

DEFEND THE HONOR

Defend the Honor Update 10-10-08

The economy's distress and the Presidential Race aren't the only things happening...

In other news, WETA is living up to its reputation of being dismissive of Latinos. WETA is the station that sponsored Ken Burns' *The War* and didn't notice for over 6 years that there were no Latinos in it. This week, WETA chose NOT to run a nationally-televised documentary about Latino political strength. (They've rescheduled now -- but after it has aired in all the other major markets and an hour later than prime time.)

That's the third time WETA has raised the hackles of Latinos. The second time was when it announced, on April 25, 2008, that it would create a documentary on Latino Americans in 2011. It will be called the Latino Americans and that announcement was a bombshell: the Latino documentarians who would be the obvious producers/directors were completely left out in the cold. The most natural fit would have been Hector Galan, who worked with Burns to add the two Latino interviews in the WWII documentary. Later, Galan got seed money grant to produce a different documentary. But the WETA documentary is scheduled to be a 6-hour production-- lots longer and with a nice fat budget. Many insiders considered WETA's announcement to be an effort to get in the last word, after the Burns snafu embarrassed the station. WETA was wise to get an established Latina documentarian involved in this documentary, a Cuban-American who has done some stellar work -- on presidents like Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan. But folks like Galan and others were left out -- folks who have been toiling diligently, doing work on the Latino community for generations, pouring their souls into trying to chronicle and explain the Latino experience to our community, and to the general community. And one of the two executive producers for *The Latinos* is Jeff Bieber, who also oversaw Ken Burns' *The War*...

WETA is about to produce a very different documentary than it could have been. And that was strike two. This latest is strike three.

Two questions for WETA:

1. What's it going to take to see Latinos?
2. Given your track record, do you **really** think your station is qualified to take on a documentary on Latinos? There are many other PBS stations around the country who have demonstrated a true understanding of Latinos.

This is the News Release from earlier today:

For Immediate Release

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WETA'S FAILURE TO AIR LATINO VOTERS DOCUMENTARY CRITICIZED

LOS ANGELES (October 10, 2008) -- Former HUD Secretary Henry Cisneros and other prominent political figures have denounced the decision by WETA, the PBS station in the nation's capital, not to air a timely documentary about Latino voters.

"The decision by WETA not to run 'Latinos '08' is surprising and regrettable," Cisneros said. "Given the pioneering tradition of WETA programs and its proven influence among policy makers and influential Washingtonians, the subject of this documentary is precisely the kind of program that should be aired in the nation's capital."

Almost all other PBS stations in major markets broadcast "Latinos '08" on Wednesday (October 8) but, one month before the presidential election, WETA did not air the program, which was directed and produced by Phillip Rodriguez. The film was made possible by support from PBS and CPB (The Corporation for Public Broadcasting).

WETA was criticized last year by Latinos for its role in the production of Ken Burns' documentary "The War," which-in its original form-failed to include any Latino service members, ignoring the sacrifice of an estimated 500,000 Hispanics who took part in World War II.

Simon Rosenberg, president of NDN, a progressive think tank based in Washington, D.C., said: "I am gravely disappointed that WETA chose not to air such a critically acclaimed and important film as "Latinos '08." Latinos are the fastest growing part of the American electorate and a huge and growing part of the D.C. region. Issues of direct concern to this community -- immigration and our relations with Mexico -- have been an important part of the presidential debate this year."

Writer and commentator Robert Lovato said: "Having D.C.'s large Salvadoran community and other Latino populations in its area and being based in the center of U.S. political life, WETA should be at the front of PBS stations airing this important film about the political ascent of this country's 45 million Latinos. Shame on WETA for failing to share this important film in this important city at this extremely important time."

Political/Marketing Consultant Lionel Sosa, a former PBS board member, added, "There is no reason good enough for WETA to be reluctant to air this show. It is relevant to our times and produced by the best talent in the industry."

WETA's decision, Lovato said, "reflects the same lack of awareness it demonstrated during the making of Ken Burns' 'The War' series." WETA collaborated with Burns on the making of 'The War' documentary. Only after a widespread protest by civic groups and public officials about the exclusion of Latinos did Burns add a short segment on two Mexican American soldiers.

WETA received complaints from would-be viewers about the station's failure to broadcast "Latinos '08." On Thursday, the station said it has now decided to air the program after all -- on Tuesday, Oct. 28 at 10 p.m.

Latinos '08 features interviews with Cisneros, Sosa, Rosenberg, Lovato, Obama Campaign Co-Chair Federico Peña, Ana Navarro, Co-chair of John McCain's National Hispanic Advisory Council, Columnist Ruben Navarrette Jr., National Political Commentator Leslie Sanchez, NALEO Executive Director Arturo Vargas, the Rev. Luis Cortés of Esperanza USA, and Professors Lisa Garcia-Bedolla of University of

California at Berkeley, Rodolfo de la Garza of Columbia, Roberto Suro of USC and Luis Fraga of the University of Washington.

Phillip Rodriguez's documentaries include *Brown is the New Green: George Lopez and the American Dream* (2007), *Los Angeles Now* (2004), *Mixed Feelings: San Diego/Tijuana* (2002), *Manuel Ocampo: God is My Copilot* (1999), and *Pancho Villa & Other Stories* (1998). A Senior Fellow at the Institute for Justice and Journalism at the USC Annenberg School for Communication, he received the first annual United States Artists' Broad Fellow Award.

Gus Chavez & Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez, Co-Founders, *Defend the Honor*
Defend the Honor

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