

LAW, JUSTICE, AND ETHICS

Resolution LJE-17-31

A RESOLUTION ON REPARATIONS FOR THE DESCENDANTS OF AFRICAN SLAVES IN THE UNITED STATES

WHEREAS, four million Africans and their descendants were enslaved in the United States from the years of 1619 to 1865, and the institution of slavery was constitutionally and statutorily sanctioned by the government of the United States during the years 1789 through 1865;

WHEREAS, slavery in America constituted an immoral and inhumane deprivation of life, liberty, citizenship rights and cultural heritage for enslaved Africans and denied them the fruits of their own labor while building a great and wealthy nation;

WHEREAS, enslaved Africans during cotton-picking season usually labored in the field the whole of the daylight, and then spent a good part of the night ginning and bailing, thereby creating tremendous wealth for slaveholders who reaped the vast economic benefits of the American garment industry;

WHEREAS, since the end of the period after the Civil War known as Reconstruction, when the Federal Government briefly attempted to compensate the former slave community for hundreds of years of bondage, for nearly 100 years, millions of African Americans were forced into quasi-slavery conditions through various state-sanctioned means like the convict leasing system, share cropping, and debt peonage;

WHEREAS, since the end of the period after the Civil War known as Reconstruction, African Americans have been widely prevented through legal and extralegal measures from obtaining equal education, employment, housing and health care; in short prevented from joining the American middle class in substantial numbers;

WHEREAS, a preponderance of scholarly, legal, community evidentiary documentation and popular culture markers have been made into the on-going inquiry into the effects of the institution of slavery and its legacy of on-going systemic structures of discrimination on living African-Americans and society in the United States;

WHEREAS, in 2001, the United Nations sponsored a World Conference Against Racism, (WCAR) attended by 14,000 world leaders and concerned groups and peoples, recognizing that people of African descent were victims of slavery and the slave trade, and that these practices were appalling tragedies in the history of humanity not only because of their abhorrent barbarism but also in terms of their magnitude, organized nature and especially their negation of the essence of the victims;

WHEREAS, WCAR, further acknowledging that slavery and the slave trade are a crime against humanity and should always have been so; that racism and racial discrimination grew therefrom, and the effects and persistence have contributed to lasting social and economic inequalities, and that people of African descent continue to be victims of the consequences of those practices;

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WHEREAS, WCAR concluded that there is moral obligation on the States to take appropriate and effective measures to halt and reverse the lasting consequences of those practices including providing avenues for just and adequate reparation;

WHEREAS, in 2008 and 2009 both Houses of Congress apologized for the "injustice, cruelty, brutality and inhumanity" of slavery;

WHEREAS, on December 23, 2013 United Nations General Assembly declared January 1, 2015 to December 31, 2024 to be the International Decade of People of African Descent, understanding people of African descent globally continue to be victims of racism and discrimination both direct and indirect, de facto and de jure, and they continue to manifest themselves in inequality and disadvantage, and

WHEREAS, the United Nations Working Group of Experts for People of African Descent, in concluding their 2016 United States visit, stated that there is a profound need to acknowledge in the United States that the Transatlantic slave trade was a crime against humanity and among the major sources and manifestations of racial discrimination, and that African Americans continue to be victims of their consequences; and that these past injustices and crimes against African Americans need to be addressed with reparatory justice;

WHEREAS, the Illinois House of Representatives unanimously passed a resolution calling on † President Obama to commission a study to detail the economic impact of the slave trade and the use of slave labor; and how Emancipation, while freeing them of their literal bonds, and ending an immoral practice, did not guarantee equality in education, employment, housing, and access to quality affordable health care;

WHEREAS, the Illinois House of Representatives unanimously passed a resolution calling on President Obama to commission a study to include an analysis for how reparations for past harms have benefited the ethnic groups that have received them during the course of American history; and a proposal for reparations to the descendants of slaves in America, and how those reparations can help overcome obstacles that still exist today in education, employment, housing, health care, and justice;

WHEREAS, the National Black Caucus of State Legislators has called on reparations in LJE-04-29 "Calling for Reparations for the Descendants of African slaves in the United States," and

WHEREAS, the United States has a long history of supporting reparations and reconciliation including a formal apology and reparations to Japanese Americans interned during World War II and reparations to Native Americans, Mexican Americans, and Filipino Americans.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the National Black Caucus of State Legislators (NBCSL) in support of Illinois House Resolution HR 1011 call for a federal African-American Reparation Study Commission formed by President Obama through the President's executive powers;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the purpose of this commission is to study and consider

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Reparation proposals/process for African Americans in accord with the purposes of Illinois House Resolution 1011 and US Congress House Resolution 40 (HR40) introduced by Congressman John Conyers (D-MI);

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the National Black Caucus of the State Legislators calls for the United States House and Senate to schedule and conduct hearings to examine equitable methods to finally award reparations to descendants of African American slaves who were forced to supply their labor under extreme conditions of tyranny and injustice to build this nation; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that a copy of this resolution be transmitted to the President of the United States, the Vice President of the United States, members of the United States House of Representatives and the United States Senate, and other federal and state government officials as appropriate.

SPONSOR: Senator Donne E. Trotter (IL)

Committee of Jurisdiction: Law, Justice, and Ethics Policy Committee

Certified by Committee Co-Chair: Representative Reginald Meeks (KY)

Ratified in Plenary Session: Ratification Date is December 3, 2016

Ratification is certified by: Senator Catherine Pugh (MD), President