

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2023

Remarks at a White House Screening of "Flamin' Hot"

June 15, 2023

The First Lady. Hello. Thank you. And welcome to the White House.

It's wonderful to see so many friends here today. And can we get another round of applause for Mariachi Vagas—Vargas.

The President. Where are they? [Laughter]

The First Lady. This country is and has always been defined by "We, the People." With varied backgrounds and beliefs, each of us makes our Nation and remakes it in big ways and small ones: when we create and innovate, when we raise families and start businesses, when we run for office or show up to volunteer.

We are millions of individuals who add up to something so much bigger than any one of us. And all of us deserve to have our stories told, respected, and heard.

Richard helped change the way companies think about Latino customers, helped establish that this community and the economic power it holds deserve to be taken seriously.

But this film isn't just about Richard. It's about everyone who has been overlooked and underestimated, but reached for a dream anyway. It's about sacrifice and love and partnership—how when someone sees the possibility that you hold, you can find the courage to take risks and rise to the top, no matter what stands in your way.

And it's about the entire community who came together to make this movie possible. Of course, that effort has been led by the incomparable Eva Longoria.

Eva, as an actress, a producer, director, nonprofit founder, and entrepreneur, you have worked tirelessly to tell the stories of your community. And you've done so much to lift up the women, especially Latinas, who want to follow in your footsteps starting businesses and shaping politics and changing our world. We're honored to screen your movie here today.

When we fight for what we believe in, when we embrace what makes us unique, what makes us stand out, the world becomes a more beautiful place to be. And as you lead and as you fight for what you believe in, remember that Joe and I stand with you.

Now it's my pleasure to welcome Eva to the mike. Eva!

Actor, producer, and director Eva Longoria. So amazing. Oh my gosh! Woo! Thank you, guys. Thank you, Dr. Biden. Woo, we're at the White House!

I—when we set out to make this movie, I never imagined a night like this would be possible. It's a dream I didn't even know I had. So thank you to the Bidens for making this come true for—for not only me, for our entire cast that's here; for Latinos everywhere who deserve to have their stories told.

And I'm so happy that I'm here with y'all tonight at the people's house because this truly is a people's story. When our producer, DeVon Franklin, came to me with Richard's story, I was so inspired. And I was also ashamed that I didn't know his story. I'm Mexican American. He's Mexican American. How come we don't hear about the heroes in our community?

And I became obsessed with being the only person who could tell his story. I was inspired. And I thought: I am Richard Montañez. I've been told no. I've been told, "Ideas don't come from people like you." "You're a woman. Maybe you shouldn't do that job."

And Richard dared to ask: "But why not me? Why can't I be great?" So——

The President. You are great.

Ms. Longoria. [Laughter] So, as you may heard—have heard already, Richard Montañez disrupted the food industry in the nineties by channeling his Mexican American heritage to help turn Flamin' Hot Cheetos into a multibillion-dollar brand today and a cultural phenomenon.

We are telling a story that celebrates the American entrepreneurial dream without sidestepping the fact that the dream isn't available in the same way for everyone.

We know that even though talent is evenly distributed in this world, opportunities have not been, which is why we rarely get to see movies where we are the heroes, let alone a janitor turned corporate executive.

So I knew I wanted to highlight his story, his life, and the importance and power of the Latino community within American culture. So we worked hard to produce this authentic film steeped in inclusion both in front of and behind the camera.

We have a brilliant Chicano Mexicano cast, with our lead actors—led by our lead actors Jesse Garcia and Annie Gonzalez, Bobby Soto, Brice Gonzalez, Emilio Rivera, Jimmy Gonzales. We have so many amazing talents in this movie, and also with our brilliant writer, Linda Yvette Chávez.

And we proved that when we tell our stories, we tell great American stories, because American history is Latino history; Latino history is American history.

So now we get to bring this story to *La Casa Blanca* under an administration that believes in our community and shares our values. And that's very, very important.

We have a lot of work to do, you guys. There's a lot of work coming, and we have to make sure that entrepreneurs and visionaries like Richard have the opportunities and that infrastructure of opportunity to make their dreams a reality. And that can only happen when you have leaders like President Biden.

So throughout Biden's career—I've been working with President Biden for many, many years, and it has always been a great joy; we share so much—he's been a champion for working people in search of the American Dream. You know, what he's been doing for the country means there's going to be a lot more Richard Montañezes ready and waiting to take their shot to make history.

So it is my honor and sincere pleasure to introduce to you tonight the man who has been fighting for us all: fighting for Latinos, fighting for Americans, fighting for workers, and, most importantly, fighting for democracy. A man who understands and embodies the values of family, community, and perseverance.

Please help me welcome President Biden.

