



# Progreso Latino Fund Third Forum

Latinos  
in the Media:

Building capacity  
to influence  
the news in all  
its aspects

The  
Community  
Foundation  
for  
Greater  
New Haven



Progreso Latino Fund Forum

**Latinos in the Media**

*Building Capacity to Influence the News in All its Aspects*

June 29, 2005

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The Progreso Latino Fund was created as an opportunity to educate, inform and influence The Foundation on the many ways philanthropy can impact the Latino community. Advised by a steering committee, Progreso Latino is a preference fund that has the potential to become a significant source of income to address the pressing issues of the times for Latinos today and into the future: educational equity, economic security, health disparities, cultural identity, etc.

As a donor to Progreso Latino, you join others in creating a unique mechanism that will have a long lasting impact on our community.

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## Latinos in the Media

One of the indicators of political sophistication among any community is how well it influences the media. Whether it is by regular dialogue with newsroom staff, or leveraging the influence of advertising dollars, Latino community leaders are challenged to maintain a vigilant posture toward media executives to ensure balanced coverage and portrayal of our community. Despite the growth of the Latino community in the United States, Latinos have entered the twenty-first century with lower levels of media representation than when protests first raised the issue in the 1960s. Latinos are the most underrepresented of all minority groups in film and television. Although the U.S. Latino community has doubled since 1970, media employment for Latinos has declined by nearly two-thirds. This, even though the commercial film and television industry is located in cities where Latinos make up almost 50 percent of the population.

This monograph is part of a continuing series of Forums sponsored by the Progreso Latino Fund at The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven. The Fund, which was established to promote the educational and socio-economic well being of Latinos in the City of New Haven and the region, uses the Forums as learning tools to promote discussion about issues as they uniquely affect Latinos.

This publication consists of two parts. Section one documents our third Forum held on June 29, 2005, “Latinos in the Media, Building Capacity to Influence the News in all its Aspects”. Our panelists brought a local, regional, and national perspective on people, organizations, institutions, and events that illustrate the growth of Latinos in various communication arenas in the United States. They also challenged us all to consider how Latinos can exert influence over the media, from meeting with editorial boards to owning radio stations. Section two highlights local leaders who work to influence the media in a number of different ways. These individuals publish community newspapers, own radio stations, promote ways for mainstream businesses to better market to Latinos, and build connections among Latinos themselves through the power of social networking. Learn about their work and challenges.

We hope you continue to enjoy our publications and that you use them to connect friends, family members and neighbors to the issues. Our heartfelt thanks to the many who contribute to our success – we look forward to meeting you at a future Progreso Latino Fund Forum!

*Juan Figueroa and John Padilla*  
*Co-Chairs*  
*“Latinos in the Media”*  
*June 2005*

**Forum Participants**

*A native of Ciales, Puerto Rico, **Juan A. Figueroa** has enjoyed a successful record of championing civil rights in the legislative arena, state government, the nonprofit sector, and as president of the Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut (formerly the Anthem Foundation of Connecticut). From 1993, until he joined the Foundation in January 2003, Juan Figueroa was president and general counsel of the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund in New York City (PRLDEF). Prior to his work at PRLDEF, he served as a Connecticut state representative from the Third District in Hartford, and as an assistant attorney general.*

*In addition, he worked as a staff attorney for the Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities. During the Clinton Administration, he worked with the President and his top advisers on affirmative action, welfare, judicial appointments, and other issues relevant to Latinos.*

***David Medina**, a veteran journalist born in New York City, began his career as a reporter for the Rochester Democrat & Chronicle in Rochester, N.Y., and later moved to the New York Daily News, where for 14 years he covered politics and wrote opinion pieces. During that time, he also wrote a column called "Dateline New York" for the San Juan Star in Puerto Rico. David has also been the assignment editor for the Bergen Record in New Jersey and assistant city editor of the Miami News from 1986 until '89, when it ceased production.*

*Today, David writes editorials for The Hartford Courant — a position he has held for the past seven years. The primary focus of his editorials is the city of Hartford, its inner ring suburbs and the Farmington Valley.*



Juan A. Figueroa



David Medina

***Diane Alverio** is president of Alverio & Company and a former journalist for the local CBS affiliate in Hartford. She has co-authored seven studies on Latinos and network news programs in the U.S., published articles in local and national publications, and been quoted as a media analyst on Latino issues in the New York Times, Washington Post and USA Today. She has also traveled throughout the U.S., Central America and the Caribbean, winning numerous awards for documentaries, news coverage and promotional ads. For two consecutive years, Diane has been named one of the "100 Most Influential Hispanics in the U.S." by Hispanic Business Magazine.*

***Iván Román** has been the executive director of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists (NAHJ) since September 2003. He oversees its many educational and professional development programs, and its growing advocacy efforts aimed at getting more Latinos into newsrooms across the country and fighting for more fair and balanced coverage of the nation's Latinos.*

*Prior to his work at NAHJ, Iván worked as a professional journalist for nearly two decades. Most recently, he was the San Juan Bureau Chief for the Orlando Sentinel where he focused on the politics, business and civic life of Puerto Rico and other major stories in the Caribbean and Venezuela. During his reporting career, he also worked at the Rochester Times-Union, the San Juan Star, El Nuevo Herald, and the Miami Herald, covering Dominican, Nicaraguan, Puerto Rican, African American and other communities in addition to local government, gay and lesbian issues, and national Hispanic affairs. ■*



Diane Alverio



Iván Román

**JOHN PADILLA:** Good evening, everyone. Welcome to our third forum of the Progreso Latino Fund. My name is John Padilla, and along with Juan Figueroa, we will serve as your co-chairs for this evening's conversation.

I have to say from the outset that this is getting exciting. We're starting to see a lot of repeat attendees, which is great. We're also seeing some new faces. So, for those of you who are here for the first time, again, thank you for coming. For those of you who have come to either your second or third forum, thank you for coming back. For those of you who are new to the forums, the purpose of the Progreso Latino Fund is to promote the long-term educational and socio-economic well-being of Latinos in the Greater New Haven community. We intend to do this by building an endowment fund at The Community Foundation that will see to those interests over the long term. Initially, our goal is to build a fund of \$100,000 as the beginning of a legacy that will outlast all of us. And for those of us who are not familiar with the largest philanthropic entity in this region, we will use the Progreso Latino Fund to promote *el progreso y bienestar de la comunidad Latina* (the progress and well-being of the Latino community) on a very long-lasting basis here in Greater New Haven.

We'll also be making our first grants from the Fund over the next few months, and as we approach that, we will send out some information to local non-profits and civic groups that might have projects for the Fund to support. Today the Fund is advised by a steering committee, whose names are on the brochures that you may have picked up on the way in. In the future, it's our hope that some of you sitting in the audience tonight will join that steering committee and advise the Fund.

The forums — this venue of moderated discussion — are a way that we use to accomplish three objectives. First, it's one way of bringing together the rich talent that we have in our own community to educate Latinos and non-Latinos about the issues of the day as they uniquely affect Latinos. Second, these forums are also cultivation events to build philanthropy among Latinos and encourage them to contribute to the Fund. As we have said in previous events, while we did not start out fundraising at these events, our



purpose after all is to build an endowment — and that requires money. So, we use these forums as a way of educating people who have not had a relationship with The Foundation to learn about The Foundation, what it does, and what it can do if all of us become involved.

And speaking about issues of the day, I think most of you by now have probably picked up at least one of our publications. If you have not done so already, please do. And I think that once you read this one — about our last forum in March on Latino voting patterns in Connecticut — you'll clearly understand we have a problem in our state — of reaching the potential that our community has in terms of voting. So, I would ask you not only take one for yourself, take one for someone who is not here tonight. Give it to them. Ask them to read it, and then see what you can do to try to increase those numbers.

On behalf of the committee, I'd like to get us right to the event this evening. I would like to introduce on behalf of The Community Foundation, Laura Berry, senior vice president for Philanthropic Services, for some welcoming remarks.

**Laura Berry:** Thank you, John. I welcome you all on behalf of the Progreso Latino Fund. This is a Fund that is truly at the cutting edge of what The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven is about. It's a place where community leaders have come together to learn about issues that are important to our community, but that are important to communities that they are particularly passionate about. It's about coming together as leaders to build from assets and to build assets, to really start to address some of the things that will make this a stronger community. I think the leadership of the members of the Progreso Latino Steering Committee has made this enterprise an incredibly strong one. We're very proud to say that the funds raised are being matched one-to-one up to \$50,000 this year. We are also very proud to say that the growth of the Progreso Latino audience, and the funds that are growing together through this enterprise are growing every single week that passes. Thank you for your interest in this exciting work and we are delighted to see that all of you came through



the monsoon out there to be with us this evening. Now it's my great pleasure to introduce Juan Figueroa, whom, I think, almost everybody in the audience knows, but to do him justice, I just want to give you a few highlights of his bio.

