



Legislation Text

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Res. No. 284

Resolution to commemorate the life and death of Dr. Maya Angelou.

By Council Members Williams, Ferreras-Copeland, Cumbo, Rosenthal, Cabrera, Vacca, Mendez, Levin, Crowley, Van Bramer, Vallone, Eugene, Chin, Constantinides, Gentile, Koo, Richards, Rodriguez, Rose, Dromm and Koslowitz.

Whereas, Dr. Maya Angelou, born Marguerite Annie Johnson, was one of the most renowned and influential voices of our time; and

Whereas, Dr. Angelou was a prolific poet, author, dancer, actress, film and television producer, playwright, film director, scholar and civil rights activist; and

Whereas, Maya Angelou was born on April 4, 1928 in St. Louis, Missouri and was raised by her grandmother in Stamps, Arkansas, where she first experienced racial discrimination; and

Whereas, As a teenager, she relocated to California to live with her mother, and won a scholarship to study dance and drama at the California Labor School in San Francisco; and

Whereas, At the age of 14, she dropped out of the California Labor School to become San Francisco's first African-American female cable car conductor; and

Whereas, She later finished high school and gave birth to her son a few weeks after graduation; and

Whereas, As a young single mother, she supported her son by working several jobs, however, she would eventually pursue her passion for the arts and other interests; and

Whereas, In 1954 and 1955, Dr. Angelou toured Europe with a production of the opera "Porgy and Bess"; and

Whereas, She also studied modern dance with Martha Graham, and participated in dance performances

with Alvin Ailey in San Francisco and appeared with him on television variety shows; and

Whereas, In the late 1950s, she recorded her first album, “Calypso Lady,” then moved to New York City to focus on her writing career, where she joined the Harlem Writers Guild, acted in the historic Off-Broadway production of Jean Genet’s “The Blacks,” and wrote and performed “Cabaret for Freedom”; and

Whereas, In the early 1960s, Ms. Angelou lived in Egypt and Ghana, where she worked as an editor, journalist, and professor; and

Whereas, During her years abroad, Dr. Angelou read and studied voraciously, mastering French, Spanish, Italian, Arabic and the West African language Fanti; and

Whereas, She also participated in the civil rights and antiapartheid movements, and worked closely with Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; and

Whereas, In 1970, Dr. Angelou published her landmark book, “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings,” which received international acclaim, and is still one of the most popular books today; and

Whereas, A trailblazer in film and television, Dr. Angelou wrote the screenplay and composed the score for the 1972 film “Georgia, Georgia,” and her script, the first by an African American woman ever to be filmed, was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize; and

Whereas, Dr. Angelou served on two presidential committees for Presidents Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter in 1975 and 1977, respectively; and

Whereas, Dr. Angelou composed and recited the poem, “On the Pulse of the Morning,” for President Bill Clinton’s inauguration in 1993; and

Whereas, In June 1995, she delivered her poem, “A Brave and Startling Truth,” to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the United Nations in New York City; and

Whereas, In 1996, she directed her first feature film, “Down in the Delta”; and

Whereas, In 2000, Dr. Angelou was honored with the Presidential Medal of the Arts, the Ford’s Theatre Lincoln Medal in 2008, and in that same year, she narrated the award-winning documentary film “The Black

Candle,” and published a book of guidance for young women titled, “Letter to My Daughter”; and

Whereas, In 2010, Dr. Angelou donated 343 boxes of her private collection containing personal papers and documents to the Schomburg Research Center for Black Culture in Harlem, some of which will be on display at the Schomburg from May 30 to June 30, 2014; and

Whereas, In 2011, President Barack Obama awarded her the nation’s highest civilian honor, the Presidential Medal of Freedom; and

Whereas, Dr. Angelou’s endless list of accomplishments also include publishing thirty-six books, including seven autobiographies, volumes of poetry, essay collections, cookbooks and children’s books; and

Whereas, She also received three Grammy awards, fifty honorary degrees and served over thirty years as the Reynolds Professor of American Studies at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina; and

Whereas, Although Dr. Angelou lived and worked in many cities across the globe, New York City was considered her second home; and

Whereas, In fact, Dr. Angelou’s first New York City apartment was located in Brooklyn, and she later became a long-time resident of Harlem until 2013, according to *The New York Times*; and

Whereas, On May 28, 2014, Dr. Angelou passed away quietly in her home in Winston-Salem, North Carolina at the age of 86; and

Whereas, Dr. Maya Angelou lived her life as a pioneer, artist, teacher, and advocate for equality, tolerance and peace; and

Whereas, The world has greatly benefitted from Dr. Angelou’s outstanding leadership, creativity, wisdom, grace and compassion; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York commemorates the life and death of Dr. Maya Angelou.

3:00 p.m.
TC