

THE 2007 HOLLYWOOD WRITERS REPORT

# Whose Stories Are We Telling?



COMMISSIONED BY  
WRITERS GUILD OF AMERICA, WEST

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# Whose Stories Are We Telling?



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COMMISSIONED BY **WRITERS GUILD OF AMERICA, WEST**  
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## Discussing the Need for Change

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This is the 2007 edition of the Hollywood Writers Report, the Writers Guild West's analysis of hiring trends of writers in the motion picture and television industry. Two changes have occurred in the Report since its last issuance. First, this is the shortest span between reports, as it is the WGAW's intention to make this an annual release. Second, unlike years past, the report is being issued in the spring so that it can have a direct impact on the television hiring season which is now upon us.



This year's report has a familiar ring to it: while there have been some advances made by women and minorities in some sectors, white male writers continue to be a disproportionately dominant portion of the writing workforce.

One of the few bright spots is for women writers in TV where median income rose significantly (though employment percentage numbers rose very slightly). The news is less encouraging, however, for women in film, where no gains were achieved.

For minority writers, past trends showing gains have either slowed or stopped altogether. The outlook going forward may be even bleaker when, next year, we will release a report that will not include data from the now defunct UPN, one of the significant employers of minority TV writers.

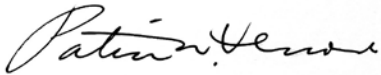
Analysis of the position of older writers is complex. Statistics show that writers in the 41-50 bracket lead all writers in television and film earnings. However, the employment share for the largest group of older writers has remained flat. Older writers are significantly underrepresented on show staffs, despite the fact that older writers recently have been accounting for a larger share of guild membership each year.

It is important to note that these statistics report on WGA-covered writing. There is a tremendous amount of writing done for which we don't have statistics, including network reality television, cable animation, nonfiction, and comedy-variety programming, as well as independent film and animated feature films because these are largely non-Guild genres.

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It could affect our conclusions if we were able to include hiring data from these growing workforces where the hiring patterns are, at least anecdotally, more diverse despite (or perhaps because of) lower salaries and inferior working conditions.

This report should be a call to action for all decision makers in this industry (TV showrunners as well as TV and film executives). Releasing this report during the TV hiring season provides a timely reminder to those decision makers to actively seek out and read the work of writers who are women and people of color. As part of a unified Guild, we must all be allowed to compete for opportunities so that all our stories may have an equal chance to be heard. We are all in this together.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Patric M. Verrone". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "P".

Patric M. Verrone  
President, WGAW

# The 2007 Hollywood Writers Report

## Executive Summary

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### *Whose Stories Are We Telling?*


The 2007 Hollywood Writers Report tells a story of an industry in which business-as-usual practices have been wholly inadequate for addressing the lack of diversity among writers. Findings from the report show that minimal progress has been made in opening up the industry to women and minority writers in recent years. To be sure, these writers have actually gone backwards in some areas relative to their male and white counterparts since the 2005 Hollywood Writers Report.

More than 30 percent of the American population is non-white, yet writers of color continue to account for less than 10 percent of employed television writers. These numbers will likely get worse before they get better because of the recent merger of UPN and the WB into the new CW Network, which resulted in the cancellation of several minority-themed situation comedies that employed a disproportionate share of minority television writers. The situation is grimmer in film, where the minority share of employment has been stuck at 6 percent for years.

Although women writers still have a long way to go before they reach parity with their male counterparts in the Hollywood industry (they have yet to exceed a twenty-something share of overall employment), it appears as if the television sector has been more open to female participation — particularly if median earnings are used as the measure of progress. In the film sector, however, women writers have made no gains relative to male writers in recent years, and there is little evidence to suggest that this pattern is changing.

Meanwhile, the employment share for the largest group of older writers has remained flat in recent years, and older writers are significantly underrepresented on television show staffs, particularly at the major networks.

Below, specific findings from the 2007 Hollywood Writers Report are reviewed in order to document in greater detail recent trends in employment and earnings for women, minority and over-40 writers. Where appropriate, statistics for these groups are compared to those for white, male and 40-and-under writers.



**DARNELL HUNT, Ph.D.** is Director of the Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies and Professor of Sociology at UCLA. Dr. Hunt has written extensively on race and media, including three recent books and numerous book chapters and articles. He was the author of the 2005 Hollywood Writers Report commissioned by the WGAW. He was also the principal investigator of The African American Television Report, released by the Screen Actors Guild in June of 2000. Prior to his academic positions, he worked in the media and as a media researcher for the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights' 1993 hearings on diversity in Hollywood.

## Women Writers

### **Women Writers' Overall Employment Share Remains Flat**

Since 2004 – the final year analyzed in the 2005 Hollywood Writers Report—women writers' shares of overall employment and television employment remained unchanged (25 percent and 27 percent, respectively). Meanwhile, the group's share of film employment increased only about one percentage point (from 18 percent to 19 percent). Over the seven-year period covered in this report (1999 to 2005), gains have not exceeded two percentage points in any of the employment areas (see **Figure 1**).

