

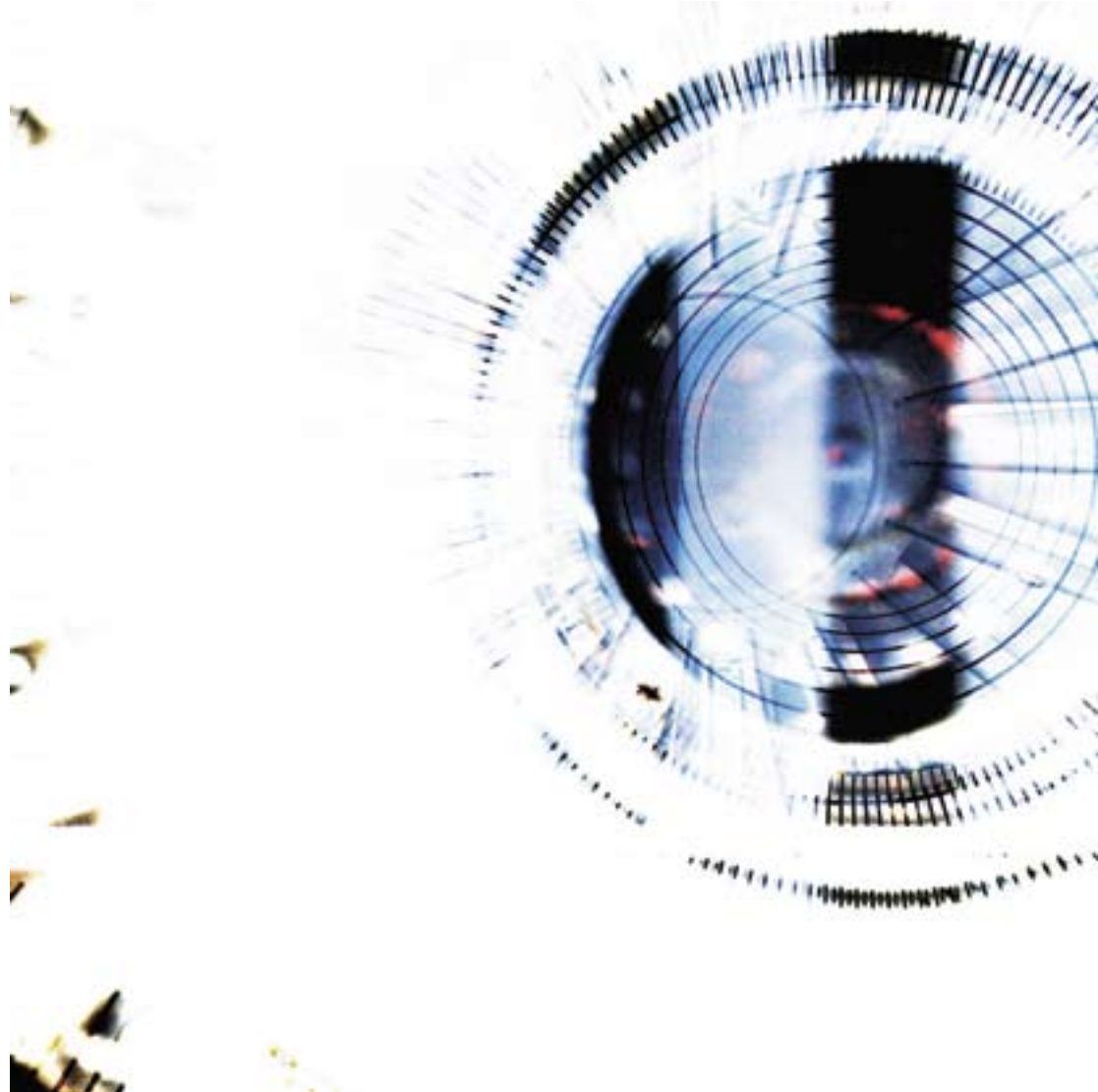
THE 2005 HOLLYWOOD WRITERS REPORT

Catching Up With a Changing *America?*

COMMISSIONED BY WRITERS GUILD OF AMERICA, WEST

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THE 2005 HOLLYWOOD WRITERS REPORT

Catching Up With a Changing America?



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Discussing the Need for Change

Dear Fellow Members:

This is the 2005 edition of the Hollywood Writers Report, the WGAw's analysis of hiring trends of writers in the motion picture and television industry. It has been some time since our last report but, even though the report itself went away, the issues it raises and the challenges it presents have not. Believing as we do that awareness of a problem is the first step toward solving it; our new administration intends to reinstate this report as a regular Guild publication.



Several observations are in order. Note that the share of television employment for women writers is 27 percent and for all minority writers combined is just under 10 percent. In film, women writers represent only 18 percent of the total while all minority groups combined account for a mere 6 percent. Knowing that women and minorities represent more than 50 percent and 30 percent of the U.S. population, respectively, these statistics raise important questions about the extent to which women and people of color are able to participate in our profession.

While employment for these groups has held steady or increased slightly since the 1998 report, the earnings gap between these writers and their white male counterparts has grown. In terms of median earnings, the gaps between white males and all females stand at \$12,000 in television (these groups were almost even in 1998) and \$19,000 in film (from \$12,500 in 1998). The difference between median earnings for minorities and their white male colleagues has increased from about \$8,500 in 1998 to nearly \$18,000 in television and from \$12,500 in 1998 to nearly \$19,000 in film. It is worth mentioning that a large portion of the writers of color in television today are employed on African-American-themed situation comedies on UPN where script fees and other financial terms are contractually reduced.

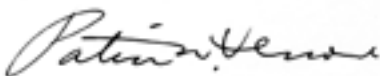
For writers over 40, the picture is somewhat more complex. While the share of television employment for writers aged 51 to 60 increased more than for any other age group, younger writers are gaining greater shares of film employment. In television, median income peaks in the groups of writers aged 31-40 and 41-50 with declining percentages reported for writers over 50. By contrast, older writers enjoy the highest median incomes in the film sector.

continued on next page

It is important to note also that these statistics report on WGAw-covered writing. There is an enormous amount of writing done for which we don't have reliable statistics in network reality television and independent films as well as cable animation, nonfiction, and comedy-variety programming. It could conceivably affect the trends if we were able to include hiring data from reality TV, not to mention Comedy Central, MTV, BET, Cartoon Network, Telemundo, and the Discovery Channels (among many others) where the hiring patterns are, at least anecdotally, more diverse, but also almost entirely nonunion (with lower salaries and inferior working conditions).

