

## Hispanic American Heritage Month Speech 2011

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Hispanics have played a vital role in the moments and movements that have shaped our country. Since before the Revolutionary War these men and women have shaped and strengthened our country, and during Hispanic American Heritage Month, we celebrate and recognize the achievements and contributions of these individuals.

Our country is one of the most diverse nations in the world, and America's diversity is a source of strength. Hispanic sons and daughters have not hesitated to defend and show their allegiance to this nation in many ways, but especially through military service.

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Since General **Bernardo de Galvez** [behr-nahr-DOH DAY GAL-vehz], once the Governor of Spanish Louisiana, defeated the British at Natchez, Baton Rouge and Pensacola and **Francisco de Miranda** [frahn-SISS-coh DAY meer-RAH-dah] assisted American colonists in the Battle of Yorktown as they fought for independence against the British, Hispanic Soldiers have been critical to the Army and the nation's military success. Our nation's history is full of examples of brave Hispanic men and women who have answered the call to arms.

During the Civil War, THOUSANDS of Mexican-Americans volunteered to fight for the Union Army. In California, many of these Mexican American units used their extraordinary horsemanship skills to guard Union trains, chase bandits, fight Confederate raiders and defeat a Confederate invasion of New Mexico.

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In World War One, a young Mexican American Soldier, Private David Barkeley [BARK-lee] volunteered to scout out an enemy position by swimming across the Meuse [Myooz] River in France. Though Private Barkeley died that night, he was later awarded the Medal of Honor for his heroic efforts, becoming the first Hispanic American Soldier to receive the award.

Since then, men like Staff Sergeant Lucien Adams in World War TWO, Corporal **Benito** [Ben-EE-Toh] Martinez in the Korean War and Master Sergeant Roy **Benevidez** [BEN-eh-VEE-dez] in Vietnam were awarded the Medal of Honor for their extraordinary courage, honor, strength and skill that are prime examples of what Hispanic Americans have brought to our nation and to countless countries around the world as they have served in every American conflict since the Revolutionary War.

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Many nations already view America with awe as they see our committed men and women from different backgrounds supporting our global military efforts. What they see is the strength of spirit and the esprit de corps that transcends our cultural differences. It is these differences and our cultural adaptability that have prepared us for the unconventional and asymmetrical battlefields of the future.

As we understand the diversity of cultures in our own ranks, it will make it easier understand cultures of other nations and demonstrate our American principles to the world.

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Since the NINETEEN FORTIES, the Army has been a military leader in the integration of its ranks, and we continue to build on that heritage. Women, racial and ethnic minorities continue to enter the Army, along with an increasing number of foreign nationals. We are truly a multicultural force serving in nearly EIGHTY countries.

The Army is a national leader in embracing the strengths of diverse people, and we are continually investing in and managing talent, valuing individuals and developing Soldiers and Civilians who value our cultural differences that enhance our global capabilities and contribute to an adaptive Army

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Today we honor the cultural differences that strengthen our Army. We celebrate the common goals and love for the United States of America that bind us together as the world's best manned and best equipped Army.

As our Nation becomes more diverse, the Army will have increasing opportunities to bring new ideas and expanded capabilities to the mission. We must be prepared to recruit, develop and retain the best of America's diverse talent pool. Our increasingly complex global responsibilities require that we not only attract personnel from diverse backgrounds, but also be knowledgeable of what our Soldiers and Civilians bring to the Army and how to integrate their attributes, experiences and backgrounds.

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Collectively, Hispanic Americans represent more than FIVE HUNDRED years of history and the culture and traditions of TWENTY nations. They form a vital part of the Army's rich and diverse social fabric. Hispanic Soldiers make up nearly six percent of our Commissioned Officers, eight percent of our Warrant Officers, twelve percent of our enlisted personnel, and six percent of the Army Civilian workforce.

In reflecting on Hispanic American heritage, let us take pride in this unique and vibrant culture and history and recommit ourselves to leading the way in diversity by valuing all the distinctive talents, backgrounds and experiences that each of our Soldiers and Army Civilians bring to the United States Army.