Dr. Hector Garcia: The Driving Force Who Persuaded Lyndon Johnson to Break the Barrier of Racial Discrimination

Isabel de la Rosa
Senior Division
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Civil rights legislation of the 1960’s, spearheaded by President Lyndon Baines Johnson, forever ended legalized racial discrimination in the United States. Minorities played a crucial role in making this happen by working through the court system and employing peaceful protests. However, what is less clear is why President Johnson, a long-time opponent of federal intervention, promoted the greatest civil rights advances in nearly a century.¹ The answer lies in the contributions of Mexican Americans, which have become a footnote in United States history and have largely been forgotten. Unique experiences regarding prejudice gave one Chicano civil rights leader access to those in power who could make a difference. Dr. Hector P. Garcia was the underlying driving force who persuaded President Lyndon Johnson to unleash federal intervention to break the barrier of legalized racial discrimination.²

THE BARRIER

Like other minorities in the United States, Mexican Americans have a long history of discrimination against them aggravated by hatred and mistreatment.³ At the conclusion of the Mexican-American War in 1848, Mexicans inhabiting annexed regions were supposed to be welcomed as new citizens of the United States.⁴ However, often seen as an inferior race best suited for the worst jobs, local governments instituted societal barriers that segregated them and limited their voice.⁵

⁵ Orozco, 29.
The resurrection of the self-image of Mexican Americans and the focus on their civil rights started with World War II. A 1942 survey of Americans found that 59 percent believed that Mexicans were “definitely inferior.” Even with this dim view of their abilities, 300,000 Chicanos put their lives on the line to defend a country that did not claim them. In doing so, they hoped that bravery abroad would lead to civil rights action at home. By the end of the war, soldiers of Mexican descent garnered a total of 17 Medals of Honor, the country’s highest award for bravery in military combat. This was the most received by any minority group. These accomplishments sparked the idea among Mexican Americans that they were, in fact, equals to whites. One of the soldiers who strongly believed this was an army infantryman and surgeon named Hector P. Garcia.

**DR. HECTOR P. GARCIA**

Hector Perez Garcia was born on January 17, 1914, in Tamaulipas, Mexico, to parents who were both teachers (see Appendix A). In 1917, at the height of the Mexican Revolution, his family fled to Mercedes, Texas, where they faced discrimination firsthand. However, Hector Garcia triumphed over this prejudice and broke barriers when he became valedictorian of his 1932 high school class and graduated with honors from the University of Texas in 1936. After receiving his doctorate in medicine, Garcia served his residency out of state as Texas hospitals would not accept him because of his ethnicity. When World War II erupted in Europe, he

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8 del Castillo, 50-59.
joined the United States Army and rose to the rank of major.¹¹ For his bravery in combat, Garcia received the Bronze Star Medal, the European-African-Middle Eastern Medal, and the World War II Victory Medal.¹² Upon his discharge from the army, he opened a practice in Corpus Christi to care for the local residents, including wounded soldiers returning from the war.¹³ However, Garcia realized there were more prominent issues in addition to the physical pain, for many Mexican American veterans encountered an unwelcoming society that lacked job and educational opportunities.¹⁴ He felt an obligation to help and, on March 26, 1948, founded the American G.I. Forum with the aim of resolving these matters.¹⁵

**THE LONGORIA INCIDENT**

In 1949, Dr. Garcia became involved in an event that brought him in contact with Lyndon Johnson and would be the pivotal first step in breaking the barrier of discrimination – the Longoria Incident. On June 6, 1945, enemy fire claimed the life of 25-year-old Army Private Felix Longoria of Three Rivers, Texas. The young soldier’s body remained buried in the Philippines for almost four years. When Longoria’s remains were returned to the United States, his wife, Beatrice, decided that visitation would take place at the only funeral home in Three Rivers.¹⁶ However, director Tom Kennedy refused to provide services for a Mexican American, saying that “the whites would not like it.”¹⁷

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¹⁵ Akers, 37.


