

City and County of San Francisco  
**HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION**

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Theresa Sparks  
Executive Director

Edwin M. Lee  
Mayor

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**May 28, 2014**

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**\*\*\* STATEMENT \*\*\***

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**SAN FRANCISCO HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION  
CELEBRATES THE LIFE AND WORK OF  
DR. MAYA ANGELOU**

***Poet, Civil Rights Activist, and Internationally Beloved  
Intellectual will be remembered as an important figure in San  
Francisco's African American History***

**San Francisco, CA:** Commission Chair Susan Belinda Christian joined Mayor Edwin Lee and the San Francisco Human Rights Commission in honoring the life of Dr. Maya Angelou with the following statement:

“Dr. Angelou’s beautiful tribute to San Francisco in her famous work, *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings* remains one of the most powerful and passionate writings about our city. As a teenager, Dr. Angelou relocated to San Francisco during the Great Migration, a movement when over 6 million African American families left the Jim Crow South for a better life in the North, the Midwest and the West. She describes her experience movingly:

*“In San Francisco, for the first time, I perceived myself as part of something...The city became for me the ideal of what I wanted to be as a grownup. Friendly but never gushing, cool but not frigid or distant, distinguished without the awful stiffness...”*

*“To me a 13 year old Black girl, stalled by the South and Southern Black life style, the city was a state of beauty and a state of freedom...I became dauntless and free of fears, intoxicated by the physical fact of San Francisco. Safe in my protecting arrogance, I was certain that no one loved her as impartially as I.”<sup>1</sup>*

After attending George Washington High School, Mission High School, and California Labor School, Dr. Angelou became San Francisco’s first African

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<sup>1</sup> Angelou, Maya. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. New York:Ballantine Books 2009. Pgs 211-212

American female streetcar conductor. Over several pages, she talks about the challenges she faced and her determination to become a “conductorette.” When she was finally given the job, she states “on a blissful day I was hired as the first Negro on San Francisco streetcars.”<sup>2</sup>

Today, as we reread Dr. Angelou’s poems, recall the first time we heard her speak, and reflect on the impact she had on our lives, let’s also remember Dr. Angelou as a San Franciscan, and a person whose potential was nurtured in our great city. As the Human Rights Commission works to stem African American Out-Migration and to bring Black residents back to San Francisco, we maintain faith in the ideal that San Francisco can be a “state of beauty and state of freedom” for everyone. The challenges abound and we are committed to meeting them. We are grateful to Dr. Angelou for a lifetime of lyrical witnessing and we honor her legacy by recommitting ourselves to human rights and human dignity for all.”

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*The San Francisco Human Rights Commission was established in 1964 by city ordinance and became a Charter Commission in 1990. On July 24, 2014, the HRC will commemorate its fiftieth anniversary and the fiftieth anniversary of the 1964 Civil Rights Act with its annual HRC Hero Awards. For more information visit: <http://sf-hrc.org/2014-hero-awards>.*

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<sup>2</sup> Id at 264-270