

By: Thompson

H.C.R. No. 205

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

1 WHEREAS, In 1619 the first African slaves arrived at
2 Virginia's Jamestown settlement to be sold into involuntary
3 servitude throughout the North American colonies; the ensuing
4 Atlantic slave trade saw millions of Africans captured, brutalized,
5 and sold or traded at auction as nothing more than a commodity,
6 distinguished only by their particular value to the plantation
7 system and developing agricultural economy of the southern
8 colonies; and

9 WHEREAS, Slaves in the Americas were bought and sold as
10 chattel, subject to absolute legal ownership by another person; as
11 such, this "Peculiar Institution," as the American slave trade has
12 been called, depended on the deprivation of the most basic human
13 rights and a systemic dehumanization of slaves whereby they were
14 stripped of their names, denied their heritage, and disassembled
15 from their families; and

16 WHEREAS, While importing slaves into the United States became
17 illegal in 1808, the domestic slave trade persisted for decades;
18 Texas was the final frontier for the domestic slave trade, which
19 arrived in 1821 when Stephen F. Austin agreed to confer on settlers
20 80 acres of land for each slave they brought to his colony; and

21 WHEREAS, Slavery was guaranteed to be institutionalized in
22 Texas when it was enshrined in the 1836 constitution of the new
23 republic; the Texas constitution prohibited the Texas Congress from
24 proscribing the immigration of slaveholders into the republic,

1 provided that slaves remained the property of their owners, and
2 permitted the further importation of slaves from the United States;
3 and

4 WHEREAS, As a result of these constitutional protections,
5 slavery expanded rapidly in Texas during the 1840s and 1850s;
6 according to the census of 1850, slaves accounted for 27.4 percent
7 of the Texas population in that year; that percentage grew to 30.2
8 percent as reported in the census of 1860, with a total of 182,566
9 slaves in the state, indicating that the slave population grew at a
10 higher rate than the general population during that decade; and

11 WHEREAS, Regrettably, slavery was no less inhumane in Texas;
12 slave-owners had broad powers of discipline, demanded that slaves
13 work from "sun to sun" six days per week, and confined their slaves
14 to deplorable living quarters; and

15 WHEREAS, As was the case throughout the southern United
16 States, slaves in Texas could be bought, sold, and mortgaged, and
17 were denied the right to own property, forbidden to marry, and
18 barred from any legal means to gain their freedom; nonetheless,
19 slaves still managed to maintain a semblance of family life and
20 humanity, drawing on religion and music for spiritual and
21 psychological strength; and

22 WHEREAS, Operating primarily in Galveston and Houston, the
23 Texas slave trade provided the labor that fueled a 600 percent
24 increase in the state's cotton production during the 1850s;
25 although its economic impact is undeniable, slavery also became a
26 key social influence as slaveholders were among the state's
27 wealthiest class and represented a social ideal to the state's

1 general populace; and

2 WHEREAS, Even following the Civil War, the emancipation of
3 the slaves on June 19, 1865, "Juneteenth," and the ratification of
4 the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, the
5 entrenched social influence of slavery and its underlying racial
6 presumptions contributed to a series of laws designed specifically
7 to denigrate former slaves to maintain social inequities; after 246
8 years of captivity, the vestiges of slavery haunted the daughters
9 and sons of Africa with lynchings, Black Codes, Jim Crow
10 segregationist laws, voter disenfranchisement, broken promises,
11 such as the 40 acres and a mule, and other examples of overt racism;
12 and

13 WHEREAS, Despite sweeping legislative efforts such as the
14 Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the
15 indignity of slavery and the virulent prejudice it spawned remain;
16 the explicit bigotry of hate groups or the less obvious racism
17 encountered when requesting public health care, purchasing a home,
18 seeking quality education or college admission, or enduring
19 pretextual traffic stops are all present-day injustices born of
20 slavery; and

21 WHEREAS, President George W. Bush recently acknowledged
22 slavery's enduring legacy when he declared during a 2003 trip to
23 Senegal that, as "one of the greatest crimes of history," slavery
24 and the racial bigotry it fed still vexes the United States;
25 President Bush also alluded to the Declaration of Independence and
26 the ideals that bind all Americans and upon which our nation was
27 founded--the "self-evident" truth "that all men are created equal,

1 that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable
2 Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of
3 Happiness"; and

4 WHEREAS, In recent decades the people of Texas have shown
5 their commitment to those fundamental ideals expressed by the
6 Declaration of Independence and upon which our nation was founded;
7 Texas has produced some of our country's foremost guardians of
8 civil rights and political trailblazers, such as the late Honorable
9 Barbara Jordan, Texas Supreme Court Chief Justice Wallace
10 Jefferson, the first African American to be appointed and elected
11 to the state's highest court and a descendent of a former slave
12 owned by Judge Nicolas Battle who served on the state's highest
13 court in the 19th century, and Judge Morris L. Overstreet, the first
14 African American elected by popular vote to a statewide office when
15 he became a member of the court of criminal appeals; and

16 WHEREAS, The story of Texas' role in the enslavement of
17 Africans and their descendents, the dehumanizing atrocities
18 committed during slavery, and the resulting human carnage must be
19 confronted; in the same way, the faith, perseverance, triumphs, and
20 contributions of the African slaves and their descendents to the
21 State of Texas and the nation must be embraced, celebrated, and
22 retold for generations to come; and

23 WHEREAS, While past injustices cannot be erased by a mere
24 apology, such a simple act can promote reconciliation and healing
25 and help our great nation avert any recurrence of past iniquity and
26 blatant injustices that have plagued our national history; and

27 WHEREAS, Although many quarters of our great nation have yet

1 to express contrition for their participation in the institution of
2 slavery, it is fitting at this time that Texas follow the example
3 set by European and African nations that have made formal apologies
4 for their involvement in the Atlantic slave trade and the moral and
5 legal injustices perpetrated against African slaves and their
6 African American descendents; now, therefore, be it

7 RESOLVED, That the 80th Legislature of the State of Texas
8 hereby acknowledge with profound regret the involuntary servitude
9 of the African slaves and call for reconciliation among all Texans;
10 and, be it further

11 RESOLVED, That on the occasion of the 400th anniversary of
12 the settlement of Jamestown, Virginia, the legislature hereby
13 express gratitude for the contributions of African Americans to the
14 State of Texas and the United States; and, be it further

15 RESOLVED, That the legislature hereby request that the
16 lieutenant governor and the speaker of the house of representatives
17 create a joint interim committee to study and document the specific
18 contributions of African slaves and their descendents to the
19 economic and cultural development of the State of Texas.