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For downloadable images, visit pbs.org/pressroom/
 For the program companion website, visit pbs.org/independentlens/longoria-affair

**JOHN J. VALADEZ'S *THE LONGORIA AFFAIR* TO PREMIERE ON THE PBS SERIES
INDEPENDENT LENS ON TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 2010**

**Story of a Little-Known Texas Incident that Helped Launch a Civil Rights Movement and
 Changed the Lives of Millions**

(San Francisco, CA)— Private Felix Longoria was killed in battle fighting the Japanese during World War II. But when his body was sent home to Three Rivers, Texas, the town's only funeral parlor refused to allow his family to use their chapel because "the whites wouldn't like it." The incident sparked national outrage and brought together two savvy political leaders, Senator Lyndon Johnson and Dr. Hector Garcia. Their complex, sometimes contentious relationship would help Latinos become a national political force for the first time in American history. The Longoria Affair would also propel John Kennedy to the White House, and lead President Johnson to sign the most important civil rights legislation of the twentieth century. *The Longoria Affair*, directed by award-winning filmmaker John J. Valadez and narrated by actor Tony Plana, will premiere on the Emmy® Award-winning PBS series *Independent Lens* on Tuesday, November 9, 2010 at 10 PM (check local listings).

In the south Texas town of Three Rivers, segregation between the Anglo and Mexican American communities had long been a way of life. But, with the onset of World War II, men and women from both communities joined together to support the war effort. One of them was a young, Mexican American husband and father named Felix Longoria.

A decorated soldier, Private Longoria was killed in battle in the Philippines. When his remains were returned, his widow Beatrice wanted him to be honored in his hometown. She was devastated when the funeral home owner, Tom Kennedy, denied her family the use of the chapel.



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Kennedy would later tell a reporter, “We’ve never let Latins use the chapel and we don’t intend to start now.”

Beatrice sought help from Hector Garcia, a doctor from Corpus Christi who was making a name for himself as a hard-edged civil rights advocate. During the war, Garcia had been a surgeon and commander of a field hospital near the front lines in Europe. After the war, he returned to South Texas where thousands of Mexican Americans desperately needed medical care. Many of Garcia’s patients were veterans, but were unable to get care from the Veterans Administration. They told him that they couldn’t get money to go to school or start businesses — benefits white veterans were receiving as part of the GI Bill. Garcia began to mobilize, creating an organization to fight for Latino rights called the American GI Forum.

Incensed by Mrs. Longoria’s plight, Garcia called the local paper and fired off telegrams to elected officials demanding justice. One telegram went to the newly elected junior Senator from Texas, Lyndon Baines Johnson. Twenty years earlier, Johnson had been principal of the segregated Mexican American school in Cotulla, just 60 miles west of Three Rivers. He never forgot the poverty and racism he witnessed there.

Johnson immediately responded, offering to have Private Longoria buried with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery. The family accepted and today Felix Longoria’s body rests on a hill overlooking the Washington Monument.

The Longoria Affair created an enduring alliance between Lyndon Johnson and Dr. Garcia. Over the next 15 years, their complex, sometimes contentious relationship would help forge Latinos into a national force for the first time in American history. Their alliance would help carry John F. Kennedy to the White House and ultimately lead to Johnson’s signature on the most important civil rights legislation of the 20th century.

After Kennedy’s death, Johnson would bring more Mexican Americans into the federal government than any President in history. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 desegregated public accommodations throughout the country, making it illegal for a business owner to deny services based on race. The 1965 Voting Rights Act ended the Poll Tax and finally gave Mexican Americans and others the legal tools to challenge discriminatory voting practices. Sixteen years after the Longoria Affair, Latinos would be elected to local school boards and city councils. They would become mayors, legislators, governors, and judges in record numbers. For Garcia, it was a triumph.

To learn more about the film, and the issues involved, visit the companion website for *The Longoria Affair* at www.pbs.org/longoria-affair. Get detailed information on the film, watch preview clips, read an interview with the filmmaker, and explore the subject in depth with links and resources. The site also features a Talkback section where viewers can share their ideas and opinions.

The Longoria Affair is a co-production of John J. Valadez, WGBH/Boston, and the Independent Television Service (ITVS) in association with Latino Public Broadcasting (LPB), with funding provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, PBS, and the Houston Endowment.

