

By the Committees on Rules; and Commerce and Tourism; and
Senators Campbell and Rodriguez

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Senate Memorial

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

WHEREAS, the United States of America has thrived as a
country of immigrants, united by common values and the promise
of a better tomorrow, and

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
nation created from a successful slave rebellion, and

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

WHEREAS, as educators, authors, community leaders,
activists, athletes, artists, musicians, and politicians,
Haitian Americans have made their mark in every facet of society
and have contributed to the betterment and diversity of this
nation, and

WHEREAS, the close proximity of Haiti to American shores,
in conjunction with our common bond of mutual values and
commitment to democracy, ensures lasting comity of nations and

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30 continued trade and diplomatic relations, and

31 WHEREAS, an estimated 1.5 million persons of Haitian
32 descent now live throughout this nation, and

33 WHEREAS, the United States and Haiti share a history of
34 freedom, a common belief in human rights, and diverse, complex,
35 and resilient peoples who have impacted the world through
36 vibrant cultures, democracy, and a wealth of talent and
37 achievement, and

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

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

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

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

57 WHEREAS, Congresswoman Frederica S. Wilson and Congressman
58 Kendrick B. Meek, having acknowledged the importance of Haitian

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59 Americans in this nation's history and diversity, have proposed
60 resolutions in the United States House of Representatives to
61 recognize the month of May as "Haitian American Heritage Month"
62 in the United States, and

63 WHEREAS, Haitian American Heritage Month is held to salute
64 the Haitian and Haitian American communities and to exhibit
65 appreciation for their culture and heritage, which have
66 immeasurably enriched the lives of the people of this nation,
67 and

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

73 WHEREAS, General Jean-Jacques Dessalines is regarded as the
74 father of the Haitian flag, known to have dramatically cut the
75 French tricolor with his saber at the May 1803 Congress of
76 Arcahaie, ripping away the white of the French flag to symbolize
77 an end to European influence and leaving two strips that
78 Catherine Flon then sewed back together: the blue, which
79 represented the former African slaves brought to Haiti by
80 colonial powers, and the red, which symbolized a people of mixed
81 ancestry, and

82 WHEREAS, the Haitian flag is a definitive symbol of pride
83 for the Caribbean nation, having become the second republic,
84 after the United States, to defeat a European colonial power in
85 the Americas, and

86 WHEREAS, Haitian Flag Day events are annually observed and
87 celebrated with pride and enthusiasm throughout the United

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88 States, and

89 WHEREAS, from a region that conjures images of a scenic
90 paradise, Caribbean Americans are as vibrant as the islands from
91 which they come, possessing a wealth of talent and history that
92 reverberates throughout this great state and nation, and

93 WHEREAS, emigration from the Caribbean region to the
94 American colonies began as early as 1619, with the arrival of
95 indentured workers in Jamestown, Virginia, and since 1820,
96 millions of people have emigrated from the Caribbean region to
97 the United States, and

98 WHEREAS, as educators, authors, community leaders and
99 activists, musicians, and politicians, Caribbean Americans have
100 made their mark on every facet of our society and have
101 contributed to the betterment and diversity of our state and
102 nation, and

103 WHEREAS, counted among the many famous sons and daughters
104 of the Caribbean are activist W. E. B. Du Bois; Secretary of the
105 Treasury Alexander Hamilton; the first African American
106 Secretary of State, Colin Powell; actress Cicely Tyson; actor
107 Sidney Poitier, the first African American actor to receive the
108 Academy Award for Best Actor in a Leading Role; author, poet,
109 and civil rights activist James Weldon Johnson; musician, actor,
110 and activist Harry Belafonte; athlete Roberto Clemente, the
111 first Latino inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame;
112 and numerous others who have displayed great strength and
113 resiliency while serving as pioneers among the people of the
114 Caribbean, and

115 WHEREAS, the modern political influences of Caribbean
116 Americans are evident in the election of a former member of the

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117 Florida House of Representatives, Jennifer Carroll of Trinidad
118 and Tobago, as Florida's first Caribbean American Lieutenant
119 Governor; the election of former Maryland Lieutenant Governor
120 Anthony G. Brown, who is of Jamaican descent; and the continued
121 representation in local, state, and national governments by
122 members from the Bahamas, the Cayman Islands, Haiti, Jamaica,
123 and other Caribbean nations, and

124 WHEREAS, in June 2005, the United States House of
125 Representatives unanimously adopted a concurrent resolution
126 recognizing the significance of Caribbean people and their
127 descendants in the history and culture of the United States and
128 observing the month of June as "Caribbean American Heritage
129 Month," and

130 WHEREAS, on February 14, 2006, the United States Senate
131 unanimously passed the resolution, culminating a two-year
132 bicameral effort, and

133 WHEREAS, since the passage of the resolution in 2005, the
134 White House has issued an annual proclamation recognizing June
135 as "Caribbean American Heritage Month," exemplifying the
136 importance of this observance across the nation, NOW, THEREFORE,

137
138 Be It Resolved by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

139
140 That the Congress of the United States is urged to
141 recognize January 1 as "Haitian Independence Day," the month of
142 May as "Haitian Heritage Month" and "Haitian American Heritage
143 Month," May 18 as "Haitian Flag Day," and the month of June as
144 "Caribbean American Heritage Month."

145 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Secretary of State is

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146 directed to dispatch copies of this memorial to the President of
147 the United States, to the President of the United States Senate,
148 to the Speaker of the United States House of Representatives,
149 and to each member of the Florida delegation to the United
150 States Congress.