

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2007

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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 1557

Sponsors: Senators Rand; Albertson, Apodaca, Atwater, Basnight, Berger of Franklin, Berger of Rockingham, Bingham, Boseman, Brown, Brunstetter, Clodfelter, Cowell, Dalton, Dannelly, Dorsett, Foriest, Garrou, Goss, Graham, Hagan, Jenkins, Jones, Kerr, Kinnaird, Malone, Nesbitt, Preston, Purcell, Queen, Shaw, Smith, Snow, Soles, Stevens, Swindell, Tillman, and Weinstein.

Referred to: Calendar 4-5-07.

April 5, 2007

1 A JOINT RESOLUTION EXPRESSING THE PROFOUND REGRET OF THE
2 NORTH CAROLINA GENERAL ASSEMBLY FOR THE HISTORY OF
3 WRONGS INFLICTED UPON BLACK CITIZENS BY MEANS OF SLAVERY,
4 EXPLOITATION, AND LEGALIZED RACIAL SEGREGATION AND CALLING
5 ON ALL CITIZENS TO TAKE PART IN ACTS OF RACIAL
6 RECONCILIATION.

7 Whereas, Article 1, Section 1, of the Constitution of North Carolina, in
8 concert with the American Declaration of Independence, proclaims, "We hold it to be
9 self-evident that all persons are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator
10 with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, the enjoyment of the
11 fruits of their own labor, and the pursuit of happiness"; and

12 Whereas, involuntary servitude, as practiced within the borders of North
13 Carolina in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, violated the precept that all persons are
14 created equal and denied thousands and thousands of people of liberty, of the pursuit of
15 happiness, of the ability to benefit from their own work, and, in many cases, of life
16 itself; and

17 Whereas, the practice of slavery was embedded in constitutional provisions
18 and laws enacted by predecessors to this General Assembly and other civil authorities of
19 North Carolina; and

20 Whereas, the practice of slavery began shortly after the founding of the
21 British Colony of Carolina, with a 1669 constitution that provided land to white
22 colonists according to the level of their holdings in slaves and free black employees, 20
23 acres per black male and 10 acres per black female; and

24 Whereas, even though North Carolina did not have as extensive a plantation
25 system as other states in the American South, slavery had become entrenched in the

1 State by the time of the American Revolution, so that at the founding of the United
2 States three out of 10 North Carolina families owned slaves; and

3 Whereas, North Carolina took legal actions to deny freedom to black people,
4 including an 1826 law that prohibited free blacks from entering the State, an 1830 law
5 that prohibited anyone from teaching a slave to read or write, and a provision of the
6 1835 Constitution denying free blacks the right to vote; and

7 Whereas, even as slaves engaged in back-breaking physical labor, endured
8 squalid housing, and saw their families broken apart as spouses and children were sold
9 from one owner to another, black men and women cultivated tobacco, cotton, and other
10 crops in a largely agricultural state, built essential public facilities, and contributed to
11 the creation and accumulation of wealth; and

12 Whereas, by the time of the American Civil War, North Carolina was home
13 to 330,000 slaves, one-third of the State's population, and North Carolina joined the
14 forces that fought to preserve a region and a society that had slavery as a defining
15 characteristic; and

16 Whereas, in the aftermath of the Emancipation Proclamation and during the
17 period know as Reconstruction, black residents of North Carolina not only gained legal
18 freedom but also participated more directly in the public life of the State, to the extent
19 that 20 black legislators were elected in 1868 to the General Assembly, and blacks
20 continued to serve in State and local offices through the remainder of the 19th century;
21 and

22 Whereas, at the outset of the 20th Century, North Carolina enacted laws that
23 prevented black citizens from participating fully in a democratic society, including a
24 1900 amendment that denied black citizens the right to vote and the segregation of black
25 and white citizens into separate and unequal public schools; and

26 Whereas, as a result of dire economic and social conditions, black North
27 Carolinians joined the "Great Migration" from the South to the North in the first half of
28 the 20th Century, so that more than 270,000 people left the State between 1910 and
29 1950; and

30 Whereas, despite the legacies of slavery and the imposition of laws that
31 segregated blacks and whites in schools, public facilities, and in civic life, black North
32 Carolinians persisted in faith and in hope for a better life, in their yearnings to
33 participate fully in the economic and democratic life of their State and country; and

34 Whereas, North Carolina should celebrate the entrepreneurship of black
35 citizens in building nationally recognized businesses; the founding and sustaining of
36 colleges and universities that historically served black students; the many black North
37 Carolinians who have provided leadership in law, civil rights, and governance to the
38 State and nation; Now, therefore,

39 Be it resolved by the Senate, the House of Representatives concurring:

40 **SECTION 1.** The General Assembly issues its apology for the practice of
41 slavery in North Carolina and expresses its profound contrition for the official acts that
42 sanctioned and perpetuated the denial of basic human rights and dignity to fellow
43 humans.

1 **SECTION 2.** The General Assembly urges schools, colleges, and
2 universities, religious and civic institutions, businesses and professional associations to
3 do all within their power to acknowledge the transgressions of North Carolina's journey
4 from a colony to a leading State, to learn the lessons of history in order to avoid
5 repeating mistakes of the past, and to promote racial reconciliation.

6 **SECTION 3.** The General Assembly calls on all North Carolinians to
7 recommit their State, their communities, and themselves to the proclamation of their
8 nation's Declaration of Independence and their State Constitution that "all persons are
9 created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights" – to work
10 daily to treat all persons with abiding respect for their humanity and to eliminate racial
11 prejudices, injustices, and discrimination from our society.

12 **SECTION 4.** This resolution is effective upon ratification.