The President. My name is Joe Biden. I'm Jill Biden's husband.

Thank you, Eva, for that introduction. And congratulations on your debut——

Audience member. We love you!

The President. I accept. [Laughter]

——your debut as a director, adding another accomplishment to an already incredible, incredible career. We've known each other a long time. She was 17; I was 40. That's a—*[laughter]*.

And thank you—the entire cast and crew and everyone involved—for making this film. It reminds us of the power—and I mean this sincerely—the power of diversity, hope, and opportunity, which is the American story—American story—the story I see in all of you: Members of Congress that are here, members of my Cabinet that are here, my fellow Americans all across the country.

As Jill said, it's important to show the country all our stories—all our stories. That's why we're honored to host you, the first-ever public screening of a film focused on the Hispanic community at the White House, the people's house—your house.

Jill and Eva described the film. Let me add this: When I think about tonight's movie, I think about courage. So many of you, your ancestors left behind all that they knew to start a new life in the United States, a nation—a nation—that's more than just a place.

We're unique in all of history, America. America is not based on ethnicity or religion or—we're founded on an idea. For real. That's what makes it—an idea: We hold these truths to be self-evident, all men and women are created equal, endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights—*[applause]*—no, I'm—we've never fully lived up to it. We've never lived up to it, but we've never abandoned it. And we keep trying to make it better.

You know, since our founding, the very idea of America has nurtured, enriched, and advanced by the contributions and the sacrifice and dreams of immigrants and all their descendants.

Like so many of you, like my family and Jill's from Ireland and from Italy, we look and see American families all across—and most of us came because we were persecuted. Most of us came because we weren't welcome where we were. And when we got here, we had to fight like hell to be recognized—to fight like hell to be recognized.

That's why it's fitting we host this screening during Immigrant Heritage Month—*[applause]*—that's what this is—the time when we celebrate the country's immigrant heritage. I want to see—I want you to know, Jill and I, we see you, we value you. We are indirectly a part of you because of our heritage as well in different ethnicities. But when we came, we were not welcome.

You know, and I'll never stop fighting for you, I promise you. Because fighting for you—by the way, I love when people say, "Well, why do we spend so much"—do you realize that 26 out of every 100 students in grades kindergarten through 12 speak Spanish?

No, think about it. What in the hell—heck are we talking about here? *[Laughter]*

Today is important for another reason. It marks the 11th anniversary of DACA—Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals—one of the proudest accomplishments of the Obama-Biden administration. This has transformed the lives of hundreds of thousands of "dreamers" who were brought here as children, who only know America as their home, who make invaluable contributions to our Nation.

Audience member. Here to stay!

The President. As I—you're damn right, you are. I promise you.

I said in my State of the Union Address we have to provide a pathway to citizenship for "dreamers"—those—also, those on temporary status, farm workers, essential workers. I'm going to continue to call on Congress to pass this bill that does just that, we've been pushing.

Folks, look—[*applause*—this is important because there are those who've made clear that they don't see you, don't want you in America's future. They demonize the community, undermine the security of this community, you know, and erase the history and contributions of the community. It's outrageous.

We have to speak out. My dad used to use an expression that came from his generation: Silence is complicity. And we will not be silent. Period. I mean it. I mean it.

I—let me close with this. Last summer, I had the honor of bestowing the Presidential Medal of Freedom on distinguished Americans, including Juliet Garcia, the first Latina to serve as a college president in American history.

And here's what she said. She said, "My job was always to thrust open doors of opportunity." "My job was always to thrust open doors of opportunity." That's my job as well: thrust open doors of opportunity.

And tonight's film is a reminder of that essential truth: opportunity. It's a cornerstone of our democracy and the American Dream. And as you'll see in the film, that's exactly what the Hispanic community embodies: opportunity and courage.

And let me say one more thing. I've said it before. Nights like this are a reminder of the power of stories, the importance of treating storytellers with dignity and—I mean this sincerely. Maybe it's because I'm Irish I think that. But it—[*laughter*].

And by the way, I'm always quoting Irish poets. My colleagues always would kid me. They think that it's because I was Irish. It's not the reason. They happen to be the best poets in the world. That's why I do it. [*Laughter*]

But all kidding aside, you've got to treat everybody with dignity and respect and the value they deserve. Tell the stories of our Nation. Tell the stories of all of us.

Ladies and gentlemen, here from the White House, Jill and I are honored to present "Flamin' Hot."

May God bless you, and may God protect our troops.

Thank you, thank you, thank you. Enjoy the film. Enjoy your house. Enjoy the grounds. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Audience members. Si, se puede! Si, se puede! Si, se puede!

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 8:20 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on June 16.

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