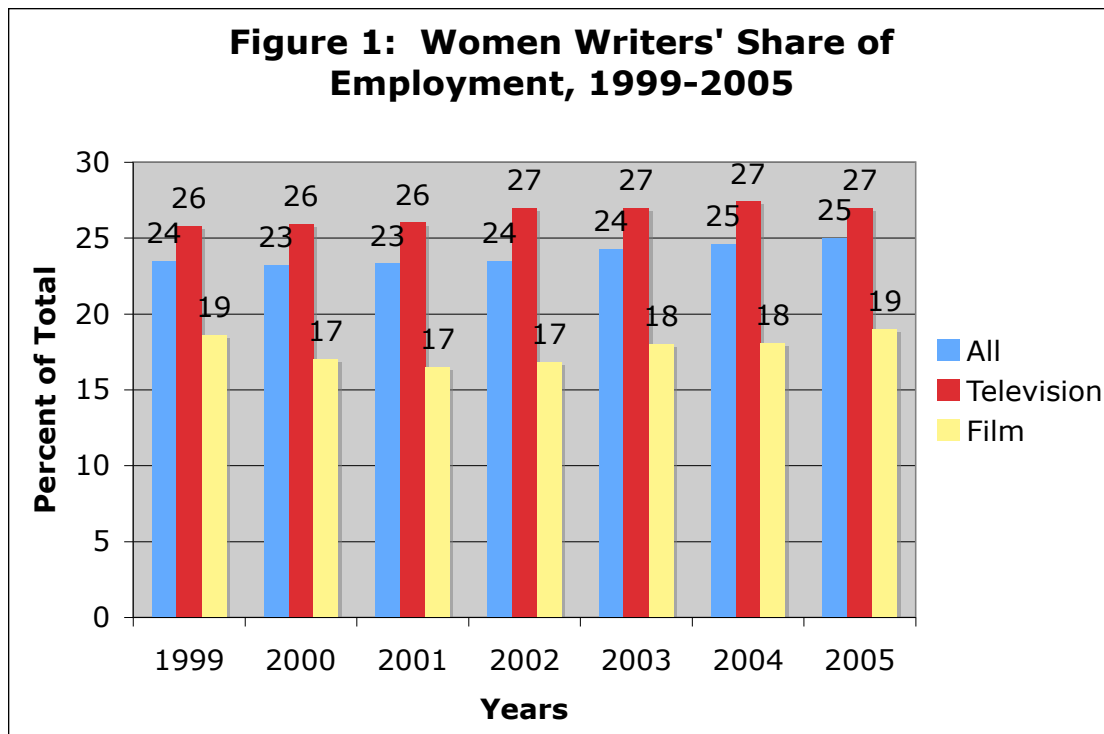
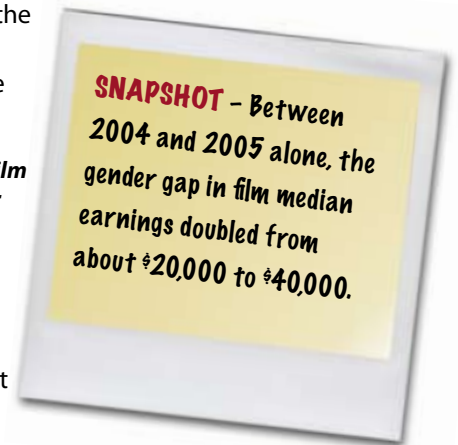
### **Women Writers Make Gains in Television Earnings**

Since 2004 – the last year covered in the previous Hollywood Writers Report -- women writers virtually eliminated the television median earn-

ings gap, earning just about \$300 less than their male counterparts in 2005<sup>1</sup>. The gap was nearly \$10,000 in 2004, \$79,447 for women versus \$88,768 for males. Over the seven-year period, women writers' television earnings have closely approached the earnings of male writers, with the largest gaps evident in 2004 and 1999 (see **Figure 2**).

### **Large Gender Gap in Film Earnings Grows Larger**

Between 2004 and 2005 alone, the gender gap in film median earnings doubled – from about \$20,000 to \$40,000.



<sup>1</sup> While this development is promising, it should be interpreted with caution. Television earnings are reported only on the first \$5,000 earned per week (approximately) by television staff writers. Because weekly earnings can significantly exceed \$5,000 as writers move up the ranks, WGAW data may not capture any gender disparities in earnings among higher status writers. Indeed, it should be noted that women writers were half as likely as their male counterparts in 2005-06 to occupy the highest status position of showrunner.

Women writers earned \$50,000 in 2005, compared to \$90,000 for males. The 2004 figures were \$65,966 and \$84,000, respectively. Over the seven-year period, the gap has never been less than \$10,000. While women writers have made considerable strides in television earnings, they appear to be going backwards in the film sector (see **Figure 3**).



**Sonya Steele, Co-Chair of Committee of Black Writers**

## Minority Writers

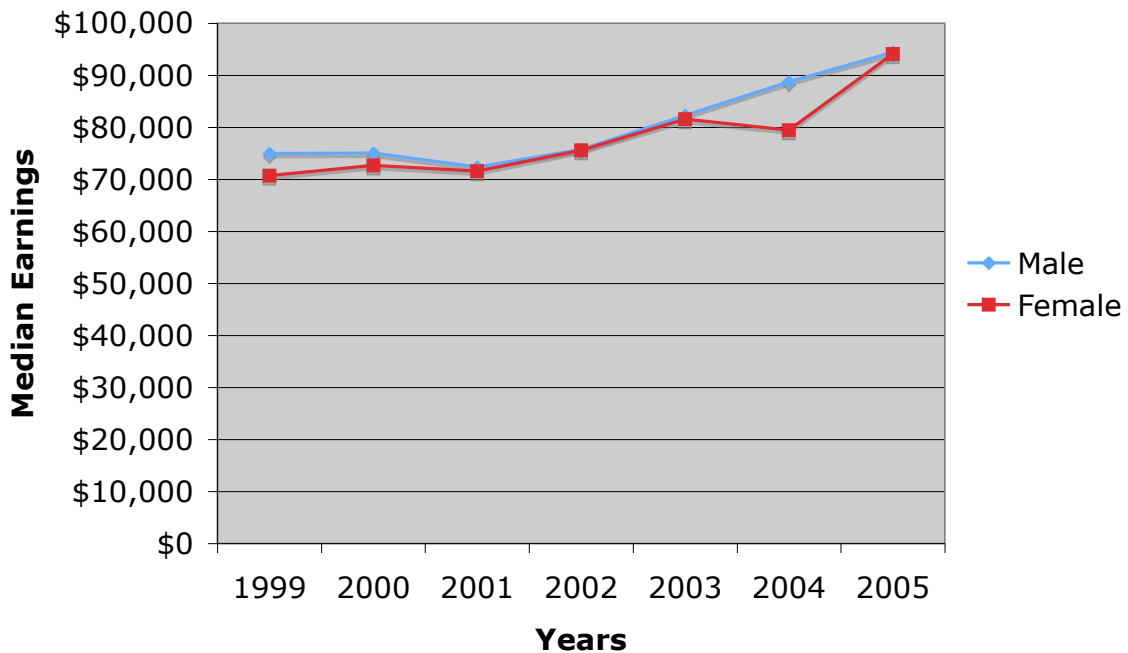
### **Minorities Lose Ground In Television Employment**

