

119TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. RES. 1154

Honoring and celebrating the groundbreaking cultural, historical, and social impact of the Grandassa Models in redefining standards of beauty, confronting colorism, and advancing Black cultural pride during the height of the civil rights era and beyond.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

APRIL 6, 2026

Mr. ESPAILLAT submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

RESOLUTION

Honoring and celebrating the groundbreaking cultural, historical, and social impact of the Grandassa Models in redefining standards of beauty, confronting colorism, and advancing Black cultural pride during the height of the civil rights era and beyond.

Whereas the Grandassa Models were a collective of African-American women who, through courage, creativity, and conviction, redefined standards of beauty and championed Black identity at the height of the civil rights era;

Whereas the Grandassa Models debuted in Harlem, New York, on January 28, 1962, and emerged as a vital force within the “Black is Beautiful” movement;

Whereas the Grandassa Models were conceived by the African Jazz-Art Society & Studios (AJASS), a pioneering cultural organization founded in 1956, and led by Elombe Brath, with the goal of embracing natural Black beauty through the promotion of African traditions;

Whereas Elombe Brath drew inspiration from the “Miss Natural Standard of Beauty” pageants organized by Carlos A. Cooks, a leader of a Black empowerment movement who advocated for replacing the term “Negro” with “Black”;

Whereas the name “Grandassa” was derived from “Grandassaland”, a term coined by Carlos A. Cooks to signify the African homeland and to symbolize unity, cultural pride, and heritage;

Whereas, in the fall of 1961, AJASS organized a group of young women, under the guidance of Elombe and Kwame Brathwaite, to model African-style clothing and natural hairstyles, leading to the formation of the Grandassa Models, with support from Bob Gumbs, Chris Acemandese Hall, and secretary Shirley Anderson;

Whereas, in 1962, the Grandassa Models presented the first fashion extravaganza known as “Naturally ’62”, boldly celebrating natural hair, African-inspired fashion, and authentic self-expression, challenging Eurocentric beauty standards and inspiring self-acceptance across the African diaspora;

Whereas members of AJASS, including the esteemed Max Roach and Abbey Lincoln, supported and amplified the world of the Grandassa Models, helping to popularize images of natural Black beauty through album covers, photography, and visual culture;

Whereas the original Grandassa Models, including Clara Lewis, Black Rose (Rose Nelms), Helene Nomsa Brath, Priscilla Bardonille, Mari Toussaint, Esther Davenport, Wanda Sims, and Beatrice Cramston, became icons of dignity and defiance;

Whereas, at a time when embracing African features and natural beauty was considered a radical act, the Grandassa Models transformed fashion into a form of activism and art into a tool of liberation;

Whereas the influence of the Grandassa Models extended far beyond the runway, as they served as educators, artists, and community leaders who inspired generations to embrace cultural authenticity and view beauty as inseparable from identity, freedom, and pride;

Whereas the legacy of the Grandassa Models continues to live on in museums, books, films, and the work of contemporary designers and activists;

Whereas, today, as only one of the original Grandassa Models remains living at the age of 99, the movement they ignited continues to shape global expressions of Black beauty through every natural hair celebration, cultural renaissance, and affirmation of Black beauty around the world; and

Whereas the Grandassa Association continues this legacy through its mission to improve the lives of Black people, preserve cultural integrity, prompt African fashion, provide educational resources, raise scholarship funds, and create intergenerational connections within Harlem and the broader New York City community: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That the House of Representatives—

1 (1) honors the Grandassa Models for their his-
2 toric role in the “Black is Beautiful” movement and
3 their contributions to redefining beauty standards in
4 the United States and around the world;

5 (2) recognizes the Grandassa Models for their
6 fearless promotion of African heritage, natural beau-
7 ty, and cultural authenticity during the height of the
8 civil rights era; and

9 (3) recognizes the ongoing work of the
10 Grandassa Models in restoring racial pride and edu-
11 cating and uplifting people in the broader New York
12 City community and beyond.

○