

By: Senators D. Sullivan, G. Stubblefield

By: Representative Bentley

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION
TO COMMEMORATE AMERICAN HISTORY.

Subtitle

TO COMMEMORATE AMERICAN HISTORY.

WHEREAS, the accomplishments of African-Americans throughout America's history have been abundant, significant, and far-reaching, helping shape America into the exceptional nation of unprecedented opportunity and achievement it has become over the centuries; and

WHEREAS, the countless contributions by African-Americans have been varied and diverse as well as indispensable and inspiring, influencing areas such as politics, religion, military, education, science, research, business, entrepreneurship, and other realms; and

WHEREAS, many important and indisputable facts from American history have been underemphasized and overlooked but are worth presenting; and

WHEREAS, the first African slaves were originally brought to North America unwillingly, having been conquered, captured, and sold by other African tribes and slave traders to the Dutch and other traders journeying to America; and

WHEREAS, the first African slaves in North America were brought by the Spanish to their colonies in the Florida region in 1565; and



WHEREAS, the first African slaves in a North American English colony arrived in Virginia in 1619 but became indentured servants instead of remaining slaves, earning their freedom, with the state giving them their own land after a set number of years; and

WHEREAS, the first documented occasion of legalized chattel slavery in the English colonies of America did not occur until 1654 in Virginia, when free African-American Anthony Johnson sued in court and won the right to own another African-American for life; and

WHEREAS, a slave ship arrived in 1646 in Massachusetts, whereupon the slaves were freed and the slave owners imprisoned and charged with the capital crime of man stealing; and

WHEREAS, the two (2) English colonies of Virginia and Massachusetts began a dual track for African-Americans, with much slavery and oppression in the South and much freedom and opportunity in the North; and

WHEREAS, African-Americans contributed much to America's rich colonial history, including political officials such as Mathias de Sousa, elected to office in 1642; Wentworth Cheswell, elected to office in 1768 and reelected for the next forty-nine (49) years to eight (8) different political offices; and Thomas Hercules, elected to office in 1793; and

WHEREAS, one (1) of the first casualties of the movement for American independence was Black Patriot Crispus Attucks, who was shot by British soldiers during the Boston Massacre; and

WHEREAS, notable African-American soldiers in the American Revolution included James Armistead Lafayette, Jack Sisson, Prince Whipple, Peter Salem, Salem Poor, Lemuel Haynes, Richard Allen, Prince Estabrook, Jordan Freeman, Oliver Cromwell, Brister Baker, and numerous others; and

WHEREAS, during the American Revolution, African-Americans and whites served together in integrated units in virtually every battle, and African-Americans routinely reenlisted, voluntarily serving an average of eight (8)

times longer than white soldiers; and

WHEREAS, influential African-American colonial clergymen included Richard Allen, founder of America's first African-American Christian denomination; Absalom Jones, the first African-American clergyman to be ordained into a major Christian denomination; Lemuel Haynes, the first African-American to receive a degree of higher education and to have a sermon published, pastoring multiple white churches; and Harry Hoosier, credited by some historians as being the namesake of "The Hoosier State" of Indiana; and

WHEREAS, African-Americans also contributed much to America's rich history well beyond the colonial era and the founding of America; and

WHEREAS, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there were many distinguished African-American entrepreneurs and business leaders, including Paul Cuffe, Stephen Smith, Clara Brown, Robert Gordon, Bridget Mason, Charles Richard Patterson, and many others; and

WHEREAS, notable nineteenth century African-American soldiers included Robert Smalls, the first African-American United States naval captain and Major General in the South Carolina militia; and William Harvey Carney, Christian Fleetwood, Alfred Hilton, Charles Veale, and Alexander Kelly, five (5) of the eight (8) African-Americans who received the medal of honor for protecting the American flag, with many others receiving that medal for other acts of courage; and

WHEREAS, in the nineteenth century, influential African-Americans included federal political leaders such as Hiram Rhodes Revels, the first African-American United States senator; Blanche Kelso Bruce, the second African-American United States senator and the first African-American man to be nominated for Vice President and to have his name printed on federal currency; Joseph Hayne Rainey, the first African-American person to preside over the United States House of Representatives; many other African-Americans at the federal level; and hundreds more African-Americans at the state legislative level; and

