

## **Respecting Our Troops; The cases of Spec. Jimenez and Pfc. Soriano**

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### **Body**

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AMID THE din and venom of the debate over illegal immigration, the cases of Spec. Alex R. Jimenez of Lawrence, Mass., and Pfc. Armando Soriano of Houston deserve notice. Spec. Jimenez, of the 10th Mountain Division, disappeared in May when his Army convoy was attacked south of Baghdad. Pfc. Soriano, of the Army's 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment, died three years ago when his vehicle rolled off the road in Iraq. The two men are missed and mourned by friends and family, in both cases including illegal immigrants who have faced the threat of deportation.

In the case of Spec. Jimenez, the problem involved his Dominican-born wife, who entered the country illegally in 2001. She was living under threat of deportation until, amid a flurry of media reports concerning her missing husband, U.S. authorities suddenly granted her a green card in June. As for Pfc. Soriano, who was born in the United States, his father, a Mexican national who entered the country illegally, continues to face deportation proceedings despite the government's decision to allow Pfc. Soriano's relatives to apply for green cards following his death, according to the Houston Chronicle.

Their cases are unusual but hardly unique. An estimated 68,000 active-duty military personnel were born in foreign countries, and 8,000 others enlist every year, a third of them Mexican or Central American. Nearly half of them are not citizens of the United States. Although undocumented immigrants are not legally eligible for service in the U.S. armed forces, there are numerous instances of some who used phony green cards to enlist. No one knows how many soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines have relatives who lack papers, but given that 12 million such people are in the country, it is probably not insubstantial. In some parts of immigrant-rich communities like Los Angeles, large percentages of those who enlist in the military are foreign-born residents of the United States.

There is a long history of immigrants serving in the American military, dating to the Revolutionary War. Acknowledging their contribution to the current war efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, President Bush signed an order in 2002 that allowed thousands of immigrants serving in the armed forces to apply for citizenship on an expedited basis. The president's policy is a just reward for those who have put their lives on the line for their adopted country, despite the cramped arguments of anti-immigration activists who say that it has merely bought their service.

What is too often lost in the fight over illegal immigrants is how deeply ingrained they have become in America's life, economy and culture. To imagine that 12 million people can be swept up in raids, deported or driven out of the

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country by mean-spirited laws is fantasy, and it fails to take into account the reality of assimilation already taking place. Anyone who doubts that need only consider the friends and family of **Spec. Jimenez** and **Pfc. Soriano**.

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