

2015-J936

LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION memorializing Governor Andrew M. Cuomo to declare March 11, 2015, to April 12, 2015, as Garifuna-American Heritage Month in the State of New York

WHEREAS, It is the sense of this Legislative Body to recognize and pay just tribute to the cultural heritage of the ethnic groups which comprise and contribute to the richness and diversity of the community of the State of New York; and

WHEREAS, Attendant to such concern, and in keeping with its time-honored traditions, it is the intent of this Legislative Body to applaud and commemorate events which foster ethnic pride and exemplify the cultural diversity that represents and strengthens the spirit of the people and the State of New York; and

WHEREAS, This Legislative Body is justly proud to memorialize Governor Andrew M. Cuomo to declare March 11, 2015, to April 12, 2015, as Garifuna-American Heritage Month in the State of New York; and

WHEREAS, Garifuna-American Heritage Month celebrates the great contributions of Garifuna-Americans to the fabric of New York City, and pays tribute to the common culture and bonds of friendship that unite the United States and the Garifuna countries of Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines; and

WHEREAS, Garifuna-American Heritage Month affirms the culture, identity and self-esteem of a people; it celebrates a rich heritage and illuminates Garifuna history and tradition, as well as the spirit of an indomitable people; and

WHEREAS, In 1665, two Spanish ships wrecked off the coast of St. Vincent; and

WHEREAS, The West African slaves who escaped to the island eventually intermarried with the Caribs and the Arawaks, indigenous native peoples;

and

WHEREAS, The new race of people, known as the Garifuna, grew strong and prosperous on the island; and

WHEREAS, In 1795, the Garifuna began the Second Carib War against the British; battles raged throughout St. Vincent over the next year with both sides enduring heavy losses; and

WHEREAS, On June 10, 1796, the final battle commenced with the Garifuna and British, resulting in the Garifuna's surrender; and

WHEREAS, The surviving Black Caribs were forcibly transferred to the neighboring island of Balliceaux; and

WHEREAS, On March 11, 1797, the defeated Garifuna were loaded onto a convoy of eight vessels and transported to Roatan, Honduras, which arrived on April 12th of that year; and

WHEREAS, The Garifuna began to migrate to the United States during the 1930s; today, New York City is home to the largest Garifuna community outside of Central America; and

WHEREAS, This year commemorates the 25th Anniversary of the Happy Land Social Club Fire tragedy that brought attention to New York City's Garifuna community; this milestone should serve as the turning point to advance the integration of the Garifuna community as it promotes its political, economic, social and cultural development; and

WHEREAS, On May 18, 2001, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) proclaimed the Garifuna language, dance and music as a "Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity"; and

WHEREAS, Garifuna-American Heritage Month provides an opportunity to recognize the significance of their contributions to the quality and character of life, and, through many events and activities throughout

the month, for all people to gain a greater appreciation of Garifuna history and traditions, and of the role Garifuna-Americans have played, and will continue to play, in our society; and

WHEREAS, In 1823, William Henry Brown, the first American playwright of African descent, wrote "The Drama of King Shotaway," recognized as the first Black drama of the American Theatre, which has as its subject the 1795 Black Caribs' (Garifunas) defense of the Island of Saint Vincent, against colonization by the British; and

WHEREAS, Today, New Yorkers of Garifuna heritage such as Sara Logan, Rosemary Ordonez Jenkins, Mirtha Colon, Eleanor Cecelia Castillo-Bullock, Sulma Arzu-Brown, James Lovell, Rosita Alvarez, Paula Castillo, Martin Bermudez, Edson Arzu and Jose Francisco Avila, continue to recognize and honor the cultural practices of their ancestors; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to memorialize Governor Andrew M. Cuomo to declare March 11, 2015, to April 12, 2015, as Garifuna-American Heritage Month in the State of New York; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo, Governor of the State of New York.