

1  
Testimony before the City Council on the Resolution to retire Roberto Clemente's jersey number 21

By William Gerena-Rochet

Latinos in this country have been an invisible population in film, TV and the media until recently when they have gotten some exposure and recognition via the role of celebrities in film, or sports and politics.

When Roberto Clemente entered the stage of sports as a full time player for the Pittsburgh Pirates in 1955, his celebrity status <sup>was met with</sup> ~~found~~ obstacles that were still a residue of Jim Crow practices in this country. Today this ~~of~~ phenomena of extreme exclusion has been translated into an anti-immigrant ideology and practice. The span of <sup>CLEMENTE'S</sup> his 18-year career saw the formative years of the Black Liberations struggle and the assassinations of MLK, Malcolm X and the many others who lost their lives in this era. The eventual gains for the Civil Rights Movement today need to undergo re-inventing in order to culminate in greater equality for African-Americans and Latinos.

Roberto Clemente would have shared this conclusion <sup>given that he was critical of what was going</sup> ~~given all that has become known of him.~~ <sup>around him</sup> ~~when he was alive.~~  
Roberto Clemente, as has been documented, also shares a number of similarities to Jackie Robinson, the only player whose number has been retired from MLB as a result of his having been the first African-American baseball player. Although Clemente was not the first Latino, he was the first Latino Super Star and began playing baseball when ML teams still had quotas on how many players of color they would have in their teams at a given time. But whereas Robinson is said to have open the gates, Clemente can be said to have held it open for the Latino players followed.

Jackie Robinson's number was not retired because of his baseball statistics – it was his role in a particular time in our country's history as it related to the social struggles against inequality and oppression. But Roberto Clemente also transcends his baseball identity; as sports journalist Dave Zirin pointed out in his writings: sports struggles have mirrored U.S. society struggles with its class, gender and racial complexities:

On this note, not only did Roberto Clement face racist treatment as a Black Latino, he was ridiculed for his lack of English proficiency; his expressions were mocked when the press wrote his words phonetically. Today many Latino players feel mocked and marginalized. Even though Clemente did not break a racial barrier he <sup>was faced with breaking a</sup> ~~did have to break~~ a language barrier. He was not interviewed in Spanish – there <sup>was</sup> ~~was~~ a lack of Latino Journalist in the media, another sign of the times; he was not provided with a translator as many Asian Baseball Stars have at their side today.

With a sense of fairness and a moral blueprint in him, had Clemente been alive today he would have wanted to develop a city-sports complex in a poor neighborhood in New York City; much as he helped create in Puerto Rico to give hope to a number of disadvantage kids.

Roberto Clemente would have noticed that Jackie Robinsons personal accomplishment and door opening for other African American baseball players has gradually been closing <sup>ed</sup> shut. The number of African American baseball players, that at its height made up 27 to 28 percent of ML players has shrunk to something like 9 percent.

The affects of governmental and corporate policies have, as it were, reversed the gains of the Civil Rights Movement, in this case Baseball, that Mr. Robinson jumped started in the North with his historic breaking of the racial barrier.

*City* The shifts in economic priorities and resources from the inner cities have resulted in less and less children playing baseball. A conscious effort to create a team is not as simple as getting a ball and playing basketball or football as has been noted. Little Leagues teams have had to fend for themselves: a case example is the East Harlem Little League who lost their baseball field last year and <sup>has</sup> have to struggle to make ends meet.

*The* Seeing this take place in the wealthiest nation on earth would have ~~made~~ <sup>appalled</sup> ~~disturbed~~ Clemente, ~~appalled at the~~ present day statistics on the decrease in African American players in baseball ~~as he would have~~ <sup>been</sup> interpreted ~~it~~ as the outcome of an economic inequality he spoke so much against. What made him unique was that he would have followed his words with action.

Roberto Clemente wanted to play in NYC because of its Puerto Rican population. He was signed by the Brooklyn Dodgers who a few years later would move out to LA, but the couple of years he was deprived in playing in the Big Apple <sup>could</sup> ~~could~~ have ~~at~~ made this dream come true. He did not play those few years in NY because of team politics that basically were designed to hide him from other teams. Incidentally it was Branch Rickey as a Dodger CEO who paved the way for Jackie Robinson in 1947, and later as a Pittsburgh CEO in the early 1950s, <sup>with the use</sup> plucked Clemente out of the Dodger system ~~base on~~ baseball draft rules; this paved the way for Clemente's 18 year baseball career.

