

By: Olivo

H.R. No. 1455

R E S O L U T I O N

1 WHEREAS, Legendary bull rider Willie Thomas of Booth was
2 inducted into the Texas Rodeo Cowboy Hall of Fame at a ceremony in
3 Temple on February 14, 2004; and

4 WHEREAS, A pioneer for African American cowboys across the
5 country, Mr. Thomas, who faced years of discrimination during the
6 segregated 1950s with grace, humility, and strength, was one of six
7 inductees into the hall of fame and was nominated for the National
8 Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum's Rodeo Hall of Fame in Oklahoma
9 City, Oklahoma, in 2004; and

10 WHEREAS, Born on January 30, 1930, in Richmond, Willie Thomas
11 was raised on the A. P. George Ranch and eventually became a working
12 cowboy who paid his dues running the cattle farm with his parents,
13 Johnny and Josephine Thomas; in 1952, he participated in his first
14 Professional Rodeo Cowboy Association competition in San Antonio,
15 and from there, he embarked on a 30-year career during which he won
16 more than 20 belt buckles, including the 1968 all-around title of
17 the Southwestern National Cowboy Association, and 25 saddles, rode
18 more than 4,000 bulls, and landed top rankings in the world; and

19 WHEREAS, This esteemed cowboy rode with renowned riders such
20 as Harold Cash, Jim Shoulders, Freckles Brown, and Clyde Frost,
21 father of Lane Frost, a world-famous bull rider whose life story is
22 featured in a film titled *8 Seconds*, and he was president of the
23 Southwestern National Cowboy Association; and

24 WHEREAS, His accomplishments are especially impressive

1 considering the great obstacles placed in his way throughout his
2 career, including racist rodeo officials who prevented him from
3 competing because of the color of his skin; on one occasion, Mr.
4 Thomas pulled his hat over his eyes, concealed his face, and won a
5 bull riding competition in Lake Charles, Louisiana, only to be
6 stripped of his winnings and escorted from town when the judges
7 discovered he was African American; and

8 WHEREAS, At the age of nine, Willie Thomas had an accident at
9 the George Ranch that left him with a prosthetic eye; he has also
10 broken his leg nine times and been told twice he would never walk
11 again; despite these setbacks, Mr. Thomas persevered and pursued
12 his dream to become one of the best bull riders in the history of the
13 sport; and

14 WHEREAS, With a large and loving family that includes his
15 wife, Ora Lee, their nine children, Sandra Pipkin, Dwight Thomas,
16 Glen Thomas, Vicki Meriwether, Berkley Thomas, Willie Thomas, Jr.,
17 Myron Thomas, Rodney Thomas, and Sharee Thomas, and 25
18 grandchildren, Mr. Thomas worked for the Texas Department of
19 Transportation for many years before retiring in August of 1991;
20 today, he hosts popular trail rides on his farm, promoting a
21 community spirit in Fort Bend County; in addition to being inducted
22 into the Texas hall of fame, he was recognized by the George Ranch,
23 which hosted a reception in his honor; and

24 WHEREAS, Truly a trailblazer as well as a man of exceptional
25 abilities, Willie Thomas opened doors for generations of African
26 Americans by integrating rodeos in Texas and beyond; it is truly a
27 pleasure to pay tribute to his impressive accomplishments, notable

1 rodeo career, and unwavering strength of spirit; now, therefore, be
2 it

3 RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives of the 79th Texas
4 Legislature hereby congratulate Willie Thomas of Booth on his
5 induction into the Texas Rodeo Cowboy Hall of Fame and extend to him
6 sincere best wishes for the future; and, be it further

7 RESOLVED, That an official copy of this resolution be
8 prepared for Mr. Thomas as an expression of high regard by the Texas
9 House of Representatives.