

Senate Resolution No. 2250

BY: Senator CLEARE

CELEBRATING the 126th Anniversary of the birth of
Paul Robeson

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 the great State of New York; and

WHEREAS, Paul Leroy Robeson, born the son of a former slave, was both valedictorian and a star athlete at Rutgers University, and received his degree in law at Columbia University in 1923 while living in Harlem; and

WHEREAS, As a young man, Paul Robeson began to advocate for the equality of all Americans, and was recognized for his exceptional vocal talents; and

WHEREAS, Paul Robeson played successfully in the National Football League while concurrently enrolled in law school at Columbia University; and

WHEREAS, Paul Robeson was soon cast in many successful musical productions in New York City during the height of the Harlem Renaissance, owing to his skills as a vocal performer; and

WHEREAS, Paul Robeson's talent as an actor and singer soon took his fame abroad, where he developed a sympathy for anti-fascist, anti-racist, and anti-colonial movements worldwide; and

WHEREAS, Paul Robeson returned to the United States in 1940 and developed a reputation as one of the nation's most prominent artists, singers, and actors, and broke many records, including as the first Black lead actor with an all-white supporting cast in the role of Othello on Broadway that ran for 296 consecutive performances, the longest run of a Shakespeare play in Broadway history; and

WHEREAS, Paul Robeson developed a reputation as an outspoken political activist for racial justice in the United States and the end of Jim Crow, pushing the Major Leagues to admit Black men in their teams, meeting with President Truman to demand the enactment of anti-lynching legislation and civil rights laws, partnering with WEB Du Bois to launch a campaign for such legislation in 1946, advocating that United Nations members cease their exploitation of colonial African territories, and charging the United States with genocide at the United Nations for failing to protect Black Americans from violence; and

WHEREAS, Paul Robeson continued his advocacy for justice for all peoples in spite of political persecution by the federal government—including blacklisting by the FBI, demands to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee, and revocation of his rights

to leave the country without due process-and at great risk to his personal well-being, for example riots at a concert of his in Peekskill

in 1949 that were organized as a benefit for the Civil Rights Congress and was disrupted by a violent white mob; and

WHEREAS, Paul Robeson, before hundreds of Black and Jewish trade unionists in this same Peekskill episode demonstrated his commitment to unionized workers of all nationalities and races, and that during World War II, Paul Robeson was made an honorary member of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU); additionally, Paul Robeson famously remarked in August 1941, "The future of America depends largely upon the progressive program of the Congress of Industrial Workers (CIO)" inspirationally shows the way forward for workers' security and rights herein New York State, nationally, and globally; and

WHEREAS, Paul Robeson's status as a talented singer and actor, as well as his pronounced and unceasing advocacy for anti-colonialism and equality, made him one of the most famous and recognizable people in the world; and

WHEREAS, Paul Robeson was born on April 9, 1898, and passed away at the age of 77 on January 23, 1976; and

WHEREAS, Paul Robeson is one of the greatest heroes of the civil rights movement, the Harlem Renaissance, and one of the greatest Americans and New Yorkers of the twentieth century; and

WHEREAS, The legacy of Paul Robeson has long been carried on by his granddaughter, Susan Robeson, a New York resident, who is an American author and producer of works about her grandfather, including: "The Whole World In His Hands: A Pictorial Biography of Paul Robeson" and "Grandpa Stops a War: A Paul Robeson story"; and

WHEREAS, The legacy of Paul Robeson is carried on today in the State of New York in a multitude of ways, including the work of Dr. Gregory Robeson Smith, Grand Nephew of the late great Paul Robeson-who is a 33 degree Mason and Past Grand Master of the 10,000 members Prince Hall Grand Lodge of the State of New York, as well as Senior Pastor at the Mount Hope A.M.E. Zion Church in Westchester, New York; and

WHEREAS, Other individuals deserve credit for their labors of love to ensure that Paul Robeson receives the recognition he deserves, including Michael Haley of the Paul Robeson "Here I Stand" Committee who, among other things, is leading a campaign to have a statue erected in Robeson's Honor in Upper Manhattan; and

WHEREAS, Paul Robeson has been recognized and lauded all over the world including the following accolades: member of the College Football Hall of Fame, recipient of a Lifetime Achievement Grammy Award, star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, a member of the American Theater Hall of Fame, commemorated via the release of a U.S. Postal Service Stamp, renaming of several buildings, libraries, boulevards and campuses after him, membership in the New Jersey Hall of Fame and naming a variety of heirloom tomato after him; and

WHEREAS, Since Paul Robeson lived in Harlem for many years and was a resident of New York, it is incumbent upon us to recognize him through the celebration of the 126th Anniversary of the birth of this one of a kind renaissance man; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to celebrate the 126th Anniversary of the birth of Paul Robeson; and be it further

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