

MADAM CHAIR,  
COMMISSIONERS,  
FELLOW RESIDENTS...

OUR COMMUNITY HAS A LONG HISTORY AND OWES A GREAT DEAL OF DEBT TO THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN PIONEERS WHO WERE HERE EVEN BEFORE THE START OF DADE COUNTY.

COMMUNITIES LIKE COCONUT GROVE AND OVERTOWN BOTH PRE-DATE THE INCORPORATION OF MIAMI.

AND BACK IN 1896, ALEXANDER LIGHTBOURN, AN AFRICAN-AMERICAN, WAS ONE OF THE LEADERS IN THE INCORPORATION OF THE CITY OF MIAMI...

WHEN ALMOST HALF OF THE CITY OF MIAMI'S INCORPORATORS WERE AFRICAN-AMERICAN.

WE ALSO HAVE A RICH HISTORY OF "FIRSTS" IN POLITICAL LEADERSHIP.

WE'RE THE HOME TO JOE LANG KERSHAW -

THE FIRST AFRICAN-AMERICAN LEGISLATOR IN THE STATE OF FLORIDA AFTER RECONSTRUCTION...

WHO REPRESENTED DADE COUNTY FOR 14 YEARS IN THE FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

HIS SON, JOE LANG KERSHAW, JR. ALSO SERVED IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

THEY INCLUDE LAWSON E. THOMAS WHO IN 1950 BECAME THE FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN JUDGE IN THE SOUTH SINCE RECONSTRUCTION.

AND LEAH ALEICE SIMMS, THE FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN JUDGE IN FLORIDA.

THE FIRST AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMAN EVER TO SERVE IN THE FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, GWEN SAWYER CHERRY, REPRESENTED DADE COUNTY.

IN FACT, JUST THIS MORNING, I HAD THE PLEASURE OF CONGRATULATING THE GWEN CHERRY BULLS FOOTBALL TEAM FOR WINNING THE POP WARNER NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP.

THE WOMAN WHO REPLACED REPRESENTATIVE CHERRY, WELL...WE ALL KNOW HER STORY.

CARRIE MEEK WAS A MEMBER OF THE FLORIDA HOUSE AND SHE WAS ALSO THE FIRST AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMAN EVER ELECTED TO THE FLORIDA SENATE...

AND THE FIRST AFRICAN-AMERICAN TO SERVE IN THE FLORIDA SENATE SINCE RECONSTRUCTION.

SHE WAS THEN ELECTED TO THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES IN 1992 AFTER FOURTEEN YEARS IN THE FLORIDA LEGISLATURE...

MAKING HER THE FIRST AFRICAN-AMERICAN LAWMAKER ELECTED TO REPRESENT FLORIDA IN CONGRESS SINCE RECONSTRUCTION.

THESE ARE SOME OF THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN AND WOMEN, AND THERE ARE MANY OTHERS, WHO HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THE MIAMI-DADE COUNTY WE SEE TODAY.

IT'S QUITE FITTING THAT WE TAKE THIS MONTH TO LEARN ABOUT THEM...

AND TO HONOR THEIR STORIES.

AS WE CELEBRATE THE DIVERSITY FOR WHICH MIAMI-DADE COUNTY IS SO WELL KNOWN...

LET US NEVER FORGET WHERE WE CAME FROM,  
THE ORIGINS OF OUR COMMUNITY -

AND THOSE ORIGINS INCLUDE THE MEN AND  
WOMEN WHOSE HISTORY WE CELEBRATE THIS  
MONTH.

MADAME CHAIRWOMAN, ON BEHALF OF ALL THE  
RESIDENTS OF MIAMI DADE COUNTY...

IT'S MY HONOR TO KICK OFF OUR CELEBRATION OF  
BLACK HISTORY MONTH.

THANK YOU ALL FOR BEING HERE.

