

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

MAUELLE SHIREK POST OFFICE
BUILDING

SPEECH OF

HON. BARBARA LEE

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, September 27, 2005

Ms. LEE. Mr. Speaker, I come to the floor to recognize an unsung hero and political legend in the East Bay area, Ms. Maudelle Shirek.

The legislation we are considering here today, H.R. 438, would name the post office building at 2000 Allston Way in Berkeley after Maudelle Shirek.

It would have been impossible for the House to consider this bill without the timely help of my colleagues, the Chairman and Ranking Member of the House Government Reform Committee, Congressmen TOM DAVIS and HENRY WAXMAN. I thank the gentlemen for their assistance.

I would also like to thank Majority Leader TOM DELAY, Democratic Leader NANCY PELOSI, and Democratic Whip STENY HOYER for their help in bringing this bill to the floor.

Mr. Speaker, this special tribute is long overdue. In fact, in June 2003, the Berkeley City Council passed a resolution recommending the post office naming. I am pleased that we will finally honor Maudelle Shirek today.

Maudelle Shirek was Berkeley's 94-year-old former vice mayor. Until last fall, Maudelle was one of California's longest-serving elected officials.

As one of my political heroes, she continues to fight for equality and social justice for all. She not only helped me get involved in politics but also inspired my predecessor, Congressman Ronald V. Dellums, to run for Congress. Her understanding of the importance in investing in people has won the solid support of voters in her district and admirers around the world as an international leader for peace and justice.

A granddaughter of slaves, Maudelle left her rural Arkansas home and came to California in the middle of World War II. Before long she was campaigning for fair housing and other civil rights for African Americans. She helped found two Berkeley senior centers, and until her health started to slow her down, she helped deliver meals to shut-in seniors; or if it was a Tuesday, did all the shopping for lunches at the New Light Senior Center, which she founded nearly 30 years ago.

Mr. Speaker, Maudelle Shirek entered elected politics in 1983 after being forced to retire from a senior center simply for having reached the age of 72. Soon after her election to Berkeley City Council, she helped end the discriminatory policy of mandatory retirement in Berkeley city agencies.

Maudelle refuses to accept arbitrary limitations. It is one of the things we all respect about her. Maudelle remains one of the best examples of how one person can make a difference.

Ms. Maudelle Shirek is a fearless and inspirational woman who for over 60 years has tirelessly fought to make this world a fair and just place. She has spoken for the voiceless and has been a staunch defender of our basic civil rights.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that my colleagues join me today in supporting this resolution, H.R. 438.

The world would be a better place if we had more Maudelles.

THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF
AUGUST WILSON

HON. CHARLES B. RANGEL

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, October 7, 2005

Mr. RANGEL. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay my recognition and respect to the extraordinary contributions of the world renowned playwright August Wilson who died October 2, 2005 of liver cancer. Mr. Wilson was a Tony Award winner and two time Pulitzer Prize winner whose plays not only chronicled and captured the harsh realities African American families faced throughout the 1900s, they have provided insight into Black life, depicting its struggles to overcome discrimination and poverty with dignity and nobility amidst the pain and the struggle that all communities are able to appreciate. His plays poetically depict the effects of slavery and oppression on Black Americans in every decade of the 20th century, and show that despite the harshness of life, this crucible produced great strength and resilience that have enabled us to overcome.

August Wilson was born on April 27, 1945 as Frederick August Kittel, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He later changed his name after his father left out of respect for his mother. Mr. Wilson grew up on "the Hill," which was a predominantly Black and poor neighborhood in Pittsburgh. It was the daily experiences of this African American community that inspired the content of his plays. At 13 years of age he moved to predominantly White Hazelwood, but he did not forget the unique culture of the Hill, especially when he had to suffer the racial taunts in Hazelwood. The racial discrimination that Wilson faced led Wilson, at the age of 15 to drop out of high school because his teacher couldn't believe that a Black student could create a well written term paper and accused him of plagiarism. This however, did not impede his thirst for knowledge or his love for writing. With diligence and self discipline, August Wilson continued his education through self-study at Carnegie Library. He began reading Black literature and other Black works, like Richard Wright, Langston Hughes, Ralph Ellison, and Arna Bontemps.

His hopes of becoming a writer were quickly challenged when his mother urged him to become an attorney. Disapproving of his dreams for a writing career, his mother forced him to leave the house. In 1963, Mr. Wilson enlisted

in the U.S. Army only to be discharged in 1964. Determined to continue his pursuit for a writing career, he invested in the purchase of his first typewriter and moved into a rooming house in Pittsburgh. To support himself he worked a series of odd "blue collar" jobs, like short-order cook, dishwasher, porter, stock boy, and gardener. Starting out as a poet, his poems were published in the late 1960s and early 70s in several periodicals, one being the Negro Digest created by the late John Johnson.

However, it was not until August Wilson heard the voice of legendary Bessie Smith's record "Nobody in Town Can Bake a Sweet Jellyroll Like Mine," he realized that it was his responsibility to carry the torch of his ancestors and assume the role as the representative of Black American culture, telling the world our history and dignifying our struggle. Hearing the blues motivated, challenged, and empowered the young poet to document Black American culture in his writings. Wilson describe this epiphany as the "Universe stuttered and everything fell to a new place . . . I cannot describe or even relate what I felt . . . it was a birth, a baptism, a resurrection, and a redemption all rolled up in one. It was the beginning of my consciousness that I was a representative of a culture and the carrier of some very valuable antecedents . . . I had been given a world that contained my image . . . The ideas of self-determination, self-respect, and self-defense . . . are still very much a part of my life as I sit down and write. I have stood [these ideas] up in the world of Bessie Smith on the ground captured by the Blues. Having started my beginning consciousness there, it is no surprise that I would mature and my efforts would come to fruition on that same ground." As a result he established two organizations that promoted Black American writing: the Center Avenue Poets Theatre Workshop, and Black Horizons. Plus, he continued writing plays chronicling different experiences that African Americans faced.

His big break was the debut of the 1982 play "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom," the first of a 10-drama series that would chronicle each decade of the Twentieth Century, which premiered at Broadway's Cort Theater on October 11, 1984. Set in Chicago in 1927, the play focuses on White record companies' exploitation of Black musicians. This play mirrored the images and positions that African Americans faced in a society dominated by White racism. The beauty of the play, grabbed national attention earning Mr. Wilson several Tony nominations, and the New York Drama Critics Circle Award. "Fences", however, a play depicting a 1950s Black family's personal and economic issues, grossed a record \$11 million in a year, which broke the record for nonmusical plays. As a result, Wilson became The Chicago Tribune's Artist of the Year; the play won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best Play, four Tony Awards for Best Play, Best Director, Best Actor and Best Featured Actress; and a Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Finally, "The Piano Lesson," inspired

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