



Once Upon a Child

Child Care & Day Care

About Us Hello parents! Thank you for allowing us to introduce ourselves. We are Once Upon a Child and we are here to make a difference! Being a childcare provider and an early educator is a profession that comes with a huge amount of responsibility. We pride ourselves in offering an environment that is safe, nurturing, and educational for every child.

[Get Pricing](#)

ADVERTISEMENT

COMMENTARY

The Obama pardon you should be mad about: Oscar Lopez Rivera

By Charles Lane
Washington Post • Jan 19, 2017 at 8:40 am



Listen to this article



"The quality of mercy is not strain'd," Shakespeare wrote. "It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven/Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest/It blesseth him that gives and him that takes."

In that spirit, and unconstrained by re-election politics, President Barack Obama used his last week in office to grant clemency to hundreds of federal prisoners, reducing the sentences of some and pardoning others outright.

TRIAL OFFER

SUPPORT QUALITY NEWS
6 months for \$1

SAVE NOW

might send. Still, damaging as Manning's leaks might have been, she committed no direct violence, and she's hardly gotten off scot-free.

The vast majority of Obama's executive clemency orders affected people considered low-level, nonviolent participants in drug-dealing, plus a few odd cases such as that of baseball great Willie McCovey, whose conviction for failing to pay taxes on money he made signing autographs Obama reasonably wiped from the record.

What was Obama thinking, however, when he ordered the release of Oscar Lopez Rivera? During the 1970s, Lopez Rivera headed a Chicago-based cell of the Armed Forces of National Liberation (FALN), which waged a futile but violent struggle to win Puerto Rican independence.

The FALN claimed responsibility for more than 120 bombings between 1974 and 1983 in a wave of senseless destruction that killed six and injured dozens. In 1981, a federal court in Chicago sentenced Lopez Rivera, then 37, to 55 years for seditious conspiracy, armed robbery, interstate transportation of firearms and conspiracy to transport explosives with intent to destroy government property.

Notably, the seditious-conspiracy charge was not some "thought crime," as Lopez Rivera's lawyer has said: The indictment listed 28 Chicago-area bombings, some of which caused injuries, as "overt acts" in support of the conspiracy.

FBI agents discovered dynamite, detonators and firearms at two residences occupied by Lopez Rivera. At trial, a cooperating witness from the FALN testified that Lopez Rivera personally trained him in bomb-making.

So Lopez Rivera is neither a low-level offender nor a nonviolent one. Nor, crucially, is he repentant.

He defiantly challenged the legitimacy of the court that tried him. Shortly after entering federal prison at Leavenworth, Kan., he and FALN members on the outside hatched an escape plan; the FBI foiled it by arresting Lopez Rivera's would-be helpers, who were armed with guns and explosives. A conviction for that escape attempt added 15 years to his sentence.

In 1999, Lopez Rivera was one of 16 imprisoned Puerto Rican terrorists to whom then-

TRIAL OFFER**SUPPORT QUALITY NEWS**
6 months for \$1**SAVE NOW**

He refused, reportedly because Clinton's offer did not include one of the FALN members who had tried to break him out of Leavenworth.

In addition, Clinton required the Puerto Ricans to renounce violence as a condition of receiving clemency.

Obama's offer this week came with no such requirement — in puzzling contrast not only to Clinton's policy in 1999, but also to White House statements that Chelsea Manning deserved clemency because she accepted responsibility and showed remorse.

Not so for Lopez Rivera. True, the 74-year-old probably no longer threatens the community; and yes, 35 years is a long time, perhaps even "a sufficient amount of time," as a senior administration official put it. Lopez Rivera served honorably in Vietnam before undergoing what today might be called "self-radicalization."

Still, unconditional release, for someone who claimed a right to wage war on the United States and repeatedly put innocent civilian lives at risk?

"I don't see the guy as a threat," Rick Hahn, the now-retired FBI special agent who helped investigate the original case against Lopez Rivera, told me. "But people I know who were victims of the FALN say that if the guy would just say he's sorry, they'd all say, 'Fine, let him go.' "

The voices Obama heeded instead were those of activists including celebrities such as Lin-Manuel Miranda and South Africa's Bishop Desmond Tutu, the latter of whom said that Lopez Rivera's only crime was "conspiring to free his people from the shackles of imperial injustice." Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., referred to Lopez Rivera, bizarrely, as "one of the longest-serving political prisoners in history — 34 years, longer than Nelson Mandela."

The presidential pardon descends from similar power wielded by British kings. Alexander Hamilton wanted it in the U.S. Constitution, partly for use "in seasons of insurrection or rebellion ... when a well-timed offer of pardon to the insurgents or rebels may restore the tranquillity of the commonwealth."

The FALN's season of insurrection is long over. But for the group's victims, as well as for all Americans concerned with the consequences our government applies to terrorists, this last-

TRIAL OFFER**SUPPORT QUALITY NEWS**
6 months for \$1**SAVE NOW**

Charles Lane is a Post editorial writer specializing in economic and fiscal policy, a weekly columnist, and a contributor to the PostPartisan blog.

Related stories:

[Lin-Manuel Miranda says he'll play 'Hamilton' in Chicago for Oscar Lopez Rivera](#)

[Obama commutes sentence of Chelsea Manning, who gave Army documents to WikiLeaks](#)

[Clemency for Leonard Peltier? Never](#)

The most relaxing farm game of 2022. No Install

Taonga: The Island Farm | Sponsored

Play Now

America's Most Miserable Cities, Ranked 1-30

ItsTheVibe | Sponsored

Who Are The Top 10 Attorneys in Lafayette

Find Attorney | Search Ads | Sponsored

This "Botox Alternative" Sold Out At Target (in Just 2 Days)

Vibrance | Sponsored

Man Who Predicted Lehman Crash Says Get Ready For A 2023 "Cash Frenzy"

Investing Outlook | Sponsored

TRIAL OFFER

SUPPORT QUALITY NEWS
6 months for \$1

SAVE NOW

Red Flag Symptoms of Bipolar Disorder Most People Are Unaware Of

StuffAnswered | Sponsored

[Learn More](#)

ADVERTISEMENT

LATEST

BREAKING SPORTS

Damar Hamlin is breathing on his own and talking, agent for Buffalo Bills player says

14m



DRINK

Photos: Naperville's nonalcoholic Go Brewing

25m



TRIAL OFFER

SUPPORT QUALITY NEWS
6 months for \$1

SAVE NOW

POST-TRIBUNE

A family affair

34m



ADVERTISEMENT



CONNECT

TRIBUNE PUBLISHING

New York Daily News

The Baltimore Sun

COMPANY INFO

Careers

About us

TRIAL OFFER

SUPPORT QUALITY NEWS
6 months for \$1

SAVE NOW

The Morning
Call of Pa.

Hartford
Courant

Contact us

Chicago
Tribune Store

Daily Press of
Va.

The Virginian-
Pilot

Manage Web
Notifications

Media kit

Studio 1847

Cookie
Preferences

Copyright © 2022, Chicago Tribune

SUBSCRIBE NOW
Get full access

TRIAL OFFER

SUPPORT QUALITY NEWS
6 months for \$1

SAVE NOW