



## For Immediate Release

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## Past and Present Collide in El Paso at Dedication of World's Largest Equestrian Statue in P.O.V.'s "The Last Conquistador" Tuesday, July 15 on PBS

Sculptor John Houser's Monumental Bronze of Juan de Oñate Exposes Raw Feelings and Sharp Divisions in the Southwest — And the Perils of Public Art in a Multicultural Society

*A Co-production of Independent Television Service (ITVS); A Co-presentation With Latino Public Broadcasting, Native American Public Telecommunications and KERA Dallas/Fort Worth*

John Houser is a man with monumental sculpture in his blood. He can remember his father working as an assistant carver on Mt. Rushmore. Enthralled with the power of art, he has dedicated himself to making history come alive in large-scale public sculptures. So when the El Paso City Council commissioned a larger-than-life statue of the Spanish Conquistador Juan de Oñate, Houser conceived his grandest project yet: the largest bronze equestrian statue in the world. He envisioned a magnificent and long-overdue tribute to the contributions of Hispanic culture and history to the United States.

But as recounted in the new documentary **The Last Conquistador**, all was not well as the statue's dedication approached. The area's Native Americans had their own very personal memories concerning Oñate. They recalled massacres, slavery and terror. They remembered that Oñate's foray into New Mexico in 1598 would eventually lead to the deaths of two out of every three Indians there and nearly caused the extermination of Native culture across the region.

John Valadez and Cristina Ibarra's **The Last Conquistador** has its national broadcast premiere on **Tuesday, July 15, 2008** at 10 p.m., on PBS during the 21st season of P.O.V. (Check local listings.) American television's longest-running independent documentary series, P.O.V. is public television's premier showcase for point-of-view, nonfiction films and winner of a 2007 Special News & Documentary Emmy for Excellence in Television Documentary Filmmaking.

As the film shows, the prospect that a murderer's image would be looming over El Paso, Texas, drew increasing anger and protest. One artist proposed a companion sculpture of a giant severed foot, commemorating Oñate's method of cutting off feet to terrorize the native inhabitants. Houser saw his grand conception transformed in a way he had not intended, caught up in a whirlwind of unresolved conflicts between races, classes and historical memories.

Neither Houser nor El Paso's city councilors had intended any offense or controversy. The statue of Oñate was intended as part of a sculpture walk through history that would memorialize the region's dramatic but often unrecognized history. When the storm of protest arose, they were taken by surprise. But should they have been? Had they too easily accepted a conqueror's version of history where the daring exploits of pioneers and colonists are celebrated, while their sins of violence are avoided or excused?

In that history, Oñate set out in 1598 from Mexico on a thousand-mile journey seeking new lands and Christian converts for Spain along with riches for himself. He was the first governor of New Mexico, and brought wheat, horses, metalworking and Western ideas to what became the American Southwest. But Oñate's brutality was well understood by his contemporaries. He was eventually recalled, tried and convicted by the Spanish Crown for what would today be called crimes against humanity. He was banished forever from New Mexico, and ended up moving to Spain.

While Native Americans are deeply offended, many wealthy whites and Hispanics throughout the region — who trace their ancestry back to the Oñate expedition — welcome the monument and defend the bloodshed, saying the Indians were the aggressors and that Oñate brought peace and stability to the region.

Caught in between are the Mestizos, Mexican-Americans like El Paso City Councilman Anthony Cobos who make up about 75 percent of El Paso's population. The sons and daughters of both the Spaniards and the Indians they subjugated, they must struggle with a conflicted heritage that is both prideful and humiliating. Councilman Cobos eventually withdraws his support for the statue and pays a heavy political price.

John Houser, who had worked on his labor of love for 10 years, eventually feels the pressure: he learns that he has glaucoma and may eventually lose his eyesight. Haunted by the heavy moral burden of his own creation and his failing health, he apologizes for being blind to the social implications of his work. "I have developed my own trap," he says, "and I think about it day and night."

But the damage is done. Deep wounds have been opened and a bitter divide has deepened. In the end, many Hispanics are elated, Mestizos are frustrated that valuable public money has been used for the sculpture, and Native Americans feel that the genocide of their people matters little to the City of El Paso or to white people who walk the corridors of power.

John Houser is proud of the art but dismayed by how it is perceived. But resilient and determined as ever, he is planning to make up for it with a statue commemorating pre-Columbian Indian life — a human figure 28 times life-size and five feet higher than the Statue of Liberty!

**The Last Conquistador** is a production of the Kitchen Sync Group, Inc./Valadez Media in association with Independent Television Service (ITVS), Latino Public Broadcasting, Native American Public Telecommunications, and KERA Dallas/Ft. Worth. Funding provided by the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Sundance Documentary Fund, Humanities Texas and the New York State Council on the Arts.

#### **About the filmmakers:**

##### **John J. Valadez**

##### **Executive Producer/Writer/Producer/Director**

John Valadez has been producing and directing award-winning documentaries for PBS and CNN for the past 14 years. His credits include the critically acclaimed "Passin' It On," which aired on P.O.V in 1994. He also was a producer for three PBS series: *Making Peace*, *Matters of Race*, and *Visiones: Latino Arts & Culture*. He was a producer of "Beyond Brown" for PBS, and produced "High Stakes Testing" for *CNN Presents*. Valadez is currently working on two PBS projects: writing and directing the third hour of the four-hour series *Latin Music USA* and producing "The Head of Joaquin Murrieta."

