

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA

**SESSION 2007
RATIFIED BILL**

**RESOLUTION 2007-21
SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 1557**

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

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

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

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

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

Whereas, even though North Carolina did not have as extensive a plantation system as other states in the American South, slavery had become entrenched in the State by the time of the American Revolution, so that at the founding of the United States three out of 10 North Carolina families owned slaves; and

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

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

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

Whereas, in the aftermath of the Emancipation Proclamation and during the period known as Reconstruction, black residents of North Carolina not only gained legal freedom but also participated more directly in the public life of the State, to the extent that 20 black legislators were elected in 1868 to the General Assembly, and blacks

continued to serve in State and local offices through the remainder of the 19th century;
and

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SECTION 4. This resolution is effective upon ratification.

In the General Assembly read three times and ratified this the 12th day of April, 2007.

Beverly E. Perdue
President of the Senate

Joe Hackney
Speaker of the House of Representatives