

ONE HUNDREDTH LEGISLATURE
SECOND SESSION
LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION 284

Introduced by Pedersen, 39.

Committee: Judiciary

WHEREAS, slavery has been documented as a worldwide practice since antiquity, dating back to 3500 B.C. in ancient Mesopotamia; and

WHEREAS, during the existence of the Atlantic Slave Trade, millions of people from the continent of Africa became involuntary immigrants to the New World, and millions more died during passage across the waters of the Atlantic. 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 products and manufactured goods and other merchandise; and

WHEREAS, many African captives resisted enslavement by fleeing from slave forts on the west coast of Africa, and many mutinied aboard slave trading vessels, casting themselves into the waters of the 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 auction 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 their heritage; women and girls were raped, and families were disassembled as husbands and wives, mothers and daughters, and fathers and sons were sold into slavery apart from one another; and

WHEREAS, despite a complex series of colonial laws being enacted to relegate the status of Africans and their descendants, these same Africans proved their loyalty, dedication, and service to the country, including heroic and distinguished service in the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, and all other conflicts and military actions involving the United States military; and

WHEREAS, on May 30, 1854, President Franklin Pierce signed into law the Kansas-Nebraska Act opening lands west of the Missouri to white settlement, extinguishing the Indian titles to these lands, wherein settlers would have been trespassers; and

WHEREAS, this Kansas-Nebraska Act allowed settlers to decide for themselves whether or not slavery would be allowed to exist within their borders; and

WHEREAS, the discovery of gold in California brought thousands upon thousands of settlers to the New World from lands in Europe where they had been subjected to tyranny for hundreds of

years, seeing in the opening of this new Kansas-Nebraska Territory a refuge and opportunity for new life; and

WHEREAS, river towns along the Missouri River became jumping-off places for the trek westward for these new immigrants as well as Americans who were just waiting for the land to open that they might take part in building of a new empire of settlement and commerce; and

WHEREAS, land speculators could stake out 320 acres, spread out to adjacent lots, and incorporate; and

WHEREAS, some land speculators brought an attitude of pro-slavery, and with them slaves; and

WHEREAS, Nebraska was a center of turmoil over the slavery issue, with Iowa being a "free" state, and Missouri being a "slave" state, and Kansas, where pro-slavery and anti-slavery feuds earned it the name "Bleeding/Bloody Kansas"; and

WHEREAS, in Nebraska male slaves were laborers, such as those working for the freighters, while female slaves were housekeepers, cooks, and washerwomen; and

WHEREAS, in the years prior to and during the civil war, the mere presence of slaves in Nebraska Territory fueled controversy and heated debate; and

WHEREAS, in 1860 the sheriff's sale of two slaves to settle a court financial judgment interrupted orderly legislative processes; and

WHEREAS, the first territorial legislature passed a resolution prohibiting the settlement of "negroes and mulattoes"; and

WHEREAS, the fifth territorial session referred a bill to

abolish slavery to special committee; and

WHEREAS, William H. Taylor of Otoe County, chairman of the committee to which the bill was referred, when questioned as to whether slavery exists in Nebraska, cited several examples and concluded with "the fact is indisputable. African slavery does practically exist in Nebraska. Our eyes cannot deceive us, and if slavery is wrong, morally, politically, socially, it is wrong to hold one slave. There is no distinction in principle between holding one human being in bondage, and holding ten thousand"; and

WHEREAS, the system of slavery had become so entrenched in United States 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, lynching, disenfranchisement of African-American voters, Black Codes designed to impose again the subordination of African-Americans, and Jim Crow laws that instituted a rigid system of state sanctioned segregation in all areas of life and 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 positive attributes; and

WHEREAS, our nation acknowledges the crimes and persecution visited upon other people during World War II lest the world forget, yet the very mention of the broken promise of "40 acres and a mule" to former slaves or of the existence of racism today evokes denial from many quarters of any responsibility for the centuries of legally sanctioned deprivation of African-Americans of their endowed rights or for contemporary policies that perpetuate the existing state of affairs; 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....For 250 years the captives endured an assault on their culture and their dignity....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 to injustice....We can finally judge the past by the standards of President John Adams, who called slavery 'an evil of colossal magnitude'....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 trouble America have roots in the bitter experience of other times"; and

WHEREAS, European and African nations have apologized for their roles 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 perpetuated upon African-Americans; and

WHEREAS, an apology for centuries of brutal dehumanization and injustices cannot erase the past, but confessions 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, acknowledging that there is a difference between wrong and right, and that slavery as an American "institution" was a wrong committed upon millions of African-Americans and that their descendants continue to suffer from the effects of Jim Crow laws, segregation, housing discrimination, discrimination in education, and other ills inflicted upon African-Americans; and

WHEREAS, the State of Nebraska, the Legislature, and its citizens are conscious that the atrocity of slavery existed in what is now the State of Nebraska from the opening days of settlement.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE MEMBERS OF THE ONE HUNDREDTH LEGISLATURE OF NEBRASKA, SECOND SESSION:

1. That the Legislature expresses its profound regret for the state's role in slavery, especially during its Territorial period prior to statehood, and apologizes for wrongs inflicted by slavery and its after effects in Nebraska and in the United States.

2. That the Legislature expresses its deepest sympathies

and solemn regrets to those who were enslaved and the descendants of those slaves, who were deprived of life, human dignity, and the constitutional protections accorded all citizens of the United States.

3. That the Legislature encourages all citizens to teach their children about the history of slavery and its effects, especially as concerns modern day slavery, to ensure that these tragedies will neither be forgotten nor repeated.

4. It is the intent of the Legislature that this resolution shall not be used in, or be the basis of, any type of litigation.