



## **Citizens by Choice**

### **Women in Business Leadership**

June 11, 2008

Many Americans are surprised to learn that there is a large and growing group of immigrant women entrepreneurs and business leaders who are rapidly making their mark in the U.S. business sector, in every region of the country and across a wide range of industries. On June 11, 2008 the National Archives Experience presented a discussion program that explored the challenges these women face, and how have they used gender and nationality as strengths in building their businesses. This program was generously supported by the William G. McGowan Charitable Fund, Inc.

#### **Part II: Panel Discussion**

WJLA news anchor Maureen Bunyan moderates a panel including women business leaders who are also naturalized U.S. citizens: Yolanda Maria Welch, CEO, Respira Medical; Maria de Lourdes Sobrino, founder and CEO, Lulu's Dessert Corporation; Sheela Murthy, founder, president, and managing attorney, Murthy Law Firm; Shirley Nathan-Pulliam, Maryland state representative and executive director/owner, Extended Family Adult Daycare, Inc.; and Susan C. Pearce, professor of sociology, East Carolina University, and author of *Immigrating Women*.

**THORA COLOT:** Now I'm going to be introducing our moderator for the evening--Maureen Bunyan. Ms. Bunyan had been a veteran television news broadcaster and a news anchor



for WJLA, ABC-7. Previously Ms. Bunyan operated her own communications consulting business and served as chief correspondent for "Religion & Ethics News Weekly" a PBS

news magazine based here in Washington, D.C. She has served as lead news anchor of WUSA-9 and hosted the award-winning weekly news magazine program "22:26 with Maureen Bunyan" and "Studio Nine." In recognition of her significant contribution to broadcasting, for over 35 years Ms. Bunyan has received numerous honors, including 7 local Emmys. She was named Journalist of the Year by the National Association of Black Journalists, and she received the annual Immigration Achievement Award from the American Immigration Law Foundation in 2002.

Now, I know that many of you feel the same way that I do that you know her well because she has been a familiar and a very well-respected face in our homes over many, many evenings over the years. It is really my pleasure to not only welcome our panelists and our distinguished guests this evening, but Maureen Bunyan to the stage.

Thank you very much.

[Applause]

**MAUREEN BUNYAN:** Thank you so much for the introduction. It's a great pleasure to be here, and it's my pleasure especially because I, too, am an immigrant. I'm not a business owner, but I admire, admire all women business owners, and I certainly have grown over the years, to admire immigrant women business owners, and when you hear the stories and the anecdotes that these women have for us tonight you're going to admire them very, very much.

Before we start, I want to tell you a couple of things. This panel is called Citizens by Choice, so we are dealing with people who came to this country by choice, sometimes a difficult choice to make, I'm sure for many of them, but also they came and they seemed to realize that America had something to offer. I know that some of you in this audience are also immigrants, and I think you might find that the theme tonight will resonate with your experience. We're going to have a discussion with them and then we're going to open up to Q&A, as was mentioned so we want to hold some time for that. I want to also remind our panelists and the audience that we are being recorded and that this program will be shown on the National Archives website. Keep that in mind in this electronic age. You will not be seen on YouTube --

[Laughter]

-- but we can't guarantee that. Now, there are very complete biographies of our panelists in your program, and I hope you've had a chance to look at them before the program started, but let me tell you first a little bit, if I may, about myself and then I'd like to present our panelists.



My family is from Guyana, originally. My parents--hey, go, Guyana! We have the other guy who's a resident of the Washington area here.

**SHEELA MURTHY:** No, no, she's in my law firm.

**BUNYAN:** Oh, she works for you, Sheela? Very good. A lawyer.

**MURTHY:** My very able assistant, my super duper A-plus assistant.

**BUNYAN:** Wow. There's a raise for you coming in pretty soon. My parents emigrated from Guyana to Aruba in the 1930s to work, because of work opportunities, and then we emigrated, after I was born and my sisters were born from Aruba to Wisconsin, also because--I hear a chuckle or two there—also because of economic issues and educational issues.

My father, my parents, like so many of our parents wanted better education for all of us, and they certainly saw the opportunities here in this country. And I grew up with a motto that my father gave to me one day when I was about 11 or so and I was really fed up because in southeastern Wisconsin, our family was the only family of color and the only immigrant family in the entire county in which we lived.

So all the time, everywhere we went, people would stop us and, you know, kind of look us up and down, and if they had the temerity to ask who we were, they would talk to us and ask us questions about how come we spoke and blah blah blah and where we were from.

And I got annoyed with this, and I complained to my dad one day, and he said to me, "It is not your job"-- rather, "It is not their job"--meaning the people who were asking questions and looking curiously at me and my sisters--"It is not their job to figure out who you are. It is your job to show them who you are."

And that has been sort of one of the guiding tenets of my life, certainly my professional life, and it's kept me out of trouble and probably caused some trouble, and I suspect that for these ladies, that motto might also hold true. Many of us who come to this country as immigrants are here to show who we are because we have the opportunity here to do that.

Now, it's a great pleasure for me to present our panelists, and in order to do this, after 35 years of broadcasting under those bright lights--it has nothing to do with my age--I need my glasses.

[Laughter]



Let me present attorney Sheila Murthy. She is the founder, president, and managing attorney of the Murthy Law Firm in Baltimore County, Maryland.

**MURTHY:** And half the audience here is from my firm.

**BUNYAN:** Excellent. All the lawyers are here. And her firm of 70 professionals concentrates in the area of U.S. immigration law. Thank you for all you do. She's on the board of trustees of the American Immigration Law Foundation, and she was born in India.

Delegate Shirley Nathan-Pulliam is here with us. She was first elected to the Maryland House of Delegates in 1994, and she has been serving over 14 years. She is the first Caribbean-born person elected to the Maryland General Assembly in its 380-year history. She was born in Jamaica, she is a registered nurse and she's the owner, president, and CEO of two companies, Extended Family Daycare Incorporated and Nathan's Network. Both companies provide personal care services to clients in their homes and adult medical daycare services for the elderly and the disabled. So she has 3 jobs, literally. She's a delegate to the Maryland House a politician. She is the CEO and runs two businesses. We know that keeps her off the streets at night.

[Laughter]

Maria de Lourdes Sobrino is the founder and CEO of Lulu's Dessert Corporation, based in Anaheim, California. Her company has become a leading player in the ready-to-eat gelatin dessert industry. She's Mexican-born. She has not brought any samples with us today.

