

Legislation Text

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Authorizing the creation of the “Special Committee on 400 Years of African American History” to evaluate the impact African Americans have had on the history of this country and acknowledging the creation of the Federal Commission by the same name that was formed in recognition of the 400-year Anniversary of the arrival of Africans in the English colonies at Old Point Comfort, Virginia, in 1619.

WHEREAS, On August 20, 1619, Free Africans arrived for the first time on the North American Coast at Old Point Comfort, present day Fort Monroe, Virginia; and

WHEREAS, This was the first slave ship on record in the North American British Colonies. The group of “20 and odd Negroes”, was part of a larger group of West Africans aboard a Portuguese ship, that was captured by an English Warship flying a Dutch flag; and

WHEREAS, The group of captives was brought to Old Point Comfort Virginia and were sold as involuntary laborers or indentured servants. At the time, slavery had not yet been institutionalized in North America, thus, these Africans were told they would work under contract with the possibility of earning their freedom; and

WHEREAS, The arrival of the group of “20 and odd Negroes” marked the beginning of the trend in colonial America of bringing Free Africans, unwillingly taken from their homeland, transported across the ocean, and forced into a life of servitude and oppression; and

WHEREAS, On January 8, 2018, President Donald Trump signed into law a bill introduced by Congressman Bobby Scott on February 28, 2017, establishing the “400 Years of African-American History Commission”.

WHEREAS, The purpose of this Commission is “to develop and carry out activities throughout the United States to commemorate the 400th Anniversary of the arrival of Africans in the English colonies”; and

WHEREAS, According to Representative Scott, “[t]he history of Virginia and our nation cannot be fully understood or appreciated without knowing about the first Africans who arrived at Point Comfort, Virginia in 1619”; and

WHEREAS, The Commission is tasked with the responsibility of: planning programs to acknowledge the impact of slavery and laws that enforce racial discrimination, encouraging civic, patriotic, historical, educational, artistic, religious, and economic organizations to organize and participate in anniversary activities, assisting states, localities, and nonprofit organizations to further the commemoration and coordinating for the public and scholarly research on the arrival of Africans in the United States and their contributions to this country; and

WHEREAS, August 2019 marks the 400-year Anniversary since the first arrival of Africans to America. The City Council of Philadelphia supports commemorating this occasion and celebrating the contributions African Americans have made to all facets of American society by forming our own Committee to conduct research on the same matter and offer our own solutions that may be used to enrich the lives of African Americans in

Philadelphia; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Hereby authorizes the creation of the “Special Committee on 400 Years of African American History” consisting of at least 5 members of City Council appointed by the Council President, and assisted by relevant experts and stakeholders chosen by the Committee, to explore the history and contributions of African Americans over the last 400 years.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the “Special Committee on 400 Years of African American History” shall hold hearings and thereafter submit a full report to the Council and the Mayor, and shall make its findings and recommendations available to the public.