

Hector Garcia's Great Role on Human and Civil Rights

Last Vignette

Hector Garcia's evolution into an outstanding human rights and civil right advocate and activist did not start during the early 60's when the Greatest Civil/Human Rights Movement (GC/HRM) in U.S. History took place but toward the end of it. A look into its history will better show Hector's role in it.

Since the beginning of time on earth and the growth of humanity, there have been human groups that suffer subjugation and inhumane treatment that must have to fight for civil and human rights. The reason I chose to call this the GC/HRM is because virtually EVERY group needing freedom from subordination, exclusion, suppression, exploitation, submission, ageism, racism, sexism, anti-jew, islamophobia, LGBTQ+, women rights, equal employment, equal education, equal opportunity, etc., were actively together in this movement, probably for the first and last time in U.S. history.

There are key/crucial legal rulings that brought the GC/HRM success to the highest level ever achieved. Some mentioned may not be the most key, but they will serve the intent of listing them.

The freedom from slavery by the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 and the 13th Amendment of 1865 ended slavery in the U.S.---a must-do before anything else in the areas of civil and human rights. Next came the acquisition of some power by the oppressed people. The right to vote. That became legal to all males by the 15th Amendment of 1869, but it was not until the 1920's before women suffrage took place. The issue of integration would now have to be dealt with. Soon after

the end of WWII, it became clear that the effort was taking place. From the Latino group, the G.I. Forum was pushing hard. It started in 1948. Ironically, the founder and first leader was Dr. Hector Garcia, the same name of the man we are honoring. In 1947, Truman desegregated employment in federal agencies and in 1948 he desegregated the armed forces. He would begin the coming era of U.S. presidents to promote integration and equality for all. The most key legislation from this, to this date, is the Brown vs. The Board of Education of 1954.

I determine the best years of the GC/HRM was from 1960 to 1980---20 years. It started its point of diminishing returns during the anti-affirmative action Supreme Court passage of the 1978 Bakke vs. University of California. The court ruled that Bakke, white, had suffered reverse discrimination when AA rejected him from college for a non-white, in compliance with AA rules. This decision would further limit the scope of AA over time. The 1981 Reagan administration would use Bakke to not enforce AA. AA was not officially eliminated until 2023.

What really exploded as power to force the U.S. government to legislate needed laws to create productive change like Affirmative Action (AA) and EEO (Equal Employment/Education Opportunity) was the returning male and female non-white and white WWII veterans. They owed each other for saving each other's lives. Retribution was there to be used.

The U.S. non-white military had experienced a greater more equality-based embracement among the ethnic cultures of the foreign allies than in their own country. They were determined to change that via the upcoming explosion of the G-C/HRM of 1960-1980.

Every “movement” group had massive leadership and followers. For us it was: The Chicano Movement. It was led by the group the U.S. erroneously calls “Mexican-Americans.” Its demand included the needs of all Latinos. It had hundreds of Latino leaders like Hector in every one of the southwestern U.S. with heavy Latino population. In states like Minnesota with less Latinos in its population, over a dozen Latino leaders surfaced due to their need engendered by AA and EEO opportunities. Every U.S. system (such as education and industry) needed culture diversity consultants (CDC) to train them on the history, heritage and culture of the non-white ethnic groups and of their needs and contributions to the U.S. way of life. Similar consultation was needed for all of the new “protected classes.” The employers would hire CDCs as individuals or as teams, such as the Tri-Racial Council co-operated by one of our pioneer leaders, Manuel Guerrero. All of us CDCs of the 60s and 70s were what are now called pioneer leaders. I started in 1963 and went on until 2003. The contemporary CD leaders are those after the 1978 Bakke Decision. Hector Garcia was one of the primary contemporary leaders. Some of the pioneer CD leaders I met during my time was Alfredo Gonzalez, Roberto Aviña and Jose Trejo. Other leaders we met were Mario Duarte, Franciso Gonzalez, Nick Castillo and Gilbert De La O. Many others. We did very well because we followed national leaders and their thousands of followers: Cesar Chavez (United Farm Workers), Corky Gonzalez (Crusade for Justice), Reies Lopez Tijerina (Land Grant Syndrome), and Angel Gutierrez (The Raza Unida Party). Can you imagine how much more Hector would have done had he been backed by the Chicano Four Horse men like we pioneers! The wonderment of it all is that I believe he did as well as we did or better.

There are no longer national Latino leaders like The Four Horsemen. Not one. It was a haven to know we still had a state one like Hector. He knew how important Latino leadership was. He knew that, somehow, a spokesperson(s) had to continue to exist. It was a dream come true when he became the leader of CLAC (Chicano Latino Affairs Council). With it came the opportunity to not only meet some of the Latino political needs, but he could finally activate the extensive use of the now always available podium. The job offered ways for him to speak anywhere in the state. Civil/human rights issues would always be part of the appeal. He was in the work heaven he had always unknowingly sought. His heart and soul were full. There was enough of appreciation shown by both the elite and common people that he knew “he had arrived.”

Yusef Mgeni is my longest civil/human rights friend. We have become inseparable business and professional friends. Yusef has held most of all key positions of the St. Paul NAACP for years. He has met most of the key leaders of the four non-white groups. He was one of many who submitted a letter of acknowledgment of Hector. Some of what Yusef said:

We are very selective in identifying our state key non-white leaders. Of the few Latinos on our list, Hector Garcia and Sam Hernandez are seen as the iconic pioneer and contemporary Latino leaders in our historical roster. They have interactively served all four groups of color.

I find it hard to end this. Hector was a man of Christian faith, and a devoted, loving husband to his wife Bryana. He had a gifted mind, a focus goal to better the lives of those in need and a great success.

He is a legacy of humanity.

By Sam Hernandez
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