



## Legislation Text

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**File #:** Res 0693-2007, **Version:** A

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Res. No. 693-A

Resolution calling on the Council of the City of New York to declare a symbolic moratorium on the use of the “N” word in New York City.

By Council Members Comrie, Dickens, Fidler, Gonzalez, Jackson, Martinez, McMahon, Nelson, Oddo, Reyna, Sears, Vann, Weprin, White Jr., Avella, Brewer, Felder, Gennaro, Gentile, James, Koppell, Liu, Mark-Viverito, Mealy, Mendez, Monserrate, Palma, Sanders Jr., Vacca, Seabrook, Gallagher and The Public Advocate (Ms. Gotbaum)

Whereas, The etymology of the “N” word is often traced to the Latin “niger” or the French word “negrè,” both meaning black; when used as a noun, the “N” word is used in a derogatory fashion to mean a black person; and

Whereas, The first documented written use of the word was in 1786, when the “N” word was a term slave masters used to label their African slaves; thus, the word has its origins in the contempt that slave masters had for their African slaves, and no matter how it is spelled, the word carries throughout the centuries these connotations of hate; and

Whereas, The “N” word was used to refer to slaves throughout the 1700's and 1800's, and by the early 1900's, the word "Black" began to appear in print in reference to African Americans, a term generally rejected by the African American community because of its negative connotations; and

Whereas, When in 1906 civil rights leader Booker T. Washington endorsed the term "Negro," the “N” word, once a common label used for African American people, was officially recognized as a derogatory racial epithet; and

Whereas, The “N” word connotes a lazy person with no self respect or regard for family, a person who is ignorant, stupid, slow moving, does not speak proper English and has childlike qualities, and such definition

was cemented in American culture by early 1900's caricatures of Black people, such as the film "Birth Of A Nation;" and

Whereas, The age of the Harlem Renaissance challenged this idea, primarily due to the leadership of Renaissance scholar Alain Locke, who encouraged African American artists, writers, poets and musicians to fully express their African pride by aligning with and capitalizing upon their rich West African history; and

Whereas, The late 1960's produced a surge of racial pride, when the term "Black" was taken on by the African American community as positive and affirming; while the Black Power Movement of this era proclaimed "Black is Beautiful" and entertainer James Brown declared "I'm Black and I'm Proud," movement participants called each other "Brother" and "Sister" and denounced the use of the "N" word; and

Whereas, While some African Americans started using the "N" word to refer to themselves in the 1970's cultural era known as Black Exploitation, the term was also adopted during the beginning of 1990's cultural era known as Hip Hop; Hip Hop culture removed the "er" from the end of the word and added the letter "a," creating the term "Nigga," although the term remained pejorative in the Black community and, depending on social circles, at some times denoted class differences; and

Whereas, Today's African American community remains divided in its use of the "N" word: some neo-revisionists attempt to redefine and lay claim to the word while others refuse to use the word in their vocabulary at all; and

Whereas, In 2003, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) successfully influenced Merriam-Webster lexicographers to change the dictionary definition of the "N" word in the dictionary to no longer mean African Americans; at the same time, the term "'N' word" began being used in popular culture and in media reports in effort to avoid publicly using the controversial and degrading word's full spelling or pronunciation; and

Whereas, Numerous high-profile incidents involving use of the "N" word have elicited condemnation from the larger society, in response to which a small group of New York City residents founded the organization

“Abolish The ‘N’ Word Project Inc.” and began a public relations campaign to abolish the use of the word by all people through the establishment of a website, educational materials and community events; and

Whereas, the Council encourages the citizens of the City of New York to cease using the “N” word and to encourage all others whom they may encounter in their daily routine to cease from using the word as well; now therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York declares a symbolic moratorium on the use of the “N” word in New York City.

BRS  
LS # 2411  
1.22.07, Rev. 2.20.07