

CARLOS P. GARCIA
(1896-1971)

Fourth President of the Philippine Republic

Carlos P. Garcia was a teacher, poet, orator, lawyer, and politician par excellence who became the fourth President of the Philippine Republic. He was also an avid chess player and chess set collector.

Before he entered politics, Garcia was known as “Prince of Visayan Poets” and the “Bard from Bohol” for his mastery of the Bisayan poetry called *balak*.

The son of Policronio Garcia and Ambrosia Polistico, who were both natives of Bangued, Abra, he was born on November 4, 1896 in Talibon, Bohol, the town where his father had been elected municipal president, or mayor, for four consecutive terms.

He acquired his elementary education in Talibon and took his secondary course at the Cebu Provincial High School. Initially, he pursued his college studies at Silliman University in Dumaguete City, Negros Oriental and, later, at the Philippine Law School in Manila where he earned his law degree in 1923. He landed among the top 10 finishers in the bar examinations that same year.

Garcia was a recipient of the four-year Malcolm Law Scholarship, which he had won through his excellence in oration and debate. Instead of practicing law right away, he taught for two years at the Bohol Provincial High School. In 1925, he ran for congressman representing the third district of Bohol. He scored an impressive victory. He was elected for another term, but served it only up to 1931.

In the local elections of 1931, Garcia ran for governor of Bohol and won. He sought reelection and got what he wanted. Thus, from 1931 to 1940, he served as provincial governor. In the 1941 elections, he ran for senator representing Eastern Visayas under the Nacionalista Consolidado Party. True to his winning ways, he was elected.

But the Japanese invasion in World War II prevented the elected government from reigning. Confronted by the war, the nationalist Garcia joined the guerilla movement, thus drawing the ire of the Japanese imperial forces. When the civilian government in Bohol was organized during the height of the Japanese occupation, he served as its highest adviser – an act which was appreciated by President Manuel L. Quezon.

Garcia ran for senator in the first postwar national elections and regained his former post. In the 1953 election, he was the running mate of Ramon Magsaysay, who eventually won as President. Magsaysay appointed Garcia, his Vice-President, as concurrent Secretary of Foreign Affairs.

On March 17, 1957, while he was attending the SEATO Conference in Canberra as foreign secretary, Garcia learned about the death of President Magsaysay in the crash of the presidential plane *Pinatubo* on Mt. Manungkal in Cebu on its way to Manila. He rushed back to Manila and took over as President on March 18, 1957.

In the Presidential election in November of that year, Garcia ran against Jose Yulo, Manuel Manahan, Claro M. Recto, and Antonio Quirino. He won over Yulo, his closest opponent, by 600,000 votes, and thus stayed on as President.

For articulating his administration's "Filipino First" policy, which put the interests of the Filipino people above those of foreigners and of the ruling party, he became popular. It reinstated the original ideals which also made the late President Manuel Quezon and Vice-President Sergio Osmeña close to the people.

In 1961, faced by the so-called "White Paper" disseminated by Senator Eulogio "Amang" Rodriguez, President Garcia lost his reelection bid to the rising political leader from Pampanga, Diosdado Macapagal.

From 1961 to 1971, he lived as a private citizen in Bohol. When the 1971 Constitutional convention was held, he ran as delegate for the province's third district, and won. He was elected as its president on June 11, 1971, with ex-President Macapagal as vice-president. Three days later, on June 14, he suffered a fatal heart attack.

Aside from the presidency, Garcia held other public offices namely: Member of the Philippine Commission that negotiated the rehabilitation and war damage claims against Japan in 1945; delegate to World Conference in San Francisco that drafted the Charter of the United Nations in 1945; delegate to the South East Asia Conference in Baguio, 1950; representative to the Inter-Parliamentary Union Conference, Dublin, Ireland, 1950; chairman of the Philippine delegation to the Geneva Conference for Korean Unification, 1954; presiding officer of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) Conference in Manila in 1954 which yielded the Pacific Charter; head of Philippine envoys to the SEATO talks held in Pakistan, in 1956, and in Canberra in 1957; and vice-president of the Nacionalista Party directorate, 1947, and executive vice-president, 1954-1971.

Garcia's death created a void in Philippine politics, for he was the only president to institute a "Filipino First" policy.

At the time of his death, Garcia was survived by his wife, Leonila (Inday) Dimataga-Garcia, a pharmacist and native of Opon, Cebu, and their only child, Linda Garcia-Campos.

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