Inevitably, this report brings with it a discussion of the need for change. In the past, the Guild has found value in the establishment of access programs and many such programs have been implemented by our employers. However, in the end, we must seriously consider whether access can be truly provided by programs or if it is people who provide access. Ours is a business based on personal relationships and social contacts. Work is distributed most fundamentally on the basis of a hiring party's personal knowledge of a writer's talent, commitment, character, work ethic, and overall appeal. This requires a social integration within the professional community and a personal access to company decision makers that is too often lacking for our colleagues who happen to be neither male nor white.

As a white male TV showrunner over 40 married to a TV writer of color (let's say she's 39), I have experienced the hiring phenomenon first hand from many perspectives over almost two decades. It is abundantly clear to me that diversity in hiring requires a firm commitment on the part of decision makers (TV showrunners as well as TV and film executives) to actively seek out and read the work of writers who are women and people of color. This is not always easy and it is rarely automatic but, as a strong and unified Guild committed to success for all members, we must insist that all writers be allowed to compete with their peers for development and staffing opportunities and that we are all properly compensated for the work that we do as professional writers. When any of our voices are muted, our collective volume is reduced.



Patric M. Verrone
President, WGAw

The 2005 Hollywood Writers Report

Executive Summary

Rewriting the Story to Catch Up With a Changing America

The 2005 Hollywood Writers Report replays a story told many times in previous WGAw reports: pockets of promise may emerge from time to time, but institutionalized barriers continue to stymie progress on the Hollywood writer diversity front. 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 writers. Not only have recent employment gains for minority television writers failed to keep up with an America that is becoming increasingly diverse,

these marginal gains primarily have been the product of employment on minority-themed situation comedies. When these shows disappeared from the schedule in the past, so did employment opportunities for minority writers. Minority gains in the film sector have stalled altogether in recent years.

Meanwhile, despite minimal gains in women writers' share of employment since the last WGAw report, women writers have yet to surpass the twenty-something percent share they have traditionally claimed. Women writers also have been unable to realize a closing of the gap between their earnings and those of white males – a gap that remains most pronounced in the film sector.

Finally, the employment rate of older writers steadily declined since the last report, even though these writers managed to hold their ground in terms of employment and earnings in certain sectors.

Below, specific findings from the 2005 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 males and writers 40 and under.

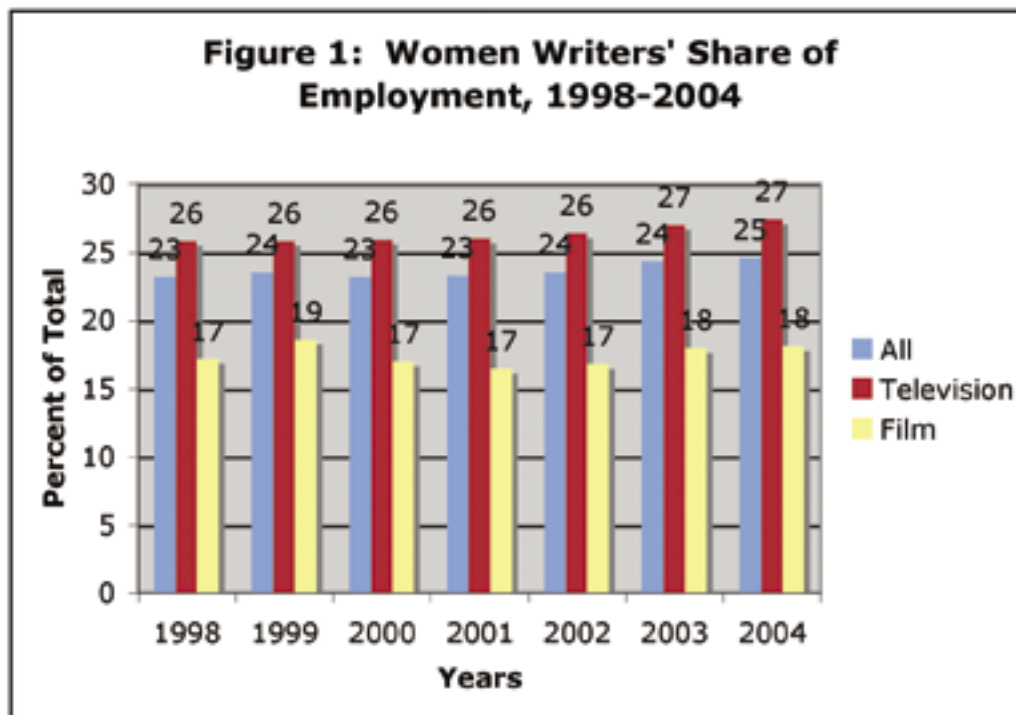
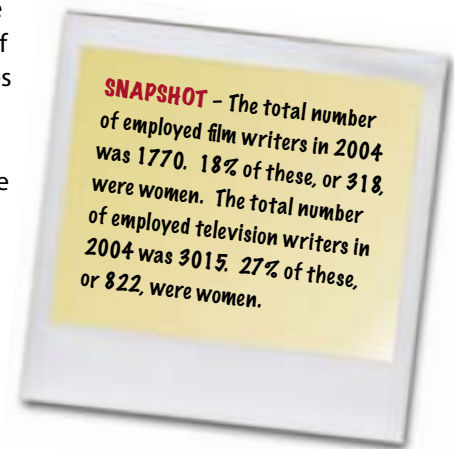
DARNELL HUNT, Ph.D. is Director of the Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies and a Professor of Sociology at UCLA. Dr. Hunt has written extensively on race and media, including three recent books and numerous book chapters and articles. He was also the principal investigator of The African 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

Figure 1 presents a look at women writers' share of employment in the industry from 1998 to 2004. Women writers' overall share of employment increased by 2 percentage points over the seven-year period, from 23 percent in 1998 to about 25 percent in 2004. As previous reports also showed, women consistently accounted for a larger share of television sector employment than they did of film sector employment. In 2004, only 18 percent of employed film writers were women, compared to 27 percent of television writers. These figures are only slightly better than those from 1998 (17 percent versus 26 percent), and the gap in employment share between the two sectors for women was unchanged (9 percentage points for both 1998 and 2004). During the 2004-2005 television season, several shows featured writing staffs that

were more than 50 percent female. These shows included Lifetime's *Strong Medicine* (64 percent), UPN's *Eve* (62 percent), and ABC's *Grey's Anatomy* (56 percent).¹ By contrast, among the twenty-two major studio conglomerates and large independents examined in 2004, women constituted less than 20 percent of the writers employed by ten of them; nine of these entities were in the film sector.² In short, the traditional employment-share advantage male writers have enjoyed relative to their women counterparts has shown few signs of eroding since the previous report, particularly in film.

