

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND

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INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

October 16, 2018
Start: 1:14 P.m.
Recess: 1:35 p.m.

HELD AT: Committee Room - City Hall

B E F O R E: JAMES G. VAN BRAMER
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

JOSEPH C. BORELLI
LAURIE A. CUMBO
KAREN KOSLOWITZ
FRANCISCO P. MOYA

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND

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INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Thomas Brasuell
Vice President of Community Affairs from Major
League Baseball

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND

INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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[gavel]

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Alright.

Alright, good afternoon everyone and welcome to today's hearing on... for the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations. We are officially in session. My name is Jimmy Van Bramer and proud to be the Chair of this Committee. We are joined by member of the Committee, Council Member Karen Koslowitz from Queens and two Council Members who have important resolutions that we're hearing today, Council Member Carlina Rivera and Council Member Bob Holden. In the interest of time we'll go right to the resolutions sponsored by the Council Members who are here with us. Resolution Number 285 is sponsored by Council Member Carlina Rivera and it calls upon the United States Secretary of the Interior to recognize the historical significance of Roberto Clemente birth... place of death in Loiza, Puerto Rico by adding it to the national register of historic places. I am incredibly fond of the Island of Puerto Rico, I obviously very much appreciate the story and the lessons of Roberto Clemente and what he has meant to so many and we are proud to hear this resolution today and I would ask

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND

INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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2 Council Member Rivera to speak to her very important
3 resolution.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER RIVERA: Thank you so much
5 Chair Van Bramer and my colleagues. Thank you for
6 allowing me to speak on Resolution 285 calling upon
7 the U.S. Secretary of the Interior to recognize the
8 historical, historical significance of Roberto
9 Clemente's place of birth in Loiza, Puerto Rico by
10 adding it to the national register of historic
11 places. With the conclusion of Hispanic heritage
12 month this week, I am so pleased that we can cap this
13 month of cultural recognition by bringing attention
14 to the life of a baseball legend, Puerto Rican icon
15 and inspiring humanitarian. Clemente, who was born to
16 the son of a sugar cane worker in Catalina Puerto
17 Rico on August 18th, 1934 quickly became a baseball
18 star on the island and started his professional
19 career at 18 playing for the Santurce Cangrejeros.
20 After graduating high school, Clemente signed a minor
21 league affiliate of the Brooklyn Dodgers and made his
22 major league debut with the Pittsburg Pirates the
23 following season. Over the next 17 seasons, Clemente
24 would establish himself as one of the greatest all
25 around players of all time reaching many milestones

2 and receiving multiple MVP and gold glove awards.
3 Clemente even enlisted during the 1958 to '59 off
4 season in the U.S. Marine Corp reserve and served for
5 six years as an infantry man. For all of his success
6 though, Clemente faced numerous challenges. As a
7 black Puerto Rican in major league baseball less than
8 a decade after Jackie Robinson broke baseball's color
9 barrier, Clemente faced discrimination for being a
10 double outsider. He was barred from dining in
11 segregated restaurants or staying in the same hotel
12 with the rest of team during spring training while
13 the press relied on Latin stereotypes, mocked his
14 accent by quoting him with phonetic spelling and
15 ignored his request to not Anglicized his name in
16 print but Clemente did not turn away from these
17 attacks, he challenged the stereotypes that had
18 marginalized native Spanish speakers in the U.S. and
19 often spoke out against prejudice. He became known as
20 a strong voice with a growing contingent of Latino
21 players in the major leagues and advocated for Latino
22 civil rights. Clemente is a hero to all Boricuas
23 because of his commitment to charity and service.
24 Unfortunately, it was during this very pursuit of his
25 humanitarian endeavors that Clemente tragically died.

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2 When a massive earthquake struck Nicaragua on
3 December 23rd, 1972 he decided to personally air lift
4 relief supplies to the nation to ensure they reached
5 those in need. The overloaded plane crashed in Loiza,
6 Puerto Rico shortly after taking off and Clemente
7 passed away at the age of 38. With New York State
8 home to over one million Puerto Ricans many of whom
9 are still recovering from the physical and mental
10 harm caused by Hurricane Maria it is important that
11 this Council and subsequently this nation recognize
12 the life of a man who still inspires so many Boricuas
13 today to rebuild and recover from one of our
14 country's greatest tragedies. And I feel that even
15 now in one of Puerto Rico's darkest times we cannot
16 forget our Island's proud history with figures like
17 Clemente and Pedro Albizu Campos and Julia DeBurgos
18 and so many others continuing to inspire young and
19 old on the island and in the Diaspora to never give
20 up on our dreams. That is why we remember Clemente
21 today; his patriotism remains a part of our people's
22 legacy and we should recognize where his time ended
23 to celebrate a lifetime of achievement. That is why I
24 hope my colleagues will join me and support this
25 resolution. Thank you.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND

