

## **STUDENT SENATE RESOLUTION 2020-1028**

**TITLE:** Student Body Resolution Requesting that the University of Florida Assemble a Working Group on UF's Connections to Indigenous Expropriation and Slavery to Better Understand and Document the University's History.

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**SPONSORS:** The Center for the Study of Race and Race Relations, The Samuel Proctor Oral History Program, Samuel Proctor Oral History Program Director Professor Paul Ortiz, Professor Jon Sensbach, Professor Elizabeth Dale, Professor Lauren Pearlman, Professor Sheryl Kroen, Professor Nancy Hunt, Professor Benjamin Wise, Professor Louise Newman, Professor Philip Janzen, Professor Vincent Adejumo, Professor Sharon Austin, Professor Rik Stevenson, Professor Patricia Hilliard-Nunn, Professor Ryan Morini, Professor Tanya Saunders, Professor Max Deardorff, Professor Fernanda Bretones Lane, Professor Heather Vrana, Professor Lillian Guerra, Professor Rosana Resende, Professor Amanda Concha-Holmes, Professor Mark Reid, Professor Beth Rosenson, Professor Katheryn Russell-Brown, Professor Diedre Houchen, Professor Kenneth Nunn, Indigenous American Student Association, UF College Democrats, UF Students for Bernie, Minority Party Leader Colin Solomon, Assistant Minority Party Leader Raisa Karim, Senator Zachariah Chou, Senator Matthew Diaz, Senator Emma Sanchez, Senator Melody Castillo, Senator Sana Nimer, Senator Suzanna Barna, Senator Aviv Cutler, Senator Sparsha Muralidhara, Senator Santiago Clavijo-Gomez, Senator Ryan Wilder, Senator Mohammed Faisal

**Whereas**, in the spring of 2019, four undergraduate students (Ahmad Brown, Javier Escoto-Garcia, Gabriella Paul, and Morgan Peltier) researched the University of Florida's ties to Indian removal and slavery, and prepared a final report "Slavery and the University of Florida: African Americans, Seminoles and the Origins of Higher Education in Florida;" and,

**Whereas**, the University of Florida was founded in 1853 as the East Florida Seminary in Ocala, Florida, before the institution moved to Gainesville, Florida, in 1866; and,

**Whereas**, the "Seminary Land Fund" that created the East Florida Seminary came from the expropriation of Native land after the Second Seminole War (1835-1842);<sup>1</sup> and,

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<sup>1</sup> Ahmad Brown, et al, "Slavery and the University of Florida: African Americans, Seminoles and the Origins of Higher Education in Florida." (2019), 5

**Whereas**, while the University itself did not own slaves, those associated with the University did own slaves; and,

**Whereas**, at least three members of the initial Board of Trustees, including Bryant E.D. Howse, Lewis C. Gaines, and Adin Waterman, were slaveholders;<sup>2</sup> and,

**Whereas**, members of the Seminary's Board of Trustees and the institution's principal (S.D. McConnell), who served at various times throughout the 1850s, collectively owned at least 219 slaves;<sup>3</sup> and,

**Whereas**, one board member, Lewis C. Gaines, had the highest property value in Marion County in 1850 at \$7,000 and owned 18 slaves;<sup>4</sup> and,

**Whereas**, a graduation program from July 12, 1861, is the only known document that survives from the East Florida Seminary, and the identifiable names of slaveholding families in the graduation program account for some 200 slaves;<sup>5</sup> and,

**Whereas**, there was enthusiastic support for the Confederacy by Seminary students and leaders (such as Principal Robert P. Bryce);<sup>6</sup> and,

**Whereas**, Alachua County is engaged in its own process of historical truth and reconciliation to document the history of lynching and racial injustice in the region;<sup>7</sup> and,

**Whereas**, there have been recent efforts across the United States to recognize American universities' connections to Indigenous dispossession and slavery; and,

**Whereas**, over the past two years, *High Country News* has collected data that shows how the Morrill Act (1862) turned Indigenous land into college endowments (which benefited institutions such as the University of Minnesota, the University of Massachusetts, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Ohio State University);<sup>8</sup> and,

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<sup>2</sup> 1850 and 1860 Marion County Slave Schedules.

<sup>3</sup> Brown, et al, "Slavery and the University of Florida," 39.

<sup>4</sup> Samuel Proctor, "The University of Florida: Its Early Years" (Ph.D. diss., University of Florida, 1958) p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Brown, et al, "Slavery and the University of Florida," 37.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>7</sup> "Alachua County Truth & Reconciliation Initiative," accessed April 2, 2020, <https://truth.alachuacounty.us/about.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Lee and Tristan Ahtone, "Land-grab universities," *High Country News*, March 30, 2020, <https://www.hcn.org/issues/52.4/indigenous-affairs-education-land-grab-universities>.

**Whereas**, since 2001, at least 57 colleges and universities (including Brown University, Harvard University, Columbia University, Georgetown University, George Mason University, Clemson University, University of Georgia, University of Mississippi, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, University of South Carolina, University of Virginia, and Wake Forest University) have joined the Universities Studying Slavery (USS) consortium and made institutional efforts to study and reconcile with their relationship to slavery;<sup>9</sup> then,

**THEREFORE, LET IT BE RESOLVED** that the University of Florida Student Government Senate recognizes the need to conduct further research regarding Indian removal and the legacies of slavery at the University of Florida.

**THEREFORE, LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED** that the University of Florida Student Government Senate requests that the Office of the President and the Chief Diversity Officer appoint a Working Group composed of students and faculty, including the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program and other campus units, to conduct further research and to develop university-level curriculum and courses on the University of Florida's connections to Indian expulsion and slavery in Ocala, Florida (1853-1866) and Gainesville, Florida (since 1866) and submit a report and a list of recommendations to the Office of the President within one year of active membership with the purposes of better understanding and documenting UF's comprehensive history.

*Proviso: A copy of this resolution shall be sent to President W. Kent Fuchs, Chief Diversity Officer Antonio Farias, Associate Dean of Students and Senior Director of Multicultural & Diversity Affairs William Atkins, and Director of Black Affairs Carl Simien.*

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<sup>9</sup>President's Commission on Slavery and the University, "Universities Studying Slavery," University of Virginia, accessed March 18, 2020, <https://slavery.virginia.edu/universities-studying-slavery/>. Carolyn Thompson, "U.S. colleges continue to grapple with ties to slavery," Richmond Free Press, March 19, 2020, <http://richmondfreepress.com/news/2020/mar/19/us-colleges-continue-grapple-ties-slavery/>.