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Face of prime time TV is still white

By ASSOCIATED PRESS

Prime time television remains overwhelmingly white both in front of and behind the camera, actors, writers and academics told a U.S. Civil Rights Commission hearing.

The findings of the commission's critical 1977 report on TV and minorities, "Window Dressing on the Set," hold true today, said Chon Noriega, an assistant professor at UCLA's School of Theater, Film & Television.

CBS Entertainment president Jeffrey Sagansky and ABC Prods. president Brandon Stoddard disagreed. Progress has been made for blacks, but not for Hispanics, they acknowledged Thursday.

Sagansky told the panel, "One area where I think we have done immensely well is in getting rid of the negative stereotyping of minorities. It has improved a lot."

Reports released this week by the Screen Actors Guild and the Writers Guild of America West found minorities and women are underrepresented on the screen and among writers.

"If you look at these two reports you could see some minuscule advances, but over time, especially for Latinos, with the static nature of the numbers there has actually been a regression," said Earl Saunders, former WGAW human resources director.

Blacks tend to be cast in one-dimensional roles, said actress Marla Gibbs.

"We are more or less told who we are, rather than asked," she said. "We sing, we dance, we tell jokes -- that's all we are allowed to do, to entertain."

"You will not see Latinos or an abundance of people of color, just as you will not see that Jesus Christ was not blond-haired and blue-eyed," said actor Edward James Olmos.

Thursday's testimony concluded three days of hearings in Los Angeles on racial tensions.

Witnesses testified that news organizations increased those tensions with inflammatory and insensitive reporting that stems in part from the lack of minorities in the newsroom. Most minority community coverage consists of negative news, they said.

"During the riots, Koreans were targeted for destruction. I think this was due to the irresponsible and inaccurate coverage" of the 1991 killing of Latasha Harlins, a black teen, by Korean grocer Soon Ja Du, said Kapson Yim Lee, senior editor of the English edition of the Korean Times.



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need to report the news. The problem is what they have
s the news," said Sandra Evers-Manly, president of the
ational Assn. for the Advancement of Colored People.

d that some of the criticism was valid.

Jose Rios, news director for KTTV Channel 11, said news organizations "don't do enough to
accentuate the positive."

Joseph Dyer, director of community affairs for KCBS Channel 2, said more minority reporters need
to be hired.

Contact the Variety newsroom at news@variety.com

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