

City of Philadelphia



Council of the City of Philadelphia
Office of the Chief Clerk
Room 402, City Hall
Philadelphia

(Resolution No. 260324)

RESOLUTION

Also naming South Street between 8th and 9th Streets as “Octavius Catto Way” to honor the life and legacy of the civil rights warrior.

WHEREAS, Octavius Catto was born Octavius Valentine Catto in Charleston, South Carolina on February 22, 1839. His family moved to Philadelphia when Octavius was still a child. Catto grew up in Philadelphia and attended the Institute for Colored Youth at 715 Lombard street in Philadelphia; The Institute for Colored Youth (now known as Cheyney University) was one of the finest institutions of its kind in existence at the time, providing a college level of education free of charge to African Americans to prepare them as teachers in black schools. Catto graduated from the Institute in 1858 as valedictorian; and

WHEREAS, Catto was a member of civic, literary, patriotic and political groups, including the Franklin Institute, Philadelphia Library Company, 4th Ward Black Political Club, and the Union League Association. Catto was largely responsible for the adoption of the 'Bill of Rights' for equal access to the public transportation in the city as was legislated in the Commonwealth in 1867 at Catto's urging and activism; and

WHEREAS, The Philadelphia Pythians were one of the earliest Black baseball clubs formed in the United States. They were co-founded in 1865 by Catto and childhood friend and civil rights activist Jacob C. White Jr. The Pythians were one of the first and most successful African American baseball teams. Catto used the sport as a tool for activism, seeking to prove Black equality by competing against white teams. Catto was known for challenging segregation in sports after the Civil War. The Pythians were refused membership in the Pennsylvania State Convention of Baseball due to their race and in September 1869, the Pythians played the all-white Philadelphia Olympics, one of the first interracial games. The structural organization of the team deteriorated after Catto's murder in 1871, but the legacy of the Pythians as early pioneers of Black baseball remains strong in Philadelphia history; and

WHEREAS, With the support of the Union League, Catto pursued the coveted goal of full and equal rights for blacks. With the help of the Union League, Catto organized to proclaim Pennsylvania's adoption of the 15th Amendment assuring black men the vote; and

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WHEREAS, Catto was an eloquent, persuasive and powerful speaker, who was intelligent and courageous. Catto possessed impeccable academic credentials. He had a deep and abiding belief in the power of education to improve the status of Blacks, and as a betterment for all citizens; and

WHEREAS, Catto was a prominent 19th-century educator, civil rights activist, and athlete in Philadelphia. Known as a "martyr to racism," he was assassinated on Election Day at age 32 while encouraging Black men to exercise their newly gained right to vote. At the time of his death Catto was serving in the Pennsylvania National Guard as a Major and Inspector General of the 5th Brigade, and in fact, was on duty at the time of his murder near 814 South street; and

WHEREAS, The City wishes to commemorate and honor the legacy of Octavius Catto through the renaming of South Street between 8th and 9th Streets in his honor; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Hereby renames South Street between 8th and 9th Streets to Octavius Catto Way to honor the life of a giant of the Civil Rights movement, defender of his country, educator, organizer, civic activist, and martyr. "One More Martyr in the Cause of Constitutional Liberty."

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy of this Resolution be presented to the family and or representatives of Octavius Catto, further evidencing the sincere respect and admiration of this legislative body.

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CERTIFICATION: This is a true and correct copy of the original Resolution, Adopted by the Council of the City of Philadelphia on the sixteenth day of April, 2026.

Kenyatta Johnson
PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Elizabeth McCollum
CHIEF CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Introduced by: Councilmember Squilla

Sponsored by: Council President Johnson, Councilmembers Squilla, Phillips, Gilmore Richardson, Gauthier, Thomas, Jones, Landau, Lozada, Young, Brooks, Harrity, O'Rourke, Driscoll and Ahmad