



josé.e. **LÓPEZ**
TRIBUTE TO
HOMENAJE A

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Frankie Davila and Choco

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*Cong. Luis Guitierrez,
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State Rep. William Delgado,
State Senator Miguel Del Valle,
Cook County Commissioner Roberto Maldonado,
Alderman Billie Ocasio,
NY State Rep Jose Rivera*

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*Rev. S. Michael Yasutake,
Rev. C. Nozomi Ikuta*

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José E. López

La Borinquena

All



Making the Impossible Happen: An Introduction to the Life of José López, In His Own Words

My Early Life in Puerto Rico and Chicago

I was born in San Sebastian, Puerto Rico on November 1, 1950. San Sebastian is in the mountains near Lares. It is the town where the revolutionary forces of Lares were defeated on September 24th, 1868. But it is also the town where there was hand-to-hand combat on the streets in 1868.

My family is what you would consider *jibaro*. In other words, all of my family are rural. No one was born in a city, not even my great grandparents. Basically we come from a peasant background. The *jibaro* are mountain people in Puerto Rico and in many ways they have come to symbolize the Puerto Rican personality in terms of culture and characteristics. The music of the mountains is still symbolic of the Puerto Rican musical personality.

My family basically supported itself from what we produced. We had a small farm of fourteen acres, which we worked with an ox cart and a plow. My mother was a farmer who planted and grew what we ate. She was a very generous and compassionate woman who was able to grow more pigs and cows than the neighbors. Every time we would kill a pig we divided it among all the neighbors, which is a very common practice in Puerto Rico. We lived in an area that became quite economically depressed. In the 1950s, when I was growing up (and I always tell people that in many ways I have been fortunate to have lived through three centuries because we lived the life of a 19th century Puerto Rican peasant), we had no running water, electricity or indoor plumbing. I first saw TV in 1959. I remember many of the people in San Sebastian did not have big pieces of land and it became increasingly difficult for people to eke out an existence in farming. My father left Puerto Rico in the late 1940s for Chicago. He was one of the first Puerto

Ricans to come to Chicago. In '57 my oldest sister and Oscar came to Chicago to live with my father.

In 1959 my father was injured. He used to work on a steel pipe line in Franklin Park. He lost most of the use of his right hand because the pipes fell on him. The company made a deal with him so that he would not sue them. They paid him a certain amount of money and gave him a supervisory position in the factory. So my father brought us here in 1959.

Basically our mother raised us. We had no real father figure and our mother acted as a father and mother. I think that helped us a lot because our mother was a very independent woman. She taught us that there was no woman's job and no man's job because we all had to learn to cook, to iron, to do all the things that in Puerto Rico were considered women's work. She taught us to overcome that kind of division of labor.

My mother never went to school and never learned to read or write. Yet my mother had an incredible compendium in her mind of Puerto Rican history and Puerto Rican literature. She would recite to us poems by Davila and José de Diego. We grew up with her reciting poems to us that she had heard from her father. She was able to memorize all these things. She also knew a great deal of politics.

When she came to Chicago she faced incredible odds. My father left her and we were in dire poverty. My mother used to make ninety cents an hour working in a laundry in which she had four presses. When she would come home, her arms would be all burned. It was really very painful. In order for her to save a quarter on the bus she would walk from the 4000 block of Division, where Rainbow Cleaners was, to the 2100 block of Division street where we lived. She walked twenty blocks to save a quarter in order to keep and maintain us.

When we first came here we lived in the 1800 block of Wood on Haddon. It was a filthy place that was later condemned. My father got the place because it was really cheap. It was one of those horrible places with roaches and everything. The man subdivided the apartments so that a lot of Puerto Ricans could live there. It was made for three families, but there were six families in this building.

I have lived in this area for forty years. Haddon is a small street and a lot of Polish people lived there. When we went to school we had to walk down Haddon St. Every morning the Polish ladies would stand outside their houses sweeping with their brooms so we would not walk on the sidewalk. They forced us to go into the street. So, immediately, I knew we were different. In actual fact, these Polish people were all immigrants, yet they felt they were much better than we were. Their treatment of us gave me an idea at a very early age what white skin privilege is really all about. It may not be real, because their conditions were not much better than were our conditions, yet they felt they were better than we were. They called us "You dirty Puerto Ricans." They insulted us. It wasn't submerged. It was very open, nothing covert about the behavior of those ladies. We had relationships with their kids, even though their parents didn't like them to hang out with us. You can't divide kids.

I went to an old school that had a closet where you hung up your coat, which was a huge closet, with bathrooms off it. That's where they would put us [the Puerto Rican kids], because the teachers didn't want to spend any time with us. Sometimes they would get a kid who knew a little bit more English, and have us read books to the others. That's almost all we did the entire day. I don't even know how we really were able to pass grades, because the teachers didn't care. There was no bi-lingual education. There was no attempt to be part of the classroom setting. You were segregated from the classroom, you were literally in the closet. The class was doing its own work. Once

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in a while, the teacher would go into the closet and go over a math problem or something like that, but until you knew English, you were completely segregated.

I was a light-skinned Puerto Rican, I liked reading a lot, and I was considered a smart kid. The teachers could not see me as a Puerto Rican. They would try to make me into a little Italian boy. They wanted to call me Joe. I insisted that they call me José. I consciously kept my accent in English. It was part of my whole idea of how to keep my own identity as a Puerto Rican. All of these practices began to create in me a sense that we were different, that there is something here that is not right.

The Development of My Political Consciousness

When I came to Chicago, the Cuban revolution had just occurred and by 1960 or 1961 there was all this talk about the Cuban revolution. My father had a Cuban friend who had been involved in the July 26th movement here who went back to Cuba in 1961 with his whole family. As a little kid I never liked to play with toys, I never liked to be around little kids. I would always be around adults, and I always listened to adult conversations. I remember when I was five or six years old, I listened to the conversations between my father and the Cuban family. I remember a conversation with a Puerto Rican barber who brought these little leaflets put out by the Fair Play for Cuba Committee in Spanish and English. That was one of the first political documents that I got. I began to deliver newspapers when I was about ten or eleven and I used to read them. It's very hard to say when I got a consciousness of being Puerto Rican. I just knew I was Puerto Rican. I have never thought of any other option for Puerto Rico than Independence. I was a strong believer in the American system and in democracy. And I thought that all you had to do was make really good, cogent arguments to the U.S. government and you could probably gain independence.

