**MILITARY SPEECH**

**FOR**

**ANGEL ESTRADA**

Hello everyone! It is an honor to speak to all of you this morning in celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month. It’s so important for each one of us to be proud of who we are and from where we came, and by celebrating the legacy of our unique backgrounds, it provides an opportunity to learn and gain insights about who we are as individuals and as a culturally rich and diverse community. By being part of the US Army, each of us has the chance to really get to know and experience the importance of diversity. We are lucky to have soldiers that hail from Spain, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central and South America, and just like the country we serve, the military is a true melting pot, uniting all of us, each one with a different story and history, to come together as a distinct team, all with the common goal to protect the freedoms of our fellow American citizens.

This year’s theme is “ Shaping the Bright Future of America.” It made me think of how the Army shapes us as individuals and how that clearly impacts our future and that of those around us. A wise man once said, “I am part of all that I have met.” Our life’s purpose, both as individuals and as a group, are formed based on the influences and foundations that have preceded us. In order to have a positive impact on the future, it’s important to learn from the past. As we study that legacy and practice the skills and principles we gain from our service, we have the opportunity to have a positive impact on those around us. As we refine our capabilities and as we respond to the disciplines of our training, it’s important to keep in mind that people are watching.... (**Do you want to make a little joke and say**).... so keep it clean! (**And wait for the laugh**). In all seriousness though, form, integrity, resilience, strength.... these are all qualities we’ve observed in those that have preceded us, especially in our Hispanic brothers and sisters that have showed us the way, and it is those qualities that will influence and strengthen the Army of the future.

The indelible contribution that Hispanic Americans have brought to all branches of the military date back to the Civil War and beyond. According to an article on the website, Houston Culture, during the Civil War, about 2500 Mexican Americans fought for the Confederacy while about 950 offered their service to the Union Army, and by the end of the war, it is estimated that nearly 10,000 Mexican Americans had served... either in the regular Army or as volunteers. Among the most renowned was Colonel Santos Benavides, who became the highest ranking Mexican American in the Confederate Army. Another interesting point to note is that someone whose name we may recognize, Admiral David Farragut, the Naval officer, famous for giving us the phrase,”Damn the torpedoes. Full steam ahead,” was of Spanish descent. His enthusiasm and colorful language must have worked... he successfully commanded the Union forces during the Battle of Mobile Bay as well as at the capture of New Orleans.... we can now see there is a precedent for the successful use of colorful language and a little enthusiasm! (**Wait for the laugh**)

In the late 1800’s, there was an Army unit known as the 65th Infantry Regiment. They originated in Puerto Rico and were known as “The Borinqueneers.” The unit was active until 1956 and consistently displayed courage, strength, and resilience while serving in conflicts and wars throughout their tenure. From World War I in which they defended the Panama Canal to World War II, where they saw action in North Africa and Central Europe, to the Korean War and beyond, their collective service was exemplary. Although they faced a certain amount of discrimination, they consistently demonstrated their valor, earning more than 2700 Purple Hearts in the Korean War alone. Finally, on April 13, 2016, after much discussion and debate, the Borinqueneers were rightfully recognized with the Congressional Gold Medal.

As Americans, as members of this military **FAMILY**, it’s so important to acknowledge the character and loyalty of the people that stand with us, side by side, in every day life as well as in adversity. It is only through understanding that we will learn and grow and find the ways to “shape the bright future of America” as we add our own unique voice to the melting pot that is the US Army and the United States itself. I can spend **HOURS** talking about my pride in my Hispanic culture... we’re bonded by blood, music, history, culture..... and so much of the spice that makes life interesting, but the truth is.... let’s face it... lucky you....they only gave me **five minutes**... (**Wait for the laugh**). The **OTHER** truth is.... I want to encourage all of you to explore the history of our culture, but I also want to initiate a dialogue... one in which we learn about each other (**if you want to make a little joke you can say**).... as long as it’s after October 15th (**and wait for the laugh**).

As a proud member of this Army Family.... and we **ARE** a **FAMILY**, I want to acknowledge all of you.... for your service, your loyalty, your resilience, and your bottomless commitment to one another... in any and every situation. It is through the recognition of our bond that we will continue to shape the course for a brighter future for ourselves, our families, our country, and the generations that watch and learn from us. I invite all of you to take some time to remember those who have devoted their lives to protecting our fellow citizens and our country. Be inspired by their commitment and accomplishments, and **LEARN**... it is our mandate to continue to make the Army stronger through education, training, and personal development. I thank each and every one of you for your dedication to protecting the freedoms of others. Thank you all!