Had Clemente dominated the English Language he would have been a noticeable <sup>✓ 101 ce</sup> leader in the civil rights movement given his admiration for Martin Luther King and his feelings of solidarity for a just society.

Robert Clemente died as a humanitarian creating a standard that many of today's baseball players emulate and for which the prestigious Roberto Clemente Award is given.

Many institutions and places are named after Roberto Clemente, something that has been noted. If the number of honorary naming could be traded with living years, Roberto Clemente would <sup>be</sup> hundreds of years old. This is a remarkable recognition no other athlete has achieved.

*well, you know what it means* Dave Zirin agrees that Roberto Clemente's number 21 should be retired. He states "In my view, Clemente and Robinson should be honored identically because it would cut against the idea that Blacks and Latinos need to compete with each other for equality – an idea that serves the owners and those who would pit them against each other and not the players or minority groups more generally." *say in quote*

Furthermore, he states, "We should support the retiring of Clemente's number because it could move the fans closer to accepting the contributions made by Latinos to the game." *WNG*

With the present backlash against Latino immigrants, the retiring of Clemente's number can provide additional inspiration for a new civil rights movement in this country.

3

With Chicago and Philadelphia having passed similar resolutions endorsing the retiring of Clemente's number, it is only logical that New York City, with its large Latino and Puerto Rican community will be another great City honoring a great human being who wore <sup>the number</sup> 21.

000-000-00000

Model # Dell Photo AIO 962

AUG 15, 2006 02:42

\*\*\* ERROR REPORT \*\*\*

TOTAL PAGES LOST: 0

TOTAL FAXES LOST: 2

No.	S/R	TO/FROM	PAGES	RESULT
01	Send	17877725280	--	LOST
02	Send	17877725280	--	LOST

\*\*\* POWER FAILURE \*\*\*

**WHY THE CITY COUNCIL OF NYC SHOULD VOTE ON A RESOLUTION TO URGE BASEBALL COMMISSIONER BUD SELIG TO RETIRE ROBERTO CLEMENTE'S #21**

Submitted by Julio Pabón, National Coordinator of the Retire 21 Campaign

Good afternoon honorable members of the NYC council. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to come here today before you and share some of the reasons that I believe that Roberto Clemente's #21 should be retired from all of major league baseball. In doing so it would perhaps be obvious to many of you as to why should this city council pass such a resolution.

The campaign to retire Roberto Clemente's #21 from all of MLB is more than just a campaign to retire a number. It is a campaign to highlight the hope and admiration that America has always demonstrated for its heroes who have contributed something in their lives to affect the greater citizenship in a positive way.

Roberto Clemente was more than just a great baseball player. The fact that he was voted into the baseball HALL OF Fame posthumously after his death without having to wait the customary 7 year period is a testament to his great ability as an athlete that still to this day is mentioned and compared when certain plays or throws are made from right field.

Clemente was the first Latino elected into that elite group of the best players in the history of baseball. But his awesome ability as an athlete is not the reason that we began this campaign to retire his #21.

The fact that he was killed in an airplane crash trying to take badly needed supplies to the earthquake victims of another country, Nicaragua was the ultimate sacrifice that any human being can make is also not the reason that we believe that his number #21 should be retired.

The reason that we believe that his #21 should be retired is because of the way that this great athlete and humanitarian lived his life during his tenure playing in the United States.

Unfortunately because of the discrimination that existed in the mid-50s of Jim Crow laws when Clemente began his baseball career in this country and the period following that ugly time frame in American life, Roberto Clemente never received the positive attention and respect that many Americans would have loved to have known.

The fact was that Clemente was an activist. He spoke up against the injustices that he saw that he had not experienced in his native Puerto Rico. Speaking up at a time when very few in his profession would.

Clemente was an organizer who went beyond talking. He not only identified issues that he had a problem with, but he also tried to change situations.

GIVE EXAMPLE OF ROOKIE YEAR IN FT. MYERS, FL. WHEN HE CHANGED THE WAY THE BLACK PLAYERS WERE FED AFTER THE GAMES.

Clemente was a caring individual that respected the fans in a way that we only could hope that any player or athlete today would emulate.

GIVE EXAMPLE HOW HE WAS WITH THE FANS SIGNING AUTOGRAPHS

Clemente Love children and would always go out of his way to help teach, or motivate any child. He was acting in the spirit of "No Child Left Behind". Or "It Take's a Village to Raise a Child" before these phrases were popular.

GIVE EXAMPLES OF LETTERS HE RECIVED FROM CHILDREN AND HIS VISITS WHILE OUT ON THE ROAD.

