

Official Apologies to Blacks, American Indians

> **Proposed**

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> **By: John Bresnahan**

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> Sen. Sam Brownback and Rep. Stephen I. Cohen are
> proposing two of the most sweeping apologies in
> American history.

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> Cohen, a Tennessee Democrat, has introduced a
> resolution apologizing for all of the wrongs suffered
> by blacks at the hands of the U.S. government,
> especially slavery and segregation. And Brownback, a
> Kansas Republican, is pushing a measure offering "an
> apology to all native peoples" for hundreds of years
> of government hostility and oppression.

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> Neither resolution is binding. And neither would
> require the United States to offer reparations to
> those wronged, although they would be powerful
> statements if adopted by either the House or the
> Senate.

> Brownback, who is seeking the GOP presidential
> nomination, has offered his American Indian resolution
> in the last two Congresses, and it was approved by the
> Senate Indian Affairs Committee in 2005. But it has
> never been adopted by the full Senate. His co-sponsors
> this time are Sens. Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.), Mike
> Crapo (R-Idaho), Chris Dodd (D-Conn.), Daniel Inouye
> (D-Hawaii) and Mary L. Landrieu (D-La.).

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> Brownback's resolution opens with declarations that
> American Indians "have for millennia honored,
> protected and stewarded this land we cherish" and
> that, with the coming of European settlers and the
> creation of the United States in the late 1700s,
> "Indian tribes provided great assistance to the
> fledgling republic as it strengthened and grew."

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> But the government "violated many of the treaties
> ratified by Congress and other diplomatic agreements
> with Indian tribes" and took numerous official actions
> that caused immense harm to American Indians,
> including "extermination, termination, forced removal
> and relocation, the outlawing of traditional religions
> and the destruction of sacred places," the resolution
> says. And these policies contribute to the social and
> economic problems facing American Indians today.

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> Brownback wants a formal apology to American Indians
> from the president and Congress.

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> His resolution states that Congress "apologizes on
> behalf of the people of the United States to all
> native peoples for the many instances of violence,
> maltreatment and neglect inflicted on native peoples
> by citizens of the United States." It also "urges the

> president to acknowledge the wrongs of the United
> States against Indian tribes in the history of the
> United States in order to bring healing to this land
> by providing a proper foundation for reconciliation
> between the United States and Indian tribes."
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> In a speech on the House floor last week, Cohen, a
> freshman representing a predominantly black district
> in Memphis, spoke out passionately for his resolution
> apologizing for the wrongs inflicted on blacks.
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> "For 246 years, our Constitution and our laws allowed
> a system that made people slaves, that divided people
> from their families and treated them as property,"
> Cohen said. "And for 100 years thereafter, a system of
> laws in many states throughout the country had Jim
> Crow laws that deprived people of the opportunity for
> equal access to education, health care, public
> facilities and other types of programs. These ended by
> law in the [1960s], somewhat through the efforts of
> Thurgood Marshall and other attorneys in Brown v.
> Board of Education, but the effects are lingering.
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> "This country needs to apologize for a brutal,
> inhumane system of slavery and Jim Crow laws," Cohen
> went on. "President Bush has made remarks similar to
> this in Senegal; President Clinton also in the
> [commonwealth] of Virginia most recently."
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> Cohen's resolution is graphic. "Slavery in America
> resembled no other form of involuntary servitude known
> in history, as Africans were captured and sold at
> auction like inanimate objects or animals," it says.
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> It also states that "the system of de jure racial
> segregation known as 'Jim Crow,' which arose in
> certain parts of the nation following the Civil War to
> create separate and unequal societies for whites and
> African-Americans" still has some "vestiges" today.
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> Cohen wants the House to acknowledge "the fundamental
> injustice, cruelty, brutality and inhumanity of
> slavery and Jim Crow" and officially apologize to
> "African-Americans on behalf of the people of the
> United States" and offer a "commitment to rectify the
> lingering consequences of the misdeeds committed
> against African-Americans under slavery and Jim Crow
> and to stop the occurrence of human rights violations
> in the future."
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> Cohen has 36 co-sponsors for his resolution, including
> Reps. Patrick J. Kennedy (D-R.I.) and Dennis J.
> Kucinich (D-Ohio), as well as House Judiciary
> Committee Chairman John Conyers Jr. (D-Mich.), Rep.
> John Lewis (D-Ga.) and several other members of the
> Congressional Black Caucus.
> Cohen tried to join the Black Caucus after the
> November election but was turned down because he's
> white.
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> His resolution has been referred to Conyers' committee
> for consideration.