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January 31, 2007

Ken Burns
Florentine Films
P.O. Box 613
Walpole, New Hampshire 03608

Re: *THE WAR*

Dear Mr. Burns,

Yesterday, I discovered that you are producing a 14 hour documentary film on World War II for Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) entitled *THE WAR*.

I applaud your patriotic and historical fervor in preserving our American experience through your films such as *The Civil War*, *JAZZ* and *Baseball*.

According to the PBS news release your film “focuses on the stories of citizens from four geographically distributed and quintessentially American towns – Waterbury, Connecticut; Mobile, Alabama; Sacramento, California and the tiny farming town of Luverne, Minnesota.” You are quoted as stating: “Every person in the country was deeply affected by this war, whether in battle, at home, at work, or in the case of Japanese Americans, in internment camps. By focusing on the personal stories of ordinary Americans who had extraordinary experiences, the film tries to bring one of the biggest events in the history of the world down to a very intimate scale. And in the end, we all begin to see, I think, that there are no ‘ordinary’ lives.”

According to your publicist, Joe De Plasco, “the film is not structured around the experience of individual groups, with the exception, to some extent, of the experience of Japanese Americans, given their experience, and also African Americans, given theirs.”

I am deeply dismayed to learn that you did not include the Mexican American experience.

Over 400,000 Hispanic Americans proudly served our country during World War II fighting and dying in every major battle in the Pacific and European Theatres. Their patriotism has been chronicled in several books including *Legacy Greater Than Words*, a

summary of 425 interviews of Latinos from across the country by the University of Texas' U.S. Latino & Latina WWII Oral History Project and *Undaunted Courage: Mexican American Patriots of World War II*, which profiles over 500 Mexican Americans who served in World War II authored by myself, my wife Linda and our organization, Latino Advocates for Education, Inc.

Significantly, Mexican Americans fought and gave their lives at a time when they, like African Americans, were subjected to segregated public schools, were not allowed full use of public swimming pools and public accommodations, were denied equal access to voting and serving as jurors and faced open discrimination in public and private employment.

If you need verification, I suggest that you read the following U.S. Supreme Court and Federal Court cases: *Hernandez v. Texas* (1954) 347 U.S. 475 which ordered Texas to allow American citizens of Mexican descent to sit as jurors in criminal trials; *Lopez v. Seccombe* (1944) 71 F. Supp. 769 which required San Bernardino, California to open its public swimming pools to Mexican American children; *Mendez v Westminster School District* (1946) 64 F. Supp. 544 which mandated that California's public schools provide integrated education for Mexican American children; *Delgado v. Batrop Independent School District* (1948) Civ. No. 388 W.D. Texas which ended state-mandated segregation of Mexican American children in Texas and *Gonzalez v. Sheely* (1951) 96 F. Supp. 1004 which enjoined Arizona from maintaining separate public schools for Mexican American children.

Moreover, there is the famous incident of Felix Longoria. He was killed in action in World War II. In 1948, his family requested that his remains be returned to Three Rivers, Texas to be buried in his hometown. However, the owners of the mortuary and cemetery refused to bury this American in their cemetery simply because he was of Mexican descent. A young Congressman, Lyndon B. Johnson stepped in and assisted the American G.I. Forum, a Mexican American servicemen's national organization, in having the body of Felix Longoria buried with full military honors in Arlington National Cemetery.

As you can see, the Mexican American experience rightfully must be presented to the American public through your film.

I know that time is of the essence as *THE WAR* debuts in September, 2007 on PBS's 354 public television stations reaching nearly 90 million people.

You can interview and include in your film at least one Mexican American from the Sacramento, California area – Lt. Col. Henry Cervantes, retired. His parents were migrant farm workers. He volunteered for the U.S. Army Air Corps and as a B-17 pilot flew 25 bombing missions over Germany. After the war he became a jet pilot as he made the Air Force his career. His exploits, including the racial discrimination that he faced, are chronicled in his book: *Piloto – Migrant Worker to Jet Pilot*, published by Hellgate Press. Lt. Col. Cervantes can be reached at HCervan102@aol.com.

John F. Wilson, Senior Vice President, PBS Programming stated in the news release: “It’s critical that we capture the stories of the generation that fought and lived through World War II before they are lost to us forever. Serving our mission to educate and inform, PBS’s goal for *THE WAR* is to reach into every home and classroom—so together we can better understand what we as a nation experienced in those difficult years and what we as a nation accomplished.”

Given the fact that Hispanic Americans are now the largest ethnic minority group in our nation, that over 50% of the K-12 students in California and many other states are Latinos, that historically Latinos have been subjected to second class citizenship in our country but have patriotically served in every war that we have fought, and to promote PBS’s mission, it is proper and fitting that the Mexican American experience be documented and included in *THE WAR*.

I trust that you agree.

Sincerely,

Frederick P. Aguirre