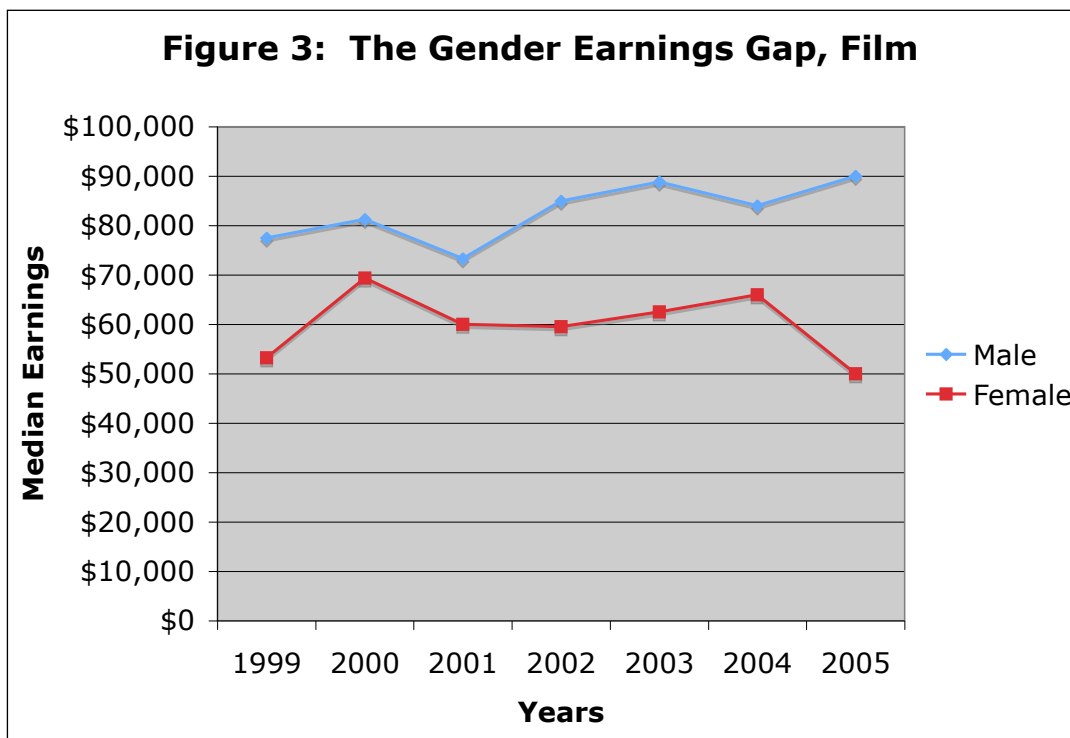
Since 2004 -- the last year covered in the 2005 Hollywood Writers Report -- minorities have lost ground in television employment relative to white writers. In 2004 the minority share was about 10 percent; a year later the minority share had dropped to about 9 percent. Over the seven-year study period (1999 to 2005), the minority share changed only minimally, ranging between a low of 7 percent in 1999 and a high of just 10 percent in 2003 and 2004 (see **Figure 4**). Minorities remained underrepresented by a factor of more than 3 to 1 among employed television writers.

### **Minority Share of Film Employment Remains Flat**

The overall minority share of film employment has remained unchanged at 6 percent since 1999 (see **Figure 5**). Minorities remained underrepresented by a factor of more than 5 to 1 among employed film writers in 2005.

**Figure 2: The Gender Earnings Gap, TV**





**Television Earnings Gap for Minorities Continues to Grow**

The overall minority earnings gap in television has increased since the final year reported in the previous Hollywood Writers Report. Between 2004 and 2005, the gap increased by more than \$6,000, from \$13,713 to \$19,849. This development continues a trend of increasing disparities that followed a moment of near parity in 2000 and 2002. In 2005, the overall median earnings figure for minority writers in television was

\$78,107, compared to \$97,956 for white writers (see **Figure 6**).

**Film Earnings Gap for Minorities Increases Slightly**

Between 2004 and 2005, the overall minority earnings gap in film increased by nearly \$2,000, from

\$9,000 to \$10,871. This increase in the earnings gap followed a moment in 2003 when the median earnings of minority film writers actually exceeded those of their white counterparts by more than \$6,000, buoyed by the relatively high median earnings of African American and Latino film writers that year. Minority film writers earned \$66,666 in 2005, compared to \$77,537 for white film writers. The largest gap — \$21,750 — was in 1999 (see **Figure 7**).

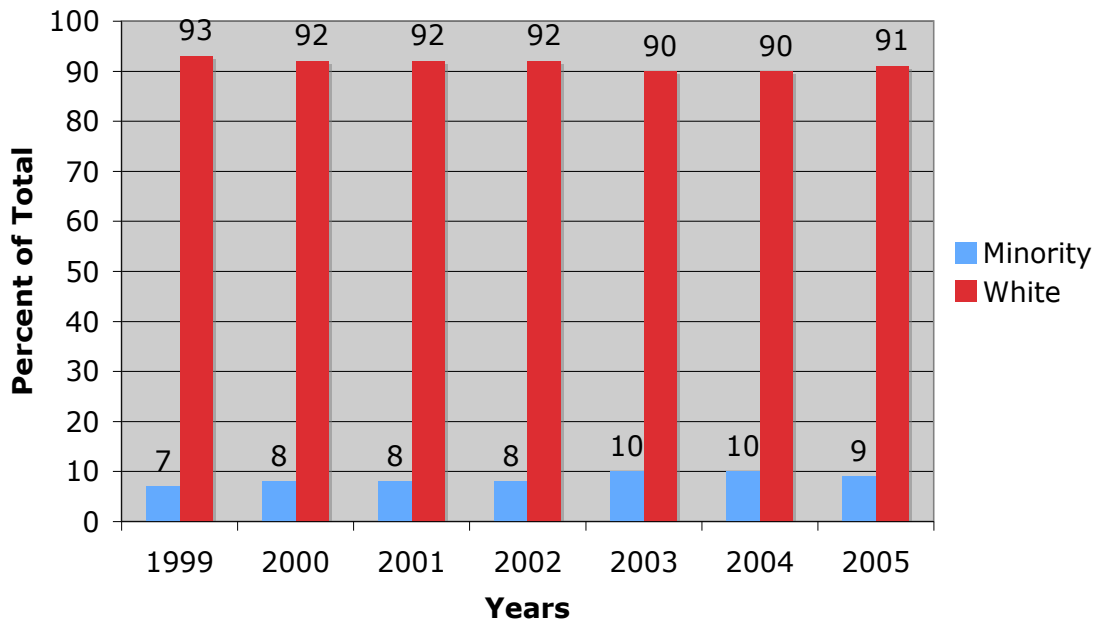
**Overall Earnings Gap Between White Male and Minority Writers Grows to a 15-year High; Women Continue to Trail White Men in Overall Earnings**

Minority writers earned \$83,334 in 2005, compared to \$94,146 for women and \$118,357 for white males. The \$35,023 gap between white male earnings and minority earnings in 2005 was the largest over the 1991-to-2005 period. Minority earnings momentarily exceeded the earnings of both white males and women toward the beginning of the 15-year period, in 1993. Women writers' earnings never matched or exceeded those of white males over the period (see **Figure 8**).

