

STATE OF MAINE

**IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD
TWO THOUSAND TWENTY-ONE**

**JOINT RESOLUTION RECOGNIZING FEBRUARY 2021 AS
BLACK HISTORY MONTH**

WHEREAS, Maine's Black history and the story of Maine's role in the Atlantic world slave economy have been largely effaced from our narratives and from our collective consciousness; and

WHEREAS, from the earliest arrivals of people from Europe and Africa in the Americas, Africans and African Americans have been part of the story of this land, and researchers have identified over 1,600 people of color who lived in what is now called the state of Maine prior to the year 1800; and

WHEREAS, Africans who were brought involuntarily to these shores suffered generations of enslavement and their descendants faced the injustices of lynch mobs, segregation and the denial of basic, fundamental rights; and

WHEREAS, Maine merchants were deeply entangled in the Atlantic world slave economy, as were the banks that handled their accounts and the insurance firms that secured their investments, and at a time when Havana, Cuba was the hub of the illicit slave trade, Portland was that city's number one trading partner; and

WHEREAS, it was not only Maine's coastal towns that were complicit in the global economy of enslavement through shipbuilding and merchant trading activities, but its inland regions as well: crops and livestock were routinely shipped in the "coastwise" trade to provision the sugar plantations of the West Indies, along with salted fish and even ice from this region; and

WHEREAS, great quantities of Maine timber were processed into barrel staves and shipped throughout the 18th and 19th centuries to the West Indies, where enslaved Africans were forced to fashion them into barrels; they then filled these barrels with the sugar and molasses that were shipped back to Portland and distilled into rum, which was used as currency in purchasing more captive Africans; and

WHEREAS, African Americans in all walks of life have shown resilience despite suffering under slavery and injustice and have made significant contributions throughout the history of the State and across the United States; and

WHEREAS, from the Revolutionary War through the abolitionist movement, to marches from Selma to Montgomery and across America today, and in this State, African Americans have remained devoted to the proposition that all of us are created equal, even when their own rights were denied; and

WHEREAS, the month of February is officially celebrated as Black History Month, which dates back to 1926 when Dr. Carter G. Woodson set aside a special period of time in February to recognize the heritage and achievements of African Americans; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED: That We, the Members of the One Hundred and Thirtieth Legislature now assembled in the First Regular Session, on behalf of the people we represent, take this opportunity to recognize the significance of Black History Month as an important time to honor the contributions of African Americans in the nation's history and encourage all people in the State to learn more about the past and to better understand the experiences that have shaped the State and the nation.