



Legislation Text

File #: Res 0808-2019, **Version:** *

Res. No. 808

Resolution calling upon the New York State Legislature to pass and the Governor to sign legislation declaring January 1 as Haitian Independence Day in the state of New York, and Congress to pass and the President to sign legislation declaring January 1 as Haitian Independence Day in the United States.

By Council Member Eugene

Whereas, In December 1492, Italian colonist Christopher Columbus sighted the island of Hispaniola, then-named La Isla Espanola, whose native Taino and Ciboney population was enslaved by the Spanish and forced to mine for gold; and

Whereas, After gold mines were exhausted and European diseases, combined with harsh working conditions, killed a majority of the island's indigenous population, the French took control of the Western portion of the island, named Saint-Domingue, and began importing increasing numbers of enslaved Africans; and

Whereas, As enslaved Africans endured brutal workdays and suffered and died from injuries, infections, tropical diseases, malnutrition, and starvation, and as free Blacks became growingly frustrated with a racist society, revolution began, with thousands of enslaved persons, led by formerly enslaved military general Toussaint L'Ouverture, revolting against the colonial French regime in 1791; and

Whereas, The French revolutionary government abolished slavery in 1794 and, in 1801, Toussaint L'Ouverture successfully liberated Saint-Domingue from French control, but was soon after captured and extradited by militants sent on behalf of Napoleon Bonaparte, who wished to restore French rule and slavery to the region; and

Whereas, Jean-Jacques Dessalines successfully led the Haitian Revolution following General

L’ouverture’s arrest, defeating the French army and declaring the entire island the independent Republic of Haiti on January 1, 1804; and

Whereas, Haiti is the first nation to be founded by formerly enslaved people and the second nation to gain independence in the Americas, which continues to serve as a great source of pride for Haitians and all people of Haitian descent; and

Whereas, Citizens of Haiti and people of Haitian descent all across the world celebrate Haitian Independence Day on January 1 to recognize Haiti’s strength, resilience, and rich cultural heritage, by gathering with friends and family, preparing and dining on Haitian cuisine, and participating in parades, festivals, and concerts; and

Whereas, The United States has the largest Haitian Diaspora in the world, serving as home to approximately 915,000 first and second-generation Haitian-Americans; and

Whereas, Hundreds of thousands of Haitian-Americans reside, worship, and engage in commerce and recreation in New York; and

Whereas, New York has the second largest Haitian Diaspora in the United States and the second major population center, with 130,000 immigrants in the state and approximately 160,000 Haitian-Americans concentrated in the New York metropolitan area (New York City-Long Island-Northern New Jersey), according to a 2014 report from the Migration Policy Institute; and

Whereas, As the anti-immigrant climate in the United States further threatens Haitian-Americans- including President Trump’s alleged derogatory remarks towards Haiti, among other Caribbean, African and Latin American countries, and his administration’s attempt to end Temporary Protected Status for approximately 58,000 Haitians, many of whom found refuge in New York after Haiti’s catastrophic earthquake in 2010-it is now important to show solidarity with our Haitian-American public, while celebrating its traditions and values; and

Whereas, Designating January 1 as Haitian Independence Day in New York State and in the United

States would further conserve Haitian heritage, formalize and foster relationships among residents, businesses, nonprofits, and community groups, as well as enable the showcasing, preservation, harnessing, and celebration of religious, academic, civic, cultural, health, and commercial Haitian institutions; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York calls upon the New York State Legislature to pass and the Governor to sign legislation declaring January 1 as Haitian Independence Day in the state of New York, and Congress to pass and the President to sign legislation declaring January 1 as Haitian Independence Day in the United States.

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