ENROLLED

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 332

Acknowledging with profound regret the involuntary servitude of Africans and the exploitation of Native Americans, and calling for reconciliation among all Virginians.

Agreed to by the Senate, February 24, 2007
Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 24, 2007

WHEREAS, 2007 marks the 400th anniversary of the first permanent English settlement in the Americas, at Jamestown; and

WHEREAS, the legacies of the Jamestown settlement and the Virginia colony include ideas, institutions, a history distinctive to the American experiment in democracy, and a constellation of liberties enshrined in the Virginia Declaration of Rights and the Virginia and United States Constitutions; and

WHEREAS, the foremost expression of the ideals that bind us together as a people is found in the Declaration of Independence, which proclaims as "self-evident" the truths "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, despite the "self-evident" character of these fundamental principles, the moral standards of liberty and equality have been transgressed during much of Virginia's and America's history, and our Commonwealth and nation are striving to fulfill the ideals proclaimed by the founders to secure the "more perfect union" that is the aspiration of our national identity and charter; and

WHEREAS, these transgressions include the maltreatment and exploitation of Native Americans and the immoral institution of human slavery, policies and systems directly antithetical to and irreconcilable with the fundamental principle of human equality and freedom; and

WHEREAS, Native Americans inhabited the land throughout the New World and were the "first people" the early English settlers met upon landing on the shores of North America at Jamestown in 1607; and

WHEREAS, records relating to the early relations between Native Americans and the settlers indicate "the Mattaponi, a part of the powerful Powhatan chiefdom, greeted settlers in 1607 and, along with other Powhatan tribes, were visited by Captain John Smith," that "the Chickahominy Tribe had early contact with the English settlers due to their proximity to Jamestown," and that "the Rappahannock Indians, possessing 13 villages on the south and north sides of the Rappahannock River, first spoke to Captain John Smith in 1608 at their kingstowne, `Cat Point Creek'"; and

WHEREAS, Native Americans provided food for the settlers, aiding the survival of 32 settlers during the first winter and later taught them how to grow crops; and

WHEREAS, Native American leaders have worked diligently to preserve and protect their heritage, history, and culture, and when public education was denied Native American children, the leaders ensured their children's education by sending them to American Indian schools in Oklahoma and Kansas; and

WHEREAS, Virginia enacted laws to restrict the rights and liberties of Native Americans, including their ability to travel, testify in court, and inherit property, and a rigid social code created segregated schools and churches for whites, African Americans, and Native Americans; and

WHEREAS, the Racial Integrity Act of 1924 which institutionalized the "one drop rule," required a racial description of every person to be recorded at birth and banned interracial marriages, effectively rendering Native Americans with African ancestry extinct, and these policies have destroyed the ability of many of Virginia's indigenous people to prove continuous existence in order to gain federal recognition and the benefits such recognition confers; and

WHEREAS, during the course of the infamous Atlantic slave trade, millions of Africans became involuntary immigrants to the New World, and the first African slaves in the North American colonies were brought to Jamestown in 1619; 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 ethos of the Africans was shattered, they were brutalized, humiliated, dehumanized, and subjected to the indignity of being stripped of their names and heritage, 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, slavery, having been sanctioned and perpetuated through the laws of Virginia and the United States, ranks as the most horrendous of all depredations of human rights and violations of our

founding ideals in our nation's history, and the abolition of slavery was followed by systematic discrimination, enforced segregation, and other insidious institutions and practices toward Americans of African descent that were rooted in racism, racial bias, and racial misunderstanding; and

WHEREAS, the most abject apology for past wrongs cannot right them; yet the spirit of true repentance on behalf of a government, and, through it, a people, can promote reconciliation and healing, and avert the repetition of past wrongs and the disregard of manifested injustices; and

WHEREAS, in recent decades, Virginia's affirmation of the founding ideals of liberty and equality have been made evident by providing some of the nation's foremost trailblazers for civil rights and electing a grandson of slaves to the Commonwealth's highest elective office; and

WHEREAS, the story of Virginia's Native Americans and the enslavement of Africans and their descendants, the human carnage, and the dehumanizing atrocities committed during colonization and slavery, and, moreover, the faith, perseverance, hope, and endless triumphs of Native Americans and African Americans and their significant contributions to this Commonwealth and the nation should be embraced, celebrated, and retold for generations to come; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the General Assembly hereby acknowledge with profound regret the involuntary servitude of Africans and the exploitation of Native Americans, and call for reconciliation among all Virginians; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That on the occasion of the 400th anniversary of the settlement at Jamestown, the General Assembly call upon the people of the Commonwealth to express acknowledgment and thanksgiving for the contributions of Native Americans and African Americans to the Commonwealth and this nation, and to the propagation of the ideals of liberty, justice, and democracy; and, be it

RESOLVED FINALLY, That the Clerk of the Senate shall post this resolution on the General Assembly's website.