



## Reflections on the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Virgin Islands Puerto Rico Friendship Celebrations

Buenos Dias, Good Day

Honorable Angel Bolkes, Jr. Chairperson, other Honorable Senators present and Distinguished Citizens Present

I am Vera M Falu Allende, A Proud Boricua that have made the beautiful island of AY AY my Home for over 45 years and remains in love with it!

A law was Established in 1964 by [Governor Ralph Paiewonsky](#), to Honor [PuertoRicans](#) who reside in and have made substantial contributions to the Social, economic, educational and political development of the US Virgin Islands. The date was chosen to coincide with [Columbus Day](#), as "an appropriate day for commemorating the solidarity of Americans in the Caribbean":

This particular Celebration holds a very significant spot in my Heart and brings me great joy to be an integral part of it since 1974.

As a born Puerto Rican who spent the majority of my Professional and Civic Life on the US Virgin Islands and St. Croix in particular I am Honored to be invited to share my Reflections on this Holiday.

It is a Celebration of Commitment and Service!. Our ancestors migrated centuries ago from mainly the Eastern Coast of Puerto Rico to the USVI.

Likewise Maroons populated the Northern Coasts of Puerto Rico while fleeing terrible enslavement and became part of Borinquen ,There is a long list of Virgin Islanders that went to Puerto Rico to study, to marry to join the Armed Forces and to share the Culture !, The migration from PR to the Virgin Islands was also significant. Daily we see households of mixed parentage. Sometimes the lines are so blurred that strangers cannot determine who is who or from where. The languages have meshed, the food has been enhanced with the various condiments added, dances are very similar; bamboula- bomba, all dance quadrille as well as salsa, marriages have been forged and children are now almost in the third and fourth generation ( Puertocrucians).

Little did I knew that I too would come here to this beautiful AY AY and fall in love with the people, its Culture in all its ramifications and become an integral part of its landscape. I LOVE THE USVI.....

In January 1978 on a fateful night our Beloved Governor Cyril E. King passed and History changed. The First Puerto Rican Governor was sworn in, Hon.Juan Francisco Luis and his lovely wife became our First Lady Upon becoming our First Lady Mrs. Luz M Luis immediately put us to work and The Civic Part of these Celebrations was born and continues to this DAY

**. Cultivating Friendship is a daily activity. We all need to incorporate activities all the time to enhance our Friendship, particularly among our young people. The history of these Celebrations should be taught in schools and at homes, Correct information regarding our Cultures should be part of the Curriculum and our leaders should acknowledge that in this Diversity we become Stronger.**

I am concerned about changes that may not reflect the deep bonds of FRIENDSHIP that Unite the People of these Two Caribbean Territories. ALL A WE IS ONE. Blessed be the Ties that Bind US

Culture has United us in All our trials and tribulations. Change for change sake cannot supersede the Essence of who we are and should continue to be!

Celebrations should be an Educational Experience to those that Follow us! Dance and drink all you want but... Bring back the Educational, Cultural Component.

There have been lots of activities added throughout the years like, Queen Show, Parades, Villages, Fiesta en ell Batey, Forums, Luncheons, Visits to Puerto Rico Cultural Exchanges, Fantastic Presentations at Island Center, Postal Cancellations, Poster Contests , Dance Competitions , Tennis Classes and Tournaments.

Each President has added Or deleted activities as the times change and availability of Funds.

We need to reiterate that this Committee is the Governors Committee as mandated by Law. Funding comes primarily from the Legislative Appropriations and from Community Sponsorships.

During the years that I Was the Chairperson of the Committee , my focus was on Educational and Cultural Activities.

Several of my initiatives were The Hispanic Library at the Florence Williams Public Library in Christiansted, The BAQUINE a Play presentation of one Puertorican tradition of a deceased child wake, written by the dearly departed Raquel Fuentes, the premier showing of the Movie El Cantante by Marc Anthony and Jennifer Lopez depicting the life of Hector Lavoe, The Bringing of the Juana Diaz Three Kings to St. Croix, The research and Highlighting of Puertorican Families Pioneras, the addition of Outstanding Virgin

Islanders to the Annual Governors Award Ceremonies , the expansion of the VIPR Friendship Celebrations to the District of St. Thomas St. John, The naming of the Village for a specific individual deserving of Community Recognition, the presentation of the Ballet Folklorico de Puerto Rico at Island Center and the wonderful Cultural Exchange between Guateque and the St. Croix Heritage Dancers led by Mr. Bradley E Christian.

Remember who we are and why we are and will be FRIENDS FOREVER.