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## **U.S. House Passes Bill to Preserve Family Records of African American Descendants**

**From Congressman Tom Lantos' website at <http://lantos.house.gov>.**

**Washington, D.C. January 22, 2007. The House of Representatives passed legislation by Congressman Tom Lantos (D-San Mateo, San Francisco) to ensure that many of the genealogical records involving the families of former slaves in this country will be preserved, catalogued and digitized for easy access for researchers.**

**"The federal and local records covered by this legislation are not only of personal importance to the families involved," Lantos said in a speech on the House floor. "They are also historically significant to us all. They document the reuniting of our nation and the historic moment of transition for slaves from the status of property to citizens, a time when our country finally began to right a horrible moral wrong. We need to take the process another step now, by ensuring that those records and the lessons they hold are preserved for all eternity."**

**The Lantos legislation, the Preservation of Records of Servitude, Emancipation, and Post-Civil War Reconstruction Act (H.R 390) builds on the foundation of the Freedmen's Bureau Records Preservation Act, which was passed unanimously by both the House and Senate in 2000 and which became Public Law 106-444. That law required the Archivist of the United States to create a searchable indexing system to catalogue the genealogical records from the post-Civil War Reconstruction period.**

**"For most Americans, researching their genealogical history involves searching through various historical records, almost all of which have been properly archived as public historical documents," Lantos noted. "Unfortunately, African Americans face a unique challenge due to our nation's history of discrimination and slavery. Instead of simply looking up wills, birth and death certificates, or other traditional genealogical research documents, African Americans are forced to identify the names of former slave owners, and then hope that these owners kept accurate records of pertinent property, tax, and probate information."**

**H.R. 390 will augment the already highly useful catalogue created by the National Archives to protect countless other critically important historic documents. The bill directs the National Archives to preserve additional post-Civil War Reconstruction records. It also establishes a grant program for the Archivist to work with various states, universities, colleges, and genealogical institutions to establish digitized databases so that anyone in this country will have access to these treasure troves of information.**

**The bill passed by a vote of 414-1. The Senate must now pass the Preservation of Records of Servitude, Emancipation, and Post-Civil War Reconstruction Act (H.R 390) for the bill to become law. Additional information is available on Congressman Lantos' website at <http://lantos.house.gov>.**