1 INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS 7

2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
3 much Council Member Rivera and I see that we have a
4 speaker from Major League Baseball and others to
5 speak to your very important resolution and I want to
6 thank you for bringing it to the Council's attention.
7 Obviously the, the record shows many things about
8 Roberto Clemente that all of us admire but there's
9 always things that we don't yet know and this helps
10 bring to light so many things about his important
11 life and legacy and all the things that he did beyond
12 playing for baseball but I did not know that he had a
13 Brooklyn Dodger association although Council Member
14 Holden was nodding his head that yes, he knew that.
15 Yes, of course..

16 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: I was a big
17 Brooklyn Dodger fan and Roberto Clemente fan and when
18 they traded him the, the rights to him they traded
19 away championships because they would have.. they,
20 they won only one in Brooklyn and with Clemente in
21 the lineup could you imagine what they would have
22 done with Jackie Robinson and Clemente, Pee Wee
23 Reese, Duke Snider, all the greats but Clemente had
24 some.. I saw him play, I saw him play live and he had
25 such an arm that he could throw from the warning

2 track and throw somebody out at home plate and, and
3 he was fast, and he was probably the best player
4 that... along with Willie Mays the best player that I
5 witnessed but what a tragedy that we, we lost him, he
6 had exactly 3,000 hits which is a milestone and then
7 we lost him obviously in the plane crash but that...
8 and that was devastating to everyone but if the
9 Brooklyn Dodgers had, had certainly Roberto Clemente
10 we would have had a bunch of... bunch... maybe they
11 wouldn't have moved out also but he was a great
12 player, yeah.

13 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Well we learned
14 a lot of things about Council Member Holden, you, you
15 love baseball and you also hold grudges because
16 you've not let go that the Brooklyn Dodgers let
17 Roberto Clemente go all those years ago. So, thank
18 you, anyone else want to speak to Roberto Clemente?
19 Yeah, he was a legend. So, we're also hearing three
20 resolutions that are sponsored by Council Member Bob
21 Holden that honor a very important community in not
22 only his beloved district but the city of New York
23 and that of course is the Polish and Polish American
24 community, Resos 420, 421 and 422 honor and seek to
25 recognize both Polish Independence Day and of course

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND

1 INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS 9

2 some of the legends including Casimir Pulaski and
3 Tadeusz Kosciuszko and I hope I said those at least
4 in some semblance of an accurate way. I am proud to
5 be married to a Polish American, a proud Polish
6 American who hails from the Polish American Community
7 in Hamtramck, Michigan but I would act... ask Council
8 Member Holden to speak to his three Resolutions
9 honoring all of those for Polish and Polish American.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you Chair
11 Van Bramer. Yes, Polish people obviously made a big
12 actually... certainly a commitment and... in our
13 revolution and so, so Resolution 420 declares
14 November 11th as Polish Independence Day in the city
15 of New York. Since regaining independence in 1918
16 Poland has been involved in numerous important events
17 including the, the invasion by Nazi Germany in 1939
18 which began World War two, they were also forced to
19 adopt communism by the Soviet Union and the people's
20 republic of Poland in 1945 but it was also the
21 birthplace of the solidarity movement in the 1980's
22 that resulted in actually the defeat of communism and
23 the establishment of the democratic third Polish
24 republic. They've also become a role model for
25 countries that experience political transformation

