

119TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. RES. 173

Restoring the promise of freedom: honoring, preserving, and investing in
Freedmen’s Settlements.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FEBRUARY 27, 2025

Ms. KAMLAGER-DOVE (for herself, Ms. TLAIB, Mr. JACKSON of Illinois, Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ, Mrs. BEATTY, Ms. PRESSLEY, Ms. MOORE of Wisconsin, Mrs. MCIVER, and Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on the Judiciary

RESOLUTION

Restoring the promise of freedom: honoring, preserving, and
investing in Freedmen’s Settlements.

Whereas over 1,200 freedmen’s settlements and Black towns were established throughout the South and across the Nation before and after emancipation by free and formerly enslaved African Americans to create safer, self-sustaining, and thriving communities away from racial violence and economic discrimination;

Whereas the freedmen’s settlements and towns are the embodiment of “ground-up emancipation” and the untold story of community resilience, collective economics, and community building of churches, schools, and enterprises rooted in the African ethic of Ubuntu (I am because you/we are);

Whereas many of these freedmen’s settlements and towns were destroyed by Southern domestic terrorists, or otherwise became impoverished by centuries of public and private divestment, which includes uncompensated enslaved labor, failed Reconstruction, and the unmet Freedmen’s Bureau’s postemancipation promises to transition people who were formerly enslaved into the United States economy, Jim Crow laws, economic and housing discrimination through redlining, public housing, and transportation policies, and environmental racism;

Whereas, in acknowledgment of extreme economic and racial disparities, the Environmental Protection Agency launched the Environmental and Climate Justice Program in 2022 to provide financial and technical assistance to implement environmental and climate justice activities to benefit “underserved and overburdened” communities across the Nation, which have continued “disproportionate environmental health burdens, population vulnerability, and limits to effective participation in decisions with environmental consequences”;

Whereas the White House further recognized the need for greater investment in disadvantaged communities through the Justice40 Initiative in 2022, where the Federal Government set a goal to direct 40 percent of overall benefits of Federal investments to communities that lack clean water, sewer infrastructure, clean energy, clean transit, affordable and sustainable housing, training and workforce development, and remediation and mitigation of legacy pollution;

Whereas, approximately 45 percent of the residents of the unincorporated community of Sand Branch, Texas, established as a freedmen’s settlement in 1878, live below the

poverty line, and the community is surrounded by environmentally polluting facilities such as cement plants and is also a dumping ground for tires and other trash, has no local school, no proximity to medical facilities, and has not had access to clean running water for over 30 years due to contamination of the local well system, and there is no access to municipal water or sewer system, and although hydropanels have recently been installed to provide drinking water, residents continue to rely on limited donations of bottled water to meet the majority of their water needs;

Whereas the unincorporated community of Africatown, Alabama, established in the 1860s as a freedmen's settlement by West Africans brought to the United States illegally aboard the ship Clotilda, consists of 1,215 people, of which 34 percent live below the poverty line, and are surrounded by industry-zoned land and potential expansions of chemical plants, resulting in continued improper waste management, causing pollution, toxic exposure, contamination, and cancer in residents;

Whereas the unincorporated community of Mossville, Louisiana, established in 1790, has been encircled by over a dozen petrochemical plants, refineries, and other industrial facilities that pollute the air and water, causing elevated rates of cancer and other diseases among residents as multinational corporations continue to expand in the area, displacing many Mossville families and threatening the community's long-term survival;

Whereas the community of Edmondson, Arkansas, incorporated in 1911, emerged as a thriving hub of Black-owned businesses, churches, and cotton farming, with African Americans constituting its civic leadership from the

outset, and despite the injustice faced in the 1930s by systematic White racism to steal hundreds of town lots from the original Black owners and the county sheriff making false declarations of the delinquent property tax status of Black families, the Edmondson community persisted and persevered, rebuilding churches, homes, and a sense of cohesion after floods, fires, and storms;

Whereas the community of Allensworth, California, established in 1908 and the first town in California to be founded, funded, and governed by African Americans, was once a promising burgeoning town off a main railroad line, but faced racist disinvestment through the relocation of their train stop, seizure of water resources and subsequent drought and pollution of the aquifer, leaving the town underresourced and sparsely populated, and since then, the residents have organized to revitalize the town through agriculture and historic preservation, and are laying the groundwork for a full community revitalization using \$40,000,000 of State funding allocated to the town in 2022;

Whereas Oberlin Village, North Carolina, established in 1866, was once a prosperous free Black community with successful small businesses, schools, and university churches, and faced discrimination and displacement through the mid-20th century and is now undergoing vigorous efforts by the community-led Friends of Oberlin Village to restore historic buildings, preserve oral histories, and ensure that the community can continue to thrive in the future;

Whereas Independence Heights, Texas, was first established in 1908 and became the first Black city in Texas in 1915, and the community built a municipal infrastruc-

ture and an ecosystem of 40 Black-owned small businesses, and now faces threats from natural disasters and gentrification that are displacing residents, including those who own property passed down through generations, leading the community to organize vehicles such as the Independence Heights Redevelopment Council to ensure community leadership in development projects and preserve its cultural and historic identity;

