

*File  
Dr. H. P. Garcia  
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TO: Dr. Hector P. Garcia  
2601 Morgan  
Corpus Christi, Texas

FROM: Gilberto L. Herrera, Coach

Attached is a copy of Mercedes' article. Not a bad  
job for a young girl.

*It was nice visiting with  
you again -*



# Garcia a veteran Hispanic activist

By MERCEDES OLIVERA

Long before the U.S. Supreme Court even thought about its landmark Brown vs. the Board of Education decision in 1954, Dr. Hector Garcia was fighting for the civil rights of minorities, especially Mexican-Americans.

Garcia, founder of the American GI Forum, was

winning civil rights cases for Mexican-Americans in South Texas — and Hispanics everywhere — as early as 1948. He was in Dallas last week to speak at the Efren Herrera appreciation banquet. Herrera, Dallas Cowboys kicker and one of the best-known names in the national Hispanic

community, was honored by more than 400 people, many of them government employees.

Garcia spoke at length about the famous ancestors Herrera and all Mexican-Americans have in common: Cuauhtemoc, the last Aztec Indian chief; Miguel Hidalgo, father of the Mexican war for independence, and Benito Juarez, the full-blooded Indian who became president of Mexico. His eagerness to add these historical notes to his address is characteristic of a man who has spent most of his life trying to improve the image of the Mexican-American.

Garcia was born more than six decades ago. He says with a modesty unlike many who have lived more than half a century, "I don't know a lot of things." But only those wise enough to say this have in reality a wealth of experience to share with others. And Garcia gladly shares with all his own life story so rich in political, emotional and social experiences.

He calls himself a "troubleshooter" for the GI Forum. Being a "practitioner of medicine seven days a week," one finds that a little hard to believe. His involvement in the Forum's civil rights activities, however, has not diminished in

the least since the late 1940s when he first organized the Forum in the aftermath of the Three Rivers' incident.

Felix Longoria, the soldier killed in France during World War II and refused burial in his hometown of Three Rivers because he was Mexican-American, eventually was buried with honors in Arlington National Cemetery largely through the efforts of Dr. Garcia and the assistance of the then-junior senator from Texas, Lyndon Johnson. Since then, the GI Forum actively has dedicated itself to civil rights activities by promoting the social and economic betterment of the Spanish-speaking people. Dr. Garcia has assumed a large part of its leadership.

As the "oldest living Mexican-American activist in civil rights," Garcia nonetheless stresses his aversion for politics. His ties with past Democratic presidents, including Johnson and Kennedy, however, have put him knee-deep in the political mainstream of Washington and Texas.

Under Johnson, he was appointed alternate delegate to the United Nations. His nephew, J. Tony Canales, recently was appointed U.S. attorney for the Justice Department in the

southwestern district. One of Garcia's sisters, Cleotilde, was on the governor's committee to rewrite the Texas Constitution.

His entire family, composed mainly of doctors, always has been actively involved in political affairs, says one longtime friend, and consequently, the name Garcia is widely respected in South Texas.

Nevertheless, Garcia claims to have no political machine, only the "prestige and political respect of La Raza," which he takes very seriously.

In the last presidential election, Garcia counted heavily on this respect as he rode with Carter from McAllen to San Antonio on Peanut One as a demonstration of his support. Garcia reminds the president now that almost 98 percent of the vote in South Texas went to Jimmy Carter and that large areas of Corpus Christi went to Carter.

For this reason, Dr. Garcia believes the Carter administration will improve its already sour relations with the Spanish-speaking community in the United States. At a recent White House conference on economics attended by Hispanics around the country, said Garcia, the administration listened to complaints about under-representation and lack of Hispanic appointments in the governmental structure.

"Carter asked us to help him and he promised to give us more recognition. People pinpointed what they want and he wrote it down," said Garcia. He admits Carter's past sensitivity to the Mexican-American community has been poor. But his optimism, which has permeated every aspect of his political involvement, also has convinced him change will come if he persists long enough. And, especially, if he lets those in charge know how he feels about things.

"I talk to ALL of them (in the administration) and visit them and this is how I'm known to them," said Garcia. He is a constant visitor to the White House, therefore, and makes his presence felt by all. Having been acquainted with so many past administrations under Democratic presidents, Dr. Garcia has remained amazingly enough the very sincere individual he was when first he served his country as an infantry officer in the U.S. Army's medical corps.