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## FOLLOWING MAGGIE THE LEADER

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Fifty-one-year-old Maggie Rivas Rodríguez seems comfortable at the helm of an elite group of Latino leaders she has rallied in the spreading nationwide protest against Ken Burns' documentary on World War II. The television series is scheduled to air on PBS during Hispanic Heritage month this September.

While African-American and Japanese-American contributions are portrayed alongside whites in the 14-hour, seven-part series "The War," Burns has totally neglected the Hispanic role. As many as half a million Latinos and Latinas, including Maggie's father, served in the U.S. military during that conflict

The historical oversight and Burns' refusal to re-edit his series doesn't sit well with Rivas Rodríguez. Her life experience has committed her to build a Hispanic World War II archive. Her vow has not fallen prey to the discouragement or disenchantment that tripped many Latinas in her youth. Maggie's parents taught her early to stand up for her heritage and her beliefs.

Rivas Rodríguez describes Ramón Martín Rivas and Henrietta López Rivas as "incredibly cool" parents. The couple raised six girls and one boy. Maggie was number five. Her father, she says, was a big women's libber.

"To their credit, my parents supported education all the way, even though it was not their world," she says.

They encouraged Maggie's move from their hometown of Devine, Texas, a community of 3,500, to Austin, the state capital 113 miles away, to pursue a bachelor's degree at the University of Texas.

On a campus bulletin board she saw an ad calling for a radio program host. She answered it and at one point found herself hosting three programs simultaneously. She loved writing, so she began reporting for the campus newspaper as well. In 1977, she went on to pick up a master's degree from New York's Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism.

Maggie was a young reporter working on an article for the Dallas Morning News when she first noticed the void of information available about Latinos and Latinas in WWII.

She was among advocates who in 1982 created the National Association of Hispanic Journalists, winning election to its board. Frustrated by the industry's failure to encourage Hispanic students to explore journalism careers, she inaugurated and developed such NAHJ projects as high school essay contests, which spread to 14 cities at their peak, and student-written newspapers providing daily coverage at national journalism conventions. The American Society of Newspapers Editors is one of several organizations that adopted her concept. It continues to use it as a tool to motivate and train Hispanic and other college journalism students

A major change occurred in Maggie's life 13 years ago. At age 38, she married Gil Rodríguez, a public school teacher she describes as a "full partner." She

became pregnant and took a year off from reporting. Searching for ways to balance career and new family, she accepted a journalist-in-residence position at the University of Texas, El Paso.

Teaching agreed with her. Soon, with a second child due, she followed her instincts and applied for a Freedom Forum doctoral fellowship. Next stop: Chapel Hill, N.C., where she earned a PhD in 1998 from the University of North Carolina.

That accomplished, the Rivas Rodríguez family — mom, dad and two growing sons — returned to Texas where Maggie joined the journalism faculty at UT Austin.

There she established the U.S. Latino and Latina WWII Oral History Project. She and her staff have filmed and written some 550 histories, some posthumous, of those who served,

She edited two books on the subject that she first encountered as a young reporter: “Mexican Americans and World War II “(2005) and “A Legacy Greater Than Words: Stories of U.S. Latinos and Latinas of the WWII Generation” (2006).

Convinced that their contributions deserve a prominent place in the saga of this nation’s vigorous responses to fascism, communism and other external threats, she has offered to share her resource materials with PBS.

“We should never have to forsake who we are in order to succeed,” Rivas Rodríguez says, repeating wisdom she learned from her parents.

If Burns and the network continue to deny the Latino community full representation in their World War II history, it will have to contend with a formidable Latina foe whose strength belies her five-foot stature.

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