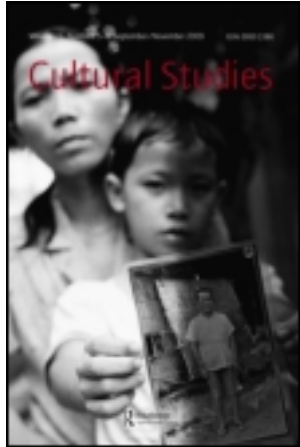


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### Media advocates, Latino citizens and niche cable The limits of 'no limits' TV

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# Scott Wible

## MEDIA ADVOCATES, LATINO

## CITIZENS AND NICHE CABLE

### The limits of 'no limits' TV

*In Shot in America, Chon Noriega calls for the study of media activism's work 'within the system' of state institutions and for analysis of the relationships between media activism, the television industry and government policies. This article uses a cultural policy studies focus to answer this call and map the deregulated terrain upon which media advocacy groups must now operate. Liberal governance demands that media advocates find means other than state-directed appeals to advance their agendas. As such, this essay examines the efforts of several Latino advocacy groups to garner viewer support for a Latino-themed cable television show, Resurrection Boulevard, and to use the series as a vehicle for increased Latino participation in the television industry. This article focuses on the issue of access for Latinos to professional positions that affect television programming, and it presents tools for advocacy efforts within political spheres to achieve more socially equitable access to media technologies. First, the paper traces the regulatory history of the broadcasting and cable television industries to show how the federal government narrowly conceives of 'the public interest' as a specifically consumerist one. The article then analyses the structures that led to cable television's 'narrowcasting' format, such as Showtime's 'No Limits' programming, and argues that liberalism has created a context wherein several media advocates normalise the 'citizen-consumer' model. Having established this groundwork, the author then conducts a case study of the economic and social forces that shape Resurrection Boulevard, which is written, produced and acted by Latinos. Through this study, the author maintains that advocacy groups' consumer-based appeals to Latinos as 'citizen-consumers' fail to serve as effective instruments for achieving increased minority representation in the television industry.*

**Keywords** cable television; cultural policy studies; media advocacy; citizen-consumer; narrowcasting; Latina/o popular culture

Beginning 12 September 1999, the National Council of La Raza (NCLR) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) promoted a two-week viewing embargo directed at national television. This

action came after the major networks released their fall television line-ups. These programme lists revealed that not one of the 26 new shows on the big four networks (ABC, CBS, NBC and Fox) featured a minority actor in either a lead or a prominent supporting role. NCLR's leaders called this exclusion from broadcast television a 'brownout'. They encouraged Latinos to protest the networks' decisions to target their fall-season programming only to young, affluent – and white – audiences. NCLR called on Latinos to deny the networks' advertisers any part of their collective \$380 billion in annual spending power by switching off their televisions (Gonzales & Rodriguez 1999).

NCLR's demand for the networks to recognize the Latino community's demographic and economic presence illustrates one way that media advocates are responding to the social formations created by liberal governance. Organizations that aim to reform the television industry presently must engage – not just argue against – its capitalist logic. In *Shot in America: Television, the State, and the Rise of Chicano Film*, Noriega argues for just such a study of media activism's working 'within the system' of state institutions. He calls for scholarship that analyses the relationships between media activism, television industry practices and political and economic policies (2000, p. 18). Noriega necessarily blurs any clear-cut distinction between resistant and reformist practices. Specifically, he contends that since media activism never stands outside of and opposes these economic and policy decisions, it is precisely on the terms of the television industry and of the state that media activism must work.

In this article, I use a similar cultural policy studies focus to extend Noriega's work and study the emergence of a Latino-themed cable television series within a period of intense deregulation of the US telecommunications industry. Noriega echoes Thomas Streeter when he says that corporate-liberal regulation gained momentum as policymakers, corporate executives and social activists began to believe that technological advancements promised a 'consumerist path to social equity and democracy' (Noriega 2000, p. 166). This faith has allowed policymakers and industry people to defer operating in the public interest because, these people argue, future technologies will be more suitable for that purpose. However, this belief significantly affects media advocacy because deregulation eliminates the state as one site through which to achieve its goals of more minority ownership and participation. Streeter, for one, argues that most appeals to 'the public interest' now are virtually ineffective (1996, p. 318). As NCLR's 'brownout' boycott suggests, advocacy groups no longer can operate with the belief that the state will see a governmental interest in assuring minority groups' access to significant positions within the television industry.

My work here uses a cultural policy studies lens in order to understand how liberal governance structures the routes through which media advocates can pursue changes both behind and in front of the television camera. My study analyses the interrelationship between federal regulation of the television industry, economic imperatives that shape television production, and Latino advocacy

groups' efforts to increase minority employment in the television industry. I use Bennett's reading (1998) of Foucault's theories of governmentality (1978/1991) to argue that media advocates no longer can usefully pursue state-mandated policy changes. Instead, these groups must presently engage with the television industry's economic logic.

To map this terrain, my project first shows that regulatory policies exhibit, especially with the strong deregulatory impulse marking the past 30 years, a move toward 'governing at a distance' (Bennett 1998, p. 75). This trend affects the programming decisions that television executives can make, which I outline in a section that examines the industry-wide attention given to demographics and the marketing of Latino audiences. I extend this discussion with a case study of *Resurrection Boulevard*, in which I examine the institutional and economic conditions that shape the production of this Latino-themed series. I then focus on recent efforts made by several Latino advocacy groups to keep the show on the air. Their efforts illustrate that this move toward 'governing at a distance' necessarily positions the show as *the* means for increasing a Latino presence within the television industry. In so doing, I trace the constructions of citizenship that arise when advocacy groups articulate their appeals through demographics. Moreover, I unpack the complexities that arise as liberal governance shapes the groups' strategies, making necessary the use of the Latino population's measurable cultural and economic presence within American society to reform industry practices.

### **The public's consuming interest in television regulation**

Ideas concerning 'the public interest' underpin the past 80 years of communications industry regulation. The US government confirmed the importance of this concept in policy decisions when, in the 1920s, it first considered the broadcast spectrum as public property to be regulated in the public interest (Streeter 1996, p. 94). Then-Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover argued for the public good to serve as a dominant criterion in broadcast regulation in order to ensure that private interests would not solely determine its shape. Since that time, broadcast companies have received licenses for a slice of the broadcast spectrum under the assumption that their business activities will provide a necessary or valuable service for the local populations that they serve. Significant to the course of this regulatory history, however, governmental policymakers have consistently maintained a narrow conception of 'the public'. This specific vision of 'the public' has structured the American citizenry's relation to telecommunications technologies and failed to engage important questions of access to these technologies.

Douglas points to the late 1910s and early 1920s as the moment in which the state first regulated the broadcast industry 'on behalf of "the people"' (1987,

p. 316). Hoover convened the annual Washington Radio Conferences from 1922 to 1925 amid growing concerns that a consortium of vertically integrated companies had monopolized the airwaves. He later declared in 1926, 'It cannot be thought that any single person or group shall ever have the right to determine what communication may be made to the American people. . . . We cannot allow any single person or group to place themselves in the position where they can censor the material which shall be broadcasted to the public' (quoted in Department of Commerce 2000, p. 12). One year later, the Radio Act of 1927 awarded licenses as a 'privilege' to those that the temporary Federal Radio Commission deemed qualified to serve as 'public trustees' of the country's scarce broadcast spectrum (Douglas 1987, pp. 233–239).

The Federal Communications Commission, established through the Communications Act of 1934, published *Public Service Responsibility of Broadcast Licensees* in 1946 in order to articulate more clearly what actions marked a public trustee. The FCC argued that this form of public service entailed, in part, presenting the voices of previously unheard groups of citizens. The document, more commonly called 'The Blue Book', explains, 'It has long been an established policy of broadcasters themselves and of the [Federal Communications] Commission that the American system of broadcasting must serve significant minorities among our population' (1946, p. 15). However, the context in which this statement appears reveals that the FCC here defines 'minority' in specific, narrow terms. Indeed, directly after this primary statement, the FCC includes the testimony of Dr Frank Stanton to illustrate its particular understanding of 'minority interests'. Stanton points to CBS as a model company that services 'the broad popular tastes [while] it also gives attention to smaller groups' (quoted in FCC 1946, p. 15). He explains, 'It is known the New York Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra, the Columbia Work Shop, Invitation to Learning, Columbia Broadcasting Symphony and many other ambitious classical programmes never reach the largest audience, but Columbia, nonetheless, puts them on year after year for minorities which are growing steadily' (quoted in FCC 1946, p. 15). This attention to classical programming and a subsequent mention of the literary programme 'Of Men and Books' illustrates a specific conception of 'unheard minority publics' that does not necessarily include a multicultural, diverse vision. The FCC's Blue Book, then, underscores Oullette's assertion that during the first several decades of policy formation, 'the term *minority* was used in broadcast reform discourse primarily as a euphemism for educated white people with uncommonly sophisticated cultural tastes' (2002, p. 146). Traces of this 'semantic legacy', to borrow Oullette's phrasing, would continue to appear throughout the next 30 years, as white broadcasters continued to exclude ethnic minority viewpoints from those that it aired to their public. More significant, though, is the fact that, as Oullette suggests, this specific definition of minority normalized and reified the position of white audiences at the cultural centre of programming and normalized media

policymakers 'foundational assumption that race and class are for "other" people' (2002, p. 174).

