

Senate Resolution 537

By: Senators James of the 35th, Davenport of the 44th, Orrock of the 36th, Harrell of the 40th, Seay of the 34th and others

A RESOLUTION

1 Apologizing for slavery and Jim Crow and reaffirming this state's commitment to freedom;
2 and for other purposes.

3 WHEREAS, millions of Africans and their descendants were enslaved in the United States
4 and the 13 American colonies, including the Georgia colony and the State of Georgia, from
5 1619 through 1865; and

6 WHEREAS, slavery in America resembled no other form of involuntary servitude known
7 in history, as Africans were captured and sold at auction like inanimate objects or animals;
8 and

9 WHEREAS, Africans forced into slavery were brutalized, humiliated, dehumanized, and
10 subjected to the indignity of being stripped of their names and heritage; and

11 WHEREAS, enslaved families were torn apart after having been sold separately from one
12 another; and

13 WHEREAS, the laws and institutions of this state supported and advanced the system of
14 slavery and the visceral racism against persons of African descent; and

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

17 WHEREAS, after emancipation from 246 years of slavery, African Americans soon saw the
18 fleeting political, social, and economic gains they made during Reconstruction eviscerated
19 by virulent racism, lynchings, disenfranchisement, Black Codes, and racial segregation laws
20 that imposed a rigid system of officially sanctioned racial segregation in virtually all areas
21 of life; and

22 WHEREAS, the system of de jure racial segregation known as "Jim Crow," which was
23 supported and advanced by the laws and institutions of this state following the Civil War to
24 create separate and unequal societies for whites and African Americans, was a direct result
25 of the racism against persons of African descent engendered by slavery; and

26 WHEREAS, a century after the official end of slavery in America, federal action was
27 required during the 1960s to eliminate the de jure and de facto system of Jim Crow
28 throughout parts of the Nation, though its vestiges still linger to this day; and

29 WHEREAS, the story of the enslavement and de jure segregation of African Americans and
30 the dehumanizing atrocities committed against them should not be purged from or minimized
31 in the telling of American history; and

32 WHEREAS, on December 9, 2015, while commemorating the 150th anniversary of the 13th
33 Amendment, President Barack Obama observed that "the issue of chattel slavery seems so
34 simple, so obvious – it is wrong in every sense . . . Tearing husband from wife, parent from
35 child; stripped and sold to the highest bidder; shackled in chains and bloodied with the whip.
36 It's antithetical not only to our conception of human rights and dignity, but to our conception
37 of ourselves – a people founded on the premise that all are created equal"; and

38 WHEREAS, on July 8, 2003, during a trip to Goree Island, Senegal, a former slave port,
39 President George W. Bush acknowledged slavery's continuing legacy in American life and
40 the need to confront that legacy when he stated that slavery "was . . . one of the greatest
41 crimes of history . . . The racial bigotry fed by slavery did not end with slavery or with
42 segregation. And many of the issues that still trouble America have roots in the bitter
43 experience of other times. But however long the journey, our destiny is set: liberty and
44 justice for all"; and

45 WHEREAS, a genuine apology, not from individuals but from the governing institutions of
46 this state, having already answered the call of freedom, is an important and necessary step
47 in this process of developing a shared understanding and ensuring racial reconciliation
48 among the citizens of Georgia; and

49 WHEREAS, an apology for centuries of brutal dehumanization and injustices cannot erase
50 the past, but confession of the wrongs committed can speed racial healing and reconciliation
51 and help Georgians confront the ghosts of their past and to see ourselves in each other.

52 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED AND ENACTED BY THE GENERAL
53 ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA that the State of Georgia hereby acknowledges with profound
54 regret the fundamental injustice, cruelty, brutality, and inhumanity of slavery and Jim Crow
55 and reaffirms this state's commitment to freedom and the inalienable rights of the men and
56 women who pursue it.

57 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Secretary of the Senate is authorized and directed
58 to make appropriate copies of this resolution available for distribution to the Millennial Civil
59 Rights Campaign, the public, and the press.