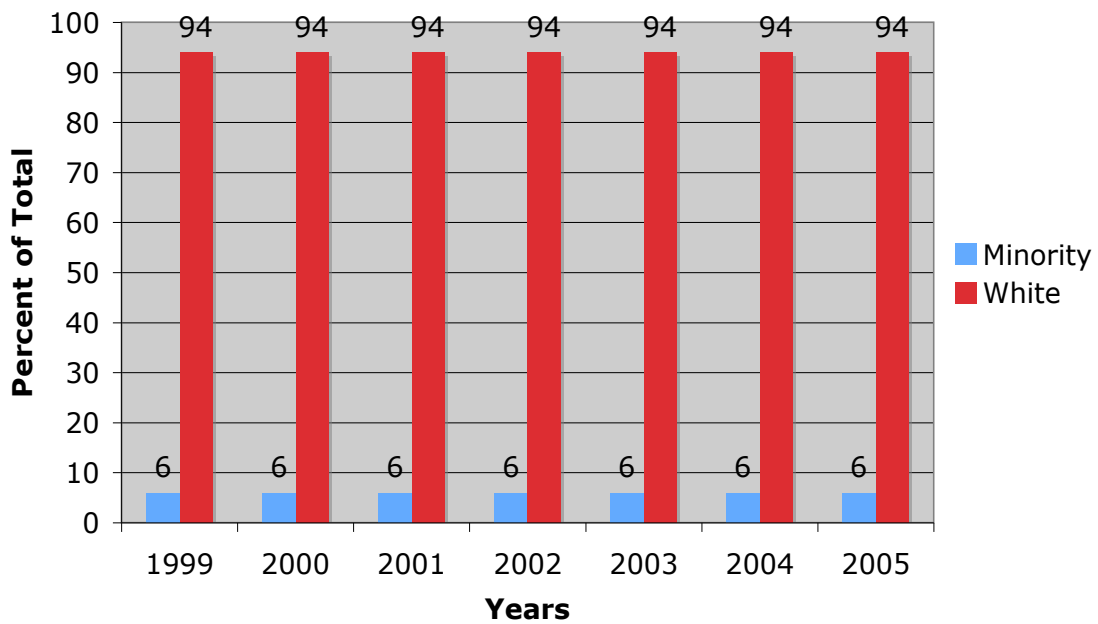
**SNAPSHOT** - Minorities remained underrepresented among employed television writers by a factor of more than 3 to 1 and among employed film writers by more than 5 to 1 in 2005.



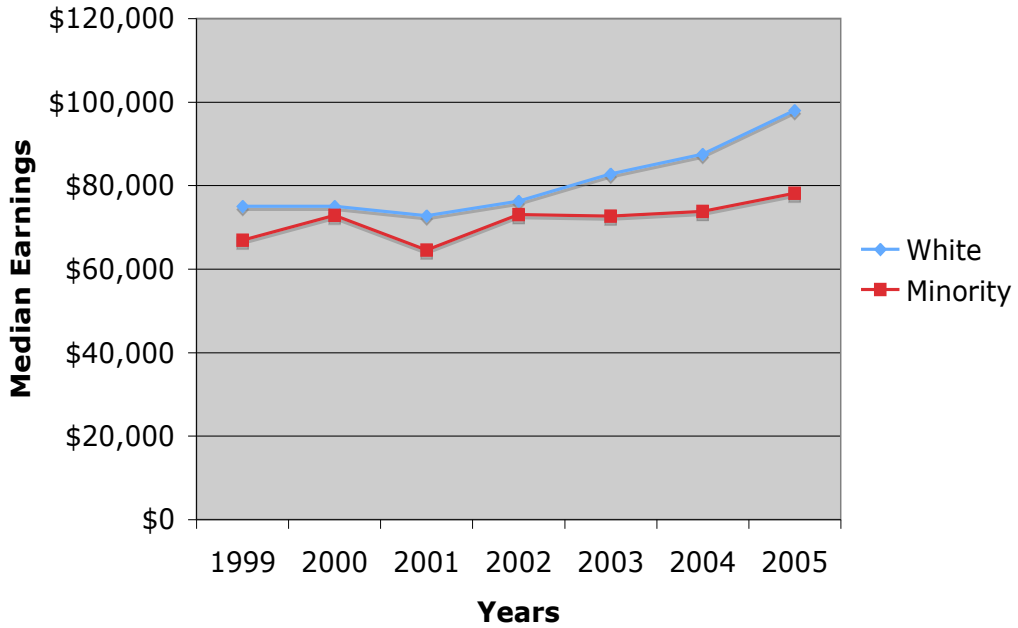
**Figure 4: Television Employment by Minority Status, 1999-2005**



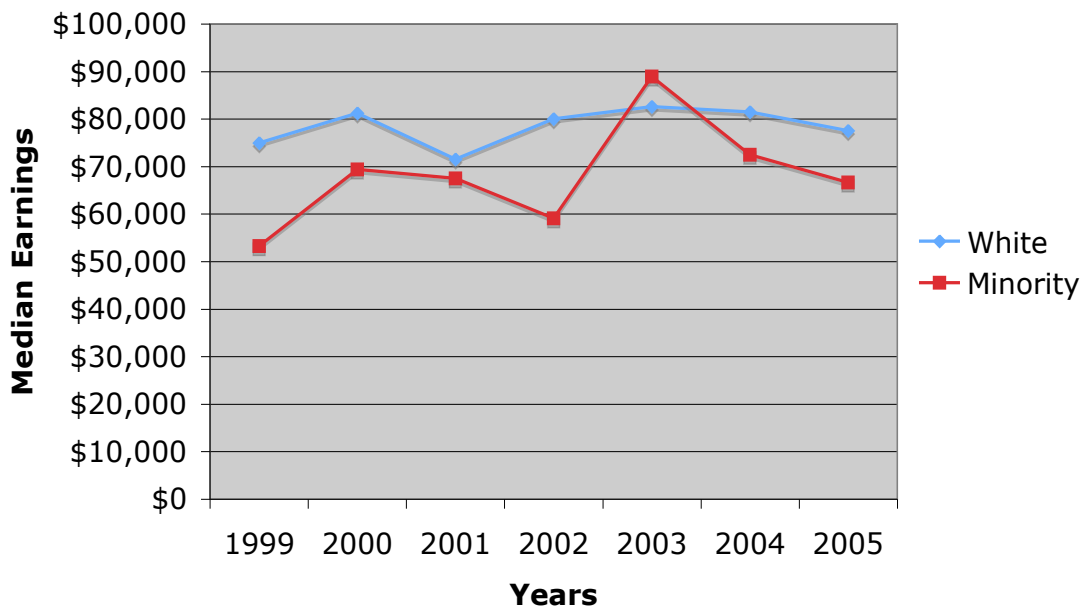
**Figure 5: Film Employment by Minority Status, 1999-2005**



