



Legislation Text

File #: Res 1442-2020, **Version:** *

Res. No. 1442

Resolution calling on the New York City Department of Education to provide public schools with a curriculum about the history of slavery in New York State and New York City and to ensure that the curriculum offered includes the history of freed enslaved people who founded local communities across New York City.

By Council Members Cumbo, Kallos, Adams and Chin

Whereas, According to Scarsdale Historical Society, New York State (NYS) enslaved Africans for more than two centuries, and between 1700 and 1774, more than 7,000 enslaved people were brought into NYS; and

Whereas, Scarsdale Historical Society also reports that more than forty percent of New York City (NYC) households had one or more enslaved persons, with the African enslaved population representing twenty percent of the colonial population, and the New York Public Library reports that NYC had the second highest percentage of enslaved people than any other city in the United States; and

Whereas, On March 31, 1817, the NYS legislature officially abolished slavery, setting July 4, 1827 as the date of final emancipation, and on Emancipation Day, approximately 4,600 enslaved Black people were freed, as reported by the Historical Society of the New York Courts; and

Whereas, Following the abolition of slavery, many Blacks formed their own communities in NYC including Weeksville in Brooklyn and Seneca Village in Manhattan; and

Whereas, Weeksville, which was named after James Weeks, a Black longshoreman who purchased the land, was located in what is now the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn, and the community had a school, a church, and a newspaper that published the alphabet, reading lessons and prayers, as reported by New York Times; and

Whereas, Seneca Village was Manhattan's first major neighborhood of African American-owned

property and was located between 82nd and 89th Street and Seventh and Eighth Avenue from 1825 to 1857, according to the New-York Historical Society; and

Whereas, The New York State Census reports that approximately 264 individuals lived in Seneca Village, including Blacks, Irish, and Germans, and in addition to homes, there were three churches, many cemeteries and a school, according to New-York Historical Society; and

Whereas, Despite the history of slavery in NYS, the Nation, a nonprofit organization, reports that some people believe that slavery was only a southern issue, and the education system can serve as an opportunity to increase awareness about NYS's participation in slavery; and

Whereas, New York State Education Department's (NYSED) K-8 Social Studies Framework includes standards that acknowledge NYS's participation in slavery such as standard 4.5a, which requires students to examine the lives of enslaved people in NYS and standard 7.2e, which requires students to investigate the different strategies enslaved Africans adopted to survive and resist their enslavement; and

Whereas, Although these standards are included in NYSED's Social Studies Framework, educators are not required to teach them and many educators do not, and overall, time dedicated to teaching social studies has decreased in the past twenty years, particularly following the 2001 passage of the No Child Left Behind Act, as educators started to focus more on math and reading, as reported by Hechinger Report; and

Whereas, Although some educators may want to teach the history of slavery in NYS, they may not have the resources as the NYC Department of Education (DOE) does not provide schools with a curriculum that is focused on such history; and

Whereas, School could serve as a vital source to increase students' knowledge about the history of slavery in NYS as well as how it connects to their current experiences as New Yorkers, and while the DOE does not require schools to teach certain curriculum, it does provide schools with optional curriculum to teach; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York calls on the New York City Department of

Education to provide public schools with a curriculum about the history of slavery in New York State and New York City and to ensure that the curriculum offered includes the history of freed enslaved people who founded local communities across New York City.

LS # 16038
10/1/20
KJ