

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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Thursday, September 12, 2024

Start: 9:54 a.m.

Recess: 10:08 a.m.

HELD AT: Council Chambers - City Hall

B E F O R E: Public Advocate, Jumaane Williams
Hon. Nantasha Williams, Chair

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Rita C. Joseph
Christopher Marte,
Rafael Salamanca, Jr.
Kevin C. Riley

Other Council Members Attending: Hudson and Louis

COMMITTEE ON CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS

A P P E A R A N C E S

(NONE)

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COMMITTEE ON CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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2 SERGEANT MESITI: This is a microphone check for
3 the vote on Civil and Human Rights. Today's date is
4 September 12, 2024; located in the Chambers;
5 recording is done by Rocco Mesiti.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning, welcome to the
7 New York City Council vote of the Committee on Civil
8 and Human Rights.

9 At this time, please silence your cell phones. At
10 this time and going forward, no one is to approach
11 the dais, I repeat, no one is to approach the dais.

12 Chair, we are ready to begin.

13 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: (GAVEL SOUND) (GAVELING IN)

14 Good morning, everyone, my name is Nantasha
15 Williams, and I am Chair of the Committee on Civil
16 and Human Rights. I want to start off by thanking
17 everyone joining us here for this early morning vote.

18 This legislation we are voting on today has been,
19 to put it simply, a long time coming. Not only
20 because these bills were first introduced and heard
21 last session, but because the issues that we are
22 intending to help remedy are ones that have afflicted
23 our city since its founding due to centuries long
24 practice of slavery.

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2 While slavery has been outlawed in the United
3 States for a 164 years, and even longer in New York
4 State, its legacy lives in the systematic racism and
5 inequity that still effects Black Americans today.

6 It is my hope that bills being voted on today,
7 one of which I am the proud sponsor of, will
8 strengthen ongoing efforts to atone for the
9 atrocities committed during slavery, and will help to
10 rectify the longstanding negative impacts the
11 institution of slavery and racism has had on
12 descendants of slaves.

13 This morning, we will be voting on Introduction
14 279-A, sponsored by Council Member Farah Louis, in
15 relation to studying the impacts of slavery and its
16 legacies in New York city and recommending potential
17 reparative measures for resulting harms.

18 Introduction 242-A, sponsored by Council Member
19 Crystal Hudson, in relation to the creation of a
20 truth, healing, and reconciliation process.

21 Introduction 833-A, sponsored by the Public
22 Advocate Jumaane Williams, in relation to requiring
23 the installation and maintenance of an informational
24 sign at the intersection of Wall and Pearl Streets in
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2 Manhattan to mark the site of New York's first slave
3 market.

4 Lastly, my bill, previously sponsored by, Council
5 Member Chris Marte, who's been a long advocate of the
6 Freedom Trail. Uh, and Introduction 471-A will
7 establish a New York city freedom trail task force.

8 I'd like to thank my colleagues for being here,
9 and both my staff and committee staff, uh, Jessica,
10 most importantly, who worked really hard. She was
11 here many late nights negotiating with the Admin, uh,
12 to make sure that these— these bills advance. So,
13 thank you so much. And, of course, Wiam.

14 I will now turn it over to my fellow sponsors for
15 some remarks on their respective bills, starting with
16 Council Member Louis.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you, Chair, and good
18 morning. Thank you, Chair, for the opportunity to
19 return to discuss Introduction 279 and its passage
20 today - which I am immensely proud to have championed
21 this legislation to mandate a comprehensive study on
22 reparations related to slavery and its enduring
23 legacies here in New York, since New York City is
24 fundamentally and essential to this council's goals
25 to eliminate inequities and disadvantages in all our

1 public and private structures and systems --
2 especially those factors perpetrated after slavey.
3 These factors often discuss, but without resolve,
4 including educational segregation, redlining, and
5 exclusion in housing opportunities, zoning.
6 Environmental disparities have existed for decades,
7 if not centuries, and addressing these compounded
8 injustices is essential to forming a more just
9 municipality and society.
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11 I want to thank Chair Williams for her leadership
12 in pushing all of these bills forward. I want to
13 thank Council Member Hudson for her leadership as
14 well. And, I also want to thank Linda Tigani, from
15 the Commission on Racial Equity, for navigating the
16 path in working with the Administration on this bill,
17 as well as Jessica Boulet, Committee Counsel, for her
18 tireless work and effort to craft this legislation to
19 lead to a powerful and effective study in our
20 municipal government.

