



## DEFEND THE HONOR

Preserving the Legacy of Hispanics of the World War II Generation

July 26, 2007

Honorable Senator Ken Salazar  
Honorable Senator Robert Menendez  
United States Senate  
Washington D.C. 20510

RE: THE WAR PBS & Ken Burns \$10,436,518 documentary

Honorable Senator Salazar and Honorable Senator Menendez:

The DEFEND THE HONOR Campaign appreciates and thanks you for your support of our national effort to have the Latino World War II experience included in THE WAR, a 14 hour WWII documentary by Ken Burns and PBS that is scheduled to be aired nationally on September 23, 2007.

Everyone, including myself, who have viewed preliminary partial promotional presentations of THE WAR, can attest to the fact that even though Latinos were major participants in WWII, none are mentioned or shown in the documentary as late as July 11, 2007 when Ken Burns and Paula Kerger presented a preview of the film at the Television Critics Association Conference in Beverly Hills, California.

Thanks to your letter to Paula Kerger (03/30/07 and the action of others, some positive movement appears to have occurred regarding our concerns. Due to national Latino public criticism about the exclusion of the WWII Latino experience from **THE WAR** film, Ken Burns has agreed to include two limited interviews of Hispanic veterans as part of the documentary. According to information we have received both of the Hispanic veterans interviewed were involved in the battle of Guadalcanal.

The total time inclusion of the two interviews, as well as one American Indian story, is limited to approximately 25-28 minutes of the entire 14 hour documentary.

We strongly believe that two Hispanic veteran interviews do not represent the Latino WWII veteran experience when compared to the WWII experiences presented for the other ethnic groups portrayed in the film.

Please know the proposal requesting funding for **THE WAR** documentary was submitted to the National Endowment For The Humanities by WETA; we obtained a copy through the Freedom of Information Act and after reading it were stunned to know that Latinos were excluded entirely in all aspects of the proposal.

While reference is made throughout the funded proposal that **“The series will celebrate American diversity”** and that **“the film will demonstrate the war’s indisputable impact on the transformation of America into a more perfect union, while at the same time acknowledging the difficult challenges faced by ethnic minorities in a segregated society”** (pp.33) astonishingly, no Latinos were included in the 14 hour documentary.

Reference is made to scholars having produced **“an almost overwhelming body of work on all aspects of the conflict.”** (pp.34) After reviewing all references to scholarly works and advisors to be used in the production of THE WAR, none of the scholars, advisors and published work include Latino or Latina academicians, other Hispanics or organizations who have a history of conducting research or advocacy on the topic and lives of Latinos and Latinas in WWII.

Regretfully, the funded NEH proposal narrative is replete with examples of Latino exclusion not only in the war itself, but in the pre and post war contributions of our Latino community to the greater good and development of our nation. Some examples of the exclusion include but are not limited to:

- “...themes and ideas that will shed light on the many ways in which the war remade America, including the transformation of the American economy and the American psyche from the disillusionment and stagnation of the Great Depression to the dynamism and vitality of the wartime boom;...” (pp34)
- “..the role of the war in shaping the 20<sup>th</sup> century immigrant experience and immigrants’ appreciation for the ideals America represents;...” (pp34)
- “..the shift in some Americans’ attitude towards civil rights prompted by the irony of fighting for freedom and democracy while our armed forces (and much of our country) remained strictly segregated;...” (pp34)
- **“It would in fact be impossible to understand American history of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries without a through examination of the war, because few events in the past 100 years have had a greater effect on American life.”** (pp35)
- “Our film will also highlight the additional sense of purpose the war inspired in many minority groups in our country.” (pp.49)
- “In our final episode, we will explore the lasting impact the war has had on the lives of our witnesses, our town, and our nation.” (pp.50)

- "...our viewers will gain a deeper understanding of what the war meant to America as it was happening, appreciate how the experience of combat shaped the lives of all those who survived it, and gain insights into the ways in which post-war America was, to a large degree, formed in the crucible of this devastating global conflict." (pp.50 & 51)
- **"..we have also recruited a panel of distinguished scholars to advise us on the film. These historians and writers are experts on American history, literature and culture, and on the history and meaning of World War Two."**

It is truly unfortunate, given what has transpired in the six year production of **THE WAR** documentary, recent Latino public discussions with documentarian Ken Burns, Paula Kerger PBS President and extensive national and local discussions in the Latino community, we continue to be excluded and ignored by Mr. Burns and PBS. Our acquisition and reading of the NEH funded proposal for THE WAR tells us that according to Ken Burns and PBS, we were not important and indeed invisible prior to, during and after WWII.

We urge you, other members of the Senate and Congressional Hispanic Caucus to join us and thousands of Latinos and non-Latinos across the nation continue voicing our strong concern for meaningful and honorable inclusion in the public and corporate funded **THE WAR** documentary.

We remain skeptical and continue to have many questions on how the final film product will represent the Latino WWII experience. The documented national memory of our WWII Latino veterans must be included in any and all publicly funded films.

Sincerely,

Gus Chavez, Co-founder  
DEFEND THE HONOR Campaign  
4674 Esther Street  
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Cc: Latino & Latina community

Copies of the above will be mailed to your offices