “Latinidades,” citizenship, race, and gender which express a universal Latino/a subjectivity. At the same time, the show represents a number of distinct Latino/a cultural practices (like the parranda

⁴⁵ As Erynn Masi de Casanova pointed out, “[m]any characters on the show are skilled bilinguals, and Spanish is also used by non-Latino characters who are not skilled speakers” (464).

⁴⁶ De Casanova observed that while on *Dora* “the emphasis is on instrumental Spanish,” on *Dragon Tales* “Spanish serves a character development function,” and on *Maya & Miguel* Spanish “becomes an in-group language among the twins’ peers” (472).

and the comparsa) through the representation of space, language, music, and racialized visual representations of Latino/a children. These double discourses express how nation, citizenship, and identity are a contested terrain most closely illustrated by the show. (209)

Dora relies on her computer, on her talking backpack, on friends, on tips from the audience, on her bilingualism, and on her intercultural competence to reach the destinations presented in a particular episode. As Clara E. Rodríguez pointed out, the show set a trend:

Go Diego Go (2004-present), is another popular spin-off of this show and is based on Dora's cousin, Diego. Also to be found on Nickelodeon was *Taina* (2001-2002), a live action show that focused on a Latina teenager, and her trials and tribulations with friends and family, and *The Brothers García*, another live action show, focused on a Mexican American family. All of these shows proved to be highly successful. Indeed, *Dora, the Explorer* was the highest rated show for pre-schoolers on all of commercial television, netting 17.6 million viewers each month. ("Census" 235)

More oriented toward boys is the animated children's show *Handy Manny* (DISNEY, 2006-13). Modeled on the British *Bob the Builder* (CBBC, 1998-2001), this show, which originated in Canada, also has an international distribution; it is broadcast as *Manny a la obra* in Latin America. The protagonist is a generic Latino who owns a repair shop. He and his team of speaking tools get called whenever anything needs to be fixed. Characteristically, Manny answers the phone by saying "Hola, Handy Manny's repair shop, you break it..." to which all the tools shout "we fix it." The youngest of the speaking tools is the flashlight Flicker, who first appears in season two, speaks Spanish, and is slowly picking up more and more English. Manny and his tools live in an intercultural environment: Mr. Lopart owns the candy shop next door, Mr. Kumar runs a Chinese restaurant, Señor López is the science teacher, and Mrs. Portillo is a neighbor.

Bilingualism and code-switching are common on the show and give it a pan-Latino flair. *Handy Manny* also follows the trend of which Erynn De Casanova has spoken for *Dora the Explorer*, *Dragon Tales*, and *Maya & Miguel*, offering no specifics in terms of national origin but instead using a "generic Latino/a" figure who is "based on an assumed/constructed pan-Latino identity" and who uses a Spanish that is not regionally coded (470). By virtue of being "generic Latinas/os," figures like Manny and Dora can serve as models of identification for a variety of audiences. Reaching out to viewers with different language backgrounds, *Handy Manny* often uses the same word or phrase in English and Spanish side by side. For example, in the pilot episode, he says: "Ooh, a *serpiente*, a snake" or "¡Eso es muy bueno! That's very good."

Over the last decade there has also been a distinct Latino presence on various shows targeting teenagers. In the live-action adolescent/family sitcom *The Brothers García* (NICK, 2000-04), for example, the events center around the family of a Latino college professor. The family's social class and level of education represent a conscious intervention in the cultural forum; they oppose traditional Latino/a typecasting and stereotypical depictions of Latinas/os (as *Devious Maids* will do in a rather differ-

ent framework thirteen years later). *The Brothers García* was one of the first projects of Sí TV, a production company founded in 1997 with the express goal of increasing the Hispanic presence on English-language television.⁴⁷ In the history of English-language U.S. television, *The Brothers García* stands out as the first sitcom in English that had an all-Latino cast and creative team of writers, directors and producers. Co-creator Jeff Valdez told a seminar at the Museum of Television and Radio in New York City that the makers of this program were intent on creating an “ethnic” show for general audiences. He characterized their target group as “a very diverse audience; it’s not the ‘Latino’ audience that people thought it would be. ... We found out that actually Latino audiences view pretty much the same as the general market, as the general audience.” In order to create this inter-ethnic appeal, some of the ethnically specific language use was dropped from the original plans for the program. Valdez recalls that in early screenplay drafts there had been many expressions like “orale,” “vato,” and “Norteno.” But when the show was ready to go into production, says Valdez, “we felt it had to be a lot more middle class. ... We made it a lot more crossover and mainstream.” The creators of *The Brothers García* thus endeavored to treat the family’s ethnic background as part of the American experience, not as an alien or comical element. As co-creator Valdez points out: “One of the great things when we pitched the show to NICK was that it’s just a family. The last name happens to be García. ... [But the setup] is really a mixture of Latino culture and American culture, and it embraces all of it.”⁴⁸

An intercultural scenario also characterizes the teenage fantasy sitcom *Wizards of Waverly Place* (DISNEY 2007-12), which revolves around an Italian-Mexican-American family in Manhattan. The Russos own a sandwich restaurant, above which they live in a big apartment. Father Jerry Russo is Italian American and a former wizard; he gave up his wizarding powers for his brother, which made it possible for him to marry a non-wizard: Theresa Russo is Mexican American and a mortal. Their three children all have wizarding powers (but two of them will eventually lose those powers). This alterity of wizardry versus non-wizardry is more important for the show than the Mexican American background of the mother, although there are some episodes when this heritage is emphasized. For example, in “Quinceañera,” Theresa plans for her daughter Alex (played by the show’s Tejana star, Selena Gomez) the fifteenth-birthday party

⁴⁷ Sí TV started its own cable channel in 2004, becoming the first network that specifically targets a Hispanic audience *and* whose programming is exclusively in English. In 2011 Sí TV changed its name to nuvoTV. Virginia Escalante surmises that “the proliferation of ‘Latino’ media constitutes a struggle for representation arising from the conflict between images and messages that are externally imposed and those that are internally constructed, as well as from economic imperatives in the communications arena” (133).

⁴⁸ Pondering this interview statement, it is interesting to note that Valdez uses “Latino” and “American” as two separate spheres here rather than presenting Latino culture as part of U.S. culture.

that she herself never had and the two start fighting about how to properly celebrate the occasion.

Another *quinceañera* is seen in the episode “Club Owners & Quinceañeras” (season 1, 2012) of the teenage comedy *Austin & Ally* (DISNEY, 2011-), which is set in Miami. On that show, the character of Trish De La Rosa has been friends since kindergarten with Ally Dawson, who now writes songs for teenage singer Austin Moon. Once Austin Moon has become famous through an Internet appearance, Trish becomes his manager. Through her figure the show’s creators play with stereotypical expectations: Trish is short and overweight, she dresses in loud colors, she often wears outlandish, Carmen Miranda-style head pieces, she gets fired from every job she starts (until she obtains a position at a beach club) and she tends to be lazy. But those clichés are offset by her self-assurance, her being the most rational member of “Team Austin,” and her taking charge when she cares about the issue at hand. Although disorganized, she is passionate and dedicated in her friendships and in promoting Austin. Trish bears similarities to the title character of *Ugly Betty*—recalling clichés but also moving beyond them. Far from being the generic Latina, though, Trish is but an individual who splices up the relationships and plots of the series. Through her character the program also conveys intercultural knowledge, as in the following comical conversation from “Club Owners & Quinceañeras,” where the Anglo Dez mixes up two terms:

Dez: Can I have a chicken quinceañera? I’m trying to cut back on red meat.

Trish: You’re thinking of a quesadilla.

Dez: No, a quesadilla is a traditional Latin American party celebrating a girl’s 15th birthday.