He's a native of Ciales, Puerto Rico, and is currently the president of the Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut. Throughout his career, he has been an awesome champion for civil rights in just about every venue that he's worked. From 1993 to 2003, he was president and general counsel for the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund in New York City. But we are now lucky enough to have him back here in our community. So, it's with great pleasure that I introduce Juan.

**Juan Figueroa:** Thank you, Laura. Thank you very much. Good evening everyone. I'm here because I've been asked to moderate this discussion. It will be a discussion that is lively, informative and interactive, because we want to provide the space for you to be able to ask questions and enter into a dialogue. But my first task is to introduce this very distinguished panel and I'll start with my immediate left.

David Medina, editorial writer for the *Hartford Courant* is a veteran journalist born in New York City. He began his career as a reporter for the *Rochester Democrat & Chronicle* in Rochester, New York. He later moved to the *New York Daily News*, where for fourteen years he covered politics and wrote opinion pieces. During that time, he also wrote a column called "Dateline New York" for the *San Juan Star* in Puerto Rico. David has also been the assignment editor for the *Bergen Record* in New Jersey and assistant city editor of the *Miami News* from 1986 until '89 when it ceased production. Today David writes editorials for the *Hartford Courant*, a position he has held for the past seven years. The primary focus of his editorials is the City of Hartford, its inner ring suburbs and the Farmington Valley. You can count on one hand how many Latinos, Puerto Ricans specifically, write for editorial boards. Thank you very much, David, for joining us this evening.

To his left is Diane Alverio, known to many here in this room. Diane is president of Alverio &

Company. She has co-authored seven studies on Latinos and network news programs in the United States, published articles in local and national publications, and has been quoted as a media analyst on Latino issues in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and *USA Today*. She has also traveled throughout the United States, Central America and the Caribbean winning numerous awards for documentaries, news coverage and promotional ads. For two consecutive years, Diane has been named one of the one hundred most influential Hispanics in the United States by *Hispanic Business Magazine*. She was well known in Connecticut as a news anchor for WFSB TV, a CBS affiliate here in Connecticut. And she is the former chair of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists. And for those of us who have known Diane for many years, we've also known her to be an ardent advocate in whatever position she has had for the rights and what Latinos are all about in this state and in this country. Thank you, Diane, for joining us this evening.

Iván Román. Iván is to Diane's left and he is the executive director of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists (NAHJ), a position he has held since September 2003. The Association is located in Washington, D.C. Iván oversees many educational and professional programs and NAHJ's growing advocacy efforts aimed at getting more Latinos into newsrooms across the country and fighting for more fair and balanced coverage of the nation's Latinos. Prior to his work at the Association, Iván worked as a professional journalist for nearly two decades. Most recently, he was the San Juan bureau chief of the *Orlando Sentinel* where he focused on the politics, business and civic life of Puerto Ricans. During his reporting career, he also worked at the *Rochester Times-Union*, the *San Juan Star*, the *El Nuevo Herald* and the *Miami Herald*, covering Dominican, Nicaraguan, Puerto Rican, African American and other communities in addition to local government, gay and lesbian issues, and national Hispanic affairs. I also happen to know Iván from my days at PRLDEF when he covered the new Puerto Rican migration to the United States and to Orlando, Florida. Iván was one of the very few Puerto Rican or Latino journalists covering this migration.



I also had the privilege of knowing and talking to Iván while he was in Puerto Rico covering the Vieques battle. So, it's really an honor and a privilege to have you here, as well, Iván. Please give him a warm welcome.

So, we have, I think you will agree, a heavy duty set of folks here. And what I'd like to do is frame a little bit the discussion by making a couple of points. When we talk about media generally, there are lots of things that media is all about. It's news. But it's also the Internet, it's corporate communications, it's marketing. It is a pretty wide-ranging field. Tonight, we're going to concentrate more on the news side, in part because of the expertise that these panelists bring to the table. But it won't be exclusively about the news. The second point I want to make is look, ultimately, we want to get you fired up. And when we have these kinds of folks who have been around the block and fighting for these kinds of issues, I do think you're going to come out fired up tonight. Because ultimately, what we want to do is be able to do this in a way so that you can translate this into your own life and say, oh, I can do this in relation to this issue. That's part of what we want to achieve tonight.

A good place to start is the future — What does the future look like for us? Panelists, imagine yourselves just being named executive producer, managing editor of your newspaper, your TV station, and you've been brought in with a change agenda. Your reputation as a fighter for quality is right up there. You are the first Latino to hold that position. You are going to your very first staff meeting. How would you introduce yourself and what would be the first order of business that you may want to impart on your new staff? Diane, you're a take-charge person — what do you think? How would you address your very first staff meeting?

**DIANE ALVERIO:** You know, I haven't been a journalist for a while, but I have such vivid memories of all the good and sometimes horrendous experiences that I had in the newsrooms that it's easy for me to jump right back in. When you're a journalist, you're there to do a job. You're there to cover the communities. And I always viewed myself as a journalist who

happened to be Latina. And to me, that was an added bonus, an added skill that I brought to the table. I really feel very strongly about that. If I found myself in that position years from now, I would still consider myself a journalist in a management position who would have a great deal of responsibility to determine what our viewers or our readers would be seeing. I would be the gatekeeper of that information. So I think what I would bring to the table is not just, okay, I'm in charge now, but more about education and bringing a totally different perspective to the conversation of how to cover that business story, or how to cover the jobs — whatever insurance company is laying off five thousand people that year — that sort of story. In addition, I would want to insure that the people in the room, who were going to cover the news, and the people who were going to be the support staff were diverse and reflected that community they are covering.

**FIGUEROA:** Very good. David.

**DAVID MEDINA:** I'm glad you gave me all that time to think about it. I would walk in and the first thing I would say is, yes, I'm David Medina, and I'm in charge! And this is not a democracy! That's the first thing I would say. I've been in newsrooms all my life — I'm going on over thirty years as a journalist and I have held supervisory and managerial positions in papers, as well as supervised journalists. I guess the one thing that I would focus on is a return to the basics of journalism, of what we're really supposed to do — get the facts, get the story, don't inject your opinion in the news. Unfortunately, there is too much of that going on now. Journalists are often guilty of blurring the lines between opinion and fact. That's why — the Supreme Court the other day just ruled against these two journalists and they were going to end up going to jail. There have been a lot of cases, as we know, of journalists who have fabricated information. In fact, I was looking at the Pointer Institute website the other day, and it's not just the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post* that have these problems. It's going on all over the country. So, the first thing that I would impose is a return to what



you're really supposed to do. Because you not only have a blurring of the lines where people inject their own opinion, but you have a predominance of people who are not of color, who are not Latinos running the business. So, you're going to get a very skewed perspective in the news. Once you impose that kind of discipline, in my opinion, the real journalists, the real gun slingers, the ones who don't use anonymous sources, those who can get a story without using anonymous sources and are good at it — and there are people like that — the good people will rise to the top. And the bad ones will fall by the wayside. There was a time — when I started out — that you were considered a wimp if you used an anonymous source. If you couldn't get it on the record — if you couldn't get somebody to empty their pockets, you were no good. That would be the first thing I would do, and if someone cannot meet those new expectations, then they would be out of the business.

