A RESOLUTION

Expressing profound regret for Georgia's role in slavery and expressing intent that this resolution shall not be used in, or be the basis of, any type of litigation; and for other purposes.

WHEREAS, slavery has been documented as a world-wide practice since antiquity, dating back to 3500 B.C. in ancient Mesopotamia; and

WHEREAS, during the course of the infamous Atlantic Slave Trade, millions of Africans became involuntary immigrants to the New World, and millions more died during passage; the first African slaves in the North American colonies were brought to Jamestown, in 1619; and

WHEREAS, the Atlantic Slave Trade was a lucrative enterprise, and African slaves, a prized commodity to support the economic base of plantations in the colonies, were traded for tropical products, manufactured goods, sugar, molasses, and other merchandise; and

WHEREAS, some African captives resisted enslavement by fleeing from slave forts on the West African coast and others mutinied aboard slave trading vessels, cast themselves into the Atlantic Ocean, or risked the cruel retaliation of their masters by running away to seek freedom; and

WHEREAS, although the United States outlawed the transatlantic slave trade in 1808, the domestic slave trade in the colonies and illegal importation continued for several decades; and

WHEREAS, slavery, or the "Peculiar Institution," in the United States resembled no other form of involuntary servitude, as Africans were captured and sold at auction as chattel, like inanimate property or animals; and

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WHEREAS, to prime Africans for slavery, the fundamental values of the Africans were shattered, they were brutalized, humiliated, dehumanized, and subjected to the indignity of being stripped of their names and heritage, women and girls were raped, and families were disassembled as husbands and wives, mothers and daughters, and fathers and sons were sold into slavery apart from one another; and

WHEREAS, a series of complex colonial laws were enacted to relegate the status of Africans and their descendants to slavery, in spite of their loyalty, dedication, and service to the country, including heroic and distinguished service in the Civil War; and

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

WHEREAS, after emancipation from 246 years of slavery, African-Americans soon saw the political, social, and economic gains they made during Reconstruction dissipated by virulent and rabid racism, lynchings, disenfranchisement of African-American voters, Black Codes designed to re impose the subordination of African-Americans, and Jim Crow laws that instituted a rigid system of de jure segregation in virtually all areas of life and that lasted until the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act; and

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

WHEREAS, acknowledgment of the crimes and persecution visited upon other peoples during World War II is embraced lest the world forget, yet the very mention of the broken promise of "40 acres and a mule" to former slaves or of the existence of racism today evokes denial from many quarters of any responsibility for the centuries of legally sanctioned deprivation of African-Americans of their endowed rights or for contemporary policies that perpetuate the status quo; and
WHEREAS, in 2003, during a trip to Goree Island, Senegal, a former slave port, President George W. Bush stated, "At this place, liberty and life were stolen and sold. Human Beings were delivered and sorted, and weighed, and branded with the marks of commercial enterprises, and loaded as cargo on a voyage without return. One of the largest migrations of history was also one of the greatest crimes of history ... Small men took on the powers and airs of tyrants and masters. Years of unpunished brutality and bullying and rape produced a dullness and hardness of conscience. Christian men and women became blind to the clearest commands of their faith and added hypocrisy to injustice ... For 250 years the captives endured an assault on their culture and their dignity ... While physical slavery is dead, the legacy is alive. My nation's journey toward justice has not been easy, and it is not over. The racial bigotry fed by slavery did not end with slavery or with segregation ... and many of the issues that still trouble America have roots in the bitter experience of other times ... We can finally judge the past by the standards of President John Adams, who called slavery 'an evil of colossal magnitude'..."; and

WHEREAS, in Georgia, the vestiges of slavery are ever before African-American citizens, from the overt racism of hate groups to the subtle racism encountered when requesting health care, transacting business, buying a home, seeking quality public education and college admission, and enduring pretextual traffic stops and other indignities; and

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

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

WHEREAS, the story of the enslavement of Africans and their descendants, the human carnage, and the dehumanizing atrocities committed during slavery should not be purged from Georgia's history or discounted; moreover, the faith, perseverance, hope, and endless triumphs of African-Americans and their significant contributions to the development of this state and the nation should be embraced, celebrated, and retold for generations to come; and
WHEREAS, the perpetual pain, distrust, and bitterness of many African-Americans could be assuaged and the principles espoused by the Founding Fathers would be affirmed, and great strides toward unifying all Georgians and inspiring the nation to acquiesce might be accomplished, if on the eve of the commemoration of the 400th anniversary of the first permanent English settlement in the New World, the state acknowledged and atoned for its pivotal role in the slavery of Africans.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA that this body expresses profound regret for this state's participation in the process of slavery, further atones for the involuntary servitude of Africans, and calls for reconciliation among all Georgians.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that it is the intent of the General Assembly that this resolution shall not be used in, or be the basis of, any type of litigation.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Clerk of the House of Representatives is authorized and directed to make appropriate copies of this resolution available for distribution to each state elected official, the executive director of the Georgia Commission on Equal Opportunity, the Board of Regents, the Georgia School Boards Association, the Georgia Congressional Delegation, the Georgia Municipal Association, the Association County Commissioners of Georgia, and the Georgia Association of Black Elected Officials, so that they may further disseminate copies of this resolution to their respective constituents in order that they may be apprised of the wisdom of the General Assembly in this matter.