WHEREAS, distinguished African-American ministers and civil rights advocates should be honored by all Americans, including Frederick Douglass, Henry Highland Garnet, Booker T. Washington, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, and Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr; and

WHEREAS, many critics today wrongly assert that the United States Constitution was a proslavery document, pointing to the three-fifths clause and claiming that the United States Constitution says that African-Americans are only three-fifths of a person; and

WHEREAS, famous African-American clergyman and abolitionist Frederick Douglass had been told this and initially accepted that the United States Constitution was a proslavery document until he personally read it for himself as well as the writings of those who wrote it; and

WHEREAS, after that personal examination, Mr. Douglass concluded that the United States Constitution was an antislavery document and declared, "I defy the presentation of a single proslavery clause in it" and that to the contrary, "it will be found to contain principles and purposes, entirely hostile to the existence of slavery"; and

WHEREAS, too many today overlook or ignore America's ongoing positive record on race and slavery; and

WHEREAS, by 1804, every northern state in the nation had passed laws for the abolition of slavery, making it one (1) of the earliest regions in the world to do so; and

WHEREAS, of the scores of nations in the world in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, in 1807 America became one (1) of the first nations in the world to sign a law banning the slave trade, with Great Britain doing so shortly thereafter; and while the British law went into effect two (2) months before America's did, it contained major loopholes, causing America to be the first nation in the world with an immediate ban on the slave trade; and

WHEREAS, beginning in 1819, America dispatched and maintained a naval presence off the coast of Africa to prevent other nations from taking slaves out of Africa, and American naval vessels intercepted and turned back numerous ships from other countries, continuing this effort until the outbreak of the Civil War, when those ships were called home in 1861 to fight the southern slave-holding Confederacy; and

WHEREAS, America was not a major world leader in the African slave trade; and of the twelve million five hundred thousand (12,500,000) Africans brutally removed from Africa and sold into slavery from 1501 until 1875, approximately five million eight hundred thousand (5,800,000) were made slaves in Portuguese holdings; three million three hundred thousand (3,300,000) in English holdings; one million four hundred thousand (1,400,000) in French holdings; one million one hundred thousand (1,100,000) in Spanish holdings; six hundred thousand (600,000) in Dutch holdings; and three hundred thousand (300,000) brought to the United States; and

WHEREAS, of the nearly two hundred (200) nations in the world today, ninety-four (94) still have not criminalized slavery or the slave trade, and there are currently forty million (40,000,000) slaves in the world, including individuals forced into labor and into marriage; and

WHEREAS, America is currently one (1) of the top nations in the world in fighting slavery, the slave trade, and human trafficking; and

WHEREAS, despite America's early progress and work in advancing the issue of securing racial freedom and equality, that issue regrettably became more political and polarized; and

WHEREAS, for example, a 1789 law that prohibited slavery in the federal territories was reversed in 1820 when Congress passed the Missouri Compromise; and

WHEREAS, in 1850 Congress passed the reprehensible Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, codifying and denying even minimal constitutional protections to accused slaves and allowing slave hunters to take African-Americans from the

North to slavery in the South; and

WHEREAS, in 1854 Congress passed the Kansas Nebraska Act, legally allowing the extension of slavery all the way north to Canada through many formerly antislavery territories; and

WHEREAS, in May of 1854, following the passage of these proslavery laws in Congress, a number of antislavery members of Congress joined with antislavery members of Congress from the Whig, Free Soil, and emancipationist parties; and

WHEREAS, in 1856 Republicans issued their first national platform, affirming its call not only for the end of slavery but also for equality and civil rights; and

WHEREAS, in 1857 the United States Supreme Court delivered the reprehensible Dred Scott decision, declaring that African-Americans were not persons but instead were property and therefore had no rights, and that Congress could not ban slavery anywhere; and

WHEREAS, in 1860 the Democratic Party Platform supported slavery and distributed a copy of the Dred Scott decision along with their platform to show they abided by the Court's disgraceful decision; and