**MARIA de LOURDES SOBRINO:** Sorry. I can't.

**BUNYAN:** She didn't get the e-mail. She has received many awards from national and international civic and business organizations. She's given of her time and talent, serving on the boards of "Latina Style Magazine" and the National Hispanic Business Women Association among many other groups.

Also with us, Yolanda Maria Welch, who is the founder and CEO of Respira Medical, a respiratory and durable medical equipment home care company, and her company is based in Baltimore. She employs 55 health care professionals. In recognition of her Hispanic heritage--she was of Colombian descent—her company is named Respira which in Spanish means "to breathe." She has chaired the Maryland Governor's Commission on Hispanic Affairs and is past president of the Baltimore Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.

Also with us, Susan Pearce. Susan is the Visiting Assistant Professor of Sociology at West Virginia University. She will be joining the Sociology faculty of East Carolina University this fall, and she's the co-author of the book *Immigrating Woman*, to be published by New York University Press, and she's currently researching the topics of gender and U.S.



immigration and collective memory of race relations in the United States, among other very, very interesting subjects.

**SUSAN PEARCE:** Thank you, Maureen.

**BUNYAN:** I want to start with Susan. Susan is our--I guess we can call you our academic presence here, and she has done a tremendous amount of research on the issue of immigrant women as well as immigrant women business owners. Susan, it's a unique area to research, and I read one of your papers, one that you wrote in 2005, and I was surprised to read that you noted that the percentage of immigrant women business owners is greater than the percentage of American-born women business owners. Tell us a little bit about this and set the scene for the lives of these women.

**SUSAN PEARCE:** Sure. I'll be glad to. Can everyone hear me? This research actually reveals that the rates of business ownership among immigrant women was increasing actually faster than the rates of male immigrant entrepreneurship, which is kind of leveling off over the years, and one of the questions that came to mind was why? You know, what is going on? Why this increase?

It's an almost 5-fold increase from 1980 to 2000 to the year 2000, if you look at the decennial census data. And I have been talking to a lot of people, including the people here on the panel, to try to find out what's going on, and I think there are a number of trends that we can point to.

One is basically that global migration of women has really increased, and the women who are moving are women who are maybe different from the grandmothers that were once immigrating to this country. A lot of women today are--sometimes they are independent. Sometimes they're single. Sometimes they are the leaders in the chain migration for their families, where once the men were doing that.

Often they are the breadwinner, the only breadwinner or are one of the breadwinners in the family, and it's kind of a different situation. A lot of women come already with skills and with education that they've gotten in their home country, partly to do with the global women's movement who have made those opportunities available and as I've talked to people, I've asked them why it was, you know, what stimulated you to go into this business? And I found a lot of answers from people who needed some kind of flexibility for their families, for their family lives; people who were finding a lot of exploitation in the workplace. They were underpaid. They were overworked. They weren't getting the challenge they wanted. One woman told me about a firm she was working for. There was an economic downturn, and everyone except native-born whites were fired, and she was Asian, so she set off on her own, and there are also people sometimes leaving--seeing



business ownership as a way to leave a domestic situation that is not going well for them. So there's a whole range, a mix of motives that drew women into these businesses, and I'd like to say just a couple of things about the economic meaning of this.

One thing I've learned from economists is how important entrepreneurship is for an economy, because it's the small businesses, it's the new businesses, that are actually the ones that are going to grow and be the engine of the economy. The older, established businesses are not quite as dynamic as these, so it's very important what these women are doing. And also, there's this question that keeps coming up--are the immigrants taking our jobs, right? One of the things that economists say is there is no finite number of jobs in any economy, and if we count the collective number of jobs, employees that these women here employ, I counted 224 collectively, plus the number that we heard earlier, and many of these are native-born people that are getting these jobs and I think these women can tell you more about other things they're doing to actually contribute to our culture and economy.

**BUNYAN:** Right. Susan, thank you so much. First of all, I want to make sure our panel knows

you can jump in and add anything to anybody's comments. I want to start with Sheela. Sheela you started an immigration law firm. You've got some great representatives of the firm here. Why law in the first place, and why a law firm? Certainly in the Washington area I think, when you started your firm immigration law was not in great demand.

**MURTHY:** Yeah. Well, if anyone is familiar with India in India, if you're not a doctor or an engineer you are a moron, and if you're a lawyer, you're a sub-moron. It's true, but I believed in women and women's rights and I believed in justice, and, you know like everybody who's very idealistic I believed in changing the world and I said, "I'm gonna do--" First, I said History and Political Science in college and then law school and only when I got admission into Harvard Law School for my LLM when I moved from India to come here to do my education, at that point my dad felt like I wasn't really somebody he needs to be ashamed of any longer, almost which was really a good feeling, I guess but I've always wanted to do law and I've always felt like, as a lawyer we can really make a much stronger impact. Only when I came to America did I realize that there were nasty lawyer jokes in this country but until then, always for me was a driving passion and a burning passion to change the world and I think in the world of immigration law when we help clients, a lot of them even if they work with companies or with families ultimately, it's individual lives we're changing and I feel like it's like the work of the Lord or a mission. I know I'm not a preacher, but you change lives forevermore when you make people live the American dream give them an opportunity to change their families' lives and many of them send money back to their home countries so now you're helping the world economy, you know, people.



So, when you look at your work as a much larger picture it gives more meaning and excitement and passion and it makes you feel so excited to go to work every day and to feel like we can really change lives and if you convey your passion and your excitement and your enthusiasm to every member in your team we, in turn, can change the lives of those people but they, in turn, can, when they deal with clients change all of those lives and families.

So, for me, immigration law has a very personal impact having gone through the process--very personal, very intense process--and it really is exciting to feel like we can really help people live their American dream.

**BUNYAN:** You haven't lost your passion, obviously after all these years. That's just a marvelous, marvelous story. Let me ask a second question of our lady Maria de Lourdes with a dessert. What a unique business and I know, hearing from Ms. McGowan about her catering business and some of the challenges that she's had you must have had, and probably still do have some interesting challenges in a business that, I would assume, not many Hispanic women go into which is food preparation, food sales, and food marketing.

**SOBRINO:** Exactly. Well, let me tell you briefly that, really, my background was not food. I was in the travel industry. That was my world. That was my company in Mexico that I had and I was moving groups and conventions around Mexico and then my customers start asking me "Why don't you take us to Las Vegas and California and all these big places?" I said, "OK." So, part of my dream as a little kid, you know it was sometimes that I feel that need that Susan said about what is the border that we have.