Infuriated family members contacted Dr. Garcia, who immediately called the funeral director. Kennedy repeated the same sentiment and added another stereotypical statement as an excuse, claiming that the “Mexicans got drunk and got into fights.” Garcia quickly informed the public and media of this blatant discrimination and sent 17 telegrams to military officials and politicians. However, the only respondent who was willing to intervene was a freshman United States senator from Texas, Lyndon Johnson. After consulting with the family, Johnson arranged to have Longoria interred with honors alongside soldiers of every ethnicity in Arlington National Cemetery (see Appendix B). This was totally out of character for the senator, who had long opposed federal intervention in state matters.

WORKING ON THE INSIDE

Hector Garcia firmly believed that social progress could only be achieved by working with the government and not against it. He had seen the limits of peaceful protests against legalized discrimination and learned that change was not possible without gaining political appointments. In effect, the doctor theorized that the better tactic was to break down the barrier with the help of those allowing it to stand.

Following the Longoria Incident, Garcia initiated a relationship with Lyndon Johnson that flourished when the senator attended an American G.I. Forum meeting. On behalf of his organization, Dr. Garcia named his fellow Texan “nuestro verdadero amigo,” or “our true friend.” Johnson reciprocated this sentiment as he wrote in a letter of appreciation, “You and I

18 Akers, 41.
21 de la Rosa, Isabel, and Michelle Hall Kells. Phone Interview with Michelle Hall Kells. Personal, March 13, 2020.
and the members of the American G.I. Forum are indeed ‘amigos.’” It was not difficult for Johnson to recognize similarities between himself and the doctor. After all, they were both proud, energetic World War II veterans from Texas who valued education.23

The close relationship continued into the following decades as Johnson’s political star continued to rise in the Democratic Party. By 1957, only eight years after meeting Garcia, Johnson dropped opposition to federal government intervention in matters of segregation.24

In 1960, when Lyndon Johnson was selected as John F. Kennedy’s running mate, Garcia created the Viva Kennedy Club to support the Democratic presidential ticket. The Mexican American organization, buoyed by five American G.I. Forum chapters in the southwestern United States, was highly responsible for securing Chicano votes that helped Kennedy become president.25

However, following the inauguration, Garcia was angered by the lack of administration positions slated for Mexican Americans. Despite this disappointment, he kept close contact with Vice President Johnson.

When Lyndon Johnson ascended to the presidency, Garcia’s tenacity paid off as he became one of the most influential civil rights leaders in the country. Johnson immediately appointed Mexican Americans to high ranking government offices under the doctor’s advisement (see Appendix C). Furthermore, the president chose Garcia as Special Ambassador to Venezuela and selected him as a member of the National Citizens’ Committee for Community Relations, an advisory board created by the administration to eliminate racial injustices affecting minorities.26

26 Kells, 187-195.
During this time, President Johnson became adamant about passing a civil rights bill that would enlist the federal government to protect Mexican Americans and other minorities. He refused to negotiate for anything less. In 1964 and 1965, the president made deals and promises to various congressmen to push through some of the most important legislation in the history of the United States. First came the Civil Rights Act, signed on July 2, 1964. It made racial discrimination and segregation in public places illegal. The following year, Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act, which required that the federal government monitor those states that were known to have voter requirements intended to drive away minorities. In culmination of his work with Hector Garcia, the president had unleashed the full power of the government of the United States.

WHY JOHNSON INTERVENED

The barrier of legalized discrimination, designed to keep racial minorities subjugated, could only be broken by federal intervention. The “whites won’t like it” excuse employed by funeral director Tom Kennedy was identical to the one used by government officials and business owners throughout the United States who wanted to keep discrimination alive. Although the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution was ratified in 1868 to guarantee racial equality, many private businesses and states circumvented this requirement.

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28 Dallek, 194.
29 Goodwin, 192.
Recognizing, as a physician, how social disparities affected the most vulnerable, Hector Garcia took the initiative to break the barrier by actively seeking the help of a politician who could be convinced to support federal intervention. He established an enduring friendship with Johnson, exhibiting complete loyalty and an uncanny understanding of his personality. Garcia’s refusal to overshadow his fellow Texan or publicly criticize the administration gained him trust and membership in the president’s inner circle. The doctor’s access produced results because he knew that Lyndon Johnson possessed both compassion and a large ego.

