

February 20, 2007

Paula Kerger, PBS President & Chief Executive Officer  
PBS Office of the Corporate Secretary  
2100 Crystal Drive,  
VA 22202-3785

Dear Paula Kerger,

I'm writing to express my disappointment with PBS for airing Ken Burns' seven-part documentary on World War II that completely excludes Latinos and Latinas from American history. As a longtime supporter of PBS (KCET, KSPS and Idaho PTV) I will be canceling my subscription and joining many others to demand that unless PBS puts pressure on Ken Burns to include the contributions of Latino and Latina military soldiers and workers during World War II, we will be launching a campaign to boycott PBS and protesting at showings of Ken Burns documentary.

Apart from the many letters that you have received and will be receiving about the exclusion of Latino and Latinas who served in the U.S. military during World War II, I want to highlight another group known as "braceros" that saved the United States from a severe economic downturn.

With the advent of World War II agricultural growers complained to the federal government about severe labor shortages produced by workers leaving the fruit fields for the military battlefields. The U.S. government responded by finalizing the first contract labor agreement on August 4, 1942 to begin importing Mexican agricultural laborers into U.S. farms. This wartime labor contract program became known as the Bracero that grew out of a series of bi-lateral agreements between Mexican government and the United States government. Between 1942 and 1964 approximately 4.6 million contracts were signed by Mexican males allowing them to come to the United States and work primarily in agricultural and railroad maintenance yards and for a short-term basis, usually lasting from six weeks to eighteenth months.

Information on braceros during World War II has been well documented by such scholars Ernesto Galarza, Henry Anderson, Barbara Driscoll, Erasmo Gamboa, Deborah Cohen, Gilbert Gonzalez, Manuel Garcia y Griego, Ana Rosas, Mae Ngai, Stephen Pitti and Matt Garcia. There are also efforts to inform the American public about the bracero experience through conferences, a digital archive, exhibitions and documentaries.

More recently, my grandparents were interviewed for a documentary on Braceros and their stories revealed the pain and suffering they encountered working in the agricultural fields of California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas. Despite the harsh working and living conditions, they insisted that contributed to the war effort by lending their "brazos" (arms) to U.S. agricultural growers who needed to supply fruit and vegetables to those fighting overseas and those working in defense industries at home. Tears flowed from

their eyes as they recalled the isolation of living in remote labor camps and harsh treatment they received from employers if they demanded more pay, better conditions and respect.

At a time when the United States has started a war in Iraq a new “guest worker” program is being proposed and debated in the United States Congress it is important to examine the largest guest worker program in American history and the experiences of braceros who contributed to the war effort and saved the U.S. from an economic depression.

Sincerely,

[Signed]

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Department of Comparative Ethnic Studies  
Washington State University