

2009-J4011

LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION commemorating the 142nd Birthday of American civil rights activist pioneer William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, and paying tribute to his life and accomplishments

WHEREAS, From time to time we take note of certain individuals whom we wish to recognize for their valued contributions and to publicly acknowledge their endeavors which have enhanced the basic humanity among us all; and

WHEREAS, Attendant to such concern, and in full accord with its long-standing traditions, it is the intent of this Legislative Body to commemorate the 142nd Birthday of American civil rights activist pioneer William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, and paying tribute to his life and accomplishments; and

WHEREAS, William Edward Burghardt (W.E.B.) Du Bois was born on February 23, 1868, in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, to Alfred Du Bois and Mary Silvina Burghardt Du Bois; and

WHEREAS, After the desertion of his father, W.E.B. Du Bois faced some challenges growing up, as the precocious, intellectual, mixed-race son of an impoverished single mother; nevertheless, he was very comfortable academically, as many of his teachers recognized his academic gifts and encouraged him to further his education with classical courses while in high school; at that time, his scholastic success also led him to believe that he could use his knowledge to empower African-Americans; and

WHEREAS, In 1888, W.E.B. Du Bois earned a degree from Fisk University, a historically black college in Nashville, Tennessee; he entered Harvard College in the fall of 1888, having received a scholarship and later earned his Bachelor's degree cum laude in 1890; and

WHEREAS, In 1892, W.E.B. Du Bois received a fellowship from the John

F. Slater Fund for the Education of Freedmen to attend the University of Berlin, Germany, for graduate work; while a student in Berlin, he traveled extensively throughout Europe and came of age intellectually in the German capital, while studying with some of that nation's most prominent social scientists, including Gustav von Schmoller, Adolph Wagner, and Heinrich von Treitschke; and

WHEREAS, In 1895, W.E.B. Du Bois became the first African-American to earn a Ph.D. from Harvard University; after teaching at Wilberforce University in Ohio, he worked at the University of Pennsylvania and taught while undertaking field research for his study "The Philadelphia Negro"; he later moved to Georgia, where he established the Department of Social Work at Atlanta University and also taught at The New School in Greenwich Village, New York City; and

WHEREAS, A contemporary of Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois carried on a dialogue with the educator about segregation, political disfranchisement, and ways to improve African-American life; and

WHEREAS, Labeled "The Father of Pan-Africanism," W.E.B. Du Bois, with a group of like-minded supporters founded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909; in 1910, he left Atlanta University to work full-time as Publications Director for the NAACP; he also wrote columns published weekly in many newspapers, including the Hearst-owned SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE as well as the AFRICAN AMERICAN CHICAGO DEFENDER, the PITTSBURGH COURIER and the NEW YORK AMSTERDAM NEWS; and

WHEREAS, For 25 years, W.E.B. Du Bois worked as editor-in-chief of the NAACP publication, THE CRISIS, then subtitled A RECORD OF THE DARKER RACES; he commented freely and widely on current events and set the

agenda for the fledgling NAACP; the journal's circulation soared from 1,000 in 1910 to more than 100,000 by 1920; and

WHEREAS, W.E.B. Du Bois inspiration was for 70 years at the intellectual epicenter of the struggle to destroy white supremacy as public

policy and social fact in the United States; and

WHEREAS, In 1950, at the age of 82, W.E.B. Du Bois ran for U.S.

Senator from New York on the American Labor Party ticket and polled a little over 200,000 votes, about 4% of the total; although he lost, he remained committed to the progressive labor cause; in 1958, he would join with Trotskyites, ex-Communists and independent radicals in proposing the creation of a united left-wing coalition to challenge for seats in elections for the New York State Senate and Assembly; and

WHEREAS, In 1961, W.E.B. Du Bois was invited to Ghana by President Kwame Nkrumah to direct the "Encyclopedia Africana," a government production, and a long-held dream of his; in 1963, when W.E.B. Du Bois was refused a new U.S. passport, he and his wife, Shirley Graham Du Bois, became citizens of Ghana; contrary to some opinions, he never renounced his U.S. citizenship, even when denied a passport to travel to Ghana; and

WHEREAS, W.E.B. Du Bois wrote and published more than 4,000 articles, essays, and books i.e. The Philadelphia Negro (1896), The Suppression of the African Slave Trade (Harvard Ph.D. thesis, 1896), Atlanta University's Studies of the Negro Problem (1897-1910), Souls of Black Folks (1903), John Brown (1909), Quest of the Silver Fleece (1911), The Negro (1915), Darkwater (1920), The Gift of Black Folk (1924), Dark Princess (1924), Black Reconstruction (1935), Black Folk, Then and Now (1939), Dusk of Dawn (1940), Color and Democracy (1945), The Encyclopedia of the Negro (1931-1946), and The World and Africa (1946), over the course of his life; on August 27, 1963, he died in Accra, Ghana, at the age of 95, one day before Martin Luther King, Jr.'s legendary "I Have a Dream" speech; and

WHEREAS, Upon the occasion of the observance of the 142nd Birthday of W.E.B. Du Bois, this Legislative Body wishes to commemorate the lifelong struggle of the man who was the most prominent intellectual leader and political activist on behalf of African-Americans in the first half of the twentieth century; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to commemorate the 142nd Birthday of American civil rights activist pioneer William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, and pay tribute to his life and accomplishments.