**FIGUEROA:** Now David's in charge! Iván, what about you?

**IVÁN ROMÁN:** I would say also, Hi, I'm Iván Román, and I'm in charge, but the way I would say it is I would rip out some pages from the previous day's paper, and I'd show them what they could have done differently if they wanted to be truly good journalists covering the community. As David knows, there's really no time for reporters and editors to talk. They have no time to talk outside of the deadline, outside of how you develop a story, how you should cover a community, et cetera, et cetera. I would basically do what we call a content audit, and I would say is this is a new day. We are going to take time to talk and review what we are doing. How we build it into the system is one thing, but we're going to take the time. No longer are we going to just run and do everything the way everybody else does it, or the way it's been done up until now. We're going to educate people the way Diane is talking about. And the most important thing is sending a signal, a very clear signal, that what I bring to the table as a black Puerto Rican journalist is just as valuable as the white journalist who covers City Hall brings to the table. Because, that has precisely

been the problem forever in newsrooms. Under the cloak of objectivity, basically what we perpetuate is a white man's point of view of the news. And my perspective of the news is not valued. Diane's was not valued. David's, depending on what position he's in, could be more or less valued, and it really depends on the newsroom you're in and who your supervisor is. So, to me, the important thing is to show that my experience is just as valuable as yours, because newsrooms these days cannot be covering the news in an institutional manner. This country is going through a demographic shift that makes the demographics more important than anything else. Okay, how many people saw Bush's speech last night? Bush's speech is important, but when your news coverage is limited to that, that is where you lose most of the other stories of what is happening in this country today. So, that is one of the main signals that I would send — make sure that we value everybody's perspectives and integrate them into how we cover the news so we change newsroom culture. Because newsroom culture in this country, unfortunately, has driven many of our people out of the newsroom. They're frustrated because they can't do work that to them is meaningful because it's not valued. We have to change that, and that's the message I would send the first day on the job.



**FIGUEROA:** Great introductory statements, opening statements for all three. So, let's take a minute now to just paint a vision. Just a brief thing for ourselves and for the audience, just paint a vision of what does media look like ten, fifteen years from now, and how do Latinos fit in. How would you describe that vision to folks who are interested in sort of moving that kind of agenda? David.

**MEDINA:** Oh, ten years from now? Ten years from now I hope and expect that a sizeable number of the managers in the newsroom will be people with Hispanic surnames. I expect that a large chunk of the reporting staff will be with Hispanic surnames. What else do I expect? I expect that the editorial slant on some of the papers — particularly because I'm just a straight newspaper man — is a slant that reflects the overall values and perspective of the general commu-

nity. And I think that given the demographic changes that Iván mentioned, that's perfectly doable. And it's happening in some communities already in the United States. Iván and I worked in Miami at the same time. He was working for the *Miami Herald*, I was working for the *Miami News*. And you saw that happen with the Cuban community in Miami and the changes that even the *Miami Herald* had to go through to adjust to that community. And that community, to their credit, they were always in your face. Talk about squeaking wheels — man, they were there up your butt all the time with complaints, reading every single word in the paper, and if they didn't like it, they'd let you hear about it. And after a while, these Gringo managers had to listen. Little by little the Cuban community changed the mindset of the paper — to the point that they didn't dare not cover something that was going on in the Cuban community. And even when something mainstream would come up, the first question within the paper was, how do you think that's going to fly in the Cuban community? That's where they had them. They had them up against the wall. That was good. And I'm saying that the demographic changes that are taking place in this country right now will repeat that scenario in other communities. So, that's what I expect to see.

**FIGUEROA:** By the way, I think today or yesterday was the fifth anniversary of Elian Gonzalez, so we're well aware of how a community can impact both policy, media, politics and the whole thing. Iván, what would you add?

**ROMÁN:** I see an increasingly fragmented media where circulation of major dailies is actually decreasing. More and more people are consuming news on line. More and more people are using a combination of Spanish language television, English language television, Spanish print, English print, the community paper, sort of a little bit of everything depending on their youth, on their age, on their interests. And that creates a lot of competition for people in general media who are looking for more audience. We see that happening already with these American companies that are starting Spanish language dailies,

Spanish weeklies, because everybody's doing it and they're trying to get into the community, but they really don't know what they're doing. And what they do end up doing is they limit it to that publication and then they forget about the fact that in the main newspaper, this English language daily, they have to cover the Latino community. We've seen it over and over again. We saw it in Dallas. We saw it in Orlando. We see it in Chicago. We see it everywhere. And that is something that we have to guard against.

**FIGUEROA:** David has something.

**MEDINA:** I want to piggyback on that because I have a theory about why that occurs. The general media, the media companies, particularly in print, are basically run by white males. And their mindset right now, which is why you're seeing what you're seeing, is that they're investing — I had a discussion about this with the publisher of one of the papers that's in the Tribune chain, the *Fort Lauderdale Sentinel* — they're investing all their money into trying to capture a population, a non-Latino population that's now moving up into Palm Beach County. And they're going into this big circulation war with them. And they're totally ignoring new readers from the immigrant community that's moving into Fort Lauderdale — they're not putting any resources into cultivating that population. And that same pattern is being repeated in newspapers all over the country. The *Miami Herald* went through it the time that we were there. And then they have since changed their ways. But that's what's happening even here. They put all their money in — never realizing, never really thinking, adjusting — if you can't adjust to change, you won't survive. These newspapers repeatedly go after a population that (a) is getting older and dying, and (b) once they move into new suburban areas, they adopt the paper of the area they move into. They're going to sever their ties with you, because they've moved up and they want a newspaper that reflects their new status. And the people who run newspapers today don't get that. I worked for the *New York Daily News* for fifteen years, and I was there during a period when there was a huge demographic change going on in New York City. And

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what did they do, they invested all their money in going after the ethnic whites that have moved into the suburbs. They had a Long Island Bureau, Westchester Bureau, New Jersey, and they put all sorts of big, huge reporting staffs in these areas. And it didn't work, because they didn't want to read that paper anymore. They left the area. And it was only when they saw circulation figures drop, as Iván pointed out, that they said, gee, maybe we should change our tactics!

**ROMÁN:** What I would like to see in ten years, and I think we can see, if we do our job right, is to have a community that's more critical and smarter about how they consume media, so that we can then command the respect that we deserve among people who do media and produce media in the country. Also, to have a staff in general, no matter who you are — if you're White, African-American, or if you're Latino, whoever you are — that's better changed to cover Latinos, or cover any community. Basically, I spent twenty years covering people of color. And my first job in Rochester, New York, actually, they called it — what did they call it? They called it the Minority Affairs desk — this is back in 1983. But really what it was, it was anybody who was out of the mainstream. It was the gay and lesbian movement; it was the Food for Peace people; or it was the sanctuary movement. Everything that was not sort of like the traditional thing, because back then papers were still struggling, well, how do we cover these people who don't fall into our boxes. They don't fall into the boxes we created. Those boxes little by little have been shattering, and reporters, no matter who you are, need to cover that. I mean, I learned how to cover it. So, everybody needs to cover it. So, in ten years, I would like to see a staff that's better trained to cover everyone, no matter who you are, and our Latino community that is more critical and smarter about how they consume media.

**ALVERIO:** I just wanted to emphasize something that Iván said earlier. As we look forward ten years, we must begin to understand the changes occurring around us, and not only the demographic change, but in terms of how we receive information in today's

world and through what communication vehicles. For example, look at where our young people are getting a lot of their information from — it is on-line. Yet, Latinos are barely moving into this area — there have been some attempts here and there, some websites, some ISPs and all of that. Some have succeeded, some haven't. But that's a whole new arena for us that we need to incorporate into our master plan.

**FIGUEROA:** Diane, let me follow up with that by asking you sort of a basic question. Why even have this discussion on media? Why should we have a vision about this?

**ALVERIO:** I wish somebody asked me that when I was the only Latina in all those newsrooms! I was the only one Latina in there and I saw how decisions were made — and who was making them. It was scary — it was really scary. I worked in the West Coast, in Texas, and here in the Northeast as well. And not just on Latino issues. One of my favorite stories that I've told over and over again — it was a few years before I left — was in a newsroom where a group of young producers were meeting. These were young girls who had gone to journalism school. They were inexpensive to hire — nothing against them — but they were brought in without any kind of experience. This incident happened during the OJ trial. The news director's office was all glass, and there was a production meeting going on. The producers were determining what we were going to cover and how we were going to cover it. And I want to tell you, there was one male in there, along with seven white women. And they were all talking about how black men in America felt about the OJ trial! — and they were serious! I remember that I stopped and thought to myself — oh my God, they think they know what they're talking about; maybe they read a book or something. So, Juan, when you ask me, "Why is it important?", it is important because the media is part of the equation and too often we think of it as an afterthought. There are so many other social issues, and rightly so, that impact our communities that influencing the media gets lost. We have to worry about educating our children. We have to worry about jobs. We have to

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**"... because how we are perceived, and subsequently, how we are treated, is based largely on information people receive about us through the media."**

worry about our homes and all these other issues. So, we're not thinking about this component, this part of the equation. That has really hurt us, because how we are perceived, and subsequently, how we are treated, is based largely on information people receive about us through the media. Let me ask, "Do you all have opinions on Iraq, what's going on there and other parts of the world? How many people have been there?" How did you form those opinions? From the information you're receiving right? And people are forming opinions about us through information they're receiving through the media. That's why it's so important.