When I was 13 years old I got involved in the Democratic Party. A Polish precinct captain came to my house and we began to talk about politics. I really enjoyed it. Little by little I began to help him by getting people to vote. He wasn't just a

political hack, he was very concerned about people. He would always be doing little favors; for example, if you got a ticket people would look to him because he could resolve it for them. I began to work with him and in 1964 I participated in my first election. The old Polish machine politicians really began to like me a lot. I went to a lot of political rallies and receptions. I got to meet Johnson and Hubert Humphrey. At a very young age these people exposed me to things that no kid even gets exposed to today. I also studied Malcolm X and was inspired by him. I got very active at Tuley High School. When I was in 8th grade I edited a newspaper called the Chopin Chatter which was the school newspaper. People wrote stupid things like little gossip and I did not want to do that. I wrote about the significance of holidays, particularly the Jewish holidays because nobody wanted to talk about Jewish holidays. I also participated a lot in extracurricular activities. In 1967, when I was seventeen years old, I was the first Latino president of the city-wide student council. We formed an alliance with the Black students. I did a lot of things in school while I was president of the citywide student council. We collected money and built a school which was in Belize and most people did not even know where Belize was at that time.

In high school I wanted to be a politician and a lawyer. For a very short period of time I had been an altar boy and I also had thought about being a priest. When I went to Loyola University, I realized that law was not a field that I wanted and I got into history and that is pretty much where I have stayed.

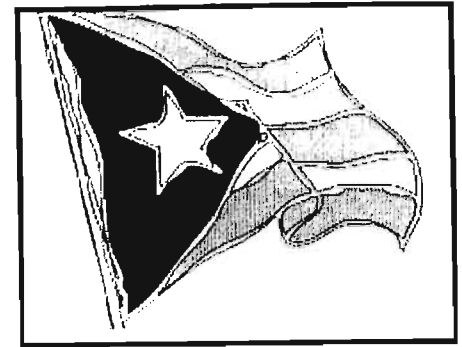
At Loyola I became very involved in student politics. I was particularly active against the war in Vietnam. By the late '60s the war in Vietnam had become really outrageous. It was a period in which the Black movement had taken a turn, a much more radical turn. I began to question a lot of things that I had really believed and began to change, except, of course, in the way I dress. I have always been a very conservative dresser.

After college, I came back to teach at Tuley High School in 1971. The first thing I did was to teach a Latin American History class. Ricardo Jimenez was one of my students. As a teacher, this was the first time I got to go to the teacher's lounge.

When I went in I saw my ex-English teacher asleep on the sofa with a sign that read "Do Not Disturb! Puerto Ricans at Work." Then it dawned on me that racism does not have to be overt. In so many ways racism is part of the culture. There is a subtle racism that affects a lot of teachers and a lot of people that is not shown openly but that is there. The message was that Puerto Ricans are lazy. That was a big eye opener for me. It was my experience as well as the experience of Carmen Valentin who was a counselor at Tuley High School and that of my brother who was doing work in the community. We began to meet together after school with a group of students and that is how our high school [Don Pedro Albizu Campos High School] got started, in a very small church basement at 2042 W. Augusta

By 1968 I broke with the Democratic Party because I found there was nothing that I could do there. I believed that electoral politics were not the answer. At the same time, I always had a lot of problems with the white left because many of those people felt they were our saviors. I met white leftists because they had made contacts with the Young Lords.

In the mid-1970s, the FALN emerged, which challenged a lot of people to rethink the whole issue of what kind of political movement they were building. Did the movement need to protect itself? Were the Nationalists' politics of insurrection from the '30s, 40s and '50s passé? 'These were issues then being debated in the Puerto Rican independence movement. We were forced to debate them because of the emergence of the armed clandestine movements. Personally, if I go back and look at that period I feel very strongly that while it was very important for people to do that kind of work, it was also really important for people to do the kind of public work that we were doing. Many of us concluded that the issue for Puerto Rican Indepen-



dence could not be divorced from the day-to-day struggles of the Puerto Rican people for their democratic rights, such as bilingual education, better health care, housing, medical care, decent living conditions. We were living in a ghetto. As a result of that conclusion, we continued to do the work that has characterized us to this day, which is working on issues such as health care, education, and police brutality. At the same time, we began to organize the work to free the Puerto Rican political prisoners [the five Puerto Rican Nationalists]. In some ways, we were the catalyst for the work to free the prisoners in the '70s. And our work to free the prisoners continues to this day.

Decades of Intense Repression and Resistance

In 1976, I was given a subpoena to appear before a Grand Jury that was supposedly investigating the whereabouts of my brother, Oscar López, Carlos Alberto Torres and other people they claimed were members of the FALN. When I appeared before the Grand Jury to tell them why I would not cooperate, the first thing the U.S. attorney asked me was about my political activity. This had nothing to do with the nature of the investigation, which was supposedly to determine the whereabouts of my brother. As a result, we knew it was a political Grand Jury. We denounced it as such; we created a movement about it; and we went to jail because of it. I was in jail for seven months, along with Roberto Caldero, Ricardo Romero, and Pedro Archuleta because I refused to cooperate with the grand jury.

The Movimiento de Liberación Nacional, the MLN, formed right at this juncture, in 1977. We understood that we could no longer do this work as separate entities. We needed a unified world view for the people facing grand jury repression. Mexican people were going to prison and at that time we saw the importance of unifying what few resources we had as Puerto Ricans and Mexicans. Later on we understood we needed to be separated, because we did not see that one organization could bring the two questions together.

This was really a very intense period, because literally from 1976 onward, the Puerto Rican community was an occu-

pled community. In 1976, the FBI began its work to try and find my brother and Carlos Alberto. They had actually set up a whole repressive apparatus, which included the road blocks of North and Western during which time they actually pulled people out of their cars. People's houses were raided. One night, my mother's house was raided with floodlights and rifles and they came

looking for my brother, knowing my brother wasn't there. We used to be followed everywhere. All of our work was under attack.

A month or two months after my release from jail in June of 1978, we had a conference against police brutality to ascertain the depths of police brutality. It consisted of a public hearing and a panel. At the end of the conference we were cleaning

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up and two undercover Chicago police came and began to attack us. I was with my daughters, Lolita who was a year and half and María Andrea who was almost four years old. All of sudden they moved towards me and put a gun to my head. I was trying to get my daughters in my car and I thought this guy was going to blow my head off. I did not want my daughters to see it. All of a sudden I looked up and all I could see were police cars everywhere. We were arrested and taken to the 13th District and interrogated. I was in terrible pain because my ribs were broken, my cuffed hands were bleeding, and they had already gotten puss in them. They kept me in there for the entire night. The next day, interestingly enough, we were supposed to hold a march in the community against police brutality. It was one of the most successful marches we ever had! The police thought that by putting me in jail they were going to be able to contain it.

We began the Puerto Rican People's Parade in 1977, almost at the spot where I had been arrested a few days earlier. Despite all the attacks, surveillance, and negative propaganda put out about us in the newspapers, we were able to survive and grow. In 1979, we welcomed the Nationalists to Chicago. The outpouring of support for them in the community was incredible, beyond anything I would have dreamt of. I always think that one of the greatest days of my life was the day the Nationalists came out.

There has never been a time since the late '60s that we have not been involved in one degree or another in political prisoner work. In 1978 William Guillermo Morales was arrested in New York and we had to mount a major campaign to explain that he was incarcerated as a political prisoner, as a prisoner of war. On April 4, 1980, the people who were accused of being members of the FALN were arrested. At that time we did not know exactly who had been arrested. We had heard the news brief that people had been arrested and they were connected with the FALN. We began to organize right away. As a matter of fact by that evening we had already mounted a picket in Evanston in front of the police station. And from there began a long, long process that culminated, in part, in the release of the prisoners on September 10, 1999. That work had an incredible impact because we had to put a lot of resources into it and build it from the ground up. There was not a lot of support for people who were being accused of terrorists and the terrorist hysteria had already begun. In 1981 Oscar Lopez Rivera was arrested. In 1983 Alejandrina Torres, Eddie Cortes, and Alberto Rodríguez were arrested.

The government has always tried to link me up to the armed struggle. They have all these resources yet they have never been able to do that because I have never been part of the armed struggle. I have never been part of any activity that could be considered an activity that goes beyond the bounds of what I feel is my work which is creating consciousness around work that should be and is protected by the U.S. Constitution.

Throughout the '80s we went through a very difficult period, always trying to organize and constantly combat the

government's attempt to set us up. The 1980s were a period of building support for the political prisoners and attempting to contextualize the charges of which the prisoners had been accused. International law defended the right of the Puerto



Students demonstrating against racist teacher at Clemente H.S.

Rican people and all colonized people to rid themselves of a crime against humanity, and colonialism has been declared a crime in Resolution 1514 of the UN in 1960. The prisoners had taken the position that they were prisoners of war. We felt that we had to defend that position and explain it to people. We had to be able to create consciousness about that position. So throughout the '80s that is what our work centered on. We built a movement and the National Committee to Free Puerto Rican Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War to explain their position.

Towards the end of the '80s and the beginning of the '90s we begin to feel the need not only to go beyond building the Cultural Center but to impact the life of the community in a broader sense. One example of how we did this was our work around Clemente High School. Students at Clemente began to mobilize against racist teachers and the poor quality of the education they received. Representatives of the teachers and students came and asked us, and other community groups, to get involved. Somewhere around twenty different community organizations, including churches, came together to say there is something really wrong at Clemente and something has to be done. Out of that situation we began to evaluate our own relationship to the wider community. We had a moral responsibility and a political obligation to get involved and we did.

At the same time the world was changing. The Soviet Union changed. The world changed. The correlation of forces in the world changed. Gorbachev's Perestroika raised some very interesting questions on the international scene about human rights violations and we understood that a summit on human rights was being called (this was the time of the Helsinki agreement) and it was the period of all this talk about human rights in the world. We knew we could play a role in exposing the violations of human rights in the US. In 1991 we helped to organize the first tribunal around the issue of political prisoners in the US. We brought experts from many parts of the world and were a part of creating a movement called Freedom Now! which was the first major attempt in many years to bring together the issue of political prisoners across this country, from the Native Americans to white anti-imperialists to Christian pacifists to people in the Black liberation struggle, to raise consciousness around the issue of political prisoners in the U.S

By the end of 1992 we started to really focus on the Puerto Rican political prisoners much more than building the broad based movement, even as we were building the October 12, 1992, events [500 years of colonialism]. We were facing a lot of internal dissension within the coalition we were trying to put together. There were a lot of positive things that came out of both tribunals. But we concluded that we had put too much emphasis on building the broader movement and not enough on the Puerto Rican political prisoners. So in 1992 we decided to turn our attention to the Puerto Rican political prisoners and in Puerto Rico *Ofensiva* 1992 was built.

Also in 1992 a bombing took place here in Chicago, and was claimed by a Puerto Rican group that allegedly to be a clandestine organization. I publicly condemned the bombing which, not coincidentally, was done the night before we were holding a public event to announce some of the changes and the new ideas that were going to take place in the campaign to free the political prisoners. It was December 10th, Human Rights Day, and we had an event and all of a sudden news appeared in the media that a bombing had taken place. We condemned it as an action of the FBI or of an agent provocateur and have sustained that position

ever since. We believe more than ever that it was the work of Rafael Marrero, working as an agent provocateur, to try and dismantle, derail and destroy the work that we were doing.