The effects of these exclusions materialized during the country's social unrest in 1967. President Lyndon Johnson appointed the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorder, more commonly known as the Kerner Commission, to identify reasons for the unrest and recommend measures to prevent a recurrence. In its published report, the Commission repeatedly criticized the media's failure to cover or accurately portray the African-American community (Kerner Commission 1968, pp. 201–208). The Commission recommended that media outlets take important first steps toward hiring minority professionals not only as reporters but also into positions that shape editorial policies (1968, p. 211). The Commission ultimately fell short of calling for increased minority ownership of broadcast outlets, however, acknowledging that competitive, financial, and advertising pressures 'may impede progress' toward more representative programming (1968, p. 212). With this final qualification, then, the Kerner Commission affirmed what has historically proven to be the FCC's aversion to regulating media content. Moreover, conclusions such as the Kerner Commission's normalize a policymaking assumption that there is seemingly little direct correlation between media ownership and media representations.

In one significant sense, cable television took broadcast companies off the hook. Streeter illustrates that during the late 1960s and early 1970s, an odd coalition formed within the cable television policy arena. This collective pulled together cable television operators, elite institutions such as the Carnegie Commission and the Ford Foundation, and several liberal progressive organizations, most notably Americans for Democratic Action and the American Civil Liberties Union. Each of these groups, Streeter explains, used the policy forum to champion this not-entirely-new technology as the cure for the social problems outlined by the Kerner Commission. These groups sustained their utopian visions by blaming broadcast television for its technological limitations. As Streeter explains, television industry experts and progressive groups alike assumed that 'lack of diversity, network dominance, [and] lack of socially responsible programming' all resulted from broadcast television's limited channel-carrying capacity; cable television would overcome these problems, they believed, with its significantly higher channel capacity (1987, p. 185). As Streeter explains, a Presidential Task Force on Communications Policy even suggested that cable television, 'by allowing minorities and disaffected groups an outlet to express themselves and to communicate with the nation, might reduce their feelings of alienation from American society' and thus help to target the problems that had brought social unrest (1987, p. 185). This discourse, Streeter argues, did lead the FCC to adopt regulations enabling cable to extend into areas previously not served. Ultimately, though, these calls for cable's growth led to a regulatory structure that aimed to meet 'the economic needs of growing

corporate ventures into cable' (1987, p. 191). These policies positioned 'the public' as geographically dispersed consumers to whom television companies should provide equal cable service. As a result, this discourse about cable fails to address issues concerning access to technologies for *producing* programmes and *using* cable television to communicate previously unheard voices and ideas to the public.

This discourse concerning cable carries several implications for discussions of 'the public interest'. The broadcast television industry successfully argued that its technological limitations should lead the FCC to lift demands that broadcasters allot airtime to minority viewpoints; instead, industry executives argued that cable created spaces where this diversity could occur (Streeter 1987, pp. 181–184). Even as policymakers asserted that 'the public interest' demands diversity of media content and diversity of minority ownership, they created a regulatory logic that ostensibly equates corporate interests and public interests. By enabling corporations to expand their cable operations, they would also allow television viewers to choose among quantitatively increased television programming. This discourse illustrates Noriega's insight that new technologies such as cable 'are promoted for their presumed ability to blur the boundaries between producers and consumers' (2000, p. 166). He contends that policymakers and advocacy groups framed cable 'in such a way as to imply that a proliferation of consumer choice creates something akin to producing the product itself' (2000, p. 167). The act of production, then, no longer entails owning stations and writing, producing, and acting in television programmes but instead involves 'creating' a product by piecing together different programmes of the viewer's choice.

However, this conception of 'the public' oversimplifies the complexities involved in empowering a powerless public. Such a regulatory focus fails to address economic inequalities that do not readily allow diversity among the nationwide group of television station owners. Those groups who the policy discourse about cable TV too easily assumed that cable could lead to diversity of media ownership by breaking the three broadcast networks' dominance of television. Instead, regulation favoured corporate interests such that this monopoly replicated itself on cable (Streeter 1987, p. 193). Conditions continued to work against minority owners who hoped to compete in the television markets, for, as Streeter maintains elsewhere (1996, pp. 178–179), the government's cable TV policy formalized the regulatory logic that considers a quantitative plurality of channels to be the most significant service of 'the public interest'.

In the mid- to late-1970s, the FCC acted upon federal court rulings that encouraged the Commission to involve itself more directly in promoting viewpoint diversity through minority ownership. In 1978, the FCC's Minority Ownership Task Force conference report stated, 'Acute under-representation of minorities among the owners of broadcast properties is troublesome because it



is the licensee who is ultimately responsible for identifying and serving the needs and interests of his or her audience. Unless minorities are encouraged to enter the mainstream of the commercial broadcasting business, a substantial proportion of our citizenry will remain underserved and the larger, non-minority audience will be deprived of the views of minorities' (MOTF 1978, p. 1). Thereafter, DC Circuit Court of Appeals decisions in *TV, Inc. v. FCC* (Fahy 1974) and *Garrett v. FCC* (Robinson III 1975) created space for the FCC to begin counting minority ownership as a 'plus' in its broadcast license determinations.<sup>1</sup> Thus, during competitive license hearings, all other factors being equal, the FCC would grant a broadcast license to minority ownership groups. The appellate court decisions asserted that 'the public interest' necessitated state-directed encouragement of minority access to the means of production in order to ensure that a plurality of narratives circulated in the airwaves.

These policies opened spaces in which media advocates could intervene around issues of ownership and representation, as well. Each year throughout the mid-1970s, petitions to deny local broadcast licenses were filed across New Mexico, Colorado, Texas, California and even Washington, DC. Besides numerous local advocacy groups, several larger organizations engaged in these campaigns, including NCLR, the National Mexican American Defamation Center, the Mexican American Political Association and the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (Noriega 2000, pp. 83–84). Each organization appealed to 'the public interest' with arguments that a particular ownership group's business plan did not reflect operations serving local Latin American communities' 'public interest'. For example, in 1975 the Puerto Rican Media Action and Education Council petitioned the FCC to withdraw WNET-New York's broadcast license 'on the grounds of discrimination against New York's Hispanic population' (Oullette 2002, p. 173).<sup>2</sup> As Oullette explains, however, this argument centred not on employment issues but rather on the station's 'failure to provide "relevant" programming' (p. 173). This qualification, along with the FCC's renewal of WNET's license, appears to illustrate the gap that industry-friendly regulations were beginning to create between activists arguing for minority ownership and those pushing for more culturally significant on-screen representations. Nevertheless, Noriega contends that while these groups faced a 0.0116 percent probability that a license would not be renewed the pressure applied by activist groups did often slow the license renewal process. In so doing, Noriega maintains, these advocacy groups often led targeted stations to agree to progressive settlements that included measures to more fully integrate local Latino communities into the station's overall business operations and programming (2000, p. 84).

By the next decade, however, Ronald Reagan's deregulatory impulse changed the landscape upon which media activists could work. Mark Fowler served as the FCC Chairman during the bulk of this period, from May 1981 to April 1987, and, after only a month in office, he revealed his sympathies for



Reagan-era social policies when he referred to the FCC as ‘the last of the New Deal dinosaurs’ (quoted in Brown 1994, p. 258). During his tenure, Fowler successfully implemented a regulatory model that he, along with his chief legal assistant Daniel Brenner, outlined in a 1982 *Texas Law Review* article entitled ‘A Marketplace Approach to Broadcast Regulation’. In this article, the authors call for ‘the perceptions of broadcasters as community trustees [to] be replaced by a view of broadcasters as marketplace participants’ (1982, p. 209). Within this regulatory model, ‘the public’s interest defines the public interest’ (p. 210), as market mechanisms work to ensure that broadcasters meet such a mandate by satisfying the public interest in order to secure their own profits.<sup>3</sup> A major component of this model would be an end to any governmental content-oriented regulations, such as prescribed minimum amounts of non-entertainment programmes, because ‘[t]heir elimination would allow broadcasters to satisfy consumer desires based on their reading of what viewers want’ (p. 245).<sup>4</sup> Likewise, Fowler lauded the marketplace model as the solution to increasing minority ownership. Speaking in September 1981 before the National Association of Black Owned Broadcasters, Fowler argued that ‘[t]he marketplace is no place to argue for special treatment’. Instead, he urged the black owners that they ‘must work to demonstrate [their] abilities’ to the large financial institutions and venture capitalists who ‘must be convinced that their investments are sound’ (1981, 1988, p. 488). Fowler’s vision for deregulation hinged so fully on the market model that Geller could remark in 1988 that ‘the FCC today is renewing all stations, radio and television, with no notion of what they are doing as to public service’, in effect ‘relying on the public to bring to its attention stations that are not rendering adequate public service’ (Geller 1988, p. 533). Obviously, such a system of public monitoring demands more information and resources than most local communities are likely to invest in public hearings of license renewal cases.

