

HR0770

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HOUSE RESOLUTION

2 WHEREAS, Ida В. Wells was seminal figure а in 3 Post-Reconstruction America and one of the great pioneering 4 activists for civil rights for African-Americans long before 5 the Civil Rights Movement, as it has come to be known in 6 history; her achievements have not received the attention they deserve as she was a fierce activist for both African-Americans 7 8 and women, challenging traditional power structures as well as 9 leadership within activist movements, and as a journalist 10 reporting first-hand and publicizing the widespread atrocity 11 of lynching; and

12 WHEREAS, Ida B. Wells was born into slavery on July 16, 13 1862, in Holly Springs, Mississippi, 6 months before President 14 Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation; her parents, Jim 15 and Elizabeth, taught her the value of education and of 16 speaking her mind; she was orphaned at 16 and left college to 17 become a teacher to care for her 5 remaining siblings and keep 18 them together; and

WHEREAS, At a time when black teachers made \$30 per month and white teachers made \$80 per month, Ida B. Wells moved to Memphis, Tennessee, embarking on a career as a journalist and civil rights activist; in September 1883, she preceded Rosa Parks' historic bus ride by 72 years, refusing to give up her HR0770 -2- LRB097 20113 KXB 65492 r seat on a train car and being forcibly removed at the age of 2 21; and

3 WHEREAS, Ida B. Wells stepped outside the traditional roles 4 of a woman and of an African-American at the turn of the 5 century by speaking out about unsavory topics; she is 6 considered to be the single most powerful leader in the 7 anti-lynching campaign in America; and

8 WHEREAS, Ida B. Wells became the editor and owner of her 9 own newspaper, and when her newspaper office was destroyed in 10 an angry response to her outspoken writings, she was exiled 11 from Memphis and stayed away from the South for over 30 years, moving to New York and then Chicago; in 1893 and 1894, she 12 13 traveled across the United States and throughout the United 14 Kingdom, passionately writing and speaking out against 15 lynching; and

16 WHEREAS, Between 1880 and 1930, approximately 3,220 black 17 Americans were reported lynched, with many hundreds more 18 unreported African-Americans killed and whites as well; 19 following Wells' campaigns, legislation against lynching was 20 enacted in parts of the South and the numbers of lynchings went 21 down, from a peak of 235 in 1892 to 107 by 1899; and

22 WHEREAS, In 1895, Ida B. Wells married Ferdinand L.

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Barnett, an attorney and owner of The Conservator, one of
Chicago's black newspapers; he and Ida had 4 children together;
and she continued her activism while juggling motherhood and
her many civil rights commitments; and

5 WHEREAS, Ida B. Wells was one of the founders of several 6 organizations, including the NAACP, the Negro Fellowship 7 League to assist black men and boys who were excluded from the 8 YMCA, and the Alpha Suffrage Club, an organization of black 9 women who worked to obtain the right to vote; she assisted the 10 National Association of Colored Women and the Brotherhood of 11 Sleeping Car Porters and served as the secretary of the 12 African-American Press Association; she worked with Susan B. Anthony as a leader in the movement for women's suffrage and 13 with Jane Addams in Chicago to prevent the establishment of 14 15 segregated public schools; and even within these 16 organizations, she challenged contemporary leaders who advocated for appeasement and accommodation in favor of 17 uncompromising confrontational actions; and 18

WHEREAS, In 1918, Ida B. Wells covered race riots and lynchings in East St. Louis and in Arkansas; In 1928, she began writing her autobiography, fearing future generations would never hear the truth of the injustices that were happening at the time; in 1930, out of frustration with the slow movement of rights for African-Americans and the stalemate of the 2 parties HR0770 -4- LRB097 20113 KXB 65492 r
1 in government, Ida B. Wells became the first African-American
2 woman to run for the Illinois State Senate; and

3 WHEREAS, Ida B. Wells passed away after a sudden illness on 4 March 25, 1931 at the age of 68; her husband passed the 5 following year, and they are interred together in Chicago's Oak 6 Woods Cemetery; in 1940, she was honored by having the first 7 public housing development for African-Americans in Chicago, 8 The Ida B. Wells Homes, named after her, which stood for over 9 60 years; and

10 WHEREAS, Ida B. Wells' tireless work and great dedication 11 to the civil rights movement is deserving of the greatest 12 honor; therefore, be it

13 RESOLVED, ΒY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE 14 NINETY-SEVENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, that we designate the date of March 25, 2012 as Ida B. Wells Day in 15 the State of Illinois in honor of Ida B. Wells and her great 16 17 work with the civil rights movement; and be it further

18 RESOLVED, That a suitable copy of this resolution be 19 presented to Michelle Duster, great-granddaughter of Ida B. 20 Wells for efforts to protect her legacy.