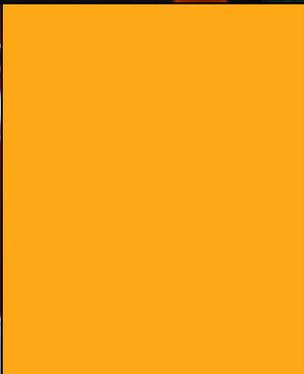
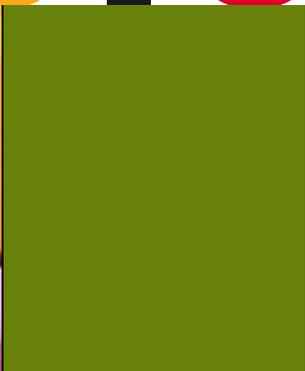


**CHILDREN  
NOW**  
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2 0 0 3 - 0 4 Prime  
Time  
Diversity  
Report

# fall colors



# Key Definitions

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## Genre

- **Situation Comedy**
- **Drama** (includes science fiction)
- **Comedic Drama**
- **Variety**
- **Reality** (real people in a contrived situation, e.g. *The Bachelor*, *The Simple Life*)
- **Real Life** (real people in real situations, e.g. *Cops*, *America's Most Wanted*)
- **Wrestling**

## Character Roles

- **Opening Credits:** Character appeared in the opening credits sequence and was integral to the plot.
- **Secondary Recurring:** Character did not appear in the opening credits sequence but appeared regularly and contributed to the plot.
- **Primary Non-recurring:** Character did not appear regularly but was vital to one episode or plot.
- **Secondary Non-recurring:** Character did not appear regularly but played a supporting role in one episode or plot.
- **Tertiary:** Character spoke but did not appear regularly and did not move the plot.

## Program Diversity Index Categories

- **All White:** All speaking characters were identified as "white."
- **All Black:** All speaking characters were identified as "African American."
- **All Latino:** All speaking characters were identified as "Latino."
- **Only One:** All speaking characters but one in the program character set were identified as belonging to the same racial group.
- **Mixed:** A mix of racial and ethnic characters in the program character set that was not *all white*, *all black*, *all Latino*, or *only one*.

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## Photos

All photos have been selected as representations of positive portrayals of diversity in prime time television and are used as courtesy of the networks and/or their production companies.

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Cover photos (left to right): *That '70s Show*, FOX; *CSI: Miami*, CBS; *Scrubs*, NBC; *George Lopez*, ABC; *24*, FOX; *Life with Bonnie*, ABC; *ER*, NBC; *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*, NBC; *Judging Amy*, CBS; *Girlfriends*, UPN.

# Introduction



Today, 40 percent of American youth ages 19 and under are children of color.<sup>1</sup> Yet few of the faces they see on television represent their race or cultural heritage. Thus, much of the racial diversity youth see every day – in school, at sporting events, at the doctor’s office – is not visible on prime time, when they are most likely to be watching television.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, though females slightly outnumber males in the real world, prime time television continues to present a world that is overwhelmingly male.

These disparities between real life and the prime time world have important ramifications for young people. As one of our culture’s primary storytellers, television provides stories and images that help shape the worldviews of millions of people. When certain groups are privileged and others are excluded it sends a message – especially to young viewers – that these groups are valued differently by society. This, in turn, can affect how viewers feel about themselves and others.<sup>3</sup>

While the influence of television images may not be immediately apparent, effects from media use are “like the steady drip, drip, drip of a faucet; measurable effects at any one moment may be small, but they accumulate over time.”<sup>4</sup> Therefore, it is essential to examine the television images that young people view and assess how those images change, or remain the same, over time.

Over the past five years, Children Now has commissioned several comprehensive examinations of prime time television to better understand the messages that television sends to youth and to provide benchmarks by which to assess the television industry’s progress over time. *Fall Colors 2003-04* presents the most current analysis of the state of diversity in prime time television programming by examining the prime time series offered on the six major broadcast networks for the 2003-2004 season.

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1.Children Now analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, 2002 American Community Survey, Tables P004 and P005K, <http://factfinder.census.gov/>, generated March 1, 2004.

2.Nielsen Media Research, 2000 Report on Television (New York, NY: Nielsen Media Research, 2000), p. 14.

3.G.L. Berry and J.K. Asamen, “Television, Children, and Multicultural Awareness,” in D. Singer and J. Singer, eds., *Handbook of Children and Media* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2001), pp. 359-373.

4.L. Jeffers, *Mass Media Effects* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 1997), p. 87.

# Race

FIGURE 1

Racial Diversity of Total Prime Time Characters

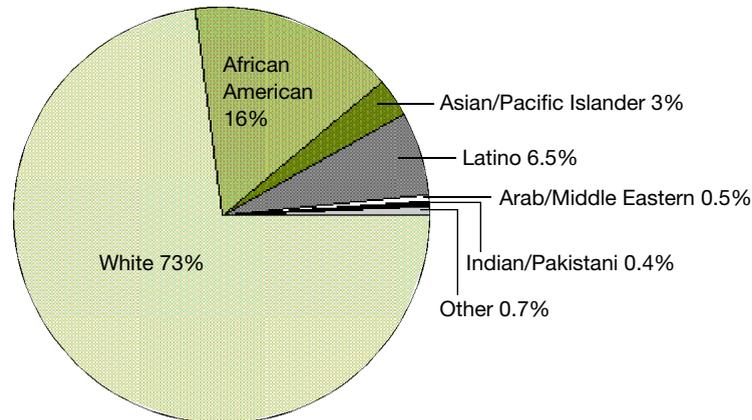
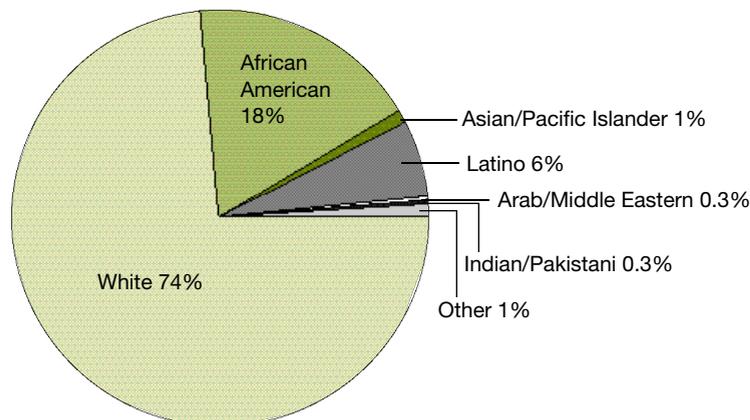