Since Fowler’s tenure ended, the Supreme Court has continued to re-shape the government’s regulatory power in matters of ‘the public interest’. Despite Fowler’s call for ownership regulations to be lessened, the Court did uphold the FCC’s policy for enhancing minority ownership in the 1990 case *Metro Broadcasting, Inc. v. FCC*. Metro Broadcasting argued that its local residence and civic participation advantages were unjustly ruled against during a comparative licensing hearing with Rainbow Broadcasting, which was ninety percent Hispanic owned. This ruling confirmed that the state’s protection of ‘the public interest’ should include, in part, eliminating barriers that prevent minority groups from owning television and radio stations (Brennan 1990). By 1995, however, the Court had overturned this decision and denounced the FCC’s rationale for expanding viewpoint diversity. Specifically, the Supreme Court ruled in *Adarand Constructors v. Peña* that federal race-based programmes must be ‘narrowly tailored measures that further compelling governmental interests’ (O’Connor 1995). This ruling suggested that the Commission’s policies to attract more

minority and female owners did not necessarily serve such a 'compelling governmental interest'. In so doing, the Supreme Court called into question the FCC's ideal that 'the public interest' must include promoting increased minority ownership. This ruling forced the FCC to respond by extending its favourable licensing terms to encourage not just minority and women-owned firms but all small businesses, as well (Department of Commerce 2000, p. 17). This extension operated according to a quantitative, not qualitative, solution to 'public interest' concerns. State-directed pursuit of minority ownership envisions a qualitative programming difference among television stations. However, the Court maintains that 'compelling governmental interests' lie with loosened regulations to spur market competition. This ruling perceives 'the public interest' to be access to an increased number of viewpoints stemming from a purely quantitatively larger number of owners.

The Telecommunications Act of 1996 continued the assault on any further efforts to encourage minority and female ownership. With this legislation, Congress directed the FCC to remove limits on nationwide radio and television station ownership. Specifically, the act raised the cap, from 25 to 35 percent, on the percentage of US households that a single owner might reach through his or her TV stations (US Senate 1996). The act operated with the assumption that economies of scale would best serve 'the public interest' by allowing owners to cluster stations in order to compete more effectively in the marketplace. Again, this belief positions 'the public' as consumers. Not surprisingly, since the passage of the 1996 Act, the broadcast industry has experienced intense activity and consolidation and, hence, less competition between media outlets. Mergers among existing owners resulted in a decrease of owners by 1998 even as the number of radio stations increased over the same two-year period (Department of Commerce 2000, p. 22). Also, the top owners, who are male and who are white, generally have accounted for significantly larger shares of advertising revenue within most metro markets (Department of Commerce 2000, p. 22). Several pre-1996 studies illustrate that most Latino broadcast company owners are primarily single-station operators, and subsequent surveys have illustrated their difficulties competing under deregulation (Department of Commerce 2000, p. 24). This legislation re-inscribes 'the public interest', under the guise of competition, as a consumer-oriented ideal. Consequently, the Telecommunications Act of 1996 protects the economic interests of large, private, corporate media operations and, in so doing, fails to promote as a 'public interest' the minority ownership of communications outlets.

This policy trend curtails media advocates' efforts to enter policy discussions as representatives of 'the public interest'. They can no longer effectively issue appeals that the government must ensure minorities' access to the material means of broadcast production. Instead, following Fowler's imposition of marketplace logic, the government now regards television viewing as production in the sense that viewers can piece together individual programming packages

suiting to their particular interests. As these policy decisions equate the freedom of consumer choice with the freedom of democratic expression, they elide the idea that 'participation in the privileges of ownership involves more than the power to manipulate property itself; it lends an ability to express oneself through property as an instrument of one's interests' (Williams 1995, p. 195). In other words, as it equates the freedom of consumer choice with the freedom of democratic expression, FCC policy has stifled the ideal that communications technologies could serve as tools for creating alternative visions of the social sphere.

Moreover, Fowler's vision, with its demands both for (so-called) consumer control over content and for owners to openly compete for operating money, drives a wedge between those activists demanding richer on-screen representations of ethnic minorities and those organizing around ownership issues. Noriega underscores the need for these two groups to speak to one another when he contends that '[i]n fact, quite often minority cinemas are named and become functional within discourse and institutional practices *before* they exist as a text-producing phenomena' (2000, p. 20). In other words, these two types of activist groups need to link more directly in order to identify structural causes of on-air under-representation. In his *Texas Law Review* article, Fowler ridiculed the FCC's formal ascertainment requirement whereby license applicants must study the needs and interests of the local community and propose programming that meets these needs and interests (with Brenner 1982, p. 207); Fowler instead contends that the marketplace model offers a regulatory logic that better maximizes the services that the public wants (p. 209). However, Noriega offers activists a glimpse of how they might form potential counter-arguments when he explains that the television industry 'go[es] with the actors, producers, and formats it already knows' not because they increase the chances of success – which, for Fowler, directly correlates to the public's interest – but rather because 'they do provide executives with a greater comfort factor than gambling on the unfamiliar' (2002b, p. 4).<sup>5</sup> Such an insight points to ways that these two types of activism might converge to intervene within the mechanisms of liberal governance that shape FCC policy, for the logic of liberal government never ensures that a large variety of programming ever becomes available for viewers to consider. Indeed, I agree with Noriega that altering the FCC's regulatory practices requires not just work that identifies and draws attention to problems but also analyses that identify the structural causes affecting ownership and executive decisions that ultimately shape on-air programmes (2002b, p. 4). Such work might begin, for example, with activist measures that examine how business relationships within the television industry affect minorities at all levels, as well as studies that track how consolidation practices after the 1996 Telecommunications Act intensify the effects of these business networks. Such work can clear rhetorical ground for challenging the FCC to re-channel its traditional aversion to regulating both content and industry hiring practices in the public interest.

Just as significant to this study, these policies structure television viewing as a civic duty. Media advocacy groups must operate within a policymaking network that conceives of 'the public' as 'consumers' who 'produce' democratic expression through the freedom of programming choice. Their calls for greater minority participation in the media industries must acknowledge this conceptual shift. As with NCLR's 'brownout', activist groups now must shape their appeals to 'the public interest' according to the demands of liberal governance. According to Foucault, the move toward liberal governance becomes 'a question not of imposing law on men, but of disposing things' (1978/1991, p. 95). With the government disposing rather than imposing, media advocates no longer can pitch their appeals solely in terms of state-enforced imperatives ensuring access. These governmental formations instead demand that media advocates operate through channels that lead to the voluntary compliance of the governed. Consequently, they must also engage the capitalist market logic that media regulations favour when they support corporate ventures. Gordon illustrates this shift from 'imposing law' to 'disposing things' when she writes that 'affirmative action confers property rights on supposedly culturally unassimilable groups, but diversity confers cultural rights on individuals possessing valuable property rights' (1995, p. 9; quoted in Juffer 2001, p. 273). For Latino media advocates, Gordon's insight suggests that groups shift their work away from legal arguments and more toward economic ones. Foucault's understanding of governmentality, then, shows that media advocates must illustrate how their conceptions of 'the public interest' align with corporate executives' best interests, emphasizing the value of the Latino demographic to marketers, advertisers and broadcasters. These efforts give rise to calls for programming decisions that reflect what this increasing consumer demographic wants – namely, programmes that most closely reflect the United States' ethnic and gender makeup.<sup>6</sup>

In making these appeals, however, media advocates necessarily work to reify the 'consumer as producer' model. Their efforts illustrate what Bennett explains as liberal government's 'techniques of "governing at a distance"' (1998, p. 75). He writes that liberalism 'eschew[s] the impositional logic of rule *d'état*, aim[ing] to induct individuals into programmes of self-management through which specific governmental objectives will be realized or carried through in and by the voluntary activities of individuals who are thus conscripted as agents for the exercise of power on and through themselves' (1998, p. 75). Liberal governance thus structures the available routes through which advocacy groups can enact media reform. This contemporary scenario has led to advocacy efforts that inscribe Latino communities as citizen-consumers who exercise power through and upon themselves as they work to cultivate 'responsible' consuming habits.

## The construction of the Latino community's economic claims

Not surprisingly, business owners have long failed to consider Latinos as consumers who possess 'valuable property rights'. Consumers influence television programmers' decisions, as the television networks sell a programme's potential audience to advertisers in order to subsidize its programming. Therefore, networks produce those programmes that they believe valuable audiences most likely will watch.<sup>7</sup> According to this economic theory, then, television executives will target minorities only to the extent that, if at all, advertisers consider those audiences to be valuable targets for their advertising messages. However, executives can obscure the personal nature of these choices when they cite figures to support claims that creating minority-formatted programmes is not economically feasible. Rose writes that 'numbers' carry a political power within the technologies of liberal government, for they 'appear to depoliticize whole areas of political judgment' (1999, p. 198). Discourses relying on numbers fit perfectly within Gordon's insight that 'valuable property rights' gain significance within liberalism. This section examines these dynamics, as it analyses the terrain of television marketing and identifies a marked conflation between the roles of marketers and policy analysts, a conflation that naturalizes these programming decisions based on 'numbers'.

