



Legislation Text

File #: Res 1222-2005, **Version:** *

Res. No. 1222

Resolution commemorating the life and mourning the death of playwright August Wilson.

By Council Members Perkins, Barron, Boyland, Clarke, Fidler, Foster, Gennaro, James, McMahon, Sanders Jr., Sears, Vann, Weprin and Jackson

Whereas, August Wilson, the playwright who chronicled the African-American experience in the 20th century in a series plays, died on October 2, 2005, at the age of 60; and

Whereas, August Wilson was born Frederick August Kittel on April 27, 1945, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to an inter-racial family whose father was a German immigrant and whose mother was of African-American descent; and

Whereas, After August Wilson's parents divorced, he and his family moved to a largely white suburb where he was raised by his mother, Daisy Wilson, who instilled in her six children a strong sense of pride and a limited tolerance for injustice; and

Whereas, As the only black student in his class at a Roman Catholic high school, August Wilson experienced racism early on in his life because, as he told The New Yorker magazine in 2001, there was a note on his desk every single day that was filled with racially insensitive remarks; and

Whereas, It was this early experience that would later inspire his poetry and writings; and

Whereas, At the age of 15, August Wilson dropped out school after a teacher accused him of plagiarizing a paper on Napoleon, choosing instead to pursue an education on his own by spending days at the local library reading books; and

Whereas, August Wilson would also spend his time outside the local library hanging out and listening to the residents of the Hill District as they passed their time on stoops, in coffee shops and at a local cigar store,

voices that would eventually re-emerge in his plays; and

Whereas, By the time he was 20, August Wilson considered himself a poet, submitting poems to Harper's and a variety of other magazines while he supported himself by doing odd jobs; and

Whereas, In 1968, August Wilson and his friend Rob Penny founded the Black Horizons on the Hill Theater, where he served as the director and at times an actor, though he had no formal experience in either role; and

Whereas, After aborting an effort to write a play for his theater, August Wilson set aside playwriting for almost a decade, before eventually moving to St. Paul, Minnesota, where he worked at the Science Museum of Minnesota adapting Native American folk tales into children's plays; and

Whereas, August Wilson began writing the play "Jitney" in 1979 as a way of keeping his connection with the voices of the Hill District alive in his memories, and "Jitney" was produced in Pittsburgh in 1982 and reworked and presented on Off-Broadway in 2000; and

Whereas, "Jitney" became the first of the ten landmark plays that August Wilson would eventually write representing ten decades of African-American culture and history in the 20th century, plays which also included "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom," his first major play to debut on Broadway at the Cort Theater in 1984; and

Whereas, August Wilson's play "Fences," which debuted in 1987 and starred James Earl Jones, ran for 525 performances and would set a record for a nonmusical production when it grossed approximately \$11 million in a single year; and

Whereas, August Wilson's plays have logged nearly 1,800 performances on Broadway in more than two decades and have been seen in more than 2,000 separate productions, both amateur and professional; and

Whereas, Over the past two decades, August Wilson plays have earned him numerous awards, including a Tony Award for "Fences," two Pulitzer Prizes for "Fences and "The Piano Lesson" and seven New York Drama Critics' Circle awards; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York commemorates the life and mourns the death of

playwright August Wilson.

LS#3582

RA

10/19/2005

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