

**Oration by Carlos Tortolero,
Founder and President of the National Museum of Mexican Art
Delivered at the Chicago History Museum's Uihlein Plaza,
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**Introduction by Gary T. Johnson,
President, Chicago History Museum**

I would like to introduce today's guest speaker. He is the founder of the National Museum of Mexican Art, one of our sister museums. This is a museum you all need to visit, and if you have been there once, I want you to go back!

Now we all know there is something special about founders. If you found a successful business, you are revered as a visionary entrepreneur. If you found an order of nuns, they might even make you a saint. If you found a community museum that works its way up to being designated as a national museum, then I'm here to tell you, you have pulled off the near-impossible.

For the 31 years since the planning for a museum began, our speaker has been a steward of art and treasures ... not only those of a cherished community right here in Chicago, but also art and treasures from one of the world's great civilizations, the civilization of Mexico.

Speaking personally, there is no other museum professional in town who has taught me more about my job as President of a museum.

It is a great pleasure and a distinct honor to give you today's speaker, the founder and president of the National Museum of Mexican Art ... Carlos Tortolero!

Oration by Carlos Tortolero,

Buenos días! Good morning!

It is a great honor for me to be here today. I can't explain to you in words how glorious it is to be here with you today.

Let me begin by thanking Gary Johnson, the great president of this great museum.

Let me also acknowledge a few people here today.

I am absolutely nothing without my lovely wife of 36 years, mi amor Maria.

I am also joined today by our museum's new Vice President and COO Phillip Jimenez and his lovely wife Beatriz.

Today we celebrate the beginning of a struggle for independence. A struggle that a little over ten years later resulted, not only in independence, but also in one of the greatest documents ever written - the U.S. Constitution. A document that in essence fulfilled the dreams of the Declaration of Independence.

And I love the way the Constitution begins "**We the People.**" Wow! Three marvelous words – **We the People** – and I will use these words as the focus of my speech today.

We the People have a great legacy and we must make it even greater.

We the People should start by doing everything we can to take care of our veterans once they return home. They have sacrificed so much for us and we need to thank them and repay them for these efforts.

We the People must work together to make sure that every child, every child, whether they live on the North Shore, Pilsen, or Woodlawn is given the best preparation possible to excel in life. We must take care of our greatest treasure.

We the People must take care of our seniors. Our elders have done so much for us. We the people need to be there when they need us. My grandmother was my hero. We must treat our seniors as heroes.

We the People must ensure that no one , no one goes to bed hungry at night. There is no excuse for this. None.

We the People must work together to ensure that everyone has access to quality health care. We must make this a priority.

We the People must ensure that women have complete equality. It's also been long overdue for **We the People** to have a woman president.

We the People must work together to make sure that all people, no matter what cultural or religious background have full equality. We must stop seeing diversity as a problem to solve and instead see diversity as a fantastic asset for our country to cherish.

We the People must work together to ensure that we provide the resources necessary to lower our infant mortality rates which are shockingly like a third-world nation.

We the People must make sure that LGBT individuals have equal rights. If anyone is denied equality, we are all denied equality.

We the People must make sure that we assist any individual with special needs achieve their full potential in our country.

We the People must work together to stop the violence that is plaguing our country. As a former high school teacher, I knew too many young people killed by guns.

We the People must make our national leaders understand that we need to invest our tax dollars in a national fight to defeat the many diseases that kill so many people before their time.

We the People must work hard to make sure that we take care of our planet. We must develop and utilize cleaner energy sources. We cannot leave our mother earth an environmental mess for our children.

We the People must remember our immigrants. Our current anti-immigration attitude especially towards undocumented immigrants held by so many people is too often filled with a misplaced anger that is down-right ANTI-AMERICAN. Immigrants should be viewed as American as apple pie.

We the People are all children, descendants of immigrants and whether they came with a green card or not, they came because they saw the U.S. as a place of hope, a place where one can get a new start, a place where we can work hard to get ahead, a place where we can go to whatever church, synagogue, temple, and mosque of our choice.

A country where **We the People** could raise our children.

A country where we can openly disagree with our leaders and not be afraid of being persecuted. I don't think many Americans appreciate and understand what a marvelous thing this is. Too many Americans take this for granted.

I am an immigrant. My family came to the U.S. in January 1957 when I was almost three years old.

We came to Chicago from Guadalajara, Mexico, a city with one of the world's greatest climates.

So picture this my dad is driving from the border to Chicago during a snowstorm in a car that was in such bad shape that my mom said that she could see the snow on the highway through a hole on the floor of the car. Fred Flintstone's car was better than my dad's car!

Oh yeah the car was a clunker. It had no heat, no kind of defrosting system and my dad would tell us later that he was afraid of the car conking out in the South.

My dad was dark-skinned and he was worried about not being to able to get mechanical help if something happened. So you ask yourself, **what were my parents thinking? Why were they bringing their four children to this new country, whether neither of them spoke English? What were they thinking? What were they thinking?**

They were thinking that they were making this trip to give their children the best possible chance they could have to improve their lives.

My dad held down two jobs. He worked in a factory and he drove a cab. My mother also worked in a factory. They worked hard so that their children could go to college and here I stand before you, because my parents had a dream.

My parents would take us to all the museums in Chicago when I was child. They wanted to expose us to as many things as possible. I remember coming to the museum right behind me.

I remember buying an Abraham Lincoln postcard. If you guessed that I became a high school history teacher ... you're right!

But never, never did I ever think that I would one day not only would I work in a museum, but that I would create one. But you know something, it didn't happen because of me. It happened because **We the People** have a wonderful "**we-can-do-it**" spirit.

No other nation on this planet has a greater history of volunteering, of giving back, of monetarily supporting institutions than **We the People**.

Hundreds of **We the People** ... staff members ...trustees, benefactors and the list goes on and on made the dream of National Museum of Mexican Art a reality.

I may have come to this country in a junky car, but America is not a junky nation.

I stand before you as a testament of the greatness of this nation. An immigrant to this nation who now stands before you reading a speech on our nation's independence day. As **We the People** say ... only in America!

I am here today because so many people have helped me, have believed in me. This is the **We the People** attitude that I love about this country.

We the People must continue to help everyone in this country achieve their dreams.

God bless America and God Bless each and every one of you.

Thank you.