



1

HOUSE RESOLUTION

2           WHEREAS, African-Americans have been a presence in  
3 Illinois since the 1700s; in fact, the first outpost on the  
4 land that is now Chicago was founded by a black man,  
5 Jean-Baptiste DuSable; many are not aware of facts like these  
6 and black history in Illinois in general, and that is why Black  
7 History Month is so important to share our heritage with not  
8 only other African-Americans, but all people, and to foster a  
9 sense of pride and respect; and

10           WHEREAS, At the beginning of the 93rd General Assembly,  
11 January of 2003, Springfield welcomed 9 African-American State  
12 Senators and 19 State Representatives; they joined the total of  
13 120 African-American legislators to serve Illinois throughout  
14 its history; and

15           WHEREAS, Illinois' first black State legislator, John W. E.  
16 Thomas, was elected to the House of Representatives in 1876; it  
17 is important to mention him first, not only because he was the  
18 first, but he is often the first to be overlooked; if one takes  
19 a tour of the Statehouse in Springfield, there is a statue of  
20 the first black State Senator; but many tour guides will tell  
21 you the statue represents the first elected black legislator;  
22 and

23           WHEREAS, John Thomas was born in Alabama in the 1840s and  
24 moved to Chicago in 1869; he was an educator and opened the  
25 city's first school for African-American children, along with  
26 running a grocery store; when he won his election in 1876,  
27 African-Americans were less than 2 percent of the city's  
28 population, and a minority in his district; but despite the way  
29 blacks were viewed at the time, Mr. Thomas put the issue of  
30 equality for all on the table; he could have meekly sat in the  
31 back of the chamber and remained inconspicuous, but he instead  
32 chose to meet the issue of equality head on and was a sponsor

1 of the State civil rights law of 1885; and

2 WHEREAS, Not much has been written on John W. E. Thomas,  
3 but his character and commitment to public service in the face  
4 of adversity warrant an understanding of his work and a  
5 memorial of his name; and

6 WHEREAS, Cecil Partee was the first African-American  
7 elected to serve as one of the State's top four legislative  
8 leaders; he spent 20 years in the General Assembly and held the  
9 positions of both Senate Minority Leader and Senate President;  
10 his breakthrough paved the way for African-Americans to reach  
11 leadership positions in State government; and

12 WHEREAS, Today, Emil Jones, Jr. serves as Senate President  
13 and Jesse White, who served in the House of Representatives, is  
14 Secretary of State; and

15 WHEREAS, Harold Washington, Chicago's first black mayor,  
16 also started his career in the State legislature; he served in  
17 the House of Representatives from 1965 to 1977 and in the State  
18 Senate from 1977 through 1981; and

19 WHEREAS, Women are also included among the ranks of  
20 African-American legislators, and although they are not as  
21 common, their achievements are no less worthy of admiration;  
22 black women have overcome two barriers in order to serve the  
23 State of Illinois, barriers of race and gender; and

24 WHEREAS, Floy Clements was the woman who opened the door  
25 for African-American women legislators to hold elected office  
26 in Illinois, and she did this in 1958, a time when women in  
27 general garnered less respect than men; and

28 WHEREAS, Carol Mosely Braun has had a long commitment to  
29 serving the people of Illinois, through her recent attempt to

1 become the first black President, as well as the first female  
2 President of the United States; she served in the Illinois  
3 House of Representatives from 1979 through 1988, during which  
4 she served as Assistant Minority Leader; she left the House to  
5 become the Cook County Recorder of Deeds; seeing no boundaries  
6 to her ambition, she became the first black woman elected to  
7 the United States Senate; and

8 WHEREAS, This lesson is taken seriously; all the  
9 African-American State Representatives and two Latino members  
10 are organized into the Illinois House Legislative Black Caucus;  
11 and

12 WHEREAS, The Black Caucus stresses teamwork in order to  
13 achieve equality; this means civil equality, economic  
14 equality, educational equality, and political equality; they  
15 have fought against racial profiling, the death penalty fiasco,  
16 equal funding for schools that serve underprivileged  
17 communities, and prejudice; and

18 WHEREAS, Unity and cooperation are best means to get things  
19 done; since the same basic values and goals are shared, it only  
20 makes sense that we fight together in one battle instead of 21  
21 separate clandestine missions; therefore, be it

22 RESOLVED, BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE  
23 NINETY-THIRD GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, that we  
24 recognize the efforts of African-American legislators and  
25 their role in the history of this State.