

Christian Leaders Praise Government Apology for Slavery

They say the House resolution is a 'huge' step toward dismantling the stronghold of slavery.



[] For the first time in history the federal government has officially apologized for slavery and Jim Crow segregation—past injustices that caused Africans to be “brutalized, humiliated [and] dehumanized.”

“This is a historic moment in the ongoing struggle for civil rights in this country,” said Steve Cohen, the Democratic congressman from Tennessee who introduced the resolution last year. “Apologies are not empty gestures, but are a necessary first step towards any sort of reconciliation between people.”

The resolution, co-sponsored by 120 lawmakers and passed in the U.S. House of Representatives last week, likened enslaving millions of Africans and their descendants between 1619 and 1865 to “inanimate objects or animals” being captured and sold at auction. It also described slavery as “incompatible” with the founding American principle of equality and expressed the legislature’s commitment to preserving human rights and resolving the “lingering consequences” of the country’s transgressions.

Although some observers criticized the apology for its flagrant tardiness or for not carrying financial reparations with it, Christian leaders who have prayed for years for reconciliation and healing among the races praised the action taken on Capitol Hill.

“This is huge,” said Dutch Sheets, senior pastor of Springs Harvest Fellowship in Colorado Springs, Colo. and a voice known for calling the church to repentance. “God has been

systematically dismantling the stronghold of racism in America.”

Another minister hailed the action as the first of what he hopes are many more. “America needs healing from the legacy of enslavement and the passage of the apology is an important first step toward that healing,” said Ronald Myer, leader of the National Day of Reconciliation and Healing From the Legacy of Enslavement and chairman of the National Juneteenth Observance Foundation.

“We must [keep] the apology for slavery and the recognition of Juneteenth at the forefront of racial healing in America,” he said.

Juneteenth is an annual observance in African-American history named after June 19, 1865—the date when, more than two years after the Emancipation Proclamation technically ended slavery, Texan slaves received word they were free. Juneteenth is recognized, in some way, by more than half of the states in the U.S.

Alice Patterson, who as president of a reconciliation ministry called Justice at the Gate, often publicly apologizes to African-Americans for her grandfathers membership in the KKK, said it’s possible for entire ethnic groups to be wounded, causing them to pass their pain down from one generation to another.

“That certainly happened in the black community,” she said. “[This] resolution is important for what it will do in a few black American’s lives. However, it’s much more important than that. An official apology from the U.S. House of Representatives removes a reproach from our nation that can only be removed by governmental repentance.” **—Paul Steven Ghiringhelli**