FIGURE 2

Racial Diversity of Opening Credits Characters



**The presence of Latino characters on prime time television has increased since 2001.**

- The percentage of Latino characters rose from 4% of the total prime time population in 2001 to 6.5% in 2003.
- The percentage of Latino opening credits characters increased threefold, from 2% in 2001 to 6% in 2003.
- More than half of all prime time programs (52%) included at least one Latino character.
- For the first time, a show included in this study featured an opening credits cast comprised exclusively of Latino characters.

**White characters continued to be over-represented, while other racial groups were severely under-represented or non-existent.**

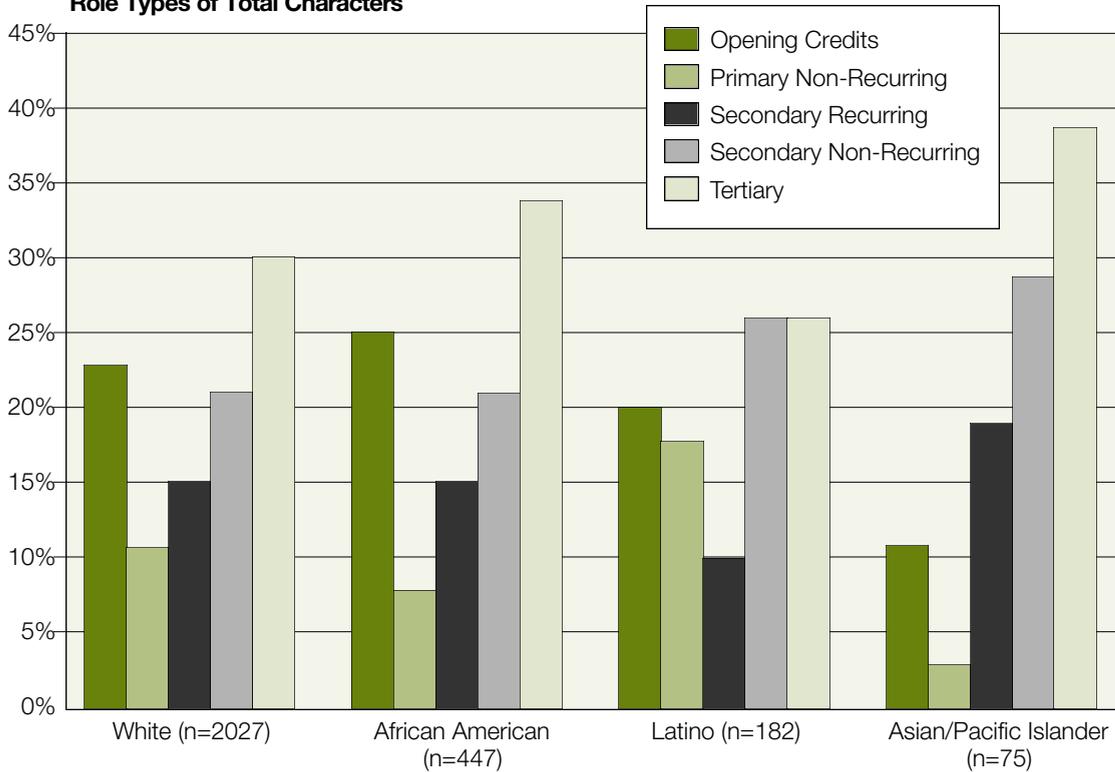
- As in previous years, nearly three-fourths of all prime time characters (73%) were white.
- The percentage of Asian/Pacific Islander characters has remained the same since 2001 (3% of total characters and 1% of opening credits characters).
- Arab/Middle Eastern and Indian/Pakistani characters were nearly non-existent, with each group comprising 0.3% of opening credits characters.
- No Native American characters were represented in any episode in the study's sample.

## Role Type

When youth see characters of color in starring roles and in parts that are central to the storyline, it sends messages that people of all races are valuable and integral, both to the story and to society.