The reason so many attacks have focused on me is that during all these years I have taken some strong positions openly and have done work that has helped to create a movement that has become effective. This movement has touched the lives of many people and it inspires people to do a lot of different types of work. Over the years as a teacher and as an activist I have helped people formulate ideas about the Puerto Rican reality and in some cases I can look at people who have been my students and they have become influential policy makers. There is an

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idea on the part of the FBI and sectors of the repressive so-called law enforcement agencies that somehow by attacking me that they can attack and stymie the work we do. The attacks directed against me are due to the effectiveness of the work that I have been involved in. Over the years we have waged very effective campaigns. They have been so successful, especially given that many people never believed them

possible. Many people did not believe that the Nationalists would be released. The same thing happened with the Mexican government's release of William Morales. A lot of people told us that this was impossible. We have made the impossible happen and that is why we have been under these incredible attacks.

These attacks have taken their toll. It is difficult to understand how much these attacks really impact on one's spirit and humanity. We have been under attack relentlessly and have been put on trial at least half a dozen times by the media. When we go back through the '70, the '80s, and the '90s, we see that there has never been a period when we have not been put on trial by the media. Their ultimate goal was to derail the campaign to free the prisoners. The fact that the right wing and the FBI mounted their attacks after the release of the prisoners in September, 1999 illustrates how successful the work has been. In actual fact we won the hearts and minds of many people, including people in the highest levels of the U.S. government, who felt a sense of justice that some things had to be done to right this wrong [the lengthy incarceration of the Puerto Rican political prisoners].

As part of these horrible attacks for nearly three years *El Pito* was put out on the streets, printing all kinds of innuendoes about my life and our work and accusing me of being a cult leader. These attacks do have an impact. When my daughters first saw *El Pito* they cried. To see your daughters cry is very hard. Even though they knew that what was written was lies, they were spread publicly! When my daughter went with me to the hearings that were mounted by the state legislature around Clemente I was put on trial for hours and accused of things that were not true. There was not an inkling of truth to the accusations. I sat with my daughter holding onto my hand and feeling so horrible. At that point I felt I would be exonerated, but for her it is not the same feeling. Her father was being accused of these lies. These are the things that are hard to explain to people. It is difficult to explain how difficult it has been for my sisters. How much they have had to suffer! At the same time as these attacks were taking place we went through a difficult family situation because my mother was suffering from Alzheimer's, at the same time that all this garbage was being thrown at us. The fact that we were able to survive this says a lot, not about me but about the movement we have been able to build and the kind of family that I have been privileged to have. My entire family has been there through the most horrible moments. It speaks about the visibility

of our incredible work that we have done to produce people in this work who, under very difficult situations, have continued to maintain the childcare center, the high school, the visibly of our community work, and the family learning center. For twenty-two years we have sponsored a people's parade. For six years we have organized Fiesta Boricua. During this period we have created new institutions, such as VIDA/SIDA, the Museum, and the Casita. If you look at the life of this community, the monuments, the flags, Paseo Boricua, they all speak to the resilience of those people who have carried out the work that goes beyond me. It is a tribute to them.

We [the Puerto Rican independence movement] have a history of sacrifices, a history of commitment, a history of being resilient. We have been so resilient that the discourse of Puerto Rico is the discourse of the Independence movement. Take, for example, the case of Vieques, and that of the prisoners. The governor of Puerto Rico, a statehooder, went to the United Nations in July of this year and said that the UN should intervene in the case of Puerto Rico because Puerto Rico is a colony of the United States and it should be put back on the list of non-governing territories. The Puerto Rican Independence movement has been struggling for this since 1972, so here we are at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century and we are beginning to see that we have won the battle in terms of the political discourse in Puerto Rico.

We are in a different political period from that of 1974 or '75, because much of the work that was



done meant that the Puerto Rican people have gained a political consciousness. Not only did they massively welcome the prisoners, but also there is also widespread support for the U.S. Navy to abandon Vieques. This has unified the Puerto Rican movement. One very interesting observation is the fight of Trinidad and LaHoya. When Trinidad arrived in Puerto Rico, he was welcomed by thousands of people, waving only the Puerto Rican flag. What were they saying? It's not so much whether Puerto Ricans believe boxing is good, but Trinidad became a national symbol. He had a little sign that he took in the ring and to Puerto Rico that said "Peace for Vieques." How many boxing figures in the world, besides Mohammad Ali, would come out making a political statement? When we look at this period, we can see that we are living in an exciting period of Puerto Rican affirmation.

My Self-Evaluation

My political work has impacted positively and negatively on my whole life experience. I give a lot of time and energy into building the political work we have been involved in. In that respect, my personal life and particularly my daughters have gotten the short end of the stick in terms of my time and what I could have done with them as a father. This is not to say that over the years they have not understood my work. They have and they have supported it. I am extremely proud of both of them. I have two daughters, Lolita Taina, who is named after Lolita Lebron and Maria Andrea, the oldest, who was born January 11, 1974. Both of them are extremely bright. I am really privileged to have them grow up with such an incredible sense of themselves. My mother had a great deal to do with their view of themselves. Their mother has done a wonderful job of raising them. I cannot claim the same credit because I was not around their lives as much. All that a parent can do is to orient a child in such a way that the child can shape his or her own world. I think that's what happened with my daughters. I tried to help in terms of thinking and rethinking the world. In the future, both of them will make good contributions to improving the world. Both of

them have chosen fields that are about people and about serving people. They chose this out of their own life experiences. I am extremely happy with them.

In terms of weaknesses it is very difficult to detach ourselves from who we are but over many years I can look back at the struggles we have had. I have not been as understanding as I could have been of different situations and different people. Sometimes I have been very harsh on people who did not need that type of harshness. In the heat of struggle you say things and do things that you regret. In terms of my daughters I could have been a better father. At times, they needed me and I wasn't there for them. In the process you do hurt people that you love and you live with that for the rest of your life as part of your conscience. I could have been more understanding. I could have been a better father. I could have done things in terms of my own personal growth and development such as finishing my dissertation.