WHEREAS, in the 1860 presidential election, antislavery candidate Abraham Lincoln represented the Republican Party, and the rest of the vote was split between three (3) proslavery candidates, Stephen Douglas of Illinois, John Breckenridge of Kentucky, and John Bell of Tennessee, with Lincoln receiving thirty-nine (39%) of the national popular vote but sixty percent (60%) of the electoral votes, and the Democrats receiving sixty-one (61%) of the popular vote and forty percent (40%) of the electoral votes, meaning that Abraham Lincoln became president; and

WHEREAS, Republicans not only won the presidency but also gained control of the United States House of Representatives and Senate after the majority of Democrats resigned and seceded, whereupon Congress began passing

antislavery and civil rights laws; and

WHEREAS, in 1865 when the 13th Amendment was passed to abolish slavery, twenty-one percent (21%) of Democrats in Congress voted to end slavery; and

WHEREAS, on the same day that Congress abolished slavery, Senator Charles Sumner took African-American attorney, teacher, dentist, and physician John Rock to the United States Supreme Court, where he became the first African-American to be admitted to the United States Supreme Court bar; and

WHEREAS, after the passage of the 13th Amendment, Congress asked African-American pastor the Reverend Henry Highland Garnet, a former slave, to preach a sermon to commemorate the end of slavery at the church service held every Sunday in the Hall of the House of Representatives inside the United States Capitol; and

WHEREAS, the Reverend Garnet preached his powerful sermon on Sunday, February 12, 1865, saying, "What is slavery? Too well do I know what it is ... I was born among the cherished institutions of slavery. My earliest recollections of parents, friends, and the home of my childhood are clouded with its wrongs. The first sight that met my eyes was my Christian mother enslaved."; and

WHEREAS, by giving this sermon, Reverend Garnet became the first African-American officially to speak in the halls of Congress; and

WHEREAS, the 14th Amendment securing civil rights for African-Americans was passed without a single Democrat vote of support, and the 15th Amendment securing voting rights was then passed; and

WHEREAS, when African-Americans in southern states received civil rights, including the right to vote, they promptly elected state Republican legislatures across the South, which moved quickly to protect voting rights for African-Americans, prohibit segregation, and open public education, public transportation, state police, schools, and other institutions to

African-Americans; and

WHEREAS, African-Americans became active legislators in the South, with the first forty (42) African-Americans elected to the state legislature in Texas as Republicans, along with the first one hundred twenty-seven (127) African-American legislators in Louisiana; the first one hundred and three (103) in Alabama; the first one hundred twelve (112) in Mississippi; the first one hundred ninety (190) in South Carolina; the first forty-six (46) in Virginia; the first thirty (30) in Florida; the first thirty (30) in North Carolina; and the first forty-one (41) in Georgia; and

WHEREAS, the first twenty-three (23) African-American legislators elected to the United States Congress were largely from southern states where thirteen (13) of them had been slaves; and

WHEREAS, in 1866, white southerners began to retaliate against African-American advancement in the southern states not only by the manipulation of election laws in the South but also by physical violence, as in Louisiana where forty (40) African-American and twenty (20) white individuals were killed, with one hundred fifty (150) more wounded at the Republican Party convention; and

WHEREAS, also in 1866, Democrats openly acknowledged in congressional hearings that they formed the Ku Klux Klan as a political affiliate to help regain Democrat control in elections; and

WHEREAS, the national leader and Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan was former Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest, who was an honored member of the Democrat National Convention of 1868; and

WHEREAS, the Ku Klux Klan's reign of violence targeted and lynched many African-Americans but also white individuals, with three thousand four hundred forty-six (3,446) African-Americans and one thousand two hundred ninety-seven (1,297) whites lynched between 1882 and 1968; and

WHEREAS, by 1875, Congress had successfully passed almost twenty-four

(24) civil rights laws to secure equality and full civil rights; and

WHEREAS, in 1876 Democrats regained control of the United States House of Representatives, blocked further civil rights progress, and began repealing existing civil rights laws so that it would be another eighty-nine (89) years before the next federal civil rights law was passed; and

