



1

HOUSE RESOLUTION

2           WHEREAS, The members of the House of Representatives of the  
3 State of Illinois learned with regret of the death of John H.  
4 Johnson of Chicago on Monday, August 8, 2005; and

5           WHEREAS, Mr. Johnson was the founder of Ebony magazine,  
6 which was the cornerstone of Johnson Publishing Co., a  
7 privately held publishing, cosmetics, television production,  
8 and fashion firm based in Chicago; it became one of the  
9 nation's largest black-owned businesses, and the owner came to  
10 be considered one of the nation's most influential and honored  
11 African-American businessmen; for 60 straight years, Ebony has  
12 been the biggest African-American owned magazine in the world;  
13 and

14           WHEREAS, Mr. Johnson lived a life that was more  
15 inspirational than any of the cover stories in Ebony or Jet,  
16 his other major magazine; a modest beginning proved to be no  
17 obstacle, and his life was filled with achievements and honors,  
18 including the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1996; he was the  
19 first publisher to persuade the business community of the vast  
20 purchasing power of the African-American market; and

21           WHEREAS, He was born in Arkansas City, Arkansas, on January  
22 19, 1918, and moved to Chicago with his widowed mother in 1933;  
23 he enrolled in DuSable High School, graduating in 1936, and  
24 then went on to work part-time as an office worker at the  
25 black-owned Supreme Life Insurance Co.; at Supreme Life, he  
26 culled newspapers and magazines to prepare a digest of events  
27 in the black community for Harry Pace, Supreme Life's  
28 president; by 1942, he had the idea of condensing such articles  
29 into a monthly magazine, a black version of Reader's Digest to  
30 be called Negro Digest (and later Black World before it was  
31 discontinued in 1976); and

1           WHEREAS, With a loan of \$500, using his mother's furniture  
2 as collateral, Mr. Johnson mailed a charter subscription offer  
3 for the magazine to Supreme Life customers; with 3,000 people  
4 responding and each sending \$2, he had funds for the first  
5 issue of Negro Digest, which he published with the aid of his  
6 wife, Eunice, whom he had married in 1941; within a year, Negro  
7 Digest was selling 50,000 copies a month; and

8           WHEREAS, His breakthrough came in November of 1945, with  
9 the first issue of Ebony, a slick-paper magazine modeled after  
10 Life magazine; paid circulation of Ebony was about 1.7 million  
11 in 2004, and his publishing activities expanded to include Jet,  
12 with circulation now at 927,402, and Ebony Jr., as well as to  
13 include books; and

14           WHEREAS, Four years after it was founded, Jet caused a  
15 sensation when in September 1955 it published an open-coffin  
16 picture of Emmett Till; the boy's death and the picture of his  
17 mutilated face galvanized the civil rights movement; and

18           WHEREAS, In 1973 he established Fashion Fair Cosmetics, a  
19 line of beauty aids and a sponsor of a large touring fashion  
20 show; he formerly owned three radio stations, and he was the  
21 first African-American businessman to have his own building on  
22 Michigan Avenue; and

23           WHEREAS, Mr. Johnson served on numerous advisory  
24 commissions on the local, State and federal levels; he served  
25 on the boards of some major corporations and educational,  
26 cultural, and philanthropic organizations; he attended the  
27 University of Chicago and Northwestern University, and was  
28 later awarded 31 honorary doctoral degrees and many honors for  
29 his business and humanitarian activities; he gave generously to  
30 many causes, including \$4 million to Howard University in  
31 Washington, which named its communications school after him;  
32 and

1           WHEREAS, His numerous awards include the Magazine  
2 Publisher's Association Publisher of the Year Award, the  
3 Advertising Hall of Fame Award, the Arkansas Business Hall of  
4 Fame Award, the National Business Hall of Fame Award, the  
5 Greatest Minority Entrepreneur Award, the Horatio Alger Award,  
6 the NAACP Spingarn Award, and just this year, the John H.  
7 Johnson Delta Cultural and Entrepreneurial Learning Center in  
8 Arkansas City was dedicated; his autobiography is entitled  
9 "Succeeding Against the Odds"; and

10           WHEREAS, Mr. Johnson, who retained the titles of chairman  
11 and publisher until his death, made Johnson Publishing a family  
12 business; his mother, Gertrude, was a vice president of the  
13 firm until her death in 1977, his wife is secretary-treasurer,  
14 and his daughter, Linda, held several positions before she  
15 became CEO; and

16           WHEREAS, The passing of John H. Johnson has been deeply  
17 felt by many, especially his wife, Eunice; his daughter, Linda  
18 Johnson Rice; and his granddaughter, Alexa; therefore, be it

19           RESOLVED, BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE  
20 NINETY-FOURTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, that  
21 we mourn the passing of John H. Johnson, a man who truly rose  
22 from a life of poverty to live the American dream and became an  
23 African-American business icon, and we extend our sincerest  
24 condolences to his family, friends, and all who knew and loved  
25 him; and be it further

26           RESOLVED, That a suitable copy of this resolution be  
27 presented to his family as an expression of our deepest  
28 sympathy and sorrow for this great loss.