

House Resolution 1011

By: Representatives Williams of the 165th and Brooks of the 63rd

A RESOLUTION

1 Acknowledging Georgia's role in slavery and urging reconciliation; and for other purposes.

2 WHEREAS, Georgia is preparing for the sesquicentennial of the Civil War and will be a
3 centerpiece for related tourism and historians; and

4 WHEREAS, James Edward Oglethorpe, Georgia's founding father, established Georgia as
5 a slave-free colony in 1733; and

6 WHEREAS, Georgia was the only one of Britain's American colonies to attempt to prohibit
7 slavery as a matter of public policy; and

8 WHEREAS, the colony's Trustees, bowing to pressure from pro-slavery interests, convinced
9 England's House of Commons to repeal the prohibition against slavery in Georgia as of
10 January 1, 1751. South Carolina planters and their slaves flooded into Georgia and soon
11 dominated the colony's government; and

12 WHEREAS, between 1750 and 1775, Georgia's enslaved population grew in size from less
13 than 500 to approximately 18,000 people. Beginning in the mid-1760's, Georgia began to
14 import slaves directly from Africa; and

15 WHEREAS, in 1776, our nation's Declaration of Independence proclaimed that "all Men are
16 created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that
17 among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness"; and

18 WHEREAS, Georgia and the other American colonies ignored the standards of liberty and
19 equality and, during the era of the American Revolution, African slaves soon constituted
20 nearly half of Georgia's colonial population. Georgia delegates to the Continental Congress
21 forced Thomas Jefferson to tone down his critique of slavery in his initial draft of the
22 Declaration of Independence in 1776. Likewise, at the Constitutional Convention in

1 Philadelphia in 1787, Georgia delegates joined with South Carolina's to insert clauses
2 protecting slavery into the new federal charter; and

3 WHEREAS, during the course of the infamous Atlantic slave trade, millions of Africans
4 became involuntary immigrants to the New World and slavery in the United States resembled
5 no other form of involuntary servitude in that Africans were captured and sold at auction as
6 chattel; and

7 WHEREAS, Africans were brutalized, humiliated, dehumanized, and stripped of their names
8 and heritage, and families were torn apart and sold separately; and

9 WHEREAS, slavery was sanctioned and perpetuated by the laws of the United States of
10 America and the State of Georgia and ranks as one of the most horrendous violations of our
11 nation's and state's founding ideals; and

12 WHEREAS, the slave population of Georgia increased dramatically during the early decades
13 of the nineteenth century. In 1790, just before the explosion in cotton production, some
14 29,264 slaves resided in this state. By 1800, the slave population in Georgia had more than
15 doubled to 59,699. By 1810, the number of slaves had grown to 105,218; and

16 WHEREAS, when Congress banned the African slave trade in 1808, Georgia's slave
17 population did not decline. Instead, the number of slaves imported from the Chesapeake's
18 stagnant plantation economy as well as the number of children born to Georgia slave mothers
19 continued to outpace the number of slaves who died or were transported from Georgia. In
20 1820, the slave population stood at 149,656; in 1840 the slave population had increased to
21 280,944; and in 1860, on the eve of the Civil War, some 462,198 slaves constituted 44
22 percent of the state's total population. By the end of the antebellum era Georgia had more
23 slaves and slaveholders than any state in the Lower South and was second only to Virginia
24 in the South as a whole; and

25 WHEREAS, in January, 1830, the State of Georgia authorized the purchase of slaves for the
26 purpose of building and maintaining roads, and by October of that year, the state had
27 purchased 207 slaves for \$50,000.00. In January of 1834, this state empowered Thomas King
28 of McIntosh County to take over all of these slaves and use or sell them as he saw fit. They
29 were sold at auction the following month; and

1 WHEREAS, even while slavery was playing a dominant economic and political role in
2 Georgia, most white Georgians did not own slaves. In 1860, less than one-third of Georgia's
3 adult white male population of 132,317 were slaveholders; and