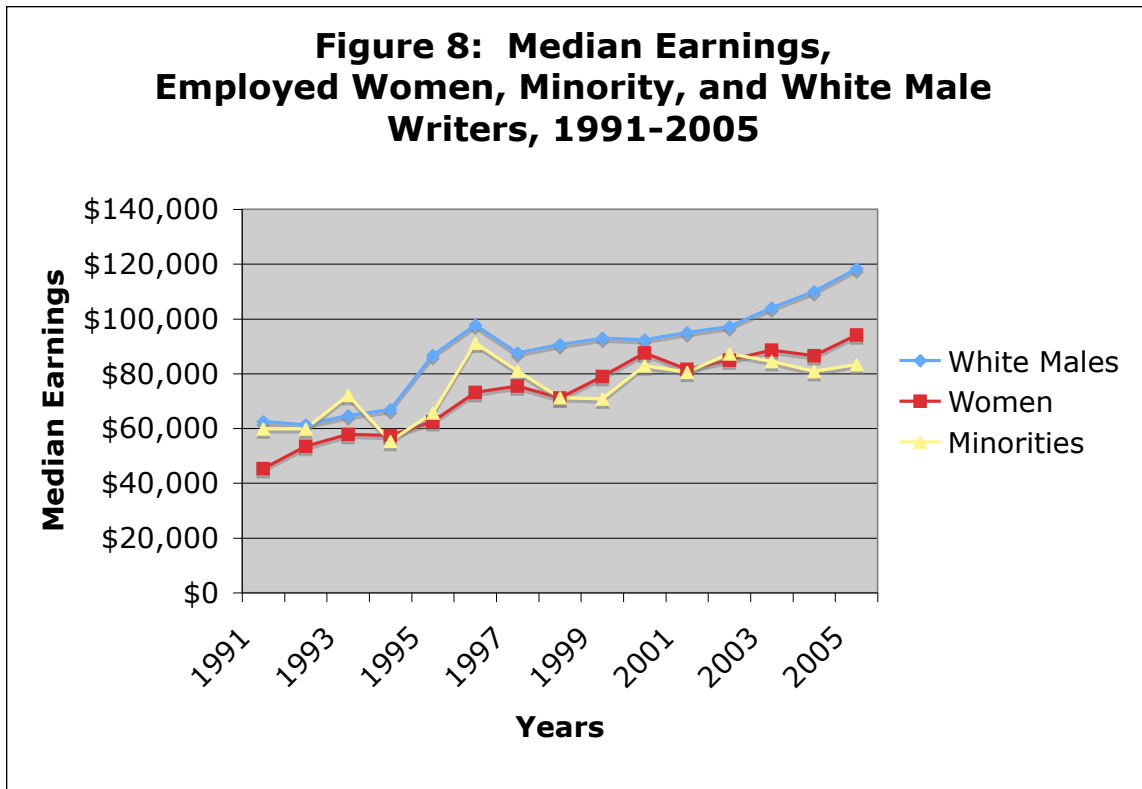
**Figure 6: The Earnings Gap for Minorities, TV**



**Figure 7: The Earnings Gap for Minorities, Film**



**Figure 8: Median Earnings, Employed Women, Minority, and White Male Writers, 1991-2005**



### Older Writers

#### **Employment Share for Largest Group of Older Television Writers Largely Flat**

**Figure 9** focuses on the period 2001 to 2005 and shows that television writers aged 41 to 50 – the largest group of older writers—accounted for a flat 35 percent of all employed television writers in each of three select years – 2001, 2003, and 2005. By contrast, the large group of younger writers aged 31 to 40 enjoyed an increase in employment share over the period (from 35 percent to 37 percent), while the smaller group of writers 31 and under posted a decrease (from 9 percent to 7 percent).

#### **Post Baby Boomers Become the Majority of All Television Writers**

When we consider employed television writers by generation cohort, the general demographic

process by which newer cohorts of writers replace older ones is revealed with startling clarity (see **Figure 10**). Post Baby Boom Generation writers (born after 1962) became the majority of all employed television writers in 2005 (51.6 percent), up 11 percentage points from their 29.3 percent share in 1999. In contrast, the combined employment share of Pre-Baby Boom Generation (born before 1946) and Early Baby Boom Generation (born between 1946 and 1962) writers declined more than 15 percentage points over the period, from 35.6 percent to 19.5 percent. The Baby Boom Generation (born between 1946 and 1962) experienced the largest percentage of change in television writer employment over the period, declining from 20.7 percent in 1999 to just 28.9 percent in 2005.



**Post Baby Boomers Increase Their Majority Share of Film Employment**

Post Baby Boom Generation writers – which included the large, 31-to-40 age grouping discussed above – first became the majority of film writers in 2004, accounting for 51.2 percent of all film writers. By 2005, Post Baby Boomers increased their majority share to 55 percent, a process of share growth that will continue for this group of writers as the currently defined generation cohorts age (see **Figure 11**).

**Overall Employment Rate of Writers Aged 41 to 50 Increases Steadily Since 2001**

Writers aged 41 to 50 enjoyed a four percentage-point increase in their overall employment rate in each of three sampled years – from 53 percent in

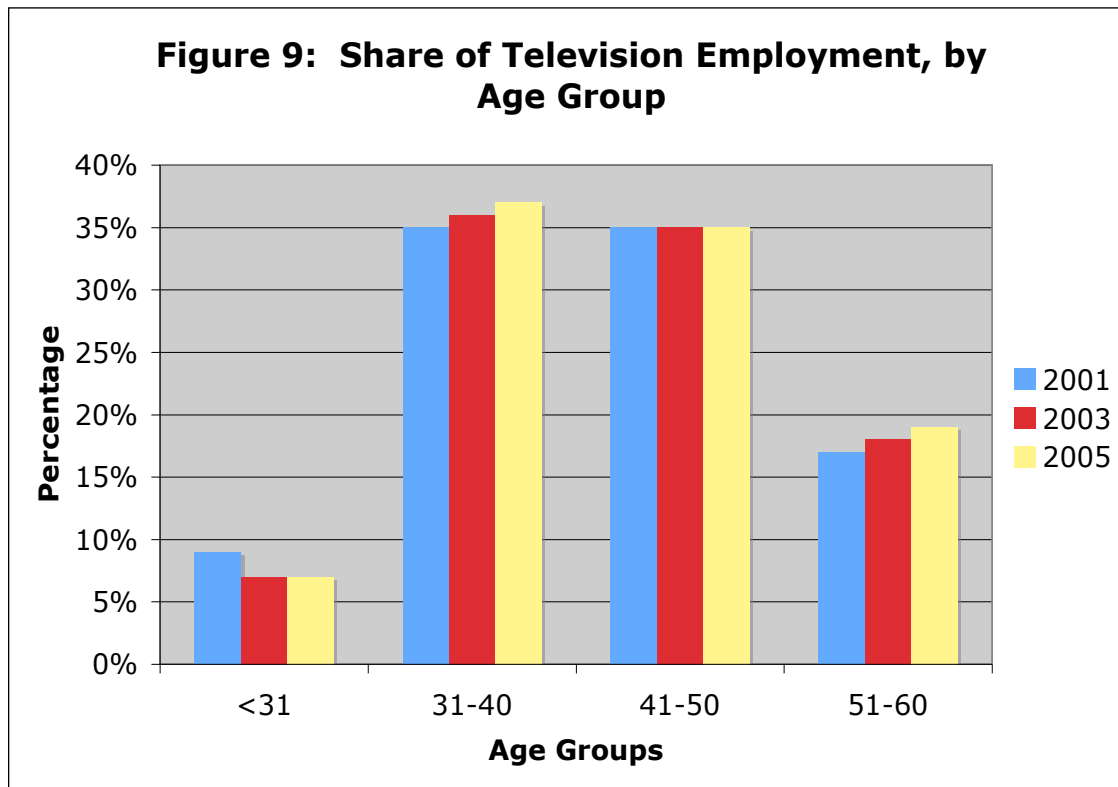
2001 to 57 percent in 2003 to 61 percent in 2005. Writers under 40 continued to post the highest overall employment rates<sup>2</sup> (see **Figure 12**).