Starting with the Longoria Incident, Garcia strategically appealed to Johnson’s sense of compassion because of his long history with Mexican Americans. With this knowledge, Garcia pointedly expressed to him in a letter, “It is no secret that Texas has for the past 100 years and to a certain extent [is] still segregating our children hoping to retard them and to discourage them from seeking higher education so that they would furnish cheap labor.” This was an effective tactic as Lyndon Johnson’s compassion was formed from his interactions with children. He grew up with a Mexican American best friend, with whom he frequently played and raced horses. When his friend’s horse died after a race, they both wept together. A more striking example of Johnson’s connection to Chicanos involved a job he secured on a break from college. In 1928, he was appointed principal of Welhausen Ward Elementary School in Cotulla, Texas (see Appendix D). The school was assigned to Mexican American children, many of whom only spoke Spanish. The students were very poor and not many teachers wanted to work there. Johnson, on the other hand, was very involved in the school as he bought sports equipment using his own money and volunteered as a debate coach, sports coach, choir instructor, and janitor. He

34 de la Rosa.
35 Goodwin, 66.
36 Kells, 120.
frequently held events to spotlight the children’s abilities.\textsuperscript{37} Johnson noted what segregation and hatred did to those children, and it had such an impact on him that he never forgot it. His empathy was evident when he later related:

\textit{“They never seemed to know why people disliked them. But they knew it was so because I saw it in their eyes. I often walked home late in the afternoon, after the classes were finished, wishing there was more that I could do.”}\textsuperscript{38}

At Garcia’s urging, thirty-seven years later, Johnson sought to ensure that the descendants of his students would be protected by new legislation when he insisted to activists that any voting rights bill must apply to all people, including Mexican Americans.\textsuperscript{39} That year, in a speech before Congress, a determined President Johnson cemented the connection between his students in Cotulla and his support of federal intervention:

\textit{“It never occurred to me in my fondest dreams that I might have the chance to help the sons and daughters of those students and to help people like them all over this country. But now I have the chance – and I’ll let you in on a secret – I mean to use it.”}\textsuperscript{40}

Garcia also influenced Lyndon Johnson because the politician’s ego drove him to seek public admiration as a savior and a powerful leader. The doctor continuously reminded Johnson that if civil rights legislation became law, he would be remembered forever as a hero who brought “democracy and happiness to more Americans than any president.” Garcia wrote to him emphasizing how past presidents were great thinkers, but it was Johnson who had the unique opportunity to put the words of the Constitution into practice.\textsuperscript{41} In addition, the president knew that his ability to stay in power hinged on his support of civil rights issues that benefited the Chicano community. He learned from state elections, and especially from the presidential races,

\textsuperscript{37} Goodwin, 66-67.
\textsuperscript{38} “‘And We Shall Overcome.’”
\textsuperscript{40} “‘And We Shall Overcome.’”
\textsuperscript{41} Kells, 195.
the importance of Hector Garcia and his influence on the Mexican American voter. In 1960, despite losing the white vote in Texas by 150,000, the Kennedy/Johnson ticket won among Chicanos by 200,000. This constituted 91 percent of the Mexican American electorate in the state.\footnote{Garcia, Ignacio M. “Garcia: JFK and the Latino Vote.” November 16, 2013. https://www.chron.com/opinion/outlook/article/Garcia-JFK-and-the-Latino-vote-4986092.php.} When Garcia threatened to leave the Democratic Party after President Kennedy ignored his recommendations on administration appointments, it was Johnson who urged him to stay. He once told Dr. Garcia, “You helped put me here and I hope you and your friends will keep me here.”\footnote{Kells, 182.} Their bond could not be broken.\footnote{McComb.}

**CONCLUSION: A TRUER DEMOCRACY**

Although some historians claim that Mexican Americans were followers in the civil rights movement, evidence suggests otherwise.\footnote{Kells, 66.} Breaking the barrier of legalized discrimination required a driving force, such as Hector Garcia, swaying a high-ranking government official who had witnessed the pain caused by racial prejudice.\footnote{McComb.} In a letter to Garcia, dated March 24, 1965, a grateful Lyndon Johnson unequivocally connected the path from the Longoria Incident to the signing of the Voting Rights Act. The president also related that their work was complete and that, through the new legislation, he had repaid Mexican Americans for their support.\footnote{Kells, 211-212.}

