



Legislation Text

File #: Res 0196-2004, **Version:** *

Res. No. 196

Resolution declaring April 9th, 2004 as “Paul Robeson Day” in the City of New York.

By Council Members Barron, Clarke, Comrie, Fidler, Foster, Jackson, Koppell, Lopez, Perkins, Recchia, Reed, Rivera, Sanders, Seabrook, Vann, Baez, Boyland, Gerson, Gonzalez, James, Jennings, Liu, Nelson, Stewart, Weprin and Martinez

Whereas, Paul Robeson was a truly remarkable individual, a man of extraordinary depth, compassion and talent who has bestowed upon our nation and the world a tremendous legacy of achievement; and

Whereas, Mr. Robeson was an athlete, singer, actor, scholar and Human and Civil Rights activist who fought valiantly against racism and injustice worldwide; he was an internationalist with an expansive understanding of world history who used his great creative gifts in the most noble of ways-to express the importance of peaceful resolutions and disputes and the value of non-violence to achieve lasting social change; and

Whereas, Paul Robeson advocated for the civil rights of people around the world and rose to prominence in a time when segregation was legal in America and African-Americans were being lynched by white mobs, especially in the South; and

Whereas, Born in Princeton, New Jersey on April 9th 1898, Paul Robeson was the youngest of five children and the product of a family familiar with hardship and the determination to rise above it: his father was a runaway slave who went on to graduate from Lincoln University and his mother came from a family of Quakers who worked for the abolition of slavery; and

Whereas, In 1915, in an age where it was almost impossible for a young Black man to acquire a higher education, Paul Robeson won a four-year academic scholarship top Rutgers University where, despite the twin evils of violence and racism, he distinguished himself both as a scholar and athlete, winning 15 varsity letters in sports and being named Valedictorian of his graduating class; and

Whereas, After attending Columbia Law School, Mr. Robeson practiced law until a seminal moment in which he was victimized by racism; he then turned his energies and supreme artistic talents to theatre and music to promote African American history and culture; and

Whereas, On stage in London, Paul Robeson earned international acclaim for his lead role in Othello and accolades for his many other performances in theatre, including his masterful performance in the musical ‘Showboat;’ and

Whereas, Paul Robeson was a gifted and eloquent singer and used his deep baritone voice to promote black spirituals, to share cultures of other countries and to benefit the social movement of his time. He sang for peace and justice in 25 languages throughout the United States, Europe, the Soviet Union and the Third World; and

Whereas, A powerful social advocate and activist, Paul Robeson fought tirelessly against racism in the United States and for peace among nations. He was an outspoken critic of the Truman administration and headed an organization that challenged President Truman to support an anti-lynching laws; and

Whereas, Paul Robeson suffered many indignities and reversals at the hands of the United States Government, among which was being branded a Communist by the Un-American Activities Committee, an accusation that derailed his career but did nothing to crush his indomitable spirit; and

Whereas, A true Renaissance Man in every sense of the word, Paul Robeson opened up the legacy of African-Americans to greater expressions of cultural, social and artistic significance; he was a visionary, a dedicated humanitarian and an advocate for the rights people the world over, and was without question one of our nation’s greatest citizens; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York declares April 9th, 2004 as “Paul Robeson Day” in the City of New York.