

Friedman's article: he outlines the episodes of the show clearly and concisely; he enumerates the various themes the shows illustrated; and he outlines the general reaction to the show from the Hispanic community. However, what he does not do is what he announces is the purpose of his study, namely, to discuss the significance of the series' content or to provide adequate analysis of the individual shows. Too much of what is presented, therefore, is simply unsupported by specific information gleaned from the shows. We do not see the process by which the author arrived at the conclusions he is presenting.

More detailed discussion of the individual episodes and less information about how much Pablo resembled the star of the show, Paul Rodriguez, would be useful in further analysis. More resource information is also needed about Hispanic reaction to the show. Readers need more detailed references upon which to form an opinion. One final point: more should have been done with a comparison of *a.k.a. Pablo* to *Chico and the Man*, tracing any similarities, progress in ethnic images since 1974, and the like.

I would have found helpful a close analysis of at least one episode of the series, complete with a discussion of the relationship between visuals and dialogue, and some in-depth reflections on the show with adequate details to serve as reference points. As is, I find the paper interesting, even provocative. Further research in analysis, in content discussion, and in background information is necessary to evaluate the impact and influence of television on a viewing public which often cannot fairly evaluate the portrayal of ethnic peoples or situations. Friedman's essay provides a model of how to begin this effort.

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## Critique

Norman Friedman's analysis of the short-lived sitcom, *a.k.a. Pablo*, raises many issues about the role of television in social life and the limited access of minorities to representation on television and to the decision-making processes of television programming. As his content

analysis implicitly shows, the “situations” and the comedy of this sitcom were defined, set in motion, and revolved around various positions of Mexican Americans in relation to white culture and society. Pablo’s Mexican jokes and flagrant stereotypical traits allowed him access to the world of show business and at the same time disturbed the self-perceptions and cultural pride of his family; his sister’s liberal activism and feminism was placed in opposition to more conservative views of how to progress in America and awareness of the constraints of mainstream white society. The program thus positioned the Rivera family along several axes which showcased the heterogeneity of Mexican Americans as it addressed the socially constructed conventions of cultural stereotypes.

Norman Lear, producer of *a.k.a. Pablo*, occupies a position in television history associated with liberal programs which straddled the far edges of social commentary. Like *All in the Family*, *Maude*, *Good Times*, *The Jefferson*, and *Sanford and Son*, *a.k.a. Pablo* would presumably do for Mexican Americans what the other programs did for blacks and the working class: explicitly expose fundamental prejudices and generational differences in social life through antagonisms within the family. Yet, as Friedman’s discussion of the reaction of some of the Hispanic press to *a.k.a. Pablo* shows, the question of how “liberating” the narrative structures and humor are is a vexing problem. Is simply having representation on television enough? Although the goal may be to reinforce pride in being Mexican American and to stress the strength of family ties through adversity, the Hispanic press argued that the price is too high. The Lear sitcom format this time stretched the limits of “bad taste” too far and the controversial aspects of the program negated any possible value for the Hispanic community.

Friedman’s analysis of critical reaction and interviews is an aspect of television which should be pursued as this is a valuable entry into understanding how audiences for television are addressed by other media. In addition to criticizing and evaluating programming, the press also sets out the terms for popular understanding of television. Comparing the reactions of mass media, trade journals, and the Hispanic press would show the differences in their responses to the program as well as the issues which each type of press considers important for its readers. As Friedman implies, the Hispanic press, speaking to and for a group, found *a.k.a. Pablo* the most problematic and most offensive. Yet this negative appraisal was undoubtedly less significant to the program’s cancellation than its ratings.

With the adopting of overnight ratings in the mid-1970s, the necessity of programs finding an “instant” audience reinforced competition

among the networks. The placement of *a.k.a. Pablo* against *The A-Team's* strength and the now typical six-episode run of new series worked at cross purposes for *a.k.a. Pablo's* renewal. Friedman asks Hispanics to articulate their viability as an audience for television by writing the networks as did the fans of *Cagney and Lacey*. This organized voice needs to constitute itself as a demographic group attractive to advertisers. What CBS recognized in the *Cagney and Lacey* letters was an audience to which advertisers of the program could be sold—women in an age group and with an income level attractive to advertisers. Finding the “best” audience for certain programs is the most critical variable.

A basic issue here is that television is unadaptable to the heterogeneity of American social life because television formats such as the sitcom and producers' perceptions of the harmony among audiences, formats and advertisers work toward homogenous and unified representations. The constraints of the sitcom format itself may have been a problem for *a.k.a. Pablo*. Was the convention of the large Mexican American family impossible for the format to adequately handle? Did the central character of Pablo have “too many” other characters with which to interact thus creating “too many” oppositions for a half-hour? *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* effectively de-centered Mary to allow the other characters to assume identities separate from her. An ensemble structure such as that of *WKRP in Cincinnati* might have allowed *a.k.a. Pablo* to focus on the heterogeneity of Mexican Americans. Yet this would have limited the self-reflection fundamental to the concept of the program, that of the position of Paul Rodriguez/Pablo Rivera as he tries to negotiate access to mass media.

Presumably though, in order to attain representation on television today, Hispanics would have to adopt the traits of already acculturated *yuppie* upward mobility as in *The Bill Cosby Show*. The situations and the comedy would have to circulate around the characters as “persons” first and identifiable cultural minorities second. The ethnicity and heterogeneity of social life would have to be effectively masked and placed into the “melting pot” of Euroamerican ideologies. Thus the conventions of Mexican American ethnicity and the issues of cultural progress for Mexican Americans would have to be relegated to past achievements and to history. Or Mexican Americans will have to, as Friedman strongly argues, establish themselves as a target demographic group for advertisers. Yet this, too, will exact a price.

Hispanics already provide another alternative to “free” television in exclusively Spanish-language television such as the SIN cable network and the UHF stations in large metropolitan areas such as Chicago.

These stations have programming which including the broad range of television such as music video, news, sitcoms, and variety shows. Although language is a barrier to non-Spanish speakers seeking exposure to programming speaking to and for a diversified culture, the development of the alternative programming is evidence of both the size and complexity of America's Hispanic population as well as their ability to summon the technology, capital, and personnel necessary to its distribution.

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