**ROMÁN:** And they're only receiving information about Iraq, and maybe about immigration. Our big problem right now is — our latest study — the Network- Brown Out Report of 2005, which started actually under Diane's leadership with NAHJ's back in 1996 — our latest study of the network news, shows that portrayal of Latinos in network news in 2004 was less than 1 percent of the 16,000 stories on the air are about Latinos. And of that, less than 1 percent — we're talking .72 percent — nearly half of those stories were about immigration, and the other half was about crime.

**ALVERIO:** Welfare?

**FIGUEROA:** — No, it wasn't welfare this year. The categories have narrowed to immigration, crime and terrorism. Two years ago, when we had Jose Padilla, it was basically about terrorism, crime and immigration.

**ALVERIO:** Let me just take it to a local level. I was still in news at Channel 3. I live in New Britain; grew up in New Britain; still live in New Britain. It's my home. And I remember picking up a newspaper one day, and the Zoning Board had voted down the opening of a Pentecostal Church. The reason given by the Zoning Board — and it was in the newspaper — was that they were worried about increased crime in the area. Clearly the people on the Zoning Board form these perceptions of us from the media, so even at the local level we have to respond to these distortions of our community.

**FIGUEROA:** David, I wanted to ask you a related question. What do you see as the role of the Spanish weekly newspapers and the Latino press in these weeklies as we think about changing these images and moving the issue forward?

**MEDINA:** If I may, I would like to finish the point that was made in the previous question, which was why we as a community should bother with this. Well, the reason we should bother with this is because, in a nutshell, perception is reality. Perception builds influence and that leads to power. I like to tell the story that speaks to this issue — I was working for a paper in New Jersey called the *Bergin Record*. And one year — I think it was my first year there — they asked me to do a pull-out section on Hispanic Heritage Month. It was up to me to do whatever I wanted. So, I decided to do profiles of some of the Hispanic movers and shakers in New Jersey, names that you probably never heard of. One of the people that I chose was Jose Unanue. Does anyone know who Jose Unanue is? He is the head of Goya foods. And he lives in New Jersey. He grew up in Brooklyn and New Jersey and he married a nice Puerto Rican girl and raised his family there. Their home town was right across the river from the newspaper that I worked for, and it turned out that he was like the seventh or eighth richest man in the state. And I had a very extensive piece on him — just to show the editors at the newspaper and to break their stereotypes of Hispanics. After the section comes out — unbeknownst to me — someone from the advertising department approaches Mr. Unanue about buying ads in the paper. I found out about this later. To his credit, he said to the salesperson that he was not going to advertise in the *Bergin Record* because it did not address the people that bought his beans. Those were his exact words, “You don’t deal with the people that buy my beans. When you deal with the people that buy my beans, then I will advertise in your paper”. That’s a true story. So, if you control the perception, you can leverage it to do anything. You can leverage it to get Goya to buy ads in your paper!

**FIGUEROA:** But it also speaks, David, to the intersection of big time business and the world of news and journalism.

**“The small independent newspapers are very, very important because they’re an alternative source of news and they should be supported— I really believe that.”**

**MEDINA:** Yes. Especially now that we’re among the biggest consumers. Now I’ll segue into the question about small weeklies and the Latino press. Why do you think that a lot of major media, major newspapers, in particular, are all trying to put out Spanish language newspapers? Because for them, it’s a cheap hit! Latinos are not really welcome, we’re being kept at arm’s length from the mainstream, but at the same time these newspapers can say they’re meeting their “obligation”. And they’re doing it in a way that doesn’t cost them much. It’s cheaper for them to print a small Spanish-language weekly than to reorganize their mainstream staff to reflect the real people that are living in the communities they cover. The small independent newspapers are very, very important because they’re an alternative source of news and they should be supported — I really believe that. I think if they grow they can compete for advertising dollars. They could serve as an alternate source and create a lot of problems for the mainstream media.

**FIGUEROA:** We’re going to be able to get into more of this discussion in the question/answer period. But I see that the time for our first section is about done — time goes by when we’re having fun, as they say. I would like to ask the three of you to take a couple minutes for your final formal comments as part of the panel, to provide the audience with what you think are the major elements of a blueprint for action. If anyone here in this audience wants to get involved with this issue, wants to do something, what would be the major recommendations, based on your experience, be for that blueprint? David, can we start with you?

**MEDINA:** I’ll answer the question. I guess you’re asking what steps you should take right now? Well, first thing is understand how media functions. What the moving parts are and how they can work for you. If we don’t understand that, then we’ll be at their mercy all the time. If we do understand how something goes from an idea or a concept to actually getting into the paper, and what you have to maneuver to get in there, you’re at an advantage. The second thing I would suggest is that if you don’t want to take the trouble to do that, hire a professional to do it for you!

Hire Diane. She knows how it's done. But understand how the mechanism works and don't allow yourself to believe that you are at the mercy of media all the time; there are weaknesses that you can exploit, and you should. The second thing that I suggest is for our community to be in their face every second. The people who run the newspapers and television stations have not adjusted to us as a population yet, so we have to be after them constantly to get them to respond to us. That, unfortunately, is the position we are in. Eventually, that's going to change as the demographics change. The third is that we should not rely on one source for our information. We must patronize the small Spanish language papers because they are an alternate source of information. If we use different sources we'll get a varied perspective, if we rely on, let's say the *Hartford Courant*, we'll only get the *Hartford Courant's* perspective. And that will color our thinking. Get information from multiple sources and formulate your opinions accordingly. Those are the three things I would advocate for.

FIGUEROA: Thank you. That's great. Diane.

ALVERIO: Two quick things to reiterate what David said. Our community has to become much more sophisticated about how the media works. We think, well, there's not much to it — we'll call them or they call us. Believe me, there's a game here involved. I've been doing this for ten years. The skills I learned from working in the media for 18 years have enabled me to help people work with the media. There are definite skill sets that need to be learned. The second point I want to make, and this is to me the core of it, is the need for leadership. On a national level, NAHJ has been plugging away for 20 years. Very few of the other national Latino organizations have really taken the lead on this. Here in Connecticut we have to have leadership, whether it's an individual who says this is what I'm going to work on, or it's an organization. You need that leadership to build a connection to the community. For example, a colleague of mine — Evelyn Hernandez from Hartford — told me a long time ago that when she was at *Newsday*, she noticed that once a year the leaders of the Jewish community

on Long Island would come in and meet with the editors. There was no screaming. It wasn't over a particular news story. It was to connect — to talk — to have a dialogue. To tell the editors what was on their mind and identify key issues for their community. Now let me ask you, how often do we do that with the *New Haven Register*? How often do we do that with television? As a community, we don't do that. So, we have to learn to do that sort of thing, and it's going to take somebody or an organization in our state to take the lead.

ROMÁN: On my long list — first, I have to say I would start by getting young people trained. It's extremely important for all of you to train your children and make sure your children know why it is important. They need to learn how to consume media. In my day it was MTV, and now they're looking at twenty thousand other things. But just ask them, challenge them about what they're seeing. Talk to them about why they think that's important, or why they think it's not important, and have them share something that you can connect with them on. In the end that helps build a more informed individual and someone who can be more analytical about what they're doing. I've done it with children and teenagers in San Francisco, in Miami, and other places.

Another thing would be, as Diane said, is organize around this in the community itself. For example, the National Association of Hispanic Journalists, we just formed two chapters, one in Orlando and one in Charlotte, North Carolina. In Charlotte, that group has met every month for a year. Most of them are Spanish-language journalists, and about forty-five to fifty people come out every month. You want to know what they have been doing for the past year? They've been calling in the news directors, the managing editors of the area newspapers and confronting them about their coverage. That is doing what Diane was talking about. The purpose of those meetings is to tell these editors, "hey, we're noticing this, and this is a way you can do better". An extension of that — the South is really the next frontier for us. When you look at the demographics in the country, the new Latino communities are

**"The people who run the newspapers and television stations have not adjusted to us as a population yet, so we have to be after them constantly to get them to respond to us."**

emerging in the South. And that is really a problem. From your question earlier, why should we talk about this now? Because if we don't talk about this now and deal with it, we basically repeat the same problems. And we repeat the same mistakes. In the South, if we don't deal with it, we repeat the same stuff. These are communities sprouting up in Georgia, in Arkansas, in North Carolina, South Carolina — and the media has no clue who these people are and they can't even talk to them. So, we have to go in there to the media and say, if they can't even communicate with them, much less can they explain to the rest of society who these people are? That's something that we as NAHJ has taken upon ourselves to do. We have a project called the Parity Project where we've dealt with papers in Florida, Texas and California. We take the places that have the biggest disparity between the numbers of Latinos in the newsrooms and the proportion of the Latinos in the circulation area and identified the worst offenders and do what we call an intervention. We train the staff on covering Latinos in national trends and then locally. We talk to the community and have a town hall meeting with the community that we recruit people to go to talk directly, as Diane was saying, to the hierarchy of the newspaper. And talk about their view — because no one's ever asked them, ever! We get anywhere from 40 to 160 people come out to these meetings that last two and three hours. And these editors really get a much more complete view of what is happening. And then from there, we form an advisory council with them for a five-year plan on how to achieve parity. Those are the kinds of long-term relationships that you start establishing, as Diane was mentioning, that really affect coverage. And we have seen just in two years that we've had the project that it has changed coverage — including the competition. So, there are ways to do it, and there are community members involved in this process. And that is the key. Get involved. Write to the editorial board. Write to the papers. You may think that you're not going to be heard, but you never know.

