

Dear Army Leaders,

During the recent celebration of the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Integration of the Armed Forces, General (Retired) Colin Powell spoke at a ceremony in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda.

I have attached his remarks and encourage you to read and disseminate them widely.

His message—that military leaders set the example for the rest of the Nation by emphasizing the importance of performance over race—is a powerful one that should resonate throughout today's diverse Army.

I firmly believe the strength of our Army comes from our diversity, and from this strength comes a force unmatched in the world. I ask that you take a moment to reflect on General Powell's remarks, and to think about how we can continue to lead the Nation in this unfinished effort.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "George W. Casey, Jr.", written in a cursive style.

George W. Casey, Jr.  
General, United States Army

## Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Powell Delivers Remarks at the 60th Anniversary of the Integration of the U.S. Armed Forces Ceremony

Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen.

Madam Speaker, platform guests, my colleagues, Joint Chiefs of Staff, representatives of the military, all the wonderful red blazers I see out there and know so well, the Tuskegee Airmen, my beloved friend Sergeant Rangel:

It's a great pleasure to be with you on this occasion. And the wonderful testimony you just heard from these two great veterans of the Buffalo Division really says it all. It tells you about 250 years of American history and how American history dealt with African Americans.

The stories they told about the deprivations they went through and the racism they faced couldn't be told -- could have been told by every generation that went before them.

But on the 26th of July, 60 years ago, President Harry Truman did the right thing when he signed Executive Order 9981. It was an executive order because no such change in policy could have passed the United States Congress at that time. It would have been stopped dead in its tracks.

And we give great credit to President Truman, and he deserves it, because he was always trying to do the right thing. That was the hallmark of Harry Truman, tried to do the right thing.

And after World War II and all of our veterans started coming home and our African-American veterans started coming home, Truman was shocked by some of the stories he heard coming out of the South and other parts of America.

He was stunned when he heard that an American -- African-American sergeant was pulled out of a car in South Carolina, beaten up by a sheriff and blinded.

He was appalled when he heard that in the deep South two African-American soldiers and their wives, in uniform, were pulled out of a car by a mob and murdered on the spot, 60 bullet holes in their bodies.

He was astounded when he heard that African-American military police guarding German prisoners, taking them to a restaurant where the German

prisoners of war, our enemy, could eat in the restaurant. The Americans guarding them could not eat in that restaurant.

Truman was shocked. And Truman was an artillery captain from World War I so he knew what service was all about, and he knew he had to do the right thing, and he did.

But in 1948 it wasn't easy for him to do so, and in 1948 he had to take great political risk to do it. But a lot of things were coming together that propelled the nation in this direction and propelled Harry S. Truman into doing the right thing.

First, hundreds of thousands of African-American veterans were coming home and they were becoming a political force, these soldiers joining civilian life again, going to school, getting their education.

Hundreds of thousands of African Americans had come out of the South and were working in the North. They were an essential part of our industrial base. Blacks were getting political power. They were getting public relations power. There were great civil rights organizations that were at work. And they all came together to put pressure on the national government.

None was more influential than a man that we haven't mentioned so far today by the name of A. Philip Randolph. A. Philip Randolph was president...

(APPLAUSE)

He was president of a great organization called the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. Great way to get ahead in those days as an African American was to get work on the railway as a sleeping car porter. It was prestigious.

My godfather was a sleeping car porter, and he was very proud of it. And A. Philip Randolph was the president of this organization, and he mobilized other civil rights leaders, and he said, "After this war, we cannot allow to happen what has happened after every previous war in our history where African Americans served the country and the country would not serve them, this will not happen after this war."

And he put political pressure on both the Republican and the Democratic Party. The Democratic platform committee, in 1948, had a big debate as to whether desegregation of the armed forces should be in the platform.

Truman was against it. He wasn't ready to take that risk. But the platform committee approved and said, we must desegregate the armed forces of the United States.

A. Philip Randolph and civil rights leaders went so far as to say, "World War II is over and the Cold War has started, and now you want universal military training. Well, this time, we will stand our ground. We will not encourage young African-Americans to join the armed forces of the United States unless they have been desegregated."

It's not clear whether or not that would have turned into a mass movement. But A. Philip Randolph and all the other civil rights leaders at that time were deadly serious: After all these years, after 250 years, we have achieved the level of political power and we have the moral right; we have the moral power to insist on this.