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND

1 INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

2 after the Revolutions of 1989. And speak of... about
3 New York City, there are approximately 200, 200,342
4 people of Polish ancestry within New York City and
5 New York City is often called America's most Polish
6 town with many Polish restaurants, markets, cultural
7 institutes and... existing within the city. New York
8 City has also recognized and celebrated Polish
9 history including like you mentioned... the, the Polish
10 leaders you mentioned Casimir Pulaski who with the
11 annual Pulaski Day Parade on 5th Avenue and Tadeusz
12 Kosciuszko with the naming of the, the Kosciuszko
13 Bridge in Maspeth that we all love and get stuck on
14 every year... or every day. I'll speak to Resolution
15 421, declaring October 11th as Casimir Pulaski Day in
16 the City of New York, he's a Polish American hero who
17 came from Poland to assist the American colonists
18 during their fight with the British in the American
19 Revolution and was a big part of, of American... like I
20 said the independence and he's a big part in Polish
21 history. In 1777, Pulaski arrived in Philadelphia
22 meeting George Washington and volunteering his
23 services to help American colonists fight England.
24 Pulaski and his legion were instrumental in
25 protecting America's independence including being

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND

INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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2 involved in the action along New Jersey coast in
3 October of 1778 and defend... and also defending
4 Charleston, South Carolina in May 1779 and fighting
5 in the Siege of Savannah in Georgia in, in October
6 1779. And of course, we have the Pulaski Day Parade
7 in 5th Avenue like I mentioned before it's the first
8 Sunday in October and again the Casimir Pulaski Day
9 will strengthen Polish American pride as well as
10 celebrate and commemorate a man who was a huge part
11 in the American Revolution and we have to thank him
12 for that. And I'll speak finally to Resolution 422,
13 declaring October 15th as Tadeusz Kosciuszko Day and
14 it's not Kosciuszko its Kosciuszko because the
15 sisters of the holy Nazareth taught me that in the..
16 how, how to pronounce that. Tadeusz Kosciuszko
17 immigrated to America in June 1776 after being
18 recruited by Ben Franklin to fight for the American
19 Independence from England. Kosciuszko was the chief
20 engineer of the entire continental army by the end of
21 1776. He played a huge role in the American war
22 effort obviously showcasing his talent in
23 constructing defensive fortifications seen in, in
24 fortifying Philadelphia, Saratoga, Fort Ticonderoga
25 and West Point and that's why I guess they named the

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND

INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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2 bridge after him because he was an engineer and so..
3 at the end of the America Revolution Kosciuszko was
4 promoted to Brigadier General in the United States
5 Army and received citizenship, U.S. citizenship. So,
6 Kosciuszko is commemorated by having monuments,
7 stands, streets, parks named after him and, and like
8 I mentioned the, the love... the lovely... new one,
9 Kosciuszko Bridge so thank, thank you Chair, and I
10 hope the Council passes the resolutions, thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
12 much Council Member Holden for bringing all of these
13 important resolutions to the council and reminding us
14 of some very important history and of course so
15 important to honor our Polish and Polish American
16 communities in Queens and throughout the city and
17 indeed the country. We have one other resolution that
18 we're hearing today, Council Member Eugene who could
19 not be with us is sponsoring Resolution 203. A
20 resolution establishing February 4th as Rosa Parks
21 Day to commemorate the civil rights leader, obviously
22 all of us are familiar or should be familiar with the
23 story on December 1st, 1955; Rosa Parks famously
24 refused to surrender her seat to a white passenger on
25 a Montgomery, Alabama bus. Her heroic act of civil

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND

INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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2 disobedience would lead to a citywide boycott of
3 buses and a United States Supreme Court ruling
4 ordering the desegregation of buses. Within such a
5 culturally diverse city that truly values and honors
6 our civil rights leaders, the council is proud to
7 recognize Rosa Park's contributions. So, with that
8 said we're hearing all five of these resolutions
9 today and we have with us Thomas Brasuell from Major
10 League Baseball I assume to speak to Roberto Clemente
11 Resolution but please join us Thomas and... thank you,
12 feel free to turn on the mic and start your
13 testimony.

14 THOMAS BRASUELL: Alright, thank you. My
15 name is Tom Brasuell, I'm the Vice President of
16 Community Affairs from Major League Baseball and I
17 bring a statement from Bernie Williams. Good day to
18 you all I am sorry I am unable to be present at this
19 hearing today, but I had a long scheduled previous
20 commitment speaking at a conference at Temple
21 University for Idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis, the
22 disease that took my dad's life. I am however
23 grateful to be able to submit this statement
24 supporting the New York City council Resolution
25 calling for the United States Congress to add this