**Television Earnings Highest Among Writers Aged 41 to 50**

Since 2004, television earnings have peaked among writers aged 41 to 50 (see **Figure 13**). This group posted peak earnings of \$100,000 in 2004 and \$111,580 in 2005.

The group of younger writers aged 31 to 40 was the highest-earning age group in each year prior to 2004. The group’s median earnings ranged from a low of \$89,156 in 2002 to a high of \$93,607 in 2003.

**Writers Aged 41 to 50 Become Highest Paid**



<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that some of the employment-rate gap between younger and older writers – particularly at the extremes of the age distribution – is an artifact of normal career progression. That is, writers in the youngest age category are the most likely of the writers to be employed partly because these writers as a group joined the WGAW most recently – an accomplishment that required industry employment. Meanwhile, a WGAW survey cited in the previous report reveals that writers over 50 are less likely than younger writers to be actively seeking employment, despite the fact that many older writers continue to pay dues and are thus counted among the unemployed.

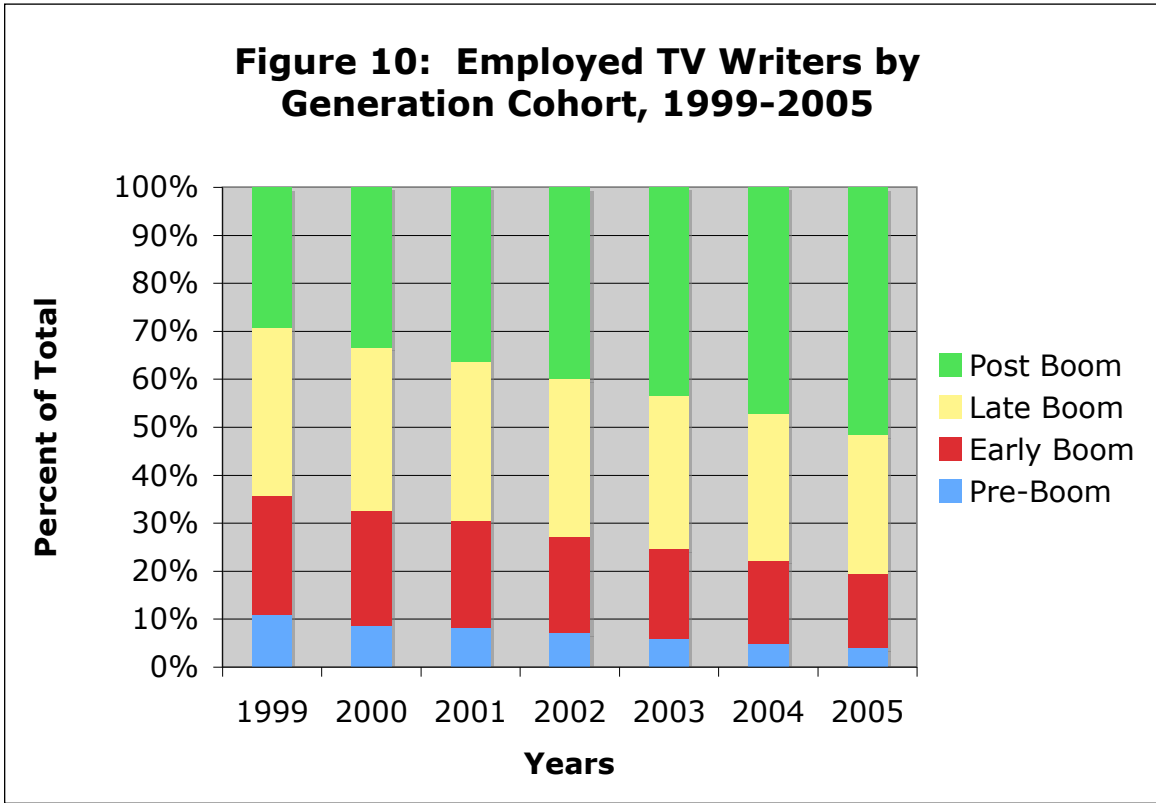
**Film Writers**

In 2005, writers aged 41 to 50 became the highest paid film writers, with median earnings of \$90,000 (see **Figure 14**). Writers aged 31 to 40 were the highest paid writers in 2004 (\$93,500). In 2003, writers aged 61 to 70 and writers aged 41 to 50 both earned the most (\$100,000).