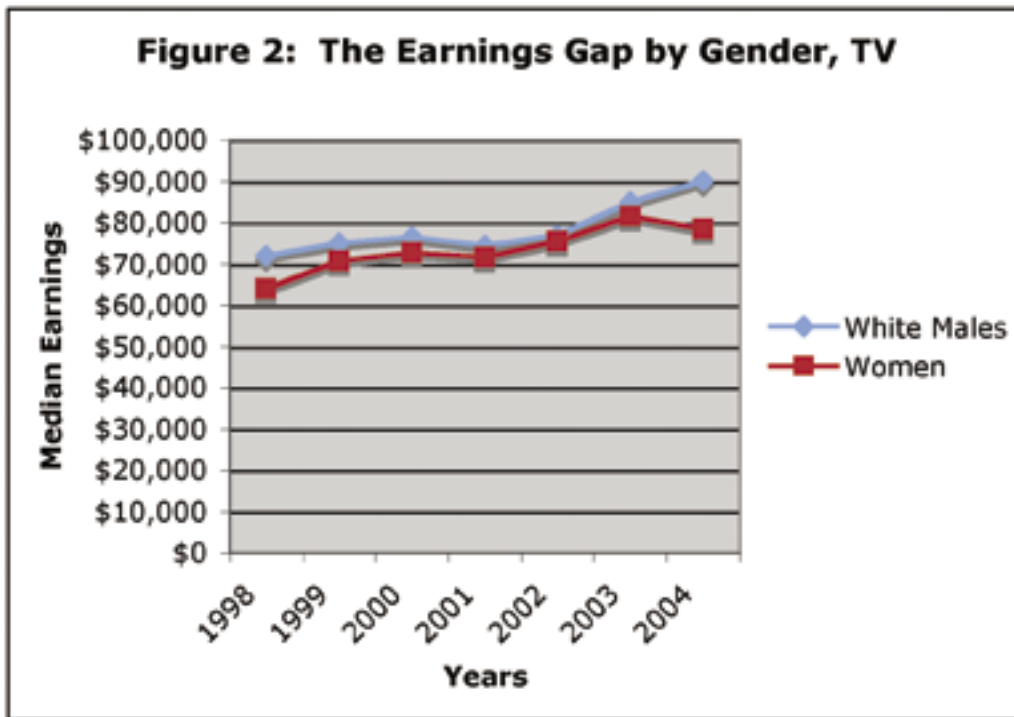


¹ Source: 2005 Hollywood Writers Report

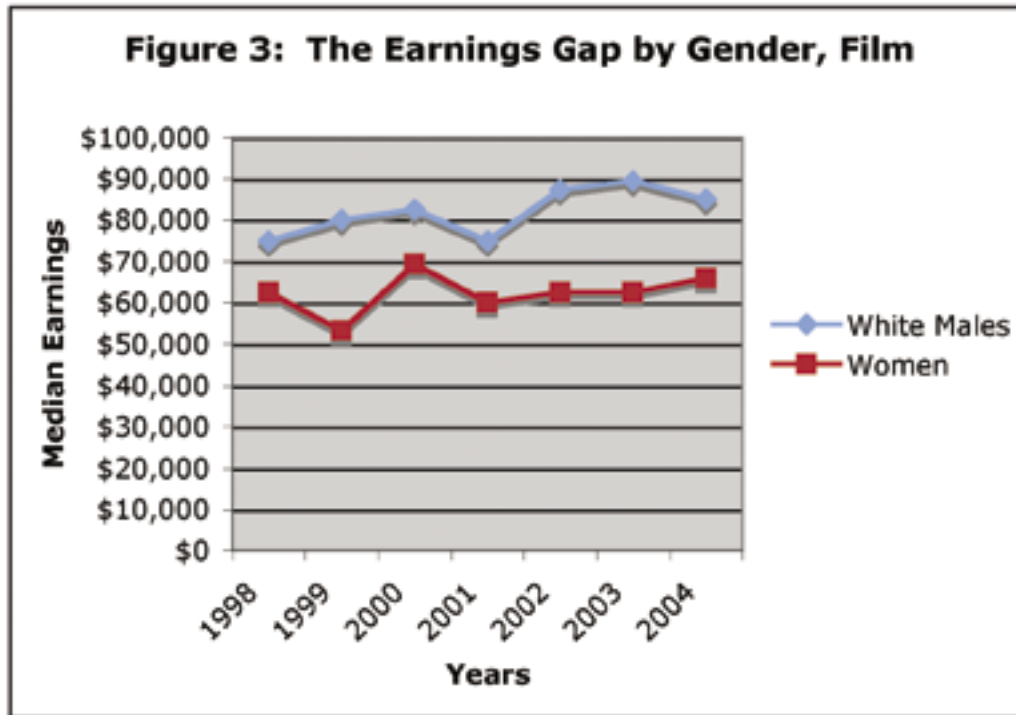
² These entities include: Viacom-Film (19.8 percent); NBC/Universal-Film (18.2 percent); MGM-Film (16.8 percent); Fox-Film (16.4 percent); Time Warner-Film (16.4 percent); Lions Gate (15.1 percent); Revolution Studios (14.6 percent); Sony-Film (14.4 percent); Dreamworks-Film (13.7 percent).

Figure 2 reviews recent trends in the earnings of women writers, compared to those of white males, for the television sector. Previous WGAw reports have shown that the earnings of women writers traditionally lag behind those of their white male counterparts. While the median³

earnings of women and white male television writers were close to converging in 2002 (\$75,562 for women versus \$76,850 for white males), the gap had increased by 2004 to nearly \$12,000 (\$90,041 for white males, compared to \$78,422 for women).



³ The “median” refers to the value physically in the middle of a distribution of numbers. Like the “mean” or arithmetic “average,” it is a measure of what is typical for a given distribution of numbers. But unlike the mean or average it has the advantage of not being unduly influenced by extremely high or extremely low values, which might otherwise produce a distorted view of what is typical for the distribution. For these reasons, the median is conventionally used to examine income distributions, as they often contain very low and/or very high values.



No such convergence occurred over the seven-year period in the film sector (see **Figure 3**). Indeed, the gap widened between the median earnings of women film writers and their white male counterparts over the period, from \$12,500 in 1998 (\$62,500 for women versus \$75,000 for white males) to about \$19,000 in 2004 (\$65,966 for women versus \$84,963 for white males).

Nonetheless, for the cohort⁴ of writers who began their careers in 1993-1994, overall⁵ median income for women actually exceeded that of males by 2003 (\$153,616 versus \$148,647). But the progress enjoyed by this group of women

writers was not enough to offset the earnings gap other women writers in the industry have faced -- a gap reflected in the charts above. Consistent with this more traditional pattern, women writers who began their careers four years later (1997-1998) earned only 68 cents for every dollar earned by their male counterparts in 2003 (median incomes of \$102,642 and \$150,000, respectively).

SNAPSHOT - The total number of employed television writers in 2004 was 3015. 10% of these, or 287, were minorities (all groups combined).

⁴ In this study, the term "cohort" is used to refer to a given group of writers who all joined the WGAW in the same two-year period.

