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Brothers' Road Trip to Bury Mother's Ashes Unearths the Saga of a Mexican-American Family in P.O.V.'s "Calavera Highway" Tuesday, Sept. 16 on PBS

*Produced in Association with American Documentary | P.O.V.;
A co-presentation with Latino Public Broadcasting*

"... beautifully crafted road movie...It's a simply terrific film about family, identity and melting-pot America in the 21st century." – Michael Fox (SF360, Independent View)

MEDIA ALERT – FACT SHEET

National Air

Date: **Tuesday, Sept. 16, 2008** at 10 p.m. on PBS. (Check local listings.) The **P.O.V.** series (a cinema term for "point of view"), now in its 21st year on PBS, is broadcast June through October, with primetime specials in the fall and winter.

Summary: When brothers Armando and Carlos Peña set off to carry their mother's ashes to south Texas, their road trip turns into a quest for answers about a strangely veiled past. As they reunite with five other brothers, the two men try to piece together their family's shattered history. Why was their mother cast out by her family? What happened to their father, who disappeared during the notorious 1954 U.S. deportation program Operation Wetback? **Calavera Highway** is a sweeping story of seven Mexican-American men grappling with the meaning of masculinity, fatherhood and a legacy of rootless beginnings.

In a circuitous route, up from Los Angeles to Washington State, back down to the Rio Grande with a side trip into Mexico, the brothers retrace some of the same highways they had traveled in their youth as migrant farm workers. They remember the brutal days working in the fields as children, even on weekends and holidays, but also the camaraderie they shared. They recall their lives as fatherless street urchins, anchored by their mother's love, hard work and pride.

The film is produced in association with American Documentary | P.O.V., and is a co-presentation with Latino Public Broadcasting. Funded in part by the Center for Asian American Media with funds provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

Filmmaker's

Statement: Director Renee Tajima-Peña is a Japanese-American filmmaker whose previous work has explored the Asian American identity. "My Japanese grandfather migrated to work on the sugar plantations in Hawaii in the early 1900s, at the same time that Armando's grandparents began crossing over from Mexico to work in Texas. I always wondered what forces in history and culture shaped the different trajectories the families took.

"I felt I had completed my search for my Asian roots when I finished 'My America...Or Honk If You Love Buddha,' the time when I married Armando Peña," she continues, "so when I felt an urge to traverse different landscapes of race, culture and family, it seemed only right to follow him on his journey to understand his past. We called the film **Calavera**

Highway (Skeleton Highway) because of the ever-present sense of ruins and ghosts, and public and private histories, along the way.”

Bios: Renee Tajima-Peña, Director/Producer
Renee Tajima-Peña was nominated for the documentary Academy Award for “Who Killed Vincent Chin?” which opened the 1989 season of P.O.V. Her 1997 film, “My America...Or Honk If You Love Buddha,” was an award-winner at the Sundance Film Festival. Her other directing credits include “The Mexico Story” for Kartemquin Films' collaborative series on immigration; “The New Americans” (IDA Award winner); “Labor Women”; “The Last Beat Movie” (Sundance Channel); and “The Best Hotel On Skid Row” (premiered at Cannes, aired on HBO).

Tajima-Peña has been awarded the Alpert Award in the Arts for Film/Video, two Rockefeller Fellowships in Documentary Film, a Peabody Award, a duPont-Columbia Award and other honors. She began her filmmaking career at Third World Newsreel and Asian Cine-Vision in New York, and has been a film critic for *The Village Voice* and cultural commentator for NPR. She is the Graduate Director of the Masters Program in Social Documentation at U.C. Santa Cruz. She lives in Los Angeles.

Evangeline “Vangie” Griego, Producer
Evangeline Griego is an award-winning independent producer/director of the documentaries “Paño Arte: Images from Inside” and “Border Visions/Visiones Fronterizo.” She collaborated with Tajima-Peña on “The New Americans” and the special “My Journey Home,” both for PBS. More recently, Griego co-produced the new documentary “Chevolution” (Red Envelope Entertainment/Netflix and Arte) and produced “Sir! No Sir!” (Sundance Channel). She is the co-founder of the Silver Lake Film Festival in Los Angeles. She serves on the board of directors for NALIP (The National Association of Latino Independent Producers) and the OUTFEST Los Angeles Gay & Lesbian film festival. She is currently in production on the feature documentary “God Willing,” about a Bible-based nomadic cult. She lives in Los Angeles.