Whereas *Austin & Ally* does draw attention to Trish’s *latinidad*, the Nickelodeon show *Big Time Rush* (NICK, 2009-13 [est.]) approaches its Latino character as just another American boy blending in with the rest. The show presents a group of four hockey players from Minnesota who are selected to form a boy band in Hollywood. The three Anglo youths on the band are joined by Carlos García, whose family roots are Argentinean. Carlos loves corn dogs (rather than distinctly Latin or South American foods) and if he is different, then that is because he enjoys wearing his hockey helmet at all times or because he has a metal plate in his head. No Spanish is used on the show, as Carlos’s ethnic background is not an aspect to which the program draws special attention.⁴⁹ He is created as just another American kid from Minnesota running into all kinds of mishaps together with his friends in the unfamiliar world of showbiz.

On the teenage comedies *Big Time Rush*, *Austin & Ally*, *Wizards of Waverly Place*, and *The Brothers García*, as well as on the animated children’s programs mentioned above, *latinidad* is not an odd element but fits well into the inter-ethnic, multicultural fictions of these programs. *Latinidad* comes across as a piece of the U.S. American mosaic, as part of the American experience. While it often adds “spice” in terms of

⁴⁹ Whether the boys’ producer and songwriter, Gustavo Rocque, is also supposed to be Latino is not made explicit on the show.

language, accent, customs, or idiosyncracies, it is no longer derided as a characterization of “spics,” but is instead valued as an enriching facet. On the conceptual map, “American” and “Latina/o” are now less likely to be seen as discrete entities (the way they tended to be half a century ago) but are rather superimposed. This approach is not limited to shows for children and teenagers but is also evidenced in programming for general audiences.

10. As American as... Tacos

As quoted above, John Fiske sees a constant tension in television programs between foregrounding the cultural or ethnic specificity of particular characters, settings, or elements and downplaying those in the interest of “cultural homogeneity” (37). He believes that the homogeneity expected by audiences is partly achieved through formulaic plots and representations: “The economic dimension of television gives it a conventional form, even when its content is more progressive” (38). This conventionality and formulaic approach characterized the tabloid afternoon talk show *Geraldo* (syndicated, 1987-98; also known as *The Geraldo Rivera Show*, 1996-98). Geraldo Rivera (of Puerto Rican descent on his father’s side) and his team picked controversial topics that did not primarily have to do with Latinas and Latinos and conducted interviews more for their shock value than for the sake of genuine information. While the show did little for presenting Latinas/os as part of the American experience, it did present a Latino talk show host as confronting sensationalist American issues. Whether this choice of a Latino host for a “trash TV” show increased or decreased the perceived otherness of Latinas and Latinos remains open to debate.

We should not expect television (or a talk show host like Geraldo Rivera) to be interested foremost in revising stereotyping, though. After all, tabloid TV strives on stereotypes and prejudice. But we may want to see television as a medium that *accompanies* rather than *causes* social change. When Hispanics became the largest ethnic minority group in the United States in 2001, television increasingly presented Latinas/os as part of the American experience, as exemplary for the nation. John Fiske remarks,

Social change does occur, ideological values do shift, and television is part of this movement. It is wrong to see it as an originator of social change, or even to claim that it ought to be so, for social change must have its roots in material social existence; but television can be, must be, part of that change, and its effectivity will either hasten or delay it. (45)

The continuing low numbers of Latina/o characters on prime-time English-language U.S. television suggest that TV is still lagging behind in terms of the quantity of representing ethnic change. But it may not be lagging behind in terms of the quality of its representation of the changing position of Latinas and Latinos in U.S. society. Along with this new quality of the Latina/o cultural, economic, political, and numerical presence goes a change of the nation’s socio-cultural reality with which television engages

and which—in the cultural forum model—it influences. “Apple pie” may have been the U.S. reality half a century ago, but that is no longer so. I would venture a bet that the number of tacos consumed in the United States on any given day exceeds the number of pieces of apple pie.⁵⁰

There have indeed been a number of revisionist portrayals of Latinas/os and engagements with the growing Latino presence on U.S. television in past decades as exceptions to the general trend of low visibility. One example is the program “East of the L.A. River” (KTLA-TV Los Angeles, 1983) in the series *Los Angeles: Impact '83*. The program documents “the Hispanic community in East Los Angeles,” and as the writing on the screen at the beginning of the documentary indicates, it seeks to “help dispel negative myths and stereotypes. This documentary also affirms the Hispanic community’s dedication to family unity, patriotism and education.” Assessing Hispanic achievements in those three areas as well as documenting East L.A. women’s organizations, lowrider culture, sports, crime statistics, music, and art, the program paints a very positive image of East L.A. as “a thriving community where Hispanics staked their claim 200 years ago.” Latino East L.A. is presented as part of the general American experience and as a feature that is as old as the city itself. By implication, the program documents the Latino presence in the United States not as a recent problem that emerges from illegal immigration but as an old, yet often overlooked, intrinsic facet of the nation.

The documentary contains an interview with Gloria Molina, then California State Assembly representative. She sets out to dispel some misconceptions:

People really look at this community through all of the myths that they have out there, you know, high crime rate, gangs run all over the place, people don’t want to work here, everybody’s on welfare, everybody’s out for a handout. They really don’t look at this community as having the same kind of aspirations and goals as anyone else: a group of people that want a safe environment; they want a nice, clean environment; they want the opportunity for their children to go to public schools and receive a good education to find jobs; all of those same things exist within our community here.

While the program shows an ethnic flair and an ethnic heritage in East L.A., it also foregrounds the “Americanness” of this community, of people, who, in Molina’s words, have “the same kind of aspirations and goals as anyone else.” In this way, this documentary sought to decrease the othering of Latinas and Latinos.

Presenting an Americanized version of Latino food culture as genuinely American is a goal pursued by 1980s television ads for the fast-food chain Taco Bell. While a 1980 commercial features three women characters, one of them Latina but speaking unaccented American English, Latinas/os had disappeared from Taco Bell’s commercials by the end of the decade. The ad slogan “Make a run for the border” highlighted

⁵⁰ If answers.com and the information provided by the American Pie Council can be trusted, it seems that the average U.S. American eats six slices of *any kind* of pie per year as opposed to 30 tacos. Assuming that about half the pies consumed in the United States might be apple pies, the ratio would be one piece of apple pie per ten tacos.

adventure and exoticism but definitely not a run *across* the border, as Taco Bell presented itself as having enriched “Americanness” and made the taco all-American. A 1988 “Make a run for the border” ad was shot with 100% Anglo characters in it, and a 1989 commercial using the same slogan features three Anglos and an African American enjoying their food at Taco Bell, but no Latina/o character. The *latinidad* of the taco is thus decreased in favor of its general appeal. More recently, Taco Bell has used a post-race approach in a commercial that featured a Chihuahua wearing a Che Guevara beret.⁵¹ While Mary Romero sees that commercial as calling forth a “racist narrative” of the *bandido*, we also need to consider the intertextual “¡Hasta la vista, Whopper!” at the end of the commercial, a reference to *Terminator 2*’s “¡Hasta la vista, baby!” which qualifies the whole commercial as a play with easily recognizable signifiers rather than as an ethnically specific comment.

As the nation’s food preferences change, so does the class structure of Latinas and Latinos. A short-lived sitcom attempt at engaging with such socio-economic changes was *Condo* (ABC, 1983, cancelled after 13 episodes), which made a point of representing its Latino characters as thoroughly middle-class. The premise of the show is that the bigoted WASP insurance salesman James Kirkridge and his wife Kiki are experiencing financial difficulties and therefore sell their palatial house in the suburbs to buy a condo. As they are getting settled in their new home, the family of Jesus (“Jessie”) and Maria Rodriguez is moving in next door. Jessie is from East L.A. and has worked his way up to some wealth through the landscaping business he owns. The show’s humor rests on the clashes of cultural backgrounds and personalities. Added to this antagonism is the Romeo and Julia motif: the Kirkridge son and the Rodriguez daughter start dating secretly, elope together and are expecting a child. In this manner the series also accompanies and reflects the social trend of Hispanics as the population group with the highest rate of marrying members of other ethno-racial groups.

