

BY: Senator JACKSON

RECOGNIZING December 20-26, 2023, as the Week of
the Commemoration of the First Black Revolt Against
Slavery in the Americas

WHEREAS, This Legislative Body is justly proud to commemorate the first historically recorded Black Antislavery Rebellion in the Americas on December 20-26, 2023; and

WHEREAS, On the "second day of Christmas" in December of 1521, African Black enslaved people working at the Montealegre cane-sugar plantation west of Santo Domingo City escaped from the plantation and, with rage unforeseen by their Spanish colonial masters, marched through a number of other plantations with the intention of recruiting additional fellow slaves into their uprising to overthrow the colonial local regime that kept them in bondage and set enslaved black people in the island-colony free; and

WHEREAS, The sugar plantation owner and slave master against whose power the 1521 rebel slaves revolted was no other than the highest political authority of colonial La Espanola and of the entire Spanish empire as it existed at the time on the Caribbean islands and parts of the Mainland, namely governor and viceroy Diego Columbus, son of Christopher Columbus and heir of the political titles conferred to his father by the Spanish Kings in reward for facilitating Spanish dominion over additional territories in the Americas; and

WHEREAS, With the benefit of superior weapons and after about a week of chasing and fighting, the Spaniards quelled the insurrection and restored the overall order to La Espanola's slaveholding society, but so much fear was generated by the revolt among the colonists' population that colonial authorities had to quickly resort to promulgating new ordinances that included very harsh punishments and death penalty for those who incurred in any form of resistance or disobedience against the slavery-based political and social order; and

WHEREAS, The Santo Domingo black slaves' insurrection of 1521 generated such a great degree of concern among the colonial authorities of La Espanola that maintained a slave-holding social order as to move said authorities to issue a distinctly severe and harsh code of ordinances to control and punish the enslaved Black population of La Espanola, the oldest "black code" of the Americas whose text has been archivally preserved; and

WHEREAS, Awareness and knowledge about the 1521 Santo Domingo slave rebellion and the ensuing 1522 first instance of a "black code" has until very recently remained limited, and for too long confined to a miniscule number of people, especially a limited number of scholars specializing in the research and writing about the beginnings of European conquest and colonization of the Americas; and

WHEREAS, In 2019, the CUNY Dominican Studies Institute at The City College of New York published the first academic monograph devoted to the black slaves' rebellion of 1521 in Santo Domingo, disseminating for the first time images, transcriptions and translations of the 16th century archival sources about the rebellion, including the chronicle about it and the text of the subsequent "black laws" enacted by the colonial authorities as a response; CUNY DSI continues to engage in research to further clarify important facts pertaining to the rebellion, as it has been the case of an archaeological survey in Santo Domingo during the summer of 2021 in search for the probable location where the rebellion started; and

WHEREAS, Furthermore, CUNY DSI, the Black Studies Program at the City College of New York and Centro Cultural Eduardo Leon Jimenes in Santiago, Dominican Republic, have sponsored a large academic virtual conference on December 2nd and 3rd of 2021, to commemorate the 500th Anniversary of the rebellion by convening scholars and artists to share the most recent knowledge about black resistance in the early colonial Americas, further contributing to public awareness on these important historical events; and

WHEREAS, The Santo Domingo slave rebellion of 1521 is the first known direct and open confrontation of enslaved Black people against their enslavers in the Americas in modern times on which a historical archival record exists, and it provoked the production and enacting also in Santo Domingo in 1522, of the first known set of colonial ordinances specifically targeted at black slaves and black people in the Americas, initiating a centuries-long trend of production of officially sanctioned legal systems to further control and subjugate black people in the Continent; and

WHEREAS, The Santo Domingo slave rebellion of 1521 initiated a long trend of revolts by Black slaves in La Espanola and the Americas that challenged slavery during subsequent centuries, and it is vivid proof of the relentless struggle for freedom and dignity by people of black African ancestry since the earliest dates of their presence in the Continent; and

WHEREAS, The pioneering historical significance of the Santo Domingo 1521 Black slave rebellion is a powerful source of inspiration for civic action aimed at the elimination of injustice and the establishment and consolidation of human freedom and equality, and thus should be part of the collective historical memory of all freedom-loving people in the Americas, including the people of the United States and the State of New York; and

WHEREAS, The public collective memory about the Santo Domingo 1521 Black anti-slavery rebellion, together with all other past instances of people's resistance against slavery and oppression either in colonial or contemporary times should be facilitated by teaching in public schools at all levels and by instruction and research in our universities; and

WHEREAS, New York State has traditionally been, and continues to be, the largest hub of Dominican-American population in the United States,

and the collective heritage of Dominican-Americans is an integral part of the cultural and social mosaic of the communities where Dominican-Americans reside; and

WHEREAS, New York State welcomes and embraces the legacies of fighting for the achievement of freedom and equality brought in by its immigrant citizens and their children from around the world; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body memorialize Governor Kathy Hochul to proclaim December 20-26, 2023, as the Week of the Commemoration of the First Black Revolt Against Slavery in the Americas.