Operation Wetback: In 1949 the Border Patrol seized nearly 280,000 illegal immigrants. By 1953, the numbers had grown to more than 865,000, and the U.S. government felt pressured to do something about the onslaught of immigration. What resulted was Operation Wetback, devised in 1954 under the supervision of new commissioner of the Immigration and Nationalization Service, Gen. Joseph Swing.

Swing oversaw the border patrol, and organized state and local officials along with the police. The objects of his intense border enforcement were “illegal aliens,” but common practices of Operation Wetback focused on Mexicans in general. The police swarmed through Mexican American barrios throughout the southeastern states. Some Mexicans . . . fled back south across the border. In 1954, the agents discovered over 1 million illegal immigrants. . . . (Source: <http://www.pbs.org/kpbs/theborder/history/timeline/20.html>)

More information: How Eisenhower solved illegal border crossings from Mexico, by John Dillin, *Christian Science Monitor*. <http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0706/p09s01-coop.html>

P.O.V. Web: The **Calavera Highway** companion website www.pbs.org/pov/calaverahighway) offers a streaming video trailer of the film, an interview with filmmakers Renee Tajima-Peña and Evangeline “Vangie” Griego; a list of related websites, organizations and books; and a downloadable discussion guide and classroom activity.

Outreach: P.O.V. is working with public television stations and national and community-based groups across the country to foster community dialogue around the issues presented in **Calavera Highway**. For a list of upcoming screening and discussion events, go to: http://www.amdoc.org/outreach_news.php

P.O.V. also works with nationally recognized media educator Dr. Faith Rogow to develop a facilitation guide with discussion questions and background information to help event organizers carry out discussions around the film's content. Cari Ladd has created the lesson plan, and Debby DeSoer of the Ellensburg Public Library have created a multimedia resource list of related fiction and nonfiction books and videos that further explore the issues. The materials are available free of charge at: www.amdoc.org/outreach.

Festivals: Best Drama Documentary, Atlanta International Documentary Film Festival, August 2008

World Premiere, Full Frame Documentary Film Festival, April 2008
Golden Gate Award, Best Television Documentary-Long Form, San Francisco International Film Festival, April-May 2008
Best Documentary Feature, San Diego Latino Film Festival, March 2008

Length: 86:46

Credits: Director/Producer: Renee Tajima-Peña
Producer: Evangeline Griego
Executive Producer: Jeff Bieber
Cinematographer: Jonathan Schell
Editor: Johanna Demetrakas
Original Music: Brian Kirk and Sharon Smith, Noel Hernandez/Frijoles Romanticos and Rene Gasca

Calavera Highway is a Rosasboys Production in association with P.O.V. | American Documentary. It is a co-presentation with Latino Public Broadcasting and is funded in part by the Center for Asian American Media with funds provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting

Pressroom: Visit P.O.V.'s pressroom, www.pbs.org/pov/pressroom, for press releases, downloadable art, filmmaker biographies, transcripts and special features.

P.O.V.: Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and celebrating its 21st season on PBS in 2008, the award-winning P.O.V. series is the longest-running showcase on television to feature the work of America's best contemporary-issue independent filmmakers. Airing June through October, with primetime specials during the year, P.O.V. has brought more than 250 award-winning documentaries to millions nationwide, and has a Webby Award-winning online series, *P.O.V.'s Borders*. Since 1988, P.O.V. has pioneered the art of presentation and outreach using independent nonfiction media to build new communities in conversation about today's most pressing social issues. More information about P.O.V is available at www.pbs.org/pov.

Major funding for P.O.V. is provided by PBS, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, The Educational Foundation of America, The Fledgling Fund, New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, New York State Council on the Arts, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, The September 11th Fund, and public television viewers. Funding for P.O.V.'s *Diverse Voices Project* is provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. P.O.V. is presented by a consortium of public television stations, including KCET Los Angeles, WGBH Boston and Thirteen/WNET New York.

DVD REQUESTS: Please note that a broadcast version of this film is available upon request, as the film may be edited to comply with new FCC regulations.



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