

Latinos to be Included in Burns PBS Documentary

Written by Robert ID3568

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PBS has reversed their position and have included the Latino experience in Ken Burns' forthcoming World War II documentary, *The War*. In a letter to the Defend the Honor Campaign, PBS President and CEO Paula Kerger reported that, "PBS, Ken Burns and his co-director/producer Lynn Novick have decided to create additional content that focuses on stories of Latino and Native American veterans of the Second World War."

The PBS plan also included the following elements:

- * The additional narratives about experiences of the Latino and Native American veterans of World War II will be integrated into the documentary, the DVD, the Website and PBS' educational outreach materials.

- * A Latino producer will be hired by Burns production company, Florentine Films, in consultation with PBS, to be part of the production teams that will create the additional content.

- * *The War* will premiere on September 23, 2007 (during Hispanic Heritage Month) as scheduled with the inclusion of the new content.

- * Additional national programming will be aired on WWII that will include and focus on the Latino contributions to the war.

The Defend the Honor Campaign was organized in early February to coordinate a national volunteer campaign to pressure PBS and Ken Burns to include Latinos in the documentary, *The War*. Based at the University of Texas at Austin's U.S. Latino & Latina WWII Oral History Project headed by Dr. Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez, the leadership of the Campaign first met with PBS President and CEO Paula Kerger on March 6, 2007 in PBS headquarters in Arlington, Virginia. At that point, Kerger informed the group that PBS would not be making any changes to the Ken Burns film because it was already completed and they did not want to interfere with his artistic independence.

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“This is a great victory for the Latino community and for our veterans and their families who have sacrificed so much for the defense of this nation,” stated Rivas-Rodriguez, a journalism professor at the University of Texas at Austin who leads the project that documents the Latino role in the war.

“When we started this campaign in February, many people told us that we would never get PBS to change its mind on this issue, given its poor history with the Latino community,” Rivas-Rodriguez said. “But it is a tribute to Paula Kerger that she listened and took our concerns seriously, especially since this problem predated her leadership of PBS. She is a person of great integrity and we look forward to working with her.”

“The unity in the Latino community on this issue was unprecedented,” stated Gus Chavez, another leader in this movement, a retired university administrator and a veteran himself. “We were part of a movement that demonstrated how powerful our Latino community could be when we work together in common cause.

We were also deeply moved to see that this struggle by the Latino community also resulted in the inclusion of Native Americans in this documentary,” Chavez said. “It makes the point that, as Latinos, we are also fighting for a broader agenda of inclusion.”

The Defend the Honor Campaign has responded to Kerger in a letter in which they outline some concerns that they wish to pursue further with her.

“As they say, the devil is in the details and we need more information, especially about how the Latino experience will be treated in the film, what role our community will be playing in the development of the film itself, in the development of the educational materials, and in PBS’ community outreach efforts,” said Marta Garcia, another leader of the Campaign who volunteers as Chair and Founder of the New York Chapter of the National Hispanic Media Coalition. “We plan a follow-up meeting with Ms. Kerger and will be talking to them about developing an ongoing mechanism by which our community can have input and can act as a resource for PBS.”

“We also need to make sure that this problem does not occur again and media advocates like the National Latino Media Council will be following up to make sure PBS in general better

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incorporates Latinos in its programming, staff and in other ways,” Garcia said. The National Latino Media Council is a coalition of 15 of the largest Latino civil rights groups that have come together to focus on media issues relating to Latinos.

“As a longtime journalist, I can attest to the impact this decision by PBS and the Burns’ film can have on how Americans will view the Latino community and its contributions to this country,” observed Iván Román, another member of the leadership of the Defend the Honor Campaign, and Executive Director of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists. “We think that this will make the documentary a more accurate and enduring work on an important part of this country’s, and the world’s, history.”

“This result was made possible by the unusually strong collaboration between the many Latino organizations and leaders that came forward to let PBS know that our community must be respected,” said Angelo Falcón, who also is part of the leadership of the Campaign and is President and Co-Founder of the National Institute for Latino Policy. “Groups like the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, the American GI Forum, the National Latino Media Council, the National Council of La Raza, MANA and many others at the national and local levels throughout the country came forward in defense of those from our community who sacrificed so much to defend all of us.”

More info and background at <http://www.nahj.org/nahjnews/articles/2007/april/defendhonor.shtml>