



Jesse White Recognizes State Leaders in a Video honoring African American Heritage Month

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SPRINGFIELD - Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White recognized African American Heritage Month with a video honoring three of the state's leaders, including the Director of the Illinois Department of Public Health, Dr. Ngozi Ezike, Illinois Poet Laureate Angela Jackson, and Apostolic Church of God in Chicago Pastor Dr. Byron Brazier.

Secretary White honored the following individuals:

Illinois Department of Public Health Dr. Ngozi Ezike the first African American Director of the Department of Public Health in its more than 140-year history received the *Distinguished Leadership Award*. She has helped lead Illinois to reach a 70% vaccination rate during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Illinois Poet Laureate Angela Jackson, the fifth Illinois Poet Laureate, received the *Excellence in Arts Award*. She joins the list of prestigious authors, including Carl Sandburg and Gwendolyn Brooks.

Apostolic Church of God Pastor Dr. Byron Brazier received the *Excellence in Community Service Award*. He established The Network of Woodlawn in Chicago to foster transformation through education, public safety, and economic development.

"This year, we wanted to honor Dr. Ezike, who has been a source of information, inspiration, and comfort to our state during this pandemic," said White. "We also wanted to celebrate our state's newest Poet Laureate Angela Jackson, a protégé of Gwendolyn Brooks, as well as Pastor Dr. Brazier, who has helped many people in the community during these difficult times."

Previous honorees include Blues legend Buddy Guy, Chicago Cubs Hall of Fame baseball player Ernie Banks, Chicago Bears superstar Otis Wilson, Jazz great Ramsey Lewis, legendary DJ Herb Kent, Grammy award-winning artist Lupe Fiasco, Destiny's Child's Michelle Williams, and Ariel Investments chair and co-CEO John Rogers Jr.

"This month we celebrate the amazing contributions made to society by African Americans," said White. "Take the time to learn more about African American culture and do something good for someone every day," said White. When you have done those things and more, this world is a better place for all of us."