

RECOGNIZING THE 140TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE 13TH AMENDMENT

SPEECH OF

HON. BARBARA LEE

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, December 7, 2005

Ms. LEE. Mr. Speaker, first I want to thank the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. SENSENBRENNER), the chairman of the Judiciary Committee, for his leadership, for his support in recognizing this important date in our Nation's history, and also for ensuring that this resolution comes to the floor in a bipartisanship way, and for your support and for really reminding the entire country now of this important date.

Let me also take a moment to thank the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. CONYERS), our minority leader, who worked very hard with the gentleman from Wisconsin to bring this resolution today.

The gentleman continues to lead Congress in the civil rights tradition that actually began 140 years ago. From renewing the Voting Rights Act of 1965, to protecting the victims of Hurricane Katrina, he is a tireless advocate for civil rights and civil liberties for all Americans.

Let me also take a moment to thank our staff on both sides for their diligence and very competent work in bringing this resolution, especially Kanya Bennett, Perry Applebaum, David Lachmann of the House Judiciary Committee and Jamila Thompson of my staff, who have worked together for over a year now on this very, very important effort.

Let me also express my appreciation to the 13th Amendment Foundation, located actually in my district. They have worked diligently to honor and to recognize this momentous occasion. And as the gentleman from Wisconsin said, it is very important that our young people, especially, are reminded of the importance of this 13th amendment and read and understand why what happened 140 years ago is very, very important to today in 2005.

I hope that everyone will support this effort to honor the 140th anniversary of the ratification of the 13th amendment.

On December 6, 1865, slavery ended and the deep roots of the modern civil rights movement were planted. The 13th amendment was a response to the Dred Scott decision of 1856, a ruling that actually declared that Congress lacked the power to prohibit slavery in our country. If the Dred Scott ruling were still in effect today, Mr. Speaker, I would not be standing here, quite frankly, as a Member of Congress, nor would the 43 great Congressional Black Caucus Members.

As someone of African descent, whether free or enslaved, I would be considered only three-fifths of a person. I would never qualify as a citizen of this country. As the descendant of people who survived the Middle Passage, who survived the cruelty of slavery, who survived reconstruction, who survived Jim Crow, I know that my life, like the lives of millions of African Americans, our lives have been inextricably linked to the 13th amendment.

As we return from celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Montgomery Bus Boycott which launched the modern civil rights movements, we really are obliged to remember this 140-year history.

In the 1860s, Representative James Ashley of Ohio, Representative James Wilson of

Iowa, and Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts, all Republicans, led the congressional fight to abolish slavery.

This debate is a very important debate. And again, let me just talk about the vote. It was a vote of 119–56 right here on this floor. Our predecessors voted to add the following words to our Constitution:

Section 1. Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

Section 2. Congress shall have the power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

Although the abolition of slavery did not necessarily mean equality for all Americans, the process actually began. According to historical accounts, on the day of the House vote on January 31, 1865, the gallery, which had just been opened, mind you, to African Americans, the gallery erupted into cheers and Representatives on the House floor were visibly moved, crying and hugging each other. Twelve months later, the requisite three-fourths of the States in the Union ratified the 13th amendment and more than 100 years later another 8 States followed suit.

Although not necessary, President Lincoln signed the 13th amendment to show a united front to abolish slavery in the United States. A treacherous and divisive burden was finally removed and our Nation was allowed to unite and truly begin to commit to the pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness for all. In fact, the 13th amendment was the foundation for future equal rights and legislative actions, like the 14th amendment, which ensured Federal and State rights to all individuals; the 15th amendment, which granted African American men the right to vote; and the 19th amendment, which expanded suffrage to all women, also the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act.

Protecting civil and human rights is not something that really should be taken lightly, quite frankly. It requires constant vigilance and review. As we honor this great act of our predecessors, we pay tribute to the visionaries who sacrificed and fought for our civil rights and liberty.

In 140 years, our country has fought and continues to fight to be a united country seeking liberty and justice for all. But it has been a long, hard journey; and countless individuals dedicated and continue to dedicate their entire lives towards this end. We must all pay tribute to the abolitionist movement leaders like Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, William Lloyd Garrison, Nat Turner, and John Brown.

And we have all reaped the benefits of the bravery and sacrifices of civil rights trail blazers like Dred Scott, Homer Plessy, Linda Brown, Ruby Bridges, Rosa Parks, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

There are many more individuals whose names will never ever be mentioned in the history books; but they worked hard, they fought, they sacrificed for the freedom that we all appreciate today. Collectively, we must pay homage to their legacy.

It is important that we not only honor this great day in history but make sure that our children and our grandchildren understand its importance, not just to African Americans, but to all Americans and to the world.

This year, with all overwhelming bipartisan support, Congress passed resolutions that rec-

ognized the hemispheric survivors of the transatlantic slave trade and great historical trailblazers like the great Honorable Shirley Chisholm and Judge Constance Baker Motley.

These resolutions actually show how far we have come since the 19th century, but we also have a long, long way to go. One hundred forty years after slavery was abolished, African Americans and other minorities continue to experience social and economic injustices, as the recent Hurricane Katrina disaster magnified.

Within our own borders and throughout the world, human trafficking is rampant. It is a modern version, quite frankly, of slavery; and it must be abolished. And, of course, we witness every day discrimination against those who have no voice. Our work in Congress should be straightforward. It is our duty to reaffirm this tradition of justice, equality, and liberty for all.

We have an obligation to ensure that everyone has equal access to health care, education, livable wages, housing, and of course economic opportunities. Clearly, we still have much work to do. We have much work to do to ensure that discrimination is eliminated, and I mean totally eliminated, and that all people are considered equal in the eyes of our laws.

The movement that began with the ratification of the 13th amendment must continue. This has not ended. We owe it not only to those who suffered and who sacrificed in the past, but more importantly we owe it to future generations. The 13th amendment liberated African Americans from the yoke of slavery. It liberated America, and we must not forget that.

I urge all of my colleagues to support this resolution. I want to thank the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. SENSENBRENNER) again for ensuring this resolution is bipartisan.

IN RECOGNITION OF THE UNITED COMMUNITY CIVIC ASSOCIATION

HON. CAROLYN B. MALONEY

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 8, 2005

Mrs. MALONEY. Mr. Speaker, I rise to acknowledge the achievements of the United Community Civic Association (UCCA) on the occasion of its annual holiday champagne brunch. I ask that my colleagues join me in saluting UCCA's distinguished honorees: Assembly Member Michael N. Gianaris, Council Member Peter F. Vallone, Jr., Gerald J. Walsh, and Dr. Arthur N. Gualtieri.

The United Community Civic Association is one of the Queens community's foremost neighborhood organizations. Deeply committed to the improvement of the Queens community, UCCA has remained vigilant on a variety of issues relevant to Queens residents, including airport pollution and health concerns. Furthermore, UCCA is an important catalyst for community pride and involvement. UCCA hosts a yearly candlelight ceremony honoring the firefighters who lost their lives on September 11 and organizes the annual Flag Day Parade in Queens. These events are moving tributes to the best America has to offer, and are always beautifully done.

UCCA is also known for its tradition of excellent leadership. UCCA's president, Rose