My biggest personal strength is resilience and that comes across from the example of my mother. We come a full circle here in terms of my life as my mother taught us to face adversity head on, with courage. To transform defeats into victory, to make out of the worse moments the best moments we can. I know how much my mother suffered as an abused woman at the hands of my father and her in-laws. I know how much my mother suffered raising us by herself. I know how much my mother suffered by living in a hostile society she did not understand. All those things she confronted. They never stopped her. She continued and she knew what she wanted which was to raise us to be the best human beings possible. I think she did a great job. That is what I inherited from her and that is my strength. Part of being resilient comes from the idea that at every turn you always have the sense of hope. In the midst of a crisis you can always have hope.

If you look at the word "reformist" in the context of its original idea, to reform, I think I am one. In other words, to reshape the world, to reshape your thinking, to rethink the world. If it means that you are a sellout, that you sell out your principles and stoop to the point that you become a slave to someone, then

that is not me. We have changed. There is no doubt about it. I have changed in a number of occasions in my life. At points you look at a problem and say what is the solution. Constantly I reformulate. But often we look at solutions in the context of boxes. We move from one box to another and we encase ourselves. One of the best ways to look at problem solving is to see that a problem has many solutions. What is the best solution?

My Vision for the Future

I have always believed in Puerto Rican independence. At one point I believed that Puerto Rican independence was a matter of being able to articulate a good argument in this democracy. At another time I thought that we must be much more radical in our approach and expose colonialism for what it is and to call the US by its name as an empire. I believe that Puerto Rico needs a radical change. I don't know what I would have said twenty years ago. Do you need to build an economy based on socialist ideals? Do you create a totally centralized society? We are beginning to rethink a lot of concepts about what kind of just society we want. I want to be a part of a just society in which there is equality but there is also a great deal of freedom. I believe that collective and individual freedom is the only way for human beings to grow and develop. In other words, we don't exist in the world, we exist with the world. With the world means I have a consciousness that not only I exist, other things also exist but neither mind nor consciousness have any limits. Therefore we are the only species capable of engaging in the exercise of freedom. We have an incredible responsibility which is born out of ethics that brings us to a very important point. How do we deal with the world about us? How are we responsible for the world about us? I think freedom, ethics, community, and equality are all inter-related because you cannot engage in true freedom if any member of our species is deprived of



freedom. If we deprive any human being of any possibilities of engaging in freedom then that human being does not exist in a situation of equality.

The very idea of education, the very idea of engaging in the creation of technology, in the creation of the world has been limited to a few at the expense of the many and the many are deprived and marginalized from partaking in the building of a better world. I think that civilization has, through its various stages, been based on the idea that you deny some people the right to community. In the process one group of people dominates another and denies a group of people its rights. You have taken them out of history and you deny them their right to be fully dignified human beings. You have created a subject/object relationship. In the last 500 years or so individualism has become so much a part of the modern world beginning with Luther's teachings that salvation itself is an individual act, all the way to this Yuppie ideology that what matters is how much I make a la Bill Gates type of personality. We have created selfishness into a virtue. I think, as Eric Fromm stated very well, that the vocation of the human being is to be human. Then if my vocation is to be human, what is it to be human? I believe to be human is to be able to engage in the exercise of freedom. By freedom I mean understanding the world about me, acting responsibly upon the world, and most importantly transforming that world. If that is what freedom means, and that is what it means to me, then I have a responsibility not only to my fellow human beings but to all living and nonliving things in the world. I have an awesome responsibility to ensure that the ecosystems of the world, that the flora and the fauna of the world, really exist and that I am not a part of destroying those things. I need to be a part of building and enhancing those things.

I believe the 21st century calls upon us to engage in the politics of human rights. That means we have to understand that the last 7000 years have been a struggle for freedom, equality, and community. It means how do you tie these three things together through an ethics of responsibility to each other and for the world that we live in. If we start to look at things from that vantage point the next period in history is going to be an exciting period for human beings and for the human condition.★

Yaki

One can't think of Jose Lopez without bringing to mind the struggles for the independence of Puerto Rico and the release of the Puerto Rican Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War. Jose has been at the center of these struggles, expending what seems tireless, surely unselfish intellectual and physical energy in the effort to realize these goals.

Any mention of the name of Jose Lopez also has to be accompanied by a list of accomplishments in the course of developing unity, consciousness, and institutions in the Puerto Rican communities of Chicago and elsewhere.

Moreover, Jose has worked to create unity and to raise the consciousness of all peoples in this city, and the institutions he's helped to build have opened their doors and extended their services to anyone in need. Jose Lopez is known, literally, throughout the U.S. and the world, as a steadfast soldier, fighting in solidarity with other peoples similarly oppressed and exploited by the U.S. capitalist-imperialist state.

I know Jose Lopez as a comrade— someone with whom I share a political engagement, and someone that I can depend upon to watch my back and to shield me from any attacks. How could I do any less, knowing that Jose Lopez is under attack?

Jose Lopez needs all of us to watch his back, to shield him from the blows of U.S. injustice— can any of us do any less?

Yaki
Spear and Shield Publications
1340 West Irving Park, Suite 108
Chicago, IL 60613

Marta Rodriguez

October 26, 1999

I thought that being in Boston, hundreds of miles from Chicago would enable me to escape you, Jose Lopez, but apparently that was not to be. Don't ask me how, but Alejandro tracked me down and told me about your upcoming tribute. I grudgingly admit that I'm glad I'm able to partake of this albeit via EMail.

One of the things that I remember the most about you is how you could do so much with very little. That affected me most personally as I was your student at a time when the high school could barely claim to have a roof over its head. Yet the lack of braille equipment, techniques in teaching the blind or braille texts did not get in the way of your meeting my needs as a student. It took some creative planning and considerable time expenditure. (I remember all those hours you spent dictating to me the texts you assigned, or going over notes of your lectures in class so that I could braille them to study later.) Now there are greater technological resources at our disposal. Yet most teachers or employers would drown in the proverbial spot of water should they have to plan for the inclusion of a disabled student or employee. This lesson has served me well in my efforts to secure work or needed training. When someone says "We don't have the resources." I often treat them to this story.