And so, on the 26th of July, Harry Truman, because he wanted to do the right thing, and because, frankly, he saw the politics of it, but most importantly, he knew it was the right thing, signed Executive Order 9981.

The executive order says nothing about integration or segregation or desegregation. None of those words are in there. It talks about equal rights.

The next day, General Omar Bradley, a great, great general, not knowing the president has signed the order, was asked by a member of the press -- you know how that can be; you're just passing by and they get you...

(LAUGHTER)

... "Does this mean desegregation?"

And General Bradley said, "Oh, no."

And later that day, somebody asked Truman, does this mean desegregation?

And Truman said, "You bet. It means desegregation. It's going to be over."

Bradley apologized and went on to become the first chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

(LAUGHTER)

The 12th chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, on that day, was just an 11-year-old kid in the South Bronx section of New York City.

(APPLAUSE)

I don't remember -- I can't say that, as an 11-year-old, I have a vivid memory of the signing of that executive order.

(LAUGHTER)

And in fact, many people have asked me, in the course of my career, General Powell, when you were a kid growing up in New York City, did you ever dream you could grow up and become chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Armed Forces (ph) of the United States?

My answer is yes, yes, I was.

(LAUGHTER)

(APPLAUSE)

I believe I was standing on a corner of 163rd Street in the Bronx and I said to myself, "Self, you're going to grow up to become chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff."

(LAUGHTER)

It didn't happen that way. It was unthinkable. It was impossible to conceive. Nothing could be possible in our segregated society at that time.

But Truman had changed it all. It took six years and three months before the Defense Department reported that the last segregated unit in the armed forces of the United States was gone.

That was the same month, October of 1954, that I started my military career by entering ROTC. Four years later, in 1958, 10 years after the order was signed, I began my active duty as an infantry officer, as the second lieutenant out of the South Bronx.

And when I got to Fort Benning, Georgia, started my career, and from there went to Germany and elsewhere, the Army, by then, as well as the other military services, had become the leaders in our nation of the integration effort of the civil rights revolution, our second revolution -- the first one in the 1860s and, now, in the 1960s, a new revolution, a peaceful revolution, where we not only, as military leaders and as members of the military, set the example for the rest of the nation, but when I went in, they no longer cared whether I was black or white, immigrant (inaudible) or not.

The only thing my commanders ever told me, from 1958 through the rest of my career, is, can you perform?

And that's all we have ever asked for. And throughout our history, we have demonstrated, we can perform; let there be no doubt about it.

(APPLAUSE)

And so, we must never forget what went before. As we celebrate 9981, as we celebrate all that has been achieved in the 60 years since 9981, as we celebrate all of the distinguished who are here, present, representing every part of the American mosaic, we must never forget; we must never let our children forget; we must never let future generations forget the sacrifice that was made by so many people.

We must never let them forget our history. Because it is our history that informs our present and gives us a vision to the future.

And that history is a mixed one: glorious valor on the part of African-American throughout our military experience, but segregation, racism, Jim Crowism. All of that is part of our history.

And we can teach our youngsters that history, and at the same time say to them, look where we are now; look where we have come. We are closer and closer to being that more perfect union that our founding fathers spoke of so often.

And as we have gone forward; as we have found a better life in this great country of ours, let us remember that there are still minorities in our country, African-American, Hispanics, others, who are not in the military, who are still looking for that dream, who still need to be helped.

(APPLAUSE)

Let us not rest on our laurels, either with the 9981 or the Voting Rights, or the Civil Rights Acts of 1964, 1965, or all that's followed. Let's not rest on our laurels as long as there is one young kid out there who grows up wondering, "Can I dream in America? Can I go to the very top?"

The answer has to be, "Yes, you can." And we have to make that dream a reality by, each and every one of us reaching down, back and across to make sure that that kid's life has been touched by an adult who believes in him; by teaching that youngster the history of our country, all aspects of the history, and making sure they realize that they and we live in a great country, a great country that rests on a value system that is like none other in the world or none other in history; that we all were created equal, and we were given those inalienable rights not by a government but by a creator.

And we have to make sure that those rights, those inalienable rights belong to all Americans.

Thank you. God bless you. And thank Harry Truman.