



HR1477

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HOUSE RESOLUTION

2           WHEREAS, One hundred years ago, Springfield, Illinois was  
3 familiar to people as the home of the 16th president, Abraham  
4 Lincoln; but on August 14, 1908, the city would enter the  
5 history books as the home of a terrible race riot; and

6           WHEREAS, According to a May 31, 2008 article in the State  
7 Journal-Register and other sources familiar with the events of  
8 the race riot, at the turn of the century racial tensions were  
9 high in the city because of the use of black workers as scabs  
10 labor during strikes; and

11           WHEREAS, On July 4, 1908, Clergy Ballard awoke to find a  
12 man standing near his daughter's bed; the intruder fled and  
13 Ballard gave chase; after catching up with the intruder,  
14 Ballard's throat was slashed with a straight razor; before he  
15 died, Ballard identified the assailant as Joe James, a black  
16 man with a long record of minor crimes; and

17           WHEREAS, White citizens of the town were enraged by the  
18 crime, thinking that the murder was the result of a thwarted  
19 sexual assault of a white woman by a black man; a crowd of  
20 whites caught James and beat him unconscious; the police  
21 rescued James, arrested him, and locked him in the city jail;  
22 and

1           WHEREAS, On Friday, August 14 of that same year, the local  
2 newspaper ran the story of a white woman, Mabel Hallam, who had  
3 allegedly been raped by a local black man, George Richardson;  
4 Hallam, the 21-year-old wife of a well-known streetcar  
5 conductor, claimed that the black caretaker had dragged her out  
6 of bed and assaulted her the night before; police arrested  
7 Richardson and took him to the city jail; and

8           WHEREAS, That evening, a crowd of white citizens gathered  
9 in downtown Springfield, outraged by the fact that two black  
10 men had allegedly committed brutal crimes against white  
11 townspeople; the crowd demanded the release of the prisoners,  
12 but Sheriff Charles Werner was able to remove the two from jail  
13 and transport them to safety in nearby Bloomington, with the  
14 help of restaurant owner Harry Loper; when the crowd learned  
15 that Loper had aided in the transport of the two black men,  
16 they walked to his restaurant, trashed the building, and  
17 torched his expensive automobile; and

18           WHEREAS, Later that evening, Governor Charles S. Deneen  
19 activated the State militia; the crowd directed their anger  
20 toward the rest of Springfield's minorities; they proceeded to  
21 Fishman's Hardware, owned by a Jewish businessman, and stole  
22 weapons to use in the further destruction of homes and  
23 businesses; then the mob moved on the Levee, a predominantly

1 African-American area, and destroyed numerous black-owned  
2 businesses; as the crowd moved on towards the Badlands, another  
3 black neighborhood, they encountered a black barber named Scott  
4 Burton, who attempted to defend his business with a warning  
5 shot from a shotgun; he was killed when the crowd returned  
6 fire, his shop was burned, and his body was hung from a tree;  
7 and

8 WHEREAS, The mob then burned black-owned homes in the  
9 Badlands; an estimated 12,000 people had gathered to watch the  
10 houses burn; when firefighters arrived, people in the crowd  
11 impeded their progress and cut their hoses; African American  
12 citizens were forced to flee the town, find refuge with  
13 sympathetic whites, or hide in the State Arsenal; the National  
14 Guard was finally able to disperse the crowd late that night;  
15 and

16 WHEREAS, Saturday, August 15 saw 5,000 National Guard  
17 troops sent to the city to keep the peace, along with curiosity  
18 seekers and tourists who had read about the riots in the  
19 newspaper; the peace was soon broken, however, when a new mob  
20 formed and began marching toward the State Arsenal, where many  
21 black residents were being housed; when confronted by the  
22 National Guard, the crowd changed direction and instead walked  
23 to the home of 84-year-old black resident William Donnegan;  
24 although he had committed no crime, Donnegan was married to a

1 white woman; when he came outside, the mob captured him, cut  
2 his throat, and lynched him in a tree in the schoolyard across  
3 the street from his home; and

4 WHEREAS, The riots ended, leaving 40 homes and 24  
5 businesses in ruins, and seven people confirmed dead; a grand  
6 jury brought 107 indictments against individuals who had  
7 allegedly participated in the riots, but only one man was  
8 convicted; Mabel Hallam later admitted that her accusation of  
9 rape against George Richardson was false, and Richardson was  
10 released from jail; Joe James was convicted of the murder of  
11 Clergy Ballard and was hanged in the Sangamon County Jail on  
12 October 23, 1908; as a direct result of the Springfield Race  
13 Riot, a meeting was held in New York City to discuss solutions  
14 to racial problems, leading to the formation of the National  
15 Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP);  
16 therefore, be it

17 RESOLVED, BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE  
18 NINETY-FIFTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, that we  
19 recognize this sad chapter in history and realize that from the  
20 aftermath comes insight and education, helping us to better  
21 deal with racial issues; and be it further

22 RESOLVED, That a suitable copy of this resolution be  
23 presented to the Springfield Chapter of the NAACP as a symbol

1 of our respect.