



# Allegheny County Council

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## Legislation Text

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**File #:** 8081-14, **Version:** 1

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Title...

Certificates of Recognition awarded to the University of Pittsburgh 2014 K. Leroy Irvis Black History Month Celebration of the Arts honorees, Nathan Davis, Toi Derricotte and Vernell A. Lillie.

Body...

On February 24, 2014, the University of Pittsburgh 2014 K. Leroy Irvis Black History Month Program, *Celebration of the Arts*, honored the achievements of three retired Pitt faculty, Nathan Davis, Toi Derricotte, and Vernell A. Lillie, who led efforts at Pitt to create distinctive and highly successful programs in jazz, poetry, and theatre, respectively. Nathan Davis arrived at the University in 1969 as director of the Jazz Studies Program. Shortly thereafter, he founded the annual Pitt Jazz Seminar and Concert-the first academic jazz seminar of its type in the country. For more than four decades, the event has hosted some of the greatest names in American jazz history, including saxophonists Grover Washington Jr. and Sonny Stitt, drummer and band leader Art Blakey, trumpet master Dizzy Gillespie, and many others. Davis has published four books, including a scholarly text on the history of jazz. He served as faculty director of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts' (Washington, D.C.) career-development residency program for young artists from 2000 to 2011. In addition, Davis was a jazz master faculty member at the annual Ravinia Festival in Chicago for many summers. He also served as the musical director for the Thelonious Monk Institute in Aspen, Colo., and in 2010, was an artist in the newly formed Jazz Masters München Program, held in Munich, Germany. Davis has written more than 200 original compositions, including film scores, four symphonies, and a jazz opera *Just Above My Head*, based on the book by James Baldwin. It premiered in Pittsburgh in 2004. He has also received many accolades over his career, including the BNY Mellon Jazz 2013 Living Legacy Award, which was presented to him last fall in a special ceremony at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. We hereby congratulate Nathan Davis for being honored by the University of Pittsburgh during Black History Month, and we acknowledge that he serves as an inspiration to this Council and to the citizens of Allegheny County.

On February 24, 2014, the University of Pittsburgh 2014 K. Leroy Irvis Black History Month Program, *Celebration of the Arts*, honored the achievements of three retired Pitt faculty, Nathan Davis, Toi Derricotte, and Vernell A. Lillie, who led efforts at Pitt to create distinctive and highly successful programs in jazz, poetry, and theatre, respectively. A renowned poet, Toi Derricotte has more than 1,000 poems published in anthologies, journals, and magazines. In 2012, she was elected to the Academy of American Poets Board of Chancellors, the academy's advisory board of distinguished poets.

Derricotte is the cofounder of the Cave Canem Foundation, an organization that has offered workshops and retreats for African American poets since 1996. She is the author of five books of poetry-The Undertaker's Daughter (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011), *Tender* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997), *Captivity* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989), *Natural Birth* (Crossing Press, 1983), *The Empress of the Death House* (Lotus Press, 1978)-and the memoir *The Black*

Notebooks: An Interior Journey (W.W. Norton & Co., 1997). In 1997, *The Black Notebooks* was included in The New York Times Book Review's "Notable Books of the Year" listing and won the 1998 Anisfield-Wolf Book Award for Non-Fiction. Among Derricotte's honors are the 2012 PEN/ Voelcker Award for Poetry, fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and Guggenheim Foundation, the First Dudley Randall Award for National Contributions to Literature, the Paterson Poetry Prize for Tender, the Lucille Medwick Memorial Award from the Poetry Society of America, two Pushcart Prizes, the Distinguished Pioneering of the Arts Award from the United Black Artists, and many others. In 2009, she was named a Distinguished Daughter of Pennsylvania and in 2001, a National Book Award Judge in Poetry. We hereby congratulate Toi Derricotte for being honored by the University of Pittsburgh during Black History Month, and we acknowledge that she serves as an inspiration to this Council and to the citizens of Allegheny County.

On February 24, 2014, the University of Pittsburgh 2014 K. Leroy Irvis Black History Month Program, *Celebration of the Arts*, honored the achievements of three retired Pitt faculty, Nathan Davis, Toi Derricotte, and Vernell A. Lillie, who led efforts at Pitt to create distinctive and highly successful programs in jazz, poetry, and theatre, respectively. Vernell A. Lillie founded Kuntu Repertory Theatre at Pitt in 1974, based upon her strong belief that both students and the community could understand African American art, culture, and social concerns through active education. For decades, student and community actors showcased the works of the late Pitt professor Rob Penny, August Wilson, and other local Black playwrights. In addition to mounting three or four productions a season, Kuntu actors performed off-campus throughout the year for students and groups throughout the community, including senior citizens, prison inmates, recovering drug addicts, and pregnant teen girls. The company also offered workshops and master classes for beginning and professional actors. Noted television actress Esther Rolle, former Pittsburgh City Councilman Sala Udin, and Pittsburgh Playwrights Theater Company founder Mark Southers are just a few of the actors who performed on the Kuntu stage. The company has won many important awards over the years, including several Onyx and People's Choice Awards from the African American Council of Theatre. Kuntu also was a frequent participant in the Pittsburgh New Works Festival. Lillie was the recipient of the Chancellor's Distinguished Teaching Award in 1986 and then-Governor Tom Ridge named her a Distinguished Daughter of Pennsylvania in 1998. In 2006, she received the Pennsylvania Creative Community Award. We hereby congratulate Vernell A. Lillie for being honored by the University of Pittsburgh during Black History Month, and we acknowledge that she serves as an inspiration to this Council and to the citizens of Allegheny County.