

Administration of Barack Obama, 2011

Remarks at a Cinco de Mayo Celebration

May 5, 2011

The President. Thank you. *Gracias. Buenas noches. Bienvenidos.* Welcome to the Cinco de Mayo at the White House.

Nothing ruins a good fiesta like a long speech from a politician. [*Laughter*] So I'm going to keep it short.

The First Lady. Keep it short. [*Laughter*]

The President. Keep it short. I just want to acknowledge a few proud Latinos and friends of Latinos who are here with us tonight. A great friend to me and to the United States, Ambassador Arturo Sarukhan is here from Mexico with his lovely wife Veronica. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar is in the house. Labor Secretary Hilda Solis is here. Several Members of Congress have made the trek tonight. And everybody please join me in wishing a *feliz cumpleaños* to the chairman of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, Charlie Gonzalez. Happy birthday, Charlie.

We are also joined by Hispanic Americans serving at every level of my administration, some who've contributed to a new web site that we launched this week: whitehouse.gov/hispanic. So check out the web site. And welcome to all of you who are serving on the commission to explore the creation of a new national museum of the American Latino. Today they presented me with their final report to Congress, and I'm grateful for their hard work, and hopefully, we will see that museum become a reality. So we're very grateful to them.

Finally, I want to thank my band, the United States Marine Band. And we are looking forward to hearing Javier Cortes spin some of his records, and he has done great work, so I know that he's going to keep this party lively this evening.

But this is really a day for commemorating our shared heritage—our shared heritage, Mexicans and Americans. It's a day for remembering that America is a richer, stronger, more vibrant place thanks to the contributions of Mexican Americans to the life of this Nation, contributions in commerce, culture, in language and literature, in faith, and obviously in food. [*Laughter*]

I asked Michelle the other day, I said, "What's your favorite food?" Because we were sitting around with the girls. She said, "Oh, Mexican food." That's—[*applause*]. You do not want to be between Michelle and a tamale. [*Laughter*] It is true. It's true. But she's moving, though, so she can afford to have as many tamales as she wants. [*Laughter*]

It is also a day for honoring the service of the many Mexican Americans who serve proudly in our country's uniform, and we are grateful to them.

And it's a day we commit ourselves to advancing the aspirations of all Latinos and reaffirm the ideals that we share as Americans. That means improving the education that we provide to our children, strengthening the social safety net that we build for our seniors and the poor and the sick, living up to our values as a nation of immigrants that built this country into the economic powerhouse that it is and the beacon of hope that it is around the world.

I've talked to you in recent weeks about this immigration issue. I strongly believe that we've got to fix this broken system so that it meets the needs of our 21st-century economy and our security needs. I want to work with Republicans and Democrats to protect our borders, to enforce our laws, and also to address the status of millions of undocumented workers. I want to sign the "DREAM Act" into law. This is not going to be easy. It's going to require bipartisan support. I'm going to need your help. We've got to keep doing the hard work of changing minds and changing hearts and changing votes, one at a time. But all of you are going to be out there, and you're going to have to help make this happen.

Let me just wrap up by saying this. Last week, I had the honor of traveling down to Florida and delivering the commencement address at Miami Dade College. And Dr. Eduardo Padron is here. There he is over there. And I want to brag on him a little bit because he's actually a graduate of the school.

This is a school with more than 170,000 students who come from 181 different countries, speak 94 different languages. The graduates were so excited. They were so proud. They spent a good portion of the ceremony dancing and doing the wave. *[Laughter]* I mean, you know, there were Cubanos there. There were Haitians. There were Puertorriquenos. I mean everybody was there. *[Laughter]* Everybody was there and everybody could dance. *[Laughter]*

And they were excited not just to finally get their exams out of the way, but because they finally knew what it was to achieve a dream. Many of them were the first in their families ever to graduate from college, and they overcame obstacles and defeated their own doubts to finish. And a lot of their parents, they're crying, and they could only dream of such a day as was happening there.

And by the way, Miami Dade is rated one of the top community colleges in the Nation. And as the ceremony—the formal ceremony finally began, the dancing quieted down a little bit. The students in the campus ROTC took turns marching the flags of the countries where—of origin for each of the graduating students. So you had 181 countries. And the students would stand up and cheer after—when the Haitian flag went by or the Colombian flag went by or—you name it, right. Everybody was getting up and cheering.

Some flags received a lot of cheers—*[laughter]*—Mexico, Guatemala. And then there were—then there was, like, the Ukrainian flag and—*[laughter]*—the Canadian flag, Estonia, and there were just a couple—*[laughter]*. But, I mean, they were proud, but it was just not as many people. *[Laughter]*

But there was one flag that every single student and spectator cheered loudly and proudly for, and that was when the American flag came through—the American flag. So it was a wonderful reminder: We have—all come from different backgrounds, we have different beliefs, we have sometimes petty and sometimes not-so-petty political differences, but we all share a set of ideals. We all have a common future. We're the heirs to mothers and fathers and grandparents, great-grandparents, who struggled and sacrificed to forge and realize the American Dream.

And that fills us with the collective responsibility to leave an even bigger and bolder, more generous, more compassionate nation for our children. That's what drives me each day. That's what inspires Michelle. I know that's what drives many of you.

So I am thrilled to have you here today, where we celebrate your incredible heritage, but we also celebrate the incredible heritage of this great country of ours.

God bless you. *Feliz Cinco de Mayo. Muchas gracias.* Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:21 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Eduardo J. Padron, president, Miami Dade College.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Cinco de Mayo celebration.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Cortes, Javier; Gonzalez, Charles A.; Obama, Malia; Obama, Michelle; Obama, Natasha "Sasha"; Padron, Eduardo J.; Salazar, Kenneth L.; Sarukhan Casamitjana, Arturo; Solis, Hilda L.; Valencia Fedora, Pilar Veronica.

Subjects: American Latino, Commission To Study the Potential Creation of a National Museum of the; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Hispanic and Mexican American servicemembers; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Service and dedication; Cinco de Mayo; Congress : Bipartisanship; Congress : Congressional Hispanic Caucus; Defense and national security : Border security; Education : Postsecondary education :: Community colleges; Education : Standards and school accountability; Health and medical care : Medicare and Medicaid; Immigration and naturalization : American "melting pot"; Immigration and naturalization : Illegal immigration; Immigration and naturalization : Reform; Mexico : Ambassador to U.S.; Social Security and retirement : Social Security program.

DCPD Number: DCPD201100329.