21 Leading up to this important day, we have heard
22 countless testimonies and conducted numerous hearing
23 revealing the ongoing impacts of historical
24 injustices.
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2 By passing Introduction 279 today, along with the
3 other bills, and documenting, and quantifying the
4 impacts of enslavement and its legacies, we take
5 crucial steps towards justice and equity. I am
6 passionately committed to the urgency of this study,
7 and I look forward to joining my colleagues in
8 driving this work forward. Thank you.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Good morning, and thank
10 you, Chair Williams, for giving me the opportunity to
11 speak on Introduction 242-A, which the Committee is
12 voting on today.

13 It should be no surprise that our city is still
14 reckoning with the long shadow cast by the
15 enslavement of African and Indigenous American people
16 and its enduring impact on Black Americans.

17 Since slavery was banned in New York in 1827, our
18 city still generated significant income from the
19 illegal trade of enslaved people, and Black New
20 Yorkers continued to experience racially motivated
21 discrimination, riots, segregation, and violence.

22 And, these practices continue to this day. Black
23 New Yorkers are eight times more likely to be stopped
24 by the police under suspicion of a crime, because of
25 nothing more than the color of their skin. Black

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2 homeowners in previously redlined neighborhoods are
3 preyed upon by real estate speculators looking to
4 trick them into signing away their homes, commonly
5 known as deed theft.

6 New York City must confront these injustices head
7 on and prioritize the needs of its Black residents to
8 forge a path toward genuine equity and healing.

9 My Black agenda for New York City, originally
10 published in 2021, includes a comprehensive citywide
11 ruth, healing, and reconciliation process to
12 acknowledge the breadth of the historical
13 mistreatment of Black New Yorkers and confront the
14 City's racist practices.

15 I am proud that the passage of Introduction 242-A
16 now makes this a reality. By passing 242-A, alongside
17 Introduction 279-A, introduced by Council Members
18 Louis and Williams, and a number of other bills, the
19 City Council underscores its commitment to
20 confronting and acknowledging the destructive racist
21 policies that have harmed Black communities.

22 I look forward to continuing to work alongside my
23 colleagues in the Council to dismantle the
24 generations of systemic and structural anti-Black
25 racism engrained in our city.

2 And, congratulations again to Council Member
3 Louis and Council Member Williams. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you so much, and
5 congrats again to all of the sponsors of the bills
6 today.

7 I will now ask the Clerk to call the vote.

8 COMMITTEE CLERK: Good morning, William Martin;
9 Committee Clerk, rollcall vote for the Committee on
10 Civil and Human Rights for Proposed Introductions
11 242-A, 279-A, 471-A, and 833-A; all items are
12 coupled.

13 Chair Williams?

14 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: I proudly vote aye.

15 COMMITTEE CLERK: Council Member Salamanca?

16 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: (ABSENT)

17 COMMITTEE CLERK: Council Member Riley?

18 COUNCIL MEMBER RILEY: Aye

19 COMMITTEE CLERK: Council Member Marte?

20 COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: I vote aye, and I want to
21 thank Dr. Chair Williams for all her help in
22 anchoring, anchoring this, uh, legislation. It's
23 gonna really change how our city looks and feels.
24 Thank you.

25 COMMITTEE CLERK: Council Member Joseph?

1 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Aye.

2 COMMITTEE CLERK: By a vote of 4 in the
3 affirmative, 0 in the negative, and no abstentions
4 all items have been adopted by the Committee.
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6 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you, I'll leave it
7 open as we await our wonderful Public Advocate.

8 (PAUSE)

9 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, we are now joined by
10 the Public Advocate, who we will turn to for his
11 remarks, even though you voted out your bill, so, yay!

12 PUBLIC ADVOCATE WILLIAMS: Thank you, Madam Chair,
13 much appreciated.

14 Good morning, my name is Jumaane Williams, I am
15 the Public Advocate of the city of New York. Thank
16 you very much, Chair Williams and members of the
17 Committee on Civil and Human Rights, for not only
18 holding a hearing to vote, but actually voting on the
19 bill and these important legislative matters.

