

By: Dutton

H.R. No. 1939

R E S O L U T I O N

1 WHEREAS, The achievements of singer, actor, athlete, and
2 activist Paul Robeson mark him as one of the most inspirational
3 Americans of the 20th century, and it is fitting to pay tribute to
4 his life and career; and

5 WHEREAS, Born in 1898 in Princeton, New Jersey, Mr. Robeson
6 was the son of William Drew Robeson, a Presbyterian minister and
7 former slave, and Maria Bustill Robeson, a schoolteacher; and

8 WHEREAS, An excellent student and athlete, Mr. Robeson was
9 only the third African American to attend Rutgers College, where he
10 made Phi Beta Kappa and graduated as valedictorian in 1919; at
11 Rutgers he also earned 15 varsity letters in sports and was the
12 first Rutgers football player ever to make All-American; and

13 WHEREAS, While supporting himself after college as a
14 professional football player, Mr. Robeson earned a law degree from
15 Columbia University in New York in 1923; his legal career was cut
16 short, however, when he encountered racial discrimination, and he
17 turned instead to the stage; and

18 WHEREAS, He joined playwright Eugene O'Neill's Provincetown
19 Players and gave a brilliant performance in O'Neill's play *The*
20 *Emperor Jones* in 1933; other stage triumphs followed in New York,
21 where he played Shakespeare's Othello and the Haitian revolutionary
22 Toussaint L'Ouverture; his performances of the song "Ol' Man River"
23 in the Broadway musical *Show Boat* and the 1936 film version are
24 considered definitive; and

1 WHEREAS, At the peak of his popularity in the 1930s and 1940s,
2 Mr. Robeson linked his concert and recording career with his
3 political activism and humanitarian work; his performances of
4 spirituals and work songs thrilled audiences all over the world; an
5 outspoken opponent of racism, he used his fame to campaign against
6 lynching, segregation, and other forms of racial prejudice, and he
7 refused to sing before segregated audiences; and

8 WHEREAS, In the 1950s, Mr. Robeson suffered ostracism and
9 harassment because of his political beliefs; he was blacklisted by
10 theater owners and concert managers and his concerts were disrupted
11 by mobs; his passport was revoked by the U.S. State Department in
12 1950 and not returned to him for eight years; and

13 WHEREAS, Even so, Mr. Robeson never backed down from his
14 principles, and before his death in 1976, he was recognized for his
15 artistic contributions and his activism with such awards as the
16 Donaldson Award, the American Academy of Arts and Letters medal,
17 the Badge of Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, the NAACP
18 Spingarn Medal, the Champion of African Freedom Award from the
19 National Church of Nigeria, the Duke Ellington Medal, and the Civil
20 Liberties Award; he was also awarded honorary degrees from Rutgers
21 University, Hamilton College, Morehouse College, Howard
22 University, and Humboldt University; in 1995, more than 75 years
23 after graduating from Rutgers, he was posthumously inducted into
24 the College Football Hall of Fame; and

25 WHEREAS, The artist and humanitarian Paul Robeson was a man
26 of remarkable gifts and accomplishments who devoted his life to the
27 causes of freedom, justice, and equal rights; now, therefore, be it

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1 RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives of the 80th Texas
2 Legislature hereby honor the life and career of Paul Robeson.