FIGURE 3

Role Types of Total Characters



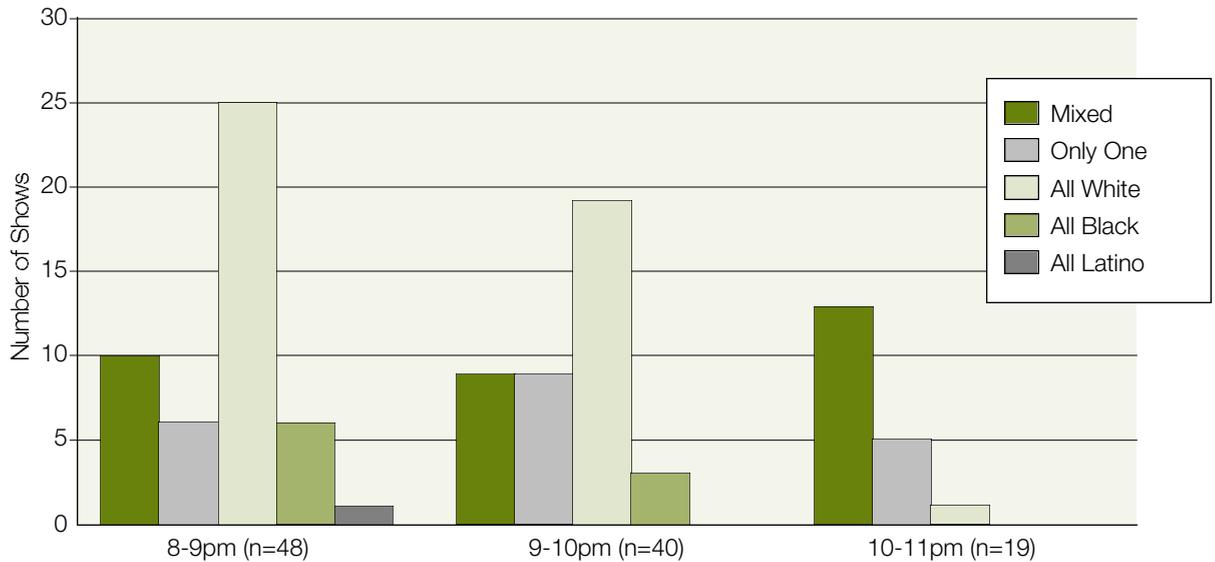
### Asian/Pacific Islander characters were far less likely than characters from other racial groups to appear in primary roles.

- Significant percentages of African American (25%), white (23%) and Latino (20%) characters appeared in opening credits roles, yet just one in ten Asian/Pacific Islander characters (11%) played a starring role.
- Approximately one-third of all white (34%), African American (33%) and Latino (38%) characters played roles that were integral to the storyline (which included opening credits characters and primary non-recurring characters). However, just one in seven Asian/Pacific Islander characters (14%) played an integral role.
- Asian/Pacific Islanders were three and a half times more likely to play tertiary roles than opening credits roles (39% vs. 11%).

## Time Period

FIGURE 4

Program Diversity Index of Opening Credits Casts by Time Period



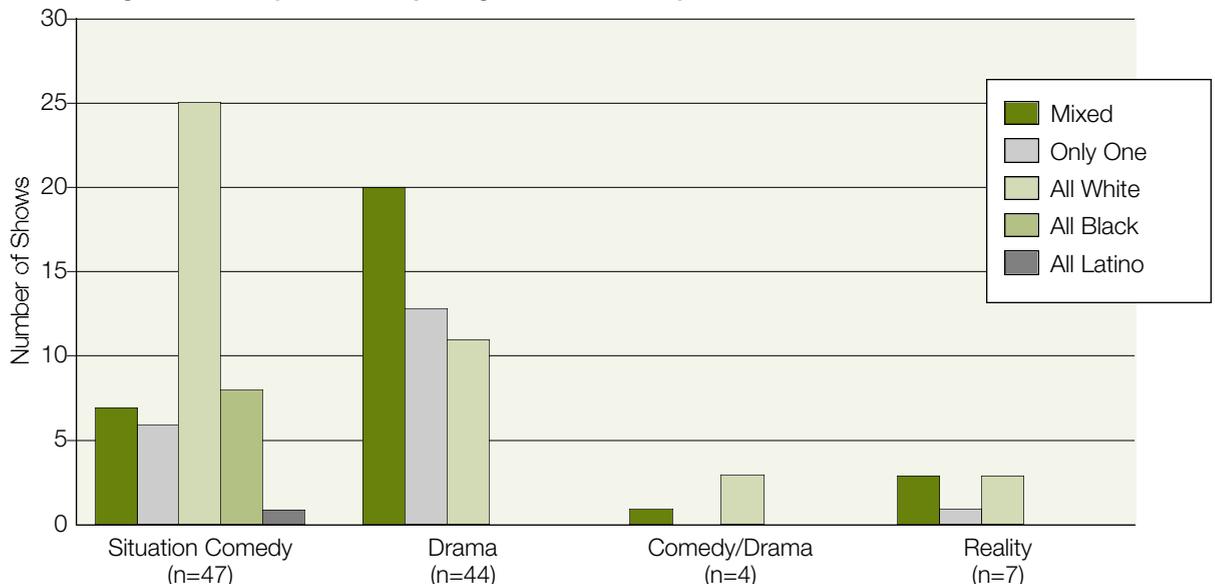
Youth are most likely to watch television during the 8 o'clock hour of prime time, yet most racial diversity can be found during the 10 o'clock hour, when they are least likely to be watching.

- The 8 o'clock hour remained the least racially diverse hour in prime time with one in five shows (20%) featuring *mixed* opening credits casts.
- The 9 o'clock hour offered slightly more diversity: 22% of the shows had *mixed* opening credits casts.
- By contrast, more than two-thirds of shows (68%) in the 10 o'clock hour featured *mixed* opening credits cast.