I could go on an on and give so many examples of how by refining Clemente's #21 we would be not just honoring a great human being, but also that by doing so we would perhaps give some hope to many of the athletes playing today that they should be a little different from the way that they are today. Perhaps we can also give a little hope to the children and youth of this country that GOD knows they need some positive role models that are not about showing the "BLING-BLING" and the "BENJAMINS" but by demonstrating true acts of love and respect to each other. This is important for all our youth, whether they are from Pittsburg, PA where Clemente played most of his career or from the streets of the South Bronx where I am from.

However, for the record we should state that Clemente did visit New York City when he came to play against the Mets and the countless number of times that he visited and stayed in the Bronx where his close family friends lived and were able to supply him with the love and wholesome "arroz con pollo" and other home dishes that he could not get elsewhere.

Passing a resolution to urge Commissioner Bud Selig to Retire #21 will be great thing for this city. Not just for the great number of Puerto Ricans who live here that remembers having a day of pride every time they visited Shea stadium to see Clemente play, or the many adults today who remember their fathers taking them to Shea just to see Clemente.

Passing this resolution will be great for all our citizens and for baseball as a whole to know that New York City has joined both Chicago and Philadelphia in letting Commissioner Bud Selig know that this is the right thing to do for all of baseball.

Thank you

TESTIMONY OF JUDGE DALE W. RADCLIFFE AND JUDGE CARMEN L. LOPEZ

BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND INTERNATIONAL  
INTERGROUP RELATIONS OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

JANUARY 22, 2008

Good Afternoon,

Distinguished members of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations.

Thank you for your kind invitation to address the Committee, during this public hearing.

My name is Dale W. Radcliffe. I am here with my wife, Judge Carmen Lopez and we appear before you this afternoon in support of Resolution Number 503, "A Resolution calling upon the Commissioner of Major League Baseball, Bud Selig, to retire number 21 in recognition of Roberto Clemente, a great baseball player and humanitarian."

In our City of Bridgeport, we have a dedicated and committed group of citizens known as the "Friends of Clemente." Each year on December 31, the anniversary of Roberto Clemente's death, this group gathers around a small monument in a park adjacent to Long Island Sound, to honor and remember the life and legacy of a great baseball player, and a remarkable human being—Roberto Clemente.

There can be no doubting Roberto Clemente's greatness as a baseball player.

In a career which spanned eighteen(18) seasons as a member of the Pittsburgh Pirates, he collected three thousand (3000) hits, won four National League batting titles, and compiled a .317 lifetime batting average. He was voted the National League's Most Valuable Player in 1966, and was a member of two World Championship teams, in 1960 and 1971. Clemente was honored as a gold glove recipient twelve (12) times, and was arguably the finest defensive right fielder who ever played.



Those statistics and accomplishments are the reason Roberto Clemente became the first Latino inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame. Following his tragic death, Clemente became only the second player for whom the Hall of Fame waived the mandatory five (5) year waiting period, thus enabling him to be immediately enshrined.

However, as impressive as those statistics are, they are not the reason groups such as the Friends of Clemente gather to honor his life and memory thirty-five years after his death. Nor are they the reason why this resolution should receive favorable action by the New York City Council.

We would do a great disservice to the life and legacy of Roberto Clemente, if we recall his heroic death in a plane crash, but neglect to honor, at the same time, a life which personified courage, dignity, strength, pride, respect and genuine compassion.

When we honor Roberto Clemente, we honor a young Latino from Carolina, Puerto Rico, who came north to play baseball for the Pittsburgh Pirates in the 1950's, and confronted the dual minority status of race and language.

We remember a young player who, during spring training in the "Jim Crow" South of that era, refused to accept food from a "White's Only" restaurant, a courageous act, particularly by one who was still years away from being acclaimed a baseball superstar.

We honor a superb athlete, who spent his entire eighteen (18) year career in a small media market in the mid-west, often overlooked and underappreciated, yet who managed to transform anger and resentment into determination, and reached the pinnacle of his profession.

We honor a player who traveled to great heights, but never forgot where he came from, and had a passion for young fans.

Clemente's dignity, pride and character were all displayed before a national television

audience, following the 1971 World Series.

Clemente had been named the Most Valuable Player in that series, and was ready to be interviewed during the clubhouse celebration. Before answering questions in English, he insisted upon speaking first in Spanish to his family and friends watching the proceedings, an act which infused a sense of self-esteem into Puerto Rican and Latino households throughout the Western Hemisphere.