Another focus on a Latino family, the Santiagos, came in 2000 with the drama series *Resurrection Blvd.* (SHOW, 2000-02), which featured a Mexican American family in East Los Angeles, in which boxing has played a significant role for three generations. The plot element of boxing serves as a means of upward mobility and connects the Santiago family to the families of other boxing champions with different ethno-racial backgrounds. This inter-ethnic connection through boxing decreases the degree of otherness of the Santiagos and presents them instead as partaking in the pursuit of the American Dream with the same kind of hopes and problems that non-Latino families are experiencing.

Placing the Americanness of his fictional Hispanic TV family in the title of his drama series, Mexican American filmmaker Gregory Nava directed the multi-genera-

⁵¹ Mary Romero believes that in this staging “Taco Bell is able to rely upon the Latino criminal trope without using the Latino physical bodily image. The Chihuahua stands in for the Mexican, the beret replaces the sombrero, and the cigar replaces the weapon. The trope works because after decades of presenting specific stereotypes on the silver screen, the popular racist narrative is easily called forth without calling the image a ‘bandido’” (194).

tional epic and episodic *American Family* (PBS, 2002-04, known as *American Family: Journey of Dreams* in the 2004 season).⁵² The drama's Gonzalez family represents what Homi Bhabha calls "the outside of the inside" (58). They find themselves in between belonging and alienation, in between being just another *American* family and being a distinctly *Mexican American* family. Nava himself said about his plans for the show's second season:

Instead of doing an episodic series, I wanted to tell one epic story that unfolds like a mini-series over 13 parts. The topical story lines will be based around events of the Iraq war, and will show how the Gonzalez family came to America during the Mexican Revolution. *American Family* will depict all the sacrifices they have made through the years to achieve the American dream. In every household in America, there is an epic story—this year *American Family* will tell that story. (PBS)

The series is told from the perspective of the father, Jess Gonzalez. His eldest son is a doctor serving with the U.S. Army in Iraq, his second son is putting his life back together after a jail term, his eldest daughter is a progressive attorney with whom Jess is constantly squabbling, his other daughter is a clothing designer, and his youngest son is always filming his family and posting the footage on the Gonzalez family website. Jess's grandson Pablito and his flamboyant sister Dora, a former aspiring entertainer, are also often seen around the house. The characters and their professions, their use of English rather than Spanish in the home, their non-Mexican American friends, and their everyday issues and problems characterize them more as part of the "inside" than the "outside." Creator and director Nava said: "PBS has allowed me the freedom to create what I need to create, to do a show that I think will both touch the hearts of everybody in the United States and also allow me to be true to my world and my culture" (PBS). His expression "everybody in the United States" can be read as designating the "inside," while his use of "my world and my culture" can be seen as referring to an "outside of the inside."

In the episode "La Casa" (season 1, 2002), the central issue is that Jess's children decide to repaint the family home. When it comes to choosing the colors, different approaches become apparent: one character wants colors chosen by a "color psychologist," the next one goes by feng shui, yet another wants to use the same colors that the house is currently painted in, and one wants "colors of a Mexican blanket." Identities and preferences overlap: while the last of these options is guided by ethnicity, the other three are unrelated to ethnic specifics. What emerges in the scene is what one character calls "the new Latino reality," a reality where ethnicity is just one of many elements that factor into identity and where an individual's membership in an ethnic group is no more important than her membership in, say, an age group or a professional group.

Relativizing the importance of ethnicity probably contributed to the show's audience appeal. Bill Moyers, for example, told Nava in an interview, "Well, when I look

⁵² My comments on *American Family* are largely taken from my essay "Latinos and Otherness: The Films of Gregory Nava."

at *American Family*, I think hey, that could be the Moyers family. That could be my family... growing up on Long Island except that I liked bacon and eggs and Jess Gonzalez likes tortillas for breakfast.” This is apparently exactly the viewer reaction that Nava was trying to elicit. He answered Moyers:

Basically I think that the human experience is universal. And as a filmmaker that’s what I’ve... in *El Norte*, *Mi Familia*, *Selena*, and now with *American Family* ... what I’ve always put in the front seat, is the universality of the human experience. You know, I’m just trying to tell stories. I see myself as a storyteller. (Moyers, no pag.)

While the stories told in the various episodes of *American Family* are ethnically specific (i.e., situated on the “outside”), they seek to speak for and appeal to inter-ethnic U.S. audiences (i.e., the “inside”) and they modify perceptions of this “inside” in the process. The “American” experience thus also comes to accommodate the Gonzalez family and the taco.

Moreover, the positioning between “inside” and “outside” extends to the show’s medium and ownership. Originally, Gregory Nava had developed *American Family* for CBS, which also financed the pilot episode. After seeing the pilot, however, the CBS executives decided to abandon the project, but they did allow Nava to take it (along with the pilot) to PBS, where it ran for two seasons.

American Family was an experiment by PBS, which reflects the corporation’s increased attention to Latino issues over the past two decades—after little consideration of Hispanics earlier on. Thirty years ago, in 1983, Mexican American filmmaker Jesús Salvador Treviño still had every reason to complain:

Despite a good faith effort in the past two years on the part of the Program Fund to rectify years of neglect in Hispanic programming, the overall percentage of production dollars devoted to Hispanic projects remains shamefully low—only about 2% of total CPB [Corporation for Public Broadcasting] funds for television production over the past fourteen years has gone to produce Hispanic programs. (“Public” 65)⁵³

But with landmark productions such as the film version of Luiz Valdez’s *Corridos* (1987),⁵⁴ the four-part documentary *Chicano! The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* (PBS, 1996, accompanied by a book of the same title by F. Arturo Rosales) and *Latino Americans* (PBS, 2013) PBS has since devoted some quality programming to Hispanics. Much of it, however, seems to be tied to the annual celebration of National Hispanic Heritage Month. *The New York Times* announces that the six one-hour episodes of *Latino Americans* scheduled to air during the 2013 National Hispanic Heritage Month, will be devoted to the untold histories of Latinos in colonial North America and in the United States in order to rectify the many omissions “in which Hispanic

⁵³ One of the few PBS programs specifically devoted to Hispanics in the United States that Treviño mentions is the series *Realidades* (PBS, 1975-77).

⁵⁴ On the “crossover” aspect of the transfer of this work from stage to a PBS film, cf. Broyles-González.

people have been casually excluded or purposefully expunged from the record of American history” (Preston, no pag.).

HBO has also started to address topics with a Latino focus. In 2006 the cable channel broadcast the docudrama *Walkout*, directed by Edward James Olmos. The film fictionalizes in an emotionally engaging manner events surrounding the 1968 East Los Angeles high school walkouts by Mexican American students protesting against discrimination and demanding curricula that would recognize the long history of Latinos in North America.

Along with HBO’s and PBS’s efforts—and those of a growing number of Latina and Latino producers, directors, screenwriters, and actors—to increase the visibility of Hispanics on the big and small screens and to take Latino representation out of the typecasting and negative clichés that have characterized much past work, there have been demographic and economic shifts that made TV executives vie for the consumer dollars of Hispanic viewers (cf. Dávila, *Latino*, esp. ch. 3). In 2001, according to a study by the National Hispanic Foundation for the Arts, there was still underrepresentation and widespread pigeon-holing of Latinas and Latinos on prime time English language television in the United States. As Clara Rodríguez sums up the situation:

those Latinos who appear *occasionally* on prime time shows are more consistently shown in lower status occupations, e.g., as service workers, unskilled laborers and criminals. The few Latino characters that have *recurring* roles have more varied occupations, e.g., physician, paramedic, social worker and law enforcement officer. However, most of these recurring Latino characters were in secondary roles as “sidekicks,” assistants, companions, or apprentices. Moreover, Latino characters continue to be portrayed mainly in law enforcement. (“Census” 238)

However, since 2001, shows like *The West Wing*, *George Lopez*, *Desperate Housewives*, and *Ugly Betty* have occasioned significant change.