⁵ "Overall" median income refers to combined income for both television and film sector employment.

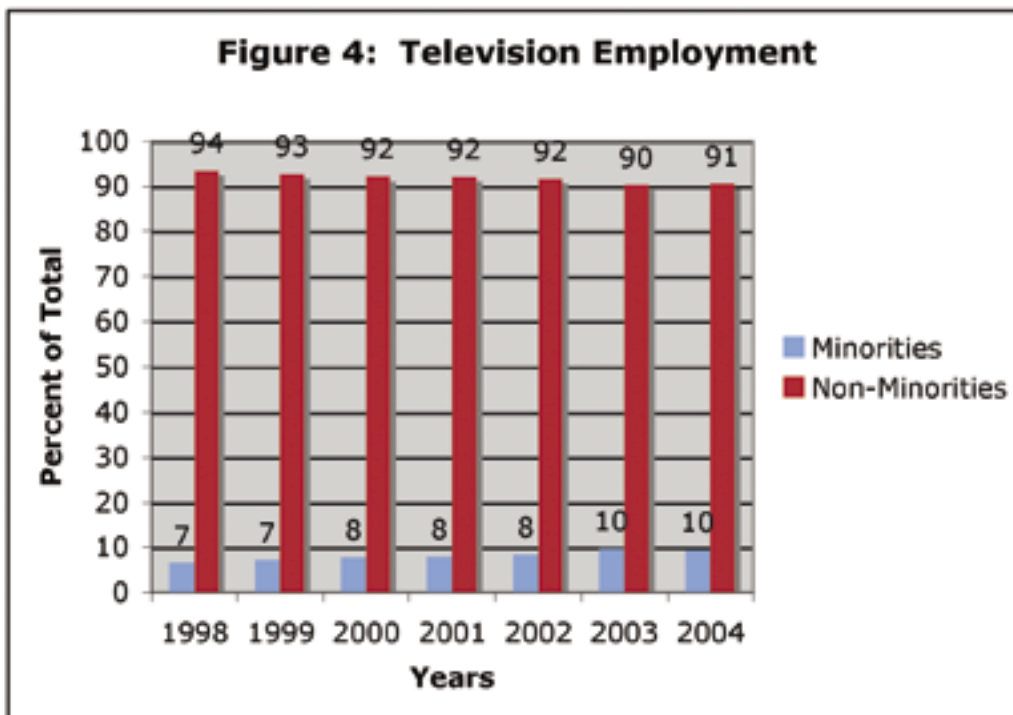
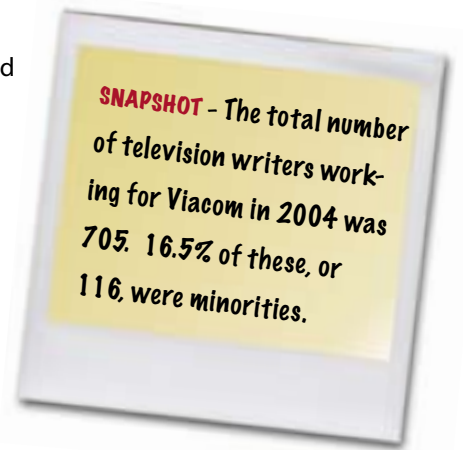
Minority Writers

Minority writers have experienced small but steady gains in their share of television employment since the last Hollywood Writers Report.

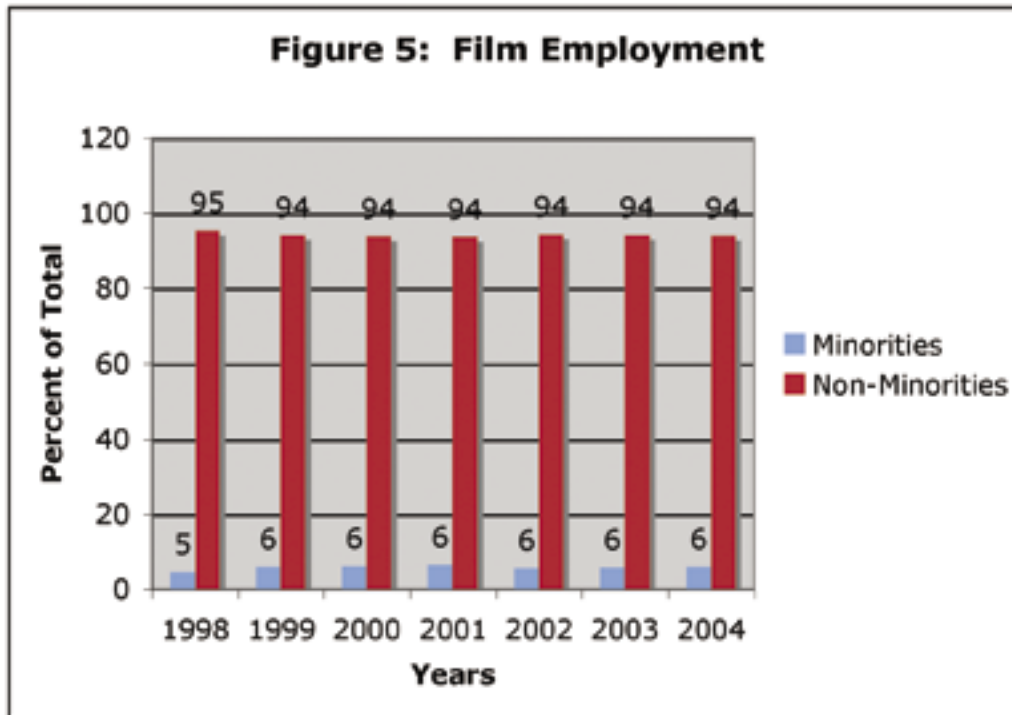
Figure 4 shows that the minority share of television writers increased by about 3 percentage points between 1998 and 2004, from about 7 percent to slightly less than 10 percent. This increase, of course, was accompanied by a corresponding 3 percentage-point decline in the non-minority share during the period, from 94 percent to about 91 percent.

