

**ASSEMBLY CONCURRENT
RESOLUTION No. 270**

**STATE OF NEW JERSEY
212th LEGISLATURE**

INTRODUCED NOVEMBER 8, 2007

Sponsored by:

Assemblyman WILLIAM D. PAYNE

District 29 (Essex and Union)

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District 28 (Essex)

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.



1 **A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION** apologizing for the wrongs of slavery
2 and expressing New Jersey's profound regret for its role in
3 slavery.
4
5 **WHEREAS**, Slavery has been documented as a worldwide practice
6 since antiquity, dating back to 3500 B.C. in ancient Mesopotamia;
7 and
8 **WHEREAS**, During the existence of the Atlantic Slave Trade, millions
9 of Africans became involuntary immigrants to the New World, and
10 millions more died during passage; the first African slaves in the
11 North American colonies were brought to Jamestown, in 1619; and
12 **WHEREAS**, The Atlantic Slave Trade was a lucrative enterprise, and
13 African slaves, a prized commodity to support the economic base of
14 plantations in the colonies, were traded for tropical products,
15 manufactured goods, sugar, molasses, and other merchandise; and
16 **WHEREAS**, Some African captives resisted enslavement by fleeing
17 from slave forts on the West African coast and others mutinied
18 aboard slave trading vessels, cast themselves into the Atlantic
19 Ocean, or risked the cruel retaliation of their masters by running
20 away to seek freedom; and
21 **WHEREAS**, Although the United States outlawed the transatlantic slave
22 trade in 1808, the domestic slave trade in the colonies and illegal
23 importation continued for several decades; and
24 **WHEREAS**, Slavery, or the "Peculiar Institution," in the United States
25 resembled no other form of involuntary servitude, as Africans were
26 captured and sold at auction as chattel, like inanimate property or
27 animals; and
28 **WHEREAS**, To prime Africans for slavery, the fundamental values of
29 the Africans were shattered; they were brutalized, humiliated,
30 dehumanized, and subjected to the indignity of being stripped of
31 their names and heritage; women and girls were raped, and families
32 were disassembled as husbands and wives, mothers and daughters,
33 and fathers and sons were sold into slavery apart from one another;
34 and
35 **WHEREAS**, A series of complex colonial laws was enacted to relegate
36 the status of Africans and their descendants to slavery, in spite of
37 their loyalty, dedication, and service to the country, including
38 heroic and distinguished service in the Revolutionary War, Civil
39 War, and all other conflicts and military actions involving the
40 United States military; and
41 **WHEREAS**, New Jersey, with as many as 12,000 slaves, had one of the
42 largest populations of captive Africans in the northern colonies; and
43 **WHEREAS**, In 1786, the State of New Jersey enacted a law that
44 prohibited the importation of slaves into this State and made owners
45 punishable for the mistreatment of slaves; and
46 **WHEREAS**, Although the State of New Jersey passed a gradual
47 emancipation law in 1804, it was the last northern state to
48 emancipate its slaves, and required all children of slaves born after

1 July 4, 1804 to remain the “servant of the owner of his or her
2 mother” until they were twenty-one years of age for women or
3 twenty-five years of age for men; and

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

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

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

18 **WHEREAS**, New Jersey adopted the Thirteenth Amendment on January
19 23, 1866 only after originally rejecting it on March 16, 1865; and

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

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

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

43 **WHEREAS**, In 2003, during a trip to Goree Island, Senegal, a former
44 slave port, President George W. Bush stated, "At this place, liberty
45 and life were stolen and sold. Human Beings were delivered and
46 sorted, and weighed, and branded with the marks of commercial
47 enterprises, and loaded as cargo on a voyage without return. One of
48 the largest migrations of history was also one of the greatest crimes

