ASSEMBLY CONCURRENT
RESOLUTION No. 270

STATE OF NEW JERSEY
212th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED NOVEMBER 8, 2007

Sponsored by:
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District 29 (Essex and Union)
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SYNOPSIS
Expresses New Jersey’s profound regret for its role in slavery and apologizes for wrongs inflicted by slavery and its after effects in the United States.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT
As introduced.
A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION apologizing for the wrongs of slavery and expressing New Jersey’s profound regret for its role in slavery.

WHEREAS, Slavery has been documented as a worldwide practice since antiquity, dating back to 3500 B.C. in ancient Mesopotamia; and

WHEREAS, During the existence of the Atlantic Slave Trade, millions of Africans became involuntary immigrants to the New World, and millions more died during passage; the first African slaves in the North American colonies were brought to Jamestown, in 1619; and

WHEREAS, The Atlantic Slave Trade was a lucrative enterprise, and African slaves, a prized commodity to support the economic base of plantations in the colonies, were traded for tropical products, manufactured goods, sugar, molasses, and other merchandise; and

WHEREAS, Some African captives resisted enslavement by fleeing from slave forts on the West African coast and others mutinied aboard slave trading vessels, cast themselves into the Atlantic Ocean, or risked the cruel retaliation of their masters by running away to seek freedom; and

WHEREAS, Although the United States outlawed the transatlantic slave trade in 1808, the domestic slave trade in the colonies and illegal importation continued for several decades; and

WHEREAS, Slavery, or the "Peculiar Institution," in the United States resembled no other form of involuntary servitude, as Africans were captured and sold at auction as chattel, like inanimate property or animals; and

WHEREAS, To prime Africans for slavery, the fundamental values of the Africans were shattered; they were brutalized, humiliated, dehumanized, and subjected to the indignity of being stripped of their names and heritage; women and girls were raped, and families were disassembled as husbands and wives, mothers and daughters, and fathers and sons were sold into slavery apart from one another; and

WHEREAS, A series of complex colonial laws was enacted to relegate the status of Africans and their descendants to slavery, in spite of their loyalty, dedication, and service to the country, including heroic and distinguished service in the Revolutionary War, Civil War, and all other conflicts and military actions involving the United States military; and

WHEREAS, New Jersey, with as many as 12,000 slaves, had one of the largest populations of captive Africans in the northern colonies; and

WHEREAS, In 1786, the State of New Jersey enacted a law that prohibited the importation of slaves into this State and made owners punishable for the mistreatment of slaves; and

WHEREAS, Although the State of New Jersey passed a gradual emancipation law in 1804, it was the last northern state to emancipate its slaves, and required all children of slaves born after
July 4, 1804 to remain the “servant of the owner of his or her mother” until they were twenty-one years of age for women or twenty-five years of age for men; and

WHEREAS, New Jersey had one of the severest slave codes in the northern colonies and was one of the few northern states to sanction the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which permitted authorities in free states to return runaway slaves to their owners, with the result that Underground Railroad passengers had to proceed with utmost caution in this State; and

WHEREAS, In 1846, New Jersey passed a law officially abolishing slavery; and

WHEREAS, The system of slavery had become entrenched in American history and the issue of enslaved Africans had to be addressed as a national issue, contributing to the Civil War from 1861 to 1865 and the passage of the 13th Amendment to the United States Constitution, which abolished slavery and involuntary servitude on December 18, 1865; and

WHEREAS, New Jersey adopted the Thirteenth Amendment on January 23, 1866 only after originally rejecting it on March 16, 1865; and

WHEREAS, After emancipation from 246 years of slavery, African-Americans soon saw the political, social, and economic gains they made during Reconstruction dissipated by virulent and rabid racism, lynchings, disenfranchisement of African-American voters, Black Codes designed to reimpose the subordination of African-Americans, and Jim Crow laws that instituted a rigid system of state sanctioned segregation in virtually all areas of life and lasted until the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act; and

WHEREAS, Throughout their existence in America and even in the decades after the Civil Rights Movement, African-Americans have found the struggle to overcome the bitter legacy of slavery long and arduous, and for many African-Americans the scars left behind are unbearable, haunting their psyches and clouding their vision of the future and of America’s many positive attributes; and

WHEREAS, Our nation acknowledges the crimes and persecution visited upon other peoples during World War II lest the world forget, yet the very mention of the broken promise of "40 acres and a mule" to former slaves or of the existence of racism today evokes denial from many quarters of any responsibility for the centuries of legally sanctioned deprivation of African-Americans of their endowed rights or for contemporary policies that perpetuate the existing state of affairs; and