Much of these employment gains can be attributed to the rise of minority-themed programming on television over the period, particularly in African-American-themed situation comedies like those appearing on Viacom's UPN. During the 2004-2005 season, for example, seven of the

top-10 shows for African American writers aired on UPN, including each of the top five shows. These shows included *One on One* (71 percent), *Eve* (69 percent), *Second Time Around* (69 percent), *Cuts* (63 percent), *Girlfriends* (56 percent), *All of Us* (43 percent), and *Half and Half* (31 percent).⁶ Not surprisingly, in 2004 Viacom ranked second among conglomerates and large independents in terms of the employment of minority writers (16.5 percent of Viacom writers), trailing only the now defunct Carsey-Werner,



⁶ Source: The 2005 Hollywood Writers Report



where 18 percent of the writers were minorities. Previous WGAw reports have shown that minority television writers tend to be concentrated in minority-themed situation comedies, which raises questions about the possible typecasting of these writers. Indeed, since the 1999 television season, between 39 and 47 percent of all minor-

ity writers employed in any given year worked on minority-themed situation comedies.⁷

Figure 5 paints a somewhat bleaker picture of minority progress in the film sector. Not only has the minority share of film writers consistently lagged behind the small minority share of television writers described above, but the gap between minority representation in the two sectors (2 percentage points in 1998 and 4 percentage points in 2004) grew over the period, due largely to the fact that the minority share of film writers has remained stuck at about 6 percent since 1999. In other words, as minorities represented more than 30 percent of the U.S. population, for the past six years they remained underrepresented by a factor of more than 5 to 1 among employed film writers.

SNAPSHOT - The total number of employed film writers in 2004 was 1770. 6% of these, or 106, were minorities (all groups combined).

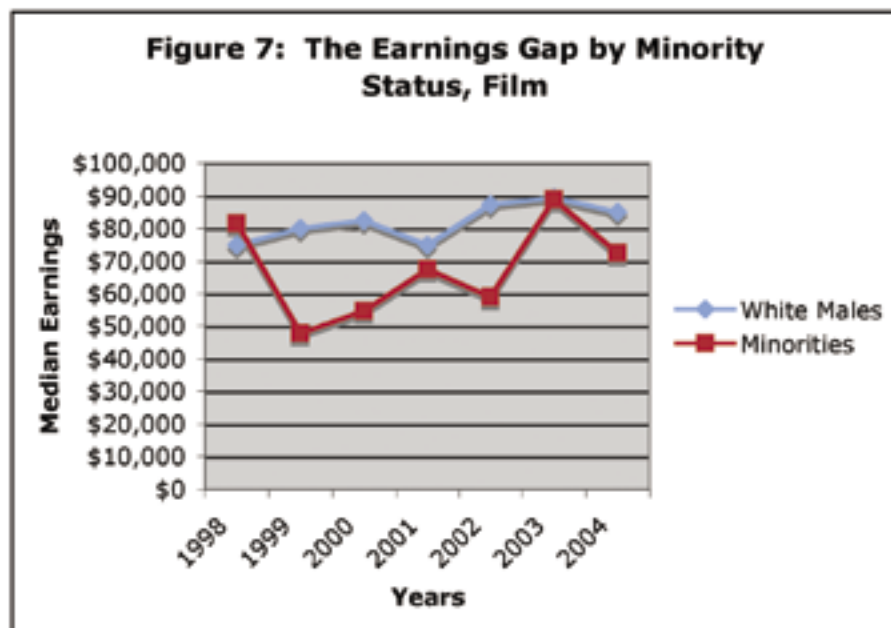
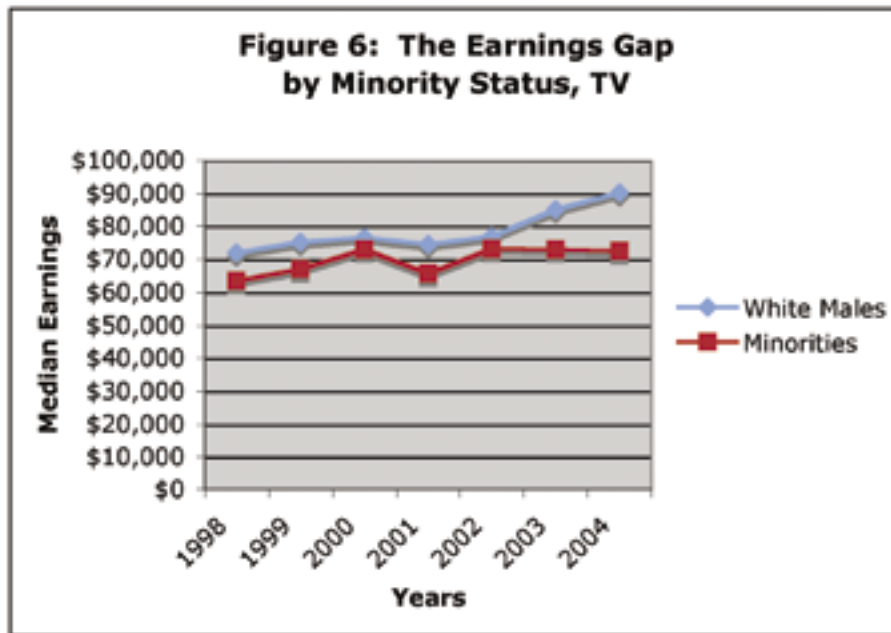
A similar story unfolds for minority writers when television and film sector earnings are examined. As was the case with employment, the gap between minority and white male earn-

⁷ Ibid.

ings typically has been larger in the film sector than in television. Moreover, for both sectors, the gap was larger in 2004 than it was in 1998. **Figure 6** charts the earnings for minority and white male television writers over the seven-year study period. In 1998, the median income for white male television writers was about \$8,500 more than the median income for minority television writers (\$71,969 versus \$63,456). By

2004, the gap had grown to nearly \$18,000 (\$90,041 for white males, compared to \$72,325 for minorities) -- despite a momentary narrowing of the gap in 2000 and again in 2002.

Figure 7 shows that the gap in earnings between minority writers and their white male counterparts generally has been more pronounced in film throughout the period. While the median



earnings of minority film writers actually exceeded the median earnings of their white male counterparts in 1998 (\$81,500 for minority writers versus \$75,000 for white male writers) and approached them in 2003 (\$88,909 for minority writers versus \$89,424 for white male writers), white male writers out-earned their minority counterparts by an average of \$14,622 throughout the period. In 2004, the gap stood at about \$12,500 (\$84,963 for white males versus \$72,500 for minorities).