I felt limited in Mexico at that time, 25 years ago just thinking, "Why is it that we don't have the import "of candies and clothes and things that I used to come here and buy with my parents?"

and my curiosity really took me to this step of deciding coming to the U.S. That was really my motivation and my company gave me that motivation, too. So, I decided to expand my business to Los Angeles. That's where I chose my company, to start it and immediately, 3 months later after I came here we had a big crisis in Mexico with the devaluation of the peso so that really hurt my business. So, who knew that I was already here with all my legal documents and everything set up and then suddenly, your plan fails, not of your efforts.

It's really the economy, so I didn't want to give up and I said, "I need to find another niche or I'm gonna wait and see what happens with Mexico's economy," and one day-- things happen like this to entrepreneurs--my eyes were opened, as far as what else am I gonna do and then I wanted to buy a gelatin dessert because it's a tradition for us in Mexico to eat gelatina almost 3 times a day and my mom made it, and it just--



**BUNYAN:** We'd like to adopt that tradition, too.

**SOBRINO:** Yeah. Well, so that's why, really, it started, the idea and then my research was, I just went to supermarkets and stores and said, "I didn't find the gelatinas" and my neighbors said "Well, why don't you start making some samples?" So, I went to Tijuana, bought my ingredients. I started making samples, and then from there, the idea "Well, why don't you start a business and put your savings there and put your nickname Lulu?" That's my nickname--Lulu. So, that's what really started the food industry. I didn't have no idea what I was talking about. I didn't have no idea that I was gonna stay here. That's another thing, my

business, really. I was so curious about the development of the business that I'm the only one until now, 26 years later living here in the United States when my whole family live in Mexico and now, even my two daughters went back to Mexico and they live there. I'm just kind of home alone here but I'm enjoying so much my learning process of being here in the United States and I've become a citizen and I was so proud when I became a citizen except it was not part of my plan.

It was not part of my plan having a food company. It was not part of my plan to write a book about my story. It was not part of my plan, so many projects that I have done. So, I just feel very, very proud that I took that decision of coming to the United States being part of my life and about your question about the tough business of being in the food industry, yes, it's tough but I really like the challenge. We're having difficult times right now, like anybody with manufacturing, but manufacturing, I think, is-- I have a passion, a passion. You have to have a passion. Whatever you do, you need to love it and that's where I think believing in myself--Do you know how many people laughed at my idea of having gelatinas and selling them with a little jar 300 cups a day that I was doing? Today we sell about 50 million cups a year of gelatin

and we distribute to supermarkets\ but that was the reason, really, that made me continue with that idea because it was me that I want to prove not only to me, honestly, to my dad, my parents. They said, "Oh, she's gonna come back, you know"--"fracasada," that we said in Spanish--"and she's gonna fail," and I didn't want to do it. It was something that was a personal goal that I said, "My parents are not gonna see me going back and say, I told you so." I said no. It was my pride. I said, "I'm gonna do it. I'm gonna make it" and I really liked the process, so until now I still continue learning so much about being an entrepreneur. There's no limit. We started so small. We continued growing and there's different growing pains but it's part of the process.

**MURTHY:** Man, she was alluding to the hard work and that stuff and I know when I switched--because I joined the big firms from "Harvard Journal," the big firms-- I thought, "Well, I'll start

my own firm because I'll be able to get more time for myself." Yeah, right. All of you here in the audience that are in the entrepreneurs or business, it's like a million hours and you



still are, middle of the night, waking up panicking and worrying about what it is, and in the big law firms

they make you work 12 or 14 or 16-hour days and I thought, "I'll have a normal life." Yeah, right. So, sounds like she only worked a million hours to do what she did.

**BUNYAN:** She learned her lesson. Shirley, I'd like to ask you about your business and specifically—as a Caribbean-American person a Caribbean-born person--I like to think that we have a special gift as entrepreneurs. Certainly, in the Caribbean and in much of Latin America also people have to start businesses just to survive. It's not a matter of a choice, but here, of course in this country, there's a choice because people have the option of getting a job working for somebody. You worked for somebody because you still are a nurse and you were a nurse.

Then you decided that you were going to have other people work for you. What is there about your personal background--your ethnic background, your Jamaican background and values and culture--that allowed you to think so creatively and so independently?

**SHIRLEY NATHAN-PULLIAM:** As a little girl, age 9 I decided I wanted to be a nurse and I never changed my mind. My neighbors said I was the most political little girl they've ever met, and as I got older become a young mother I went to school in England, and I came here. As a young mother working and juggling taking my kids to school I keep saying, "I want to do my own business. I want to be more autonomous. I don't want to be able to report to someone and have them critique me and evaluate me." I got a little bit annoyed when those things came about so I decided, yes, they needed to go.

**MURTHY:** But now every client, every patient is your critique.

**NATHAN-PULLIAM:** Well, that's true, but it's a different story when you're--I have a lot of patience if you're ill and so I decided then that I would start a health care company but it didn't happen right then. After finishing nursing school, I quickly decided that I wanted to get into organization so I started serving on boards and commissions and starting to learn more about the process and the business process, and I began to serve on a board with folks like Raymond Haysbert who was the president of Parks Sausage and those are the folks and Dorothy Brunson who started her first radio program and television program so that I could kind of get a sense of business and I began to learn about African-Americans and the business and some of the racism and discrimination that exists and the problems they were faced with but as a Caribbean woman, I learned there's a statement. I have it framed in my office, and it says "We women must close our eyes and walk in the dark." So, it's really about taking risks and I decided that I was gonna take the risk and move my business forward and as I provided nursing care, going in and out of the homes in Baltimore City and Baltimore County and I saw some of the needs that existed I thought that, huh, I wanted to develop my own adult medical day care center for the elderly and for the disabled that, as a place, extended families a part of their family, that it can come and



spend a beautiful day where they have a registered nurse to monitor their vital signs and give them their medication and do everything and a physician to oversee what is happening and nurse's aides and occupational therapists and social worker to work with their needs so that that whole person is addressed and that gave me a special kind of pride and, as you said before starting that business was not easy. There are many days I find myself in there with a paintbrush painting and old jeans and taking things back and I had the architect design my center and I want it this way, and I want it that way and, yes, I worked long hours, and keep in mind that I also had another business the personal care business that I have going in the homes. This is where I saw the needs because that was a much smaller business and then I moved towards the day care.

So, it's just that inner passion and drive that you want to see people happy] and when I walk in my center, whether you're Alzheimer's whether you had a stroke, whether you have dementia

whatever your problem is, I come alive when I walk in and hear the patients talking and being a part of the--You know, just getting an embrace and hug.