As I was listening to someone relate to me their fears about my traveling alone, getting around stairs, and so on, I suddenly remembered an occasion where you and I were aggravating each other, for a change, (grin) and you said - as if realizing it for the first time - "I often forget your blind." Would that everyone else could do the same. Granted, I wish you had remembered that time we were laden with suit cases running up escalators to catch that plane to San Francisco. (Grin.) It would have saved me a pretty penny on the insurance policy I later got in order to walk with you, (laugh) but more often than not I'm thankful for your forgetfulness. It meant that you

trusted my ability to determine what I could and could not do. In the short time that I was around the cultural Center and the various projects it supported, it was this attitude which made it possible for me to do my work.

The Puerto Rican Community of Chicago has gone through a lot of changes since the days of the fights at Tuley High School. Your hard work is responsible for many of the self directing institutions that now grace this community. Such work was difficult at best given the odds you faced. but you hung in there and a lot of people are better off for it.

I'm sure there are many whose lives have in some ways changed for the better because they had you as a friend or teacher. I'm glad you'll have the opportunity to know it. Enjoy your well deserved celebration.

May you live very long and prosper.
Marta Rodríguez

Alan Berkman & Barbara Zeller

We want to thank the people for stepping up and taking the initiative to do an event honoring Jose. His consistency and commitment have earned him the respect and love of many of us here and in Puerto Rico, and the animosity of the state. We're proud to join you in standing by his side.

Oscar López Rivera

I would like to share some remembrances of José's early years, which is probably the least known part of his life. Even during those early formative years we could already see the picture of a very special and endearing human being who was destined to

become the man we have learned to love and respect.

When our mother was pregnant with José she would tell us she was carrying a very special child, and that she was going to name him José Elías in honor of her dead father. Her father had been a very special person to our mother, and she must have had the desire for José to be like him. When he was born we called him "Chelia", which was our grandfather's nickname.

The most salient characteristic of José's early behavior was his propensity to prefer the company of adults over that of his peers. While other children would be playing, José would be engaged in some activity with adults.

When we arrived in Chicago we had a white lady for a neighbor. She lived by herself and some dogs, and wasn't too popular with her neighbors. José, who was nine years old at the time and didn't speak English, began to associate with her. Soon they became so close that they were inseparable. She treated him like a son and would take him to theaters, movies, museums and resaurants. Thus exposing José to a world unknown to his peers.

We moved, and I believe José lost contact with her. José began to misbehave in the new school. We moved again. And this time he connected with Stanley and Annie, a Polish couple who had no children.

Stanley was a precinct captain for the Daley Machine. He made José his interpreter with the Puerto Rican voters. As the relationship flourished he taught José how to work the precincts, how to turn out the voters and how to work the polling stations. He provided José with firsthand lessons into the workings of the Daley Machine and its patronage system. José became like a son and he would partake in every aspect of Annie's and Stanley's life, including family vacations. Stanley would take him to all political meetings at the local, city and statewide level. He even took him to a National Democratic Party Convention.

By the time José graduated from the 8th grade he acted and talked like a politician. In high school he continued to excel and became a known debater and student leader. And by the time he graduated from high school our mother had no doubt he

had become the very special person she had divined and desired. He had already touched many people, had many good friends of all ages and of different races and nationalities, was active in the community and enjoyed the admiration, respect and love of many. It's this special person of then and now I call brother and compañero with all my love and respect.

Oscor López Rivera
#87651-024
P.O. Box 33
Terre Haute, Indiana 47808

Jan Susler

What an exciting moment to celebrate the life of our dear comrade José. As we move to the close of the decade/century/millennium, this historian guides us to the next millennium; fearless in his vision; undaunted by the slings and arrows of oppression and the endless recurrent witch hunts; rabbinical in his study; ministering to the political, educational, personal and yes, spiritual, needs of his minions; daring to hope- and to make that hope contagious- and then acting relentlessly, inspired by that hope, to realize a world of thinking, self-determining, women and men who together will forge a space free of exploitation. Forever in motion, excited, irrepressible, learning and teaching - an inspiration for those of us fortunate enough to walk at this side. With deep and abiding respect and love, and gratitude for his example to us all, and for his two decade long investment in me.

Jan Susler

Laura Whitehorn

When the news of the President's clemency offer was confirmed, I picked up the phone and called the bakery to leave a message for Jose: "You are a genius." He was out teaching a class at the time. A tireless genius.

Being by now a life-long revolutionary, I don't mean 'genius' as an elite term. Intellect — something Jose undeniably has in great quantity — is only one small part of it. What I find so exceptional and inspiring about Jose is the energy and enthusiasm he brings to the struggle: a drive to figure out and then implement a way for the forces of David to overcome Goliath. The uncanny thing is how many of Jose's strategies turn out to be successful ones.

The first time I met Jose, sometime around 1978, he made a speech detailing the historical development of the Puerto Rican Independence Movement. He began by taking off his watch, like a college professor. I prepared to yawn. But by the time he finished, I was ready to sign on for whatever task I might be able to perform. He was compelling; his analysis motivated me to act.

Throughout my years in prison, Jose, you were a friend and an inspiration. Every vicious state attack on you only underlines your effectiveness. In particular, through those years in prison, you gave me needed political and personal support as a lesbian as well as an anti-imperialist:

I admire you. I respect you. I love you.

Laura Whitehorn
Recently released
political prisoner

R 'n B

Resistance in Brooklyn

It is indeed an honor for Resistance in Brooklyn (RnB) to be able to send these words of celebration for José E. López. Though rooted in the north american progressive movements of New York City—as José is profoundly rooted in the Puerto Rican community of Chicago—we can barely begin to express the many ways that he has inspired, educated and led us over many years of struggle.

