

By Senator Thompson

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Senate Memorial

A memorial to the Congress of the United States, urging Congress to annually recognize January 1 as "Haitian Independence Day," May 18 as "Haitian Flag Day," and the month of May as "Haitian Heritage Month."

WHEREAS, the Republic of Haiti, an island nation located in the West Indies on the western third of the Island of Hispaniola, declared its independence from French colonial rule on January 1, 1804, following a slave revolt under the leadership of Generals Toussaint L'Ouverture, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, and Alexandre Pétion, becoming the first and only state created from a successful slave rebellion, and

WHEREAS, Haiti was the first independent nation in Latin America and the first post-colonial independent nation led by blacks in the world, and

WHEREAS, Haitian Independence Day is globally acknowledged and annually celebrated on January 1 as an affirmation of equality, freedom, and the abolition of slavery, and

WHEREAS, the Haitian flag known today, a variant of which first came into use in 1806, is emblazoned with the country's coat of arms and the colors red and blue, adopted from the flag of France, the country from which Haiti gained its independence, and

WHEREAS, General Jean-Jacques Dessalines is regarded as the father of the Haitian flag, known to have dramatically cut the French tricolor with his saber at the May 1803 Arcahaie conference, ripping away the white of the French flag to

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30 symbolize an end to European influence and leaving two strips
31 that Catherine Flon then sewed back together: the blue, which
32 represented the former African slaves brought to Haiti by
33 colonial powers, and the red, which symbolized a people of mixed
34 ancestry, and

35 WHEREAS, the Haitian flag is a definitive symbol of pride
36 for the Caribbean nation, having become the second republic,
37 after the United States, to defeat a European colonial power in
38 the Americas, and

39 WHEREAS, Haitian Flag Day events are annually observed and
40 celebrated with pride and enthusiasm throughout the United
41 States, and

42 WHEREAS, Haitian Heritage Month is a jubilant celebration
43 in the United States, embracing Haitian heritage and culture,
44 and

45 WHEREAS, first celebrated in Boston, Massachusetts, in
46 1998, Haitian Heritage Month is observed nationwide in the month
47 of May from Florida to New York with parades, festivals, and
48 school activities, and

49 WHEREAS, the importance of Haitian Heritage Month is
50 exemplified by South Florida Congressman Kendrick B. Meek's
51 introduction of a bill in the United States House of
52 Representatives in 2004 and 2006 to recognize the month of May
53 as Haitian Heritage Month, by former President George W. Bush
54 and First Lady Laura Bush's letter, sent in May 2005, to
55 congratulate the Haitian-American community on the occasion of
56 the heritage month, and by the organization of a celebration at
57 the White House that same year, and

58 WHEREAS, as educators, authors, community leaders,

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59 activists, athletes, artists, musicians, and politicians,
60 Haitians and Haitian Americans have left an indelible mark on
61 every facet of this nation's society and the world, evidenced by
62 the accomplishments of such icons as Jean Baptiste Point du
63 Sable, founder of the City of Chicago; civil rights activist
64 W.E.B. Du Bois; National Football League player Pierre Garçon;
65 author and candidate for the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2009,
66 Frankétienne; and Tony Award-winning actress and singer Nikki M.
67 James, and

68 WHEREAS, the close proximity of Haitian and American
69 shores, in conjunction with our countries' common bond of mutual
70 values and commitment to democracy, ensures lasting comity of
71 nations and continued trade and diplomatic relations, and

72 WHEREAS, with an estimated 1.5 million persons of Haitian
73 descent now residing in the United States, it is important to
74 acknowledge the positive impact of Haitian Americans in their
75 contribution to the betterment and diversity of this country,
76 and

77 WHEREAS, the United States and Haiti share a history of
78 freedom, a common belief in human rights, and diverse, complex,
79 and resilient peoples who have impacted the world through
80 vibrant cultures, democracy, and a wealth of talent and
81 achievement, and

82 WHEREAS, Haitian Independence Day, Haitian Flag Day, and
83 Haitian Heritage Month are each observed to salute the Haitian
84 and Haitian-American communities and to exhibit appreciation for
85 their culture and heritage, which have immeasurably enriched the
86 lives of the people of this nation, NOW, THEREFORE,
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88 Be It Resolved by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

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90 That the Congress of the United States is urged to
91 recognize January 1 of each year as "Haitian Independence Day,"
92 May 18 of each year as "Haitian Flag Day," and the month of May
93 of each year as "Haitian Heritage Month" and to encourage the
94 people of the United States to observe these occasions with
95 appropriate ceremonies, celebrations, and activities.

96 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that copies of this memorial be
97 dispatched to the President of the United States, to the
98 President of the United States Senate, to the Speaker of the
99 House of Representatives, and to each member of the Florida
100 delegation to the United States Congress.