January 2009

Georgia Eugenics Resolution

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"Georgia Eugenics Resolution" (2009). Buck v Bell Documents. 47.
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A RESOLUTION

Expressing profound regret for Georgia’s participation in the eugenics movement in the United States and marking the centennial of the first eugenic sterilization law in the United States; and for other purposes.

WHEREAS, the so-called science of eugenics emerged in the late 19th century as an outgrowth of Darwinian evolutionary theory, first advanced by anthropologist and geneticist Francis Galton, a cousin of Charles Darwin; and

WHEREAS, in the early 20th century, this pseudo-scientific movement gained popularity in the United States and advocated the improvement of the human race by the application of Darwinian principles to eliminate supposed hereditary flaws such as mental disability and physical deformity and to alleviate human suffering through selective breeding and birth control; and

WHEREAS, eugenics was endorsed by so-called "progressive" academicians, scientists, politicians, and newspaper editors, often over religious objections that such matters "ought to be left to God"; and

WHEREAS, in 1907, Indiana became the first state to enact a eugenics based sterilization law, mandating the sterilization of "confirmed criminals, idiots, rapists, and imbeciles"; and

WHEREAS, eventually more than 30 states enacted similar compulsory sterilization laws, resulting in the forced sterilization of more than 65,000 individuals in the United States; and

WHEREAS, the Supreme Court sanctioned the practice of compulsory sterilization in the infamous 1927 decision by Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes in which the court upheld Virginia’s sterilization of a young woman in a mental health facility on the grounds that "three generations of imbeciles [were] enough"; and
WHEREAS, with the editorial support of The Atlanta Constitution, the Georgia General Assembly passed a eugenics law in 1935, but that law was vetoed by Governor Eugene Talmadge; and

WHEREAS, in 1937, after Governor Talmadge had left office, Georgia enacted a new law creating the State Board of Eugenics and authorizing the compulsory sterilization of Georgia’s patients in state mental health facilities as well as Georgia inmates in state prisons and reformatories; and

WHEREAS, Georgia’s eugenics law remained on the books until 1970; and

WHEREAS, more compulsory sterilizations were performed in Georgia between 1937 and 1970 than in any other state in the nation except North Carolina; and

WHEREAS, eugenics legislation devalued the sanctity of human life, placed claimed scientific benefit over basic human dignity, and denied the God given rights recognized by our Founding Fathers; and

WHEREAS, eugenics legislation targeted the most vulnerable among us, including the poor and racial minorities, wrongly dehumanizing them under the color of law and for the claimed purposes of public health and good; and

WHEREAS, in the past five years, several other states, including Virginia, Oregon, North Carolina, and California, have publicly repudiated their involvement in the eugenics movement; and

WHEREAS, the year 2007 marks the centennial of the first eugenic sterilization in the United States and the 70th anniversary of the passage of Georgia’s sterilization law.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE that the members of this body express their profound regret for Georgia’s participation in the eugenics movement and the injustices done under eugenics laws, including the forced sterilization of Georgia citizens.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the members of this body hereby support the full education of Georgia citizens about the eugenics movement in order to foster a respect for the fundamental dignity of human life and the God given rights recognized by our Founding Fathers.
BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Secretary of the Senate is authorized and directed to transmit an appropriate copy of this resolution to the public and the media.