In subsequent years, Garcia served in positions never before available to Chicanos. He became an alternate ambassador to the United Nations and was appointed to the United States Commission on Civil Rights.\footnote{Moore, John L. “LBJ Appointee: Garcia Sworn In As Civil Rights Commissioner.” The Corpus Christi Caller-Times, November 7, 1968. https://www.newspapers.com/image/23046671.} Additionally, Garcia’s leadership was so respected that every
president from John F. Kennedy to Bill Clinton employed him as an aide. However, the
greatest validation of Dr. Garcia’s contributions to American democracy occurred in 1984 when
he was 70-years-old. In a prestigious White House ceremony, President Ronald Reagan awarded
him the Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honor in the United States (see Appendix E).
After serving his country for 54 years as a soldier and civil rights activist, Hector Garcia died of
heart failure on July 26, 1996, at the age of 82.

The civil rights legislation of the 1960s had a profound impact on American society.
Businesses and states could no longer withhold services and segregate people because of race.
States also could no longer implement requirements that purposely reduced the number of
minority voters. This enforcement of voting rights allowed for powerful minority blocs to form
that today have a tremendous impact on state and national elections. Politicians now
strategically try to court these voters, recognizing the importance of the issues that affect them.

In 2010, the United States Congress officially recognized the civil rights contributions of
Hector Garcia and encouraged all school districts to teach students about his accomplishments.
Were it not for the civil rights laws he advocated, racial equality as Americans know it today
would not exist. As a result of legislation made possible by Dr. Hector Garcia’s hard work and
determination, the barrier of legalized racial discrimination was destroyed, and the United States
became a truer representation of the democracy it was meant to be.

49 Kelley.
52 Recognizing Dr. Hector Garcia. Resolution, 156 Recognizing Dr. Hector Garcia §. 52 (111AD).
53 Hoffer, 177.
This portrait of Hector Garcia shows him in his early adult life when he was an army veteran and a physician. Although constantly exposed to racism, Dr. Garcia risked his life as an infantryman and army surgeon in World War II. Despite displaying bravery in the war, he returned home, along with other Chicanos, to the same unwelcoming environment. This infuriated Garcia and pushed him to seek change immediately.

This photograph of Private Felix Longoria’s funeral demonstrates the event that brought then-Senator Lyndon Johnson into the civil rights movement. The Longoria Incident would show his affinity for Mexican Americans. Johnson had previously opposed federal intervention for cases involving discrimination. However, this event served as a turning point for him.
Appendix C


This photo of President Lyndon B. Johnson and Hector P. Garcia emphasizes the relationship that was built because of the Longoria Incident and the doctor’s persistence on Mexican American civil rights. The friendship helped both men receive what they valued most. Lyndon Johnson was elected president due to the Mexican American vote that Garcia helped mobilize. In return, Johnson advocated and passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965. Additionally, many Chicanos were appointed to high ranking government offices at Garcia’s request. This photograph is from Dr. Garcia’s papers kept at Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi.

Lyndon Johnson loved teaching and I included this photograph to showcase his background. In 1928, Johnson was appointed principal of Welhausen Ward Elementary School in Cotulla, Texas. This position allowed the future President of the United States to interact directly with poor Mexican American children. As a result, Johnson formed a connection with them. This job, which was unattractive to many, had a profound impact on Johnson and the future of civil rights for minority groups.

This portrait of Dr. Hector Garcia showcases the culmination of his hard work and dedication to the Mexican American civil rights movement. Because of his civil rights work with several U.S. presidents and the American G.I. Forum, he was awarded the Medal of Freedom by President Ronald Reagan. This was a remarkable achievement as Garcia was the first Mexican to receive this award.
Annotated Bibliography
Primary Sources


This website provided the speech that President Lyndon Johnson gave to Congress about the civil rights movement. It emphasized one of his reasons for being an advocate for the minority races. Johnson wished to use his position of power to better the social standing of Mexican Americans and other groups. He stated that he had always wanted to do something to help, but now had the power.