The West Wing (NBC, 1999-2006), for one, brought us the first fictional Latino President of the United States. The figure of Democratic Congressman Matt Santos from Texas appears in season six and becomes President in season seven. He does not run on a Latino platform but as a generic American politician campaigning for innovation, the reduction of red tape, education, and “new prosperity.” In one episode, when Santos is admonished to “remember where [he] came from,” he displays his “post-race” approach, joking that he “was born a poor black child. No!... close, but not quite” (cf. Avila-Saavedra, *Trend* 100). And when the editor of a Spanish-language newspaper is asked whether “having a Latino president [doesn’t] advance the Latino cause,” he answers that for a Latino president to be endorsed by Latinos, that candidate would have to “stand up for Latinos,” which Santos does not really do (cf. Avila-Saavedra, *Trend* 100).⁵⁵ Avila-Saavedra therefore speaks of “the mainstreaming and

⁵⁵ Writing before season six, when Congressman Santos becomes President, Trevor and Shawn J. Parry-Giles remark that “[a]t base, *TWW* [*The West Wing*] is a predominantly white show that features mostly white characters that perpetuate an ideology of whiteness” (307). With Santos, the ideology becomes less white and more post-racial, I would add.

whitening of Santos” on the show; he believes that “[b]eyond the portrayal of cultural and racial stereotypes, the writing of a Latino presidential candidate into *The West Wing* turns out to be no more than an empty gesture consistent with the liberal, wishful rhetoric representative of the show” (*Trend* 105).

However, one could also argue that the show offers to the cultural forum an imagined political arena and a nation in which ethnic identity need not come first in defining who a person is or what she or he does.⁵⁶ That the public was ready to discuss such a scenario is underscored by the 2008 presidential campaign of Barack Obama on a platform that downplayed the distinctiveness of “race,” a real-life campaign occurring two years after the fictional candidacy of Matthew Santos for the presidency on *The West Wing*. Indeed, *The West Wing* shows that, as write Trevor and Shawn J. Parry-Giles, “[m]imetic representations of the presidency frequently offer audiences new visions of this political institution or revised biographies of the nation’s chief executives. Such representations work precisely because they approximate a reality of the presidency that is persuasive and credible” (295). The show’s “new vision” impacts the conceptual map, reduces the otherness of Latinos, and changes the parameters of ethno-racial normativity. So does the sitcom *George Lopez* (ABC, 2002-07; also known as *The George Lopez Show*).

Like *The Brothers Garcia* and *American Family*, *George Lopez* has an all-Latina/o cast of principal characters and focuses on a Latino family represented as experiencing the problems, issues, and joys of an *American* family. Guillermo Avila-Saavedra calls the show “a traditional sitcom about an average middle-class family where the issues to be treated comically are husband-wife, parent-kid and in-law-couple relationships. The remarkable difference is that the relationships that provide comedic material are heavily influenced by the Mexican and Cuban backgrounds of this fictional family” (*Trend* 62). The Mexican American George works as plant manager in a Los Angeles airplane parts factory; he is married to the Cuban American Angie. They have two teenage children, Carmen and Max, who often struggle to reconcile their Latino heritage with their multicultural environment. Moreover, *George Lopez* illustrates some of the heterogeneity of Latino communities: much of its humor is based on the verbal sparring between George’s sassy Mexican mother Benita (“Benny”) and Angie’s light-skinned, sophisticated Cuban father Vic.

The show takes a non-sectarian approach to Latinos/as in the United States; easy-going and humorous interaction occurs between Latinos/as and non-Latinos/as. Most of the time, ethnicity is not mentioned, which suggests that multiculturalism and inter-ethnic relationships go without saying. When ethnicity is mentioned, there is at times a post-racial approach that pokes fun at an alleged discrimination, as in the episode “George’s Grave Mistake Sends Him to a Funeral, Holmes” (season 6, 2007), in which George and his wife Angie want to take a vacation in Hawaii, and George loses the

⁵⁶ Commentators point to “the producers’ commitment to issues of inclusiveness and multiculturalism, as the drama seeks to mimic the larger cultural campaign to have a presidential administration that looks like the nation” (Parry-Giles/Parry-Giles 299).

room reservation because he forgets to reconfirm it with his credit card. As he is on the phone with the hotel, he says: "What do you mean: you gave it away? Is that because I'm Chicano or what? [Pause and canned laughter] I'm not calling you a racist, Mr. Gonzalez."

The questioning of race attributes goes along with the questioning of gender attributes: in the same episode, a few minutes later, George's son Max is feeling bad because he has not yet cried at the news of his maternal grandmother's death. George tells him: "Men aren't supposed to cry; we're supposed to be strong," to which Max answers, "You cried during that Penguin movie." George defends himself: "The egg slipped onto the ice and froze." *Latinidad* is just *one* element defining these characters. Their trials and tribulations are not that different from those of other middle-class American TV families like the Bradys or the Huxtables. *Latinidad* just adds a certain flair or spice but is not the main issue.⁵⁷

Latino ethnicity is not passed over, but the stereotypes connected to it are humorously questioned, as in *Ugly Betty* and *Mind of Mencia*. In the above-mentioned episode George tries to get a gravesite for his deceased mother-in-law next to the ones he has already bought for his wife and himself. When he is told that the adjacent sites are already in use but that there are available spots three sites down the line, he suggests that he and his friend Ernie could sneak in at night and "replant" those occupants. He tells the graveyard manager: "Hey, we're Latino, it'll look like we're working overtime." Similarly, there are jokes about Cuba: when in "Fishing Cubans" (season 3, 2003), George's Cuban American father-in-law complains that the coffee at George's house is too weak and that "in Cuba even babies drink coffee that is stronger than this," George answers: "Yeah, that's because they haven't had milk since 1959." The joke is not on *latinidad* but on the political and economic system of Cuba.

Humorous references to Latino and Latina stereotypes also characterize *Modern Family* (ABC, 2009-). Here the character Gloria, a very attractive woman from Colombia (portrayed by Sofia Vergara), is married to a much older Anglo man. She has a small child with him and an older child with her former husband. Stereotypes like a voluptuous body, heavily accented English, her role as a devoted wife and mother, a potential family involvement in the drug cartel, a childhood in a neighborhood of prostitutes, being comfortable with blood and violence, excellent marksmanship, devout religiosity, bad driving skills all apply to this character but are often humorously undermined. Gloria and her sons fit well into the three-family patchwork that the show focuses on. Her national and ethnic difference is just one element in the very differentiated roles that appear on the show and that also include, for example, a gay couple and their adopted Vietnamese daughter.

The "new vision" of Latinas and Latinos which shows like *Condo*, *The Brothers García*, *American Family*, *The West Wing*, *George Lopez*, and *Modern Family* have

⁵⁷ For the comedian and actor George Lopez, however, this added spice is essential. After he had been informed by ABC of the cancellation of his show, he commented to the *Los Angeles Times*: "TV just became really, really white again" (Fernandez, no pag.).

furnished extends to both fictional and non-fictional TV formats and to both local and national networks. In the fictional arena, for example, *Cane* (CBS, 2007, canceled after 13 episodes) dramatized the successes, problems, and power struggles of a wealthy and influential Cuban American family in South Florida who is successful in the rum and sugar cane business. In the advice/infotainment segment, there are shows like *Living Smart with Patricia Gras*, produced by HOUSTONPBS and aired on 200 PBS channels. That program offers interviews, news, and advice on wellbeing by Argentinean American journalist Patricia Gras. Also out of HOUSTONPBS comes *Latina Voices: Smart Talk*, which is aired once a month on television and streamed on the Internet. This afternoon talk show is geared toward U.S. Hispanics aged 30 to 65. For this target audience the two hosts discuss contemporary issues as they affect Latinos and especially Latinas. Their opening self-description calls *Latina Voices* “a show about universal topics with a Latina point of view,” while the show’s website compares the program to *The Oprah Winfrey Show*.