There's a lady in my center that reminds me of my own mother and when my own mother had a stroke that even pushed me further that I needed to do this and so I enjoy every bit of it each day.

**BUNYAN:** Thank you. Thank you, Shirley. Now, Yolanda, as an immigrant woman I wonder what advice you would give to young women about starting businesses. Many young women do come to this country. Many of them come and get education, of course and I wonder if the business schools are full of immigrant women. I don't know what the statistic are about that. Maybe Susan knows, but I wonder if they're really being inspired to become business owners in a more formal way. If our audience were all--Let's make you 20 to 24 years old.

**YOLANDA MARIA WELCH:** I like that.

**BUNYAN:** Use your imagination.

**WELCH:** Can we be 20 to 24, too?

**BUNYAN:** Sure. Of course, of course. We're part of the group. What would you tell us about why you should start your own business as a non-native American?

**WELCH:** OK. Well, I guess, also, to let you know even though I was born here, I lived in South America and very much raised 100% Latina. My first language was Spanish. I lived in Colombia, as well. I'm actually, just to give you a little background so that I can answer your question I'm a product of a very traditional Latino family and I was promised in marriage at 12. I was married at the age of 14.



**BUNYAN:** -14?

**WELCH:** 14 in a beautiful Cinderella-like wedding in Colombia, and my parents wanted to keep me a good girl because I really was a good kid. Really, honestly, if I could put that in a bottle and sell it to parents--I was very devoted to my family and our roots and when they made that decision--My mother will tell me now--My father, he since has passed away but she says to me, "It was out of our own ignorance of not knowing, and it was wanting the best for you" and, believe me, many years of therapy after that --

[Laughter]

--you know, whew, trying to figure that one out there was a lot of resentment. I'm figuring now, "What was that all about? You're good, and this is how you pay me back send me to a

country, and you leave me with some man I don't know? That's great." However, my life's challenges along the way--my second marriage, survived domestic violence I'd been homeless--so I guess what happened with me is that entrepreneurship found me, in a way and at the time that it happened it was a time where I had nothing. I had no credit. I had absolutely lost everything we had and my father was dying of asbestos exposure chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and my mother was dedicated to him his last two years and his bed and taking care of him and the reason I tell you this is understanding, then why I became this entrepreneur. So, I saw, also, the quality of care in our home and it was very sad because my father was an iron worker and we were poor, but I didn't know it. I went to a private Catholic school, Notre Dame Prep which is a very elite school and all the Latino children that did go there were doctors' children or attorneys' children. There was no iron worker, blue collar child there so life was a little challenging at times. However, seeing what was happening--My father had wonderful insurance so we'd have people come in, drop equipment off not tell my mother what was going on and just ignoring her and also the language barrier. So, when I did have this opportunity it was way after my father passed. I sent my mother back to Costa Rica because I knew we were going to be homeless and my first husband and his wife the best stepmother in the world I could ever ask for my son. I always say that. They helped me with my son, but at that time I found myself with nothing, and I was asked through the Department of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation through unemployment if there was a business I would want to start, what would it be and I said, "How can I start one? I don't have anything. I have no credit. I'm homeless. I mean, how to you start a business when you can't even take care of your own family?" and they said, "Forget that, Maria. What would you do if you could?" and I said, "I would start a respiratory home care company and take care of patients and their families the caregivers, and treat each patient as a privilege to serve, not as just another number or a name on a sheet."



So, through an organization called Women Entrepreneurs of Baltimore which I am very proud of, they literally rebuilt me because it was a very emotional time and through--Susan knows them very well--their wonderful nurturing, I was afforded to put this business plan together having nothing and it's been now 7 years, and my company, though small 9.5 million this year, God willing and up to 60 employees, actually.

**BUNYAN:** -60 employees?

**WELCH:** -60 employees.

**BUNYAN:** And you, at one time, had no job and no home and now you provide jobs and homes for 60 people.

**WELCH:** And it's such a beautiful blessing and our state is actually rich with opportunities and what helped me even more was working with organizations like the House of Ruth who helped me through that terrible time and the United Way of Central Maryland which I'll forever

be indebted that strangers who contribute were really helping people like me who wanted a hand up, not a handout. So, in answering your question, there are so many opportunities. There's organizations such as the U.S. Hispanic Youth Entrepreneur Education that teach children entrepreneurship, as well but that college education is essential. So, there are so many best-kept secrets out there and there is opportunity, but you just need to find mentors. Find people that have gone through that path.

**BUNYAN:** Have you spoken to young people?

**WELCH:** Yes, ma'am. I consider it my obligation and my duty and Respira has afforded me the opportunity to share my story to shedding the light on like after domestic violence and the fact that there are resources and Sheela and I, we're with the United Way of Central Maryland.

I'm on their Board of Directors, as well and it's through meeting people like that who just-- They have time, talent, and treasure. Melanie Sabelhaus, who was the Deputy Administrator of the SBA, who's one of my mentors, very proud to say she's one of those people who take you under their wing and truly nurture you and help guide you. So, it was out of love that they did it.

Truly, you love a stranger--you do--someone who is just asking for some guidance and help and, to me, that is truly the gift.

**BUNYAN:** Quite a story, all incredible stories and just not only inspirational, but obviously showing the talent that these women have no matter where they have come from. Let me ask a couple of questions and any of you can respond.



**MURTHY:** Can I ask a really quick question about--Was it even legal in Colombia--I'm sorry; I'm a lawyer; I think everything legal—but legal to get married at 14? Because in India--it's true--a lot of families will fix the marriage at 6 or 8 or 10 and whatever, but it's illegal. The government of India says it's illegal. People violate the law, and you do all kinds of crooked things. Like here, we all drive above the speeding limit most of us, not all. Most of us do, but was it legal in Colombia?

**WELCH:** I hope so.

**MURTHY:** You hope so, or you hope not?

**WELCH:** No. Well, I mean, you know--

**MURTHY:** Even if it's illegal, the marriage is still binding. That's what it is in India. It's illegal, but everybody does it.

**WELCH:** To my knowledge, I do have a document and I'll tell you, now that you're saying this--

Oh, my God, this is gonna be on YouTube. I know it. The document did say--and this is years later when we're putting documents together--it did say I was 15, and I wasn't. I was 14. Oh, my God, this conspiracy theory. Oh, Lord.

**MURTHY:** No. You were too young to make a decision. You were statutorily incapable of saying--So--I just heard this--you are statutorily incapable under law of saying anything wrong. You were below age. You are underage. You are protected by the law.