It is no exaggeration to say that every Latino player in Major League Baseball today, from Alex Rodriguez, Jorge Posada, Carlos Beltran, Carlos Delgado and Manny Ramirez, to the rookie trying to make a Major League roster, stands on the shoulders of Roberto Clemente, and owes to him a debt which can never be repaid.

However, it would be a tragic mistake to limit the significance of this remarkable man, only to the Latino or Puerto Rican community.

Just as the man whose birthday we celebrated yesterday, Dr. Martin Luther King, is an American hero, not simply a hero to African Americans, Roberto Clemente's life and death serve as a beacon and a role model to a humanity that needs true heroes as never before.

When the Connecticut premier of "The Legacy of 21" was held in Bridgeport this past April, we witnessed an enthusiasm and support for the goal of retiring number 21 from non-Latinos, whose admiration for Clemente as a player and a human being was deep, and genuine.

Of course, as is well known, the legacy of Roberto Clemente is also the legacy of a rare superstar athlete, who used his celebrity to be of service to humanity. He insisted upon going to Nicaragua on New Year's Eve, 1972, to make certain that vital supplies reached the victims of an earthquake, and were not diverted by corrupt government officials.

In 1972, it must be remembered that Roberto Clemente was a celebrity, who had already

achieved bigger-than-life status in his homeland of Puerto Rico. He was a can't miss Hall of Famer, who could have been content to bask in the glory and fame which he had so richly earned.

However, Clemente did not parachute in to Nicaragua on a first class flight for a staged photo-op. Instead, at age 38, disregarding his own safety, he flew in the rear of a cargo plane, on a mission of mercy from which he would never return.

It is for all of these reasons, that thirty-five years after his death, Roberto Clemente is respected and admired— not only for the heroic way in which he died, but the courageous way in which he lived, and the role model he has become.

These are the reasons that Major League Baseball should retire number 21, and that Resolution Number 503 should receive favorable and enthusiastic action by the New York City Council. Passage of this Resolution will recognize that the greatness of Roberto Clemente will ultimately be found not in the baseball record book, but in the history books, and in the accomplishments of those who are inspired by his legacy.

Today, Major League Baseball is in desperate need of positive role models such as Roberto Clemente. Anyone who doesn't believe that, has not been reading either the front pages or the sports pages over the past few months.

It can accurately be reported, that the integrity of our National Pastime is under assault, as it has not been since the "Black Sox" scandal of 1919.

We can think of no better way to lift up the game of baseball, than by celebrating the life and legacy of Roberto Clemente, as the best baseball has to offer, and an example, we would all do well to emulate.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I also wish to thank you for the opportunity to address you this afternoon.

I have spent much of my time as a Superior Court Judge on the Juvenile Court. That is the court that attempts to address the issues involving children and youth who come to court either charged as juvenile delinquents or as victims of child abuse and neglect. I can say that without a doubt our children are facing tremendous challenges as they navigate through their life's journey. In years past, sports figures, government officials, and other celebrities served as role models for our children.

Now we are in the age of corruption, steroids, pleasure and money. This is a lot of what our children are exposed to.

Societies have traditionally selected outstanding individuals, who have chosen to serve humanity and live by the values of respect for all people to honor and hold in high esteem. Usually those individuals who have demonstrated an extraordinary capacity to selflessly promote the well being of others are held up as role models in society.

I don't know as much about baseball as my husband, although I have learned a lot from him and have even been to Cooperstown, which as I understand it, makes me a grown up baseball fan.

However, I do know that baseball's reputation has been tarnished and is under a cloud, as we speak. My husband and I, serve on a little league board of directors in Bridgeport which is associated with the Cal Ripkin division of Babe Ruth baseball. If you have ever witnessed a group of youngsters involved in little league, you could not help but notice the special way in which baseball players are looked up to. The youngsters want to be like them.

And now, I worry, as I am sure you do, that they may grow up believing that you do

whatever it takes to make it, and that to make it big, you CHEAT.

I believe that Major League Baseball, as a good corporate citizen, has a wonderful opportunity to showcase a superstar who lived by the principles of respect and service, rather than worshipping the almighty dollar.

When future generations enter a major league stadium and ask "What does that number 21 on the outfield wall mean?" the heroism of Roberto Clemente and his memory will come alive again in the retelling. Clemente is not a "hero", because he could hit, catch and throw a baseball with great skill, but because of a life of service to others and a life lost in an attempt to help others.

These are the role models that our children and youth need.

By passing this resolution you will advance the cause of convincing the Commissioner of Major League Baseball that number 21 should be retired. The Commissioner has the power to do this. Your endorsement of this cause, will help provide him with the will.

Thank you.