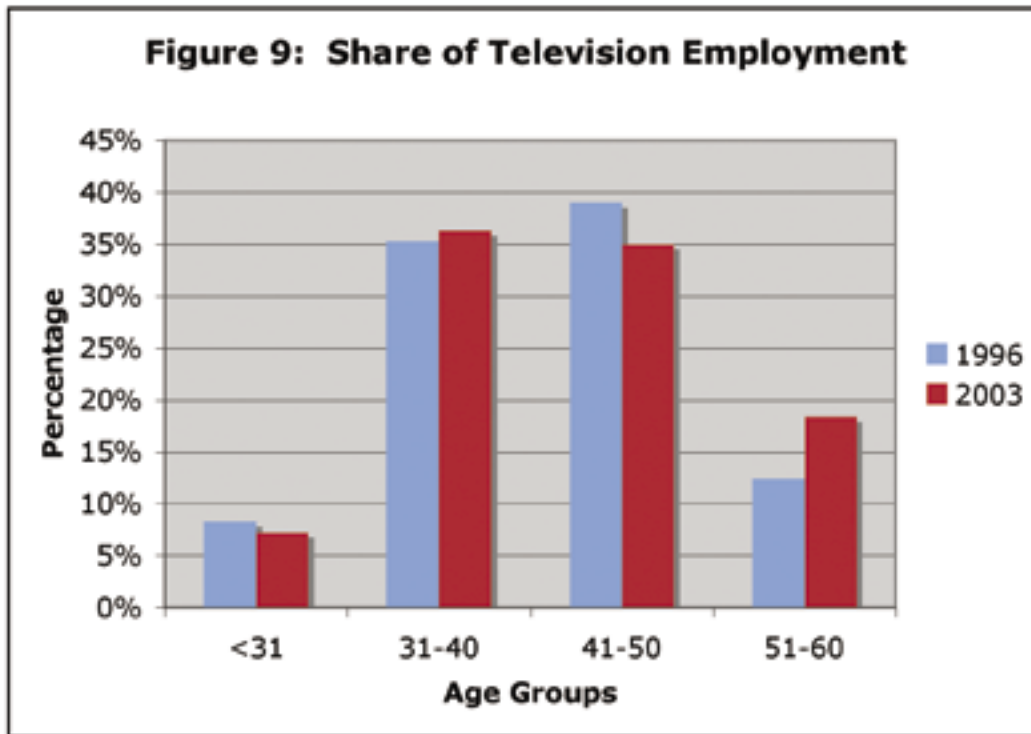


Doug Jung, writer *Confidence*

When overall median earnings are examined, it is clear that minority writers have lost ground in recent years to both white male writers and women writers. **Figure 8** presents overall median earnings for each group over the 14-year period that began in 1991 and ended in 2004. It shows that in 1991 the median earnings of minority writers (\$59,898) exceeded the earnings of women writers (\$45,374) and approached those of white males (\$62,500). Two years later, in 1993, the median earnings figure for minority writers (\$72,161) actually exceeded the figure

for white males (\$64,610). By 2004, however, the relative earnings gains that minority writers enjoyed in the mid 90s seemed to have evaporated -- minority writers again earned the least of the three groups. Indeed the \$29,500 gap between minority and white male median earnings in 2004 (\$80,000 and \$109,500, respectively) represented the largest earnings gap between the two groups over the 14-year period covered by the chart.



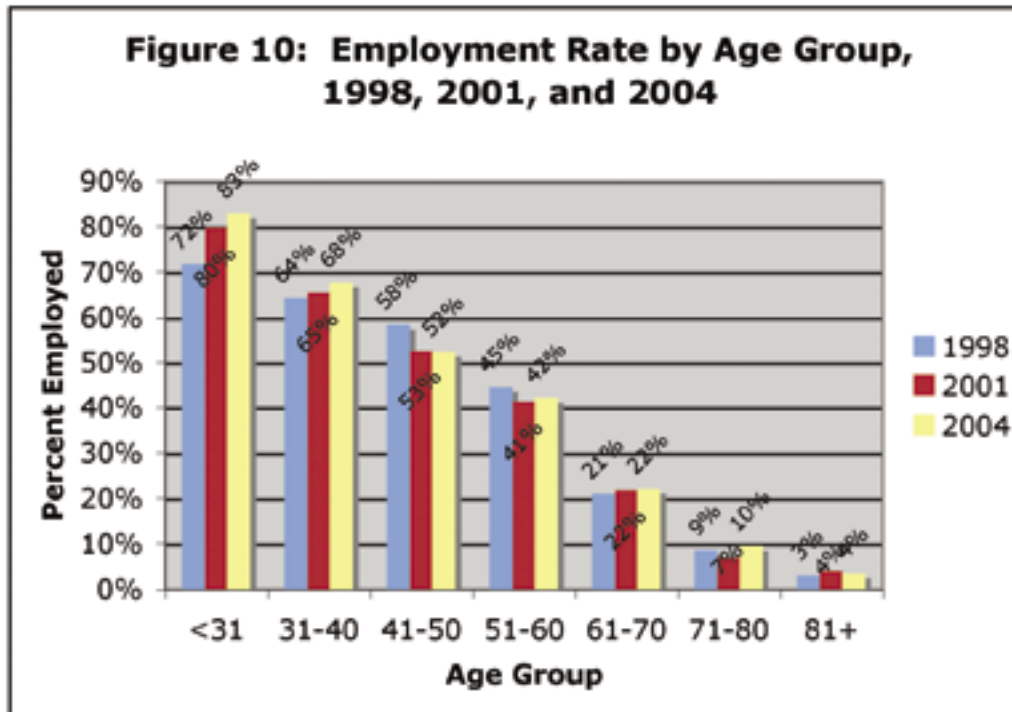


Older Writers

Since the last WGAw report, older writers have more than held their ground in terms of overall industry employment -- from 50 percent of all writers in 1998 to 51.8 percent in 2004. Indeed, television writers aged 51 to 60 enjoyed a 6-percentage-point jump in their share of employment after 1996 (from 12.4 percent to 18.4 percent), the largest of any of the age groups (see **Figure 9**).

While overall employment *shares* have remained relatively stable since the last WGAw report, the

SNAPSHOT - The total number of employed television writers for which age was known in 2003 was 2785. 18.4% of these, or 512, were writers aged 51-60.



employment *rate* of older writers has steadily declined relative to that of younger writers. **Figure 10** shows that the employment rate of writers younger than 31 years of age increased a hearty 11 percentage points over the period, from 72 percent in 1998 to 83 percent in 2004. By contrast, the employment rate of older writers either increased only minimally or declined over the period. Writers aged 31 to 40, for example, experienced only a 4-percentage-point increase in employment rate (from 64 percent in 1998 to 68 percent in 2004), while writers aged 41 to 50 actually experienced a decline in employment

rate (from 58 percent in 1998 to 52 percent in 2004). The net result in 2004 was an employment rate gap of 15 percentage points between the youngest group of writers and writers aged 31 to 40, and a gap of 31 percentage points between the youngest group and those aged 41 to 50.⁸

Consistent with this story, the distribution of writers by generation cohort reveals that writers from the latest generation⁹ (i.e., post-Baby Boomers) have steadily replaced those from earlier generations (i.e., pre-Baby Boomers, early-Baby Boomers, and late-Baby Boomers) since the

⁸ 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, as a March/April 2005 survey conducted for the WGAw reveals, 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.

⁹ Pre-Baby Boom writers were born before 1946; early Baby Boom writers were born between 1946 and 1953; late Baby Boom writers were born between 1954 and 1962; post-Baby Boom writers were born after 1962.

last report. **Figure 11** shows that in 1998, pre-Baby Boom writers accounted for 13.3 percent of all employed television writers; by 2004, the group's share had fallen to 4.9 percent. At the other extreme, post-Baby Boomers' share of television employment increased nearly 22 percentage points over the period, from 25.2 percent in 1998 to 47 percent in 2004. Baby

Boomers (i.e. early and late combined) saw their share drop 13 percent, from 61.5 percent in 1998 to 48.2 percent in 2004.