## Genre

FIGURE 5

Program Diversity Index of Opening Credits Casts by Genre

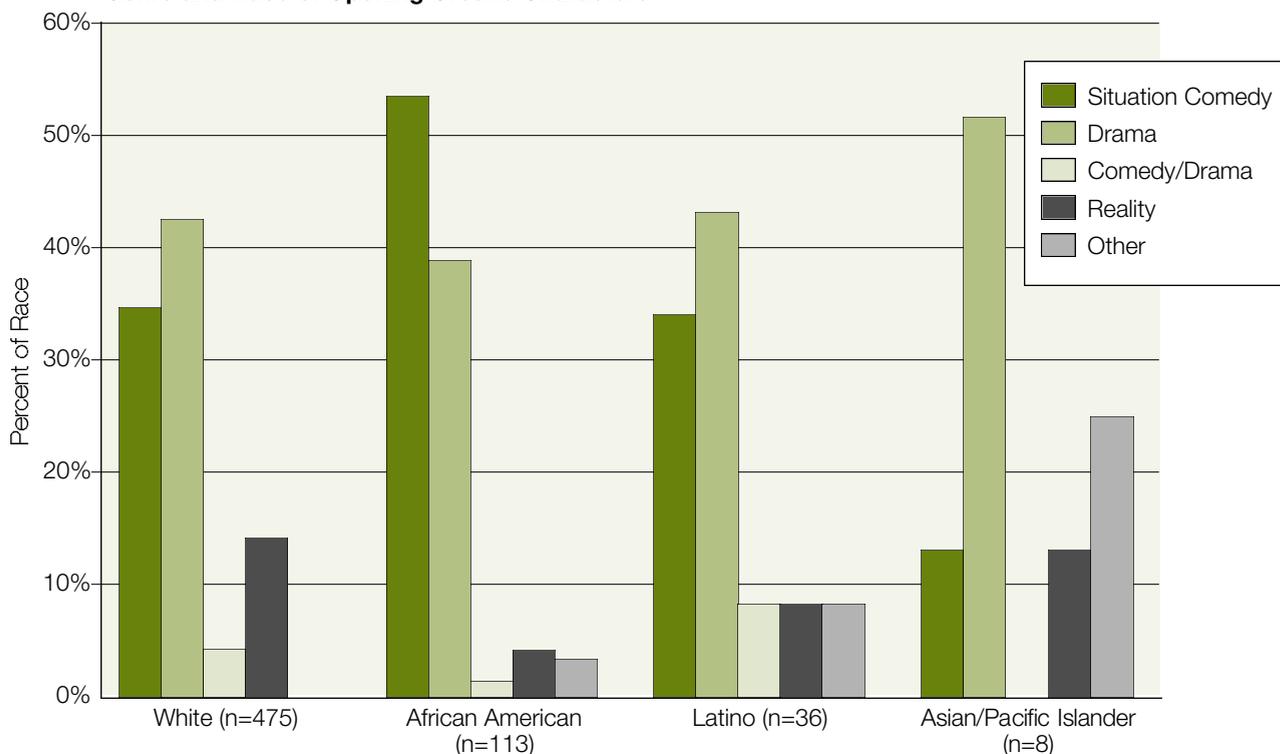


Although situation comedies are the most popular genre among youth,<sup>5</sup> they were the least diverse, most segregated shows on prime time.

- Sitcoms were the least diverse genre with one out of seven (15%) featuring *mixed* opening credits casts.<sup>6</sup>
- Sitcoms were also the most segregated shows, with almost three-fourths (72%) featuring opening credits characters who all belonged to the same racial group.
- In seven sitcoms (15%), not a single character of color appeared in any type of role – every character onscreen was white. These shows were: *A Minute with Stan Hooper* (Fox), *Everybody Loves Raymond* (CBS), *Frasier* (NBC), *It's All Relative* (ABC), *Married to the Kellys* (ABC), *Reba* (WB) and *Run of the House* (WB).
- Dramas were the most diverse programs with almost half (45%) featuring *mixed* opening credits casts.
- Nearly half of reality shows (43%) included *mixed* opening credits casts.

FIGURE 6

Genre and Race of Opening Credits Characters



The majority of African American characters, but only a small percentage of Asian/Pacific Islander characters, appeared in situation comedies.

- More than half of African American opening credits characters (54%) appeared in situation comedies. However, African Americans were under-represented on reality programs, with only 4% appearing on those shows.
- Asian/Pacific Islander opening credits characters were more likely to appear in variety or wrestling shows (25%) than in sitcoms (13%), a stark contrast to that of other racial groups.

5. Nielsen Media Research, unpublished data, children ages 12-17, August 25, 2003 through December 7, 2003, Prime Time Daypart.

6. While all three real life shows had *all white* opening credits casts, each show featured only one character, the host. Thus, these shows did not have enough characters to meet the definition of *mixed* and were not included in the analysis.

## Occupation

When young people see characters of all races employed in a diverse range of occupations, including those that are highly valued and respected, it not only helps break racial stereotypes but also can teach youth of all races that their career options need not be limited.

### Although there has been progress in increasing Latinos' presence in prime time, Latinos continue to be cast as characters with low-status occupations.

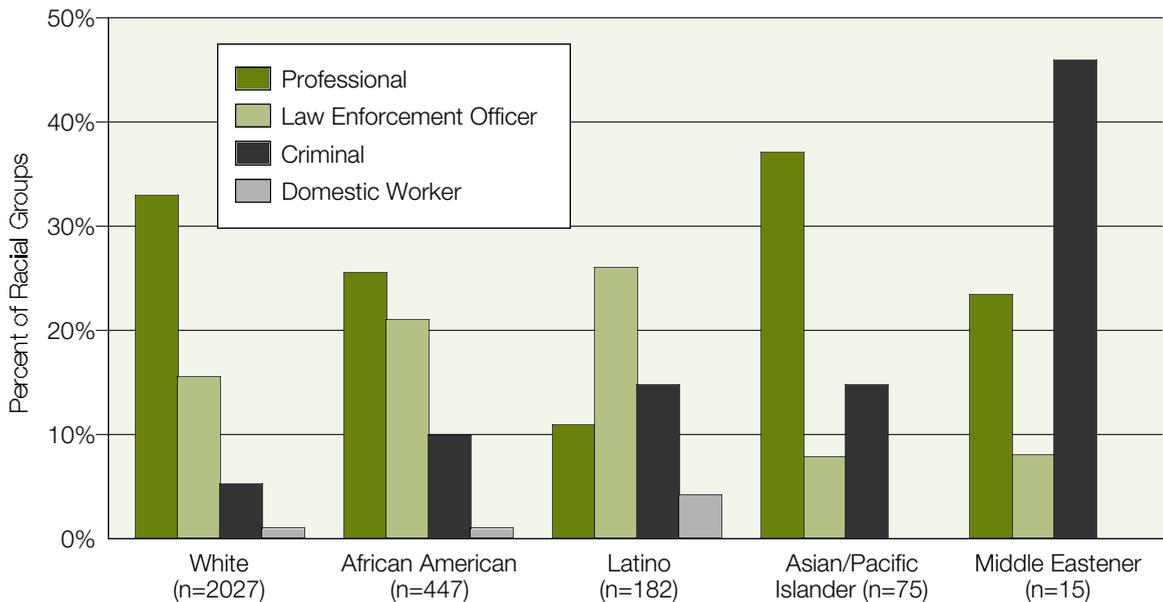
- More than one-third of Asian/Pacific Islanders (37%), one-third of whites (32%) and one-quarter of African American characters (26%) were employed in high status, professional occupations such as physician, attorney, judge, journalist or elected official. However, only 11% of Latinos held similar occupations.
- Although the number of characters who were domestic workers was small overall, Latino characters were four times more likely to portray domestic workers than were other racial groups. While 1% of whites and African Americans played domestic workers, 4% of Latinos played such roles.

