

2015-K940

LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION memorializing Governor Andrew M. Cuomo to proclaim February 20, 2016, as Frederick Douglass Day in the State of New York, honoring the noted African-American orator, journalist, and anti-slavery leader who was a longtime resident of New York State and the City of Rochester on the 121st Anniversary of his death

WHEREAS, Frederick Douglass, whose original name was Frederick Augustus Bailey, was born in 1817, in Talbot County, Maryland, to a black slave, Harriet Bailey, and an unknown white father; and

WHEREAS, Frederick Douglass went on to become the most prominent African-American orator, journalist, and antislavery leader of the 19th Century; and

WHEREAS, After learning basic literacy skills as a child, at the age of 13, Mr. Douglass bought his first book entitled, THE COLUMBIAN ORATOR, which convinced him of the injustice of slavery and of the right of all people to be free; and

WHEREAS, In 1845, Frederick Douglass published his first autobiography entitled A NARRATIVE OF THE LIFE OF FREDERICK DOUGLASS, AN AMERICAN SLAVE, a narrative which was one of the most important accounts written by a fugitive slave and became a major source of information about slavery and a classic piece of American literature; and

WHEREAS, After spending two years in England, Mr. Douglass returned to the United States in 1847, a free man after some of his British friends purchased his freedom; and

WHEREAS, Upon his return to the United States, Frederick Douglass started publishing a weekly newspaper called THE NORTH STAR, which later became the FREDERICK DOUGLASS WEEKLY, a newspaper managed and edited solely by blacks in order to disprove the proslavery argument that blacks were "naturally inferior"; and

WHEREAS, From 1847 through 1863, Mr. Douglass continuously published his newspapers, which also included DOUGLASS' MONTHLY, through which he championed the rights of free blacks and slaves and supported a number of other causes, most notably women's rights; and

WHEREAS, From 1840 through the 1850s, Frederick Douglass worked closely with the antislavery Liberty Party, a party he helped organize, which called for the election of abolitionists to public office and demanded the total elimination of slavery; and

WHEREAS, Believing deeply in the right of slaves to rebel and in the right of fugitives to resist re-enslavement, his house in Rochester, New York, was used as a station of the Underground Railroad, a network of antislavery activists who helped smuggle slaves from the south safely to the north and to Canada; and

WHEREAS, On July 4, 1852, Frederick Douglass, renowned for his eloquence, delivered an Independence Day Address entitled "What to the Slaves is the Fourth of July?," an address which commemorated the coming of independence to the United States and focused on the topic of "American Slavery"; and

WHEREAS, During the Civil War, Frederick Douglass argued that slavery was the true cause of the conflict and that the Union should make the abolition of slavery its primary focus; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Douglass also called for the Union Army to recruit slaves and free blacks, helping to raise two regiments of black soldiers, the Massachusetts 54th and 55th; his own sons, Frederick and Lewis, were among the first to volunteer for these all-black regiments; and

WHEREAS, During the Reconstruction Era after the Civil War, Frederick Douglass campaigned for suffrage and civil rights for all blacks, becoming a spokesperson for improving the circumstances of former slaves; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Douglass also worked for the passage of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments which abolished slavery, made all people born in the United States citizens, and prohibited racial discrimination in voting;

and

WHEREAS, Frederick Douglass died on February 20, 1895, in Washington, D.C.; funeral services were held in the Rochester Central Presbyterian Church in Rochester, New York, and he was buried in Mount Hope Cemetery, Rochester; and

WHEREAS, It is important to recall and honor individuals such as Frederick Douglass, longtime New York State resident, fittingly recognizing their valued contributions and publicly acknowledging their endeavors which have enhanced the basic humanity among us all; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to memorialize Governor Andrew M. Cuomo to declare the 121st Anniversary of his death, February 20, 2016, as Frederick Douglass Day in the State of New York; and be it further

RESOLVED, That copies of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo, Governor of the State of New York; and Bernice Musgrave, President of the Sullivan County, New York, Chapter of the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History.