Salim Akil Writer/Director
Felicia Henderson Creator/Showrunner
Soul Food (The TV Series)

SNAPSHOT - The total number of employed television writers for which age was known in 1998 was 3019. 61.5% of these, or 1859, were writers in the Baby Boom generation, while 25.2% of these, or 760, were writers born after 1962. The total number of employed television writers for which age was known in 2004 was 2755. 48.2% of these, or 1326, were writers in the Baby Boom generation, while 47% of these, or 1295, were writers born after 1962.

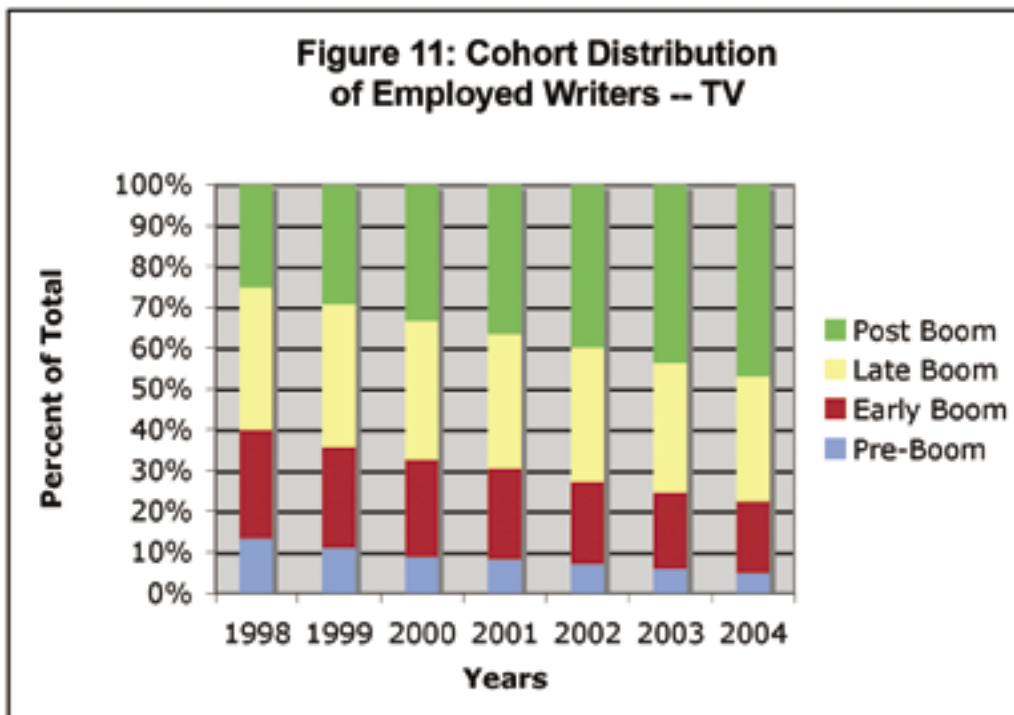


Figure 12 presents a similar picture for the film sector: Baby Boom and pre-Baby Boom generation writers experienced sizable declines in their shares of employed writers (about 17 percentage points and 8 percentage points, respectively), while post-Baby Boom generation writers enjoyed a whopping 24-percentage-point increase in their share of sector employment.

When median income is examined for television writers, we also find sharp declines for the oldest writers relative to their younger counterparts. However, as **Figure 13** reveals, the television earnings story is a bit more complicated for older writers than the employment story. Whereas overall employment rate peaks for writers in the youngest age group (writers under 31), median income in the television sector peaks in older age groups before subsequently declining. In 1982, for example, the highest median income was for writers aged 51 to 60 (\$39,897). By 2003 the peak had moved down to the 31-to-40 age group (\$93,607), with the median income of writers aged 41 to 50 following closely behind (\$93,519).

An analysis of film sector earnings by age group complicates the story even more. **Figure 14** shows that in 1982, 1989, and 1996, patterns very similar to those described for television were evident in film. But by 2003, older writers – those who fell into the 41 to 50 and 61 to 70 age groups – had the highest median incomes (\$100,000 and \$96,250, respectively). While this finding seems

SNAPSHOT - The total number of employed film writers for which age was known in 1998 was 1762. 58.9% of these, or 1037, were writers in the Baby Boom generation, while 27.3% of these, or 481, were writers born after 1962. The total number of employed film writers for which age was known in 2004 was 1610. 42.4% of these, or 683, were writers in the Baby Boom generation, while 51.3% of these, or 826, were writers born after 1962.

