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SPRINGFIELD RACE RIOT ANNIVERSARY OFFERS A TIME FOR REFLECTION IN ILLINOIS

*Government, Civic and Cultural Institutions Present a Variety of
Special Programs to Commemorate this Revolutionary Moment in U.S. History*

SPRINGFIELD, III. — To mark the 100th anniversary of the 1908 Springfield Race Riot, Illinois will hold a number of commemorations and conversations that highlight the history of the event and illuminate the path of civil rights advancements in its wake.

The Springfield Race Riot began Aug. 14, 1908, when a crowd formed outside the Sangamon County Jail in Springfield where two African-American men were held for alleged crimes against whites. News that the prisoners had been moved led to rioting. African-American-owned businesses and homes were destroyed, at least seven people were killed with many more injured, and despite the arrival of the state militia, rioting continued until Aug. 16. A total of 117 people were indicted for rioting, arson, larceny, and murder. However, only two people were punished for the riot.

While the riot is, undoubtedly, a blemish in U.S. history, it is also an emblematic beginning of many significant and important changes with regard to civil rights; most notably, the riot led to the formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), which was founded in February 1909.

Springfield is the site of many significant Race Riot remembrances this year:

- “Something So Horrible: Springfield Race Riot of 1908,” an exhibit and program at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum will run through October 2008. A collection of individual stories, newspaper reports, oral accounts and witness testimony. The exhibit, fashioned by guest curator Carole Merritt, seeks to illustrate how racism and political corruption can undermine law and order. Visit www.alplm.org or call 217.558.8934 for more information;
- Springfield Race Walks, a guided 90-minute tour traces the actual sites and recounts many of the key details of the two-day tragedy; visit www.springfieldwalks.com for details and tour dates;
- The 72nd Annual Convention of the Illinois State NAACP — “Transformation of a Nation: Commemorating Our Past, Celebrating Our Future,” Oct. 10–12 — is themed around remembering the Race Riot and recognizing its impact on the formation of the renowned organization; visit www.springfieldnaacp.org for more information; and
- Famed sculptor Preston Jackson has designed a permanent work that marks the riot in Springfield’s Union Square Park; the bronze sculpture is slated for installation in early 2009.

“It is important to uphold the progress and the lessons that come in the aftermath of such tragic events. The number of activities and exhibits being held throughout Illinois provide an opportunity to be educated about the history and relevance of the 1908 Race Riot, and also gain understanding and perspective about its long lasting significance,” said Jan Kostner, deputy director of the Illinois Bureau of Tourism

(IBOT). "Illinois continues to evolve and grow, and this anniversary is a way for us to acknowledge how far we've come."

To learn more about commemorations of the 1908 Springfield Race Riot, or to learn more information about Illinois destinations and attractions, visit www.soulfulillinois.com or call 1-800-2CONNECT.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Media materials and downloadable images are available via the Soulful Illinois online media center at www.soulfulillinois.com. Additional photography may be obtained by contacting Meghan Haynes at mhaynes@beamaninc.com, 312-751-9689.

The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Bureau of Tourism manages industry efforts that result in sustainable and significant economic and quality-of-life benefits for Illinois residents.