### Arab/Middle Eastern characters were most likely to be portrayed as criminals.

- Nearly half of Arab/Middle Eastern characters (46%) were criminals, compared to 15% of Asian/Pacific Islander and Latino characters, 10% of African American characters and 5% of white characters.
- Whites (16%), African Americans (21%) and Latinos (27%) were more likely to play law enforcement officers than criminals, while Asian/Pacific Islanders and Arab/Middle Easterners were more likely to appear as criminals (8% of both groups were law enforcement officers).

FIGURE 7

Selected Occupations by Race for Total Characters

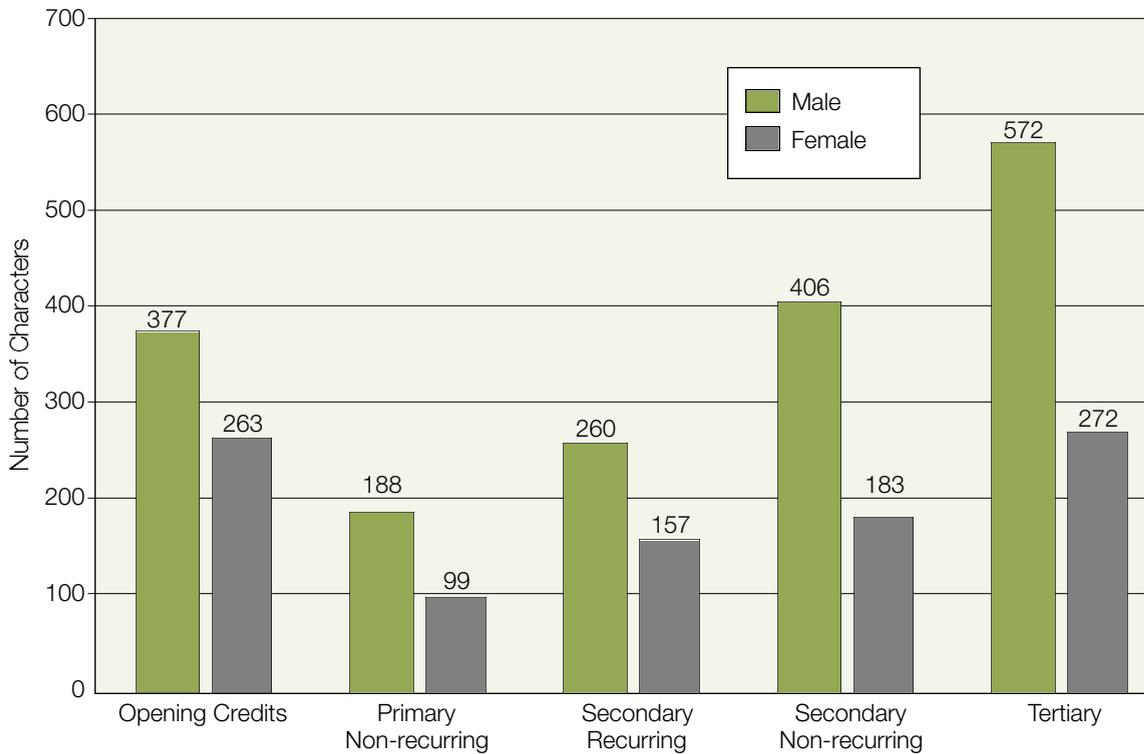


# Gender

In the same way that youth benefit from seeing high-quality portrayals of racial diversity on television, they also benefit from seeing characters of both genders in substantial numbers and in leading roles that offer positive, strong and competent role models.

**FIGURE 8**

**Gender by Role Type**



**Males outnumbered females nearly two to one in the world of prime time television.**

- Nearly two-thirds of all characters were male (65%) while one-third (35%) were female. This figure has not changed since Children Now’s first prime time diversity report in 1999.
- Though males outnumbered females in every role category, there was slightly more balance among opening credits characters, with males comprising 59% and females comprising 41% of opening credits roles.

## Age

Providing young girls and boys with examples of strong, older women can help reinforce to viewers of both genders that women of all ages are valued members of our society.

**Prime time television depicts a world in which women are significantly younger than their male counterparts and where older women are hard to find.**

- Female characters were younger than their male counterparts. The largest percentage of female characters (33%) were young adults (ages 19-29) while the largest percentage of males (31%) were adults (ages 30-39).
- Males were twice as likely as females to be in their 50s and 60s (16% of males vs. 8% of females).

## Occupation

When young people see characters of both genders employed in a diverse range of occupations, including those that do not fit traditional gender stereotypes, it challenges restrictive gender roles and illuminates a range of potential career opportunities for both girls and boys.

