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Georgia Eugenics Resolution

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"Georgia Eugenics Resolution" (2009). *Buck v Bell Documents*. Paper 47. http://digitalarchive.gsu.edu/col_facpub/47

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Senate Resolution 247

By: Senators Shafer of the 48th, Rogers of the 21st, Johnson of the 1st, Moody of the 56th, Williams of the 19th and others

A RESOLUTION

- 1 Expressing profound regret for Georgia's participation in the eugenics movement in the
- 2 United States and marking the centennial of the first eugenic sterilization law in the United
- 3 States; and for other purposes.
- 4 WHEREAS, the so-called science of eugenics emerged in the late 19th century as an
- 5 outgrowth of Darwinian evolutionary theory, first advanced by anthropologist and geneticist
- 6 Francis Galton, a cousin of Charles Darwin; and
- 7 WHEREAS, in the early 20th century, this pseudo-scientific movement gained popularity
- 8 in the United States and advocated the improvement of the human race by the application of
- 9 Darwinian principles to eliminate supposed hereditary flaws such as mental disability and
- 10 physical deformity and to alleviate human suffering through selective breeding and birth
- 11 control; and
- 12 WHEREAS, eugenics was endorsed by so-called "progressive" academicians, scientists,
- politicians, and newspaper editors, often over religious objections that such matters "ought
- 14 to be left to God"; and
- 15 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
- 17 WHEREAS, eventually more than 30 states enacted similar compulsory sterilization laws,
- 18 resulting in the forced sterilization of more than 65,000 individuals in the United States; and
- 19 WHEREAS, the Supreme Court sanctioned the practice of compulsory sterilization in the
- 20 infamous 1927 decision by Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes in which the court upheld
- 21 Virginia's sterilization of a young woman in a mental health facility on the grounds that
- 22 "three generations of imbeciles [were] enough"; and

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1 WHEREAS, with the editorial support of *The Atlanta Constitution*, the Georgia General

- 2 Assembly passed a eugenics law in 1935, but that law was vetoed by Governor Eugene
- 3 Talmadge; and
- 4 WHEREAS, in 1937, after Governor Talmadge had left office, Georgia enacted a new law
- 5 creating the State Board of Eugenics and authorizing the compulsory sterilization of
- 6 Georgia's patients in state mental health facilities as well as Georgia inmates in state prisons
- 7 and reformatories; and
- 8 WHEREAS, Georgia's eugenics law remained on the books until 1970; and
- 9 WHEREAS, more compulsory sterilizations were performed in Georgia between 1937 and
- 10 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
- 13 our Founding Fathers; and
- 14 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
- 16 purposes of public health and good; and
- 17 WHEREAS, in the past five years, several other states, including Virginia, Oregon, North
- 18 Carolina, and California, have publicly repudiated their involvement in the eugenics
- 19 movement; and
- 20 WHEREAS, the year 2007 marks the centennial of the first eugenic sterilization in the
- 21 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
- 23 express their profound regret for Georgia's participation in the eugenics movement and the
- 24 injustices done under eugenics laws, including the forced sterilization of Georgia citizens.
- 25 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the members of this body hereby support the full
- 26 education of Georgia citizens about the eugenics movement in order to foster a respect for
- 27 the fundamental dignity of human life and the God given rights recognized by our Founding
- Fathers.

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1 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Secretary of the Senate is authorized and directed

2 to transmit an appropriate copy of this resolution to the public and the media.