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LATINOS '08

PBS DOCUMENTARY WILL EXAMINE THE 2008 PRESIDENTIAL
ELECTION THROUGH THE PRISM OF ETHNIC POLITICS

AIRS NATIONALLY ON PBS, OCTOBER 8, 2008 at 9 p.m.

*“If you’re going to be an active participant in this thing called democracy, you got to work at it.
You can’t be on the sidelines.” – Federico Peña, Former Cabinet Member*

LOS ANGELES—With the presidential election a month away, a new documentary from Phillip Rodriguez examines how supporters of Barack Obama and John McCain are trying to mobilize Latinos, who are less cohesive than other ethnic voter blocs and who do not fit the black/white racial binary that has long shaped American politics.

Latinos '08 airs Wednesday, October 8, at 9 to 10 p.m. on PBS (check local listings).

The program explores the increasing presence of Latinos on the American political scene through the wider lens of ethnic politics across U.S. history, says Rodriguez, the award-winning Los Angeles filmmaker. “This is just the latest chapter of the American immigrant assimilation story,” Henry Cisneros points out in the film. Cisneros, the former mayor of San Antonio and Clinton Administration cabinet member, is joined in the documentary by a lineup of astute political commentators and scholars, complemented with animation and graphics.

John F. Kennedy’s presidential campaign in 1960 was the first to make a concerted effort to reach Latino voters, and the documentary features a TV ad, delivered gingerly in Spanish, by

Jacqueline Kennedy. In 1980, Ronald Reagan broke through the traditional Democratic-voting pattern of Latinos by appealing to their conservative family values.

McCain was seen favorably by many Latinos for his support of a comprehensive immigration reform, but he has retreated from that position amid hostile attacks against illegal immigrants. Those attacks, to some, appeared to demonize Latinos in general. “Some of that rhetoric sounded anti-Hispanic specifically,” says TV commentator Leslie Sanchez, a Republican. Meanwhile, Obama was beaten by Hillary Clinton among Latino voters in the primaries, and her support was especially strong among Latinas. This political landscape sets up some key questions in Campaign 2008: Will McCain manage to win significant Latino voters despite the Republican Party's harsh immigration rhetoric? Will Democrat Barack Obama succeed in securing the Latino votes of Hillary Clinton supporters?

Predicting how Latinos will vote is a risky exercise because of the heterogeneity among Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Central Americans and other national groups. Latinos, like others, also are divided by class and education, and the lives of more recent immigrants are often vastly different than those of U.S.-born Latinos.

New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson, a Mexican American, competed in the Democratic primaries earlier this year but did not fare well. He was running against two mega-stars -- Obama and Clinton. And, as one program commentator says, Richardson ran as a “non-Latino candidate.” Marketing executive Lionel Sosa, a Republican strategist, says of Richardson: “Maybe some people did not support him because he was Latino, and maybe Latinos didn’t support him because he wasn’t Latino enough.”

The ethnic group’s identity and role in national politics is evolving rapidly, and Columbia University political scientist Rodolfo de la Garza, asks: “What will it mean to be Latino” in the future?

For now, Latinos are the nation’s largest ethnic/racial minority. But with low rates of naturalization and low turnout among those who are naturalized, Latino voters have yet to achieve the level of political participation of other groups. Those who do vote constitute an increasingly divided electorate. In 2004, for example, the Latino vote was roughly split between the two parties.

How, then, are today's candidates and advocacy groups trying to mobilize and attract this group of voters? This documentary considers current strategies, from get-out-the-vote campaigns to bilingual blogs to mariachi theme songs. Says columnist Ruben Navarrette Jr.: "Most of the people who run for president, they're all mostly white males, and when they show up, they show up with mariachis, they show up with chips and salsa. We get tired of being defined by a food group."

Latinos '08 also addresses the lack of top-tier Latino national leaders. Says USC Professor Roberto Suro, former head of the Pew Hispanic Center: "Many have tried; many have fallen, often as a result of personal weaknesses, because of scandals."

Latinos '08 features interviews with a wide range of prominent Latinos, including former Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Henry Cisneros, Political/Marketing Consultant Lionel Sosa, Columnist Ruben Navarrette Jr., Obama Campaign Co-Chair Federico Peña, National Political Commentator Leslie Sanchez, The Rev. Luis Cortés of *Esperanza USA*, and Professors Rodolfo de la Garza of Columbia, Roberto Suro of USC and Luis Fraga of the University of Washington.

Phillip Rodriguez's documentaries include *Brown is the New Green: George Lopez and the American Dream* (2007), *Los Angeles Now* (2004), *Mixed Feelings: San Diego/Tijuana* (2002), *Manuel Ocampo: God is My Copilot* (1999), and *Pancho Villa & Other Stories* (1998). A Senior Fellow at the Institute for Justice and Journalism at the USC Annenberg School for Communication, he received the first annual United States Artists' Broad Fellow Award.

Latinos '08 is a production of **323 Projects, LLC**. *Latinos '08* was made possible by **PBS**, the **Corporation for Public Broadcasting** and **Latino Public Broadcasting**. Travel provided by **Southwest Airlines**.

Additional information and digital photography from *Latinos '08* is available at:

pbs.org/latinos08, <http://pressroom.pbs.org/search?keyword=Latinos+%2708>

Latinos '08 Credits

- Producer/Director
- Image
- Editor
- Writer
- Co-Producer

Phillip Rodriguez**Claudio Rocha****David Egen****Suzanne Smith****Jennifer Craig-Kobzik****Latinos '08 Cast****Ruben Alvarez***Molera Alvarez Group***Henry Cisneros***Chairman, City View***Rev. Luis Cortés***President, Esperanza USA***Luis Fraga***Professor, University of Washington***Lisa García Bedolla***Associate Professor, University of California at Berkeley***Rodolfo de la Garza***Professor, Columbia University***Javier Gonzalez***Sol/Voter Registration***Mickey Ibarra***Mickey Ibarra & Associates***Roberto Lovato***Writer***Ruben Navarrette Jr.***Syndicated columnist***Ana Navarro***Co-Chair, McCain National Hispanic Advisory Council***Federico Peña***Co-Chair, Obama National Campaign***Simon Rosenberg***President, NDN**(Formerly New Democrat Network)***Leslie Sanchez***Television commentator***Sanchez Family***Salinas, CA***Lionel Sosa***Republican strategist***Roberto Suro***Professor, USC Annenberg School for Communication***Arturo Vargas***National Association of Latino Elected Officials*

Latinos '08 funders

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Travel provided by Southwest Airlines.

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Today, Southwest operates more than 500 Boeing 737 aircraft between 64 cities. Southwest topped the monthly domestic originating passenger rankings for the first time in May 2003. Yearend results for 2007 marked Southwest's 35th consecutive year of profitability. Southwest became a major airline in 1989 when it exceeded the billion-dollar revenue mark. Southwest is the United States' most successful low-fare, high frequency, point-to-point carrier. Southwest operates more than 3,400 flights a day coast to coast, making it the largest U.S. carrier based on domestic departures.

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