Barnard’s newspaper article detailed the rise of Dr. Hector Garcia and his organization, the American G.I. Forum. It was formed to benefit the underserved and underrepresented Mexican American community. Garcia hoped to especially tackle the lack of jobs and educational opportunities along with segregation in public areas. The discrimination was quite apparent as white Americans received wages twice that of Chicanos. Garcia believed this was directly connected to the health of Mexicans as they lived in far worse poverty than whites.


This website article gives an understanding of how powerful the Mexican American vote is today. They are now the largest minority voting bloc in the United States comprising 13% of the vote. Chicanos, once ignored, are now courted by politicians because of their influence.


This portrait of Dr. Hector Garcia showcases the culmination of his hard work and dedication to the Mexican American civil rights movement. Because of his civil rights work with several U.S. presidents and the American G.I. Forum, he was awarded the Medal of Freedom by President Ronald Reagan. This was a remarkable achievement as Garcia was the first Mexican to receive this award. I used the photograph as Appendix E of this paper.

The Del Rio News Herald article detailed the atmosphere surrounding the Longoria Incident and the impending investigation of discrimination. The newspaper gave me firsthand accounts and witness testimony. This included funeral director Tom Kennedy’s infamous statement that “the whites would not like it” if he allowed a Mexican American to use the chapel for a service. There were no laws that protected minorities from this type of treatment.


Linda Fregoso’s radio interview of Dr. Hector Garcia gave a summary of his involvement in the civil rights movement of the 1960s with President Lyndon B. Johnson. Garcia also recounted his early experiences and give his personal insight and thoughts on the movement. This interview was from *The Mexican American Experience* program on the University of Texas Longhorn Radio Network.


This portrait of Hector Garcia shows him in his early adult life when he was an army veteran and a physician. Although constantly exposed to racism, Dr. Garcia risked his life as an infantryman and army surgeon in World War II. Despite displaying bravery in the war, he returned home, along with other Chicanos, to the same unwelcoming environment. This infuriated Garcia and pushed him to seek change immediately. I used this picture as Appendix A in the paper.


This newspaper detailed the death of Dr. Hector P. Garcia at the age of 82. The article covers his life and his significant contributions to the Mexican American civil rights movement. Dr. Garcia died in the Corpus Christi hospital where he worked.

Lyndon Johnson’s letter was the only response offering help that Dr. Hector Garcia received from a government official regarding the Longoria Incident. This source exemplified Johnson’s eagerness to help the Longoria family and the Mexican American population. Although he could not legally force the funeral home to hold services for a Chicano, Johnson arranged for Private Longoria to be buried in Arlington National Cemetery. This letter is from Dr. Garcia’s papers, which are kept at Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi.


The Daily Telegram’s article about President Lyndon Johnson detailed his reasoning for the passage of bills, such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964. He wanted equality for all to eliminate discrimination. He believed the only way to fully carry this out was through federal intervention.


This newspaper opinion article written by K.M. Landis supplied a concise account of the Longoria Incident. This resource was most helpful in that Landis included the interaction between Beatrice Longoria, Felix’s widow, and then-Senator Lyndon Johnson. I was able to directly see their communication and the help Johnson sought to give Beatrice to provide her husband the burial he deserved. Landis emphasized that Felix Longoria was an American hero and had to be treated as one.


Lyndon Johnson loved teaching and I included this photograph to showcase his background. In 1928, Johnson was appointed principal of Welhausen Ward Elementary School in Cotulla, Texas. This position allowed the future President of the United States to interact directly with poor Mexican American children. As a result, Johnson formed a connection with them. This job, which was unattractive to many, had a profound impact on Johnson and the future of civil rights for minority groups. The photo appears as Appendix D in this paper.

The Associated Press’ full text of then-Senator Lyndon B. Johnson’s speech to Congress illustrated his transition from opposing federal intervention to endorsing it. By voting for a civil rights bill, Johnson and other politicians were welcoming the federal government to intervene in state affairs dealing with discrimination. This dramatic shift in philosophy by Johnson was due to two occurrences: his previous job as a principal at Welhausen Ward Elementary School in Cotulla, Texas and his involvement in the Longoria Incident.


