

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA -- 2001 SESSION

ENROLLED

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 607

Expressing the General Assembly's regret for Virginia's experience with eugenics.

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 2, 2001

Agreed to by the Senate, February 14, 2001

WHEREAS, the now-discredited pseudo-science of eugenics was based on theories first propounded in England by Francis Galton, the cousin and disciple of famed biologist Charles Darwin; and

WHEREAS, the goal of the "science" of eugenics was to improve the human race by eliminating what the movement's supporters considered hereditary disorders or flaws through selective breeding and social engineering; and

WHEREAS, the eugenics movement proved popular in the United States, with Indiana enacting the nation's first eugenics-based sterilization law in 1907, closely followed by Connecticut; and

WHEREAS, in 1924 Virginia passed two eugenics-related laws, the first, the Racial Integrity Act, defined a white person as having no trace of black blood and made it illegal for whites and non-Caucasians to marry; and

WHEREAS, the second 1924 measure permitted involuntary sterilization, the most egregious outcome of the lamentable eugenics movement in the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, under this act, those labeled "feeble-minded," including the "insane, idiotic, imbecile, feeble-minded or epileptic" could be involuntarily sterilized, so that they would not produce similarly disabled offspring; and

WHEREAS, in practice, the eugenics laws were used to target virtually any human shortcoming or malady, including alcoholism, syphilis and criminal behavior; and

WHEREAS, still another regrettable aspect of the eugenics laws was their use as a respectable, "scientific" veneer to cover activities of those who held blatantly racist views; and

WHEREAS, in a landmark 1927 decision, the United States Supreme Court upheld Virginia's involuntary sterilization of Carrie Buck, in an 8-1 ruling written by Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes; and

WHEREAS, from then until 1979, Virginia involuntarily sterilized some 8,000 people, with estimates of the precise number ranging from 7,450 to 8,300; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly expresses its profound regret over the Commonwealth's role in the eugenics movement in this country and the incalculable human damage done in the name of eugenics; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the General Assembly urge the citizens of the Commonwealth to become familiar with the history of the eugenics movement, in the belief that a more educated, enlightened and tolerant population will reject absolutely any such abhorrent pseudo-scientific movement in the future.

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