

THE WALT WHITMAN CITATION OF MERIT FOR POETS

STATE POET

AUDRE LORDE is a poet of passion and purpose, a voice of eloquent courage and unflinching honesty. Audre Lorde grew up speaking with the true voice of a poet, resolving always to tell the truth and to share her triumphs and her pain with her loved ones, her community, and the world. And she has adhered to that elusive moral and aesthetic ideal, singing her songs of joy and anger, of desire and loss. She writes about the universal themes of love and suffering in vividly honest and direct language but with artful, dramatic dexterity. There is no cant or idle conjuring in Audre Lorde's work, for she allows herself to be known fully, and, in doing so, becomes an inspirational force on behalf of all men and all women. Her imagination is galvanized by a sense of racial injustice and sexual prejudice, and in that voice, she speaks for an outraged humanity. Her bold, lucid lyric style is a triumph of openness and control. But Audre Lorde's verse also sings of the love and sisterhood among women and of the tensions and tenderness between parents and children and mothers and daughters. Her distinctive voice is that of the eloquent outsider who, ironically, speaks in a language that can reach and touch people everywhere. It has been said of Audre Lorde that she is like the Black Unicorn of which she writes: a magical and mysterious bearer of fantasy draped in truth and beauty. Her perspective is both personal and visionary and these lines from her poem "Coal" are luminous with her moral clarity and joy:

Love is a word, another kind of open.

As the diamond comes into a knot of flame

I am Black because I come from the earth's inside

now take my word for jewel in the open light.

Audre Lorde is a poet of affirmation, courage and pride, and we honor her today

with the pride of knowing that she is our sister and our true neighbor.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, MARIO M. CUOMO, Governor of the State of New York, do hereby award this Walt Whitman Citation of Merit for Poets to Audre Lorde, and designate her State Poet for the State of New York for the years 1991-93.