



**Like to Win?**  
 Check our online contests

• personals • promotions • best of austin • find a paper • submit an event • advertise with us • contact • jobs



ARCHIVES CALENDAR

keyword

SEARCH

SUBSCRIBE TO RSS FEEDS

GET MOBILE CONTENT FOR YOUR IPOD, PDA, AND PHONE  
 SIGN UP FOR EMAIL DIGEST AND EVENTS NEWSLETTER

SIGN UP

HOME NEWS ARTS BOOKS FOOD SCREENS MUSIC CALENDAR CITY GUIDE CLASSIFIEDS

featured stories culture flash/news arts listings reviews theatre comedy dance classical performance visual arts

HOME: MARCH 17, 2006: ARTS

TEXT SIZE - / + / ++

## Who They Are and What They Deserve

The play 'Voices of Valor' records the memories of a Latino generation that won the war abroad and at home

BY BELINDA ACOSTA

As those Americans who served in World War II pass away in ever-growing numbers, they're taking their stories with them – those personal histories whose intimate details bring the period into sharper focus, and more importantly, reveal the human experience within History's panoramic view. There has been no shortage of World War II oral history projects to capture these histories before they are lost forever, but several years ago Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez, associate professor of journalism at the University of Texas at Austin, knew something among them was missing: the U.S. Latino experience. Thus was born the U.S. Latinos & Latinas World War II Oral History Project. In 1999, with early seed money from the A.H. Belo Corporation and an appropriation from the state of Texas, professional and student journalists and volunteers took on the Herculean task of interviewing and writing accompanying narratives. (See "Collecting Voices.")

CLICK TO ENLARGE



Next week a new play based on these narratives opens at the B. Iden Payne Theatre in conjunction with the third national symposium of the U.S. Latino & Latina World War II Oral History Project. Written by James E. Garcia, *Voices of Valor* is a joint project from Artes Americas partners Arizona State University Public Events and UT Performing Arts Center. They presented the play's world premiere in Phoenix, Ariz., on March 11 and are now bringing the cast of that production, directed by Richard Trujillo, to Austin for two performances.

If Garcia's name sounds familiar, it may be because he was a reporter and political columnist who covered U.S. Latino affairs and Latin American politics for the *Austin American-Statesman* in the 1990s and later the Mexico City correspondent for Cox Newspapers. After 18 months as editor of the *San Antonio Current*, he moved to Phoenix, where he returned to an earlier interest in theatre and was accepted into the MFA creative writing program in playwrighting at Arizona State University. In 2003, he won the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival 10-Minute Play Contest for his play about undocumented immigrants, "The Crossing." Garcia spoke about writing *Voices of Valor* from his home in Phoenix.

**Austin Chronicle:** With hundreds of interviews to choose from, how did you know where to begin?

**James Garcia:** The first thing I realized, after reading a few dozen transcripts, was that there was no way to pick, oh, these 10. I decided on composite characters, with one exception. The [two-act] play has an ensemble of six actors playing 35 roles. Because of my training as a journalist, I know how to write on deadline and have learned how to deal with a mountain of material.

**AC:** Oral histories can be dry. What was your process to create a theatrical piece?

**JG:** One of the first things you learn as a journalist is how to hear the quote. When there was a gem of [a] line that was great, I went to that. I culled as many of those as I could to build the characters. I wanted to stay as true to the fictional characters and true to the content and not distort. I whittled down and essentially had monologues, but I didn't want a play of monologues. I saw a play called *The Exonerated*, based on transcripts of death row inmates. It was presented with six actors, with music and strands of transcripts. I liked that.

I wanted the audience to experience not just the facts of the story but also the experience of hearing a story for the first time, that experience of people experiencing their memory. There's a lot of movement, and I guess you could say a filmic quality to the play.

**AC:** The project's Web site says several "interesting themes" emerged in the interviews. What themes did you see?

**JG:** I think there's this idea that those who went to World War II – all wars – they don't want to talk about it, especially when they first came back. It's just something they did. But as they go through their lives, they realize they need to say it ...



YOU COULD WIN A FREE T-SHIRT!

COMMENT ON THIS STORY

WRITE A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

PRINT THIS STORY

EMAIL STORY TO A FRIEND

DIIG IT

DELICIOUS

RELATED STORIES

Collecting Voices

BY BELINDA ACOSTA

From 'Voices of Valor,' a Play by James E. Garcia

FURTHER READING

Keywords

for this story

- Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez
- University of Texas at Austin
- U.S. Latinos & Latinas World War II Oral History Project
- Voices of Valor
- B. Iden Payne Theatre
- James E. Garcia
- Austin American-Statesman
- Cox Newspapers
- San Antonio Current
- Arizona State University
- Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival Ten-Minute Play Contest
- The Crossing
- Artes Americas
- ASU Public Events
- UT Performing Arts Center
- Richard TrujilloThe Exonerated
- G.I. Forum
- MALDEF
- Mexican American Legal Defense Fund
- LULAC
- League of United Latin American Citizens
- Hector Santa Anna
- Jennifer Lindgren
- KXTI-TV
- A Legacy Greater Than Words: Stories of U.S. Latinos & Latinas of the WWII Generation
- UT Press
- Virgilio Roel

Deep Focus

- Artist
- Cultural Focus
- Production / Performance

BLOGS

- Austin City Store: A Taxing Place?
- Spirit Warriors: Made in China?
- Proof that Cops Always Have the Best Stash, Pt. 3

FORUMS

ADVERTISING AND PROMOTIONS

um ok, im an ordinary girl who doesnt really club...

**VOODOO**  
 MUSIC EXPERIENCE

OCTOBER 26/27/28, 2007  
 NEW ORLEANS CITY PAL

REGGAE AGAINST THE MACHINE • THE SMASHING PUMPKINS  
 WILCO • BEN HARPER AND THE INNOCENT CRIMINALS  
 SINÉAD O'CONNOR, AND MANY OTHERS...

Reach Austin's most informed audience.

CHRONICLE SPORTS BLOG

