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Hector Garcia

Hector Perez Garcia was a towering figure in the fight for Mexican American civil rights, whose legacy of advocacy and service spans several decades of the 20th century. Born on January 17, 1914, in Llera, Tamaulipas, Mexico, Garcia moved to Texas with his family as a young child. He pursued higher education with fervor, culminating in a medical degree from the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston in 1940. His medical career was interrupted by World War II, during which he served as an officer in the U.S. Army, earning a Bronze Star among other decorations for his service in Europe.

After the war, Garcia established a medical practice in Corpus Christi, Texas, but his experiences, both as a soldier and as a physician serving the Mexican American community, propelled him into civil rights activism. In 1948, he founded the American GI Forum (AGIF), initially to address the concerns of Mexican American veterans who were being denied the benefits they had earned. The AGIF quickly expanded its mission to fight for the civil rights of all Mexican Americans, advocating for equal treatment in areas such as education, employment, and healthcare.

Dr. Garcia's activism led to significant achievements in the struggle for equality. He played a key role in landmark cases and legislative changes, including the desegregation of schools and public facilities in Texas. One of his most notable efforts was his involvement in the Felix Longoria affair, which highlighted the discrimination faced by Mexican American servicemen. Garcia's tireless advocacy in this case successfully challenged the segregation of funeral services for Mexican American veterans, drawing national attention to the broader issues of racial discrimination and inequality.

Beyond his work with the AGIF, Garcia was appointed by President Lyndon B. Johnson as the first Mexican American to serve on the United States Commission on Civil Rights. His numerous honors include the Presidential Medal of Freedom, awarded to him in 1984 in recognition of his lifelong dedication to the advancement of minority rights and his service to the nation.

Dr. Hector P. Garcia's impact extends beyond his many achievements and honors; his legacy is a testament to the power of determined advocacy in the pursuit of justice and equality. Through his founding of the AGIF and his relentless fight for the rights of Mexican Americans, Garcia not only improved the lives of countless individuals but also helped to reshape the social fabric of the United States. He passed away on July 26, 1996, leaving behind a nation changed for the better through his efforts.