1 of history.... For 250 years the captives endured an assault on their
2 culture and their dignity.... Small men took on the powers and airs
3 of tyrants and masters. Years of unpunished brutality and bullying
4 and rape produced a dullness and hardness of conscience. Christian
5 men and women became blind to the clearest commands of their
6 faith and added hypocrisy to injustice.... We can finally judge the
7 past by the standards of President John Adams, who called slavery
8 'an evil of colossal magnitude'.... My nation's journey toward
9 justice has not been easy, and it is not over. The racial bigotry fed
10 by slavery did not end with slavery or with segregation ... and many
11 of the issues that still trouble America have roots in the bitter
12 experience of other times ...; and

13 **WHEREAS**, In New Jersey the vestiges of slavery are ever before
14 African-American citizens, from the overt racism of hate groups to
15 the subtle racism encountered when requesting health care,
16 transacting business, buying a home, seeking quality public
17 education and college admission, and enduring pretextual traffic
18 stops and other indignities; and

19 **WHEREAS**, European and African nations have apologized for their
20 roles in what history calls the worst holocaust of humankind, the
21 Atlantic Slave Trade, and racial reconciliation is impossible without
22 some acknowledgment of the moral and legal injustices perpetrated
23 upon African-Americans; and

24 **WHEREAS**, An apology for centuries of brutal dehumanization and
25 injustices cannot erase the past, but confession of the wrongs can
26 speed racial healing and reconciliation and help African-American
27 and white citizens confront the ghosts of their collective pasts
28 together; and

29 **WHEREAS**, The story of the enslavement of Africans and their
30 descendants, the human carnage, and the dehumanizing atrocities
31 committed during slavery should not be purged from New Jersey's
32 history or discounted; moreover, the faith, perseverance, hope, and
33 endless triumphs of African-Americans and their significant
34 contributions to the development of this State and the nation should
35 be embraced, celebrated, and retold for generations to come; and

36 **WHEREAS**, The perpetual pain, distrust, and bitterness of many
37 African-Americans could be assuaged and the principles espoused
38 by the Founding Fathers would be affirmed, and great strides
39 toward unifying all New Jerseyans and inspiring the nation to
40 acquiesce might be accomplished, if on the eve of the
41 commemoration of the 400th anniversary of the first permanent
42 English settlement in the New World, the State acknowledged and
43 atoned for its role in the slavery of Africans; and

44 **WHEREAS**, Acknowledging that there is a difference between wrong
45 and right, and that slavery as an American "institution" was a
46 wrong committed upon millions of African Americans and that
47 their descendants continue to suffer from the effects of Jim Crow

1 laws, segregation, housing discrimination, discrimination in
2 education, and other ills inflicted upon African-Americans; and
3 **WHEREAS**, The State of New Jersey, the Governor, and its citizens are
4 conscious that under slavery many atrocities and gross violations of
5 human rights were imposed upon African-Americans, and that
6 acknowledging these facts can and will avert future tragedies, be
7 they in the Sudan, or other parts of the world; now, therefore,

8
9 **BE IT RESOLVED** by the General Assembly of the State of New
10 Jersey (the Senate concurring):

11
12 1. The Legislature of the State of New Jersey expresses its
13 profound regret for the State's role in slavery and apologizes for the
14 wrongs inflicted by slavery and its after effects in the United States
15 of America; expresses its deepest sympathies and solemn regrets to
16 those who were enslaved and the descendants of those slaves, who
17 were deprived of life, human dignity, and the constitutional
18 protections accorded all citizens of the United States; and we
19 encourage all citizens to remember and teach their children about
20 the history of slavery, Jim Crow laws, and modern day slavery, to
21 ensure that these tragedies will neither be forgotten nor repeated.

22
23 2. It is the intent of the Legislature that this resolution shall not
24 be used in, or be the basis of, any type of litigation.

25
26 3. Duly authenticated copies of this resolution, signed by the
27 President of the Senate and Speaker of the General Assembly and
28 attested by the Secretary of the Senate and the Clerk of the General
29 Assembly, shall be transmitted to the New Jersey Secretary of State,
30 all New Jersey branches of the National Association for the
31 Advancement for Colored People, Garden State Bar Association,
32 the Amistad Commission, and the New Jersey Commission on
33 Higher Education.

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36 STATEMENT

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