

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 7

By Gilmore

A RESOLUTION expressing profound regret for the enslavement and racial segregation of African-Americans.

WHEREAS, the foremost expression of the ideals that bind us together as a nation is found in the Declaration of Independence, which holds as self-evident the truth that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, and that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; and

WHEREAS, despite the "self evident" character of these fundamental principles, millions of Africans and their descendants were enslaved in the United States and the thirteen American colonies from 1619 through 1865; and

WHEREAS, resembling no other form of involuntary servitude, Africans forced into slavery were brutalized, humiliated, and dehumanized; and

WHEREAS, stripped of their names and heritage, they were regarded as chattel to be bought and sold at auctions, where the bonds of family were ripped apart as husbands and wives, mothers and daughters, and fathers and sons were forcibly separated from one another; and

WHEREAS, slavery, or the "Peculiar Institution," was practiced within the borders of Tennessee from its founding; by 1860, Tennessee's 275,719 slaves represented nearly one quarter of the total population and were engaged in urban, industrial, and agricultural slavery; and

WHEREAS, the system of slavery, having been sanctioned and perpetuated through the laws of Tennessee and the United States, ranks as the most horrendous depredation of human rights in our nation's history; and

WHEREAS, slavery was not officially abolished until the passage of the 13th Amendment to the United States Constitution in 1865 after the end of the Civil War, which was fought over the slavery issue; and

WHEREAS, African-Americans soon saw the fleeting political, social, and economic gains they made during Reconstruction eviscerated by racism, lynchings, enforced segregation, and other insidious practices; and

WHEREAS, one hundred years after emancipation, the rigid system of de jure racial segregation known as "Jim Crow" persisted; not until the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act would this system of separate and unequal treatment of American citizens be abolished; and

WHEREAS, the struggle to overcome the bitter legacy of slavery has been long and painful, and for too many, America's promise of a brighter tomorrow remains an elusive dream; and

WHEREAS, while no apology for past wrongs could ever right them, a spirit of true repentance on behalf of a government can help to speed racial reconciliation and healing; it is hoped that by acknowledging a grievous past we will better avoid future human tragedies; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED SIXTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that the General Assembly acknowledges with profound regret the fundamental injustice, brutality, and inhumanity of slavery and the discrimination that was slavery's legacy.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this body expresses our deepest sympathies and solemn apology for the official acts that sanctioned and perpetuated the denial of basic human rights and dignity to fellow human beings.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we encourage all Tennesseans to reflect upon the shameful past that was slavery, so that such human tragedies will neither be forgotten nor repeated.