

Senate Resolution No. 1723

BY: Senator MAYER

MOURNING the death of Richard Roundtree, actor and star of numerous acclaimed movies and television shows

WHEREAS, It is the custom of this Legislative Body to pay tribute to citizens of the State of New York whose lifework and civic endeavor served to enhance the quality of life in their communities and this great Empire State; and

WHEREAS, Richard Roundtree, of New Rochelle, New York, died on Tuesday, October 24, 2023, at the age of 81; and

WHEREAS, Born July 9, 1942, to parents John and Kathryn (Watkins) Roundtree, Richard Roundtree went to New Rochelle High School, and later Southern Illinois University; he enjoyed successful football careers at both schools before moving onto modeling with the Ebony Fashion Fair of **Ebony** magazine; and

WHEREAS, Richard Roundtree moved back to New York following his modeling career, and began his theater career by joining the Negro Ensemble Company; and

WHEREAS, His first role was in a 1967 production of Howard Sackler's "The Great White Hope," starring as a fictionalized version of Jack Johnson, the early 20th century's first Black heavyweight boxing champion; and

WHEREAS, Richard Roundtree distinguished himself in his profession and by his sincere dedication and substantial contribution to the welfare of his community; and

WHEREAS, For his lead role in the popular movie "Shaft," which was released in 1971, Richard Roundtree quickly found his way into the spotlight at the age of 29; and

WHEREAS, Richard Roundtree returned to the role for follow-up movies, "Shaft's Big Score!" (1972) and "Shaft in Africa" (1973); and

WHEREAS, A testament to the success and impact of the "Shaft" character, in 2019, another "Shaft" was released, starring Samuel Jackson (now said to be the original character's son); like the 2000 "Shaft," it included Richard Roundtree in the cast; and

WHEREAS, The "Shaft" movies were trailblazers of their time, being of the first major movies to shift from a common stereotypical narrative, and rather, highlighted the pros of the Black experience in America; the character, John Shaft, was noted to be the first Black character who led his life free from racial torment, truly opening the industry to a wealth of possibilities for narratives that truly honor Black people in cinema; and

WHEREAS, Richard Roundtree was in the all-star ensemble cast of the 1974 disaster movie "Earthquake"; he also played the title role in "Man Friday" (1975); and

WHEREAS, He additionally held roles in the movies "Inchon" (1981), "Q" (1982), and "City Heat" (1984), where he notably starred alongside Clint Eastwood and Burt Reynolds; and

WHEREAS, Richard Roundtree was also widely known for his performance in the acclaimed mini-series "Roots" (1977), which he has described as transformational regarding pop culture and the changing of societal norms; and

WHEREAS, This renowned actor was an amoral private detective in a five-episode story arc of "Desperate Housewives" (2004), appeared in 60 episodes of the soap opera "Generations" (1990), and played Booker T. Washington in the 1999 television movie "Having Our Say: The Delany Sisters' First 100 Years"; he was a big-city district attorney in the film "Seven" (1995) and a strong-willed Mississippi iceman in "Once Upon a Time... When We Were Colored" (1996); and

WHEREAS, After the year 2000, he made appearances in more than 25 TV series (he was a cast member of or had recurring roles in nine of them - including "Heroes," "Being Mary Jane" and "Family Reunion") and was seen in half a dozen television movies and more than 20 feature films; and

WHEREAS, In 2020, Richard Roundtree starred as a fishing boat's gray-bearded captain in "Haunting of the Mary Celeste," a supernatural maritime movie mystery; in 2022, he was a regular in the second season of "Cherish the Day," Ava DuVernay's romantic drama series; and

WHEREAS, Richard Roundtree's commitment to excellence, and his spirit of humanity, carried over into all fields of enterprise, including charitable and civic endeavors; and

WHEREAS, Richard Roundtree is survived by four daughters, Kelli, Nicole, Tayler, and Morgan; a son, John; and at least one grandchild; and

WHEREAS, Armed with a humanistic spirit and imbued with a sense of compassion, Richard Roundtree leaves behind a legacy which will long endure the passage of time and will remain as a comforting memory to all he served and befriended; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to mourn the death of Richard Roundtree, actor and star of numerous acclaimed movies and television shows; and be it further

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