In an interview format, Dr. Hector Garcia provided personal background information on his upbringing and how the American G.I. Forum was created. Additionally, Dr. Garcia provided details on the foundation of his relationship with then-Senator Lyndon Johnson and his involvement in what became known as the Longoria Incident. Garcia’s intimate description of Johnson’s push to honor Private Felix Longoria allowed me to understand the doctor’s positive, enthusiastic thoughts about his friend. The interview took place in Garcia’s Corpus Christi office in 1969.


This Corpus Christi Caller-Times article announced the official appointment of Dr. Hector Garcia to the Civil Rights Commission. In this new position, Garcia would be able to hear various cases involving discrimination and inform the president and Congress on how to improve the situations. As a Civil Rights Commissioner, Garcia would not receive a salary. This aspect shows his selflessness to put civil rights action ahead of himself. Unlike the more radical Chicano activists, Garcia believed that long-term social change would come through appointments to government positions of power.


This photograph of Private Felix Longoria’s funeral demonstrates the event that brought then-Senator Lyndon Johnson into the civil rights movement. The Longoria Incident would show his affinity for Mexican Americans. Johnson had previously opposed federal intervention for cases involving discrimination. However, this event served as a turning point for him. The picture appears as Appendix B in this paper.

This website of American historical documents allowed me to see the exact wording of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that was signed by President Lyndon Johnson. I was able to fully understand the extent of the bill and how it would impact American society. The Civil Rights Act now protects all citizens against discrimination.

*President Lyndon B. Johnson and Dr. Hector P. Garcia Outside the White House.* 1967.

This photo of President Lyndon B. Johnson and Hector P. Garcia emphasizes the relationship that was built because of the Longoria Incident and the doctor’s persistence on Mexican American civil rights. The friendship helped both men receive what they valued most. Lyndon Johnson was elected president due to the Mexican American vote that Garcia helped mobilize. In return, Johnson advocated and passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965. Additionally, many Chicanos were appointed to high ranking government offices at Garcia’s request. This photograph is from Dr. Garcia’s papers kept at Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi. I used the photo as Appendix C in this paper.


This 2010 congressional resolution highlighted Dr. Hector Garcia’s profound impact on the Mexican American community and the civil rights movement. School districts were encouraged to educate students about the doctor and his influence. The absence of curriculum covering the work of Mexican Americans was apparent to politicians. They recognized that the full story was not being taught in schools.


The Oakland Tribune’s article highlights the rising impact of Mexican American votes. Because of the American G.I. Forum’s growing prominence, politicians, such as Lyndon Johnson, began to recognize their importance. Dr. Hector Garcia, the forum’s founder and leader, noted that the Chicano vote proved vital to President John F. Kennedy’s victory in five southwestern states in the 1960 national election. Garcia also forecasted that the growing Mexican American population would again have the same effect on the 1964 presidential election. This would result in politicians courting the Chicano vote.
Annotated Bibliography
Secondary Sources


Akers’ biography about Dr. Hector Garcia gave great insight into his overall life experiences and upbringing. Moreover, because Dr. Garcia was Akers’ father, I was able to obtain deeply personal information about his thought processes and interactions with various politicians, including President Lyndon B. Johnson.


This book detailed the complete story about Felix Longoria and the conflict over his burial. It gave precise details about Mrs. Beatrice Longoria’s and Dr. Hector Garcia’s interaction with funeral director Tom Kennedy. I was able to fully understand the blatant racism and discrimination Mexican Americans received.


I used this website to understand President Lyndon Johnson’s intentions with the passage of a civil rights and voting rights bill. He made clear that any law that was to be established would benefit everyone, not just one particular race or ethnicity. Johnson emphasized the link between Mexican Americans and the new legislation. This indicated that his connection with Chicanos influenced his opinion regarding civil rights.


Dallek’s biography of Lyndon Johnson illustrated the president’s determined, unwavering attitude toward the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Although he made promises to other politicians, he made sure the forthcoming laws would protect all American citizens.
de la Rosa, Isabel, and Michelle Hall Kells. Phone Interview with Michelle Hall Kells. Personal, March 13, 2020.