**FIGUEROA:** Thank you, Iván. How about a big hand for the panelists? Excellent points. So, we want to open it up now so we can entertain some questions and comments.

**“And we see a direct correlation between ownership of the media and the commitment to the community and their coverage of the community. Media consolidation basically has the impact of having less ownership and less coverage.”**

**QUESTION:** Good evening. I work in Hartford for the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission. My question is — think I'm going to direct it to Iván. It's the media consolidation today and the negative effects that it has in our community. We don't have a fair chance to have a say because media's being gobbled up by one or two or three big giants out there. So, how do we fit in there?

**ROMÁN:** That is very important question that actually NAHJ, unlike some other media and journalism organizations, is dealing with. If you want more information about that, I direct you to FreePress.net and that is a website that basically has what you're talking about. It lists all the companies who own newspapers, radio and television stations and who basically gobbled up the other companies. At our convention in Fort Worth, Texas, two weeks ago we passed a resolution calling for a stop to media consolidation so there is a chance to further study the effects of media consolidation and its direct effect on the lack of minority ownership of media. We have seen it over the decades and it has become worse. When Univision and Clear Channel Communications started buying hundreds and hundreds of stations, a lot of those stations were formerly African American or Hispanic-owned radio stations. Those people are no longer owners. And we see a direct correlation between ownership of the media and the commitment to the community and their coverage of the community. Media consolidation basically has the impact of having less ownership and less coverage. I'm sure all of you heard of when Sinclair Broadcasting put on a documentary during the last Presidential campaign. The documentary was anti-Kerry and was produced by another group, but they basically wanted to force all of their stations to run it. There were journalists at one of the stations in Washington that refused to run it and eventually blew the whistle on it — but the documentary was shown anyway because Sinclair forced their affiliate stations to run it. Now, this is Sinclair Broadcasting, which has dozens and dozens of stations. Now, Clear Channel has 1200 stations. What if Clear Channel had decided to do something like that? We're talking about a

major problem with media consolidation. And that is something that we all need to understand. The problem is we don't understand it. In NAHJ's Board ourselves, we're very conflicted and we talked about it for two years before we took that a stance. So, this is something that all of us should be very concerned about.

**FIGUEROA:** When I left Connecticut in '93 I think there were double the number of Latino radio stations that there are today.

**ALVERIO:** Except for Radio Cumbre in Bridgeport, the ones in Hartford are no longer Latino-owned. In the last couple of years, in two cases, big groups have come in and purchased these stations from the Latino owners.

**ROMÁN:** And could you imagine if one company in Hartford, for example, if the *Tribune* could own the *Hartford Courant*, and the top two televisions stations in the market, and the top three or four or even ten radio stations in the market, in essence, they could control media in a place like Hartford. This is a major issue that we should be concerned about.

**MEDINA:** But that's also why we should get involved and are having this discussion. It is a measure of power to have a voice out there and to be able to control what goes over the air waves and what goes into print.

**FIGUEROA:** Other questions? Did I see a hand over here? Yes.

**QUESTION:** My name is Dr. Black, and I'm a professor at Yale. And I have a program that has lots of Hispanic students, African-American students, and Native-American students. And we're excelling for ten years in the sciences. We're taking the National Awards. We're doing everything. But trying to get coverage in the media is like dying and going to heaven. You send articles, I have students doing stuff, and what I hear is, oh, we pick it up from the *Yale Daily*, the Yale whatever. But they don't cover us



because, "we're not newsworthy". So, how can I get across some of the positive things that are going on? These students are coming from all over the U.S. They're not wealthy students. I have migrant worker students, the whole spectrum. You know, we're not wealthy, but we are excelling. So, how do I get somebody to cover us?

**ALVERIO:** Can I just address that, because I do this everyday for my clients. And you know, it's about the definition of news and who's defining it. And David, you're sworn to secrecy here, but let me tell you, when I have to go to try to pitch a story to the *Hartford Courant*, I go to every department. I figure out an angle on every story, because I'm praying this one's not talking to that one. You have to find a friendly ear. You have to find someone who understands why this is important. And I do that, and that's part of what becoming sophisticated is. It's when you read those articles and you say, "oh, this person is covering this. What's that by-line, who is that person?" Make that mental note. Whatever you do, do not rely solely on sending a press release! One of my most vivid recollections of Channel 3, was walking up to the assignment editor as he was discarding a stack of press releases from the fax. Newspapers are so inundated with requests, you have to figure out who is who.

**FIGUEROA:** . . . how to stand out?

**ALVERIO:** Yes, how to stand out, but also having a sense of who's going to have that friendly ear. And let me tell you, it works.

**MEDINA:** There are more of us in the media who can be the sympathetic ear. I'm going to get a little vulgar here for a second, and Diane has heard this story before. I talk a lot to children's groups, to school children, college kids, give talks on journalism. And one of the things to get them to understand what it's about, what this journalism business all comes down to, the whole thing comes down to two words: Oh, Shit! You're laughing! The idea is that, in the morning when you pick up that paper — or you turn on your

radio to listen to what's going on — you read or hear something that causes you to say, “Oh, Shit!” As a journalist, if I can get you to do that, I've done my work. And the reason I'm bringing this up is because whatever you're projecting, whatever you're selling, has to be packaged in a way that's going to make the editor, the reporter, the general public go, “Oh, Shit!” That's it! If you can find a way to do that, your story will penetrate through the system.

**“Don't use the word “positive,” because journalists hate positive stories. The stories can be positive, just don't call them positive stories.”**

**ROMÁN:** Dr. Black, to talk about the example you mention — it turns out that my sister runs a science education program out of the American Museum of Natural History in New York. She works with high school students on different things, astro-physics and genome and all that stuff. And basically, the way she was able to pitch a story to the newspaper in New York had to do with genome research and what that means and what is it going to mean in terms of our future, our children, whatever. So, the research that the kids were doing had something to do with that specific thing. That's how they were able to pitch a story to the *New York Daily News*. You mentioned that you had kids. Some of your kids are migrant farm workers. That for me is a natural for any Latino paper in this area, because through that angle they can get in and say, oh, these students, these children of migrant farm workers, look what they're doing. They're getting involved in this — that means they're going to be scientists, whatever. There are different ways of getting into those angles. Of course, without knowing more about your story, I can't tell you more. That's just off the top of my head. Don't use the word “positive,” because journalists hate positive stories. The stories can be positive, just don't call them positive stories. Well, positive stories can also be news, but we're not about covering positive stories. We're about covering news. So, tell us this is news — this is important — because it may be positive, but don't say, oh, you don't cover positive stories, so you need to look at us. Because that's the first way to get us to tune out.

**FIGUEROA:** I saw another hand here.

**QUESTION:** You briefly talked about the alternative media, the local papers, like *La Voz Hispana* — these local papers that we have here and in all the communities. How can you as professional journalists, and how can we as the community, how can we help to improve and make these mediums of communication more positive, more effective means of communication to our community? They are here, but unfortunately they don't really communicate the news. Primarily they're weeklies, or bi-weeklies, or monthlies. How do we strengthen them and make them more effective communicators of the realities of not only the things that happen in our community, but things that are happening in the community in general?

