

Regular Session, 2014

HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 194

BY REPRESENTATIVES JAMES, BADON, BARROW, WESLEY BISHOP, BURRELL, COX, DIXON, FRANKLIN, GAINES, HONORE, HUNTER, KATRINA JACKSON, JEFFERSON, TERRY LANDRY, NORTON, PIERRE, PRICE, SMITH, THIERRY, ALFRED WILLIAMS, PATRICK WILLIAMS, AND WOODRUFF

A RESOLUTION

To express the condolences of the House of Representatives upon the death of famed poet, author, and activist, Dr. Maya Angelou.

WHEREAS, it is with deep regret and profound sorrow that the Louisiana House of Representatives has learned of the death of Dr. Maya Angelou, at the age of eighty-six, at her home in Winston-Salem, North Carolina; and

WHEREAS, charismatic and passionate, warm and wise, formidable without being forbidding, Maya Angelou's life was a gift to the world; she shared her talents so selflessly as a professor, singer, dancer, actress, author, poet, and activist, and it is appropriate to commemorate her life and legacy; and

WHEREAS, Marguerite Johnson was born on April 4, 1928, in St. Louis, Missouri, to Vivian Baxter Johnson and Bailey Johnson; she grew up between St. Louis and Stamps, Arkansas, and spent her early years studying dance and drama in San Francisco before dropping out at age fourteen, instead becoming the city's first African-American female cable car conductor; and

WHEREAS, due to tragic and unfortunate events in her childhood, Maya did not speak for many years as an adolescent; out of her silence, a star of world-famed magnitude was born; and

WHEREAS, Maya later returned to high school to finish her diploma and gave birth a few weeks after graduation; as she waited tables to support her son, she acquired a passion for music and dance; and

WHEREAS, Maya toured Europe in the mid-1950s in the opera production "Porgy and Bess"; in 1957, she recorded her first album, "Calypso Lady"; and

WHEREAS, in 1958, Angelou became a part of the Harlem Writers Guild in New York and so played a queen in "The Blacks," an off-Broadway production by French dramatist Jean Genet; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Angelou worked as a coordinator for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and lived for years in Egypt and Ghana, where she met Nelson Mandela, who became a lifelong friend, and Malcolm X, whom she remained close to until his assassination, in 1965; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Angelou was also a close friend of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; she helped King organize the Poor People's March in Memphis, Tennessee, where the civil rights leader was slain on her fortieth birthday; and

WHEREAS, in 1971, Angelou published the Pulitzer Prize-nominated poetry collection "Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'Fore I Die"; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Angelou's most revered and acclaimed work was "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings", which was described as a work of art which eludes description, a tough, funny, lyrical voice that transforms her story from a litany of isolation and suffering into a hymn of glorious human endurance; it made literary history as the first nonfiction best-seller by an African-American woman; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Angelou was most famous for her poems and books, which were uplifting, inspiring, and motivating literary masterpieces; in 1993, she was asked to recite her famous classic, "On the Pulse of Morning" at President Bill Clinton's inauguration in 1993 and for President George W. Bush, she read "Amazing Peace," at the 2005 Christmas tree lighting ceremony at the White House; and

WHEREAS, in 2011, President Barack Obama awarded Dr. Angelou with the country's highest civilian honor, the Presidential Medal of Freedom; she also received presidential recognition with a National Medal of Arts and an honorary National Book Award; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Angelou was also one of the first black women film directors; her work on Broadway was nominated for Tony Awards in addition to countless other honors she received throughout her lifetime, including thirty honorary degrees, two NAACP Image Awards, and three Grammy awards; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Angelou was a role model to millions across the globe; her work inspired dignitaries and heads of state around the world and she will be remembered as a Renaissance woman, a cultural pioneer, and a beacon of hope and light; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Angelou's life was a gift to the world and it is wholly appropriate to express condolences upon her death; she leaves behind a rich, renowned history of literary works and poems that will forever speak of the profoundness and greatness of Dr. Maya Angelou.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the House of Representatives of the Legislature of Louisiana does hereby express condolences upon the death of Dr. Maya Angelou; does hereby recognize her life as a treasure to the United States and the world; does hereby commemorate her journey as a black woman born poor who went on to write and recite the most popular presidential inaugural poem in history; does hereby record for posterity her contributions as an activist and author who recorded and celebrated the experience of being black in the United States; and does hereby express the deep regret of the entire state upon the loss of this legendary and iconic woman.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a suitable copy of this Resolution be transmitted to the family of Dr. Maya Angelou.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Dr. Angelou once said that she wished to be remembered as in the closing lines of her famous poem "Still I Rise": "Leaving behind nights of terror and fear, I rise; Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear, I rise; Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave, I am the dream and the hope of the slave; I rise; I rise; I rise".

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SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES