

HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 56

Designating the third Saturday of June, in 2007 and in each succeeding year, as "Juneteenth" Freedom Day in Virginia.

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 22, 2007

WHEREAS, Virginia is home to the first permanent English settlement in the New World, which was established at Jamestown in 1607; and

WHEREAS, the first record of slavery in Colonial America is that of a Dutch ship that brought 20 Africans to the English colony at Jamestown in 1619, to labor first as indentured servants, who later were dehumanized by the inception of Colonial Virginia's "Peculiar Institution" of slavery; and

WHEREAS, Virginia's Slave Codes in the Henning Statutes at Large: Laws of Virginia, 1711-1738, Chapter IV, November 1711, 9th Anne, provided that "All Negro, mulatto, and Indian slaves within this dominion shall be held to be real estate"; and

WHEREAS, slavery's assertion that one individual has a property right over another contradicts America's sacred founding principles eloquently expressed in the Declaration of Independence, specifically, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness"; and

WHEREAS, in 1784 Thomas Jefferson proposed that Virginia and other states relinquish their claims to the Northwest Territories and, together with fellow Virginian James Madison, urged adoption of the Northwest Ordinance, which passed the Continental Congress on July 13, 1787, was signed by President George Washington, and stipulated that "There shall be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude in the said territory . . .," but failed to end the abominable practice of slavery already existing in Virginia; and

WHEREAS, the system of slavery became entrenched in Virginia's social fabric, and because America's founding principles were unattainable with our nation divided into two parts, one free and one enslaved, slavery had to be addressed as a national issue; and

WHEREAS, joining other Southern states, Virginia seceded from the Union on April 17, 1861, and with the South's preference for maintaining slavery at odds with the objectives of the North, Civil War descended upon the Old Dominion; and

WHEREAS, many slaves in Virginia fled human captivity by joining the Union Army when President Abraham Lincoln announced that any Negro man joining the Union Army would be given freedom; and

WHEREAS, President Abraham Lincoln's issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, did not end slavery in Virginia and only became effective in the Commonwealth with the enactment of Chapter 103 of Title 30 of the Code of Virginia in 1873; and

WHEREAS, news of freedom for enslaved Americans did not reach each state on the same date, and each state has its own account of this important announcement; and

WHEREAS, "Juneteenth," or June 19, 1865, is recognized as the date on which General Gordon Granger, upon arriving in Galveston, Texas, issued General Order Number Three, notifying the last enslaved Americans of their new legal status almost two and one-half years after the Emancipation Proclamation; and

WHEREAS, "Juneteenth" is observed by many African Americans and others as a special time of celebration, and they credit the survival of their forebears to faith in God, perseverance, hope, and triumph of the human spirit; and

WHEREAS, all Virginians, without regard to race, ethnicity, origin, creed, religion, and culture, share a common destiny and a desire for freedom and the determination to preserve our freedoms and extend these benefits to people abroad; and

WHEREAS, in 2007 Virginia will commemorate the 400th anniversary of the founding of Jamestown, and the Old Dominion's unique role in American history—its humble beginnings leading to the American Revolution, the stain of slavery and its legacy, and the ultimate victory of freedom for all men—will be visible to the nation and the world; and

WHEREAS, Virginia will again be set apart as a national leader in seeking to bridge a difficult past and complicated present to attain a harmonious and prosperous future, and the commemoration of "Juneteenth" offers an occasion to remember the bonds of our unity and common destiny; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, That the third Saturday of June, in 2007 and in each succeeding year, be designated as "Juneteenth" Freedom Day in Virginia; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the House of Delegates recognize the pain caused by the enslavement

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of generations of African Americans in Virginia, and call for reconciliation among all Virginians; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Governor call upon the people of the Commonwealth to reflect upon the significant roles and many contributions of African Americans to Virginia and the nation throughout history and today, and to celebrate this day with appropriate activities and events that honor this rich legacy; and, be it

RESOLVED FINALLY, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates post the designation of this day on the General Assembly's website.