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND

INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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2 site of the Roberto Clemente's tragic death to the
3 national register of historic places. Words will
4 never be able to adequately express the pride I have
5 having been a major league baseball player who was a
6 native of Puerto Rico. Like many children growing up
7 in Puerto Rico I dreamed of being able to be like the
8 great Roberto Clemente and as I got older and
9 progressed to the major leagues, playing in New York
10 City I wanted to not just emulate the player Roberto
11 was but also the person he was and everything Roberto
12 Clemente represented off the field. Clemente stood up
13 for and helped break barriers and opened doors for
14 Latino players in major league baseball. Clemente is
15 an icon not just for the great player he was but for
16 how he led his life giving back to others
17 particularly those less fortunate. Clemente died as
18 he lived serving others. He died on New Year's Eve in
19 1972 while embarking on a mission to deliver relief
20 supplies to earthquake ravaged Nicaragua. When news
21 of Clemente's death spread around the island,
22 reactions were a combination of shock and sadness but
23 mostly stunned silence. I was only four, but I
24 realized then that Puerto Rico and America had lost a
25 hero. There were similar reactions in Pittsburg, New

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND

INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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2 York, and across America and around the world. Today
3 nearly 50 years after his death Roberto Clemente is
4 still an idol to Puerto Ricans every where and is the
5 gold standard for athletes looking to help others and
6 serve the community. As major league baseball was
7 about to announce the recipient of the annual Roberto
8 Clemente award at this year's world series,
9 recognizing the positive impact players have off the
10 field, it is important that we all follow that
11 example and commemorate the life of Roberto Clemente
12 for all generations to come. By adding the site of
13 Roberto's passing to the national register of
14 historic places, we celebrate his life, his legacy
15 and establish an inspiring reminder of service above
16 self to current and future generations who will visit
17 Puerto Rico and this site. Thank you for this
18 opportunity and for your consideration of this long
19 overdue recognition for the great Roberto Clemente,
20 sincerely Bernie Williams, former major league
21 baseball player, 1991 to 2006.

22 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
23 much for being here and obviously thank you to Bernie
24 Williams for speaking on this very important
25 resolution and of course we all know him as a great

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND

1 INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

2 Yankee and even though I'm a big Mets fan we can
3 still appreciate all of what he means to the city, to
4 the island of Puerto Rico and to the country and we
5 very much appreciate you being here to speak on
6 behalf of this important resolution.

7 THOMAS BRASUELL: Thank you and I should
8 just note Congressman Serrano who has the resolution
9 in the... in the... in congress, it was passed out of
10 committee and its been put in the full house calendar
11 and there is a Senator who also is planning on
12 introducing similar... a, a resolution probably within
13 the next 30 days or so, so this is moving forward
14 pretty quickly so we thank the Council... [cross-talk]

15 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Perfect... [cross-
16 talk]

17 THOMAS BRASUELL: ...thank the Committee
18 and Council Member Rivera for this... joining the
19 support.

20 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Absolutely, I
21 hope that Council Member Rivera's Resolution and our
22 passing it helps just a little bit in making sure
23 that it happens. Thank you so much... [cross-talk]

24 THOMAS BRASUELL: Thank... [cross-talk]

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COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: ...again for
being... [cross-talk]

THOMAS BRASUELL: Thank you... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: ...here today and
I don't believe we have any others to testify on the
issue today but before going I want to recognize
Chloe Rivera to my left, this will be her last
hearing as our aid on the committee, she's been
working with the Committee on Cultural Affairs for
about three years but of course before she was with
this committee she served as an intern in my first
year as a Council Member starting on the same day as
my Chief of Staff, Matt Wallace who is now with me
for well over eight years so we're very excited for
Chloe as she moves on to some new assignments here at
the council so we'll still be seeing her but I want
to thank her for her incredible service to this
committee and all that she has done for the council,
my committee, the city of New York and we expect
great things from Chloe Rivera going forward in her
career and I know we'll welcome formerly our new
staff member at the next committee but for this one
we want to say thank you to Chloe and wish her well
in her new assignments here at the council. We've

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND

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INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

also been joined by Council Member Joe Borelli on the
Committee from Staten Island and unless there is
anyone else to testify on any of these resolutions we
are adjourned. Committee on Cultural Affairs,
Libraries and International Intergroup Relations
hearing on five very important resolutions and we
wanted to recognize that we've been joined by two
other members of the Committee; Council Members
Francisco Moya from Queens and Laurie Cumbo from
Brooklyn. Thank you very much, we have 100 percent
attendance and with that we are formerly adjourned.

[gavel]

C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date

October 31, 2018