As I outlined in the previous section, the state's 'governing at a distance' demands that media advocates find ways to present the Latino demographic as 'valuable property'. The experiences of marketing professionals, who have also been trained to do such work, offer important lessons. Rodriguez (1999) details the severe difficulties that these vendors face in 'selling' English-language Latino audiences to both advertisers and programme directors. The most telling examples date back to 1992, when Univision and Telemundo, the country's two largest Spanish-language networks, pushed the AC Nielsen Company to develop new techniques that more accurately measure Hispanic audiences.<sup>8</sup> This new method revealed a 40 percent larger Hispanic audience across the nation.<sup>9</sup> Latino marketers expected that these new Nielsen numbers would force network executives to validate the Latino community as a valuable consumer market (Rodriguez 1999, pp. 53–54). Nevertheless, media executives still widely perceive that all Latinos are poor. These views hinder marketers' efforts to transform an ethnic-minority market into what Rodriguez calls 'just another market' (1999, p. 53). One Los Angeles-based seller recalls 'explaining the new Hispanic Nielsen numbers to a group of potential grocery store advertisers. At the end of the presentation, one asked, "But can they afford to buy cereal?"' (quoted in Rodriguez 1999, p. 54). Another vendor admits, 'We have come to some retailers and pitched them and said, "We'd like to drive the Hispanic consumer into your store and the way to do that is . . ." And we've heard, "The only Hispanics who come into our stores are the ones who come in here to

shoplift” (quoted in Rodriguez 1999, p. 48). These perceptions construct imposing obstacles for marketers who seek to highlight Latino communities’ importance as ‘valuable properties’ for the television industry. These advertisers and television executives do not see how Latino-themed programmes would align with their bottom-line interests. Hence, programmes that would attract Latino audiences fail to progress past the idea stage, and the supposed need for Latinos to work within the industry never materializes.

When several Latin musical acts crossed over into mainstream markets beginning in the summer of 1999, television vendors did begin to enjoy some success. Since that time, marketers have increased their efforts to counter perceptions that the Latino demographic can be ignored. Both sellers and the small number of Latino television executives point to the demographic’s burgeoning 18–34-year-old audience, the age group advertisers most covet. These statistics underscore the Latino demographic’s ‘marketability’, as Jeff Valdez, co-chairman of *Sí TV*, the first English-language cable network aimed at young US Latinos, maintained in a July 1999 *Hispanic Business* interview. Valdez explained that his network’s efforts to attract investors had been so positive that prominent potential investors used words like “home run”, “no-brainer”, and “you don’t have to hit me with a stick, I’m in” (*Hispanic Business* 1999, p. 72). As deregulation highlights ‘the public’ as consumers, these policies also conflate the positions of marketers and media advocates in relation to the communities they ostensibly serve; marketers appear to work indirectly to create a more significant Latino presence in the television industry. Citing demographic figures to shape their appeals for industry reform, these quasi-advocates maintain that advertisers and networks will lose a large consumer market if they fail to meet Latino communities’ ‘programming needs’.

Further evidence of this conflation comes as policy institutes now pitch similar arguments. For example, the Aspen Institute’s Forum on Diversity and the Media has targeted the long-held economic assumptions that businesses best meet their bottom-line objectives by neglecting minority audiences. The forum aims to develop the means ‘to make improved media service to minorities good business as well as good social policy’ (Chisman 1999, p. 28). As such, its policy recommendations include securing investments in cross-cultural and minority-focused media content. However, ‘improved media service’ exposes the fact that the policy institute uncritically adopts this conception of ‘the public’ as consumers, not as citizens who produce new discourses. Moreover, the forum fails to include more hiring of minorities in its vision of ‘good social policy’.

In another sense, the Aspen Institute’s work reflects the conditions created by liberal governance. Charles Firestone and Amy Garmer, Executive and Associate Directors, respectively, of the Institute’s Communications and Society Programme, implicitly affirm Bennett’s insight (1998) concerning the shift from a rules-bound to a consensual mode of governance. Firestone and Garmer contend that ‘American businesses see diversity as an obligation – a requirement to hire

individuals . . . or to support certain communities and activities so as to inoculate the enterprise from charges of prejudice or racial insensitivity' (1998, p. vi). Here, they invoke 'inoculation', which connotes *forced* pain. This particular choice suggests that industry change must come through consensus and through pointing out common interests. Furthermore, Firestone and Garmer maintain that both deregulation and legal battles waged over equal-employment opportunities illustrate that 'times have changed drastically' (1998, p. vii). As a result, they call upon policymakers to adopt the marketer's role. Specifically, Firestone and Garmer argue that policymakers must show media executives that their economic interests and minority audience's social interests align: 'the one-out-of-four Americans who belong to minority groups today wield significant economic power – both real and potential – that should be of concern to media executives and programmers who want to remain competitive industry players in the future' (1998, p. vi). This conclusion echoes the rhetoric of Fowler's marketplace model as it seeks to 'empower' the Latino audience as consumers who can shape the television industry's practices. While this discursive move illustrates the terrain upon which media advocates must operate, the Institute's policy analysis helps to naturalize this easy equation of consumption with public speech.

The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute recently issued a report that similarly conflates these two actions. The report, 'Missing in Action: Latinos in and out of Hollywood', aligns Hollywood's economic self-interest and the Institute's own interest in the increased hiring of Latinos within the industry. The report's principal author, Harry Pachon, asserts that the Latino population's rapid growth brings 'massive buying power' which remains an 'untapped resource for the entertainment industry' (Pachon *et al.* 2000, p. 53). For Pachon, 'tapping' would increase the number of Latino and Latina actors as well as the number of projects centred on issues of interest to Latino communities. Moreover, television screenwriters would create more sophisticated portrayals of Latinos (2000, p. 53). Importantly, Pachon also echoes Gordon's insight that 'diversity is positive, a source of communal pleasure' (1995, p. 9; quoted in Juffer 2001, p. 273) when he highlights the intersections between Latinos' media tastes and concerns and advertisers and media executives' profit-seeking motives. Pachon maintains that

Latinos . . . are not an uncritical audience. To keep the present generation of moviegoers coming to the theaters and television-watchers viewing television – as well as to reach out to new audiences – the entertainment industry must pay attention to the concerns raised in this study. As Latinos become a larger share of the national audience, their preferences will increasingly shape the success or failure of the entertainment industry.  
(2000, p. 53)

These conclusions suggest that entertainment industry executives make up the target audience for this policy analysis. Pachon *et al.*'s predictions of success or



failure reflect analytical work that pursues routes to and through the industry itself rather than presenting evidence to and constructing arguments toward government policymakers.

Rose anticipates such conclusions when he argues that ‘numbers’ operate as ‘diagnostic instruments’ within liberal governance. He maintains that numbers ‘promise to align the exercise of “public” authority with the values and beliefs of “private” citizens. This promise becomes even more alluring as democratic citizens themselves come to be understood as consumers with preferences which politicians ignore at their peril’ (1999, p. 197). As liberal governments move from ‘imposing law’ to ‘disposing things’ (Foucault 1978/1991, p. 95), deregulation entrusts broadcasters to protect its specific conception of ‘the public interest’; therefore, I see these broadcasters positioned similarly to the politicians in Rose’s statement. However, problems arise when specialists – marketers, television executives and policy analysts alike – use numbers to construct and represent Latino communities. Rose contends that liberal governance makes up ‘communities’ as spaces for containing thought and action without imposing law: ‘Communities have been objectified by positive knowledges, subject to truth claims by expertise and hence can become the object of political technologies for governing through community’ (1999, p. 189). Those professionals listed above necessarily use ‘consumers’ to label the political subjects that constitute these communities. By extension, these authorities shape individual conduct through repeated claims that encourage citizen-consumers to perform their consuming duties in the spirit of a responsible citizen. As such, this discourse of the citizen-consumer’s power works against any collectivity that tries to create new practices or new social relations that might govern it.

### ***Resurrecting Showtime with ‘No Limits’ narrowcasting***

As Streeter’s analysis (1987) of cable policy discourse suggests, policy research that focuses on minority-related media issues must also consider the implications of cable television’s supposed ability to deliver niche audiences, as it draws attention to what programmes appear on cable and what audiences they target. Most cable television networks practice ‘narrowcasting’, as they gear programming toward groups defined by particular interests or demographics, such as ethnicity. More importantly, Nielsen surveys add a qualitative, financial dimension to the demographics that cable television’s ‘niche’ audiences promise. As Byars and Meehan suggest, cable television’s subscription fee appears to separate ‘those who merely view television programming and those committed to the lifestyle of consuming capitalism’s brand-name advertising goods’ (1995, p. 21). Narrowcasting makes sense for cable stations, then, because its ability to garner specifically defined audiences potentially makes cable programming more economically efficient.

Murdock argues that this narrowcasting approach contributes to social conditions of 'fracture and fragmentation' because it caters to specific demographic tastes and interests (1999, p. 10). However, economic imperatives necessarily prevent the 'narrow' in 'narrowcasting' from being as limiting a concept as Murdock insists. Wilson, for one, maintains that narrowcasting must simultaneously refine the 'television gaze' to an exclusive genre or topic while also openly inviting the attention from those not committed to the channel's packaged sense of 'community' (1995, p. 130). Narrowcasting tries to attract this broader audience when it loosely advertises programmes as 'an (easy) experience of the novel for a more general constituency' (Wilson 1995, p. 130). Wilson's work points to the economic imperatives that structure narrowcasting programming decisions. Cable networks will survive only if they draw audience figures significantly higher than a 'niche audience' might imply. Given these economic necessities, Murdock's concerns over public 'fragmentation' seem overstated.

