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ORDERS

On motion of Representative ADAMS of Portland, the following Joint Resolution: (H.P. 1327) (Cosponsored by Senator GOODALL of Sagadahoc and Representatives: KENT of Woolwich, PERCY of Phippsburg, WATSON of Bath, WEBSTER of Freeport, Senators: BLISS of Cumberland, DAMON of Hancock, GERZOFSKY of Cumberland)

**JOINT RESOLUTION RECOGNIZING THE TRAGIC
EXPULSION OF THE RESIDENTS OF MALAGA ISLAND,
MAINE IN 1912 AND REDEDICATING OURSELVES TO THE
MAINE IDEALS OF TOLERANCE, INDEPENDENCE AND
EQUALITY FOR ALL PEOPLES**

WHEREAS, Malaga is a small rugged island of less than one square mile situated in Casco Bay off the shores of the Town of Phippsburg in Sagadahoc County and the Town of Harpswell in Cumberland County; and

WHEREAS, from about 1870 to 1912, Malaga was home to a mixed-race Maine community of people of Scots, Irish, Anglo, Native American and African-American ancestry, among others, struggling to survive as boatmen, fishermen, carpenters and laundresses, as did many rural islanders of that era; and

WHEREAS, in that era, for fear of being taxed to support alleged "chronic pauperism," nearby towns denied that Malaga existed within their town waters, and amid lawsuits actual ownership of Malaga lay in dispute for decades; and

WHEREAS, in that era, the now-disgraced Eugenics Movement claimed poverty and intemperance were genetic traits due to "impure blood," using pseudoscience to reinforce racial and social stereotypes, holding Malaga and other isolated Maine communities up to ridicule in the national press, including the sensational "Queer Folk of the Maine Coast" in *Harper's* magazine in 1909; and

WHEREAS, in that era, prime island real estate, including Malaga, suddenly caught the eye of speculators and developers eager to build resort hotels for Maine's booming tourist trade; and

WHEREAS, in 1911, amid such tensions, Maine's Governor Frederick Plaisted and his Executive Council personally led an expedition to investigate conditions on Malaga and thereafter paid \$417 to clear title to the island in the name of the State of Maine, which took possession; and

WHEREAS, in 1912, as public policy, the State of Maine evicted all Malaga islanders from their homes, paying token sums for the structures, ordered the Malaga schoolhouse, wharves and houses removed or destroyed, dug up the island graveyard, jumbling all remains into common caskets, and forcibly relocated many islanders to the Maine School for the Feeble Minded at Pownal, where some spent the rest of their lives and where the deceased of Malaga lie in mixed graves to this day; and

WHEREAS, in 1925, the State of Maine by law allowed forced eugenic sterilization of many residents of the Maine School for the Feeble Minded in order to, in the words of one Maine State Senator, "permanently improve the human race . . . and enforce sound, decent and efficient human beings"; and

WHEREAS, with Malaga deserted and the islanders dispersed or institutionalized, for almost 100 years the true story of Malaga disappeared into mystery and myth, a half-remembered legend deeply tinged with heartbreak, loss and shame, rarely referred to openly even by the scattered descendants of the Malaga islanders themselves; and

WHEREAS, the last known living former Malaga islander died in 1997 at the age of 103; and

WHEREAS, in recent years the story of Malaga has been rediscovered and has been the subject of books, national publications, television productions, university studies and a prominent Maine Public Radio production, "Malaga Island: A Story Best Left Untold," and will be the subject of a Maine State Museum special exhibition for the centennial in 2012; and

WHEREAS, in 2001, the Maine Coast Heritage Trust purchased Malaga Island, which now serves as a nature preserve, a University of Maine archeological site, a landmark on the Maine Underground Railroad and a place of education, reflection and renewal; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED: That We, the Members of the One Hundred and Twenty-fourth Legislature now assembled in the Second Regular Session, on behalf of the people we represent, do recognize with profound regret the tragic displacement of the Malaga islanders in 1912, in the name of the disgraced Eugenics Movement, with its overtones of prejudice against poverty, racism and stereotyping; and, while rebuking this past, rededicate the future to the ideals of tolerance, independence and equality of all peoples in our ever-changing world, which are the birthright and heritage of all proud Mainers; and rededicate ourselves as lawmakers to the social and economic justice that is the right of all peoples; and be it further

RESOLVED: That suitable copies of this resolution, duly authenticated by the Secretary of State, be transmitted to the Maine Coast Heritage Trust, the Maine Historic Preservation Commission, the Maine Historical Society and the NAACP.

READ.

The SPEAKER: The Chair recognizes the Representative from Portland, Representative Adams.

Representative **ADAMS**: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, Men and Women of the House. The story of Malaga Island, Maine, related in this Resolve, is rarely remembered and is little known today. As you will read, it is by turns remarkable, revealing, shameful, cautionary, unexpected, unbelievable and educational. And often it is all of these things, all at once, as is so much of life. And for all too long it has been, as stated by one town official involved in the tale that you will read, "a story best left untold". This tragic story opened our last century and as we begin a new century and read and ponder this story, may we consider whether it is the story of the island's eviction or the island's redemption which, in our hearts, must be the most important.

Colleagues, the story before you is true and, like truth, it can sting. Colleagues, we cannot deny our past, but we do not have to be its prisoner. We cannot change our past, but we can change our future. And so, as lawmakers, let us read this story and rededicate ourselves to the work of seeking justice for all, which is, after all, the goal of good lawmaking. As Mainers, let us rededicate ourselves to the ideals of tolerance, opportunity and equality which, after all, are our birthright as Mainers. For Malaga Island, now a nature preserve, let students probe its secrets, let scholars search its history, let visitors enjoy its beauty and let its old ghosts find peace at last. No one will ever live on Malaga again, but, in a sense, a piece of it belongs to us all. Madam Speaker, I move Passage.

Subsequently, the Joint Resolution was **ADOPTED**.
Sent for concurrence. **ORDERED SENT FORTHWITH**.