

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 511

Celebrating the life of Dr. Edgar Allen Toppin.

Agreed to by the Senate, February 17, 2005
 Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 25, 2005

WHEREAS, Edgar Allen Toppin was born in Harlem, New York, in 1928, and passed from this life to eternity on December 8, 2004; and

WHEREAS, Edgar Allen Toppin's passion for learning was nurtured by loving parents who immigrated to this country and encouraged his love of reading, to which he devoted considerable time as a child on his apartment's rooftop; and

WHEREAS, although he had not considered attending college, Edgar Allen Toppin earned a place at New York City College at age 16, where he studied for one semester before receiving a scholarship to Howard University, his alma mater, from which he graduated with bachelor and master's degrees, and in 1955, he completed his doctoral degree at Northwestern University; and

WHEREAS, in 1964, Edgar Allen Toppin began his 39-year career as a professor of history at Virginia State University, after teaching at colleges in Alabama, North Carolina, and Ohio; and

WHEREAS, he became the dean of graduate studies at Virginia State University in 1979, a position in which Dr. Toppin served until his first retirement in 1993, and he also served as the provost and vice president of academic affairs of the University from 1987 to 1989; and

WHEREAS, although Edgar Allen Toppin never had an African-American teacher during his school career and he never studied African-American history, he became a nationally known expert on African-American history, the study of which he helped to legitimize during the 1960s; and

WHEREAS, as the president of the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History, Edgar Allen Toppin was instrumental in the passage of legislation by Congress which changed Black History Week to Black History Month in 1976; and

WHEREAS, Edgar Allen Toppin created a 30-lesson television course, *Americans from Africa*, in the mid-1960s that was broadcast by Richmond's public TV station and later aired on educational stations across the country; and

WHEREAS, in 1969, he wrote *Blacks in America*, a 15-part series of articles published by the *Christian Science Monitor*, which resulted in his demand as an expert in African-American history; and

WHEREAS, a nationally noted historian, Edgar Allen Toppin was recognized for his expertise in other academic areas, specifically the Civil War, Reconstruction, and 20th century history; and

WHEREAS, Edgar Allen Toppin was the first African-American member of the National Parks Board, the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, and the Board of Trustees of the Virginia Historical Society; and

WHEREAS, after the passage of federal legislation that established the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday and called upon states to create state level commissions to further the work and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Edgar Allen Toppin was among the first nonlegislative citizen members appointed by the Virginia General Assembly to the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Commission in 1992; and

WHEREAS, as a longtime member of the Commission, he enriched the deliberations with his profound knowledge of American and Virginia history, promoted bipartisanship, and led the Commission to anchor its statutory mandates firmly in the principles of conventional scholarship in order to maximize student learning, scholarly research, acceptance of the Commission's leadership as the state entity authorized to represent Virginia in matters pertaining to Dr. King's legacy, and to promote the implementation of and continuous reflection upon the Commission's recommendations; and

WHEREAS, his professional career spanned nearly 50 years, during which he was an educator, college professor, author of 10 books, and college administrator; and

WHEREAS, he shared his knowledge and expertise freely with numerous boards, museums, television programs, and local and national organizations, as a visiting professor at schools across the country, and he worked with the city of Petersburg; and

WHEREAS, after his retirement in 1993, Edgar Allen Toppin became a research professor at Virginia State University and a visiting professor at Virginia Commonwealth University, retiring from both universities in 2003; and

WHEREAS, Edgar Allen Toppin accomplished more during his lifetime than most people do in 150 years, and his influence upon the academic study of history in the nation will be felt and remembered for years to come; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the General Assembly hereby

note with great sadness the loss of Dr. Edgar Allen Toppin; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the family of Dr. Edgar Allen Toppin, adopted son of the Commonwealth, renowned historian of African-American history, and distinguished educator, as an expression of the General Assembly's esteem for his memory and gratitude for his contributions to the Commonwealth.