

## The Adieu Parting of a Great Man

HECTOR GARCIA left us for his new after-life venture on 29 August 2023. He leaves us with a model of what it takes to give one's most in order to best serve the needs of our people. He epitomizes one of the values we hold high in our Latino family-extension system: "You are only as good as you serve."

The non-white (people of color) have always had to fight against oppression and equality. So, at any given time in history there has been a civil/human rights "movement" by us. However, the period of time in the U.S. when all of us so-called "protected classes" (the non-whites, the aged, women, antisemitism, islamophobia and gay rights) inadvertently joined together at one time. We became *The Great Civil Rights Movement*. This fantastic period evolved together soon after WWII, its best years being between 1950 and 1981 (the year Reagan was elected President). Those of us in Minnesota who advocated successfully during this time are the "pioneer" Latinos. (I will mention some of them another time.)

Hector Garcia did not join us here in Minnesota until 1973. He had met a Minnesota woman, married, and had a son named David.

1973 was just 5 years from the crucial year of 1978. One of the major forces that had been giving fuel to the "Great Movement" was a procedure under which all U.S. organizations that train or hire people redesign their practices to improve the disadvantaged positions of the ethnic minority group and others (to soon be called "protected classes") after centuries of discrimination. They were asked to act more "affirmative" on civil rights – therefore the term: "Affirmative Action" (AA). This idea had been advanced first by President Kennedy in 1961 and then followed by President Johnson. It greatly multiplied the civil rights receptivity by the U.S. organizations. Those opposed felt this excessiveness would soon create "reverse discrimination." It came to a head in *Bakke v. University of California* in 1978. The court ruled that Bakke, a white college applicant, had supposedly experienced "reverse discrimination" when he was turned down in favor of a non-white applicant. The Reagan Years used this decision to see that the teaching and employing organizations need no longer act affirmatively. The court recently canceled Affirmative Action altogether. It is a dire human rights blow.

Those Latinos who started or continued being active civil/human rights advocates soon, or after the *Bakke* decision, are the persons I call contemporary Latino leaders. They have had a much tougher row-to-hoe than those of us supported by Affirmative Action. Hector was one of them. He was the one that was perceived by many (white and non-white) as our current Latino icon leader.

The power and success of "movements" depend on who and how many are in accord with them and how much support each group musters. They need to measure the power of those against them. They need as many laws and other legal support that they can get and ride-the-coats of the powerful ones, like we did with affirmative action. A most effective leader like Hector Garcia has to know all that supports and/or opposes his efforts. S/he has to have the intelligence and charisma necessary to convince many key personnel and have them join him/her. S/he has to convince others that he/she truly believes in what s/he says and does. S/he has to convince you in what s/he sees is indeed a dire need and that you and the people served will greatly benefit from the success; that you were an essential key to the affirmative outcome. S/he has to have the craft of the public relations pitch for the humane needs of humanity.

Some of the people who knew Hector and worked with him have written commentaries that acknowledge his extraordinary service to the needs of our people. One of them is Ron Lezama, one of the pioneers of the Latino Economic Development Council (LEDC). Some of what he says:

Hector Garcia was a visionary. His vision was a community where Latinos owned their own businesses. That vision resulted in over one-hundred Latinos owned businesses in Minneapolis, St. Paul, and the surrounding area. He had a vision of Latinos getting involved with politics which resulted in several state representatives and senators being elected. Hector supported education and college scholarships for Latinos which resulted in families being able to proudly say that their child is the first in their family to receive both a scholarship and a degree. Hector quietly accomplished a lot for the community. His vision will be missed.

The next vignette will be about Hector's early years, the immediate family, and his public school and college education, as well as the related travel.

By "Sam" (Sebastian) J. Hernandez  
Week 1; November 2023