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SPANISH-LANGUAGE BROADCASTERS: TOP RATINGS, SECOND-CLASS STATUS

by

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Over the last ten years, the market for Spanish-language media in the U.S. has grown at a remarkable rate. Fueled by rapid increases in the nation's Latino population, this industry's growth is marked by increased revenues and market control. Univision—the giant Spanish-language network that controls 80% of the Latino television market in the U.S.—has become the fifth-largest television network in the nation, while the Spanish-language network Telemundo represents the nation's fastest-growing television network of any type.¹ Furthermore, in the year 2000, \$1.2 billion was spent on Spanish-language television advertising alone, with another \$557 million spent on radio.²

The Los Angeles metropolitan area most strikingly reflects this growth and serves as the nation's leader in terms of media market size. Los Angeles boasts the largest Spanish-speaking population in the U.S.,³ with nearly half of its residents claiming Latin American descent. Consequently, nearly two-dozen major radio and television stations are devoted exclusively to its Spanish-language market and two of the six highest-rated radio stations in the city—KSCA-FM and KLVE-FM—broadcast in Spanish.⁴

While this exponential growth in the Spanish-language media market has made headlines in recent years, little is known about the people who work in this industry or their conditions. This brief draws from the first independent, scientific study of such workers and their working conditions within the Spanish-language broadcasting industry, providing a case study of Los Angeles.⁵

The study reveals a dramatic disparity between Spanish-speaking broadcasters and their English-language counterparts, particularly in terms of income, benefits, working conditions, and union representation. While Spanish-speaking broadcasters are an essential part of the industry's growth and provide the immediate interface between the industry and the Latino community, employers have been slow to recognize and reward their role as community assets.

THE BROADCASTERS

The Spanish-language broadcasting industry is staffed by a diverse group of workers. Within this work force are both distinguished senior broadcasters—celebrities who function as important icons in Los Angeles and across the nation—and less well-known junior broadcasters. Consistent with the technical expertise required in this industry, the Latino-broadcasting population is well educated and highly skilled. Of the respondents, 93% have formal industry-related training, nearly half have completed one to four years of education beyond high school (44%), and an additional third hold bachelor's degrees (35%).

Dedicated to their profession, many of the Latino broadcasters surveyed immigrated to the U.S. specifically to pursue their career and to provide better opportunities for their families. Of those surveyed, 85% were born outside of the U.S.; of those 85%, more than half were born in Mexico (59%) (see fig. 1).

WORKING CONDITIONS IN THE BROADCASTING INDUSTRY

Importantly, the interviews reveal that 86% of the respondents are dissatisfied with employment conditions. Non-standardized hiring practices, the lack of job security, low pay, and limited benefits all contribute to the interviewees' discontent. In addition, 86% of female broadcasters report being sexually harassed in the workplace, and an equal percentage of male broadcasters express awareness of discrimination against women in the industry. Over half of the respondents report working without an individual employment contract; 25% of those who have worked overtime report receiving no overtime pay; and finally, 30% of those interviewed have been fired at some point in their careers without explanation.

Unionization: Of all Spanish-language broadcast media in Los Angeles, only two are unionized (KMEX-TV and Metro Network, which contracts with stations). This stands in sharp contrast to the English-language television stations in Los Angeles, all of which are unionized.

Income: Disparities between the largely unionized English-language broadcasting industry and their non-unionized Spanish-speaking counterparts are most significant around income. On average, Spanish-language television broadcasters earn 70% less than those at English-language stations. (see fig. 2) The median salary for on-air talent at English-speaking stations is approximately \$200,000 for television broadcasters and \$90,000 for radio broadcasters. In comparison, Spanish-language broadcasters' median incomes averaged \$60,001 for television and \$41,000 for radio.⁶

That this difference is due to lack of unionization is suggested by the higher wages and better benefits at the small number of Spanish-language stations that have implemented unionization. The median income of a unionized Spanish-language broadcaster (\$80,001) is almost double that of a non-unionized Spanish-language broadcaster (\$43,846) (see fig. 3). Still, although unionized salaries are higher than non-unionized salaries within the Spanish-language industry, the higher salaries remain remarkably low when juxtaposed with English-language station-workers' median salaries.

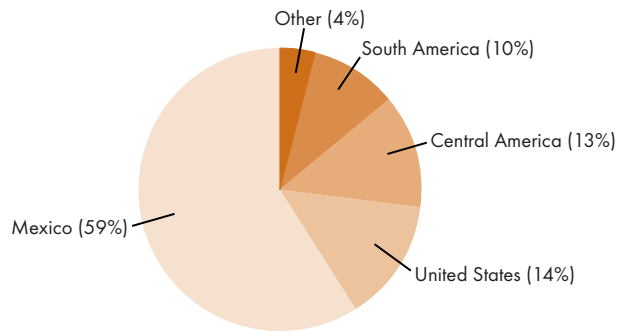


Fig. 1. Country of Origin among Spanish-Speaking Broadcasters.
Source: Spanish Broadcasting Survey, UCLA Center for the Study of Urban Poverty, 2001.

