MISSISSIPPI LEGISLATURE REGULAR SESSION 2011

By: Representative Perkins To: Rules

HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 2

A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION APOLOGIZING FOR THE WRONGS OF SLAVERY, EXPRESSING PROFOUND REGRET FOR MISSISSIPPI'S ROLE IN SLAVERY, THE DISCRIMINATION OF ITS LEGACY AND URGING RECONCILIATION.

WHEREAS, slavery has been documented as a worldwide practice since antiquity, dating back to 3600 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 auctions as chattel, like inanimate property or animals; and

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 disassembled, as husbands and wives, mothers and daughters, and fathers and sons were sold into slavery apart from one another; 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 reimpose 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, during the 1995 Regular Session, the Mississippi Legislature, in an act to remove the tainted perception of our state, formally ratified the 13th Amendment to the United States

Constitution and abolished slavery with passage of Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 547; 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 and 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 Mississippi, the vestiges of slavery are ever before African-American citizens, from the overt racism of the 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 role 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 Mississippi's history or discounted; moreover, the faith, perseverance, hope and endless triumph 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 Mississippians and inspiring the nation to acquiesce might be accomplished if the state acknowledged and atoned for its pivotal role in the slavery of Africans; and

WHEREAS, acknowledging that there is a difference between what is wrong and right, and that slavery as an American "Institution" was a wrong committed upon millions of African Americans and that their ancestors are the beneficiaries of such wrongs, including, but not limited to, segregation under Jim Crow, housing discrimination, discrimination in education, and other ills inflicted upon African-American people; and

WHEREAS, the State of Mississippi, the Governor and its citizens are conscious that under slavery many atrocities and gross violations of human rights were imposed upon African Americans, and that acknowledging these facts can and will avert future tragedies; and

WHEREAS, the State of Mississippi has a long history of civil rights involvement and is on the cutting edge of effective measures to promote racial tolerance:

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI, THE SENATE CONCURRING THEREIN, That we express our profound regret for the State of Mississippi's role in slavery and that we apologize for the wrongs inflicted by slavery and its aftereffects in the United States of America, express our deepest sympathies and solemn regrets to those who were enslaved and the descendants of slaves, who were deprived of life, human dignity and those constitutional protections accorded all citizens of the United States, and we encourage the remembrance and teachings about the history of slavery, Jim Crow laws and modern day slavery, to ensure that these tragedies will neither be forgotten nor repeated.

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

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That copies of this resolution be furnished to each state elected official of Mississippi; the Commissioner of Institutions of Higher Learning; the President of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Mississippi Chapter; the Director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Mississippi Chapter; requesting that they further disseminate copies of this resolution to their respective constituents so as to apprise them of the sense of the Mississippi Legislature in this matter; and to the members of the Capitol Press Corps.

ST: Slavery; issue apology for state's role in upholding and perpetuating the institution of in Mississippi.