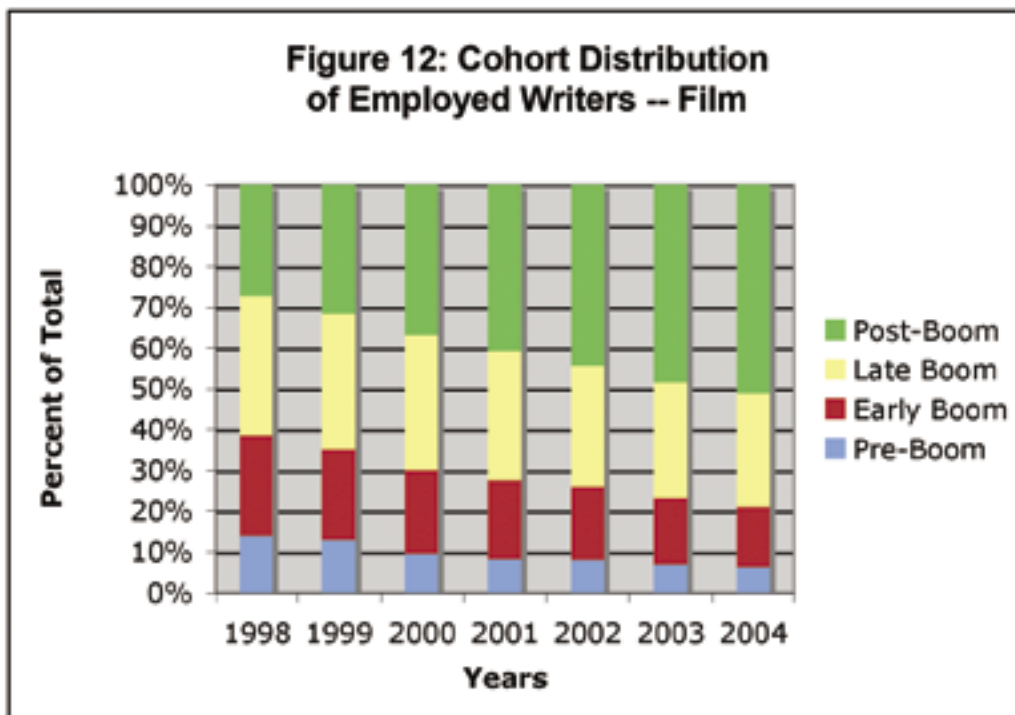


Figure 13: Television Earnings

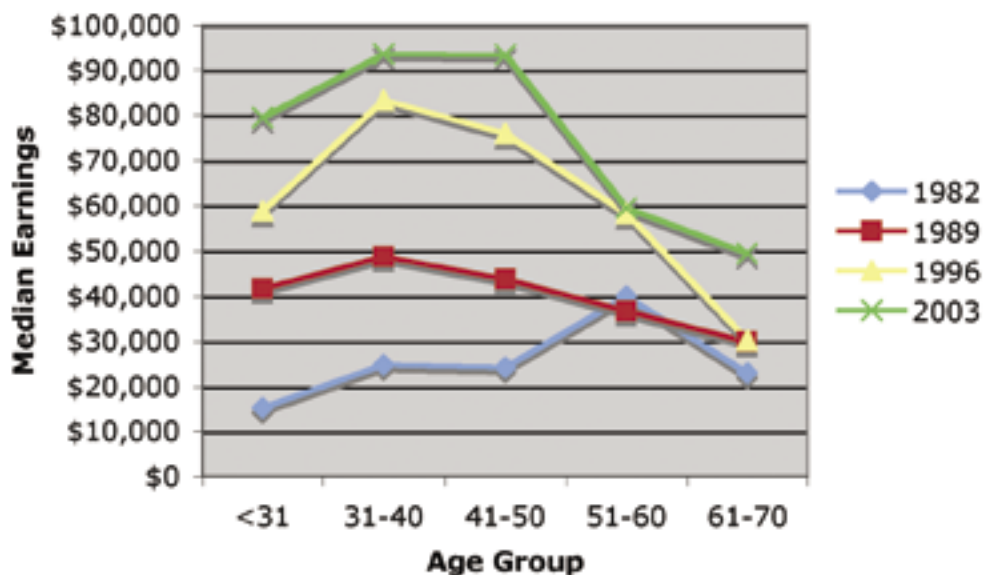
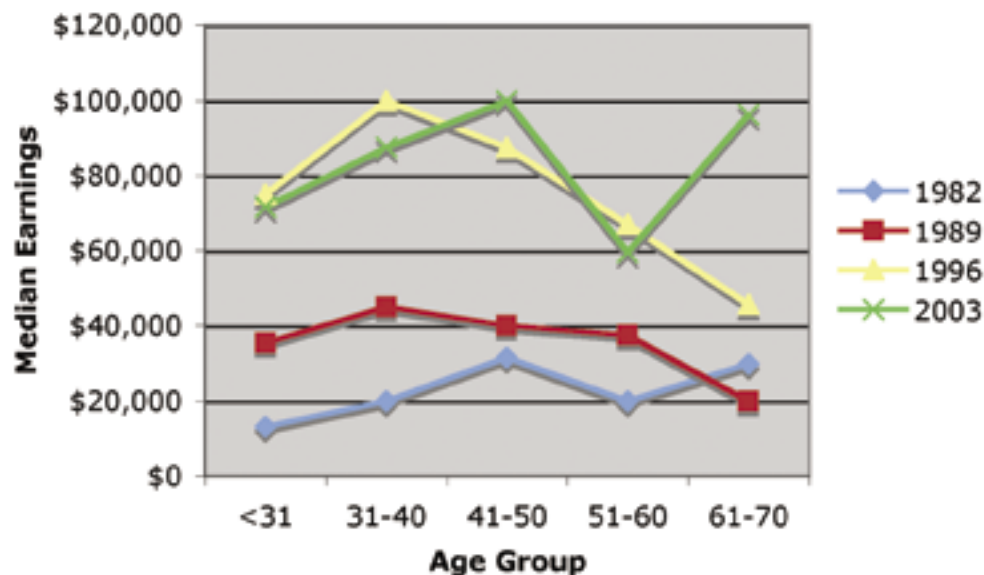


Figure 14: Film Earnings



to defy employment and earnings trends that advantage younger writers in the industry, it is consistent with other findings suggesting that years of experience may be the single most significant determinant of earnings for employed writers.

Rewriting A Familiar Story

Since the WGAw released the first Hollywood Writers Report in 1987, the structure of the Hollywood industry has changed considerably. The emergence of new television networks in 1995 (UPN and WB), the government's relaxation and eventual elimination of "fin-syn" regulations in the 1990s,¹⁰ and the steady rain of media company mergers and acquisitions throughout the two-decade period have transformed the landscape faced by writers who seek employment in the industry. By the early years of the 21st century, the hiring of writers was concentrated more than at any other point in the history of this report series within a handful of large, vertically integrated media conglomerates.

Through it all, however, a familiar story remained: white male writers continued to account for a disproportionate and dominant share of industry employment and earnings. Indeed, minority writers still represented less than 10 percent of all employed writers in 2004, despite the fact that minorities comprised more than 30 percent of the U.S. population. And women, who made up slightly more than half of the U.S. population,



Luisa Leschin,
Co-Producer, *The
George Lopez Show*

accounted for less than 25 percent of employed writers in 2004.

For women and minority writers, it seems, the old adage of "a few steps forward, a few steps back" more aptly describes the nature of in-

dustry employment opportunities than any narrative about steady progress. The sheer magnitude of continuing white male overrepresentation among Hollywood writers underscores this point.

Meanwhile, the overall employment rate of older writers fell further behind that of younger writers, despite the fact that older writers held their ground in terms of employment share and earnings in some sectors.

The Writers Guild of America, west long has been committed to advancing the employment opportunities of all writers. Toward this end, the WGAw seeks to collaborate with the industry in rewriting the familiar story told in this report and in previous ones. The findings presented in this summary 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. The work of catching up with a changing America is challenging, yet important work. Without this work, it is unlikely that institutionalized barriers will be surmounted and that all of our stories will be told.

A Note On Study Data

This summary is based on findings from the 2005 Hollywood Writers Report, the fifth 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 full report focuses on the seven-year period since the release of the previous Hollywood Writers Report in 1998. Data come from the computerized files of the WGAw, which are based on member reports of employment and earnings. These reports are collected in 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.

¹⁰ The Financial Interest and Syndication Rules (or "Fin-Syn Rules") were Federal Communication Commission polices that prevented broadcast networks from producing all but a small share of the programming they aired in prime time. These regulations also prevented the networks from participating in the syndication of prime time series. The regulations were relaxed in 1991, before being phased out entirely in 1997.