



P.O.V.'s "THE LAST CONQUISTADOR"

By John J. Valadez and Cristina Ibarra

Tuesday, July 15, 2008 at 10 p.m. on PBS (Check local listings)

Filmmakers' Statement

When we first saw the statue of Juan de Oñate, it seemed to be calling us home to face our roots, making us both think back to what it was like growing up Mexican-American. We grew up like cultural contortionists, awkwardly straddling the literal and psychological borders around us, and in the process we somehow came to be ashamed of our Indian roots.

When we first saw how seductive and intoxicating the Oñate monument is, we were both inspired and heartbroken. Inspired by its majesty and raw power, and saddened because the statue overlooks an important part of our legacy: the madness and horror of what we have done to one another and how that trauma continues to affect our lives today. Why our community can't respectfully acknowledge the dark edifice of our past and extend a somber embrace to our Indian brothers and sisters is perplexing to us. After all, as Mexican-Americans we do share in their history, their culture; and it is their blood that runs through our veins.

We can easily imagine that for the next thousand years, people will look upon this statue and they will believe that it depicts a great man whose deeds, values and exploits represent the best of who we are; that our culture and our civilization believed that he was worthy of being enshrined and idolized for all time in magnificent bronze. They may study his life and believe that his values, his actions, his determination and his vision are worthy of their aspiration. They may see him as a hero, a founding father to be emulated, and his world-view to be propagated. We think there are many in El Paso, in the American Southwest, and across our great land who already believe this deep in their hearts.

This has given us pause, and cause for sober reflection.

We hope **The Last Conquistador** contributes to awareness, not only of the triumphs of history, but also the failures, the tragedies and the humiliation. We believe that viewers must be trusted to examine historical and contemporary questions in all their complexity, including legacies of prejudice and discrimination, resilience and courage. This trust encourages people to develop a voice in ongoing civic conversations in their community and the nation.

Lastly, we hope **The Last Conquistador** promotes an understanding of different perspectives, competing truths and the need to comprehend one's own motives and assumptions, and those of others. The film asks difficult questions about the role and responsibility of the artist. It examines issues of memory and judgment with an eye toward moral and perceptual complexity, and the ways in which the deep divides of difference resonate from history into the present along class, racial, ethnic and cultural lines. With Juan de Oñate's stunning resurrection in exquisite bronze comes the painful knowledge that his anguished legacy still haunts the land.

— John J. Valadez and Cristina Ibarra

