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Will Latino Civil Rights be included in Proposed Civil Rights Oral History Project?

Dear Defenders of the Honor,

We have received word this week that there is legislation proposed to create a **"Civil Rights Oral History Project,"** a joint effort between the Smithsonian Institution and the Library of Congress to collect oral histories of those involved in the Civil Rights Movement and preserve them for future generations. The legislation is co-sponsored by Senators Dianne Feinstein, Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn); Thad Cochran (R-Miss.); Ted Kennedy (D-Mass.); and Chuck Schumer (D-NY).

Rep. Carolyn McCarthy (D-NY) and Rep. John Lewis (D-GA) have introduced a companion bill in the House.

The bill would direct the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture to record - in audio and video -- firsthand stories from the Civil Rights Movement.

We thank our elected officials for spearheading this important initiative at a time of important change being felt in the nation. Defend the Honor stands ready to assist in any way we can or are called upon to support by the sponsors of the Civil Rights Oral History Project. **(This announcement comes in the same month that an important documentary on Mexican American civil rights, A Class Apart, is scheduled for viewing nationally on PBS.)**

Of course, we expect that the Latino civil rights movement will be included in this important effort and that those stories are archived appropriately. It is crucial to record the civil rights history of all Americans, including the history of racism and exclusion experienced by our Latino elders throughout the country. Racism is still with us, as evidenced by the hate crimes against Latino immigrants. We have every hope that this important recording of our civil rights history might ameliorate some of the ugliness of racism.

We recognize that there is one narrow view of "civil rights," that fails to recognize the very real discrimination against Latinos and their brilliant, steady and powerful efforts to battle racism.

We expect that the Latino civil rights experience will be recognized and integrated into the language and regulations of any proposed legislation concerning the civil rights movement in the United States of America.

We call on all Senators and members of Congress to be explicit on the intent and nature of this proposed legislation so that all people are honored and respected for their struggle to gain full status granted to all Americans. This matter is far too important to be left to vague wording, and empty promises.

We also call on all Latino and Latina elected officials and organizations in the nation to voice their expectation for inclusion in the proposed legislation as presented by Senator Feinstein and her Senate co-sponsors along with similar legislation proposed by Congressman John Lewis and other co-sponsors in the House of Representatives.

We have contacted Sen. Feinstein's office this week, but have not heard back as of this writing. Please communicate any more information you receive on this matter. Defend the Honor will pass along any substantive news on this issue.