**BUNYAN:** She just got about \$1,000 worth of legal advice for free.

**MURTHY:** But, talking about free, I think Maria and myself and, I'm sure, many others here one of the things that I love to do and I think most immigrant women do maybe even more than a lot of the Americans here is, we just really are so excited about being in this incredible land of milk and honey of great opportunity, and so we always want to give back even more than a lot of Americans. I always tell all my American friends "You're all spoiled. You're spoiled brats because you grew up expecting that you'll be fed and you'll get a home, and if you don't have work there's an unemployment office. In India, you don't work, you don't eat that day." There is no unemployment. That's a luxury of a rich nation and so because of the opportunities that we've gotten here, I know, I, for example our law firm, being an itty-bitty kind of law firm if you look at the size of large law firms in America we're one of the biggest charitable givers in Maryland. We're like number one, even bigger than the firm which has 500 lawyers, and we're that way because we feel like we want to give back to our country and help other people who don't have opportunities and I think



that immigrants do so much more for America than a lot of native Americans because, I think, you take it for granted. You do take it for granted.

**BUNYAN:** You know you are living in the United States now so watch out what you say about them.

**MURTHY:** I know.

**BUNYAN:** Ha ha! Thank you, Sheela. We understand. We understand completely. Susan, like many people, I was surprised to read your writing and the fact that immigrant women business owners are growing. The numbers are growing, but nobody seems to know about them. We, in the media, certainly have done a lot of stories and many of the stories focus on day laborers and I have done stories like that and you see the reporter standing in front of this long line of men who are usually Latinos and they're waiting for jobs and there's political controversy. Are they taking jobs away? Should the day labor center be here or there? And you just see men and, of course, these are not men who are working for themselves, obviously, but the male presence seems to be established in the business community in this country, but the female business owners' presence does not seem to be established in people's minds. Why is that, and what can we do about it?

**PEARCE:** Well, I guess my first question is why isn't the media telling us about it otherwise?

[Laughter]

**BUNYAN:** I know that game. I can play it, too.

**PEARCE:** I'm not sure completely I can tell you. There has been this image. When you hear the word "immigrant" there's the image of the male day laborer, right. The working-class Mexican or Central American man is kind of in our heads and also, when he hear "immigrant entrepreneurship we think about the old Jewish tailor shop and the Chinese restaurant and these things that we associate with the male entrepreneur and so somehow in our collective imagination we haven't moved forward and said, "Wait a minute. There are women who are really doing a lot of the same things that the men are doing in increasing numbers," and I guess we're just not stopping to think about it and notice it. It seems to be a very invisible sort of group of people. Maybe people are sort of doing their businesses sort of quietly. I don't know. Maybe there hasn't been a lot of promotion, media, research. Social scientists are to blame, as well. There hasn't been a lot of research on this at all so it's a number of sources for this.

**BUNYAN:** Do any of you think that you would benefit from more public attention?



**SOBRINO:** Well, I would like to share here that since 1998, I had the first article that came the local "Orange County Register" in my county because it was Cinco de Mayo and they thought it was by the way, Independence Day. That is not. So, they were looking. "OK. Can we find a Mexican business around here?" So, they found me, and, believe me since that article in 1998 the media has not stopped calling me because now--it's true--the numbers of Hispanics the growing numbers and the census also gave a lot of data. From there, especially women in business and especially my case, Latinas it's something important for the media. So, one thing that I didn't know about marketing, for instance that, until now, we don't have a budget for marketing but the best, best marketing that we have had is the press that we have had, the media.

**BUNYAN:** See, Susan?

**SOBRINO:** No, no, honestly, the media has come to us and they want to learn. They want to know more about the story what is behind our company but it has been the best press that we have had, really that has supported our company. So, Lulu's Desserts is well-known nationwide but not really from the paid marketing that you pay of advertisement but it has been through the media and so in my case, I would like to say, yes people and the media is supporting us but it's people that need to know more and want to read more about this.

**MURTHY:** But I think it doesn't help if people like Lou Dobbs and other people every night night after night for an hour badgering and focusing and making it sound like the word "immigrant" equals to "illegal immigrant" someone who sucks up money from our society uses it and exploits it.

**SOBRINO:** That has to stop. We need to be respected. We're contributors to our Society and we're businesspeople, and there's different kinds of immigrants that come to the country. There's these people that come with their own capital like in my case. I came from my own capital from Mexico and I put it, and I risk it here. I didn't have no credit. I didn't have nothing to support me financially until one day, I received an SBA Loan but it was like 10 years later, I started my business.

So, those are the things that are important that people come and bring also capital here to the United States. That's why I talked about taking risk. That's a real good opportunity. Bring in your own money because, the same with me when I went out to look at the SBA loans I looked at it different. When I looked at the percentage that I had to pay back I thought, "Hmm, maybe--" and I did what they say you're not supposed to do. I actually loaned myself the money by using my CDs and a couple of things to get startup and once I got the startup going, then I was OK. I just didn't want to be burdened and saddled with all the money so sometimes you just have to start a little bit smaller to get where you need to go, but I think as for me as a Caribbean woman and a black woman and especially from



English-speaking Caribbean I assimilate much easier in the community so maybe that's another reason that it doesn't bring the attention to me like I would like. I would love to get the media and I would love to be able to talk about my business and get more business so I could expand. My business can easily make twice as much money if I had the marketing budget to properly market it and to get it out. It can happen to you anytime but you have to have, also, the time. It takes a lot of time, but it is the best thing that you can do for your business.

**MURTHY:** It's interesting. We are a nation of immigrants, and it's interesting that now immigrants are viewed in a negative manner because of the badgering in the media and the press and while it's true that--whether it's Lulu's business or even our law firm, which is, Apparently the world's most popular legal web site with 10 times more unique business than the top 10 law firms in the world combined--in spite of that, I think it's such a small margin of people that really know about it because we're all in niche markets whether it's the dessert market or the health care market or immigration law. We're not in the mass media and the mass media thinks of immigration in general and somehow immigrants being them versus us. It's not them. It's our own ancestors. It's our family. It's our people. Where's the them and the us other than the Native Americans who I also hear were] immigrants when the continent divided, I guess. Everybody here is the child or the progeny of immigrants. And so it's kind of both sad and surprising that you have this divide.

