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**Jesse White Hosted Celebration for African-American Heritage Month**

*Chicago Broadcasting Legend Merri Dee and Illinois Historian Timuel D. Black, Jr., honored*

Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White hosted an African-American Heritage Month celebration today at the James R. Thompson Center featuring legendary broadcaster Merri Dee, Illinois historian Timuel D. Black, Jr., Little Black Pearl founder Monica Haslip, ComEd business leader John T. Hooker and Loop Capital founder James Reynolds, Jr. The theme of the event was: *Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.*

“It is important that we commemorate one of the most comprehensive laws in the history of our great nation and highlight the roles of pioneering Illinoisans who affected change in American history,” said White. “We are honored to celebrate their legacies as we reflect on the progress we have made.”

Merri Dee received the Distinguished Leadership award for her work in the field of broadcast journalism and as an outspoken advocate and philanthropist with her efforts to increase the adoption of orphaned children and reduce violence in Illinois. Timuel Black, Jr. was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award for his work in organizing the Chicago contingent for the historic March on Washington, and his lifelong commitment to education, community activism and preserving African-American heritage. Monica Haslip earned the Humanitarian Achievement Award for her success in creating an artistic haven and educational opportunities for young people at the Little Black Pearl Art & Design Center and Options Laboratory School in Kenwood. James Reynolds, Jr., founder of Loop Capital, received the Distinguished Leadership Award for his contributions to the financial services industry. John T. Hooker, ComEd business executive, also received the Distinguished Leadership Award for his outstanding career with the Chicago-based company.

“Our honorees have gone above and beyond in their industries – each of them has made a valuable impact on American history,” White said. “The theme of the program, ‘Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Civil Rights Act of 1964,’ is about recognizing the great impact the law has had on multiple generations.”

Dawn Hasbrouck and Jon Kelley, both Fox 32 Chicago anchors, emceed the event.

The event also included participation and performances from jazz quartet Two Guys & Two Dames, Chicago Military Academy – Bronzeville Color Guard, dance group Move Me Soul, Evanston Township High School Poetry Slam Team and the Red Clay Dance Youth Ensemble.

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