WHEREAS, Congress had opposed equal education for all students, with eighty-seven percent (87%) of congressional Democrats voting against the 1872 civil rights education bill, while at the same time schools and churches in which African-American children were being taught were being burned, resulting in segregated, inferior, and dilapidated schools for blacks becoming the norm in the southern states; and

WHEREAS, in 1919, one (1) of the bloodiest racial confrontations in the history of the country occurred with the Elaine Massacre in Elaine, Arkansas, in which hundreds of African-Americans and five (5) white individuals are estimated to have been killed following a meeting of courageous African-Americans who were taking a bold stand for equal opportunity, individual liberty, and the right to make a living for themselves and their families; and

WHEREAS, in the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the United States Supreme Court finally struck down mandatory state segregation laws in education, thus reinstating the anti-segregation standard that Congress had passed nearly seventy-five (75) years earlier in the Civil Rights Act of 1875, which had been strongly opposed by Democrats at the time; and

WHEREAS, ninety-nine (99) Democrats and two (2) Republicans in the United States Congress, nineteen (19) Senators and eighty-two (82) Representatives, signed the "Southern Manifesto" denouncing the Court's 1954 decision to end segregation; and

WHEREAS, although under President Franklin Roosevelt the 1944 Democratic Party Platform for the first time called for an end to racial discrimination, Congress still killed every piece of civil rights legislation

introduced in that era; and

WHEREAS, when President Harry S. Truman introduced an aggressive ten-point civil rights legislative package that included an anti-lynching law, a ban on the poll tax, and desegregation of the military, Congress killed all of his proposals, including his proposed Civil Rights Commission; and

WHEREAS, President Dwight D. Eisenhower issued executive orders to eliminate racial discrimination and segregation in the District of Columbia and among federal contractors, and became the first president to appoint an African-American, E. Frederic Morrow, to an executive position on the White House staff; and

WHEREAS, in 1957 President Eisenhower proposed a bold civil rights bill to increase African-American voting rights and protections, but it was weakened by Senator James Eastland, who is credited with killing every civil rights bill that came before his committee in the 1950s; and

WHEREAS, in 1960 President John F. Kennedy refused to sign an executive order to integrate public housing until the violent racial discord in Birmingham in 1963 caused him to change his mind, after which he began promoting the civil rights bill; and

WHEREAS, when President Lyndon Johnson promoted the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which, like President Kennedy, he had earlier voted against while serving in the United States Senate, it was halted by Senators Robert Byrd and Richard Russell until Senator Everett Dirksen and Congress were able to move the measure forward, allowing the Civil Rights Act of 1964, followed by the Voting Rights Act of 1965, to be signed into law; and

WHEREAS, Democrats had it completely within their power to pass those landmark civil rights bills but did not, and Republicans overwhelmingly supported the Civil Rights Act of 1964, with eighty percent (80%) of Republicans voting for that bill, a percentage of support almost twenty (20) percentage points higher than that of the Democrats; and

WHEREAS, the most recognizable civil rights leader of that era was the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., a Christian minister who was with President Johnson when the famous civil rights bill was signed into law; and

WHEREAS, the contributions of not only these noted African-Americans but also of countless others in these and many other facets of American life and culture should be recognized and honored; and

WHEREAS, the story of African-American heroes over the past three hundred and fifty (350) years needs desperately to be told and known by all Americans today but is often ignored or rewritten; and

WHEREAS, these heroes are not just African-American heroes but are American heroes and should be honored by all Americans, regardless of race or ethnicity; and

WHEREAS, Arkansas is committed to preserving historical literacy and honoring the names and lives of those who have contributed so much to America becoming the remarkable nation it is among the nations of the world,

NOW THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE NINETY-THIRD GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ARKANSAS, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING THEREIN:

THAT the Senate urge each citizen to become familiar with the names in this resolution and investigate and learn about their extraordinary achievements; celebrate the contributions of all Americans, especially those of African-Americans during Black History Month; and are grateful and thankful for their contributions across previous generations, which made America the exceptional nation it is today.