

March 26, 1984
Santa Ana, Calif.

Dear Mr. Garcia ...

I just read of your well deserved
and long overdue recognition as a
dedicated, hard working and unselfish
humanitarian.

Whenever I read of our political
parties trying to find an hispanic
for a political appointment, like ambassador
to Mexico, you were always on my
mind. Oh well! there loss is our gain.

In 1944 to 46 or 47, I was around
12 to 14 years old and I worked for
Gomez drugstore.

When you came out of the army and
started your medical practice, you
came into the drugstore often.

There were times when you didn't

even had ~~no~~ transportation.

Mr. Gomez, Mrs. Gomez and myself
picked you up one night when you
were walking to see a patient by
Ben Barza Park. It was late at
night and we offered to wait for you
but you graciously declined.

It's people like you that have inspired
me to show compassion for my fellow men.
Although I've been in California for
25 years, my family, my roots and my
real home are in Corpus.

Que Dios Lo Bendiga
a usted y su familia
Ricardo Fuentes Castillo

2340 N. GRAND #28
SANTA ANA, CA. 92701
714-431-1187

U.S.A.
Today

FROM

RICHARD F. CASTILLO
SANTA ANA, CA.

'Dr. Hector' in mold of Rev. King

Mexican-Americans often compare Dr. Hector P. Garcia's role to the Rev. Martin Luther King's in the black civil rights movement.

When Garcia was leading the Viva Kennedy movement in the South for John F. Kennedy's presidential candidacy, he brought the same King intensity.

"He was demanding, he was emotional, and above all he was a leader," recalls Tony Bonilla, a Corpus Christi, Texas, lawyer and former state legislator who first met Garcia then.

Today, Garcia, at 70 the elder statesman of Mexican-Americans, will be honored in Washington as one of 14 people receiving the Medal of Freedom — the nation's highest civilian award. He's the first Mexican-American so honored.

Garcia has weathered coronary bypass surgery, but still practices medicine in Corpus Christi's poor West Side and keeps up with politics.

And he'll end the week back in Corpus Christi with Founder's Day celebrations for his American GI Forum.

"I hope when the Lord takes me, he takes me walking — or working," says "Dr. Hector."

Garcia was born in Mexico. His father brought his family to



By Lee Dodds

GARCIA: Will receive Medal of Freedom today

the USA during the Mexican Revolution.

It was Garcia who attracted attention to a south Texas funeral home that refused its chapel for the funeral of a Mexican-American hometown boy, a war casualty named Felix Longoria.

The reason, Garcia says: "The whites would not like it."

Then-U.S. Sen. Lyndon Johnson saw to it that Longoria was buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

Who gets the medal

Other Medal of Freedom winners:

- The late Whittaker Chambers, spy whose testimony helped convict Alger Hiss.
- Sen. Howard Baker, R-Tenn., Senate majority leader.
- Actor James Cagney.
- Economist Leo Cherne, International Rescue Committee board chairman.
- Heart surgeon Denton Cooley.
- Singer Tennessee Ernie Ford.
- Retired Army Gen. Andrew Goodpaster, former NATO commander, head of U.S. Military Academy.
- American ballet promoter Lincoln Kirstein.
- Western author Louis L'Amour.
- The Rev. Norman Vincent Peale, author of *The Power of Positive Thinking*.
- The late Jackie Robinson, first black major league baseball player.
- The late Egyptian President Anwar Sadat.
- Eunice Kennedy Shriver, for work in mental retardation.

Garcia also led the fight to integrate schools and public facilities for Mexican-Americans in south Texas.

As political king-maker, Garcia has been influential through the GI Forum, founded in 1948 as an advocacy group for veterans.

At election time, Garcia has printed up a facsimile of a ballot, marked his choices and had copies distributed door-to-door to 10,000 households in the Corpus Christi area.

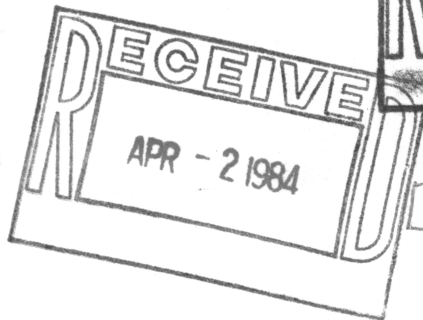
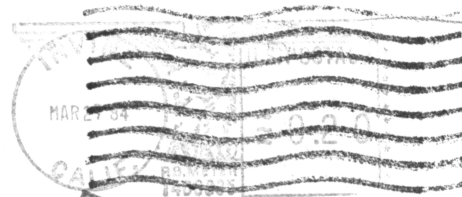
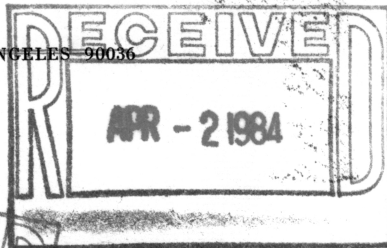
With the ballot comes a let-

ter from Garcia — hammered out by the doctor on the antique typewriter in his office, and signed in his old-fashioned flowery handwriting.

As Garcia protege Hugo Berlanga, Speaker Pro Tempore of the Texas House of Representatives, puts it: "You'd love to have him on your side. You definitely don't want him against you. If all things fail, you want him sitting on the sidelines."

— Marta McCave

R.F. CASTILLO 2340 N. GRAND #28
SANTA ANA, CA 92701
CONTINENTAL GRAPHICS / 101 SOUTH LA BREA AVENUE / LOS ANGELES 90036
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Dr. Hector P. Garcia

G.I. Forum - Founder

CORPUS CHRISTI, TEX.

Carver
0522
Deliver
on
Bught St.