

By Senator Siplin

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## Senate Resolution

A resolution apologizing for the wrongs of slavery and expressing profound regret for Florida's role in slavery.

WHEREAS, slavery has been documented as a worldwide 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 more 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

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30 inanimate property or animals, and

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

38 WHEREAS, multiple complex colonial laws were enacted to  
39 relegate the status of Africans and their descendants to slavery,  
40 in spite of their loyalty, dedication, and service to the  
41 country, including heroic and distinguished service in the Civil  
42 War, and

43 WHEREAS, by the mid-19th century, the system of slavery had  
44 become entrenched in American history and society, and the issue  
45 of enslaved Africans had to be addressed as a national issue,  
46 contributing to the Civil War from 1861 to 1865 and the passage  
47 of the 13th Amendment to the United States Constitution, which  
48 abolished slavery and involuntary servitude on December 18, 1865,  
49 and

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

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59 WHEREAS, throughout their existence in America and even in  
60 the decades after the Civil Rights Movement, African Americans  
61 have found the struggle to overcome the bitter legacy of slavery  
62 to be long and arduous, and for many African Americans the scars  
63 of slavery and the continuing afflictions of racism persist,  
64 preventing a sense of self-efficacy and clouding belief in a  
65 decent future for African Americans in America, and

66 WHEREAS, acknowledgment of the crimes and persecution  
67 visited upon other peoples during World War II is embraced lest  
68 the world forget, yet the very mention of the broken promise of  
69 "40 acres and a mule" to former slaves or of the existence of  
70 racism today evokes denial from many quarters of any  
71 responsibility for the centuries of legally sanctioned  
72 deprivation of African Americans' endowed rights or for  
73 contemporary policies that perpetuate the status quo, and

74 WHEREAS, in 2003, during a trip to Goree Island, Senegal, a  
75 former slave port, President George W. Bush stated, "At this  
76 place, liberty and life were stolen and sold. Human Beings were  
77 delivered and sorted, and weighed, and branded with the marks of  
78 commercial enterprises, and loaded as cargo on a voyage without  
79 return. One of the largest migrations of history was also one of  
80 the greatest crimes of history.... Small men took on the powers  
81 and airs of tyrants and masters. Years of unpunished brutality  
82 and bullying and rape produced a dullness and hardness of  
83 conscience. Christian men and women became blind to the clearest  
84 commands of their faith and added hypocrisy to injustice.... For  
85 250 years the captives endured an assault on their culture and  
86 their dignity.... While physical slavery is dead, the legacy is  
87 alive. My nation's journey toward justice has not been easy, and

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88 | it is not over. The racial bigotry fed by slavery did not end  
89 | with slavery or with segregation ... and many of the issues that  
90 | still trouble America have roots in the bitter experience of  
91 | other times.... We can finally judge the past by the standards of  
92 | President John Adams, who called slavery 'an evil of colossal  
93 | magnitude'," and

94 |       WHEREAS, in Florida, the vestiges of slavery are ever before  
95 | African American citizens, from the overt racism of hate groups  
96 | to the subtle racism encountered when requesting health care,  
97 | transacting business, buying a home, seeking quality public  
98 | education and college admission, and enduring pretextual traffic  
99 | stops and other indignities, and

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

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

110 |       WHEREAS, the story of the enslavement of Africans and their  
111 | descendants, the human carnage, and the dehumanizing atrocities  
112 | committed during slavery should not be purged from Florida's  
113 | history or discounted; rather, the faith, perseverance, hope, and  
114 | endless triumphs of African Americans over adversity and their  
115 | significant contributions to the development of this state and  
116 | nation should be embraced, celebrated, and retold for generations

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117 | to come, and

118 |       WHEREAS, the perpetual pain, distrust, and bitterness of  
119 | many African Americans could be assuaged, and the principles  
120 | espoused by the Founding Fathers would be affirmed, and great  
121 | strides toward unifying all Floridians and Americans might be  
122 | accomplished if, on the eve of the commemoration of the 400th  
123 | anniversary of the first permanent English settlement in the New  
124 | World, this state acknowledged and atoned for its pivotal role in  
125 | the slavery of Africans, and

126 |       WHEREAS, what is needed is acknowledgement of the difference  
127 | between wrong and right, the recognition that slavery as an  
128 | American "Institution" was a great wrong committed upon millions  
129 | of Black Americans, and that their descendents have inherited  
130 | these wrongs, including, but not limited to, segregation, housing  
131 | discrimination, discrimination in education, and other ills  
132 | inflicted upon Black people, and

133 |       WHEREAS, the State of Florida, the Governor, and the  
134 | residents of this state are conscious that under slavery many  
135 | atrocities and gross violations of human rights were imposed upon  
136 | Black people, and that acknowledging these facts can help to  
137 | avert future tragedies, be they in the Sudan or other parts of  
138 | the world, NOW, THEREFORE,

139 |  
140 | Be It Resolved by the Senate of the State of Florida:

141 |  
142 |       That the Senate expresses its profound regret for the State  
143 | of Florida's role in slavery and apologizes for the wrongs  
144 | inflicted by slavery and its after-effects in the United States  
145 | of America; expresses its deepest sympathies and solemn regrets

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146 | to those who were enslaved and to their descendants, who were  
147 | deprived of life, human dignity, and the constitutional  
148 | protections promised to all citizens of the United States; and  
149 | encourages remembrance and teaching about the history of slavery,  
150 | Jim Crow laws, and modern-day slavery in order to ensure that  
151 | these tragedies will not be forgotten or repeated.

152 |       BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this resolution be  
153 | transmitted to each state elected official; the Executive  
154 | Director of the National Association for the Advancement of  
155 | Colored People, Florida Chapter; and the Executive Director of  
156 | The Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Florida Chapter,  
157 | requesting that they further disseminate copies of this  
158 | resolution to their respective constituents so that they may be  
159 | apprised of the sense of the Florida Senate in this matter.