Still, narrowcasting's packaged 'easy experience of the novel' points to the need to examine what images make it onto a medium that, as Streeeter (1987) explains, policymakers have routinely valorized. Rose's understanding (1999, p. 189) that specialists shape consumers' actions in the name of the community good pushes for cultural policy studies work that analyses the industry pressures which intersect in narrowcasting's pitch to both niche demographics and somewhat larger groups. To address these concerns, this section focuses on Showtime's narrowcasting of *Resurrection Boulevard*. This analysis emphasizes the economics and politics that structure the citizen-consumer's responsible actions, for these factors affect the final television product that media advocates urge 'responsible consumers' to watch.

*Resurrection Boulevard* stands out within the industry because both its creative talent and production crew are predominantly Latino. Obviously, though, Showtime's decision to programme the show was not an outright public service. Significant financial pressures affect not only the programme that makes it onto the air, but also the way that the network packages its programmes for publics to consume. The core slogan 'We Make Excitement' guided Showtime through the 1980s and 1990s, but its reputation during that period primarily hinged upon B-movie thrillers and soft porn. To attract more viewers to its 'edge-of-your-seat entertainment' (Miller 2001, p. 42), Showtime launched a \$40 million advertising campaign in January 1997 titled 'No Limits' (*Twice* 1997, p. 42). The network's advertisements in trade publications now assert that 'No Limits' captures its vision to 'push the boundaries of everyday television, offering an emotional escape that has no limits and endless possibilities' (quoted in Zook 2001, p. C1). However, Showtime's promise to 'push the boundaries of everyday television' raises questions as to whom the network wants to invite to these outer limits. Do the 'endless possibilities' hint at the depiction of multicultural experiences from the perspective of diverse subjects? Or does the slogan only

suggest representations of minority groups and ‘other’ lifestyles that white, moneyed viewers can feel comfortable watching?

Showtime’s recent programming does suggest that it interprets ‘No Limits’ to mean not just picking edgy, sexual or violent topics. This vision also entails creating original series that ostensibly target niche audiences served less often by broadcast and basic cable networks. Showtime developed *Resurrection Boulevard* as part of this ‘No Limits’ ideal, making it the first English-language drama series to feature Latinos both in front of and behind the camera. Dennis Leoni writes the series, while long-time Chicano cinema activist Jesús Salvador Treviño directs most episodes. The drama centres on the fictitious Santiagos, a Mexican American family that lives on Resurrection Boulevard in East Los Angeles. Roberto is a widower who, as the family patriarch, has trained his middle son, Carlos, to win middleweight boxing championships. Boxing contenders have been in the Santiago family for generations, and Roberto longs to see his son succeed. A gunshot in a fight kept Carlos out of the ring, though, so younger brother Alex dropped his medical school aspirations and took up the gloves to rescue his father from despair. By the time that a crooked promoter robbed Alex of a chance for the championship, Carlos had recovered, and he now appears primed for a title shot. Meanwhile, older sister Yolanda works at a Beverly Hills paralegal firm and attends USC Law School.

Journalists and industry insiders alike have lauded Showtime’s efforts to create programmes featuring minorities and non-normative demographic groups. Latino-themed *Resurrection Boulevard* now sits alongside the network’s African American-themed *Soul Food* and the gay-themed *Queer as Folk*. Showtime’s chief programmer Jerry Offsay says, ‘I don’t think there’s necessarily a calculated social agenda here. We’re always trying to find shows and characters and worlds that just aren’t being portrayed on network television’ (quoted in Case 2001, p. SR6). This ‘No Limits’ edginess aside, however, the network ultimately programmes series that help it meet bottom-line pressures. Not surprisingly, Offsay pushed for a Latino programme after calculating that minority-themed movies ‘consistently outperformed others’ (quoted in Levin 2001, p. D4). Statistics suggest these ‘niche’ series, in some respects, have enacted the hoped-for subscription increase. While HBO’s original series *The Sopranos* and *Sex in the City* attract wider audiences than *Resurrection Boulevard* and *Queer as Folk*, Showtime’s original series have increased viewer interest. Network CEO Matthew Blank states that 60 percent of Showtime subscribers cite original programming as ‘very important’, double the percentage from 1998 (Miller 2001, p. 29). Evidence suggests, then, that Showtime cashes in on its status as a pay channel, which, suggests Kevin Coyne, media director of Bates Worldwide, a media buying firm, presents opportunities to ‘use more creative license . . . to create a curiosity factor’ (quoted in Case 2001, p. SR5).

Pay channel subscription figures also hint at the profit potential of a Latino-themed show like *Resurrection Boulevard*. For example, *USA Today*’s Gary Levin

cites a study that concludes that Latinos figure disproportionately high in the share of pay cable households (2001, p. D4). Likewise, Showtime officials confirmed that Latinos made up 15 percent of *Resurrection Boulevard's* debut audience – double the usual number of Latino subscribers who might tune in to a given show (Zook 2001, p. C1). Additionally, the network's Latino subscriber base rose from 10 to 12 percent, or 3.6 million households, since the series first aired, according to the channel's subscription figures (Zook 2001, p. C1). There is the boxing connection, too. Showtime rejected Leoni's first series pitch because the script was too sentimental and not action-packed. After regrouping, he gained inspiration from a likely source. He explains, 'I was watching a boxing match on Showtime, and I just put it together: boxing, Latinos and Showtime' (quoted in Zook 2001, p. C1). Since appearing on Showtime, *Resurrection Boulevard* has featured boxers Joe Frazier, Sugar Ray Leonard, Johnny Tapia and Gariel Ruellas in cameo roles; Hector 'Macho' Camacho also made a guest appearance as a fictitious boxer. Showtime's Latino audiences increase by 50 percent for its boxing programmes, say network officials, and, according to Offsay, half of *Resurrection Boulevard's* highest-rated episodes have immediately followed boxing matches (Zook 2001, p. C1).

Treviño, for one, has tried to steer the show away from reinforcing stereotypes about Latinos and boxers. To move away from these caricatures, he says that he wants the series to show 'the community itself, and all the myriad colors and traditions – the food vendors, street musicians and families in the park. And it's Mexican American-specific. It's the community of Boyle Heights, where I grew up. I don't think you can do "universals" in the abstract' (quoted in Zook 2001, p. C1). However, while the writers and directors cast the Santiagos as a Mexican American family, the storyline remains heavily grounded within the space of the home and, consequently, rarely addresses the family's culture in specific ways. Ironically, Treviño himself provides the reasoning behind this decision. He admits that he would like to see the programme address social issues more directly, but he also concedes, 'I'm also acutely aware of the fact that this is our first opportunity. So you have Latinos on the conservative end of the spectrum who probably think the show goes too far, with its treatment of police brutality and illegal immigration. On the other had, you have people like myself who think we should be doing more' (quoted in Zook 2001, p. C1). Treviño's insights illuminate the politics and the economics that shape the scripts written by the show's Latino writers. Narrowcasting demands that writers who 'represent' their ethnic group with Latino-themed programmes must also account for the 'No Limits' network's desire to 'create curiosity' and offer the cherished white, upper-middle class viewers a comforting glimpse into a middle-class, Mexican American home.

Treviño's experience creating a bilingual *telenovela*, *Canción de la Raza*, provides a parallel example against which to analyse *Resurrection Boulevard's* struggle between universal abstracts and culturally-specific programmes. The

Ford Foundation funded and produced *Canción de la Raza* between 1968 and 1970 at Los Angeles' KCET-TV. In terms of its content, the soap opera centered on East Los Angeles and dealt with social issues facing the barrio (Noriega 2000, p. 143). The show enjoyed local success, and by 1969, *Canción de la Raza* was being rebroadcast to fifteen other stations serving cities with significant Latino populations. The show did not succeed in these other markets, however, due to the ethnic differences arising through regionalism. Noriega explains that several audience surveys suggest that the East LA drama did not resonate with Puerto Ricans in New York and New Jersey, while Chicanos in other parts of the Southwest often objected to what they perceived as racial stereotypes and improper dialects (2000, p. 143). This reception history raises significant policy implications. On the one hand, FCC broadcast regulation seemingly emphasizes the 'local' as its ascertainment requirement calls for owners to gather input on local audiences' needs and interests. On the other, producers and directors of Latino TV necessarily must meet narrowcasting and pay-cable's bottom-line demands; to do so, they construct a pan-ethnic framework in which to display their products in order to secure not only Latino audience shares outside the smaller circle of Mexican-American viewers but also non-Latino audiences, as well. This tension indeed paves the way for multilocal and multiethnic activist and production networks that can support programming when initial image-serving funds from larger corporations fall through. Nonetheless, this tension between the FCC's localism and the ethnic differences within the Latino community creates the potential for ethnic communities' specific content and service needs to be glossed over in the push for pan-ethnic 'universals'.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the mixed reception of a programme like *Canción de la Raza* suggests that programmes that do not adopt a pan-ethnic approach might not meet the Fowler-esque view of large audience figures as clear articulations of the public's interests and desires.