Whereas communities such as Edmonson, Allensworth, Oberlin Village, and Independence Heights should not be exceptional cases of communities overcoming their circumstances, but rather models for the possibility of reparation, restoration, protection, and thriving of freedmen's settlement communities;

Whereas it is difficult to fully quantify and understand the history and current status of all the freedmen's settlements in the United States due to lack of research and investment in analyzing, preserving, and supporting these historic settlements, towns, and communities, with a large part of this history held by the descendants of the founders and residents;

Whereas these freedmen's settlements can serve as pillars of inspiration and modeling of land regeneration, ecobased economies organized around communal and collective land, and economic policies for divested communities;

Whereas a handful of former freedmen's settlements have received State or local designation for their historic status, offering them an opportunity for preservation and public acknowledgment, such as the Freedmen's Town Historic District in Houston, Texas;

Whereas there is an ongoing call, gaining much traction today, to preserve and document the history of freedmen’s settlements, leading to projects such as the Texas Freedom Colonies Project, the Mapping Blackness Project, as well as the Freedmen’s Bureau Search Portal created by the National Museum of African American History and Culture, among others;

Whereas, with a greater focus and leveraging of the power of various Federal agencies’ support, protection, and investment, transformation becomes possible for all these historic communities across the United States; and

Whereas the current moment presents an opportunity for the Federal Government to expand on the promises made when Juneteenth was designated a Federal holiday by not only fulfilling the unmet promises and possibilities of the Freedmen’s Bureau and the larger Reconstruction movement, but also to helping right the historic and present wrongs that have placed the freedmen’s settlements and Black frontline communities in such chronically vulnerable positions: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That the House of Representatives—

2 (1) affirms, that on Juneteenth 2024, 158
 3 years after the 250,000 enslaved in Galveston Bay,
 4 Texas, received the news from Union troops that
 5 they were freed, that the efforts for racial justice
 6 after 250 years of United States slavery did not end
 7 on June 19, 1865;

8 (2) acknowledges that following Juneteenth,
 9 many African Americans faced terror and repression

1 which suppressed their ability to create stable and
2 resilient communities or freedmen's settlements after
3 the Civil War;

4 (3) honors the rich history of emancipated Afri-
5 can Americans who built communities by acquiring
6 land and housing security for freedmen's settle-
7 ments;

8 (4) supports preserving freedmen's settlements
9 through comprehensive documentation that utilizes
10 oral histories and existing records as well as physical
11 commemoration of settlement remnants;

12 (5) encourages investing in the lasting legacies
13 of freedmen's settlements with designated funding
14 for historic preservation and funding economic jus-
15 tice initiatives to support the descendants and re-
16 maining residents of these communities;

17 (6) recognizes the need for coordination
18 amongst the Federal Government, State govern-
19 ments, agencies, and nonprofit organizations is war-
20 ranted to better understand the power dynamics of
21 the historical injustices that have taken place in the
22 freedmen's settlements;

23 (7) expresses a commitment to identify United
24 States freedmen's settlements to enshrine their his-
25 toric community preservation, including protecting

1 communities from development, gentrification, and
2 environmental hazards through strategic investment,
3 external development regulation, community-led and
4 driven economic development, small business cre-
5 ation, workforce development, and education;

6 (8) urges the Federal Government, States, lo-
7 calities, nonprofit organizations, schools, and com-
8 munity organizations to provide ongoing support to
9 the residents and descendants of the founders of
10 freedmen’s settlements who hold long-standing
11 knowledge of the history of their communities to
12 preserve the historical foundation of this Nation;

13 (9) recognizes that coordination among the
14 Federal Government, State governments, agencies,
15 and nonprofit organizations is warranted to support
16 freedmen’s settlement communities and municipali-
17 ties, including, but not limited to, the Environmental
18 Protection Agency, the Department of Housing and
19 Urban Development, food assistance programs, his-
20 toric land preservation, and clean water foundations;

21 (10) affirms that freedmen’s settlements in the
22 United States have fair standards of living, includ-
23 ing sewage, roads, emergency services, climate-resil-
24 ient infrastructure, and an overall focus on the

1 health, well-being, sustainability, and resilience of
2 these communities;

3 (11) recognizes that recognizing and providing
4 resources for freedmen’s settlements will lead to
5 greater equity and investment in historically dis-
6 advantaged communities that have faced centuries of
7 racism, discrimination, environmental and climate
8 injustices, and violence, as conceived since the col-
9 onization of the Americas and is continually built
10 upon today; and

11 (12) honors the legacies of freedom, ingenuity,
12 resilience, and community care created by the com-
13 munities in the freedmen’s settlements and brings
14 recognition and honor to the efforts of these for-
15 merly enslaved people on Juneteenth 2024.

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