

2021-J478

Senate Resolution No. 478

BY: Senator GAUGHRAN

RECOGNIZING October 17, 2021, as National Black
Poetry Day

WHEREAS, It is the sense of this Legislative Body, in keeping with its time-honored traditions, to recognize and pay tribute to those who seek to preserve and celebrate the African-American heritage of our State and Nation; and

WHEREAS, This Legislative Body is justly proud to recognize Sunday, October 17, 2021, as National Black Poetry Day; and

WHEREAS, Established in 1985, National Black Poetry Day is celebrated annually on October 17th, the birthdate of renowned poet, writer and preacher Jupiter Hammon, to celebrate not only his work as the first published Black poet in America and the contributions of Black poets thereafter, but to commemorate the importance of Black heritage and literacy; and

WHEREAS, Today, we celebrate this day to pay respect to the significance of Black voices throughout history, both past and present, and to recognize the indelible mark Black poets have made on the arts of this State and Nation, as well as to show appreciation for their effect on the world; and

WHEREAS, Jupiter Hammon was born into slavery on October 17, 1711, at the Lloyd Manor on Long Island, which is now known as Lloyd Harbor, New York; with the facts of his personal life very limited, it is thought he was the son of Opium and Rose, the first set of male and female slaves to serve the Lloyd family; and

WHEREAS, In his early years, Jupiter Hammon was enslaved by Henry Lloyd, during which time he was heavily influenced by the Great Awakening, a major religious revival of the time, and became a devout Christian; and

WHEREAS, Jupiter Hammon attended school where he learned to read and write, and went on to work alongside Henry as a bookkeeper and negotiator for the family's business; he served the Lloyd family his entire life, working under four generations of the family masters; and

WHEREAS, Overcoming inconceivable adversity, this extraordinary man published his first poem, "An Evening Thought. Salvation by Christ with Penitential Cries: Composed by Jupiter Hammon, a Negro belonging to Mr. Lloyd of Queen's Village, on Long Island, the 25th of December, 1760," as a broadside in 1761; and

WHEREAS, Eighteen years passed before the publication of his second work, "An Address to Miss Phillis Wheatley"; in this poem, Jupiter Hammon addresses a series of quatrains with accompanying Bible verses to Wheatley, the most prominent African-American poet of the time; in 1782, he published "A Poem for Children with Thoughts on Death"; and

WHEREAS, After the death of Henry Lloyd in 1763, Jupiter Hammon remained enslaved by Lloyd's son, Joseph, with whom he moved to Connecticut; there, he became a leader in the African-American community and attended abolitionist and Revolutionary War societies; and

WHEREAS, At the inaugural meeting of the Spartan Project of the African Society of New York City on September 24, 1786, Jupiter Hammon delivered his most famous sermon, "Address to the Negroes of the State of New York," at the age of 76 after a lifetime of slavery; his writing was reprinted by several abolitionist societies, including the New York Quakers and the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery; and

WHEREAS, Widely considered the founder of African-American literature, Jupiter Hammon's date of death is unknown, although he is believed to have died sometime around 1806; he is likely buried in an unmarked grave on what was once the Lloyd property and is now Caumsett State Historic Park Preserve in Long Island, New York; and

WHEREAS, Throughout the course of American history, Black poets and writers have used their great talents to share the richness of the African-American experience and to develop a uniquely American style of literature enjoyed throughout the world; on October 17, 2021, we honor Jupiter Hammon, a true pioneer of African-American poetry, along with today's artists who continue his legacy; and

WHEREAS, Events which provide a means of preserving a part of our rich American past and which contribute to the community in such noble endeavors, are held in the highest regard by this Legislative Body; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to recognize October 17, 2021, as National Black Poetry Day; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to Preservation Long Island.