Herein lies a paradox, however. Journalists praise the show's presence as a Latino show, but this labelling as a Latino – and hence, pan-ethnic – drama clears space for arguments that *Resurrection Boulevard* reinforces stereotypes. These critics primarily point to the show's central focus on boxing and angry Latino males (Iorio 2000, p. D1), stereotypes that sell well to non-Latino audiences. Significantly, though, Flores points to a structural problem – not a purely profit-seeking one – as the source of this tension. In *From Bomba to Hip-Hop*, he argues that the demographic conception of 'Latino community' necessarily leads to stereotypes and pan-ethnic cultural formations. Flores writes, 'It is important to recognize [superficial portrayals of Latino people] as products not just of opportunist politicians or greedy marketers but also of the demographic mentality itself. Numbers call forth labels, which in turn engender generic, homogenized representations – stereotypes' (Flores 2000, p. 195). His analysis intersects with how the television industry operates structurally to construct the 'Latino community' as a passive, target audience with little social agency or creativity. As Gray explains, script writing for television often occurs in combinations of

individual and group writing (1995, p. 99), but it remains a heavily producer-driven medium (1995, p. 71). Therefore, this industry practice potentially undercuts those arguments that see a numerically higher Latino presence necessarily leading to more 'positive' portrayals.

The pressure to 'sell' its ethnic-themed programme to viewers and subscribers outside this targeted ethnic audience registers noticeable effects on *Resurrection Boulevard's* content, effects that Treviño encapsulates in his desire to 'do universals'. Significantly, many press reviews address *Resurrection Boulevard's* 'universal' themes and its 'quality' in ways that underscore the series' potential appeal to the country's white, 'mass' viewership. These specific discourses suggest that *Resurrection Boulevard's* writers use recognizable themes to break down resistant television executives and transform their concepts into actual programmes.

Obviously, *Resurrection Boulevard's* 'newsworthiness' for major news outlets comes from its position as the first Latino-themed, Latino-produced drama series on cable television. Nevertheless, many entertainment writers speculated, as did industry executives, whether the show would legitimate a greater Latino presence within the television industry. On the day of the show's network premiere, however, Barbara D. Phillips of the *Wall Street Journal* wrote that *Resurrection Boulevard* benefited from 'strong writing, vivid acting and well-tested if sometimes melodramatic themes' (2000, p. A44). Similarly, Dana Calvo of the *Los Angeles Times* suggested that Showtime signed *Resurrection Boulevard* to a series deal after the rough cut of the show's original film 'proved so powerful and its themes so universal' (1999, p. 7). One year later, Terry Jackson reported in *Hispanic* that while the show's first-season ratings had not been strong, Showtime renewed the series 'mostly because critics loudly applaud *Resurrection Blvd's* richly textured story-telling and realistic portrayals' (2001, p. 40).

The show's staff invoked similar terms to promote the show. In one interview, Leoni emphasized the fact that '[t]his could have been an Irish or Russian boxing family; any kind of ethnic-specific family. It's how four generations of a Mexican American family cut their piece of the American pie' (quoted in Calvo 1999, p. 7). He maintained that the Santiagos 'are Americans just striving for the American way' and suggested that while the show's writers indeed did exaggerate the plots for drama's sake, the Santiagos remained 'recognizable, everyday characters' (quoted in Jackson 2001, p. 40). Meanwhile, Nicholas Gonzalez, who portrays Alex Santiago, contends, 'They call it a Latino show. It's not. It's a show about a family that happens to be Latino' (quoted in Iorio 2000, p. D1).

This discourse about the show's 'quality' and its universal themes echoes Treviño's efforts in the 1970s to package Chicano-themed content under the 'universal quality' label in order to deliver it into larger media spheres. Noriega, for one, lauds Treviño's efforts in that period to instil Chicano social protest into a media industry 'whose universalist terms excluded racial minorities' (2000, p. 134). Noriega explains that Treviño first 'turned from the social realm *per se*

and addressed the medium in aesthetic terms, making a distinction between ethnic-specific content (a set of issues) and a universal form (film artistry)' (2000, p. 134). Since he distinguished 'film artistry' conventions from content, Treviño could argue that Chicano-themed content could indeed express universal humanism and, in so doing, appeal to a more broadly based audience (Noriega 2000, p. 134).

The Santiago family serves as the show's primary expression of universal humanism. As such, the middle-class, nuclear family signals *the* mode for Latino participation in American life. Fraternal rivalry does flare up between Alex and Carlos after Alex assumes the mantle as the family's boxing hope. However, Roberto and Alex's brother Miguel help to coach and train Alex, forming a tightly-knit team; in an episode from the show's first season, boxing promoter Jack Mornay slyly admits to Roberto, 'As a matter of fact, there's a lot about your family that I respect'. Pointing to his lavish office space, he continues, 'See, all of this you can buy. But I saw a tape of the Sanchez fight. I saw a fighter surrounded by his father and his brothers, all of them giving him strength, wanting only the best for him. And that you can't buy' ('El Regreso de Paco' 2000). This family-as-team unit illustrates the Santiagos' commitment to the pursuit of upward mobility, another anchoring universal theme. Gonzalez contends that boxing permeates the show's scripts because 'it's a metaphor for that struggle, that fight for the American dream' (quoted in Iorio 2000, p. D1). Phillips illustrates a similar perspective when she concludes that '[t]here couldn't be anything more American' than the Santiagos' refusal to 'go down without a fight' (2000, p. A44). However, such visions affirm Gray's insight concerning television's 'hegemonic gaze of whiteness'. Gray argues that this gaze attempts to claim social inclusion for non-European ethnic groups because their specific cultural experiences 'are parallel to white immigrant experiences' (1995, p. 91). He maintains that this perspective keeps its stranglehold in large part because the industry is producer-driven (1995, p. 71), and countless quantitative studies show that minorities hold few positions in this capacity (see Noriega 2002b). One would not be surprised, then, to read in Noriega's recent review of *American Family*, PBS's Latino-themed series, that Latino filmmakers have deployed the family trope 'as the fulcrum for leveraging universal appeal from a minority cultural setting' (2002a, p. B15). The family-centred focus of both *Resurrection Boulevard* and *American Family* constructs a 'universal humanism' that looks familiar to the white, upper-middle class television audience to which television executives feel comfortable pitching their shows.

These normative themes bring severe implications for Latino cultural expression, however. Writing about black cultural politics, Gray argues that the television industry does serious damage when it produces only those ethnic-themed shows that are family-centred. He contends that this situation limits the social and cultural terms in which it is possible to be a minority and an American and to participate in the American experience (1995, p. 88). Television



executives' perceptions that Latino programmes could not otherwise be attractive prevent these shows from depicting diverse forms of Latino cultural and social life. Significantly, it infringes upon Hall's conception of popular culture as a space where 'we discover and play with the identifications of ourselves, where we are imagined, where we are represented' (1991, p. 32, quoted in Yarbrow-Bejarano 1999, p. 337). Consequently, the television screen fails to depict the heterogeneity of Latino imaginations, lives, and cultures.

The intersections between cable regulation and these effects of industry control over ethnic representations hold important implications for media advocates, as well. Not only must Latino advocacy groups engage the 'consumption equals production' logic that drives this regulatory bias, but they also work within an industry whose ratings operate according to a 'watch/don't watch' scale. The television medium offers no venue for recording varying degrees of support for any particular show. Premium cable's 'pay to play' format leaves no mechanism for viewers to comment upon these moves toward universalisms. Viewers either watch the show as the network chooses to air it or listen to the network declare Latino-theme programmes beyond even its own 'limits' and watch the network remove the series from its schedule. As they respond to this situation, Latino advocacy groups normalize the discourse of the Latino citizen-consumer as they effectively limit other potential expressions of citizenship that might allow Latinos to talk back to the television industry in more qualitative ways. Therefore, viewers are left issuing their vote or no vote of confidence for shows that, like *Resurrection Boulevard*, express universal humanism instead of depicting Latinos who set their own terms for living within the larger populace.

### **'The Latino community' and technologies of liberal governance**

Writing on the one-year anniversary of the series premiere, Zook reported that Showtime executives, for financial reasons, had considered not renewing *Resurrection Boulevard* to a second season (2001, p. C1). Showtime's subscription figures had increased by two percent since *Resurrection Boulevard* first aired; Latinos made up ten percent of this new subscriber base total. Zook noted that while Showtime does not regularly track the racial composition of *Resurrection Boulevard* viewers, network officials did say that fifteen percent of the debut episode's audience was Latino – double the usual number of Latino subscribers who might watch a given show.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, according to Offsay, these figures signalled that 'the audience probably was not big enough to bring *Resurrection Boulevard* back' (quoted in Zook 2001, p. C1). However, Showtime signed the series for a second season because, Offsay explains, the series 'got an enormous amount of community support that we thought would help build the numbers in the second season' (quoted in Zook 2001, p. C1).