In the shows discussed in this section, *latinidad* matters but it is not represented as deviant. Instead, Latino issues and characters are explored in the framework of *American* issues and characters, which are enriched and spiced up by *latinidad*.⁵⁸

11. Playing with Stereotypes

In 1994 the National Council of La Raza still complained that “[n]ot only are Hispanics portrayed negatively in a traditional ‘good vs. evil’ sense, they frequently appear on television as stereotypes and caricatures” (27). By the 21st century, rather than dwell on this negative representation, several programs are using it as the basis for questioning stereotypes about Latinas/os. Shows like *George Lopez* ridicule common clichés of Latinos in their efforts to decrease the alleged degree of otherness or deviance of *latinidad*.⁵⁹

A precursor of this contemporary post-*latinidad* approach was the sitcom *a.k.a. Pablo* (ABC, March–April 1984; cancelled after six episodes), which focused on the young comic Pablo Rivera and his extended family—a format later used much more successfully by *Seinfeld* (NBC, 1989–98). In his nightclub appearances Pablo makes many jokes at the expense of Mexican Americans, which lead to frequent conflicts with his parents, who want him to treat his ethnic heritage with more respect. The very short run of the series indicates that this self-ironic vision did not yet fit into the conceptual map of U.S. English-language TV audiences thirty years ago. Two decades later, however, a number of shows exploited Latino self-irony.

⁵⁸ On the changing conception of *latinidad* in the Americas, cf. Kirschner.

⁵⁹ Guillermo Avila-Saavedra sees a dual strategy at work in *George Lopez*, *Freddie*, and *Mind of Mencia*: on the hand, these comedy programs construct “a collective sense of Latino ethnic identity” by affirming otherness, but on the other hand they claim “inclusion into a broader American mainstream” (“Ethnic” 288).

One of them is the sitcom *Freddie* (ABC, 2005-06).⁶⁰ Its protagonist, Freddie Moreno (notice the telling last name, which translates as “Brown”) is played by Freddie Prinze, Jr., the son of the late Freddie Prinze from *Chico and the Man*. Freddie Prinze, Jr.’s character is the successful, young chef and owner of a restaurant in Chicago. Much of the comedy is based on his living in the same apartment with four women from his extended family (sister, niece, sister-in-law, and grandmother). His grandmother understands English perfectly well but refuses to speak it; her Spanish is accompanied by English subtitles. This device can be seen as a tool for fostering the intercultural (and possibly foreign-language) competence of non-Hispanic viewers and as a mark of familiarity or recognition for Hispanic audiences. Also, this sitcom portrays much interaction between Latinas/os and non-Latinas/os. Most prominent is the interaction between Freddie and his best friend and next-door neighbor, the Anglo Chris. Often the self-ironic result of such inter-ethnic interaction is that Latino impulsiveness brings chaos to Anglo orderliness. To put it more positively: The Latino characters on the show spice up the otherwise somewhat monotonous lives and relationships of the non-Latinos around them. As Avila-Saavedra remarked,

Despite its cancellation after only one season, this show is remarkable due to the network’s evident effort to brand it as Latino comedy. The presence of a Spanish-speaking character and the fact that the source of comedy goes beyond ethnic stereotypes to explore the clash that young, bilingual Latinos experience between the social rewards of assimilation and the more private pull of traditional culture also contribute to the show’s exceptionality. (“Ethnic” 280)

While she would not necessarily be characterized as spicy, the figure of Betty Suárez on the one-hour comedy drama *Ugly Betty* (ABC, 2006-10) explores Latino realities (from illegal immigration to single motherhood) as well as Latino typecasting (ironizing Latina stylishness and glamour). The series spotlights the unglamorous and good-natured Betty Suárez from Queens and her incongruous job as an editorial assistant at the ultra-chic, snobbish Manhattan-based fashion magazine *Mode*, but it also explores the illegal immigration status of Betty’s father, her romantic involvements, and the challenges that her single-mother sister and nephew are facing. *Ugly Betty* is an adaptation of the Colombian *telenovela* *Yo soy Betty, la fea*.⁶¹ The show is co-produced by the Mexican (American) actress Salma Hayek,⁶² whose breakthrough role as an actress had been a role on a *telenovela* in Mexico (*Teresa*).

While the protagonist Betty Suárez seems totally out of place at the fashion magazine *Mode*, she is intelligent, has creative ideas, and can stand her ground. Once she

⁶⁰ As Avila-Saavedra points out, in *Freddie* “the source of the comedy goes beyond ethnic stereotypes in order to explore the clash that young, bilingual Latinos experience between the social rewards of assimilation and the more private pull of traditional culture” (*Trend* 66).

⁶¹ For the global context of *telenovelas* and soap operas, cf. Rios/Castañeda. For situating *Ugly Betty* in this global context, cf. Donoghue.

⁶² On the role of Salma Hayek and the Cuban Silvio Horta as cultural translators, cf. Piñón.

silences an arrogant co-worker by threatening him that she would arrange for a Queens-style beating and expose how much time he spends on his favorite explicit gay websites if he kept harassing her. While Betty's clothes, glasses, hair, braces, as well as her short stature and her working-class roots in Queens are often mocked by her co-workers and while she is often clumsy (e.g., commonly walking into Plexiglas windows), she asserts herself and becomes the trusted confidante of the magazine's editor-in-chief, who had originally not wanted to work with her.⁶³ In her acceptance speech for the 2007 Alma Award for best television series, *Ugly Betty* executive producer Salma Hayek said that the show "is about the strength of overcoming prejudice and the beauty of being individual and I want to say to all my brothers and sisters who are Latin, or Hispanic, or whatever you want to call us, *si se puede!*" (Avila-Saavedra, *Trend* 167). But in addition to empowering Latinas and Latinos, the show also challenges stereotypical expectations of either Latino inaptitude or Latin glamor.⁶⁴

In the pilot episode (2006), homely-looking, unfashionable Betty applies for a position at Meade Publications but is not even admitted to the job interview when the office clerk sees her braces and her attire. The scene happens to be observed by the head of the firm, who hires Betty as assistant editor to his son Daniel for *Mode* magazine in order to contain his son's womanizing. However, Betty clashes with the ultrachic world of her employer. On her first day on the job, she makes an entrance in a poncho with "Guadalajara" (her father's hometown) written on it—a homeliness totally out of place among the designer clothes, designer furniture, and designer lighting, as emphasized by the receptionist's disbelieving "Oh my God." But Betty does not give up—even when Daniel gives her the most unpleasant and humiliating of tasks. Soon she uncovers the pretentiousness of most people in this fashion magazine world.

In this environment of mistrust and quarrels the audience sympathies are clearly with Betty.⁶⁵ In contrast to the backstabbing and intrigues of most of the people she

⁶³ In this way the figure negates Latina stereotypes. At the same time, however, the show presents Betty's sister Hilda stereotypically as "a seductive single mother, who did not go to college." Nonetheless, adds Maggie Rivas-Rodríguez, "in other ways, *Ugly Betty* turns the stereotypes on their heads: the father is 'maternal'—wears an apron, does the cooking; the 12-year-old son of Hilda is effeminate, and is accepted by his family. But *Ugly Betty* also tinkers with the ethnic stereotypes of Latino/as: the family is of Mexican descent, living in Queens" (175).

⁶⁴ Michael Curtin and Jane Shattuc write that "[a]lthough not publicly marketed as a 'Latino' programme, the series marks the growing awareness of the networks that a move away from all-white characters could help to engage the Hispanic American audience" (115). I believe, however, that it is not merely the "move away from all-white characters" that accounts for the show's success but its postmodern, ironic approach to typecasting Latinas and Latinos.

