



Legislation Text

File #: Res 1723-2008, Version: *

Res. No. 1723

Resolution declaring a symbolic ban on the negative use of the word “ghetto” in New York City.

By Council Members Baez, and Seabrook

Whereas, The word “ghetto” is derived from the Venetian term, “ghèto,” a conjugation of an Italian word that means “to pour” or “to cast”; and

Whereas, The term “Ghèto” was first applied to Jews living in Venice, who were forced to live behind walls on an island near an iron foundry; and

Whereas, Though the ghettoization of Jews has taken place throughout history, it is most closely associated with the ghettos created during World War II by the Nazis where Jews throughout occupied Europe were sequestered into small areas with little food, water and sanitation; and

Whereas, In the modern-day United States, the term ghetto is most often applied to low-income urban neighborhoods populated by ethnic and racial minorities; and

Whereas, The existence of these neighborhoods is a legacy of our country’s history of discrimination, which by law or by custom forced certain groups to live in specific neighborhoods; and

Whereas, Residents of these enclaves often miss the economic opportunities that are frequently found in more affluent areas, thereby perpetuating the downtrodden nature of the neighborhood; and

Whereas, Over time, the word “ghetto” has evolved in popular culture to pejoratively describe something perceived to be of low quality or taste; and

Whereas, “Ghetto” has also acquired a more comical definition, referring to the perceived quirky and unique style and behaviors that accompany a lifestyle with limited financial resources; and

Whereas, Invariably, the colloquial use of the term “ghetto” is linked to the African American and Latino communities; and

Whereas, “Ghetto”, whether it is referring to a geographic location or a particular style and attitude, is almost always used in the pejorative; and

Whereas, Linking a racial or ethnic group to terminology used to describe a state of poverty only serves to further dehumanize and disenfranchise that particular group; and

Whereas, While a government must never limit one’s free speech, however incendiary or offensive its expression may be, it is imperative that individuals understand the power of their words and their potential to inflict great harm on the community; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York declares a symbolic ban on the negative use of the word “ghetto” in New York City.

DMB
LS# 6106
12/4/08