

Ethical analysis of the longoria affair essay sample

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The Longoria Affair (2010)

The movie, *The Longoria Affair* (2010) depicts the events that occurred in a small town in Texas that directly helped in raising the work of civil rights activists against discrimination and racism. The documentary is based on a 60-year old story in Three Rivers, Texas, where the sole funeral home refused to wake a deceased army man. The widow of the deceased Private Felix Longoria was simply told by the proprietor of the funeral home that the whites in the town would not like it if the funeral home held the wake for her husband. From the documentary, it can be seen that the events triggered massive civil rights movements that indirectly propelled both Senator Lyndon Johnson and John F. Kennedy to subsequent presidencies. This analysis will focus on the framing of the documentary to show the messages it did and the ethical arguments about the characters in the documentary. The documentary shows the underlying racism in the country at that point, but also leans towards one side of the story.

Using Fairhurst's concept of framing, both sides in the documentary can be analyzed differently according to the issues presented. The concept essentially states that the media, through the presentation of the facts or frames, influences what the people think about when they view a documentary. This theory states that the media draws attention to certain parts and topics and ignores others in order to have the public have a specific view about an event. Since the journalists or presenters select topics from a broad spectrum, they have the ability to influence the final thought of the watcher. Fairhurst states that the way in which news and documentaries are presented is entirely up to the discretion of the director, who ultimately

decides the reactions of the watchers. In *The Longoria Affair*, the opposing sides of the documentary are given different perspectives. The documentary leans towards presenting a racist and unethical side towards the proprietor of the funeral home and the residents of Three Rivers.

One of the main redeeming characters in the documentary was Hector P. Garcia, who fought for the rights of the discriminated against Mexican-Americans in the small town of Three Rivers. From the documentary, it can be seen that Garcia formed an alliance with the then Senator, Lyndon Johnson, to fight racism in the town. However, the ethical implications for Garcia in the documentary are two-sided. Initially, it can be argued that Garcia's actions in involving the Senator and the fight for the family and against racism in the state were heroic. In this argument, the underlying opinion is that Garcia acted ethically in the case. After Garcia initiated the GI forum in Corpus, he actively sought help for the family of Longoria for the injustice they faced. This single fact dictates the ethical situation that propelled Garcia in a positive light. Garcia's actions in championing the rights of Mexican Americans helped the minority all through the United States, a fact that is ethical in itself. However, the actions by Garcia are also unethical, since he used the unethical situation for political and media glory. Garcia realized the potential that the story had of propelling his agenda, and he used it to the best of his benefit. From the documentary, the civil rights fight by Garcia was boosted by the Longoria case, and he ensured that he used it completely.

The other player in the Longoria debacle was the then Senator, Lyndon Johnson, who was involved right from the beginning. Just like Hector Garcia,

Johnson was completely aggrieved by the manner in which the Longoria family was treated in the town, and first ordered that a full military burial be held for Private Felix Longoria. Lyndon Johnson, as the senator at the time, was ultimately responsible for the ethical abolition of racism in the state. Therefore, it can be said that his actions were ethical as a first reaction. However, it was unethical for the Senator to use the events for political gain, which he did to ultimately gain presidency. Just like Hector Garcia, Lyndon Johnson exploited the events, and sometimes blew them out of proportion in order gain public sympathy and agreement. This helped in bolstering his political ambition, since he knew that the Mexican-Americans possessed numerical power in the politics of the time.

The role of framing in ethical leadership is two-fold; a leader can frame messages in ways that promotes or lowers the ethics in the environment. From outside research into the Longoria affair, it can be seen that the director decided to show only the facts of the case that promoted the final cause. The selection of frames to show and those to ignore gives substance to the case for racism that occurred against Mexican-Americans in Texas and other states more than 60 years ago. The audience to the documentary is shown the side of the town, civil rights activists and politics that the director wants them to see. The framing of the comments by the society in the panel hearings also determines the ethical outlook and frames of the documentary. From the above analysis, the final opinion is that the documentary itself uses framing in an ethical way. Despite the fact that the situation in the documentary is unethical and the main characters try an ethical stand, the presentation is unethical. The role of framing in the documentary is to

promote a different perspective from the one that actually occurred on the ground. For example, the documentary tells the audience of the injustices of the Anglo-American community, but fails to depict the good part of the community. The framing manages to portray the Anglo-American community in way and does to give them a side to defend themselves. This means that the director focuses on victimizing the Mexican-American community as the victims of racism that was ultimately stopped by human rights activists and politicians.

Reference

Valdez, J. (Director). (2010). *The Longoria Affair* [Motion Picture]. United States: PBS.