

**A prominent producer turns to the web with his show about American Latinos.**

# THE BIGGEST MISSING MARKET



**While the size and influence of the U.S. Latino population continues to grow, it is increasingly hard to find English-language programs in primetime that mirror the experience of American Latinos.** So Dennis Leoni decided to create his own show and post it on the web.

He is writing and directing the internet series, *Los Americans*, debuting this spring on One Economy's Public Internet Channel, or pic.tv. The eight-episode drama is being produced by Robert Townsend, who also produces and directs the pic.tv series *Diary of a Single Mom*.

"People have told me that Latinos are moving forward [in English-language American television]," says Leoni, who created and executive produced *Resurrection Blvd.*, the Mexican-American themed drama seen on Showtime from 2000 to 2002. "We did make strides with *Resurrection Blvd.*, *American Family*, *Greetings from Tucson* and *George Lopez*. But when I look at the television landscape today, we really don't have any shows on the air."

For Leoni, *Los Americans* represents a very welcome opportunity to tackle serious issues concerning Latino identity and life in the U.S. The drama surrounds an upper-middle-class Mexican-American family, something also rarely portrayed on English-language television.

Esai Morales stars as a marketing executive attempting to blend his family into mainstream America. He frowns on his mother speaking Spanish in his home, insisting that his kids learn to speak accent-free English. As life unfolds, the family faces problems related to illegal immigration, class differences, corporate downsizing, childhood obesity and alcoholism.

A goal of the series is to directly help viewers if they are struggling with similar issues. Various referrals, from social service to legal support, are available at the pic.tv site.

Leoni and Morales hope that *Los Americans* creates enough buzz on the web to inspire a cable or over-the-air network to take a chance on the series. In this sense, these fifteen-minute installments are serving as pilot episodes.

"I would hope that there would be a place for a show like this with the networks," remarks Morales, who also appeared in *Resurrection Blvd.* and many other television and film projects. "When people ask about Latino family shows, the networks mention *Modern Family*. But having a couple of characters in the show doesn't mean you're fulfilling a social obligation to address the American Latino family on television. It's really never been done, except on a limited basis with shows like *Resurrection Blvd.*"

The challenge *Los Americans* faces is building a sizable viewership in a medium teeming with options. The series was created on a shoestring budget, with the actors receiving minimal fees, so a major marketing campaign is not an option.

But the show benefits from name recognition. Morales and performers Lupe Ontiveros, Raymond Cruz and Tony Plana are all recognizable faces in the Latino acting community. Leoni is also trying to drum up interest in the show via Latino organizations like the National Council of La Raza and Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute.

Leoni believes it's also up to English-speaking Latinos to show a greater commitment to shows like *Los Americans*.

"We like to beat our chest and say we consume so many billions of dollars in this country," he observes. "But the truth is, we haven't created a marketplace for ourselves in the same way that the African Americans have created a marketplace. We tend to assimilate. We'll go see *Spiderman 7* before we'll go see *Tortilla Soup*."

"If we ever coalesce the Latino audience, you've got a huge audience. Even 10 percent of the Latino population watching a show would be more than 4 million people." —Jon Matsumoto



The cast of *Los Americans* includes: (top) Carrie Reichenbach and Esai Morales; (center) Ana Villafane, JC Gonzalez, Yvonne Delarosa, Morales, Lupe Ontiveros, Raymond Cruz, Jovan Armand and Bibiana Navas; (bottom) Tony Plana.