Res. No. 537

Resolution celebrating the historical documents that contributed to the birth of the United States of America and are on display at the New York Public Library as part of the nation's 250th anniversary events

By Council Members Marte, Farías, Wilson and Louis

Whereas, In honor of the 250th anniversary of the birth of the United States (U.S.), The New York Public Library (NYPL) is presenting an exhibition, entitled *Declaring America: 1776 and Beyond*, which the NYPL notes "will focus on New York City's unique role as a literal and intellectual battleground in the riveting first months of the American Revolution, trace the central role of protest throughout American history, and showcase contemporary artworks that grapple with enduring questions tied to the nation's democratic ideals"; and

Whereas, The exhibition will be housed from June 15, 2025, through January 10, 2027, in the grand and historic Stephen A. Schwarzman Building on Fifth Avenue, which opened to the public in 1911 and is marking its 125th year of service to New Yorkers; and

Whereas, The exhibition begins with documents that represent "Revolutionary City: The Road to Revolution" and that eventually led to an order by General George Washington to gather to hear the Declaration of Independence read aloud on July 9, 1776, at the southern tip of Manhattan; and

Whereas, Those remarkable documents include the Olive Branch Petition sent to King George III by the Second Continental Congress on July 5, 1775, in an attempt to reconcile peacefully; John Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* (printed in 1698), which was the philosophical underpinning for the American Revolution; Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* (1776), which was published and read throughout the colonies and which called for a necessary break from Great Britain; a 1765 stamp, which was a product of the British

Parliament's notorious Stamp Act; a 1770 broadside, entitled "To The Public" and written by a New York Son of Liberty, protesting the housing of British troops in New York City and leading to the Battle of Golden Hill (in what is now the Financial District), the first bloody battle between colonists and British troops of the American Revolution, occurring two months before the Boston Massacre; a December 17, 1773, letter from Samuel Adams's Boston Committee of Correspondence, sent via Paul Revere to update New Yorkers and Philadelphians about the Boston Tea Party; a November 26, 1775, letter from an 18-year-old Alexander Hamilton to John Jay, a New York delegate to the Second Continental Congress; a June 21, 1776, letter to George Washington from Benjamin Franklin, who was then serving on the Second Continental Congress's Committee of Five to draft the Declaration of Independence; and

Whereas, In addition to Franklin, the Committee of Five was made up of Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Roger Sherman, and Robert Livingston, who was born and bred in New York City (NYC), graduated from King's College (now Columbia University), served in many official government roles, and administered the oath of office to President Washington in NYC on April 30, 1789; and

Whereas, After weeks of work by Jefferson, who became the primary author of the Declaration of Independence, delegates took two days to debate and edit the document and approved the final version on July 4, 1776; and

Whereas, In 1896, NYPL trustee John Stewart Kennedy bought and donated to the NYPL a collection of historical documents, including a copy of the Declaration of Independence, handwritten by Jefferson and believed to be the one that Jefferson sent to George Wythe, his mentor and former law professor; and

Whereas, The NYPL's copy of the Declaration of Independence shows Jefferson's underlining of parts of the original draft that were removed before its adoption, including a rebuke of the slave trade, noting that King George III "has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating it's [sic] most sacred rights of life & liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating & carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither"; and

Whereas, The NYPL's extraordinary handwritten copy of the Declaration of Independence will be on display for public viewing by reservation from July 1 to July 7, 2026; and

Whereas, *Declaring America: 1776 and Beyond* gives all New Yorkers the unique opportunity to see firsthand many original documents that gave rise to our democracy and which, as the NYPL notes, allows all of its visitors "to explore America's remarkable beginnings, complex legacies, and promises fulfilled and unfulfilled"; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York celebrates the historical documents that contributed to the birth of the United States of America and are on display at the New York Public Library as part of the nation's 250th anniversary events.

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