**MEDINA:** Well, one way is advertising. In most cases these publications live hand to mouth. In a way they're a microcosm of what happens in the larger media, only in this case you have people who are sympathetic to your issues, to your values that are running them. I'll tell you right now, when I want to know what's the dirt that's going on in my community, I read *La Voz*, because I know I'm not going to get it in my own paper, the *Courant*. The real down and dirty stuff that we all identify with and you know these people and it's like your family. It's people you know, people you can touch, people you inter-relate with. And I'm not going to read about that in the *Courant*. So, I know I'm going to get a flavor of what my community's really like when I pick up *La Voz*.

**ALVERIO:** What I wanted to add to that very quickly is an on-line component. And I just think if you're looking long term, that is such a crucial piece. Even now, in my business — I now do public relations, marketing — and in the last ten years, looking back, in the last three or four, every client, when we're talking about a communication vehicle — it used to be newsletters that they wanted to produce for a year. Now we're producing a brochure and the website, because we can update that constantly. Something new happens, we can change it. Print is just harder to change. It's going to be part of who we are, but as we look long term, that on-line component where you can change

something very quickly is going to be very important. And our children are on-line. Our community is on-line more and more every day.

**MEDINA:** I want to add one little thing if you don't mind. It would be nice at some point, particularly in Connecticut, you could develop a daily Spanish language component here. The *Miami Herald* is an English language paper, but a number of years ago it began inserting a Spanish language insert called *El Herald* into the paper. The insert was written in Spanish by a predominantly Cuban staff, and the management of the *Miami Herald* discovered that people would buy the *Herald*, take out the Spanish insert, and then return the newspaper. What was happening was that Latinos — primarily Cubans — were not paying for the *Herald* because what they wanted to read was *El Herald* — the insert! The newspaper managers noticed more and more papers coming back to them without the insert, so they eventually decided if people wanted it and were going through this sham to get the paper, why not sell it as a separate paper? So they put *El Herald* on the newsstands as a stand-alone selling newspaper, and for all intents and purposes, it has become the local paper. Even though it's run by the same *Miami Herald* paper, it has become the paper where you really get the local news about what's going on in Miami. And it's in Spanish and it comes out everyday. So, this is what the small papers like *La Voz* can aspire to, because it's doable. And with the demographic changes that are going on, I don't see why — it's going to take time, but it can happen. Time is on our side. It really is. And we should always function with that in mind. Eventually, the media companies are going to have to come around because there's going to be so many of us, they'll have no choice.

**FIGUEROA:** And since we have the owner and publisher of *La Voz*, who has just raised her hand, and we have mentioned her paper quite a bit. Norma.

**QUESTION:** My name is Norma Rodriguez-Reyes. I beg to differ with David. The newspapers do cover a lot of stories about Latinos. And what's very interesting is,

in terms of the demographics, the Hispanic newspapers have a longer life expectancy than your mainstream daily. I want to congratulate The Community Foundation for doing this Forum on Latinos in the Media, but right now, the perspective that we are getting is the perspective of the mainstream daily. We would be getting a totally different perspective from the nine different Hispanic newspapers that we have here in Connecticut, of which four of them are weekly and the rest of them are either biweekly or monthly. But what's also very interesting is how the Latino community views the newspapers. *La Voz*, for example, is considered a Puerto Rican newspaper, even though the only Puerto Rican in *La Voz* happens to be myself; everyone else comes from different countries — and these immigrants are our new readership. Even though Puerto Ricans are mainstreaming, and Spanish for a lot of us is no longer the language we prefer to read in, for all these new immigrants Spanish is their preferred language, and they will come from the suburbs to pick up the newspaper because they're very anxious to read. But I think the perspective would be very, very different if we were here today listening to a lot of these different publishers that own these different newspapers. But I think this is wonderful that we're doing it.

**ROMÁN:** I would say, answering your question, that basically you should demand more from the papers. Just like you would demand from the *Hartford Courant*, you should demand more as a community from the community papers and from the weeklies. I differ with David in terms of having to need a daily. I don't think you necessarily need a Spanish language daily. The weeklies, I think, could do fine, and in the weeklies you could have the kinds of stories you're not going to get everywhere else. And that's the point. The point is to get the stories there that you're not going to get somewhere else. Right now there's a national movement — it started in California called the New California Media — but the point of the movement is to get the ethnic press organized and interacting with the mainstream press, because it's in the ethnic press that all these stories appear that the mainstream press is constantly missing. The small independent

**“Time is on our side. It really is. And we should always function with that in mind. Eventually, the media companies are going to have to come around because there's going to be so many of us, they'll have no choice.”**

weeklies and biweeklies and monthlies do want to improve, because there is competition. And so, you'll see the children and the grandchildren of the people who established the paper decades and decades ago now looking at it as a business and saying, look, we need to improve it; we need to do better with news; we need to go on-line; we need to have the website. That is happening around the country with these publications. So, just like we would demand it from the *Hartford Courant*, we need to demand more from these publications and also participate and collaborate more with them as a way to move forward jointly

**FIGUEROA:** We have time for two quick questions. Frances here.

**QUESTION:** David, you said if you control the perception, that's a lot of power. And Iván, you talked about teaching our children to be more effective consumers of media. So, my question is, if we are going to capitalize on the opportunities to change mainstream media, be more effective in ethnic media, use the Internet as you suggested, how do we get more Latinos into the media? What do we need to do with our children to interest them in careers in the media?

**MEDINA:** Well, the first thing you have to do is to make sure you accept it as a valid career. And I have to say that because, unfortunately, there are many parents who want their kids basically to be doctors and lawyers and nothing else. I remember when I was going to school, I was in business school, basically, for three years, and my father understood that. But when I told him I switched to become a journalist, he didn't understand that at all. And the problem we're having is we face that a lot in the Southwest — especially with Mexican-American women. If they aspire to become journalists, Mexican-American women need to leave the home. They have to be willing to leave home, become independent — the whole thing. That has become a cultural issue with some families, depending on the generation. So, that's one thing that I would recommend is be more accepting of it as a career for your kids. And I think you can be more accepting when you understand and you accept the importance

**"It's about really doing a service to your community. If you can phrase it as that, it's why I do the job I'm doing. It is imperative that we do this."**

that it has. It's not just about running around covering fires and crime. It's about really doing a service to your community. If you can phrase it as that, it's why I do the job I'm doing. It is imperative that we do this. That is why it's important that we have all these projects now within NAHJ, to be more pro-active in the community. That is why. It's imperative. If you understand it's important, you're going to transfer that message to your kids.

**QUESTION:** I have a quick comment and a question. The comment is that the Progreso Latino Fund has shown leadership in doing these forums. This is the third one with hot topics, Latinos in the Media. So, Latinos in the Media should follow the example that Progreso Latino Fund has been doing with these forums. We have to work or think out of the box. And my question is, what media coverage tonight is this receiving in the mainstream media and with the Hispanic media or the ethnic media?

**FIGUEROA:** I think we had two, the *New Haven Register* and *La Voz* were the two. Is there anybody else? So the *New Haven Register* and three other papers are here. And a local radio station.

**QUESTION:** Hello, I'm Michael Negrón. The first one is going to be a little self-serving. I just want to share some information. Our youngest son is a student at NYU majoring in photography. His passion is to change the way people see us through the images, not the words. The second thing is — I want to go back to Juan's first question. And I want to say to you, yes, you are journalists. You are gatekeepers. What I would ask you though is that as Latinos and Latinas, what is your stamp if you were in charge? My observation is as we go into people in Español and all the other newspapers and magazines, it almost seems like an excuse for the mainstream to stop covering us. I see less of us now in the mainstream media since these publications have come along. What would you do that would be different?

**MEDINA:** Well, what I mentioned when I answered that question is to make sure that everyone understands,

not just the Latinos, that everyone understands that what I bring to the table is just as important as what you bring, and that everyone, regardless of who you are, should be trained and should do well at covering us and including Latinos and other populations in the coverage throughout the paper. So, that would be the stamp that I think we all need to aspire to.

**ALVERIO:** Real quick, Mike, because I made that comment. And I want to tell you, I spent eighteen years, and I am who I am, very proud of it, but I have to tell you, it was a fight not to get pigeon-holed. I survived for eighteen years and did very well, and was able to, more strategically, achieve more than in your face confrontations because I made sure people understood I was a good journalist who happened to be a Latina. But let me just say this: you do not want Latino journalists just covering Latino issues. I don't want someone coming in saying, "well, I'm Asian, this is all I am covering". A newsroom is a melting pot as well, and no one group should dominate that newsroom — including white males! If it's true journalism, true objectivity, and true coverage, then it has to be a combination of different views.