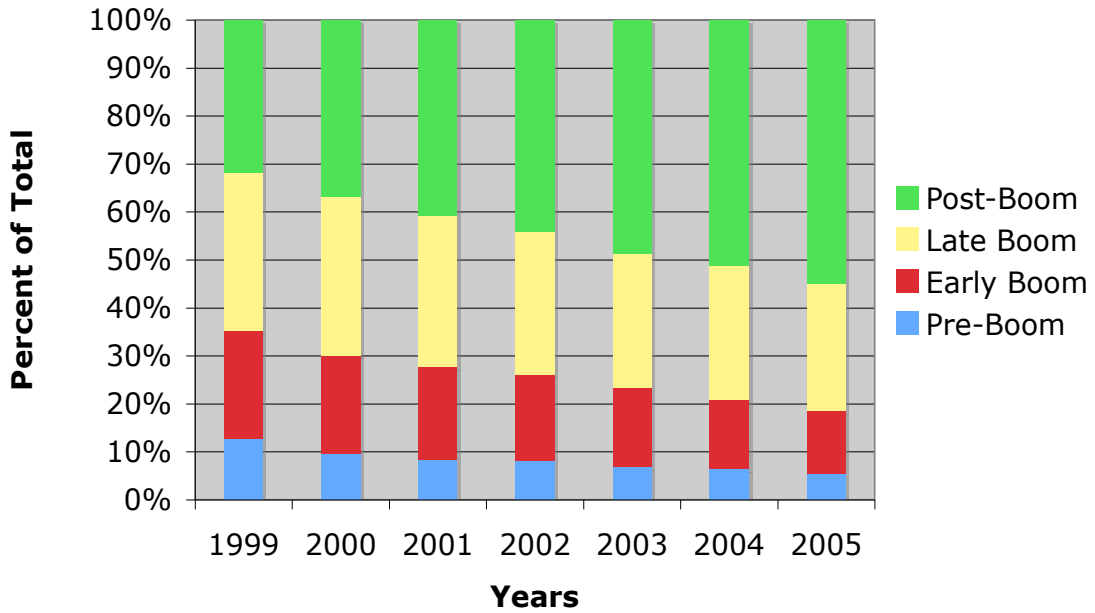


*Kris Young and Weiko Lin, Co Chairs of Asian American Writers Committee*

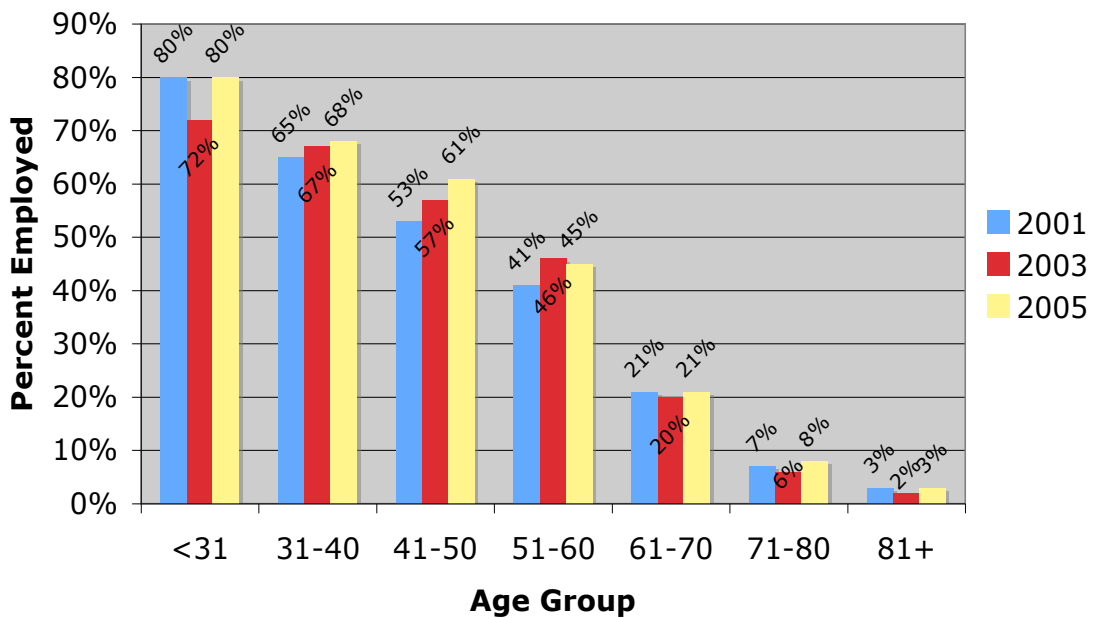
**Figure 10: Employed TV Writers by Generation Cohort, 1999-2005**



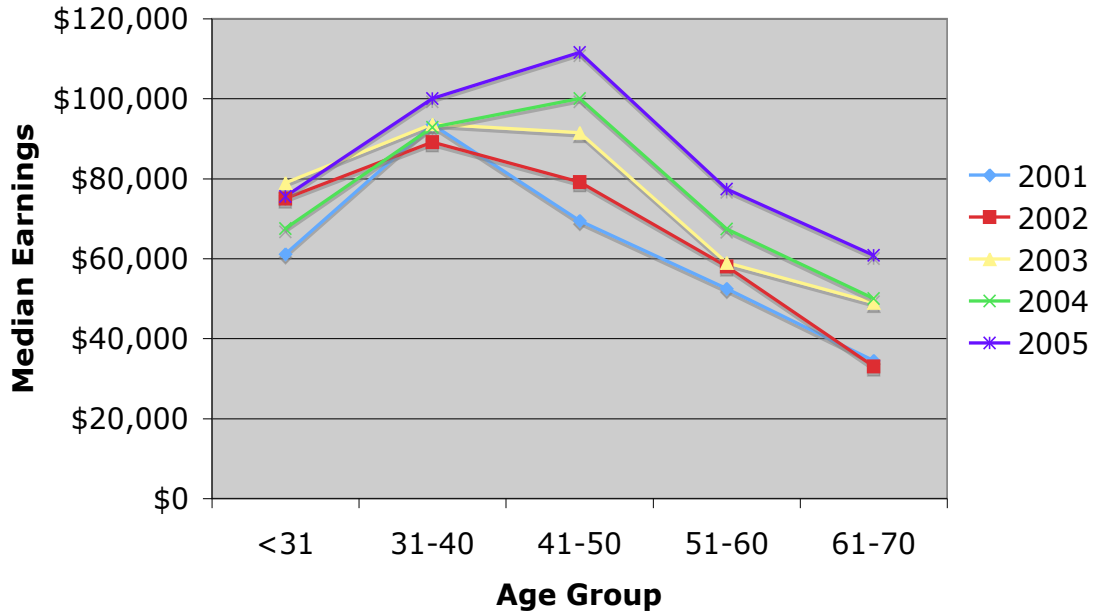
**Figure 11: Employed Film Writers by Generation Cohort, 1999-2005**



