



Felix Longoria's Wake: Bereavement, Racism, and the Rise of Mexican American Activism (Cmas History, Culture, & Society)

Patrick Carroll

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Winner, Tullis Prize, Texas State Historical Association, 2004

Private First Class Felix Longoria earned a Bronze Service Star, a Purple Heart, a Good Conduct Medal, and a Combat Infantryman's badge for service in the Philippines during World War II. Yet the only funeral parlor in his hometown of Three Rivers, Texas, refused to hold a wake for the slain soldier because "the whites would not like it." Almost overnight, this act of discrimination became a defining moment in the rise of Mexican American activism. It launched Dr. Héctor P. García and his newly formed American G.I. Forum into the vanguard of the Mexican civil rights movement, while simultaneously endangering and advancing the career of Senator Lyndon B. Johnson, who arranged for Longoria's burial with full military honors in Arlington National Cemetery.

In this book, Patrick Carroll provides the first fully researched account of the Longoria controversy and its far-reaching consequences. Drawing on extensive documentary evidence and interviews with many key figures, including Dr. García and Mrs. Longoria, Carroll convincingly explains why the Longoria incident, though less severe than other acts of discrimination against Mexican Americans, ignited the activism of a whole range of interest groups from Argentina to Minneapolis. By putting Longoria's wake in a national and international context, he also clarifies why it became such a flash point for conflicting understandings of bereavement, nationalism, reason, and emotion between two powerful cultures—Mexicanidad and Americanism.

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