

By: McClendon

H.R. No. 531

R E S O L U T I O N

1 WHEREAS, The stage and screen actor Ossie Davis died on
2 February 4, 2005, at the age of 87, and the conclusion of his
3 remarkable life provides a fitting opportunity to reflect on the
4 contributions this renowned performer and social activist made over
5 the span of his 50-year career; and

6 WHEREAS, Born in 1917, Ossie Davis set out on foot from his
7 hometown in rural Georgia to attend Howard University and study
8 playwriting; at the end of his junior year, he moved to New York to
9 join a Harlem theater group and made his Broadway debut in 1946 in
10 the title role of *Jeb*; although the play only ran for nine
11 performances, it produced a magnificent personal and professional
12 partnership that lasted more than five decades, for it was then that
13 he met his future wife, Ruby Dee; and

14 WHEREAS, Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee were one of the most revered
15 couples of the American stage and screen, performing in 11 plays and
16 5 movies together; their illustrious partnership was recognized in
17 2004 when they were selected for the prestigious Kennedy Center
18 honors; they were also awarded with induction into the Theater Hall
19 of Fame, a National Medal of Arts, and a Silver Circle Award from
20 the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences; the couple celebrated
21 their 50th wedding anniversary in 1998 with the publication of a
22 dual autobiography, *In This Life Together*; and

23 WHEREAS, In 1950, Mr. Davis and Ms. Dee made their first film
24 together, *No Way Out*, an acclaimed story of racial hatred also

1 starring Sidney Poitier; Mr. Davis, who also wrote, directed, and
2 produced for both the theater and Hollywood, made films that often
3 explored the lessons of black history in the United States, most
4 notably in such films as *Cotton Comes to Harlem* (1970) and *Countdown*
5 *at Kusini* (1976), the first American feature to be shot entirely in
6 Africa by black professionals; his and Ms. Dee's company, Emmalyn
7 Enterprises, produced the 1986 PBS special, *Martin Luther King: The*
8 *Dream and the Drum*, and they both had key roles in the television
9 series *Roots: The Next Generation* (1978); and

10 WHEREAS, Mr. Davis was introduced to a younger generation
11 with performances in *Grumpy Old Men* (1993), *The Client* (1994), the
12 television series *Evening Shade* (1990-1994), and *I'm Not Rappaport*
13 (1995), in which he reprised his stage role of 10 years earlier, but
14 perhaps his most memorable recent performances grew out of a
15 collaboration with the director Spike Lee in films such as *School*
16 *Daze*, *Jungle Fever*, and *Get on the Bus*; in Mr. Lee's 1989 film, *Do*
17 *the Right Thing*, Mr. Davis and Ms. Dee were described by one critic
18 as "not only figures within the film, but they also seem to preside
19 over it as if ushering in a new era of black filmmaking"; and

20 WHEREAS, Offstage, Mr. Davis was deeply involved in civil
21 rights issues, taking up such causes as the freeing of Nelson
22 Mandela and the championing of human rights in Haiti; an eloquent
23 spokesperson for civil rights and social equality, Mr. Davis
24 delivered an inspiring keynote address at the first meeting of the
25 Congressional Black Caucus, which took place shortly after Martin
26 Luther King's assassination, and a moving eulogy at the funeral of
27 Malcolm X, which he later recited in Spike Lee's biographical film

1 about the slain civil rights leader; and

2 WHEREAS, A central figure among black performers for decades,
3 Mr. Davis paved the way for future generations of African American
4 artists while fighting zealously for human rights and creating
5 profound and lasting work that has touched us all; now, therefore,
6 be it

7 RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives of the 79th Texas
8 Legislature hereby pay tribute to the life of Ossie Davis and extend
9 sincere sympathy to the members of his family: to his wife, Ruby
10 Dee; to his children, Guy Davis, Nora Day, and Hasna Muhammad; to
11 his seven grandchildren; and to his brother, Dr. William C. Davis of
12 San Antonio; and, be it further

13 RESOLVED, That an official copy of this resolution be
14 prepared for the members of his family and that when the Texas House
15 of Representatives adjourns this day, it do so in memory of Ossie
16 Davis.