⁶⁵ As Adriana Katzew writes, "[a]lthough *Ugly Betty* at times reifies stereotypes of Latino/as, more often it subverts, complicates and destabilizes common stereotypes. Overall, the program clearly presents Betty's Latino family in a positive light—as functional, close and

works with (with the exception of the seamstresses), Betty has clear values. She does what she can to get her father's health care provider to pay for his heart medication, she takes care of her nephew when she can, and when she finds out that her nephew cut school in order to be at the office with her, she tells him: "Justin, this place that you think is so glamorous, it's not all it's cracked up to be. It's people deceiving each other and hiding things and all kinds of stuff that's not good for a kid to be around. Some day, maybe you're gonna work in a place like this, but you're not gonna get very far in life by lying. That is not who we are" ("Fey's Sleigh Ride," season 1, 2006). Although some may consider her the odd woman out, Betty represents ur-American values.

By giving her this role, the show uses the figure of the "ugly" Betty to oppose the hollow stylishness of the fashion and magazine business. Astrid Fellner has therefore spoken of the show's "resistant Latina performance." She explains:

Exhibiting seemingly irreconcilable but interdependent tendencies, TV series contribute to the objectification of the ethnic, racialized female body through the desiring male gaze, but they also allow for expressions of women's independence and non-hetero-normative concepts of sexuality. ... *Ugly Betty*, in turn, addresses today's fascination with style and fashion when it features a main protagonist that defies current standards of beauty. (1-2)

The figure of Betty functions as such a counter-image to the sexy, glitzy model type, especially since the models who appear in the series are, as a rule, not Latina.⁶⁶ In the pilot episode, Daniel (out to humiliate her) asks Betty to dress up in a provocative outfit and pose with two tall, thin models, who look down on her and start laughing. But by showing how Daniel has been tricked himself in that photo shoot and by having him apologize to Betty by the end of the episode and ask her to return to her job, viewers are invited to join in the show's skepticism about the oh so glamorous world it portrays.

In this way, *Ugly Betty* goes a step further than *Desperate Housewives*. Gabrielle Solís on *Desperate Housewives*, as a former model, represents the standard beauty ideals of the Latina temptress, while Betty Suárez questions them. As Astrid Fellner has astutely remarked:

While *Desperate Housewives* engages, parodies but ultimately also perpetuates our ideas of the normal—concerning beauty, sexuality or ethnicity—*Ugly Betty* not only criticizes notions of normality but also offers a model that opposes this ethnocentric and hetero-normative model. Defying hegemonic discourses of the normal on all levels, the show has a cast of characters that expose the workings of normality not only as an illusion, but offer powerful counter examples that not only break with this illusion but also show that there are alternatives to it. Paradoxically, though, Betty, the slightly overweight woman with blue braces and bad style more accurately than anyone else on contemporary TV represents "real" women. (Fellner 8)

supportive—and avoids the all-too-common stereotype of Latino/as as lazy people, gang bangers, criminals or the like" (301).

⁶⁶ On body images in *Ugly Betty*, cf. Katzew.

Fellner further speaks of *Ugly Betty* as “camping ethnicity” since the show ironizes and parodies the very cultural forms that marginalize and exclude: “In *Ugly Betty*, the main character puts on a grand show to denaturalize a normative whiteness that has become obsessed with a normative beauty ideal” (12).

Denaturalizing ethnic slurs is one of the main pursuits of the standup comedy show *Mind of Mencia* (Comedy Central, 2005-08). Hosted by Honduran-born comedian Carlos Mencia,⁶⁷ the four seasons of this variety program with stand-up comedy and sketches, took on Latino and other ethnic stereotypes and thus ridiculed common typecasting. For example, the show’s third episode (2005) opens with a joke on education and pronunciation, as an apparently uneducated Latino with a heavy Hispanic accent (whose spoken English is accompanied by phonetically misspelled subtitles across the center of the screen) complains that although he has been in the United States for thirty years, when he went to the financial district to apply for a “yob” as investment banker, he was denied the position, which he considers an instance of racism. To this statement, Mencia gets between the man and the camera and says, “Racism, my ass. The reason this man cannot get a better position is because there is no ‘y’ in the word ‘job’.” Next Mencia tells of a (fictitious) incident where he was asked in the mall parking lot by someone who had locked his keys in his car: “Sir, you are Mexican, you can get them out for me, can’t you.” Which is followed by Mencia’s “I wanted to punch him in the face, but I knew how to do it. I had a slim jim in the car and everything, man. I was looking at the guy, like, I can’t believe you picked the right beaner.” Avila-Saavedra has labeled this strategy “reclaiming the insult,” a Latino using anti-Latino prejudice and insults in order to “diminish their validity as political discourse” (“Ethnic” 279, 281).

Some of the same technique, although with a broader spectrum of topics and much cross-ethnic content, was used by George Lopez on *Lopez Tonight* (TBS, 2009-11), which became the most-watched evening talk show in 2009 and 2010 and the first evening talk show on English-language television with a Hispanic host. However, the show’s ratings dropped sharply when it was pushed one hour later into the night, as Conan O’Brien joined TBS and was offered Lopez’s original time slot.

The shows discussed in this section move the focus of viewers away from the question “What are Latinas/os like?” toward the question “Which modes of representation have been used with regard to Latinas/os in the media?”. They ironize long-standing stereotypes and invite audiences to laugh both at clichés and at the political correctness that forbids mentioning those clichés.

⁶⁷ Since 1998 Carlos Mencia, born Ned Holness in Honduras and raised in California, as writes Avila-Saavedra, “has become known as an outspoken, brazen exploiter of racial and ethnic stereotypes through guest appearances in programs such as *The Tonight Show* (NBC) and *Politically Incorrect* (ABC) and through stand-up comedy specials on HBO and Comedy Central” (*Trend* 64).

12. Latin Glamor

With *Lopez Tonight* and the genre of the evening talk show, we are moving toward Latin glamor—e.g., with actress Eva Longoria and rock music legend Carlos Santana appearing on the premiere of *Lopez Tonight* in 2009. Lopez has hosted Emmy and Grammy award ceremonies, and Longoria hosted an American Latino Media Arts (ALMA) awards ceremony in 2006, which was broadcast nationally on ABC and in which Jimmy Smits was honored. Other occasions for redefining *latinidad* as Latino glamor include the *MTV Music Video Awards*' category for Best Latino Artist. The ALMA awards were created by the National Council of La Raza in 1987 as the BRAVO awards and have been broadcast on a variety of television channels from Univision to FOX to ABC and currently NBC and MSNBC. In 2000 the first annual Latin Grammy award ceremony became the first program primarily in Spanish to be carried by an English-language U.S. network (CBS). As Alberto González and Amy N. Heuman have shown in their analysis of the Latin Grammys and the ALMAs as “cultural epideictic,” these ceremonies “contain ethnic contradictions.” Despite much criticism of these shows (as sectarian, exclusive, anti-Spanish, anti-Mexican etc.), they “were poised to create awareness and change perceptions in the ways Latinos and their allies had long anticipated.” The ceremonies “make possible the expressions of nostalgia, nationalistic pride, and affirmations of ethnic identity” (51). González and Heuman see two principal discourses at work in these shows: a discourse of (pan-Latino) unity and a discourse of “differences among Latinos and differences from non-Latinos” (53).

Since 1985, finally, the Imagen Foundation has held annual awards ceremonies for positive portrayals of Latinos in or important contributions of Latinos to the entertainment industry. The foundation's website informs its visitors:

The Imagen Awards aims to recognize and reward positive portrayals of Latinos in all forms of media, as well as to encourage and recognize the achievements of Latinos in the entertainment and communications industries. The Imagen Foundation works to create, promote, and enhance opportunities for all Latinos in front of and behind the camera and throughout the entertainment industry, and serve as a liaison between the industry and the Latino community by providing access, education and resources. (Imagen, no pag.)

Latin glamor has become an integral part of U.S. showbiz and is thus investing *latinidad* with an air of the cool, exotic, beautiful, and urban that is far removed from images of the bracero, the spic, the illegal border crosser, or the harlot. Latin chic is spicing up the entertainment industry and thus changing the perception of Latinas and Latinos. These changes enter into the cultural forum and they affect the connotations of Latinas and Latinos on the conceptual map. Deviance becomes desirability.

