



HR0770

LRB097 20113 KXB 65492 r

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HOUSE RESOLUTION

2 WHEREAS, Ida B. Wells was a seminal figure 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
7 deserve as she was a fierce activist for both African-Americans
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

19 WHEREAS, At a time when black teachers made \$30 per month
20 and white teachers made \$80 per month, Ida B. Wells moved to
21 Memphis, Tennessee, embarking on a career as a journalist and
22 civil rights activist; in September 1883, she preceded Rosa
23 Parks' historic bus ride by 72 years, refusing to give up her

1 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,
12 moving to New York and then Chicago; in 1893 and 1894, she
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.

1 Barnett, an attorney and owner of The Conservator, one of
2 Chicago's black newspapers; he and Ida had 4 children together;
3 and she continued her activism while juggling motherhood and
4 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.
13 Anthony as a leader in the movement for women's suffrage and
14 with Jane Addams in Chicago to prevent the establishment of
15 segregated public schools; and even within these
16 organizations, she challenged contemporary leaders who
17 advocated for appeasement and accommodation in favor of
18 uncompromising confrontational actions; and

19 WHEREAS, In 1918, Ida B. Wells covered race riots and
20 lynchings in East St. Louis and in Arkansas; In 1928, she began
21 writing her autobiography, fearing future generations would
22 never hear the truth of the injustices that were happening at
23 the time; in 1930, out of frustration with the slow movement of
24 rights for African-Americans and the stalemate of the 2 parties

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, BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE
14 NINETY-SEVENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, that
15 we designate the date of March 25, 2012 as Ida B. Wells Day in
16 the State of Illinois in honor of Ida B. Wells and her great
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.