Top Ten Occupations for Males in Prime Time (n = 1446)	Top Ten Occupations for Females in Prime Time (n = 643)
Law Enforcement Officer (21%)	Law Enforcement Officer (10%)
Criminal (10%)	Professional (10%)
Professional (8%)	Service/Retail Worker (10%)
Entertainer (7%)	Entertainer (8%)
Physician (6%)	Clerical Worker (8%)
Attorney (6%)	Attorney (6%)
Service/Retail Worker (6%)	Journalist/Media Professional (6%)
Journalist/Media Professional (5%)	Manager/Small Business Owner (6%)
Manager/Small Business Owner (5%)	Student (6%)
Military Personnel (4%)	Homemaker (5%)
	Nurse (5%)

**Both male and female characters were employed in a range of professions, including high-status careers.**

- The top occupation for both males and females was law enforcement officer, due primarily to the large number of law enforcement shows on prime time this season.
- Thirty percent of male characters and 28% of female characters were employed in high-status occupations such as executive/CEO, physician, attorney, judge, professional, journalist/media professional and elected/appointed official.

**An examination of gender diversity within each occupation revealed that some professions continued to be dominated by one gender, while others presented more equitable gender representation.**

- Male characters outnumbered female characters as attorneys (71% were male), executives/CEOs (80%), physicians (80%), law enforcement officers (82%), paramedics/firefighters (84%), elected/appointed officials (92%) and criminals (93%).
- Female characters outnumbered males as domestic workers (67% were female), clerical workers/secretaries (76%), nurses (81%) and homemakers (100%).
- Female and male characters appeared with similar frequency in the following roles: service/retail workers (43% female; 57% male), activists (57% female; 43% male), judges (47% female; 53% male) and educators (50% female; 50% male).

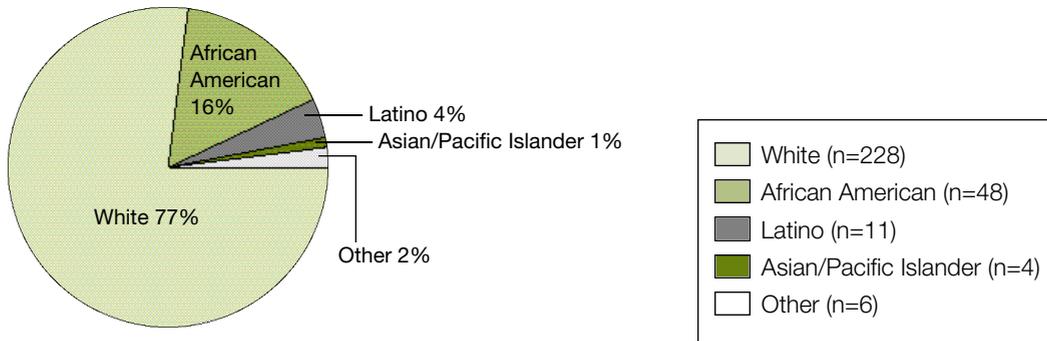
# Youth

When youth turn on the television, what kind of picture does prime time offer them about themselves?

## Race

**FIGURE 9**

**Race of Total Youth Characters**



**FIGURE 10**

**Race of Opening Credits Youth Characters**



**Youth comprise the most racially diverse population in the country, yet their diversity was not reflected on prime time television.**

- Youth characters (ages 18 and under) in prime time were less racially diverse than the overall sample. They were slightly more likely to be white (77%) than adult characters (73%) and there were fewer racial groups represented.
- Gains for Latinos in the overall prime time population were not reflected in youth roles, as only 4% of total youth characters and 3% of opening credits youth characters were Latino.
- Asian/Pacific Islander youth comprised 1% of the total youth population and appeared solely as tertiary characters.

## Gender

- The number of male and female youth was more balanced than in the total prime time population (59% male; 41% female).
- Female and male youth characters were equally represented in opening credits roles (50% each).

