

SENATE RESOLUTION

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By Senator O'Ban

1       WHEREAS, The evil and abhorrent practice of slavery reached the  
2 shores of colonial America less than a century after the first  
3 European settlement there, starting with the first Africans who were  
4 brought, against their will, to Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619, a year  
5 before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth; and

6       WHEREAS, The establishment of slavery in colonial America became  
7 a cruel irony since the United States of America, the land of the  
8 free, was later founded on the principles embodied in our Declaration  
9 of Independence that "all men are created equal" and "endowed by  
10 their Creator" with "certain unalienable Rights" including "Life,  
11 liberty and the pursuit of Happiness;" and

12       WHEREAS, African Americans were denied these rights by the  
13 practice of slavery; and

14       WHEREAS, When the Founding Fathers met in 1787 to create the  
15 Constitution and set America's new federal government on a firm  
16 course, compromises were made, including allowing slavery to  
17 continue, denying African Americans their individual rights and  
18 dignity, tearing apart families, and contradicting the American  
19 values enshrined in the Declaration of Independence; and

20       WHEREAS, By 1860, nearly four million slaves, one-eighth of  
21 America's population at that time, were kept in bondage in America's  
22 Southern or border states, and those who supported slavery in America

1 sought to "strengthen, perpetuate, and extend this interest  
2 [slavery]" even at the cost of a Civil War; and  
3 WHEREAS, The American Civil War began in 1861 and lasted four  
4 bloody years, resulting in more than 650,000 deaths suffered between  
5 the two sides; and  
6 WHEREAS, On January 1, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln took a  
7 monumental first step toward ending slavery in America by issuing the  
8 Emancipation Proclamation, which declared that the slaves of the  
9 Confederate states that rebelled against the Union were free; and  
10 WHEREAS, President Lincoln fought valiantly for the passage of a  
11 13th Amendment to the United States Constitution, to ban slavery in  
12 America forever, but a bullet fired by a Confederate sympathizer  
13 ended Lincoln's life eight months before the 13th Amendment was  
14 ratified on December 6, 1865; and  
15 WHEREAS, The potential for a full and meaningful Reconstruction  
16 following the Civil War died with President Lincoln's assassination  
17 just days after the Confederate capital fell, and the largest  
18 Confederate army surrendered; and  
19 WHEREAS, Vice President Andrew Johnson, who assumed the  
20 presidency upon Lincoln's death, failed to lead a reunited America to  
21 a complete and true Reconstruction, as Johnson lacked commitment to  
22 the civil rights of the former slaves; and  
23 WHEREAS, President Johnson failed to thwart the efforts within  
24 the former Confederate states to suppress the rights of African  
25 Americans through enactment of "Black Codes" and other discriminatory  
26 laws and practices; and  
27 WHEREAS, The "Radical Republicans" led Congress to enact a  
28 Reconstruction agenda that expanded civil rights and sought to  
29 realize the goal of a more equal America; and  
30 WHEREAS, The national achievements of the Reconstruction era  
31 included the ratification of the 13th Amendment, as well as the 1868  
32 ratification of the 14th Amendment, which ensured the citizenship of  
33 former slaves, and guaranteed equal protection under the law, and the  
34 1870 ratification of the 15th Amendment, which proclaimed the rights  
35 of citizens to vote, regardless of "race, color, or previous  
36 condition of servitude;" and  
37 WHEREAS, America's Reconstruction era saw the historic election  
38 of about two thousand African American officeholders in our nation,  
39 from local positions and state legislative seats to the United States

1 Senate, a period that would give African Americans a more active role  
2 in the political, economic, and social life of the South; and

3 WHEREAS, The Reconstruction era ended after federal troops  
4 withdrew from the old Confederacy in 1877, soon followed by the overt  
5 and covert efforts of many Southern whites to reverse the newfound  
6 freedoms of African Americans, such as passage of laws in Southern  
7 states that took away rights of African Americans, including  
8 preventing them from freely participating in elections; and

9 WHEREAS, Despite these setbacks, the dream of equal rights for  
10 African Americans continued to flicker for nearly a century until it  
11 reignited with the civil rights movement in the 1960s, led by the  
12 Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and others, and was advanced by  
13 the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights  
14 Act, both of which received strong bipartisan support in Congress;

15 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, That the Washington State Senate  
16 remember, recognize, and honor America's Reconstruction era and its  
17 advances in civil rights for African Americans.

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