Valadez is a founding member of the New York City Chapter of the National Association of Latino Independent Producers (NALIP). He is a Rockefeller Fellow and a PBS/CPB Producers Academy Fellow, and currently sits on the Board of Trustees of the Robert Flaherty Film Seminar. He has twice been a New York Foundation for the Arts Fellow and is a graduate of the film program at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts; Valadez lives in Warwick, N.Y.

**Cristina Ibarra**  
**Producer/Director**

This is Cristina Ibarra's first feature documentary. For the past eight years, she has been making short films that have been seen on public television and in galleries, museums, schools and film festivals across the United States including at the Guggenheim Museum, Exit Art Gallery, and the Queens Museum. Her award-winning directorial debut, "Dirty Laundry: A Homemade Telenovela," aired on the PBS series *ColorVision*. She has also produced interstitials for Latino Public Broadcasting, the New York International Latino Film Festival and *fulana*, a Latina multimedia collaborative. Some of her credits include "Grandma's Hip Hop," "Amnezac," and "Wheels of Change." Ibarra is a Rockefeller Fellow, a New York Foundation for the Arts Fellow and a CPB/PBS Producers Academy Fellow. She is a founding member of NALIP; *fulana*; and SubCine, the first Latino self-distribution collective. Ibarra, who lives in Brooklyn, N.Y., is currently developing two projects: a documentary entitled "Another Martha" and a feature film entitled "Love & Monster Trucks."

**Credits:**

Executive Producer:	John J. Valadez
Producer/Director:	John J. Valadez, Cristina Ibarra
Writer:	John J. Valadez
Director of Photography:	Elia Lyssy
Editor:	Keiko Deguchi, Jean-Phillipe Boucicaut
Original Music:	Richard Martinez

**Running Time:** 56:46



The Independent Television Service (ITVS) funds and presents award-winning documentaries and dramas on public television, innovative new media projects on the Web and the Emmy Award-winning weekly series *Independent Lens* on PBS. ITVS is a miracle of public policy created by media activists, citizens and politicians seeking to foster plurality and diversity in public television. ITVS was established by a historic mandate of Congress to champion independently produced programs that take creative risks, spark public dialogue and serve underserved audiences. Since its inception in 1991, ITVS programs have revitalized the relationship between the public and public television, bringing TV audiences face-to-face with the lives and concerns of their fellow Americans. More information about ITVS can be obtained by visiting [itvs.org](http://itvs.org). ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people.



Created in 1998 by Edward James Olmos and Marlene Dermer, Latino Public Broadcasting (LPB) is a non-profit organization funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. LPB's mission is to support the development, production, post-production, acquisition and distribution of non-commercial educational and cultural television that is representative of or addresses issues of particular interest to U.S. Latinos. These programs are produced for dissemination to public broadcasting stations and other public telecommunications entities. Mr. Olmos is presently LPB's Chairman of the Board of Directors. For more information please visit [www.lpbp.org](http://www.lpbp.org).



Native American Public Telecommunications (NAPT) is one of five national consortia chartered by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) to provide minority programming to the public broadcasting system. For 32 years, NAPT has supported the creation, promotion and distribution of Native public media. NAPT support has made it possible to bring to the PBS audience such quality programs as *Indian Country Diaries*, *Unnatural Causes*, *The Oneida Speak*, *Way of the Warrior* and many others. More information about NAPT is available at [www.nativetelecom.org](http://www.nativetelecom.org). Other award-winning services of NAPT include the AIROS Native Network, [www.airos.org](http://www.airos.org), and Visionmaker Video, [www.visionmaker.org](http://www.visionmaker.org), distributor of authentic documentaries by and about Native Americans. NAPT receives major support from CPB and the Ford Foundation.



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 Tuesdays at 10 p.m., June through September, with primetime specials during the year, P.O.V. has brought more than 250 award-winning documentaries to millions nationwide, and now 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 online at [www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov).

***P.O.V. Interactive*** ([www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov))

P.O.V.'s award-winning Web department produces special features for every P.O.V. presentation, extending the life of our films through filmmaker interviews, story updates, podcasts, streaming video, and community-based and educational content that involves viewers in activities and feedback. P.O.V. Interactive also produces our Web-only showcase for interactive storytelling, *P.O.V.'s Borders*. In addition, [www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov) has launched the *P.O.V. Blog*, a gathering place for documentary fans and filmmakers to discuss and debate their favorite films, get the latest news and link to further resources. The P.O.V. Web site, blog and film archives form a unique and extensive online resource for documentary storytelling.

***P.O.V. Community Engagement and Education***

American Documentary | P.O.V. works with local PBS stations, educators and community organizations to present free screenings and discussion events to inspire and engage communities in vital conversations about our world. As a leading provider of quality nonfiction programming for use in public life, P.O.V. offers an extensive menu of resources, including free discussion guides and curriculum-based lesson plans. In addition, P.O.V.'s *Youth Views* works with youth organizers and students to provide them with resources and training in order to use independent documentaries as a catalyst for social change.

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.

***American Documentary, Inc.*** ([www.amdoc.org](http://www.amdoc.org))

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream media outlets. AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, online and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback to educational opportunities and community participation. Simon Kilmurry is executive director of American Documentary | P.O.V.

***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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