**BUNYAN:** Americans have gotten--many Americans, I should say--have gotten very cynical about obviously, the subject of immigration. And I must say, obviously, part of the reason is the media coverage of controversial issues but the American--the myth of the immigrant coming to this country leaving everything behind, reestablishing life making a contribution--this is a very powerful national myth in our country. I would assume that it's hard to kill it. Based on the presence of all of us here certainly it seems like it's hard to kill but there are people who don't believe it and a lot of them are people who were born here. Sheela, you alluded to this. I wonder how you all have felt about Americans meaning native-born people who are cynical and negative about opportunity the chances for opportunity in our country. After what you've gone through, Yolanda I can't imagine what you would think when somebody turns to you and says "Oh, I don't know what to do. Nobody wants to help me. I'm stuck. I can't move forward." What would you say to them?

**WELCH:** Oh, goodness.

**BUNYAN:** You'd say what?

**WELCH:** I'd say "Oh, goodness. "

**BUNYAN:** Oh, goodness.



**WELCH:** You know, it is sad. I actually hear a lot-- I look Irish, don't I? I don't look like-- And I hear a lot of things, a lot of the racism and the prejudice that takes place, and it hurts so badly.

And I actually become embarrassed for the person who's saying those things. I think it's fear. It's fear that they have of the fact that in our community we have such work ethic, we really do--immigrants overall. The work ethic of an immigrant is that of consistency of reliability. In Maryland, we have the sharecrop workers that come the migrant farm workers. In the state of Maryland--I just have to say this very quickly if you don't mind--In Salisbury, right over the bridge the Chesapeake Bridge I just had the pleasure, but at the same time very sad to see what a migrant farm camp looked like. And it's right over the bridge right next door in our state of Maryland--a housing facility that was an ex-POW camp for Germans.

**BUNYAN:** Hmm.

**WELCH:** 700 and some people live there legally working here for the time they're here to pick the crops. And they're stuffed in there, and they pay high rent. I mean, we're still doing such awful things to people. We really, truly--it's shameful. We'll be talking.

[Laughter]

**BUNYAN:** More work for you, Sheela.

**WELCH:** The human rights issue, of course.

**MURTHY:** So you're saying that there were racial comments and ethnic comments to you?

**WELCH:** Oh, yeah.

**MURTHY:** To you about the Americans, like--

**WELCH:** Oh, yeah.

**MURTHY:** Look at those freeloaders?

**WELCH:** And I'm like, "Oh, my gosh." When I start letting them know who I am and where I'm from it's quite the--

**BUNYAN:** How do they respond when they finally know who you are?



**WELCH:** They don't know how to respond. I have people apologize. There's no apology. This is what you think and what you hear and what you're sharing with your children and friends and neighbors. This is why there's such anti-immigrant sentiment that we saw in the legislation.

**NATHAN-PULLIAM:** That's what I was just going to say. As a legislator, I deal with that on a regular basis every session, every 90-day session. Because you have legislators who definitely believe that all immigrants are just literally bums that they're here living off the United States. And would America be without immigrants?

**WELCH:** A day without a Mexican...

**NATHAN-PULLIAM:** The economy would definitely collapse. The amount of taxes we pay and many don't even reap the benefits of those taxes that they pay.

**MURTHY:** I've actually been several times on television and radio to combat those issues. Then they look at me and say, "Oh, but you're the exception. You're educated. You're smart. You pay taxes. We're not talking about immigrants like you. We're talking about all of them that come here and freeload." And, like, all of them are also people like me. Why are you just marginalizing us like we don't exist? Immigrants are Sue McGowan. You know, almost all of the computer science engineers and many of the international doctors, the professors and yes, maybe the migrant workers but what makes them less a human being because they did not have opportunity for education? They work just as hard and deserve every bit of the incredible opportunity, and they pay their taxes and do everything else and they're exploited by U.S. employers in most cases.

**BUNYAN:** We're going to open to questions so, as you know, there are microphones on either side of the stairwell. So please get up. Give us your name if you care to and your question. And I encourage you--or should I say I demand that you keep it short. I'm being polite. So, please, if you have any questions please come to the microphones. In the meantime, I want to ask a couple more questions.

**SOBRINO:** I'm sorry, Maureen but I would like to interrupt you before you move to another question.

**BUNYAN:** Sure.

**SOBRINO:** About your question I really believe in the American dream. I just want to say that because nothing is easy. It's not free. It depends individually in each person. So it can be an immigrant or it can be an American Native American. And everybody, we have the opportunity. And I really believe that we should continue supporting the American dream concept because that gives us motivation. That gives us at least a fact that we can read in the newspaper another success story. So I just wanted to mention that because it's very



important, and I call it in my case my Mexican dream but it's the same thing, you know. You call it Mexican dream or American dream. It is the same. So I think we should--

**MURTHY:** But it's the Mexican dream realized in America.

**SOBRINO:** Yeah, I know. But it's just like when I go to Mexico. They see me with these eyes of "Oh, she made it in the United States," you know. Well, it's just like the same thing. you can make it also in Mexico. And as an example, you can make it in your own country is not only in America. You can be an entrepreneur and contributing to country. So these are the things that we need to continue supporting and inspiring others to have their own business. I really believe that everybody--because for me, it was natural to be an entrepreneur when I was 18 years old. So a lot of people I know, it takes years and years to think about it if I'm going to be able to have a business or not. But it really depends in each individual person that had the courage to take the risk. Not everybody can take risk but it's a matter of taking risk. That's your whole business, your whole life is gonna be on risk.. and that's part of you. So I just wanted to mention that.

**NATHAN-PULLIAM:** I just wanted to echo that America is opportunity but you got to work for it. It's not just gonna come to you. You have to put everything that you have and if you're passionate about it, learn all that you can. When I went to Johns Hopkins University to do my Master's when I was assigned--I think my marketing class. I think I used that class to write my plan my business plan and my marketing plan. So while I was thinking about the degree I was also thinking about what am I gonna do next with the business. So you have to use whatever opportunities that you have. And in the legislature, I see from a different perspective because now I can work on policies that help make sure that the financing is there that we find more

money for micro-financing and the other things that is necessary to help small business. And also, I work on the MBE program the women--the minority women program because again, it sets a 25% goal to make sure that businesses include women and minorities in their business.

**BUNYAN:** You all have incredible experience personal experience as well as business and professional experience. And Susan, I might ask you about this, too. One of the things that American businesses are constantly saying—American corporations with boards of directors, they're always saying, "We need more diversity on our boards, our corporate boards. We need more women on our corporate boards." I don't know if any of them say specifically we need more immigrant women on our corporate boards, but all of you, as far as I can tell, could serve tremendously well on a corporate board related to your own industries, your own businesses and others, too Have you been asked to join corporate boards?

