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## **The Latino American Experience In America**

Throughout history Latino Americans have been met with endless discrimination in many forms. Fair pay, proper housing and basic civil and unalienable rights weren't being adhered to. These outrageous conditions led to people like Dr. Hector Perez Garcia rising up against these injustices. While the War ended when people returned home, for many Latino Americans the war for equality and being treated with essential human rights had just begun.

According to the Documentary on Latino Americans, an estimation of roughly 500,000 men and women served in the war. Unfortunately, Latino Americans were often subjugated to negative discrimination and segregated into separate units. They would be given menial tasks such as cooking and cleaning rather than being allowed on the front lines. Sometimes Latino American soldiers got denied promotional advancements and were not given the same opportunities as other soldiers of different races. Not only did they fight for their country traditionally but they also fought for civil rights and freedom. "[While] Latinos were awarded more Medals of Honor per capita during World War II than any other minority group, their stories have remained in the shadows," (Medina). However, despite these difficult and unreasonable challenges, many Latino American soldiers were awarded the Medal of Honor for demonstrating exceptional skill and courage on the field of battle. Nevertheless, while these amazing contributions helped the way people looked at Mexican/Latino Americans, the war and fight for civil rights on the homefront was still underway.

Due to a lot of Latino Americans being on the war front, there were labor shortages and many other minorities and women were sent to work; as stated in the Documentary "The war effort changed the life of Latinos on the home front. Calling millions to military service created massive labor shortages." These women were recruited to work in extreme conditions in massive factories, farms and other industries. While there was a labor shortage, there was no

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shortage of racism and discriminatory behavior being handed to these women. It should also be mentioned that a lot of these women were more than likely working all day and then having to take care of children and perhaps even elderly relatives. This may have left a lot of people feeling fatigued and restless. However, despite these challenges, Latina women contributed largely in the war effort to keep the country running and their contributions led to great strides in breaking down barriers for racial inequality in the workplace.

Throughout history there have been many people that have contributed to changing the tides of racism and inequality in America. One such person is a man named Dr. Hector Perez Garcia. Garcia was an influential Mexican-American veteran and civil rights leader. His strides, contributions and advocacy for Latino-Americans have helped shape the country we live in to this day. Garcia showed great determination and zeal in the fervent push for all individuals. During WW2, veteran Felix Longoria died in the field of battle and it was many months later when his family received his remains and tried to hold a burial for him. Due to the atmosphere in Texas they were received with massive resistance. The funeral home director reportedly said, "We have never had a Mexican buried here, and we don't intend to start now." It was only when the great Dr. Hector Perez Garcia stepped in and launched a campaign to pressure the funeral home and local officials to allow the family to bury Felix. Overall, Dr. Garcia's involvement in the case spread awareness of prejudice faced by Mexican-Americans in the United States.

Watching the *Latino Americans* PBS Documentary helped me to learn a lot about how Mexican/Latino Americans showed incredible resilience and resistance in the face of discrimination. Additionally, seeing how there were many moving parts taking place during WW2 that led to large strides that had lasting impact on equality and civil rights in Our America.

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