

SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 933

In Memory
of
Barbara Smith Conrad

WHEREAS, Countless people were inspired by the grace and courage of famed mezzo-soprano Barbara Smith Conrad, who died on May 22, 2017, at the age of 79; and

WHEREAS, Raised in the East Texas town of Center Point, Barbara Louise Smith excelled in University Interscholastic League singing and debate competitions and was recruited by The University of Texas at Austin; she enrolled in 1956, the first year in which African American undergraduates were admitted; a faculty member urged her to audition for the female lead in the College of Fine Arts production of the opera *Dido and Aeneas*; when she won the role, segregationists protested her being cast opposite a white male, but she persevered despite threatening calls and a physical attack; ultimately she was advised by university administrators that she could not appear in the production; the controversy drew national attention, and superstar Harry Belafonte offered to sponsor her studies at any school in the country; though shocked and hurt by the injustice, she was committed to the integration of the university and chose to complete her degree in music; and

WHEREAS, With assistance from Mr. Belafonte and former first lady Eleanor Roosevelt, she moved to New York after graduation; because there was already a Barbara Smith in Actor's Equity, she adopted her father's first name, Conrad, as part of her stage name; although she was passed over for some roles because of her race, her career flourished nonetheless, and in 1977, she played another pioneer, Marian Anderson, in the movie *Eleanor and Franklin: The White House Years*; she spent eight years with the Metropolitan Opera and performed with other noted companies, among them the Vienna State Opera, the New York City Opera, and Venezuela's Teatro Nacional; under the direction of Lorin Maazel, Leonard Bernstein, and other renowned conductors, she sang with many of the world's greatest orchestras, including the New York Philharmonic and the London, Boston, Cleveland, and Detroit symphonies; she also earned critical acclaim with an album of the spirituals she had loved since her youth, and she was the cofounder and codirector of the Wagner Theater Program at the Manhattan School of Music, as well as an eminent private vocal coach; and

WHEREAS, Barbara Smith Conrad was named a Distinguished Alumna of The University of Texas in 1985, and the university established the Barbara Smith Conrad Endowed Presidential Scholarship in Fine Arts; reconnected to her alma mater, she performed and taught master classes, and in 2012, she was appointed as a visiting professor and artist-in-residence at the Butler School of Music; she spoke at the College of Fine Arts commencement ceremony that year and became an artistic adviser

and ambassador for the American Spirituals Initiative at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History; the center produced a biographical documentary, *When I Rise: The Story of Barbara Smith Conrad*, which premiered at the 2010 South by Southwest Film Festival and aired nationally on PBS; the film includes her deeply moving 2009 performance in the Capitol Rotunda on the occasion of her recognition by the Texas Legislature; her myriad accolades also include the Texas Medal of Arts Award for Lifetime Achievement and the History-Making Texan Award; and

WHEREAS, The loss of Barbara Smith Conrad is keenly felt by The University of Texas community and by all who were privileged to share in the richness of her life, but her outstanding contributions as an artist and trailblazer will continue to resonate in the years to come; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the Senate of the State of Texas, 85th Legislature, hereby pay tribute to the memory of Barbara Smith Conrad and extend sincere condolences to her loved ones; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution be prepared for her family and that when the Texas Senate adjourns this day, it do so in memory of Barbara Smith Conrad.

Hughes, Watson

President of the Senate

I hereby certify that the above Resolution was adopted by the Senate on May 27, 2017, by a rising vote.

Secretary of the Senate

Member, Texas Senate

Member, Texas Senate