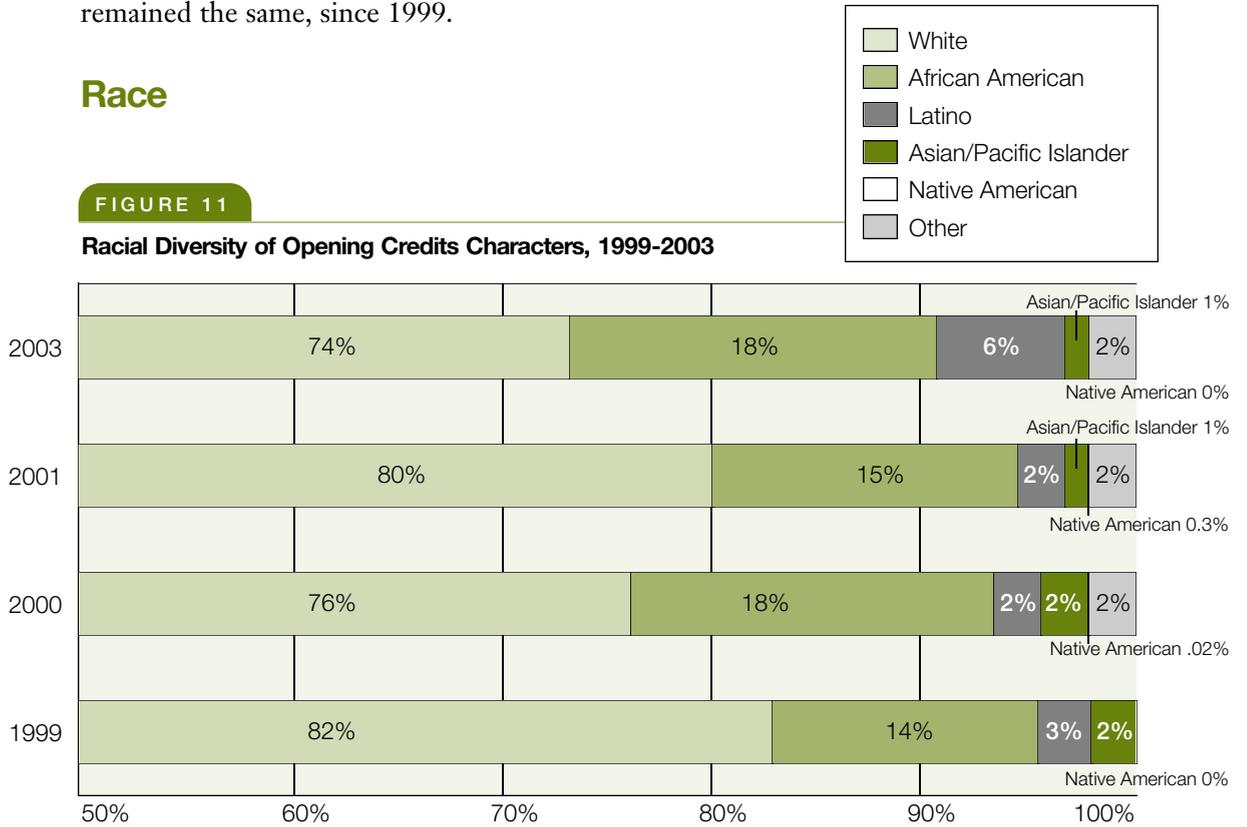
# Snapshots in Time

## Has the Picture Improved?

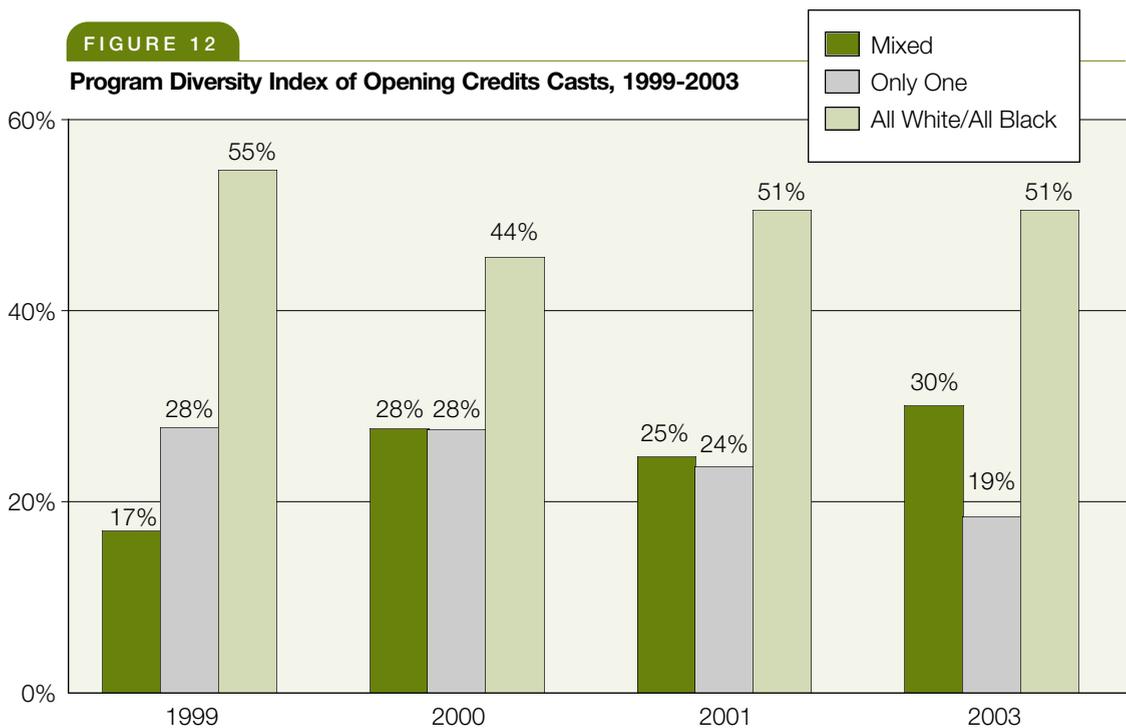
*Fall Colors* was designed to provide television executives with benchmarks for assessing their progress in incorporating diversity in their programming. The following five-year assessment integrates findings from four separate *Fall Colors* studies to provide a longitudinal glimpse of how diversity on prime time has changed, or remained the same, since 1999.

### Race

**FIGURE 11**  
Racial Diversity of Opening Credits Characters, 1999-2003



**FIGURE 12**  
Program Diversity Index of Opening Credits Casts, 1999-2003



**There has been some noteworthy progress in the amount of racial diversity in prime time over the past five years.**

- The percentage of Latino opening credit characters has doubled from 3% in 1999 to 6% in 2003.
- White characters continue to account for the majority of roles, but their proportion of the prime time population has decreased by 8 percentage points (from 82% to 74%) since 1999.
- The number of *mixed* opening credits casts has nearly doubled since 1999, from 17 to 30.

**Groups such as Asian/Pacific Islanders and Native Americans still remain under-represented.**

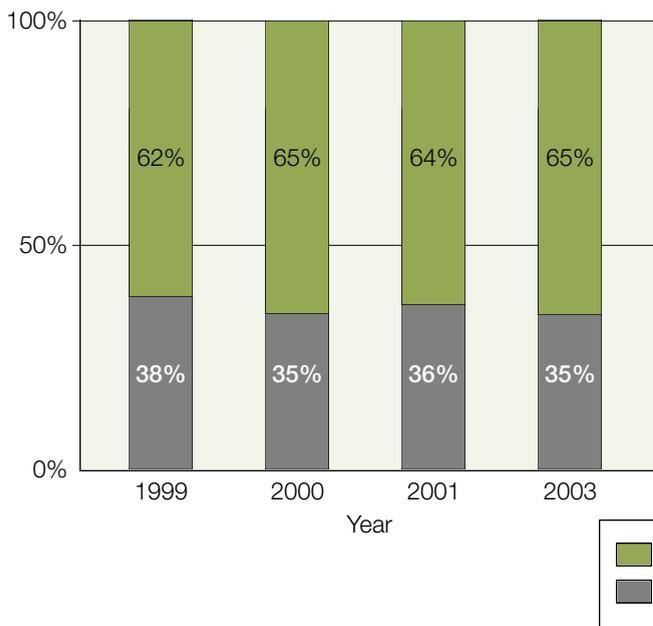
- The percentage of Asian/Pacific Islander opening credits characters has decreased by 50% since 1999.
- Native Americans have remained nearly invisible throughout the past five years.
- The number of *all white* and *all black* shows has remained nearly constant.