WHEREAS, In 2003, during a trip to Goree Island, Senegal, a former slave port, President George W. Bush stated, "At this place, liberty and life were stolen and sold. Human Beings were delivered and sorted, and weighed, and branded with the marks of commercial enterprises, and loaded as cargo on a voyage without return. One of the largest migrations of history was also one of the greatest crimes
of history.... For 250 years the captives endured an assault on their
culture and their dignity.... Small men took on the powers and airs
of tyrants and masters. Years of unpunished brutality and bullying
and rape produced a dullness and hardness of conscience. Christian
men and women became blind to the clearest commands of their
faith and added hypocrisy to injustice.... We can finally judge the
past by the standards of President John Adams, who called slavery
'an evil of colossal magnitude'.... My nation's journey toward
justice has not been easy, and it is not over. The racial bigotry fed
by slavery did not end with slavery or with segregation ... and many
of the issues that still trouble America have roots in the bitter
experience of other times ...; and
WHEREAS, In New Jersey the vestiges of slavery are ever before
African-American citizens, from the overt racism of hate groups to
the subtle racism encountered when requesting health care,
transacting business, buying a home, seeking quality public
education and college admission, and enduring pretextual traffic
stops and other indignities; and
WHEREAS, European and African nations have apologized for their
roles in what history calls the worst holocaust of humankind, the
Atlantic Slave Trade, and racial reconciliation is impossible without
some acknowledgment of the moral and legal injustices perpetrated
upon African-Americans; and
WHEREAS, An apology for centuries of brutal dehumanization and
injustices cannot erase the past, but confession of the wrongs can
speed racial healing and reconciliation and help African-American
and white citizens confront the ghosts of their collective pasts
together; and
WHEREAS, The story of the enslavement of Africans and their
descendants, the human carnage, and the dehumanizing atrocities
committed during slavery should not be purged from New Jersey's
history or discounted; moreover, the faith, perseverance, hope, and
endless triumphs of African-Americans and their significant
contributions to the development of this State and the nation should
be embraced, celebrated, and retold for generations to come; and
WHEREAS, The perpetual pain, distrust, and bitterness of many
African-Americans could be assuaged and the principles espoused
by the Founding Fathers would be affirmed, and great strides
toward unifying all New Jerseyans and inspiring the nation to
acquiesce might be accomplished, if on the eve of the
commemoration of the 400th anniversary of the first permanent
English settlement in the New World, the State acknowledged and
atoned for its role in the slavery of Africans; and
WHEREAS, Acknowledging that there is a difference between wrong
and right, and that slavery as an American "institution" was a
wrong committed upon millions of African Americans and that
their descendants continue to suffer from the effects of Jim Crow
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laws, segregation, housing discrimination, discrimination in education, and other ills inflicted upon African-Americans; and

WHEREAS, The State of New Jersey, the Governor, and its citizens are conscious that under slavery many atrocities and gross violations of human rights were imposed upon African-Americans, and that acknowledging these facts can and will avert future tragedies, be they in the Sudan, or other parts of the world; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED by the General Assembly of the State of New Jersey (the Senate concurring):

1. The Legislature of the State of New Jersey expresses its profound regret for the State’s role in slavery and apologizes for the wrongs inflicted by slavery and its after effects in the United States of America; expresses its deepest sympathies and solemn regrets to those who were enslaved and the descendants of those slaves, who were deprived of life, human dignity, and the constitutional protections accorded all citizens of the United States; and we encourage all citizens to remember and teach their children about the history of slavery, Jim Crow laws, and modern day slavery, to ensure that these tragedies will neither be forgotten nor repeated.

2. It is the intent of the Legislature that this resolution shall not be used in, or be the basis of, any type of litigation.

3. Duly authenticated copies of this resolution, signed by the President of the Senate and Speaker of the General Assembly and attested by the Secretary of the Senate and the Clerk of the General Assembly, shall be transmitted to the New Jersey Secretary of State, all New Jersey branches of the National Association for the Advancement for Colored People, Garden State Bar Association, the Amistad Commission, and the New Jersey Commission on Higher Education.

STATEMENT

This concurrent resolution issues a formal apology on behalf of the State of New Jersey for its role in slavery and discusses the history of racism and inhumane treatment toward African-Americans in the United States from the arrival of its first settlers to the present day. It calls upon the citizens of this State to remember that slavery continues to exist and encourages them to teach about the history and legacy of slavery and Jim Crow laws.