

Assembly Resolution No. 393

BY: M. of A. Bichotte Hermelyn

MEMORIALIZING Governor Kathy Hochul to proclaim
May 2023, as Haitian Heritage Month in the State of
New York

WHEREAS, Haitian Heritage Month, recognized globally during the month of May, celebrates the rich culture of Haiti and its people, including their history, language, distinctive art, delicious foods and cuisines; and

WHEREAS, The purpose of the month is to raise awareness and understanding about Haitian culture, history and traditions; by educating the historical contributions Haitian people have made to the United States and to the world; and celebrate these Haitian achievements across the globe; and

WHEREAS, Haiti's history is of vital significance and pride for its people and has crucial global importance, representing a new concept of human rights, universal citizenship, and participation in government through the Haitian Revolution (1791 - 1804); and

WHEREAS, The Haitian Revolution is one the largest and the first successful slave rebellions in the Western Hemisphere; starting with the founding act of the Revolution by Dutty Boukman-a slave transferred from British colonial Jamaica to French colonial Saint Domingue-was a Houngan, or Vodou priest, who led the ceremony of Bois Caiman on the night of August 14, 1791; and

WHEREAS, In 1793, Toussaint L'Ouverture, former slave of the French colony and born with the name Francois Dominique Toussaint, was a Haitian General who led to the success of enslaved Africans gaining autonomy in Saint-Domingue, now known as Haiti; and

WHEREAS, Jean Jacques Dessalines, a former slave, lead a mighty group of Haitians, Africans and Blacks during the Haitian Revolution as the General, who emerged after Toussaint L'Overture was captured, that defeated Napoleon Bonaparte and the French colonists at the Battle of Vertieres at the end of 1803 to become the first Black ruler of the first independent Black republic in the world; and

WHEREAS, Henry Christophe became Toussaint Louverture's Chief Lieutenant fighting the French, British, and the Spaniards and later became President of Haiti in 1806 where he introduced a monetary system, declared Catholicism the state religion, and established schools and hospitals including a basic school of medicine; and

WHEREAS, The Haitian flag was designed by Jean Jacques Dessalines and was adopted on May 18, 1803, at the Congress of Arcahaie, which was held to establish the united command of the revolutionary army under the supreme authority of Jean-Jacques Dessalines; and

WHEREAS, Haitian Heritage Month is an expansion of Haitian Flag Day, a national Haitian Holiday celebrated annually on May 18th, serving as a major patriotic celebration in Haiti and the Diaspora to encourage patriotism; and

WHEREAS, Haitian Flag Day is a reminder of the struggle to freedom and the Haitian Flag symbolizes the unity that borne the Haitian nation through the alliance of the Blacks and mulattoes during the Revolutionary war; and

WHEREAS, The independence of Haiti echoes the importance of women and women of color in building independent nations, through revolutionaries like Marie-Jeanne Lamartiniere, who fought as a soldier in the Indigenous army, and Catherine Flon who, like Betsy Ross, is credited with crafting the independent Black Republic of Haiti Flag in 1803, and who also served as a nurse; and

WHEREAS, Haitian culinary dishes, such as Soup Joumou, a soup Haitian slaves were forbidden from eating as it was "reserved for their white masters," have become symbols for Haitian freedom; and Haiti has vast variety of unique local food now enjoyed throughout the world, such as griot (fried pork), diri djon djon (black rice), plantains, grenadia juice and rhum; and

WHEREAS, Haitians continue to produce the largest number of health care workers (nurses, and doctors) and engineers in the Black diaspora; and

WHEREAS, Haitian history has indelibly shaped the United States, including the 800 men of color from Saint-Domingue (present-day Haiti), who fought along with the Continental Army during the American Revolution at the Battle of Savannah, Georgia in 1779 to fight against the British, and enslaved Pierre Toussaint, who accompanied his master to New York in 1787 and became a major philanthropist who contributed money to the erection of the Saint Patrick's Cathedral; and

WHEREAS, Haitian born, Jean Baptiste Point du Sable traveled to North America in the early 1770s and was instrumental in the Pontiac's Rebellion by negotiating and preserving peace among several Native American tribes and later became the first settler and Founder of Chicago in the 1780s; and

WHEREAS, Haiti's victory over France helped ensure the survival of the United States, who got an enormous bargain on the purchase of the Louisiana Purchase after French leaders were spooked by the revolution in Haiti; and

WHEREAS, Haitian American immigrants have come to the United States bringing their own influences and cultural traditions to a variety of spheres including the arts, business, sports, literature, science and law, with notable figures including: Jean-Michael Basquiat, one of the defining artists of the 20th century; Jackson Georges, a Haitian-American painter who worked with wood, marble, metal and leather to create works featured at the World Trade Art Gallery, United Nations,

and Mehu Gallery; Jean-Claude Brizard, a Haitian-American teacher and superintendent who served as the chief executive officer of the Chicago Public Schools from 2011-2012; Dean P. Baquet, a Haitian American journalist who has served as the executive editor of The New York Times since 2014; Nicole Baron Rosefort, who served as a New York City and State public education leader; Jacques Jiha, who was Commissioner of the

New York City Department of Finance, and who currently serves as director of the New York City Mayor's Office of Management and Budget; and Karine Jean-Pierre, who serves as the Assistant to the President and White House Press Secretary; and

WHEREAS, The New York State Assembly houses the largest Legislative Haitian Caucus in the country, with five members; New York City has one of the largest Haitian elected officials in city council and the judiciary; and the National Haitian American Elected Officials Network (NHAEON) has the largest network of Haitian elected official in the United States; and

WHEREAS, Haitian Creole is one of the top 10 languages spoken in New York City, and in 2018, the 'Little Haiti Brooklyn' cultural and business district was established to preserve, harness, showcase, and celebrate the commercial and socio-cultural institutions in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn with the largest concentration of stakeholders of Haitian ancestry; and

WHEREAS, In 2021, the MTA renamed the Newkirk Avenue subway station in Flatbush to the Newkirk Avenue-Little Haiti station to honor the neighborhood's unique Haitian roots; the Haitian population continues to grow across the state which started in Harlem, to Brooklyn, and with the highest concentration of Haitians in Queens, Long Island, Rockland County, Poughkeepsie and Buffalo; and

WHEREAS, For decades, Haiti has faced significant challenges, including natural disasters that have devastated the land and disrupted the lives of millions, however, the Haitian people have demonstrated resilience throughout history; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to memorialize Governor Kathy Hochul to proclaim May 2023, as Haitian Heritage Month in the State of New York; and be it further

RESOLVED, That copies of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to The Honorable Kathy Hochul, Governor of the State of New York; and Haitian organizations across the State.