**FIGUEROA:** Thank you, Diane. Go ahead. You have the last one.

**MEDINA:** I've been in the business a long time, and when you're young and you start out, you want to make it. You want to succeed. And too often, I've seen that with some Latino journalists, they want to succeed so badly that they allow themselves to be pigeon-holed. They adopt the same values of the people — of the group that dominates, and basically become pieces of furniture, tinsel boxes. And they're great, they're very remarkable. And I'm going to tell you something. When I started out, I was the same way. Fortunately, I got old, and wiser, and more experienced. I will say that I have a lot more experience than my non-Latino colleagues at the paper — so I'm a little more cocky about it now. Because if you don't grow out of that box, you become the embodiment of the very thing you wanted to change. Avoid that so that you can be an effective voice.

**"Perception is reality.  
And it's about attitude.  
And finally—  
it's about leadership!"**

**ROMÁN:** Forgive me. For those of you who play golf, that's known as the golf syndrome in newsrooms. Because the people who got ahead were the people who played golf with the editors. And that is what we need to break out of.

**FIGUEROA:** Great. Let me share with you some of the phrases and some of the points that I picked up as a way of wrapping the discussion and closing the program. It's a fight not to get pigeon-holed. It's about fairness. It's about using all communication vehicles. It's about not using positive to get your story in the paper. It's about the power of advertising dollars. It's about the "Oh, Shit!" factor. It's about media consolidation and the problems with that. It's about the impact of being the only Latina in a newsroom. Perception is reality. And it's about attitude. And finally — it's about leadership! Let's thank the panelists for a job really well done!

**Local Leaders Reflect**

*Putting the Press  
in Perspective*

**“My impression is that the mainstream media doesn’t cover Hispanic issues unless, with few exceptions, they publish the negative aspects of Hispanics.”**

*by James Battaglio*

**Pablo and Migdalia Colon**

The answer to the question “is the mainstream press fair to Hispanics?” needn’t be asked when you enter the reception area of Radio WCUM 1450 AM.

It’s staring you right in the face.

There, scores of plaques pay tribute to the achievements of Pablo and Migdalia Colon, owners and operators of the state’s first Hispanic radio station, a 24-hour 1000 watt broadcast business taking up the entire second floor of a huge brick building in downtown Bridgeport.

Amidst the tributes for excellence in broadcasting, public service, overall service to the Hispanic community, the city and even the state, are two tiny mainstream press articles held by a common pin in the corkboard.

“That’s all the mention we get,” said Colon whose smile never seems to leave his face.

For 16 of his 36 years in Connecticut Colon has owned the station, garnering the honor of being the only minority radio station owner in Fairfield County; the first owner of a Hispanic station in Connecticut, and the first Dominican Republican in the US to own his own radio station. The 71-year-old Colon was born in Santo Domingo and, along with Migdalia, a native of Puerto Rico, knows the mainstream media very well.

“My impression is that the mainstream media doesn’t cover Hispanic issues unless, with few exceptions, they publish the negative aspects of Hispanics,” he says in a soft-spoken voice, translated through Migdalia. “With very few exceptions will the Anglo media point out the positive; the growing and struggling Hispanic community. And yet, the community has important people that have evolved into big business through higher education, but you don’t find this in the newspapers. The successful Latino isn’t covered.”

Case in point: Colon cites numerous businesses that either call or mail press releases that apply to Hispanic programs, asking WCUM to report the release as a public service, and although he provides this service “those businesses don’t spend one dime of their very large advertising budgets with our station...they spend hundreds of thousands with the Anglo media.”

“If we call them and ask them to consider advertising on our station, they say ‘that’s not our decision...you’ll have to ask our ad agency,’” said Colon. “You call the ad agency and they say that’s not our deci-

sion...you'll have to ask our client. In the end, you get none of their business, only their request for free advertising of their Hispanic event or program.”

“Every time I have the opportunity to promote Hispanics, I do so,” he said. “I do it on my own radio show and encourage communities to promote themselves because they won’t get it from the Anglo press.”

**“The big difference between the mainstream press and the Latino press is that we’re extremely conservative, especially with the new immigrants that come in with old and serious family values.”**

#### **Aberlardo King and Norma Rodriguez Reyes**

Aberlardo King’s take on the mainstream media goes one step beyond proclaiming the press as biased. He actually credits them with negatively influencing the public’s image of Hispanics, of which there are between 20-25 different Latino groups.

King, through his partner and interpreter Norma Rodriguez Reyes, admits some newspapers do a good job of covering Latino issues but for the most part, most “don’t do a good job of covering many issues that apply to Hispanics.”

“We’re portrayed in a very negative light,” he said, “setting up a false perception within the general public. What we don’t know, we go by what we see, read or hear in the press. We’re left with just the mainstream press as an information source so we don’t know much about the new immigrants or their cultures. Therefore, when we see someone from that particular ethnic group, we only see what we’ve read in the media.”

Both Reyes and King produce Connecticut’s largest Spanish newspaper, *La Voz Hispana* (The Spanish Voice), a weekly tabloid with a circulation of 30,000. The paper has been in existence since 1993 but Reyes, the publisher, took it over in 1998. King serves as managing editor of the newspaper.

“The big difference between the mainstream press and the Latino press is that we’re extremely conservative, especially with the new immigrants that come in with old and serious family values. A lot of the Hispanic immigrants are Republicans, believe it or not,” Reyes said, quick to add “there’s been a lot of improvement in the mainstream media but they’ve got a ways to go.”

Listing some of the Hispanic immigrants as “no longer just Puerto Ricans but also Mexicans,

Columbians, Peruvians, Ecuadorians, Cubans, Chileans, Costa Ricans and Venezuelans,” she believes “you have to be able to balance among these cultures. The mainstream media hasn’t made progress in this arena yet.”

Addressing the trend toward the mainstream media’s efforts to create offshoot Hispanic publications, Reyes, as with so many of the Hispanic media and business people interviewed, sees through this as “not because they see the need to help the Hispanic society. It’s more a case of ‘this is the market we want to go after because this is where the money is.’”

From Reyes perspective, she and King have the advantage because economics were never the ultimate motive behind *La Voz Hispana*; social responsibility was their motivator.

#### **Julio Urdeneta**

Julio Urdeneta has the unique distinction among his colleagues of not only being a member of the mainstream media, but also being in charge of a Latino publication. From his perspective, greater diversity in media coverage is not only needed, it’s a need that should be spread among all minority groups, not just Latinos.

Urdeneta, a staff member of the *New Haven Register* and editor of a staff of three writers who produce their 32-page Spanish week, *Registro*, is a journalist with 10 year’s experience and comes from a newspaper family.

“I think the press right now not only needs to cover more Latino issues but more diversity issues in general as other communities grow throughout this country,” said Urdeneta. “Newspapers, TV and radio need to recognize there is a segment of the population that has a need to have issues covered. This applies to Asian, Africans and Eastern European people.”

He believes that there has been a boom of Hispanic-oriented publications in America “and I think that’s pretty good...a lot of people are getting to see their community in the press.”

“There’s a lot of things from the mainstream press that get translated into Spanish and helps newer immigrants to navigate into their community. It would

**“I think the press right now not only needs to cover more Latino issues but more diversity issues in general as other communities grow throughout this country.”**

be nice to see that exchange go from Spanish or ethnic media in general and get into English papers,” said Urdeneta.

However, he believes people from both sides of these communities are afraid to take the next step. He finds it unfortunate that journalists have to be the ones to break a story and literally serve as bridges between two segments of society and “let everyone know both societies share the same dreams and values and have the same fights.”

“We just speak a different language. The same issues apply to all of us, regardless of languages we speak,” he said.

Urdeneta is proud of the fact that the *New Haven Register* has been very open and trusted him to publish *Registro* and do “very much whatever I want to.”

Urdeneta has seen change coming over the past decade, depending on what happens on a government level with immigration reforms before the House and Senate and the overall government regarding this issue.

“That could propel more interest toward Hispanics and other communities in general. Hopefully this will create a wider outreach process to everyone who has a story to tell.”

“I feel very blessed to be in a position to serve the New Haven community and serve my brothers and sisters that, like me, are pursuing the American dream. I can’t fathom a greater job than this,” he said.

#### **Abraham Hernandez**

If you ask Abraham Hernandez his opinion of the media as it applies to its coverage of Latino issues, Hernandez will tell you the issue is a double edge sword of sorts.