**SOBRINO:** Hmm. Well, I took a seminar, you know, to get ready to do that I know I want to do



that formally, you know It's a lot of liabilities in these days, also, that you have, you know, serving that kind of board So I want to do it, but I would want to do it right So I took a seminar just to be trained to do that and I would like to explore that possibility, yes and I agree there should be more women and more immigrants in those kind of boards.

**BUNYAN:** Are you on corporate boards or nonprofits?

**NATHAN-PULLIAM:** I've been on mostly nonprofits--mostly the House of Ruth, Planned Parenthood -- those kinds of boards and some business boards but not major major corporations.

**BUNYAN:** And what about you, Yolanda? Because with your experience in health care, my gosh this is the industry of the future in this country You could serve on a corporate board easily.

**WELCH:** Thank you for saying that, and I'm very blessed to serve on quite a few nonprofit boards as well and also serve on several commissions through the state of Maryland I think what's happened is that people say they want to do work with us, but when we're ready and we're there they don't really mean it, and I've encountered that in the corporate world as well.

**BUNYAN:** What do you think causes their reticence?

**WELCH:** I don't think they're ready yet I really don't think they're ready to embrace our—and I'm talking about ethnic side, not just the woman thing I'm talking about the Latino or, you know, from India or wherever you are from For some reason, it's almost like there's a pedigree of sorts that has to take place, and if you're not from the right place, the right school, the right this, there's not opportunity It's very interesting So I've been approached from several boards,

but as Maria was saying, I always want to make sure that they're not in crisis, and unfortunately some of these have been in crises, and not that I don't like crises, because I thrive off of fixing things I love to fix problems But my experience has been--I serve on about 17 and the reason I do that is because I've been historically the first Latino in our state of Maryland to be serving on these boards, and I want to open the door so that I can bring in other very wonderful Latinos, too -So, no, that opportunity---We have some--

**NATHAN-PULLIAM:** But you believe that serving on corporate boards -- when you start your own business like we do you really don't have that much time, too So when the opportunity comes, many of us don't jump for those opportunities, and for me being in the legislature, I'm already serving in probably 10 or 12 different things appointed by the governor or the Speaker of the House so I really have my plate full, so I wouldn't really go out I would probably turn down any other request to serve on any other corporate.



**WELCH:** I have to say I have a dear friend through the U.S. Hispanic Chamber who now serves on a very big hotel board, and I won't say the name of it, though but he gets \$250,000 a year to sit on this board I would like that opportunity If you're out there, hotels of America or international all of us would like that opportunity.

**BUNYAN:** And Sheela will negotiate the deal.

**WELCH:** Absolutely. And the team will be with us.

**BUNYAN:** Could we have your question, please?

**WOMAN:** Sure. One of the things that I think we women are best at is helping ourselves by helping each other, so I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about mentoring and being a mentor, having a mentor and any of these sorts of networks that have helped you, resources that are out there for everyone

**MURTHY:** Well, Maria and I, we were talking I met Maria through the United Way, through my philanthropy and giving, and so all of us women are members of different groups, and even through the American Immigration Lawyers Association, which is actually 11,000 member, it includes law professors and immigration lawyers—we mentor each other Many of the attorneys in our firm, we mentor the other attorney, other attorneys So I think that it's incredibly beneficial and helpful mentally, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually to be a mentor and a mentee and we're all mentors and mentees all of our lives You know, when we talk about learning--learning is a life-long process, and so we do it and we love to do it, and yes, there's a finite amount of time but you want to use every bit of it to mentor and help other people, and whether it's the Girl Scouts where this past weekend, 2 days, 3 days ago, the entire day on Saturday from morning to evening I was at the Maryland Correctional Facility in Jessup, Maryland.

**BUNYAN:** Voluntarily?

**MURTHY:** Actually through the board of directors, through a nonprofit board through the Girl Scouts of Central Maryland, where we went because we've adopted sort of these--the unintended victims of the crimes committed by the mothers of these children who are paying the price for their mothers, and what we found is by giving these opportunities for these children to meet the mothers, not through a glass and not the way criminals are treated but to actually hang out with their mothers their crime rates have dropped. The mothers have become less violent within the criminal system. They want to get out and tell their children, "Don't goof up your life the way I goofed up mine," and so we are like big sisters I've actually almost semi-adopted those people I took them out for a holiday luncheon, a shopping spree. They're coming to our law firm Picnic to hang out with us. But being a mentor and mentee is so, like important for me personally, and I think it's selfish and exciting and interesting, and I'd like anybody else to share.



**NATHAN-PULLIAM:** I think for me, too, as a mentor, I've 3 times been named one of Maryland's top 100 women by the "Daily Record," and it's because of the work in mentoring. So I find that I have interns I have not just everybody who's coming out of different colleges or high school but want to come to serve with me in the legislature, but beside being in the legislature, I have them coming to talk with me about how to start business and how to do this, and I have a whole group of kids that I've adopted I have so many sons and daughters, you would never imagine. And they're all successful business people that I've been able to mentor.

**BUNYAN:** Amazing. Thank you so much Any other questions?

**WOMAN:** Yes. One thing is, I have to say that I'm so glad that someone clarified, because America is the dream, and all of us came from different communities, and in my community, I only spoke French, yet I was born in this country, and what I'm saying is, I'm glad someone clarified because all of us at one point was born either in America or came here to America, so I'm glad someone clarified it is an American dream in our own country for all of us, everyone here. The question I have for you--and by the way, you're an amazing panel I'm just astonished how marvelous it was to hear all of you and how young you are and how much you have accomplished. Excuse me. The question I wanted to know--do you see 15 20 years from now or beyond from now that you would have your own foundation and begin to expand on a global level? I realize, you know, and of course some of you have I realize that. But is that in your dream, also, someday?