## Gender

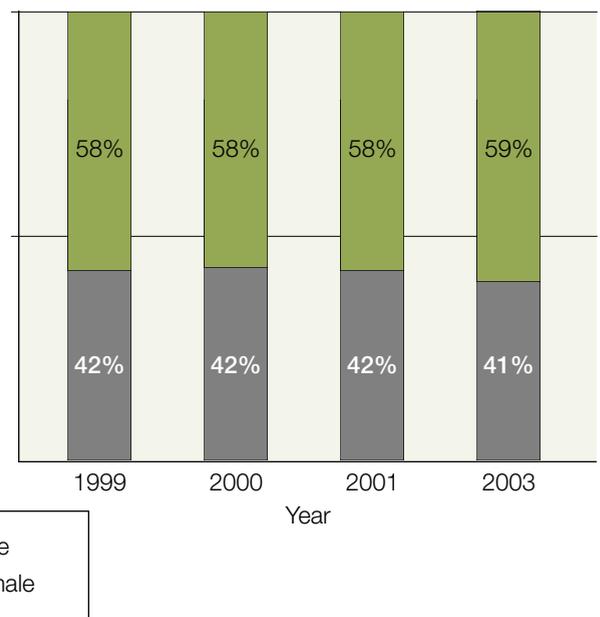
**The dominance of male characters in prime time has not changed in the past five years.**

- Male characters have consistently outnumbered female characters by nearly two to one since 1999.
- A slightly more equitable proportion of females in opening credits casts has also remained constant over the years.

**FIGURE 13**  
Gender and Race of Total Characters by Year



**FIGURE 14**  
Gender and Race of Opening Credits Characters by Year



## Conclusion



*all Colors 2003-04* illustrates that the world of prime time entertainment on the six broadcast networks continued to fall short of reflecting the rich diversity of our society. The vast majority of programs shown on prime time – especially those most watched by youth audiences – depicted a world where people primarily associate with members of their own racial group, where some racial groups remain non-existent and where males significantly outnumber females.

The 2003-2004 season did show an increase in the number of Latino characters, including one show with an *all Latino* opening credits cast. This is a positive advance for the nearly 13 million Latino youth in America who benefit from seeing characters that share their ethnic heritage on television. This progress, however, is tempered by the fact that Latino characters were more likely to appear on real life shows such as *Cops* and *America's Most Wanted*, often as criminals, than on situation comedies. They were also more likely to hold low-status jobs than were members of other racial groups.

This prime time season also revealed a lack of progress in several key areas: a continued gender imbalance, a decline in the number of Asian/Pacific Islander characters, an absence of Native American characters and a lack of racial diversity among youth characters. As in previous years, programs that were broadcast in the 8 o'clock hour, when youth are most likely to be watching, were the least diverse shows in prime time.

All young people deserve to see positive role models with whom they can identify on their television screens each night. While *Fall Colors 2003-04* has identified some improvements this season, only time will tell if these are indeed positive trends in prime time programming or merely momentary peaks in diversity. Still, the progress that television networks and producers have made toward creating a more diverse prime time is promising. It offers hope that future studies will reveal similar achievements for those groups who continue to be left behind.

# Methodology

This study examined two episodes of each prime time entertainment series airing in fall 2003 on the six national broadcast networks. "Entertainment series" refers to programming in a serial format whose main purpose is to entertain, not to inform. The sample did not include sports programming, news magazines, made-for-TV movies or specials. Programs in the sample aired between 8:00 and 11:00 P.M. PST each night.\* Programs were recorded between August 26, 2003 and December 9, 2003 by independent researchers Katharine E. Heintz-Knowles, Ph.D. and Jennifer H. Henderson, Ph.D. Since this project focused on 2003 series programming, only first-run episodes were recorded.

All content was subjected to two levels of analysis:

1. Macro-level analysis examined program characteristics including *genre, network, program start time, age-based rating and content rating.*
2. Micro-level analysis identified each speaking character and examined characteristics such as *character role, age, gender, race, marital status, parental status, occupation, disability, sexual orientation and family structure.*

All content was coded by Katharine E. Heintz-Knowles, Ph.D. and Jennifer H. Henderson, Ph.D. To ensure reliability between coders, 10% of the sample was coded by each of the coders independently. The percent of agreement between coders was calculated. All variables included in this analysis received a level of agreement of at least 95%.

For more detailed information on *Fall Colors 2003-2004* methodology, including a glossary of terminology and a list of programs included in the study, please visit [www.childrennow.org](http://www.childrennow.org).

\* Previous Fall Colors analyses included the 7-8pm hour on Sunday. This hour was dropped from the analysis because just two programs fitting the selection criteria aired during this time period: ABC's *America's Funniest Videos* and Fox's *King of the Hill*. It was determined that this was too small a sample to justify inclusion of the extra hour.

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**Children Now** is a research and action organization dedicated to assuring that children grow up in economically secure families, where parents can go to work confident that their children are supported by quality health coverage, a positive media environment, a good early education, and safe, enriching activities to do after school. Recognized for its expertise in media as a tool for change, Children Now designs its strategies to improve children's lives while at the same time helping America build a sustained commitment to putting children first. Children Now is an independent, nonpartisan organization.