



## THE EX-STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION

SERVING THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS SINCE 1885

POST OFFICE BOX 7278  
AUSTIN, TEXAS 78713  
(512) 471-UTEX (8839)

May 30, 1989

Dr. Hector P. Garcia  
1315 Bright  
Corpus Christi, Texas 78415

Dear Dr. Garcia,

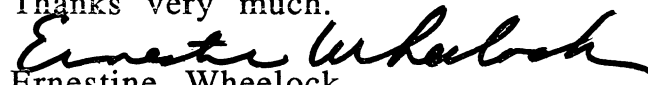
I'm enclosing a copy of the script for your Distinguished Alumnus Award presentation in October. I like it; I hope you do. I think the finished package, with the narration and pictures, will be very impressive. If it requires changes, please call me or return a marked copy. Sorry it can't be any longer.

The pictures you sent me work very well, but I still could use the three listed below. If you don't have them, I can improvise.

- ① One or two photos from your childhood, with or without your parents.
- ② A photo of you as a young doctor.
- ③ A poorer section of Corpus where children had TB and dysentery.

I would like to have them around June 15.

Thanks very much.

  
Ernestine Wheelock  
512/ 471-3799

## Héctor García Distinguished Alumnus Script for 1989

In 1948 a young medical doctor from Corpus Christi brought the nation's attention to a gross injustice, and set up a chain of events that would change social and political history. A funeral home in Three Rivers, Texas, refused to bury a Mexican American soldier who had died fighting for his country in World War II--because, they said, the Anglos wouldn't like it. Dr. Héctor García went straight to Senator Lyndon Johnson, and the remains of Private Félix Longoria were buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

Private Longoria became a symbol that gave impetus to the newly organized American GI Forum, a group founded by Dr. García to defend the rights of Mexican American war veterans and their families. He was the first national chairman of the Forum, which is now active in 34 states.

Héctor realized the need for such an organization when he saw Mexican Americans being subjected to discrimination in housing, in jobs, in the schools, and even in hospitals. He declared war when he saw one of his patients--a seriously ill Gold Star Mother--left lying in a hospital corridor when there were empty beds waiting for Anglos. Because of him, the hospital was soon integrated.

Working through the GI Forum, he changed national policy by gaining benefits under the GI Bill for veterans in vocational training. In such ways he has given the underprivileged the confidence to

speak up for their rights and to work for their own education, self-respect, and dignity.

This year a mural painted in honor of Dr. García was unveiled in Corpus Christi at the Forty-First Founder's Banquet of the GI Forum. Called "Broken Barriers," the mural depicts the past battles and renewed hopes of veterans of all ethnic backgrounds. In 1984 Héctor received the highest honor bestowed on a civilian in this country--the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Héctor García's life began in Mexico in 1914. His father, José García, was a teacher who left Mexico in 1917 to spare his family the hardships and dangers of the Mexican Revolution. The family settled in the south end of the Valley, in Mercedes, where José opened a grocery store and raised seven extraordinary children: six of them became medical doctors, and all but one are still practicing.

Héctor never takes a vacation, but he enjoys life to the fullest, sometimes at the expense of good friends who bear the brunt of his practical jokes. His optimistic outlook has helped him survive three serious illnesses. He likes to say that he still stands on two feet because once, when it seemed necessary to amputate one of his legs, there was no doctor in town brave enough to do it against Hector's will.

Dr. García opened his practice in Corpus Christi when he and Wanda, his Italian bride, settled there after World War II. In those days he fought for sewage connections in the poor barrios, where TB and infant dysentery were rampant; today he is working to get water piped to the poverty-ridden "colonias" that have sprung up along the U.S.-Mexico border. He says, "God gave me a real good conscience, and He makes me use it."

Héctor became, in effect, a character in Edna Ferber's great novel Giant. The young Mexican doctor who went to the ranch to save a dying Mexican baby was modeled on the Dr. García then practicing in Corpus Christi; and the discrimination felt by the family's Mexican-American daughter-in-law in the novel was patterned on Wanda García's early experiences in Texas.

Héctor's life has been full. It takes four pages just to list the offices he has held and the honors he has received for his work in health, human rights, education, and politics. He organized the "Viva Kennedy" and "Viva Johnson" campaigns in 20 states. He has served on the Democratic National Committee, two presidents have sent him on treaty-signing missions, he represented President Johnson at the inauguration of President Raul Leoni of Venezuela, and he served a term as delegate to the United Nations. He has served on the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights and was appointed by President Carter to the Nominating Commission for U.S. Circuit Judges.

Héctor's name is prominent in prestigious places. There is an endowed chair named for him in the Chicano Research Center at Yale University, and in Corpus Christi the post office and a city park bear his name. This year the Texas Senate passed a resolution to honor him as a nationally recognized Hispanic leader. The Austin American-Statesman called him a true Texas hero--a man who has influenced the course of Texas history.

After attending Edinburg Junior College and spending two years at the University of Texas, Héctor entered UT Medical School in Galveston in 1936. After a surgical internship at Creighton University in Omaha, he had four years of military service in Europe and was awarded the Bronze Star. His daughters Wanda and Adriana Cecilia have UT degrees, and his third daughter Susana is working at UT for a Ph.D. in Music.

Tonight the Ex-Students' Association pays tribute to a man whose dedication to the cause of liberty, equality, and fraternity has blessed all of his countrymen: Dr. Héctor García, a distinguished alumnus of The University of Texas.