



Legislation Text

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Res. No. 849

Resolution designating December 4 annually as Jay-Z Day in the City of New York and celebrating his legendary status as a masterful MC and lyricist and as an innovative entrepreneur.

By Council Members Louis, Ossé, Riley, Hudson and Gutiérrez

Whereas, Shawn Carter was born on December 4, 1969, in Brooklyn, grew up in the Marcy housing projects in Bedford-Stuyvesant, began penning rhymes at the age of nine, and became one of Hip Hop's most renowned MCs (master of ceremonies) and lyricists, known to his fans around the world by countless nicknames over his storied career, including Jazzy, Jigga, Hova, HOV, and Jay-Z; and

Whereas, By his teen years, Jay-Z became known for not writing down his brilliantly composed lyrics, but simply memorizing them as he wrote them, or, as he explained in his own memoir *Decoded*, finding “little corners in my head where I stored rhymes”; and

Whereas, According to *The New York Times*, this “love of words would give Jay-Z more number 1 albums than Elvis” or indeed any other solo artist, with a total of 14 so far; and

Whereas, Jay-Z first attracted widespread attention in “Show & Prove,” the celebrated posse cut from Big Daddy Kane’s 1994 album *Daddy’s Home*, which memorably showcased Big Daddy Kane trading verses with Scoob, Sauce Money, Shyheim, Ol’ Dirty Bastard, and the relative newcomer Jay-Z; and

Whereas, Many years later in 2012, Jay-Z honored Big Daddy Kane by choosing him as the sole guest star for Jay-Z’s eight-show opening of Brooklyn’s Barclays Center; and

Whereas, Jay-Z launched his business career with the founding of Roc-A-Fella Records and released his debut album, the critically acclaimed *Reasonable Doubt*, in 1996; and

Whereas, “Dead Presidents II” from *Reasonable Doubt*, named by *Rolling Stone* as number 2 on the list

of Jay-Z's 50 greatest songs, refers poignantly to the shooting of a childhood friend and to his own brushes with gun violence; and

Whereas, According to *Rolling Stone*, "Brooklyn's Finest" from *Reasonable Doubt*, named by *Rolling Stone* as number 6 on the list of Jay-Z's 50 greatest songs and featuring the Notorious B.I.G., shows off perhaps Brooklyn's two greatest rappers trading "ever more ridiculous crime boasts," including Jay-Z's line "Peep the style and the way the cops sweat us"; and

Whereas, According to Billboard, Jay-Z's top five biggest albums include *Vol. 2...Hard Knock Life* (1998), which was his first GRAMMY Award win, *The Blueprint* (2001), and *The Black Album* (2003); and

Whereas, According to *Rolling Stone*, "Hard Knock Life (Ghetto Anthem)" from *Vol. 2...Hard Knock Life*, named by *Rolling Stone* as number 9 on the list of Jay-Z's 50 greatest songs, was Jay-Z's first single on the Top 15 pop charts and was based on the famous tune from the Broadway show *Annie*; and

Whereas, Jay-Z wrote in *Decoded* about "Hard Knock Life" that he "found a mirror between the two stories-that Annie's story was mine, and mine was hers, and the song was the place where our experiences weren't contradictions, just different dimensions of the same reality"; and

Whereas, According to *Rolling Stone* magazine's 500 greatest albums of all time, *The Blueprint* comes in at number 50 and includes "Takeover," described as "one of rap's most precise and unrelenting diss tracks" in which Jay-Z famously "commits GBH [grievous bodily harm] on Nas and Prodigy from Mobb Deep"; and

Whereas, As a result of "Takeover," the Jay-Z and Nas beef became one of rap's hottest, with Jay-Z offering these lines on the song to explain why he had sampled Nas on two earlier songs: "So yeah I sampled your voice, you was usin' it wrong/You made it a hot line, I made it a hot song"; and

Whereas, According to *Rolling Stone*, Jay-Z "elevates clever rhymes and innovations with an unmatched air of calm control and a cavalier confidence" on *The Blueprint*; and

Whereas, Jay-Z's first top 10 hit was "Izzo (H.O.V.A.)" (from *The Blueprint*), and he now boasts 22 Billboard top 10 Hot 100 songs, with the longest-running number one hit "Empire State of Mind," with Alicia

Keys, about which he wrote that he decided to “tell stories of the city’s gritty side, to use stories about hustling and getting hustled to add tension to the soaring beauty of the chorus”; and

Whereas, According to *Rolling Stone*, “99 Problems” (from *The Black Album*), named by *Rolling Stone* as number 4 on the list of Jay-Z’s 50 greatest songs and put together with Rick Rubin, had “vintage heavy metal riffery reminiscent of Rubin’s Eighties work...but lyrically it was a blistering, modern-day critique, taking aim at those who demonize [Jay-Z] as a black man and rapper”; and

Whereas, “Crazy in Love,” a 2003 Beyoncé single from her debut album *Dangerously in Love*, came in at number 16 on *Rolling Stone*’s list of the 500 best songs of all time and featured a “killer verse” by her future husband Jay-Z,; and

Whereas, According to *Rolling Stone*, “4:44,” named by *Rolling Stone* as number 15 on the list of Jay-Z’s 50 greatest songs and the title track of his *4:44* album (2017), was described by Jay-Z as “one of the best songs I’ve ever written” and discusses his marital infidelities with a “vulnerability long lurking but never revealed in such a deliberate fashion”; and

Whereas, His impressive business career continued after the founding of Roc-A-Fella Records with his presidency of Def Jam Recordings for three years and with his 2008 founding of Roc Nation, which oversees a record label, management agency, a clothing line (Rocawear), a streaming service (Tidal), and philanthropies and which has expanded to include partnerships with a wide variety of corporations, organizations, and institutions; and

Whereas, Jay-Z’s career is one of remarkable longevity, being one of only two artists to score a top 10 hit in Billboard’s Hot 100 in four different decades from the 1990s to the 2020s; and

Whereas, Jay-Z has earned 88 GRAMMY Award nominations and boasts 24 wins, including for best rap song, best rap performance, best rap solo performance, best R & B song, best R & B performance, best rap/sung collaboration, best rap duo/group performance, best urban contemporary album, and best music video; and

Whereas, Jay-Z writes near the end of *Decoded*, “We were kids without fathers, so we found our fathers on wax and on the streets and in history, and in a way, that was a gift...Our fathers were gone...but we took their old records and used them to build something fresh”; and

Whereas, Jay-Z’s career was commemorated in 2023 with *The Book of HOV* exhibit at the Brooklyn Public Library’s main branch; and

Whereas, Jay-Z and the Hon. Dr. Gloria Carter, his mother, founded the Shawn Carter Foundation 20 years ago to open up educational opportunities through college scholarships and more for young people who otherwise might not have access to them; and

Whereas, It is unthinkable to celebrate 50 years of Hip Hop without noting the monumental success of a kid from Bed-Stuy, who changed the face of the industry in New York City and beyond; now, therefore, be it Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York designates December 4 annually as Jay-Z Day in the City of New York and celebrates his legendary status as a masterful MC and lyricist and as an innovative entrepreneur.

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