“I think there’s been more coverage of Hispanic issues over the last five years, especially since 2000 when immigration became a hot topic,” he said, “but I believe there isn’t much coverage as to our issues. Unfortunately the media coverage is mostly on immigration issues; very little of the other issues that impact Hispanics, such as education, highly-populated Hispanic concentration in metropolitan

**“Hispanics in this country have come to better themselves. If the media were to cover this fact a little more, all this tension surrounding immigration would ease.”**

cities; children who aren’t bilingual; more assistance in having more bilingual programs within school districts or having more bilingual personnel in the schools.”

Hernandez, general manager of station Radio AMOR in New Haven for the past 10 years, hosts a morning talk show called *Al Dia Contigo* (Keeping You Up To Date). Before that he did a youth talk show.

He questions exactly how much help or service the mainstream media provides to the Latino community, especially as it applies to education.

“How can we better help with their (Hispanic) children’s education if we can’t communicate with them?” he asks. “I think the media could provide more help in this arena if the press concentrated on the kids’ poor reading and education skills.”

Admitting he doesn’t interact much with the English speaking media, Hernandez considers himself a strong proponent of children being bilingual, after having started in a kindergarten bilingual program himself.

Hernandez’ radio station actually practices what he preaches, in terms of bilingual services. In 2006 his station will feature six English speaking shows.

His message to the mainstream media is fairly simple in that he points out that Latinos are like any other culture attempting to assimilate into society.

“Latinos are people who are very passionate,” he said, aiming his comments to the press. “Hispanics in this country have come to better themselves. If the media were to cover this fact a little more, all this tension surrounding immigration would ease.”

#### **Clodomiro Falcon**

Clodomiro Falcon sees the issue of Hispanics and their present day image from two sides: one from business and one from the media.

And in Falcon’s eyes, business scores much higher grades than does the press.

Falcon, who owns five Hispanic commercial guides called *La Guia Hispania* (Yellow Page Directory), will tell you that businesses have seen the wisdom in attracting the Hispanic market while

**“When there’s a big Hispanic event, news covers it because they will look bad if they don’t. Everyday stories dealing with our everyday issues... there we see a big lack of coverage.”**

the media, Falcon believes, is fixed on the lesser image of Hispanics as impoverished people living in crime-riddled environments.

Falcon, president of his Stratford company which publishes in Fairfield, New Haven, Hartford and two in Westchester County, NY, has been in America 18 years after leaving his native Venezuela. He has watched the metamorphosis occur from 15 years ago, “when doors were closed to Hispanics” to today, “when there is more receptiveness and the general business people are more aware of the potential of Hispanic consumers.”

“Take companies like AllState and State Farm Insurance,” said Falcon. “I’ve been in this business nine years and sold radio advertising before that. As recently as five years ago big insurance companies such as these two never advertised in Hispanic publications or on Hispanic television stations. Now, they’re big in TV because large corporations are reacting positively to the Hispanic market. My clientele base is 50/50 Hispanic and non-Hispanics now... it wasn’t that way eight years ago.”

The press, however, is a different story.

“In terms of the media — mainstream newspapers, TV — the general trend is to talk about the bad news about Hispanics. The mainstream press covers some of the Hispanic issues a little more than they did 5-10 years ago, but mostly it’s stories about Hispanic athletes and entertainers, not the local everyday people,” said Falcon.

“The media only covers sensational Hispanic events,” said Falcon. “Mostly there’s minimum coverage of Hispanic issues. When there’s a big Hispanic event, news covers it because they will look bad if they don’t. Everyday stories dealing with our everyday issues... there we see a big lack of coverage.”

Falcon admits to having a “generally poor relationship” with the Anglo press, instead having a good relationship with the Hispanic media on which he’s focused his efforts. The mainstream media, he said, calls him when there is a Hispanic issue to discuss — “that day I’m important to them, but the rest of the year... nothing.”

“The mainstream media is missing the boat when it comes to recognizing our culture, our issues

and just our everyday struggles like everyone else’s,” he said. “It would be nice to see the press cover a Hispanic who earned a scholarship, not just a Hispanic involved in a drug sale.”

#### **Frank Borres**

As a child in the 1960’s, Frank Borres watched journalist Geraldo Rivera with open awe, realizing for the first time that a Hispanic kid could do anything he wanted. Since those days, following a long series of twists and turns in his life, Borres, president of American View Productions, feels even stronger about carving one’s own way and not being swayed by the prejudices and biased of others.

Including the media.

“What are Hispanic issues?” Borres asks from his Bridgeport television studio where he produces award-winning documentaries seen by most of us. The question was ‘does the media adequately and fairly cover Hispanic issues?’

“I don’t want to compartmentalize Hispanics. We need to integrate and be included in overall society, not just our own cultures. Certainly our language and culture are issues, but they’re limited issues. It’s how you’re sensitive to who we are that’s more important. By calling these Hispanic issues is to further segregate our culture.”

“TV news gave me the opportunity to show my viewers that I’d go the extra mile... show them where the guns were coming from; why the shooting took place; speak Spanish to some of the neighborhood people,” he reflects. “I was among the journalists who cared about the issues they were covering. My pieces impacted my community but I was disheartened after winning awards only to find doors closed to people like me. I’d gotten 18 Emmy nominations on my own. I know that sounds self-promoting, but as a Hispanic male you feel the need to justify and qualify yourself, because the mainstream media doesn’t do it for us so we have to promote ourselves.”

And today?

“Are the barriers knocked down? Absolutely not. No way. News crews do not reflect the neighborhood breakdowns.

**“I don’t want to compartmentalize Hispanics. We need to integrate and be included in overall society, not just our own cultures.”**

Borres is also quick to point out that he wouldn't consider a career in the mainstream press today "because I'm at a different point in my career now."

"As I've changed, news has changed too. I've become disheartened with TV news. I would hope they would hire me...that's my answer. But I've lost faith in local news."

Borres goes one step further and accuses the media in general of "not covering anyone's issues very well...so why should they cover Hispanic issues well?" "The media is so canned...so driven by consultants and entertainment. The news doesn't provide us what it should," he said. "It has its limitations. Damn, what would it hurt to see something different and innovative once in a while?"

#### **Gilberto ("Gil") Martinez**

In Gilberto ("Gil") Martinez's eyes, the Hispanic community is an awakening giant, suddenly recognized by the media and society in general. Unfortunately, from the media's perspective, Martinez believes his culture is viewed as a marketing source, rather than a source of culture and information.

Martinez, who was born and educated in Hartford, has a strong background in business. He is the former director of communications and one of the original founders of the Aetna Hispanic Network which is still active today. He is also one of the original founders of The Hispanic/Latino Network at The Hartford where he also served as director of communications..

In 2000, Martinez founded and became President of the Board of Directors for the Hispanic Professional Network, Inc. (HPN), a federally registered 501 c 3 non-profit tax-exempt organization whose mission is to actively engage Hispanics in positively impacting the environment where they live, work, learn and play. He has been the editor of the HPN E-Newsletter & Special Announcements and administrator for the HPN Web site ([www.hispanicportal.org](http://www.hispanicportal.org)) since its inception in 1999. HPN currently has a base of over 4,000 email subscribers and receives more traffic than any other Hispanic website in the state of CT and has become the central point of

**"The media in general is just beginning to view the Hispanic community as the awakening giant."**

electronic communications for the Hispanic community in Connecticut.

"The media in general is just beginning to view the Hispanic community as the awakening giant. Electronic communications has allowed us to become more aware of our surroundings and the opportunity to streamline communications. For years the media has depicted an image of the Latino community that's generally undesirable," he said. "Primarily all that has been printed by the media has been the negative, which obviously sells papers. We feel there should be more of a balance — bad news shouldn't be ignored, but good news should be added — that's the main reason HPN started the National Hispanic Heritage Month Celebration. We use that event to publish more of the positive news and contributions to the community and to promote pride and heritage among our youth. By exposing them to our positive contributions, they're able to aspire and see success."

"I would like to see a focus on the positive contributions of the Hispanic community along with better coverage of Hispanic arts and culture and major Hispanic events in general. One huge thing that bothers me is that during National Hispanic Heritage Month the major mediums do nothing regarding this event," he said, adding "We had four stamps celebrating Latin Dance, and Hartford was one of the three sites in the US for the unveiling. None of the mainstream media, except for the *Hartford Courant* and the Hispanic media, came to the event; no TV, no radio. Here's an example of where the mainstream press could take a greater interest in the premiere Latino events that should be covered."

Echoing the sentiment of his colleagues, Martinez feels the mainstream press "still has a way to go." He keeps in contact with the Anglo media all the time, but "our batting average is quite low. They continually bump us; it's not a priority. It's a positive event that isn't seen as a priority."



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