

2015-J739

LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION commemorating the 113th Anniversary of the birth of Langston Hughes on February 1, 2015

WHEREAS, As we celebrate the champions of civil rights during Black History Month we must also remember those, such as Langston Hughes, who have contributed to the literary culture of the African American community in both historical narratives and fiction; and

WHEREAS, James Mercer Langston Hughes was born on February 1, 1902, in Joplin, Missouri; while his mother moved around during his youth, Langston was raised primarily by his maternal grandmother, Mary, until she died in his early teens; and

WHEREAS, Langston Hughes first began writing poetry when one of his teachers introduced him to the works of Carl Sandburg and Walt Whitman, both of whom he would later cite as primary influences; and

WHEREAS, In 1920, Langston Hughes graduated from high school and spent the following year in Mexico with his father; around this time, his poem THE NEGRO SPEAKS OF RIVERS was published in THE CRISIS magazine and was highly praised; and

WHEREAS, In 1921, Langston Hughes returned to the United States and enrolled at Columbia University where he studied briefly, during which time he quickly became a part of Harlem's improving cultural movement; and

WHEREAS, Langston Hughes worked various jobs including as a busboy in a Washington, D.C. hotel restaurant when he met American poet Vachel Lindsay; Langston showed him some of his poems and he was impressed enough to use his connections to promote Hughes's poetry and ultimately bring it to a wider audience; and

WHEREAS, In 1925, Langston Hughes's poem THE WEARY BLUES won first prize in the OPPORTUNITY magazine literary competition, and in addition

to winning, he received a scholarship to attend Lincoln University, in Pennsylvania; and

WHEREAS, While studying at Lincoln, Langston Hughes's poetry came to the attention of novelist and critic Carl Van Vetches, who helped him get his first book of poetry, *THE WEARY BLUES*, published by Knopf in 1926; and

WHEREAS, After his graduation from Lincoln in 1929, Langston Hughes published his first novel, *NOT WITHOUT LAUGHTER*; the book was commercially successful enough to convince Langston he could make a living as a writer; and

WHEREAS, During the 1930s, Langston Hughes would frequently travel the United States on lecture tours, as well as abroad to the Soviet Union, Japan, and Haiti; and

WHEREAS, In 1940, Langston Hughes's autobiography, up to the age of 28, *THE BIG SEA*, was published; also around this time, he began contributing a column to the *CHICAGO DEFENDER*, for which he created a comic character named Jesse B. Semple, better known as "Simple," a black Everyman whom Langston Hughes used to further explore urban, working-class black themes, and to address racial issues; and

WHEREAS, Over the next two decades, Langston Hughes would continue his prolific output; in 1949, he wrote a play that inspired the opera "Troubled Island" and published yet another anthology of work, *THE POETRY OF THE NEGRO*; and

WHEREAS, During the 1960s, he published countless other works, including several books in his *SIMPLE* series, English translations of the poetry of Federico Garcia Lorca and Gabriela Mistral, another anthology of his own poetry, and the second installment of his autobiography, *I WONDER AS I WANDER*; and

WHEREAS, On May 22, 1967, Langston Hughes died at the age of 65; a tribute to his poetry, his funeral contained little in the way of spoken eulogy, but was filled with jazz and blues music; in addition, his ashes

were interred beneath the entrance of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem; and

WHEREAS, Langston Hughes's Harlem home, on East 127th Street, received New York City Landmark status in 1981, and was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1982; and

WHEREAS, Volumes of his work continue to be published and translated throughout the world; in 2002, the United States Postal Service added the image of Langston Hughes to its Black Heritage series of postage stamps; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to commemorate the 113th Anniversary of the birth of Langston Hughes on February 1, 2015; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to the family of Langston Hughes.