

STATE OF ARKANSAS

EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT

PROCLAMATION

TO ALL TO WHOM THESE PRESENTS COME – GREETINGS:

WHEREAS: John Harold Johnson, born Johnny Johnson on January 19, 1918, in Arkansas City, Arkansas, to Gertrude and Leroy Johnson, was a direct descendant of slaves and rose to international acclaim as owner and publishing icon of the Johnson Publishing Company, publisher of *Ebony* and *Jet* magazine; and

WHEREAS: Arkansas City was a poor and segregated town in the Mississippi Delta, and Johnson was born into poverty. He lost his father at a young age to a sawmill accident and was forced to start working. His mother remarried James Williams, who became an important figure in Johnson's life. Arkansas City had no opportunities for education beyond the eighth grade for African Americans and schools were overcrowded and segregated. These formative years in rural Arkansas and Johnson's passion for learning laid the foundation for his eventual rise as the founder of the largest African American publishing company in the world; and

WHEREAS: After a trip to Chicago to attend the World's Fair, the family realized opportunities for African Americans were far greater in the North than they had experienced in the South, and they stayed in Chicago. Johnson was more determined than ever to excel. Even though he was teased by his classmates at DuSable High School on the Southside of Chicago for his ragged clothes and Southern manner, he was empowered by the knowledge of the existence of an African American middle class, something he had never experienced; and

WHEREAS: Johnson excelled at DuSable, was elected class president, and graduated in 1936. He spoke at the Urban League that same year and started courses at the University of Chicago, while also working at Supreme Liberty Life Insurance as editor of the company magazine. The owner of Supreme Liberty Life Insurance was impressed with Johnson after hearing him speak at the Urban League and gave him a job and money for college tuition. Johnson became inspired while working at Supreme Liberty and came up with the idea for his first magazine, *Negro Digest*, published in November 1942. He was 24; and

WHEREAS: In 1941, John H. Johnson married Eunice Walker, from Selma, Alabama. She, along with his mother, was his constant support, and she later helped him run other business pursuits, most notably Fashion Fair Cosmetics. They adopted two children, Linda and John, Jr.; and

WHEREAS: John H. Johnson was a man of exemplary character with a powerful determination to succeed. He was in the inaugural class of inductees into the Arkansas Black Hall of Fame, and he was the first African American to receive the Young Man of the Year by the United States Chamber of Commerce. He received the Spingarn Medal from the NAACP and the Presidential Medal of Freedom. He was the first African American to be on the Forbes 400 and the first to own a building on Michigan Avenue in Chicago. His legacy will be treasured through the positive influence he had on his community and his commitment to covering race relations; and

WHEREAS: We join together to honor John H. Johnson, a renowned figure whose extraordinary life and contributions will have a lasting influence around the world, throughout our nation, and across Arkansas;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, ASA HUTCHINSON, Governor of the State of Arkansas, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the laws of the State of Arkansas, do hereby proclaim November 1st, 2022, as

JOHN H. JOHNSON DAY IN ARKANSAS

across the state, and I encourage my fellow citizens to join me in recognizing John H. Johnson's exemplary life and legacy during this commemoration of his roots in this great state.

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Great Seal of the State of Arkansas to be affixed this 31st day of January, in the year of our Lord 2022.



Asa Hutchinson, Governor

Attest:

John Thurston, Secretary of State