**MURTHY:** I actually have a foundation I was just speaking with Sue McGowan before We set it up right after September 11 Me and my husband said, "But for the grace of God" because I did work in New York right after I finished my Harvard education, and I thought, "I could have been in one of those high rise buildings, and we would be history, like, unfortunately, those thousands of people and their families," so we set it right after September 11, the same year,

and every year, we give a lot of money -- a lot for our standards -- maybe not hundreds of millions. We're not Bill Gates yet, but we give a lot. We are probably saying the number one charity, or one of the top, certainly, businesses in the second highest in Maryland for what we give to charity and that's through the foundation, and I've actually done global, international giving because we give a lot of money through the United Way of Central Maryland for local charities in Central Maryland because I believe that America is my adopted home, but I also love my birth home, and my birth home, of course, is India, and so we give about half the money to India and half the money to the United States of America, and just 3 weeks ago, the United Way National Conference at the Baltimore Convention Center they led off with the United, and I was the keynote speaker right after Desmond Tutu, which was a hard act to follow, but basically I spoke in front of over 2,000 people where I talked about being a citizen of the world and how America needs to be a leader, not just the American dream for people who come here, but to spread our



philanthropy and giving because in Asia and Europe and the rest of the world they do not give like we in America give 7 out of 10 Americans, even middle-class and not-very-well-to-do Americans, we are willing to write checks--maybe not a thousand-dollar or million-dollar check but \$10, \$20, \$50. Almost everybody here would have given some money in charity. Very few countries, whether it's in Europe or Asia or Australia, do people give. They're not as generous as Americans are, and I think we can export not just American business and not just America being the leader in the world for finance and business and industry, but also in philanthropy, and I am a firm believer that we have a lot more to offer to the world, and all of us here can be little ambassadors for that. And I'm fortunate to have a foundation I don't know if anybody else here has started or is thinking of starting, but Sue McGowan's family certainly did it. That's how this McGowan Theater is named, and as you heard about her incredible immigrant journey so there's a lot of immigrants that have worked in foundations or set up.

**BUNYAN:** We have just a couple of minutes left and I want to ask each of our panelists to answer a kind of a personal question, not that the others haven't been personal, too, but I wonder. A lot of us who come to this country by choice, no matter where we go, we do have opportunities to look back and we do have imaginations about what would have happened if we hadn't come here. What would have happened if the 4 of you had not come here to this country at whatever age you came? Where would you be today? What would you be today?

**SOBRINO:** I asked myself that question many times, and I think it has been the best decision that I took in my life to come to the United States. I feel very, very proud, and my family, also, are very proud of what I have accomplished, and that I have also extended what I have learned here to my country, Mexico.

**BUNYAN:** What would you be doing in Mexico today?

**SOBRINO:** I was thinking in that. Yes, I had my company and business in tourism, and you know, I'm sure I will continue in business but in the travel industry that way. Never have this

excitement as far as starting something new that I never had an idea that I was gonna start in the food industry manufacturing and engineering some machines and production and development products, innovation. So I feel very, very proud that we were the first company that started, the gelatin concept ready to eat at that time and that many other big companies like Kraft or ConAgra, Del Monte, and Dole they followed us. But I can say that we were the first one, so imagine to feel that as an innovator, you know, that you started something just using your common sense--common sense and the tradition of your country to extend in the cultural side of Mexico that the dessert is something that I really wanted for me for Hispanics to have, but I was at the right time at the right moment when the food at that time, the Hispanic food was just starting, and then from there it boomed. It



boomed to the mainstream market because it was not any more for the Hispanics It was really for everybody.

**BUNYAN:** I'm sorry. I'm sorry, Maria. I've got to cut you off because we're running out of time.

**SORBINO:** Fine. That's OK.

**BUNYAN:** And I do want to get to Shirley.

**NATHAN-PULLIAM:** I just wanted to say that I probably would have left England and gone back to Jamaica, working as a nurse and maybe would have done the same thing probably run for political office because I've always felt that kind of passion to give back, and I always believed that health care, your health, is the most important thing, because you cannot become economically successful or educationally wise and be a great -- and accomplish all the things if you're not healthy. So for that reason, I know I would have been doing something in health care and in politics.

**BUNYAN:** What about you, Sheela?

**MURTHY:** I probably would have done a lot of marches the anti-dowry marches and women's marches I think I would have joined a nonprofit fighting for women and women's rights because I think women are treated as second-class citizens in India even today.

**BUNYAN:** And your father might have disowned you.

**MURTHY:** No. They, I think, gave up on me and knew that I was a fighter and I believed in fighting. So I think they respected it, but they didn't know how to deal with it because it was very -- in India, women are expected to play second fiddle and always be subservient a little bit and polite, which I certainly wasn't, and I fit in right into America.

**BUNYAN:** Don't ever change...And what about you, Yolanda?

**WELCH:** Well, you know, not that it's a bad thing but I would have never been encouraged to become an entrepreneur. I would have never been encouraged to think of those things. I was always pretty much my task was to marry someone nice, good. He was a lieutenant commander 10 years older than I was, and he had a very stellar career path and I would have been -- probably have 6 kids by now and be in Colombia. I'm gonna be a grandmother in November, by the way. I'm so excited My 27-year-old son is gonna have-- so you know how old I am, though—21.

[Laughter]



So I would be the wife of a -- not that there's anything wrong with it -- of an admiral by this time in the Colombian navy and going to little socials and doing all those lovely things and have children. Yeah.

**BUNYAN:** Susan, what would you be doing if you weren't in your field?

**PEARCE:** If I weren't in my field?

**BUNYAN:** Weren't.

**PEARCE:** Oh, my gosh. That's a good question I'm a lot like Sheela I would be working in activism, basically.

**BUNYAN:** Right. Well, how do you like these women?

[Applause]

You are all truly, truly amazing, and it's been a personal and certainly a professional privilege for me to be with them and to hear their stories. While they were talking, I was jotting down some words because we in the news media like to summarize things. We can't tell you the whole story, but there are some thoughts that I'd like you to leave with tonight about these women, and I gave each of them a word that to me describes their personality and how they got to where they are. For Sheela, passion! Passion is her word. For Maria, flexible.

**SOBRINO:** Flexible?

**BUNYAN:** Looking for opportunity, yes You are a flexible person. You look for opportunity, and you move Shirley, you're a risk-taker. Definitely, definitely a risk-taker. Being a woman from the Caribbean, being of African descent, and being in politics--you're a risk-taker. And, Yolanda, you are a multi, multicultural multitalented person, and I would say that you allowed your personal experience to inspire you to go ahead. A lot of people would allow or would give in to their negative or bad personal experiences and let them stop them from going ahead. You

instead did just the opposite, and that not only reflects very, very much on you, but also on the fact that to me, that's a really strong indication of someone who understands what this country has to offer. And, you know, the myth of creating something new out of nothing is a very strong myth in this country and there's a reason why it's so appealing. It works. It's inspired all of us, and it works for you, and I know it's going to continue working for many, many of us who come here by choice, and I hope it works for everybody, no matter how you got here Thank you so much. Let's give them a round of applause.



[Applause]

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