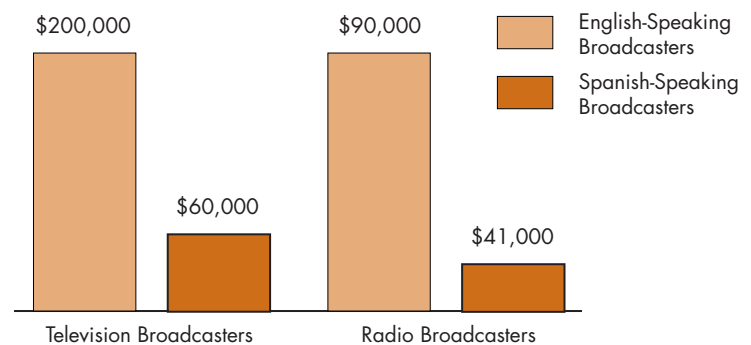


Fig. 2. Median Annual Earnings among English-Speaking and Spanish-Speaking Broadcasters by Media.
Source: Spanish Broadcasting Survey, UCLA Center for the Study of Urban Poverty, 2001.

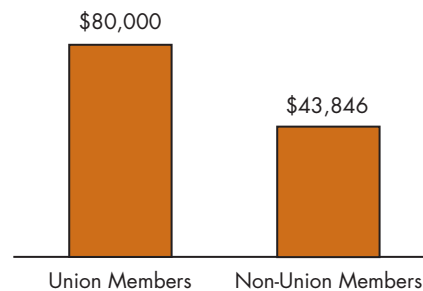


Fig. 3. Median Annual Earnings among Spanish-Speaking Broadcasters by Unionization.
Source: Spanish Broadcasting Survey, UCLA Center for the Study of Urban Poverty, 2001.

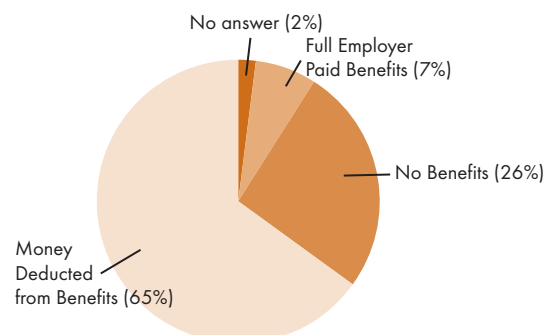


Fig. 4. Health Benefits among Spanish-Speaking Broadcasters.
Source: Spanish Broadcasting Survey, UCLA Center for the Study of Urban Poverty, 2001.

Health & Retirement Benefits: The implications of a non-unionized industry are also reflected in the limited health and retirement benefits offered to Spanish-language employees. In the English-language industry, health benefits are considerably more generous. Our analysis of the Spanish-language industry reveals that workers are only eligible for health benefits if they work full-time and nearly two-thirds of those receiving benefits must pay for a portion of the cost (see fig. 4). In contrast, in the English-language industry, the employer-paid AFTRA Health Fund covers all full-time employees and many part-time workers.

The retirement benefits for English-language broadcasters also sharply contrast with their Spanish-language counterparts. Most of those Spanish-language broadcasters eligible for retirement benefits participate only in 401K plans. Of those who received 401K benefits, 65% reported receiving some matching funds from their employers. In the English-language industry, unionized workers are eligible to receive a pension in a “defined benefit plan” that is fully paid by the employers. No such pension plan exists in the Spanish-language industry outside of KMEX and Metro Network, both of which are unionized.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite increasing demand for Spanish-language broadcasting and the rise of industry profits, Spanish-speaking broadcasters continue to receive lower pay than their English-speaking counterparts and minimal benefit packages. Policy recommendations that address these concerns include:

- Increase pay to levels comparable to those at English-language stations.
- Encourage contractual arrangements with freelance and part-time workers.
- Improve employment benefits, particularly those related to health and retirement.
- Encourage stronger enforcement of anti-discrimination and anti-harassment laws.
- Increase unionization of Spanish-language stations.
- Support additional study of the industry nationwide, in particular in other cities with significant Spanish-speaking populations.

NOTES

1. *U.S. News & World Report*, June 4, 2001.
2. *U.S. News & World Report*, June 4, 2001.
3. U.S. Bureau of the Census. See <http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/2001/sumfile2.html>
4. *Broadcasting & Cable*, May 14, 2001.
5. Study based upon a non-random survey of 114 Spanish-language on-air broadcasters and 14 in-depth interviews with Spanish-language on-air broadcasters conducted in spring 2001.
6. Information about the Spanish-language industry was obtained in the phone survey while the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA) provided information about the English-language market.

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SOURCE

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Despite increased ratings, Spanish-language broadcasters receive less compensation than English-language counterparts.

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