Whether spin or not, Offsay's comments do illustrate that liberal policy regulation structures the routes through which media advocates can operate effectively. Media activists stand little chance to 'resist' the television oligopoly from outside spaces, and the community support that they do draw together must be shown to television executives, not policymakers. Furthermore, this 'support' mobilizes communities as 'audiences', not as 'publics' or as 'citizens'. Frighteningly, liberal governance demands that before they can call for increased hiring of minorities in the television industry, media advocates must first shape the underserved communities into the kind of consumers that network executives want.

Moreover, as the liberal government moves toward governing at a distance, it situates minority actors, writers and directors as the means through which both activists and industry executives pursue their objectives. While their language points to the same ends that activists pursue, the *Resurrection Boulevard* cast's appeals sound similar to television executives digging for more consumers. In a June 2001 interview, Cuban-born Tony Plana, who portrays Roberto on the show, admitted, 'We need more Latinos to subscribe to Showtime. Jerry Offsay says he'll renew the series for a third season if we can get 100,000 new subscribers. If we can rally people around this show, it will cause other shows about Latinos to be done. Then maybe we could start to revolutionize the face of television' (quoted in Jackson 2001, p. 40). This plea for other Latinos to 'rally around' the show in order to 'revolutionize the face of television' echoes the pleas of people situated more concretely as media activists. Nevertheless, while this call to 'rally around' invokes political connotations, it reifies consumption of Showtime's programming as *the* mode of Latino civic participation.

Likewise, the co-ordinated efforts by several Latino groups to keep *Resurrection Boulevard* on the air capitulate to an industry that already benefits from deregulation. Advocacy groups valorize the Latino citizen-consumer when they equate the payment of cable subscription fees with the issue of appeals for hiring more Latinos in the television industry. Jackson reported in June 2001 that Showtime sign-up campaigns were planned through NCLR, the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and the National Hispanic Chamber of Commerce (2001, p. 41). In an e-mail communication on 3 December 2001, Scott Gunderson Rosa explained that LULAC agreed to promote the show by including fliers in its bi-monthly magazine that explained the group would add \$10 to its National Scholarship Fund for each new household that subscribed to Showtime. The National Organization of Hispanic Journalists promised Showtime that it would give significant attention to *Resurrection Boulevard's* new season, and NCLR agreed to devote four pages to the show in a forthcoming newsletter (Jackson 2001, p. 41). NCLR furthered its public support of the show when in 2001 it presented American Latino Media Arts (ALMA) Awards both to the programme's staff and cast for 'Outstanding Television Series' and to Roberta Pena for 'Outstanding Actress in a Television Series'. *Resurrection Boulevard*

repeated as outstanding series in 2002, while Luis Avalos won an ALMA Award as 'Outstanding Supporting Actor in a Television Series'.

NCLR president Raul Yzaguirre made a personal effort to keep the show on air, as well. In his 20 December 2000 newsletter, he called for what amounts to a 'brown-on', as he encouraged Latinos to enact a service to the Latino community by subscribing to Showtime and watching the show. This appeal came at a time when Showtime was deciding whether to renew *Resurrection Boulevard* for another 20-show season. He first informed his readers that the show 'needs your help' and asked them to support a series that is both 'historic' – 'it is the first-ever drama series focusing on a Latino family on primetime television' – and 'unique' – 'it is currently the only drama series about Latinos on television'. Yzaguirre then described the series in aesthetic terms in order to suggest that the show carries a universal appeal, as well. He implored Showtime subscribers not only to watch the show and 'spread the word about how good it is' but also to get other Showtime subscribers that they know to watch 'this exceptionally well-written and well-acted show that features acclaimed Latino actors'. Since this 'historic' show's fate apparently hinged on the Latino community's support, Yzaguirre emphasized that 'the stakes are high': 'If *Resurrection Boulevard* and the other Latino-themed shows on cable succeed, it will help prove to the networks that there is indeed an audience for these kinds of shows. On the other hand, if these shows fail, experience tells us that it will be months, and more likely years, before we get another chance to have another Latino show even considered for broadcast'.

Yzaguirre again invoked the model of the responsible citizen-consumer later in his letter. He explained that in his September 2000 meeting with Showtime's president and top executives, he learned that Latinos, an 'astonishing' 14 percent of the network's subscribers, were not watching *Resurrection Boulevard* (2000). 'Astonishing' reinforces the capability of Latino consumers to effect industry-wide change if only they could pool their collective economic potential. However, Yzaguirre fails to critique – and implicitly reaffirms – the calls for no government intervention in media when he calls upon the Latino citizen-consumer in this way. Specifically, his argument draws upon the ideal of the 'rational consumer' that underpins political and economic theories of classical liberalism. As Grossberg *et al.* explain, underpinning liberalism is the belief that just '[a]s products compete, ideas do, too' (1998, p. 376). Through competition, 'the good and useful drive out the bad and worthless. Thus, the driving spirit of liberal capitalism suggests that free people, left to their own initiative, will make economically and intellectually profitable choices' (Grossberg *et al.* 1998, p. 376). Leaving consumers to their own initiative obviously entails a lack of state interference in these marketplaces, as well. Thus, Yzaguirre accepts a model that leaves rational consumers to decide what services and products best serve the public interest. In so doing, he normalizes the policymaking focus on promoting corporate ventures in the interest of a public of consumers.

A cultural policy studies focus calls attention to how Yzaguirre positions the Latino community. Rose maintains that ‘community’ becomes a “‘third way’ of governing’ under liberalism (1999, p. 167) as the state moves toward ‘governing at a distance’ (Bennett 1998, p. 75). Furthermore, as Etzioni contends, community in part arises from ‘commitment to a . . . shared history and identity’ (1997, p. 127; quoted in Rose 1999, p. 172). First, Yzaguirre aims to foster a shared history when he suggests that ‘experience tells’ Latinos the importance of ensuring *Resurrection Boulevard’s* success. Here he draws upon decades of mostly unfruitful efforts to petition the state to ensure that the television industry hires more minorities. The community becomes a space of government, then, because it links individual citizens through acts of consumption and leads citizens to envision that the community’s interests hinge upon their actions as individual consumers. Liberalism works to set the terms for ‘responsible choice’ (Rose 1999, p. 166) such that civic activity entails not signing petitions or interrupting license hearings, but becoming the consuming citizens that television executives want Latinos to be.

Ultimately, however, the ‘rational consumer’ ideal – and by extension, Yzaguirre’s efforts – hide two important points. First, as Grossberg contends, this thinking fails to consider that liberalism does not provide ‘access to the widest possible variety of ideas’ (1998, p. 381). Consequently, this theory holds that consumers will guide the marketplace of ideas but fails to engage the history of deregulatory policies that dismantled the state as one route through which to increase viewpoint diversity. More importantly, Yzaguirre’s support of this ideal ignores material concerns related to the cable subscription fee. Liberalism curtails efforts to address class issues that arise when ‘minority-formatted media [moves] beyond advertiser support and into a dependence on the audience’s ability to pay for the content’ (Wilson and Gutierrez 1995, p. 246). Therefore, while the Latino middle-class continues to grow larger, lower incomes relative to the sought-after white audiences can limit the extent to which Latinos appear to make – as measured by ratings and subscriptions – ‘intellectually profitable choices’ (Grossberg *et al.* 1998, p. 376). Nevertheless, executives like Offsay can use numbers, as Rose (1999, p. 198) suggests, to ‘depoliticize’ their decisions to cancel programmes that serve minorities.

Nevertheless, liberalism demands responses from media advocates that take shape in ways that would not fit traditional conceptions of ‘activism’. Under liberalism, individuals with independent interests become the means through which the government pursues its objectives, namely, to support and protect capitalist ventures. These advocacy groups illustrate one way that media reformers have responded to this ruling logic. Yzaguirre’s efforts to align the individual consumer’s interest with that of the Latino community’s shows his response to the government’s move away from ‘imposing’ rule and, as Bennett maintains, toward ‘induct[ing] individuals into programmes of self-management’ (1998, p. 75). As these activities aimed at *Resurrection Boulevard* suggest, these groups no

longer direct appeals toward the government but instead try to shape the Latino consumer's actions and mobilize the community's economic power to change the television industry.

## Conclusion

In January 2002, *The Nation* published a special issue that addresses, as the cover explains, 'Big Media, and what you can do about it'. The centrepiece of the issue was 'The Big Ten': a list of the world's largest media conglomerates that illustrates the alarming effects of the FCC's corporate-centred conception of the 'public interest'. Each of the special issue's five feature articles respond to the limits that deregulation imposes upon democracy and civic participation. In one article, Mark Crispin Miller reports that, when asked to give his own definition of 'the public interest', current FCC chairperson Michael Powell replied, 'I have no idea. It's an empty vessel in which people pour in whatever their preconceived views or biases are' (quoted in Miller 2002, p. 19). Miller added an additional shocking remark that Powell had delivered before the American Bar Association in April 1998: 'The night after I was sworn in [as a commissioner], I waited for a visit from the angel of the public interest. I waited all night, but she did not come' (quoted in Miller 2002, p. 20). These comments, as well as policies such as the 1996 Telecommunications Act, force media advocates and cultural studies scholars to realize that the government's corporate-liberal conception of 'the public interest' might be entrenched for some time, as evidenced by the FCC's current efforts in the spring of 2003 to remove barriers to cross-ownership. As this study illustrates, some media advocates now respond to and operate within – rather than forthrightly resist – such a policy forum.

