

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Remarks at a Black History Month Reception

February 6, 2024

The President. Well, Nijel, thank you for that introduction. Where's Mom and Dad?

Participant. Right there.

The President. Put your hands up so everybody can see you.

Dad, you knew that expression: God made man, then he made a few firefighters. *[Laughter]* God love you. An incredible family. And I need a commitment from you, old buddy, that when you're President and they say, "Joe Biden is in the waiting room," you remember who I am. *[Laughter]* All right?

I think that's important—*[laughter]*—because I don't want to be forgotten by you. *[Laughter]*

Look, folks, the fact is, to all of you, on behalf of Jill and me, happy Black History Month from the White House.

Let me just say we are really fortunate to have a real leader, a true friend, and a historic Vice President, Kamala Harris. I not only asked her to join me, I love her. *[Laughter]* It's a good relationship.

She is doing an incredible job on everything from voting rights, to reproductive freedom, to economic opportunity, to foreign policy and national security, and so much more. We couldn't do this without you, Kamala, and that's a fact. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

And the same goes for Doug. He's a great friend. He also teaches now, these days. *[Laughter]* You guys don't teach at the same school, do you?

The First Lady. No.

The President. No. *[Laughter]*

There are so many friends here that if I were to acknowledge everyone, I'd be—we'd be here until next Black History Month. *[Laughter]* But look, folks, we will be back here next year. This community is the reason why I'm standing here—this community.

And a special thanks to members of our Cabinet and our military. I promised the administration would look like America, and I'm proud to have the most diverse administration in all of American History.

And a special thanks to the Congressional Black Caucus, who are key partners in the progress we're making.

And thanks to all of you elected officials, like Governor Wes Moore. Gov, where are you? Watch this guy. *[Laughter]* Watch this guy. He won in spite of my campaigning for him. *[Laughter]*

Civil rights leaders, business leaders, educators, artists, and so much more, I sincerely mean it: I am President and Kamala is Vice President because of you. You've had my back, and I've—we've had your back, and we always will.

Kamala just talked about the power of Black history that is an American History. Black excellence, culture, resilience. Heroes known and unknown who inspired a nation.

But as Kamala described, you know, as you—all of you know, that proud history has always been shadowed by sinister forces—always—trying to erase our history, trying to deny freedoms to—those who seek to dim the brilliance of our Nation's North Star.

That's the very idea of America—the very idea of America. And you know that we're all created equal, in the image of God, deserve to be treated equally throughout our lives. We've never fully lived up to that, but we've never walked away from it before—because of you and your ancestors before you and because of all of the progress we've made together, building a democracy that recognizes the inherent dignity of all of us.

My dad's favorite word was "dignity." Every—he used to say: "A job is about a lot more than a paycheck, Joey. It's about your dignity. It's about honor. It's about respect."

And that's what everyone deserves—to grant each of us the power to shape our collective destiny. A democracy with dignity rooted in freedom, fairness, opportunity, and justice and truth—truth—based on promises made and promises kept, a recognition that we all have promises to keep.

So tonight let's reflect on how we make history, not erase history. You know?

And may we reflect on this wisdom. As you entered the White House, you heard the choir from St. Augustine's Church here in Washington. St. Augustine's Church once—[*applause*]. St. Augustine once said, "Singing is praying twice."

Well, I felt that power over a week ago when I attended Sunday service at Saint John's Baptist Church in Columbia, South Carolina—the church that's home to our very own former mayor—Columbia mayor, Steve Benjamin. There's Steve over there.

The pastor, Reverend Graham, preached a powerful sermon. He reminded us, no matter how dark the hour, the power is in our hands—it really is—to find light. Then he said history is in our hands to build a future within the—our reach.

My friends, we face a moment of real choosing. And I mean it sincerely. It's not hyperbole. In this moment, may we choose to be the light and make real the promise of America for all Americans. May we make clear that, in America, we still believe in honesty, decency, dignity, respect—where we leave no one behind; where everyone deserves a shot; where we give no—we give hate no safe harbor.

May we remember what our late friend John Lewis would say. He said: "Democracy is not a state. It's an act." "Democracy is not a state. It's an act." Through this Black History Month and each day we feel the grace of God, let's act. Let us act in light and truth and freedom. The power really is in our hands. It's not hyperbole—it's in our hands.

Let's remember who in the hell we—who—[*laughter*]. Let's remember who we are. [*Laughter*] We are the United States of America, and there is simply nothing—nothing—beyond our capacity when we act together and do it together.

So God bless you all, and may God protect our troops.

Please enjoy—[*applause*]—please enjoy the performance that's about to begin.

All right. We're going to walk off here and get our performance—[*laughter*].

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:48 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Nijel B. Murray, founder, Klothes 4 Kids, and his parents Shon and Duane Murray; Douglas C. Emhoff, husband of Vice President Kamala D. Harris; Gov. Westley W.O. "Wes" Moore of Maryland; and Office of Public Engagement Director Stephen K. Benjamin. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on February 7.

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