

2017-J1275

Senate Resolution No. 1275

BY: Senator COMRIE

MOURNING the death of Derek Alton Walcott,
acclaimed Caribbean poet, playwright and Nobel
Laureate

WHEREAS, It is the sense of this Legislative Body, representing the people of the State of New York, to pay tribute to an extraordinary man of indomitable faith and dedication whose purposeful life and accomplishments will forever stand as a paradigm and inspiration for others; and

WHEREAS, Derek Alton Walcott, whose intricately metaphorical poetry captured the physical beauty of the Caribbean, the harsh legacy of colonialism and the complexities of living and writing in two cultural worlds, bringing him a Nobel Prize in Literature, died on Friday, March 17, 2017, at the age of 87; and

WHEREAS, Derek A. Walcott was born to Alix (Maarlin) and Warwick Walcott on January 23, 1930, in Castries, Saint Lucia in the West Indies; after the death of his father, Derek was raised by his schoolteacher mother; and

WHEREAS, A true renaissance man, Derek A. Walcott was inspired each day by the beauty and mystery that surrounded him; he was deeply moved by the island's volcanic beaches, reef-diving sites, luxury resorts and

fishing villages, as well as its magnificent trails in the interior rainforest which lead to waterfalls, like the Toraille, which pours over a cliff into a garden; and

WHEREAS, At the young age of 19, Derek A. Walcott first attracted attention when he self-published two books of poems with the aid of his mother, 25 Poems in 1948 and Epitaph for the Young: XII Cantos in 1949; and

WHEREAS, After earning a scholarship, Derek A. Walcott studied French, Latin and Spanish at the University College of the West Indies in Kingston, Jamaica; during this time, he began writing plays; and

WHEREAS, Upon graduation, Derek A. Walcott moved to Trinidad, where he became a teacher in St. Lucia, Grenada and Jamaica while continuing to both write and stage plays; and

WHEREAS, Derek A. Walcott then studied directing with Jose Quintero in New York City for a year; after returning to the West Indies, he founded the Little Carib Theater Workshop, which later became the Trinidad Theatre Workshop; one of the group's first productions was Derek's Malcochon; and

WHEREAS, Derek A. Walcott's best-known play, Dream on Monkey Mountain was produced on NBC-TV in the United States, and in 1971, it was produced by the Negro Ensemble Company off-Broadway in New York City; it won an Obie Award that year for Best Foreign Play; and

WHEREAS, In 1962, Derek A. Walcott published a collection of poems entitled In a Green Night: Poems 1948-1960; his powerful work was praised by international critics and fellow poets; there was nothing shy about his poetic voice; it demanded to be heard, in all its sensuous

immediacy and historical complexity; and

WHEREAS, Derek A. Walcott's poetry matured and deepened in works such as *The Castaway*, *The Gulf*, and *Another Life*; shortly thereafter, he was named an enormously ambitious artist, ambitious for himself, his art and his people; and

WHEREAS, Derek A. Walcott returned to the United States, and was hired as a teacher by Boston University, where he taught literature and writing for more than two decades while publishing new books of poetry and plays on a regular basis; in 2007, he officially retired from this position; and

WHEREAS, In 1981, Derek A. Walcott founded the Boston Playwrights' Theatre, and received a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship; and

WHEREAS, In 1990, Derek A. Walcott published his epic poem, *Omeros*, which referred to characters from the *Iliad*; his work was called a major achievement, and was named one of the Best Books of 1990; and

WHEREAS, Derek A. Walcott was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1992; the Nobel committee described his work as "a poetic oeuvre of great luminosity, sustained by a historical vision, the outcome of a multicultural commitment"; in 2004, he won an Anisfield-Wolf Book Award for Lifetime Achievement; and

WHEREAS, His later poetry collections included *Tiepolo's Hound*, which was illustrated with copies of his watercolors, *The Prodigal*, and *White Egrets*, which received the T.S. Eliot Prize; and

WHEREAS, In 2009, Derek A. Walcott began a three-year distinguished scholar-in-residence position at the University of Alberta, and in 2010,

he became a Professor of Poetry at the University of Essex; and

WHEREAS, Predeceased by his twin brother, Roderick Walcott, Derek A. Walcott is survived by his longtime companion, Sigrid Nama; one son, Peter; and two daughters, Anna Walcott-Hardy and Elizabeth Walcott-Hackshaw; as well as several grandchildren; and

WHEREAS, Throughout his magnanimous life, Derek A. Walcott created many works of literary beauty and depth that will remain essential parts of today's prose; he will always be remembered as a powerful voice in Caribbean literature which demanded to be heard, in all its luxurious immediacy and historical complexity; and

WHEREAS, In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, Derek A. Walcott proclaimed "For every poet, it is always morning in the world. History a forgotten, insomniac night; History and elemental awe are always our early beginning, because the fate of poetry is to fall in love with the world, in spite of History"; and

WHEREAS, Derek A. Walcott believed in the celebration of life and this Legislative Body, on behalf of the people of the State of New York, is proud to celebrate his; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to pay tribute to the life of Derek Alton Walcott, whose legendary talent entertained readers for several decades; he will be greatly missed by his family, friends, colleagues and fans across New York State, the Nation, and the World; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to the family of Derek Alton Walcott.