20 I was planned to ask, and so I'm glad my
21 colleagues did vote, yes, on Introduction 0883-A,
22 which would ensure that we place a sign at Pearl and
23 Wall Street, which is a common location of where the
24 first slave trade market took place in 1711. The
25 sign will also include a description that describes

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2 the role of the slave market in the City's economy,
3 through all of the City's government established in
4 the market and the use of the market, and the use of
5 the market in the sale of African and Indigenous
6 persons.

7 I first introduced this bill in 2014 when I was a
8 council member, and the bill was known as
9 Introduction 0036. The bill was never voted on, the
10 de Blasio Administration agreed to proceed with the
11 placing of a sign in Manhattan Park on the corner on
12 Wall and Water Street. It has been 10 years since it
13 was installed, and while I am grateful that a sign
14 was placed conveying our history, it is not at the
15 correct location.

16 In 2022, members of my staff encountered a senior
17 citizen standing in front of the sign. She told them
18 that she saw a documentary on the New York slave
19 trade on Manhattan Neighborhood Network, MNN. She
20 told them that she went searching for the sign on
21 three separate occasions and found it on that day on
22 her fourth search. She had been looking at the
23 correct location, which is not where the sign was
24 placed.

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2 The wealth of America to this day was born from
3 violence and greed of human chattel slavery. Well
4 after slavery was outlawed in New York, our city
5 remained the center of the illegal international
6 slave trade. The Emancipation Proclamation, along
7 the with 13th Amendment's ratification in 1865 began
8 to dismantle the institution of chattel slavery in
9 America. Inequity of resources hardly ended there,
10 from the adoption of the Black (INAUDIBLE) during
11 construction to the implementation of Jim Crow laws,
12 to the fight against a living minimum wage, we can
13 directly see the ways this violence and deliberate
14 exclusion from economic safety has provided
15 prosperity to our city today.

16 At this very moment, Louisiana, New Hampshire,
17 and Tennessee introduced legislation to not teach
18 this history. So, it's critical that people can see
19 the connection between what is happening today and
20 what happened at this market.

21 Enslaved New Yorkers were emancipated on paper,
22 but shared... but shared no part of the wealth,
23 land, and the institutions that their labor had
24 financed and created.

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2 These structures have never been adequately
3 addresses, especially since this nation employed the
4 separate but equal doctrine, a doctrine that the
5 Supreme Court said is inherently unequal.

6 The centuries that followed, clearly show the
7 reclamations of slavery, continuing through
8 institutional and systemic racism. It is vital that
9 we never forget this part of our country's history
10 and address this impact. We sometimes talk about the
11 enslavement in America as just "part of our past",
12 but communities still feel the crippling generational
13 effects of the brutal violence that built the wealth
14 of the banks that, to this day, surround the
15 locational placement of this signage.

16 Passing this legislation will allow us as a city
17 to acknowledge the enslaved men, women, and children
18 and pay our respects to their decedents. So, I am
19 glad that folks voted yes to help cement this history
20 into the infrastructure of New York City.

21 I also note today throughout the country, people
22 are being lied to about what created our society and
23 the privileges and wealth that is there. And, I
24 think people are being lied to about what caused us
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2 to get here, so they can be lied to about what it
3 takes to actually maintain it.

4 I would like to thank all those who worked on
5 this bill. Thank you to K Bain who was my previous
6 Legislative Director when I was first... when I
7 first introduced this bill in 2014. Thank you to
8 historian Christopher Cobb, who worked with my team
9 and actually brought this to my attention. And,
10 lastly, thank you to Veronica Aveis, my current Chief
11 Deputy Public Advocate for Policy, and Rosie Mendez
12 my current Director of Legislation and Policy who
13 worked on this bill from 2023 - 2024. Thank you.

14 Sorry, uh, just, one thing I wanted to add,
15 because, uh, when we talk about this, I think
16 sometimes folks hear the wrong thing. And, I always
17 want to make sure I'm clear that there is no one
18 Black, white, brown responsible for the systemic
19 institution of slavery or systems that have come into
20 play since then, but I do believe that all of us all
21 responsible for the systems that we leave to our
22 children and our grandchildren. And, there's a place
23 for everyone to try to change the impacts, thank you.

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COMMITTEE ON CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you, Mr. Public Advocate. And, with that, this committee meeting is adjourned.

(GAVEL SOUND) (GAVELING OUT)

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 September 13, 2024