The case study of *Resurrection Boulevard* and the actions taken to ensure its success present just one mode of operation. Specifically, this study showed that advocacy groups are engaging the capitalist logic of the deregulated television industry. These groups articulate their appeals through demographics precisely because liberalism demands that they illustrate how their interests align with those of television networks. Narrowcasting serves a significant economic benefit for cable networks, and while it necessarily positions niche audiences, this model appears to offer one opportunity – albeit one shot through with contradictions – for a collectivity of viewers to 'consume responsibly' in ways that call for greater access for minorities to ownership opportunities. This advocacy does not push for legally binding obligations such as the FCC's former minority-ownership enhancement policies of the 1970s and 1980s. Foucault's insight on liberal government's shift from 'imposing law' to 'disposing things' (1978/1991, p. 95) suggests that the industry would only grudgingly submit to such regulation. Consequently, these advocacy groups highlight sets of common interests and 'valuable properties'. As Noriega suggests (2000, p. 25), only

limited potential remains within this deregulatory moment for advancing Latino interests on legal and political grounds. Instead, these appeals must be economic and moral ones that engage the industry's interests.

The 'public interest' shift from fostering minority ownership to encouraging consolidation holds implications for coalition building, as well. Deregulation since the 1970s has directed attention to demographics and the segmenting of once seemingly collective interests. Flores warns of the potential for demographics to enact such segmentation: 'It is clear how tools of advertent inclusion and conjunction may at the same time serve as wedges between and among groups whose social placement and experience in the USA could just as well, given a different political agenda, point to commonalities as to differences' (2000, p. 195). The segmenting of the market does afford increased opportunities for narrowcasting to meet, in a qualitative sense, Latino consumer needs. Narrowcasting also creates a somewhat-superficial opportunity for the citizen-consumer to support the Latino community, as liberalism equates viewing a programme with appealing for increased access to the means of producing programmes. However, Flores expresses his concern as to whether this particular form of advocacy will create a zero-sum contest for access between historically excluded groups. The collective efforts by NCLR and the NAACP in September 1999 provide one instance that suggests otherwise. Nevertheless, as McChesney and Nichols suggest, coalition building gains added importance when one considers the \$111.3 million that the fifty largest media companies and four of their trade associations spent between 1996 and mid-2000 to lobby Congress and the executive branch (McChesney & Nichols 2002, p. 13). Advocacy groups must necessarily work by means of coalitions in order to slow down the government's deregulatory push for corporate mergers that effectively delimit the diversity – not variety – of television programming.<sup>12</sup>

More significantly, as liberal governance continually forces these media advocates to respond to deregulatory policies, these groups end up devoting few resources to developing alternative proposals for reform (McChesney & Nichols 2002, p. 16). Nevertheless, cultural policy studies must not rush to create new policy proposals. Such a move would undercut Foucault's insight that an intellectual's work is not 'to propose', because '[a]s soon as one "proposes", one proposes a vocabulary, an ideology, which can only have effects of domination' (1988, p. 174). Instead, Foucault argues that intellectuals help to create new possibilities only when they present 'instruments and tools that people might find useful' (1988, p. 174). Currently, policy work such as the Tomas Rivera Policy Institute report (Pachon *et al.* 2000) discussed earlier merely cites statistics to show the lack of minorities in the television industry. However, liberal governance ensures that this work no longer provides an effective tool for media advocates. Instead, policy analyses must continually analyse the structures within which new policies can be advanced and negotiated. Policy studies must work to interrogate the ways in which contemporary media advocacy appears to

undercut media reform as it normalizes the citizen-consumer model. This scholarship must unpack these political and economic rationales and find means by which media reformers might effectively denaturalize this model. The charge for cultural policy studies scholars, then, becomes one for developing conceptual tools that allow people to envision alternative practices of citizenship that respond to the demands of liberalism while they also push for a more equal use of media technologies and cultural resources.

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## Notes

- 1 In her written opinion in the *TV 9, Inc. v. FCC* appellate case, Senior Circuit Judge Fahy maintained that minority representation among a potential ownership group cannot be excluded from favourable consideration during a license hearing because, she concludes, '[b]lack persons having substantial identification with minority rights' may be able to translate 'their ownership stake into meaningful effects on this aspect of station programming' (1974). Circuit Judge Spottswood W. Robinson III nuanced Fahy's ruling in *Garrett v. FCC*, contending that credit awarded for part ownership by minorities in management groups is not the same as 'credit based on broader community representation attributed to black ownership and participation' (1975).
- 2 For a more extended account of this protest, see Noriega (2000, pp. 150–152).
- 3 Brown argues that scholars responding to Fowler and Brenner's vision of broadcasting regulation by and large have ignored the final fifth of this article. In this section, Fowler and Brenner acknowledge that the marketplace approach alone 'would *not* supply the optimum broadcasting service' because 'some types of programming would find it hard to survive in that environment leaving several groups in society without access to programmes designed to serve their needs and interests' (Brown 1994, p. 257). To account for this situation, Fowler and Brenner underscored the need for the public broadcasting system as a 'merit good' that carries 'a social value beyond market efficiency' (Fowler and Brenner 1982, p. 252). Of this vision Brown remarks, 'It is particularly unfortunate that this part of the Fowler and Brenner article should have been given so little attention by the academy since it is based on a view of broadcasting that is more compatible with much of recent mass



media scholarship'. Later in his article, Brown argues for the significance of this qualification because he sees Fowler and Brenner asking 'whether citizens have a right of access to information, ideas, and entertainment specific to their needs and interests even if the marketplace would rather ignore them' (1994, p. 258, p. 261). I agree with Oullette's contention, however, that the view espoused by Fowler and Brenner effectively works to bolster the marketplace model rather than carve out a genuinely alternative non-commercial programming. Specifically, Oullette draws upon Willard Rowland's argument that the impetus behind the push for public television was 'not to rethink the private commercial foundations of US broadcasting but, rather, to maintain the legitimacy of that system by resolving its apparent "weaknesses and contradictions"' (Oullette 2002, p. 50).

- 4 Brown contends that '[t]here were few instances where [Fowler] acknowledged that the market was anything less than infallible' (1994, p. 259). Indeed, Brown cites a 1981 speech that Fowler delivered to a group of telephone industry executives in which the FCC chairman explained that instances 'where markets do not work the way that we would prefer' should be attributed not to 'shortcomings in the theory' but instead to 'too much government tinkering' (Fowler 1981, p. 2; quoted in Brown 1994, p. 259).
- 5 Indeed, Noriega explains that 75 percent of all new series – not just minority-themed ones – get cancelled after one season (2002b, p. 4).
- 6 According to Noriega, any shift in programming relative to the increasing Latino population has not occurred. While the Latino population increases both in real numbers and as a percentage within the US population, the figures for Latino portrayal and employment remain stagnant (at about two percent). Thus, Noriega explains, both employment opportunity and equitable representation decreased by about 50 percent between 1970 and 1990 (2002b, p. 1).
- 7 I use 'valuable' here to refer to either one of two types of audiences: numerically large audiences or smaller, high-income demographics.
- 8 My use of 'Hispanic' here follows from the demographic labelling employed by census figures and business demographic research. For a critique of this terminology, see Flores (2000, pp. 147–154).

Rodriguez explains that Univision's critique of standard Nielsen audience measurement techniques 'revealed the inherent fluidity and cultural biases of objective methodology' (1999, p. 52). Specifically, the Nielsen Company relied on Census bureau data to identify Hispanic residences, although the bureau itself acknowledges that this data undercounts Hispanics (Rodriguez 1999, pp. 52–53). Additionally, Univision criticized both the Nielsen survey's use of largely English monolingual enumerators to approach potential Hispanic households as well as the standard eight-button peplemeter device, which, Rodriguez explains, was not suitable for many multifamily Hispanic households that occupy the same residential unit. In the Hispanic Nielsen Pilot Survey in the spring of 1990, the AC Nielsen Company conducted its own census of Hispanic residences, sent bilingual enumerators to homes to explain

- the importance of the Nielsen ratings, and doubled the number of buttons on the Hispanic peplemeter (Rodriguez 1999, p. 53).
- 9 According to Rodriguez, this national figure is based on a study of Los Angeles that was then replicated in 13 markets with similar results (1999, p. 53).
  - 10 For a thorough articulation of the political, economic, social and cultural differences among the various ethnic communities that constitute the Latino demographic, see Gonzalez (2000).
  - 11 Total viewer statistics remain unavailable for the show, however. In her article, Zook explains that a spokesperson for Showtime informed her that it is network policy not to give out its ratings (2001, p. C1). Jackson writes in *Hispanic* that on most weeks during the show's first season, *Resurrection Boulevard* drew less than a tenth of the number of viewers tuned into the Home Box Office hit *The Sopranos* (2001, p. 41).
  - 12 According to Grossberg, variety refers to materials that are superficially, but not basically, different. Meanwhile, diversity suggests 'fundamental difference' (1998, pp. 386–389).

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