



**STATEMENT BY THE NATIONAL PUERTO RICAN DAY PARADE, INC.
ABOUT OSCAR LÓPEZ-RIVERA
05/12/17**

In 2014 under new leadership the Board of Directors of the National Puerto Rican Day Parade (“NPRDP”) established a theme, *“Un Pueblo Muchas Voces”* (“One Nation, Many Voices”), to represent the rich cultural and ideological diversity of the Puerto Rican experience worldwide. With 500+ years of history characterized by a unique blend of cultures, ethnicities and traditions, the Puerto Rican community is not homogeneous. The NPRDP leadership recognizes its responsibility to preserve the Parade’s tradition of inclusiveness while also promoting the parade as an educational platform.

The Parade is a platform for the entire Puerto Rican community to express themselves and we are and will continue to be the instrument that embraces the diverse views and voices of our community. Raising awareness on key issues affecting our communities, at times has led to tough and challenging conversations that are important for our collective development and progress. These tough conversations include the Puerto Rican Economic Crisis and release of Oscar López Rivera, as well as the:

- 2017: Jones Act 1917, which granted U.S. citizenship to all Puerto Ricans
- 2016: Family unity, marriage equality and LGBT rights
- 2015: Environmental justice for Caño Martín Peña

The response to Oscar López Rivera’s participation in the 60th Annual National Puerto Rican Day Parade evidences the extraordinary complexity and diversity of perspectives that make up the Puerto Rican identity. On one hand, there is an online petition commending the Board’s decision to honor López Rivera and asking that he lead a march as a demonstration of solidarity for Puerto Rico and on the other hand, there is different petition demanding that no recognition should be made.

Undoubtedly, Oscar López Rivera is a controversial figure. López Rivera’s ideologies on the independence of Puerto Rico do not represent all Puerto Ricans. Nevertheless, his figure brought together Puerto Ricans of all ideologies, as well as global human rights organizations and leaders, including Pope Francis, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, President Clinton and President Carter, among many others, to seek clemency in unison. Some people call him a terrorist while others think of him as a freedom fighter, as was the case with Nelson Mandela.

The decision to include Oscar López Rivera among the marchers on Fifth Avenue was not made in haste. It is the culmination of a three-year awareness and solidarity campaign conducted by

the Parade, alongside hundreds of leaders of all ideologies and cultural backgrounds; and for many supporters this journey is more than 30 years in the making. The intention of integrating López Rivera into the Parade is meant to honor the commitment and hard work of thousands of people, Puerto Rican and non-, whose efforts contributed to his sentence commutation. At the same time, we seek to raise awareness about Oscar López Rivera's story, the grave colonial situation in Puerto Rico and the identity questions that continue to arise, even today. Nevertheless, Oscar's participation is not an endorsement of the history that led to his arrest, nor any form of violence. But rather a recognition of a man and a nation's struggle for sovereignty.

We aim to use Oscar López Rivera and his story - decades after - to bring a message for peace, unity, compassion and reflection. Amidst the controversies surrounding López Rivera, we have been compelled by his early work as a community activist of Chicago's Puerto Rican community, and that his convictions led to more than 35 years without freedom, of which 12 were spent in solitary confinement; several U.S. political leaders have conceded that Oscar's 70-year sentence was out of proportion. Also, given the opportunity to shorten his time behind bars, he did not accept President Clinton's 1999 clemency, expressing that he could not leave behind Carlos Alberto Torres, who was detained along Oscar but was not included in Clinton's clemency offer.

Our 60th Annual National Puerto Rican Day Parade is about recognizing key moments in our history, and the current challenges facing Puerto Rico. We are also paying a special tribute to the hard work of Puerto Ricans who contributed to the creation and evolution of this cultural organization, while we honor the communities of *Hormigueros* in Puerto Rico, as well as Lorain and Cleveland in Northeast Ohio, who continue to enrich our culture. Among other great announcements and accomplishments of the Parade's initiatives in higher education, this year we will continue to carry a message of inclusiveness because there are many voices to represent.

While the diversity within our community represents a wide array of perspectives and opinions, this is a time for solidarity and unity - not for factions and division - given the grave situation in Puerto Rico. In unity, we will find the strength we need to move forward. It was the unity of voices that led to Oscar López Rivera's commutation, and we will need even more voices during this debt crisis. This is a time to come together, to recognize and transcend our differences and obstacles, as we learn and discuss about the issues relevant to our democracy. We are one nation, and united we have more power to inspire positive change.

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