4 WHEREAS, propping up the institution of slavery was a judicial system that denied African
5 Americans the legal rights enjoyed by white Americans. Since the colonial era, children born
6 of slave mothers were deemed chattel slaves, doomed to "follow the condition of the mother"
7 irrespective of the father's status. Georgia law supported slavery by restricting the right of
8 slaveholders to free individual slaves. Slaves were taxed as property by the state. Other
9 statutes made the circulation of abolitionist material a capital offense and outlawed slave
10 literacy and unsupervised assembly. Although the law technically prohibited whites from
11 abusing or killing slaves, it was extremely rare for whites to be prosecuted and convicted for
12 these crimes. The legal prohibition against slave testimony about whites denied slaves the
13 ability to provide evidence of their victimization; and

14 WHEREAS, in the months following Abraham Lincoln's election as the first Republican
15 president of the United States in 1860, Georgia's planter politicians debated and ultimately
16 paved the way for the state's secession from the Union on January 19, 1861. Senator Robert
17 Toombs argued that secession was a necessary response to a longstanding abolitionist
18 campaign to "disturb our security, our tranquility – to excite discontent between the different
19 classes of our people, and to excite our slaves to insurrection." Lincoln's election, according
20 to these politicians, meant "the abolition of slavery," and that act would be "one of the direst
21 evils of which the mind can conceive"; and

22 WHEREAS, in spite of his promise that he would not interfere with slavery where it existed,
23 Lincoln ended slavery with the Emancipation Proclamation in 1862; and

24 WHEREAS, Georgia politician Alexander Stephens noted that slavery had become a moral
25 as well as an economic foundation for white plantation culture. The "corner-stone" of the
26 South, Stephens claimed in 1861 just after Georgia had seceded, consisted of the "great
27 physical, philosophical, and moral truth" which is "that the negro is not equal to the white
28 man; that slavery – subordination to the superior race – is his natural and normal condition";
29 and

30 WHEREAS, even after the abolition of slavery by the 13th Amendment to the U. S.
31 Constitution on December 18, 1865, there followed a systematic discrimination toward
32 Americans of African descent that was rooted in racial bias and racial misunderstanding; and

1 WHEREAS, African Americans experienced varying degrees of political, social, and
2 economic discrimination for almost 100 years until the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act
3 and the 1965 Voting Rights Act led by heroes such as Georgia's Reverend Martin Luther
4 King, Jr., until all laws were rewritten to assure that every American is treated equally under
5 the law; and

6 WHEREAS, in 2005, the Georgia General Assembly finally removed the last vestiges of the
7 Jim Crow laws that remained on the law books.

8 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES that
9 this body acknowledges that sanctioning and promoting the institution of slavery by the State
10 of Georgia was wrong and that, as a result, denial of liberty and other grave injustices were
11 inflicted on fellow human beings under the auspices of state law.

12 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the House of Representatives expresses its profound
13 regret for Georgia's role in the enslavement of Africans.

14 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the members of this body hereby support the fair and
15 accurate education of Georgia citizens about the inhumanity of slavery in order to foster a
16 respect for the fundamental dignity of human life and the God given rights of all people as
17 called for in the Declaration of Independence.

18 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that slavery and the triumph against it, as well as efforts to
19 end lingering inequality and discrimination, are to be embraced and celebrated as the State
20 of Georgia marks the historic sesquicentennial anniversary of the Civil War; that official
21 promotions and educational material should include Georgia's role in slavery; and that, by
22 doing so, we will recognize that an accurate and unbiased understanding of our common
23 history will make possible a deep and lasting reconciliation of all Georgians.

24 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Clerk of the House of Representatives is authorized
25 and directed to transmit appropriate copies of this resolution to the Governor, the Georgia
26 Department of Economic Development, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, the
27 Chancellor of the Board of Regents, and the State School Superintendent.