13. The Spanish-language Competition

Geared toward Spanish-speaking and bilingual audiences, a number of national and local TV channels in the United States offer programming in Spanish. “The primary demand for Spanish programming,” report DeSipio et al., “comes from immigrants, who constitute approximately 40 percent of the Latino population nationally” (DeSipio 60). While, according to a 1998 survey in the five states with the largest Latino population, only about 11% of U.S.-born Latinas/os watched primarily or exclusively television in Spanish, the rate was 29% for foreign-born Latinas/os.⁶⁸ Spanish-language television in the United States is not a recent phenomenon: U.S. television networks have provided programming in Spanish since the 1960s. In that segment of the television market, news programs in Spanish exert the biggest pull.⁶⁹

The predecessor of Univision was launched in 1962 as a growing conglomerate of local Spanish-language stations throughout the country; it became the Spanish International Network in 1968 and Univision in 1986. In 1988 the network started producing programming for a national audience, its first show being *TV Mujer*. Since then Univision has become the fifth most-watched television network in the United States, which, by the turn of the century, puts it ahead of Time Warner’s WB and Viacom’s UPN as well as ahead of cable channels like HBO and ESPN (cf. Rodríguez, “Census” 240). In 2003 Univision merged with Hispanic Broadcasting Corporation, the largest owner of Spanish-language radio stations, which further increased its domination of the media market (cf. Dávila, *Latino* 79). Clara E. Rodríguez describes the impact of Univision thus:

during the November 2001 sweeps, [Univision’s] stations in Los Angeles, New York, Miami, Houston, Dallas, Fresno and Bakersfield captured the #1 position for the entire broadcast schedule, while a number of these same stations were #1 during prime time. Univision’s local news programming has also penetrated the media market. During the November 2001 sweeps, Univision’s *local news* programming claimed the #1 position in Los Angeles, Miami, Houston and Fresno, particularly among young adults aged 18 to 34. (“Census” 240-41)

Univision’s major competitors are Telemundo, a sister network of NBC, and Azteca América, the U.S. version of the Mexican channel TV Azteca. Since its start in 1987, Telemundo has been more focused on domestic production than on foreign imports (like many of the Latin American *telenovelas* on Univision). The network gained market shares with U.S.-produced Spanish-language remakes of older shows that its parent company happened to own. As Elana Levine writes, Telemundo

⁶⁸ DeSipio et al. report that of the U.S.-born Latino population 53% watched exclusively or primarily English-language television, whereas for the foreign-born Latino population that number was 14%.

⁶⁹ DeSipio et al. found in their 1998 study that “85 percent of those Latinos who watch any program on Spanish-language television watch the news” (67).

[p]rograms like *Reyes y Rey* (a remake of *Starsky & Hutch*), *Solo en América* (a remake of *One Day at a Time*), *Angeles* (a remake of *Charlie's Angels*), and new versions of *The Dating Game*, *The Newlywed Game*, and *Candid Camera* filled the broadcast hours. Promoting itself as “The Best of Both Worlds,” Telemundo explicitly targeted an audience of young people and women, the most coveted demographics in the '90s television industry (33).

While Univision's most coveted audience has strong ties to countries outside the United States, since many of its viewers have been born abroad, Telemundo constructed “a bicultural, bilingual Latino/a identity” to which it caters (34).

Whereas Univision and Telemundo envision a pan-Hispanic⁷⁰ audience, “Azteca America first pursues Mexican people, then targets ‘Hispanics,’ a marketing category referring to populations of Latin American and Spanish Caribbean descent who immigrated to or were born in the US” (Beck 272). In terms of programming geared toward younger viewers, there is UniMas, owned by Univision. And most recently, in 2012, MundoFox started broadcasting. Despite these national channels and much local programming in Spanish, we should not assume that any of these enterprises see it as their paramount goal to offer positive or differentiated representations of Latinas and Latinos.⁷¹ Their goal is to sell advertising time. Arlene Dávila points out that

the seemingly greater number of media offerings for Latinos veils their consignment to being mere consumers, rather than producers or owners of media outlets. It is important to note that neither of the largest Spanish-language TV networks, Univision, Telemundo, and Azteca TV, are Latino owned, but rather are controlled by American investors and corporations, alongside investments from Latin American media moguls. (*Latino* 80)

Univision and Telemundo, Dávila points out elsewhere, “share the common goal of addressing Latinos as a unified and culturally specific market” (“Culture” 264). Advertising on these networks is

guided by the premise that there are basic differences between Latinos and other consumers that need to be addressed through culture- and language-specific marketing, and that there is a continuous influx of Spanish-speaking populations who would otherwise not be reached by advertising were it not for this type of marketing, advertisements. (“Culture” 267)

For example, as Dávila mentions, the 1998 advertising campaign for Nicoret, a product designed to help people stop smoking, foregrounded in non-Hispanic media outlets that overcoming one's smoking habit is an “individual achievement,” whereas the ads on Spanish-language television stressed the benefits to the (former) smoker's loved ones: “Por tu Bien y el de los Tuyos” (“Culture” 270).

⁷⁰ Levine calls this constructed audience “syncretic” rather than “hybrid” (34-35).

⁷¹ As Dávila writes, portrayals are more likely to be reductionist: “representations of Latinidad in the Spanish TV networks, when not revolving around generic representations that prioritize white Mediterranean Hispanic actors and talent, have generally reduced each Latino subgroup to a particular cultural index, be it music, race, or an artist” (“Talking” 29).

In 1998 the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute conducted a telephone survey on how Latinas and Latinos “see themselves on television. In that survey “Latinos reported that Spanish television was less likely than English television to present sexual content and violence and generally presented Latinos in a positive light. Yet, Latinos with children in their households reported that Spanish television did not present enough educational programming for children” (DeSipio 60). Also, we should not assume that Spanish-language television is color-blind or all-inclusive. As Piñón and Rojas observed,

[t]he Latino-oriented Spanish-language television industry has created marketable ‘desirable audiences’ through programming strategies in which some groups are more visible than others, and some languages and accents are privileged over others. This has resulted in excluding from the screen dark skinned Latina/os and US non-Spanish-speaking Latina/os. (132)

Since 2007 PBS has been operating its own Spanish-language network, V-me TV, which is broadcast through PBS stations and which (in 2013) reaches over 70 million households in the United States. V-me TV avoids the frenzy and sensationalism of programs like Univision’s flagship variety show, *Sábado Gigante*, which has been on the air since 1962. Instead, the network provides information, news, drama, lifestyle, music, variety, and children’s programming as well as programs adapted from English-language PBS productions.

14. ¿Adonde?

In 1997 Lichter and Amundson complained that

Hispanics have never played a significant role in television’s debate over race relations. When television has explored discrimination, prejudice, or the appropriateness of interracial relationships, it has almost always staged them as a black versus white issue. Whatever racial tensions exist between Latinos and other groups in American society, they have very rarely made it to the small screen. (68)

Moreover, they remarked on the use of “generic” Latina/o characters and the failure to present differentiations within the Latino community (cf. 70). Putting the matter bluntly, they stated that “Hollywood has cracked open the door to black concerns while letting Hispanics serve as window dressing” (71). That was then.

For the early 21st century, with the exception of *George Lopez* and *Ugly Betty*, Clara E. Rodríguez notes that “although Latino family life prevailed in real life, on cable and on the Spanish-language networks, it was strangely absent on primetime network television [in English], which still, however, garners by far the largest share of audience. It is also the medium that the majority of U.S. Latinos watch” (“Census” 236). When she surveyed the Nielsen top-rated programs for the 2006-07 TV season, she found that

of a total of 114 characters on these shows, only two (or 1.8%) were clearly Latina/o actors playing Latina/o characters and in lead roles. This lack of Latina/o leads was espe-

cially striking on the numerous crime shows on primetime, many of which were set in cities or areas with high proportions of Latinas/os. These findings are consistent with earlier research. There were *supporting* Latina/o characters and actors in seven of the 13 shows. However, the remainder (6 of the 13 shows) had *no* recurring Latina/o characters in either supporting or lead roles. (“Latinas/os” 11)

Among the findings that surprised Rodríguez were that in the 2006-07 season “two Latina actors played *non*-Latina characters,” that “[i]n a reversal of previous patterns, only one *non*-Latina played a Latina character,” that there were what she calls “ambiguous Latina/o characters,” whom she describes as “characters that (whether played by Latina/o actors or not) had their ‘Latinidad’ or references to their Latina/o origins somewhat obscured or seldom addressed,” and that audiences saw “Latina/o actors playing substantial Latina/o characters as part of ensemble casts” in *Lost*, *Desperate Housewives*, and *Grey’s Anatomy* (“Latinas/os” 16-18).

