

By: Giddings

H.C.R. No. 65

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

1 WHEREAS, The celebration of Black History Month in February
2 2005 provides an opportunity to recognize the rich cultural
3 heritage and significant contributions of African-Americans in the
4 State of Texas; and

5 WHEREAS, Black History Month is now an annual observance that
6 began as Negro History Week in 1926 and was later renamed Black
7 History Week; originally proposed by Carter Godwin Woodson, an
8 African-American historian known today as the "Father of Black
9 History," it was a time to "dramatize the achievements of the race,
10 not to play up grievances but to demonstrate what Negroes had
11 achieved . . ."; Woodson noted that ". . . the achievements of the
12 Negro properly set forth will crown him as a factor in human
13 progress and a maker of human civilization," as he chose the week in
14 the month of February containing the birthdays of Frederick
15 Douglass and Abraham Lincoln, two individuals who did much to pave
16 the way for a better life for African-Americans; and

17 WHEREAS, In 1976, Black History Week expanded to become a
18 monthlong event officially acknowledged by the United States
19 government when President Gerald Ford, on February 10th of that
20 year, urged Americans to pay ". . . tribute to Black History Month
21 and the message of courage and perseverance it brings to all of us";
22 and

23 WHEREAS, People of African descent have a long history in
24 Texas; in 1528, less than ten years after explorers claimed Texas in

1 the name of King Charles I, a Moor named Estevanico accompanied the
2 Spanish explorer Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca on a trek across Texas;
3 by the late 1700's some 450 people of African descent were living in
4 Spanish Texas, and in the early 1800's many African-Americans from
5 the South escaped across the Sabine River to freedom, often
6 settling in East Texas, where they undertook a variety of
7 occupations; by the close of the 18th century, they comprised
8 approximately 15 percent of the population of Texas; and

9 WHEREAS, In the 19th century, before emancipation,
10 African-Americans played an enormous role in producing the state's
11 agricultural bounty and also worked as skilled artisans; after the
12 Civil War, many moved to urban centers and, in the years to follow,
13 provided manpower for new industries that were established; and

14 WHEREAS, African-American infantry and cavalry garrisoned
15 forts in West Texas during the Indian Wars; known as "Buffalo
16 Soldiers," they patrolled the frontier with the assistance of
17 Seminole-Negro Indian scouts, built roads, and escorted mail
18 carriers; Sergeant Emmanuel Stance, stationed at Fort McKavett, was
19 the first African-American who fought in the Indian Wars to be
20 awarded the Medal of Honor; and

21 WHEREAS, Since the early 1800's, African-Americans have been
22 involved in the cattle industry; one of the most famous black
23 native-Texan cowboys was Bill Pickett, who became a Wild West rodeo
24 performer and who is believed to have originated the bulldogging
25 event; and

26 WHEREAS, In the mid-20th century, African-Americans in Texas
27 significantly advanced the civil rights movement by filing and

1 winning lawsuits that outlawed the "white primary" and helped to
2 integrate graduate and professional schools; in more recent years,
3 officials such as Representatives Barbara Jordan, George "Mickey"
4 Leland, Craig Washington, Eddie Bernice Johnson, Sheila
5 Jackson-Lee, and Al Green, Texas Supreme Court Justices Wallace
6 Jefferson and Dale Wainwright, and Texas Court of Criminal Appeals
7 Justice Morris Overstreet, Texas Railroad Commission Chairman
8 Michael L. Williams, and others have taken their place in the public
9 arena; and

10 WHEREAS, Among the many notable black Texan contributors to
11 the arts and humanities have been the musicians Blind Lemon
12 Jefferson, Huddie "Leadbelly" Ledbetter, Scott Joplin, and Eddie
13 Durham, historian and folklorist J. Mason Brewer, as well as artist
14 John Biggers; and

15 WHEREAS, African-Americans have been a significant part of
16 the population of Texas for hundreds of years, and the celebration
17 of Black History Month acknowledges and promotes the immeasurable
18 benefits of a truly diverse society; now, therefore, be it

19 RESOLVED, That the 79th Legislature of the State of Texas,
20 Regular Session, 2005, hereby designate the month of February 2005
21 as Black History Month in Texas and encourage all citizens to learn
22 more about the history and contributions of African-Americans in
23 the Lone Star State.