Assembly Resolution No. 96

BY: M. of A. Heastie

MEMORIALIZING Governor Kathy Hochul to proclaim February 2025, as Black History Month in the State of New York

WHEREAS, Black History Month serves as an opportunity to recognize and celebrate the achievements, contributions, and resilience of African Americans throughout history; and

WHEREAS, It is essential to recognize some of the most integral parts of Black history, including the struggles; and

WHEREAS, The Civil War was a defining moment in American history, fought over the issue of slavery, leading to the eventual liberation of millions of African Americans; and

WHEREAS, The Emancipation Proclamation, signed by President Abraham Lincoln on January 1, 1863, declared that all enslaved individuals in Confederate-held territories were to be freed, marking a critical step toward the abolition of slavery; and

WHEREAS, The passage of the 13th Amendment to the United States Constitution on December 6, 1865, formally abolished slavery in the United States, securing the freedom of African Americans and paving the way for future civil rights advancements; and

WHEREAS, Black History Month was originally established as Negro History Week in 1926 by Dr. Carter G. Woodson, a historian and educator committed to ensuring that the achievements and contributions of African Americans were acknowledged and preserved; and

WHEREAS, In 1976, the celebration was expanded to a month-long observance, recognized nationally each February to honor the profound impact of African Americans on the history, culture, and progress of the United States. From their contributions in science, literature, politics, business, and the arts to their pivotal role in the fight for civil rights and social justice; and

WHEREAS, Black History Month seeks to emphasize that Black History is American History; and

WHEREAS, The month of February observes the rich and diverse heritage of our great State and Nation and encourages the celebration of Black History Month to provide a continuing opportunity for all people in the United States to learn from the past, and understand the factors that have shaped and guided the course of our present-day experiences; and

WHEREAS, The achievements of African Americans have been instrumental in shaping the nation's progress, and it is essential to highlight some key moments, accomplishments, and historical firsts that

have left a lasting impact on American history; and

WHEREAS, From the legal field to public office, John S. Rock became the first African American admitted to the bar of the U.S. Supreme Court in 1865, followed by Oscar J. Dunn as the first African American lieutenant governor in Louisiana in 1868; Hiram Revels made history as the first African American U.S. Senator in 1870, and Charlotte E. Ray became the first African American female lawyer in the United States in 1872; in education, Booker T. Washington founded Tuskegee Institute in 1881, helping pave the way for future Black scholars; in athletics, George Poage won an Olympic medal in 1904, and Jesse Owens defied racial prejudices with four gold medals at the 1936 Berlin Olympics; in innovation, Bessie Coleman became the first African American woman to earn a pilot's license in 1921, Garrett Morgan invented the modern traffic signal and received a patent in 1923; in the arts, Hattie McDaniel became the first African American to win an Academy Award in 1940, while Gwendolyn Brooks became the first African American writer to win a Pulitzer Prize in 1950; and

WHEREAS, Breaking barriers in civil rights, law, and politics, Brown v. Board of Education led to desegregation in schools in 1954, and Ruby Bridges, at six years old, became the first African American child to integrate an all-white elementary school in the South in 1960; Thurgood Marshall became the first African American Supreme Court Justice in 1967; Shirley Chisholm was the first African American woman elected to Congress in 1968; Douglas Wilder became the first African American governor in U.S. history in 1989; in science and space, Guion Bluford became the first African American astronaut in space in 1983, while Mae Jemison followed as the first African American woman in space in 1992; Toni Morrison made literary history as the first African American woman to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993; and

WHEREAS, African Americans have also made great strides in leadership, with Carol Moseley Braun becoming the first African American woman to serve in the U.S. Senate in 1995, Colin Powell serving as the first African American U.S. Secretary of State in 2001, and Condoleezza Rice becoming the first African American woman in that role in 2005; and

WHEREAS, The impact of African-American contributions to the moral fabric and history of this great Nation are ever-growing and unprecedented; more recently, on January 20, 2009, Barack Obama became the first Black President of the United States, earning his wife, Michelle Obama, the same distinction in her role as First Lady; and

WHEREAS, More notable African-American trailblazers who serve as a testament to the success, growth, and strength of our Nation are: Cheryl Boone Isaacs, who became the first Black president of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in 2013; Paulette Brown, the first Black woman to become the American Bar Association President in 2015; Dr. Carla Hayden, the first Black Librarian of Congress in 2016; Jennifer King, the first full-time Black woman NFL coach, heading the Washington Commanders in 2020; Kamala Harris became the first female and first Black and Asian American Vice President of the United States in January 2021; Lloyd J. Austin has the unique distinction of being the first Black United States Secretary of Defense, sworn in on January 22,

2021; Maya Angelou, the first Black woman to appear on U.S. currency in 2022; Ketanji Brown Jackson made history in her becoming the first Black woman to serve on the United States Supreme Court on June 30, 2022; Karine Jean-Pierre became the first Black and LGBTQ White House press secretary in 2022; and Sika Henry, the first Black woman to be

recognized as a Professional Triathlete in the United States, was inducted into the National Black Distance Running Hall of Fame in 2022; and all of whom encompass the many more powerful Black individuals who pushed through countless obstacles to earn the respect of their peers and this Great State and Nation; and

WHEREAS, Furthermore, Fred Perpall was elected to serve as the 67th president of the United States Golf Association (USGA) in 2023; also in 2023, Kirsten Neuschwanger made history as the first Black woman to graduate from the U.S. Air Force Academy's pilot training; Victor Glover was selected as the first Black astronaut to orbit the Moon as part of NASA's Artemis II mission in 2024; Simone Biles became the most decorated American Olympic gymnast in history on July, 30, 2024; and on February 2, 2025, Beyonce became the first Black woman to win a GRAMMY for Best Country Album with "Cowboy Carter"; and

WHEREAS, In recognition of the vast contributions of African-Americans, a joyful month-long celebration is held across New York State and across the United States with many commemorative events to honor and display the cultural heritage of African-Americans; and

WHEREAS, This Legislative Body commends the African-American community for preserving, for future generations, its centuries-old traditions that benefit us all and add to the color and beauty of the tapestry which is our American society; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to memorialize Governor Kathy Hochul to proclaim February 2025, as Black History Month in the State of New York; and be it further

RESOLVED, That copies of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to The Honorable Kathy Hochul, Governor of the State of New York; and to the events commemorating Black History Month throughout New York State.