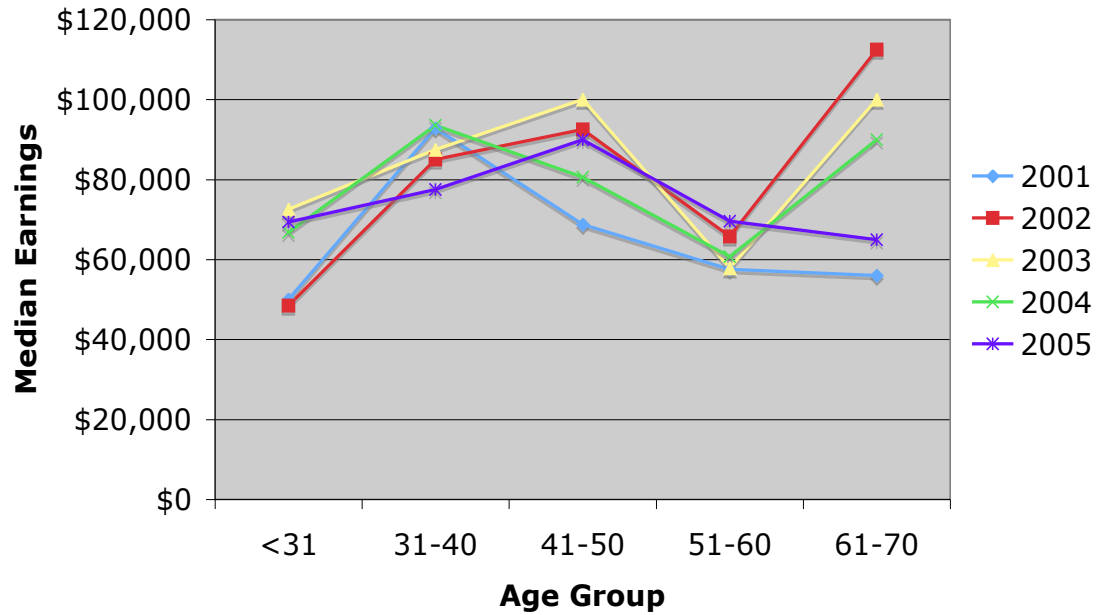
**Figure 12: Employment Rate by Age Group, 2001, 2003 and 2005**



**Figure 13: Television Earnings by Age Group, 2001-2005**



**Figure 14: Film Earnings by Age Group, 2001-2005**



## Rethinking Business as Usual

The data examined in this report tell a story that has been told many times before: while there have been some noteworthy advances made by women and minority writers on certain measures, in certain sectors, and at certain companies, there are few signs that the overarching industry dominance of white and male writers is easing to any significant degree.

Women writers still have a long way to go before they reach overall parity with their male counterparts in the Hollywood industry. Nonetheless, it appears as if the television sector has become increasingly open to female participation in recent years – particularly if median earnings are used as the measure of progress. In the film sector, however, women writers have made no gains relative to male writers in recent years, and there is little evidence to suggest that this pattern is changing.

For minority writers, it appears as if the long-term employment and earnings gains noted in previous Hollywood Writers Reports have either slowed in recent years or ground to a halt altogether. Indeed, in a few instances minority writers actually lost ground since the last report relative to their white counterparts in the industry.

Meanwhile, the industry position of older writers is much more complex. On the one hand, the opportunity structure confronting older writers is not nearly as rigid as the one facing women and minority writers: older writers continue to constitute the majority of film and television writers; they continue to occupy the highest

status positions on television show staffs; and since 2004 or so, older writers aged 41 to 50 have led in television and film earnings. On the other hand, the employment share for the largest group of older writers has remained flat in recent years, and older writers are significantly underrepresented on show staffs (as opposed to in all television employment), particularly at the major networks. These latter observations raise red flags when we consider that the over-40 share of guild membership actually has been increasing in recent years.

As these findings clearly show, industry business as usual has been wholly insufficient for addressing the Hollywood diversity problem. A new paradigm is required. This fresh approach to business would be grounded in an appreciation for the connections between stories and society. It would understand diversity as both a public good and a sure bet for the bottom line. This new paradigm would move beyond symbolic pronouncements and token gestures; it would establish clear goals, reasonable timetables and effective mechanisms for an industry truly committed to catching up with a changing America.

The Writers Guild of America, West has long been committed to advancing the employment opportunities of all writers. Toward this end, the WGAW seeks to collaborate with the industry in the creation of a new paradigm for diversity. The findings presented in this report identify missed opportunities for change that might be seized in the future, as well as pockets of promise that ought to be recognized, nurtured and replicated. Industry best practices are there for all to see. The difficult part involves figuring out how to institutionalize these forward-thinking approaches so that they become the new industry business as usual. The work of catching up with a changing America is challenging, yet important work. Without this work, it is unlikely that institutionalized barriers in the industry will be surmounted and all of our stories will be told.



**SNAPSHOT** - About 40 percent of television shows during the 2005-6 season had no minority writers on staff.



## A Note On Other Groups

Depictions of gays, lesbians and persons with disabilities have increased in film and television in recent years. Yet questions remain regarding the degree to which writers from these groups have been incorporated into the industry workforce, particularly to work on projects where their perspectives and sensitivities might be most valued. Indeed, anecdotes suggest that television and film projects featuring depictions of gays, lesbians and persons with disabilities all too often fail to employ writers from these groups. Beyond the industry experiences reported by select Guild members, however, the data do not currently exist to systematically examine the industry position of these groups of writers.

The WGAW sponsors member committees that represent the special concerns of these groups of writers and that work with the Guild's Diversity Department to make sure that their concerns are addressed by internal guild programs and industry-guild, collaborative initiatives. The Gay and Lesbian Committee has advocated using current estimates of gay and lesbian representation in the overall population as a benchmark against which to measure the group's position in the industry. By this logic, at least one in ten voices and perspectives on a project writing staff ideally should be gay or lesbian. Meanwhile, the Writers with Disabilities Committee conducted a survey of the full WGAW membership in June 2006 in order to track the careers of writers with disabilities, provide useful information for and develop programs for these members, as well as increase awareness of the talents, language and culture of writers with disabilities. In an effort to increase the employment opportuni-

ties of all writers, the WGAW will continue to work with these committees in order to collect the data necessary for documenting in future reports the industry positions of the writers the committees represent.

## Study Data

This summary is based on findings from the 2007 Hollywood Writers Report, the sixth in a series of reports released by the Writers Guild of America, West (WGAW) that examines employment trends for writers in the Hollywood industry. The 2007 report is the first to provide a one-year follow-up to its predecessor, the 2005 Hollywood Writers Report. While it focuses primarily on hiring and earnings patterns for the latest 12-month period not covered in the previous report (i.e., 2005), it also includes updated analyses of data extending back to 2001, as well as data for select earlier years imported from previous reports. Study data come from the computerized files of the WGAW, which are based on member reports of employment and earnings. The Guild collects these reports during the normal course of business in order to establish member dues. A more detailed discussion of study data and research methods is available in the full report.



**Maria Elena Rodriguez,**  
**Writer on Kingpin**