

Resolution Hearings Transcript

On February 26, 2007, the Committee Counsel on Civil Rights met to pass a symbolic moratorium to “ban the n-word” in New York City. Councilman Leroy Comrie led the fight in abolishing this hateful term. Juxtaposed with the resolution hearings are the opinions of New Yorkers: Maria Rivera Cosme, Cynthia Wong, Veralynn Williams, Kenyon Farrow, Rev. Conrad B. Tillard, Thomas Ambrosio and Victor Escobores.

Voice Over: The n-word has been called one of the most offensive, racist and inflammatory word in language. The word stems from the Latin and French root for black. Its current English use has been a part of society since 18th century slavery. The N-word has existed as a term of hate for as long as America has been a nation. The committee is interested to hear testimony as for need to encourage New Yorkers to remove this term from their vocabulary.

MR: When you see the politicians, the ministers, and everyone in the social arena, you say, “Wow, it really is going to come to a conclusion.”

CW: What’s the purpose? “Let’s ban the n-word”, whatever, That’s not going to end discrimination.

CUT to HEARING

Councilman Leroy Comrie: Given the recent events surrounding the Michael Richards incident and current campaigning in many areas of this country to abolish this hateful term, I thought it was appropriate to encourage my fellow New Yorkers in this movement.

JB: I think Councilman Comrie, what he did was an excellent way to provoke thought, to have people to understand, that this is a word that is derogatory and is painful. We know that words don’t really hurt you physically but it’s an emotional scar and for some people for these words to come up, nigger and any derogatory slur to come up, it can fester because it’s still laying within you.

Marcia Harris: I’d like to share a few quotes from scholars on the n-word. Dr. Wade Nobles on the power of words; ‘the hearing of the word creates energy, creates heat, take heed in what we say to each other. If we call each other nigger, we are creating the evolution of our destruction.’ Dr. Francis Wellson on her function definition of the word nigger; “Any and all use of the word nigger, used by a white person or a black person or shade of black, no matter in what context or what tone of voice, consciously or subconsciously I am helping to maintain the local, national, global system of white supremacy”.

VW: There’s a lot of images in the media that’s telling people that they can use the word, so it’s nice to have an image saying that you shouldn’t use it. On the other hand, there’s a

war in Iraq. People are getting shot by the police and why is this Congressman putting all his effort into this? Isn't he a Congressman for Queens?

KF: We have to kind of go a step further and not let the sort of symbolism of that also sort of displace other real socio-economic problems that the black community is dealing with that just eradicating the n-word won't necessarily solve.

CUT TO HEARINGS;

KF: It is not just a word that we fight against but a mentality. This mentality shows up when we don't go out to vote. When we accept black on black crime as a norm. This mentality shows up in health, education and alarming prison statistics. The symbolic moratorium proposed by Councilman Leroy Comrie, is a powerful weapon in the fight against this mentality, signifying it is time to speak life into the black community instead of death.

TA: Getting the word out, and telling kids to learn about the word is fine. I find nothing wrong with that, that's great. To think, we're going to put up a moratorium and kids are going to learn, it's more complex than that.

CT: We're going down a very dangerous road and it's very hurtful when you see young people who are so headstrong in one sense and so vacuous in another sense that you can't even talk to them about what this all represents.

VE: Some may argue that it's a term of empowerment but it's not. The root of the word is so racist, so demeaning, so degrading that there's no possible way of saying it's a positive thing.

CUT TO HEARINGS:

Marcia Harris: There is no other racial derogatory slur that offends like the n-word. This word is rooted in the historical makeup of the United States of America, where it was used by one group of people; white people, in attempt to dehumanize another group of people; Africans, Black people to maintain and justify a system of chattel slavery, free human labor, which is the cause of America being what it is today.

VW: Mississippi was one of the most headstrong states. They didn't want to stop Jim Crow, they were very headstrong. So they had a symbolic voting registry, where they were trying to get black people to come, even though it didn't matter, just come and register and there were fires, they set the buses on fire to stop this from happening. Even though it was symbolic, they knew the power of black people coming together and deciding that if they could vote they would. They knew what they meant to have symbolism behind that. So if people bound together and decided they weren't going to use it, it can have power but unfortunately, people are gonna forget about it.

CT: I'm extremely hopeful, extremely prayerful. I stood with Leroy Comrie; we had him here at the church when he led the fight to symbolically ban the n-word. I'm joining with

him now in drafting letters to the major corporations that have shown a double standard in acceptance of the word but I'm not sure how this is all going to end up.

MR: The first stitch has taken place. You know when you close a wound; maybe this stitch will really heal, somehow.