A part of RnB originated directly from the work of the Free Puerto Rico Committee, formerly the New Movement in Solidarity with Puerto Rican Independence and Socialism, and it was in this work that José's breathtaking and razor-sharp analysis first won our hearts and minds. Teaching us the history and multifarious manifestations of U.S. colonialism, he was one of the few who clearly articulated a practical program of solidarity. By creating a space to practice that solidarity under the direction of a part of the Puerto Rican movement, he helped us to become the type of internationalists that would neither lose sight of the imperial and repressive nature of the U.S. state, nor of the fact that grassroots community-building can be a powerful tool to combat that state.

Many of us in RnB are educators, and here again José's teachings remain strong. Whether developing independent day care center's in El Barrio's Taino Towers and in Crown Heights, or in representing the superintendent of NYC's Alternative High Schools and Programs, we have been ever-mindful of the manner in which the building of empowering institutions in Chicago's Puerto Rican community has been part and parcel of building for social change. Though the examples of one community cannot easily be replicated in another, the Pedro Albizu Campos High School and Doña Conseula Corretjer Day Care have been more than models for us; they are spaces where we continue to learn the lessons of bettering our own craft. Our work in the lesbian and gay, and AIDS activist, communities has been influenced by

the work of VIDA-SIDA, another alternative institution that models not simply social service, but the fight for social justice.

In addition to being an exemplary strategist, José has taught us the connections between culture and community, between praxis and ideology. Though "RnB" most typically stands for our geographic orientation, we share José's thirst for examining the world without dogma, and have tried to embrace the best of the Red & Black. Meeting as often in the kitchen or the bakery as in the conference hall, we are happy to share José's love of food (including Rice & Beans), and have been honored to be served up some challenging questions by José as he has simultaneously served us some café. It is our pleasure now to offer him both Roses & Bread.

As we've worked together these past decades, we must acknowledge José's extraordinary sense of audience and moment, finding the right things to say and the right ways to connect with widely diverse peoples. Whether addressing a consortium of conflict resolution professors in Ohio, or a gathering of pacifists in California, or a group of students at Columbia University, José never fails to enlighten. In the work to free the political prisoners/pows, we have felt privileged to help set up lists of prominent signers to impress those inside the White House, while also engaging in civil disobedience outside of that same house—in a myriad of campaigns under José's influence and direction. No one can talk about the campaign to free the Puerto Rican political prisoner and prisoners of war without talking about the incredible role in that movement that José has played from the beginning, and continues to play. He has truly put his whole self into it, turning very personal suffering—the separation from his brother, the years of COINTELPRO, and the many forms of oppression living in the belly of the beast—into a tremendously hopeful and passionate movement for the liberation of the prisoners and of the island. His consistency, theory and praxis, have built the whole movement to free all the U.S. political prisoners, and have helped us all to learn to turn defeats into victories.

We feel privileged now to be able to host José once again, as we organize a national conference in NYC on the two-

hundredth birthday of radical abolitionist John Brown (May 12-14, 2000), at which José will be a major presenter. This movement, full of change and continuity, is a far richer, brighter, and more successful place because of the hard work and clear thinking of José E. López. May we all walk together, in this new era, toward even greater successes. Long Live José Lopez!

Meg Starr, Matt Meyer, Bob Lederer, Elspeth Meyer, Betsy Mickel and all the members of Resistance in Brooklyn (RnB)

R 'n B
Resistance in Brooklyn
c/o WRL, 339 Lafayette Street, NY 10012; mmmsrmb@igc.org

Arawn Eibhlyn

Wednesday, October 27, 1999

José,

I wish I could be there with those friends and allies gathered to honor you. Please know that I am with you in spirit.

We rarely take the time to honor those we love and respect. Caught up in our lives, we believe there will be time to do it another day. I'm happy this day is set aside to honor you, and no one is more deserving of such a tribute.

I've had the privilege to know you for more than fifteen years. There are memories I hold very close. No doubt, many "José moments" will be recalled tonight. Near the top of the list: the drive and energy that motivated hundreds of us to board buses to demonstrate at the gates of the Lexington Correctional Facility and Alderson Penitentiary. Or your determination to maintain spirited and organized pickets outside Alejandrina's trial on those legendary Chicago winter days. On a more mundane level, I remember the debates about whether or not vegetarianism was an imperialist conspiracy against the Third

World. And the first time you prepared a vegetarian dish for one of the many programs at the Cultural Center, pulling me into the kitchen to show off your culinary feat. As anyone can attest, there are too many wonderful José moments to mention. I cherish each and every one.

Most of all, José, I honor you for your heart, your tenderness, your humanity, and your deep willingness to open yourself to all you meet. As a gay man and as a person living with AIDS, your friendship and your support have been deeply felt and welcome. Perhaps more importantly, your personal commitment and that of the Puerto Rican movement to openly support queer liberation has challenged the all too numerous homophobic elements of progressive movements.

As I write this, I'm looking at a picture of David Stern. His mischievous smile all teeth and quick wit. Had he lived, he would have been the first and loudest voice at the gates of Pleasanton to greet Carmen, Dylcia, Alicia and Lucy when they were released. And just as you honored his deep commitment to the prisoners and Puerto Rican independence at a tribute in San Francisco, I know he would be here with you tonight, the first one on his feet when you're introduced.

Finally, in honoring you, José, I feel that I am also honoring the Puerto Rican Independence movement. The opportunity to work with you and all those associated with the PRCC, VIDA/ SIDA, and the Puerto Rican community has made me a better person. Your example has deepened my sense of personal and political integrity, perseverance, and flexibility. It has even forced me to admit that there are moments when that which is seemingly impossible can indeed be achieved.