In March 2007, Monk-Turner et al. did a content analysis of two weeks of prime time U.S. television, modeling their study on an analysis that had been done ten years earlier. They found that in 2007 Latina/o characters on prime time English-language TV were less marked as different than they had been in 1997 in terms of appearance, conversational style, and personal attributes. However, they also found that in 2007 “Latino characters were most likely to be ridiculed and least likely to be respected compared to either white or black characters” (107),⁷² which might indicate that we have moved beyond political correctness, as a show like *Mind of Mencia* would suggest.⁷³

For April 2013 Media Matters conducted a survey of 1,677 guests on 13 evening cable news shows and found that only 3% of those guests were Latino. The study also revealed that only 13 out of the 239 regular anchors and reporters on ABC News, CBS News, NBC News, Fox News, MSNBC, and CNN (or 5%) could be classified as Latinos (meaning that they have at least one Hispanic parent). At the same time, however, media are vying for Latino audiences and their potential as consumers. As Piñón and Rojas have shown, “the enthusiasm for the Hispanic market has opened the door for new players, such as new Spanish- and English-language Latino television networks and the incursion of mainstream and global television corporations” (129).

⁷² It did come as a surprise, though, that the study found that of these three groups Latina/o characters were depicted “as least intelligent” (107).

⁷³ For 1998 DeSipio et al. had reported that when asked whether they feel that the portrayal of Latinas and Latinos on English-language U.S. television “builds bridges” or “perpetuates stereotypes,” the responses of Hispanic viewers were equally split between these two choices. Asked how they assessed the image of Hispanics in English-language TV news, 55 to 65% of Hispanic respondents found it “positive” or “somewhat positive” (70). As to the portrayal of Hispanics on English-language entertainment programs, 38.8% of Hispanic viewers answered that they considered it to be “positive,” 15.6% “negative,” and 43.3% “neutral.” Among Anglo viewers, “43 percent said that Latinos were presented positively [in English-language entertainment programs] and 47 percent said that they were presented in neutral terms” (71).

Nonetheless, the numbers show that Latinas and Latinos are still underrepresented in all kinds of programming on English-language U.S. television. This should come as no surprise. As Herman Gray observed,

the conventions of television production (especially collaborative writing) serve to discipline, contain, and ultimately construct a point of view. Not surprisingly, this point of view constructs and privileges white middle-class audiences as the ideal viewers and subjects of television stories. In the producer-driven medium of television, a paucity of producers of color continues to be the rule. (71)

He adds that there continues to be “an institutional and cultural system tightly but subtly structured by race and gender” (72). However, as the preceding sections of this essay demonstrated, change is under way.

The *quantity* of Latina/o representation is half the story. The *quality* of Latina/o representation has significantly developed over the past sixty years. While the 1950s presented stereotyped caricatures and while in the 1980s so-called “reality” TV and crime shows tended to denigrate Latinos as delinquents, numerous examples in recent years reveal attempts at a more authentic, differentiated, non-stereotypical representation of U.S. Latinas/os as partaking in the American experience, along with humorous takes on old stereotypes. We should not expect television to answer the question “What is a U.S. Latina/o?” What we can expect are narratives that explore Latina/o experiences. As Horace Newcomb and Paul M. Hirsch point out,

television does not present firm ideological conclusions—despite its *formal* conclusions—so much as it *comments on* ideological problems. The conflicts we see in television drama, embedded in familiar and nonthreatening frames, are conflicts ongoing in American social experience and cultural history. ... [F]or the most part the rhetoric of television drama is a rhetoric of discussion. ... We see statements *about* the issues and it should be clear that ideological positions can be balanced within the forum by others from a different perspective. ... [I]t is television as a whole system that presents a mass audience with the range and variety of ideas and ideologies inherent in American culture. (565-56, italics in the original)

Increasingly, Latinas and Latinos are also recognized as playing an important role in those “ideas and ideologies inherent in American culture.” As the range of approaches to Latinas and Latinos is constantly widening, we move away from monologic representations as spics, criminals, or temptresses toward Latina/o plurality. At the same time, we are seeing more frequent instances where the *control over* Latina/o representation by non-Latinas/os is changing to a *control by* Latina and Latino television makers.

For the early 21st century Clara Rodríguez noted that “Latino employment in broadcast television, both on and off the screen, continues to be low. Latino underrepresentation in the TV news area—again, both on-camera and off-camera—is similarly low. Latinos hold few ‘gatekeeper’ positions in network news operations and

they are underrepresented as correspondents and anchors. (“Census” 239).⁷⁴ Recently, however, higher numbers of Latinas and Latinos are to be found in positions of creative control over TV programs featuring Latinas/os.⁷⁵ For example, Salma Hayek served as executive producer for *Ugly Betty*, and Jennifer Lopez⁷⁶ took over as chief creative officer of nuvoTV in 2013.⁷⁷ Launched in 2004, nuvoTV (formerly *Sí TV*), as mentioned above, became the first cable channel that catered to the Latino community with exclusively English-language programming. For the medium of cinema, Charles Ramírez Berg spoke of the “Latino boom” in the U.S. film industry that has been visible since the early 21st century (262).

The quality and quantity of the Latino presence on and behind big and small screens are also changing. While it is not the task of television to mirror the demographic makeup of the United States and while deviance assigned to ethnic others will continue to garner attractive ratings, we can expect that the growing Latino viewership and buying power—along with developments like the notion of “Latin glamor” and the growing participation of Latinas and Latinos in public discourse and published opinion—will continue to bring about changes in Latino TV appearances.

One of the current changes is a tension between the representation of Latinas and Latinos as “racialized subjects” (highlighting their degree of difference, sometimes constructed as deviance), as largely unracialized participants (speaking unaccented English and blending into ethnically mixed environments) in the “American experience,” and as figures through which racialized discourses and conventions are exposed as inappropriate or outdated. As more Latinas and Latinos are entering positions of creative or executive control in English-language U.S. television, as the English-language networks keep having to react to the competition of Spanish-language U.S. television, as the “mainstream” is redefined, and as ethnic identification is becoming increasingly interlaced with other markers of identity, the representation of Latinas and Latinos is bound to become more frequent and more multi-dimensional.

⁷⁴ Rodríguez also refers to a study of the news programs on ABC, CBS, and NBC for 1995 that “found that only 1% of the news stories focused on Latinos and issues related to Latinos. . . . Of these stories, the vast majority (85%) fell into four ‘problem’ categories: crime (19%), immigration (21.5%), affirmative action (22.3%), and welfare (8%). . . . In addition, and also in contrast to the coverage of other news stories, Latinos aired on camera in only about half of these stories. Thus, in half of the stories that were about Latinos, Latinos were missing” (“Census” 239).

⁷⁵ As Chon A. Noriega has argued, “it is not just an issue of introducing new content into a value-free communications system, but of minorities entering into the exclusive social space that produces and sustains the ‘mainstream’” (“U.S. Latinos” 57).

⁷⁶ For a detailed account of the cultural significance of Nuyorican actress, singer, and media mogul Jennifer Lopez’s rise to prominence, cf. chapter six in Beltrán.

⁷⁷ As Isabel Molina-Guzmán writes, Latinas have entered numerous venues of public impact: “Latinas are political advocates, global figures, and producers of their own media stories” (1).

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