My interview with Dr. Michelle Kells allowed me to expand on the ideas she presented in her book, *Hector P. Garcia: Everyday Rhetoric and Mexican American Civil Rights*. She helped me further understand the relationship Lyndon Johnson had with the Mexican American community and why his involvement with Garcia had such a profound impact on the civil rights movement. Professor Kells also provided insight into the doctor’s personality and why he preferred a more conservative approach in his fight for civil rights. Garcia believed that protesting against the government did not accomplish as much as working within.


This book chronicles the trials and tribulations Mexican Americans faced in the United States and the military. Although not fully accepted in society, Chicanos put their lives at risk to defend their country. They hoped that their valor would translate into civil rights in the United States. Veterans were disappointed that society had not changed. However, the war had changed Mexican Americans, who were more inclined to stand up for their rights.


This web article in the Houston Chronicle recounts how important the Mexican American vote was to the presidential elections of John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson and to the advancement of civil rights. The Chicano vote overcame the white margin that could have given the 1960 election to Richard Nixon. Because Lyndon Johnson became vice president and eventually president, he was able to push for the legislation that ended legalized discrimination.


This Lyndon Johnson biography by renowned historian Doris Kearns Goodwin explains his reasoning for supporting civil rights progress. His upbringing with his Mexican best friend and his job as a school principal had a profound impact on him. Johnson’s experience with Mexican Americans proved to him that they were just like any other Americans. He recognized early in his life that Chicanos were treated unfairly, and he developed compassion for them. This personality trait was necessary for someone in power to take on segregation.

Hoffer’s book on the 1896 Supreme Court case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* provided information on how the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution was circumvented. This was the case that determined that “separate but equal” facilities were acceptable and legitimized segregation. Hector Garcia’s influence on Lyndon Johnson resulted in the federal government enacting laws to end this misinterpretation of the Constitution.


Kelley’s website article about Dr. Hector Garcia described his accomplishments during his service in World War II and his role as a White House aide. I was able to take note about how much Dr. Garcia achieved from his days as a young immigrant in the United States. He was a hard-working, determined individual from his earliest days.


This Hector Garcia biography illustrated his impact on Johnson’s campaigns and administration. Kells and Hinojosa described the close relationship that blossomed due to a shared determination to better the social status of minorities. Over time, Garcia chipped away at Johnson’s long-held belief that discrimination was a state issue that could not be remedied by federal involvement.


This documentary was dedicated to the life of Dr. Hector Garcia. “The Longoria Affair” recounted the incident that brought him and Lyndon Johnson together. This would be monumental in the civil rights movement as Garcia would have a large impact on Johnson and his administration. Together, they became a force that changed America forever and made it a true democracy. The film also demonstrated how many of the older white residents of Three Rivers still view Garcia as a troublemaker.

Orozco’s book on Mexican American civil rights covers how they were hated and mistreated for decades. At a time when African Americans were deemed inferior to whites, a former Texas governor declared in the 1920’s that Mexicans had an even lower status and were not capable of becoming “good citizens.”


Rivas-Rodriguez’s book about the Mexican American War detailed how Chicanos worked to assimilate into American society. Although they were promised equal treatment with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, that is not what they received. This would only be the beginning of the mistreatment of Mexican Americans. Legislation would make that treatment illegal almost 120 years later.


This book provided me with background on the Mexican American movement. I was able to understand the effort that the Chicano community put into providing support for America during World War II, yet receiving little in return. Many white Americans did not see the irony of fighting against the racist Nazi ideology while discriminating against minorities at home. However, with Lyndon Johnson’s intervention into the Longoria Incident, the Mexican American civil rights movement was brought into the national spotlight.


Rozeff’s website article detailed Dr. Hector Garcia’s full life story. In particular, the website gave me information related to his upbringing. I was able to see Dr. Garcia’s struggles with discrimination and segregation. Even through horrible treatment, he was able to persist and become a monumental figure in the civil rights movement for Mexican Americans and other minority groups.

Saavedra’s website was dedicated to the life of Dr. Hector Garcia. Specifically, it gave me insight into his background in the military. Garcia’s service as a major in the U.S. Army had a great impact on his mindset. He saw the hard work Mexican Americans put into fighting for their country, and, yet, they returned home to the same discriminatory treatment. This drove Garcia to form the American G.I. Forum.