Gracias por 30
años de
consentimento y
enseñanza a los
Latinos de
Chicago

De
Graciela Macias
y
Juan Alexandro
Villagrana-Macias

**Blessings &
Congratulations
to you,
our friend
José López**

**8th Day Center
for Justice**

*The American Friends Service
Committee is honored to take part in
this tribute to José who has been a
guiding light in the struggle against
oppression and social injustice.*

Thank You José



José,

**Thank you for your
priceless contribu-
tions to the construc-
tion of a world free of
oppression.**

**With all our respect
and admiration,**

In deepest solidarity,

**Prairie Fire
Organizing
Committee**



Sorry we can't be there.
We add our voices to
those who acknowledge
the great contributions
of José López, not only
to struggle for Puerto
Rican independence but
to the struggle for peace
and social justice for all
human kind.

Bonnie Kerness
Masai Ehehosi
AFSC Prison Watch
Newark, New Jersey

TO JOSÉ LÓPEZ

**In respect and
appreciation of
your many years
of commitment
to Puerto Rican
independence and
social justice.**

China Brotsky

Malcolm X College

One of the City Colleges of Chicago

Latino Center

Salutes

José López and the PRCC on 30 years of planting seeds in the
community.



**Thank you for your
unwavering support for
Chicago's Puerto Rican
community and Latino's
causes over the last 30
years.**

**Miguel del Valle
State Senator
Assistant Democratic Leader
2nd Senate District
4150 W. Armitage Avenue
Chicago, IL 60639
773/292-0202**

To Jose Lopez,

**With great admiration for your
unwavering commitment to the
freedom and independence of Puerto
Rico and your over two-decade's his-
tory of work in the Puerto Rican
community of Chicago.**

**With great respect,
the People's Law Office
1180 West Milwaukee
773-235-0070**

**The Chicago Chapter of
the National Lawyers
Guild**

Salutes

José López

for his commitment to the
struggle for self determina-
tion for the Puerto Rican
People and especially for
his unceasing efforts to
free the Puerto Rican Po-
litical Prisoners.

It's great working
with you José

*“You are one of the
Indispensables!”*

30 Años Sembrando Semillas

**Felicidades al Centro Cultural
Puertorriqueños por su incansable
compromiso a la independencia de Puerto
Rico y a la libertad de los prisioneros
pólicos. Aunque no todos los patriotas
fueron puestos en libertad, y las
coniciones impuestas a los excarcelados
son injustas, nos regocijamos por la
libertad de aquéllos están ahora libres.**

**En especial, le queremos ofrecer nuestro
apoyo, nuestra amistad, y nuestra
admiración a José López, cuya dirección
del Centro y del esfuerzo por parte del los
prioneros es un ejemplo para todos.**

**José, te echamos de menos, gracias por las
muchas comidas ricas que nos preparaste
en nuestro hogar, especialmente los
tostones. ¿Cuano vuelves?**

**P'alante siempre.
Tus hermanos en la lucha,
Piri Thomas y Suzie Dod Thomas
Cheverote Productions
1678 Shattuck Ave., Ste. 278
Berkeley, CA 94709
(510) 520-0660, FAX (510) 620-0668
Email: Pthomas@DNAI.COM
SuzieDodSJ@AOL.COM**

**Gracias José por tu
compromiso a
nuestra comunidad
Puertorriqueña.**



**William Delgado
State Representative
3rd District
4150 West Armitage Ave.
Chicago, IL 60639
(773) 292-0202**

José, we appreciate your:

- Vision and sense of history**
- Breadth in opposing all forms of oppression and nurturing a culture of resistance**
- Personal sacrifice**
- Role in uniting and galvanizing so many people**
- Consistency and indefatigability and last but not least,**
- Home cooking!**

**Vicki Legion, Director
Community Health Training Center
Department of Health Education
1600 Holloway Ave
San Francisco CA 94132 4161**

**a joint program of City College of San
Francisco and San Francisco State Uni-
versity. Phone 415 338-3480 fax 415
338-7948**

La patria es valor y sacrificio ... y sazón y sudor.

Congratulations and thanks to a man of great heart and prophetic vision, whose stubborn resistance to colonialism and oppression continues to inspire us.

James and Nozomi

Love,

Respect

and

Deep

Appreciation

Nancy & Steve

HammerHard MediaWorks

salutes

José E. López

educator, activist, Puerto Rican
patriot, and friend.

**¡FUERA LA MARINA DE
VIEQUES!**

¡Viva Puerto Rico Libre!

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Chris Geovanis • Dick Reilly

**Neighbors Against
Police Brutality**

salutes

José E. López

for his tireless work
on behalf of Chicago's
Puerto Rican community and justice for all
oppressed peoples.

End police privilege and protection from due process.
Write Mayor Daley and tell him to strike language
from the FOP contract that protects brutal cops
from being punished for crimes of violence!

Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley,



**From the family of programs at
The Don Juan Antonio Corretjer
Puerto Rican Cultural Center**

**Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos Puerto Rican High School
Consuelo Lee Corretjer Day Care Center
Family Learning Center
Andres Figueroa Cordero Memorial Library
Vida/SIDA Program
Margarita de Cayey Theatre of the Oppressed
Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos Museum**

**We salute you for your dedication and leadership,
for your steadfast commitment to our
community and to justice.**

***Tonight we honor you and
celebrate your contributions.***

José:

In Solidarity

Close All Control Units!

**Committee to
End the Marion
Lockdown**



Comrade José:

**Thank you for
your unceasing
efforts and
example!**

Amandla!

**Out Of Control
Lesbian Committee to
Free Political Prisoners**

ROBERTO MALDONADO



**Cook County Commissioner 8th District
26th Ward Democratic Committeeman**

Roberto Maldonado

Salutes a great Puerto Rican leader,

José E. López

**for his hard work and dedication to the
Puerto Rican community.**

OUR OFFICE IS HERE TO SERVE YOU!

**8th District Community Service Office
26th Ward Democratic Committeeman Office:**

2615 W. Division Street

Chicago, Illinois 60622

Tel: (773) 395-0143

Fax: (773) 395-0146

E-mail: RMaldonado@wwa.com

**COOK COUNTY COMMISSIONER 8TH DISTRICT
26TH WARD DEMOCRATIC COMMITTEEMAN**