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Participants, in Order of Appearance

Patrick Carroll is a professor of history at Texas A & M University in Corpus Christi, Texas. He is the author of *Felix Longoria's Wake: Bereavement, Racism, and the Rise of Mexican American Activism*.

Sara Posas is Felix Longoria's sister-in-law. She was raised in Three Rivers, Texas and was an eye witness to many of the events in the film

Patti Reagan was born and raised in Three Rivers, Texas.

Santiago Hernandez is a musician and activist who works in Three Rivers. He is the Civil Rights Director of the Felix Longoria Chapter of the American GI Forum in Corpus Christi, Texas. He has long worked towards helping the Longoria Affair gain recognition as a milestone in Mexican American civil rights.

Henry AJ Ramos is the author of *The American GI Forum: In Pursuit of the Dream, 1948-1983*.

Robert Dallek is professor emeritus of history at Boston College and is the author of seventeen books including *Lone Star Rising: Lyndon Johnson and His Times 1908-1960*, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times 1961-1973*, *An Unfinished Life: John F. Kennedy 1917-1963*, *Lyndon B. Johnson: Portrait of a President*, and *Let Every Nation Know: John F. Kennedy in His Own Words*.

Wanda Garcia is the eldest daughter of Dr. Hector P. Garcia. She writes for the online publication *Somos Primos*.

Susan Zamzow is the daughter of Tom Kennedy.

Jane Kennedy is the wife of Tom Kennedy.

Richard Hudson spent much of his childhood in Three Rivers, Texas. He is working on his Master's degree in history, has researched the Longoria Affair, and plans to write his thesis about the topic.

Vicente Ximenes is a longtime friend and confidant of Dr. Hector P. Garcia. He is a former president of the American GI Forum and was in the Kennedy Administration. He served as a member of President Lyndon Johnson's cabinet — as Chairman of the Cabinet Committee on Mexican American Affairs — making him the first Mexican American to ever hold a cabinet level position in the White House.

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About the Filmmaker

John J. Valadez (Writer/Director/Producer) has been writing, producing, and directing awardwinning, nationally broadcast documentaries for the past sixteen years. Last year his film *The Chicano Wave*, a history of Mexican American music, for the PBS/BBC series *Latin Music USA* received a primetime national broadcast in both the United States and Europe. Valadez has had two films on the acclaimed PBS series *POV: Passin' It On*, about the false imprisonment of a former leader of the Black Panther Party, and *The Last Conquistador*, about an artist who must face the moral implications of his work as he creates a statue of a Spanish explorer who committed genocide. He directed the first hour of the PBS series *Making Peace*, about Chicano writer and former gang leader Luis Rodriguez, and produced *The Divide*, the first hour of the PBS series *Matters of Race*. Valadez was a director for the PBS series *Visiones: Latino Arts & Culture*, and he was also a producer of the prime-time PBS special *Beyond Brown*. The film looked at the re-segregation of American schools 50 years after the Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education*. At CNN, Valadez wrote, directed, and produced the award winning film *High Stakes Testing*, for CNN Presents. The film was an hour-long, hard-hitting, investigative film about the Bush administration's education policies. Valadez will be a writer, producer, and director for the forthcoming six-hour PBS series *Latino Americans*.

Valadez has twice been a New York Foundation for the Arts Fellow, is a Rockefeller Fellow, and a PBS/CPB Producers Academy Fellow. He regularly lectures at universities across the United States. A member of The Writers Guild of America East, Valadez is also a founding member of the National Association of Latino Independent Producers (NALIP) and is a graduate of the film program at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts.

About *Independent Lens*

Independent Lens is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing on PBS. The acclaimed anthology series features documentaries and a limited number of fiction films united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of their independent producers. *Independent Lens* features unforgettable stories about unique individuals, communities, and moments in history. Presented by The Independent Television Service (ITVS), the series is supported by interactive companion websites and national publicity and community engagement campaigns. *Independent Lens* is jointly curated by ITVS and PBS and is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding provided by PBS and the National Endowment for the Arts. The series producer is Lois Vossen.

About Latino Public Broadcasting

Latino Public Broadcasting (LPB) supports the development, production, acquisition and distribution of public media content that is representative of Latino people, or addresses issues of interest to Latino Americans. These programs, including the series 'VOCES', are produced for dissemination to the public broadcasting stations. Edward James Olmos is founder and Chairman of the LPB Board of Directors. For more information please visit www.lpbp.org and www.voces.tv.

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