

By: Senator(s) Dawkins, Jackson (11th),
Jordan, Frazier, Norwood, Witherspoon,
Simmons (12th), Butler, Blackmon, Horhn,
Turner-Ford, Burton, Dearing, Hopson, Jackson
(32nd)

To: Rules

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 583

1 A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION REMEMBERING THE LEGACY AND
2 DISTINGUISHED LEGAL CAREER OF CIRCUIT COURT DISTRICT JUDGE MARCUS
3 D. GORDON, MISSISSIPPI'S LONGEST-SERVING TRIAL COURT JUDGE WHO
4 PRESIDED OVER HISTORIC MISSISSIPPI CIVIL RIGHTS CRIMINAL CASES,
5 AND EXPRESSING BELATED CONDOLENCES TO HIS SURVIVING FAMILY.

6 WHEREAS, we join The Mississippi Bar and the legal community
7 of Newton County and Mississippi legal historians in remembering
8 the distinguished career of Mississippi 8th Circuit Court District
9 and longest-serving Trial Court Judge Marcus D. Gordon. Judge
10 Gordon, who presided over the belated trial of a hometown
11 childhood acquaintance in the 1964 "Mississippi Burning"
12 kidnapping and murder of three Civil Rights workers, and who meted
13 out the maximum sentence, passed away on May 26, 2016. He was 84;
14 and

15 WHEREAS, a Newton County native, Gordon grew up near the
16 Neshoba County line and had always claimed kinship with the
17 neighboring county where his mother was born. Following
18 graduation from Union High School in 1950, Judge Gordon embarked
19 on a career at East Central Community College as an athlete.



20 After a semester, he enlisted in the United States Air Force.
21 With four years of service under his belt as an enlisted man,
22 Gordon was honorably discharged in 1954 and pondered a career in
23 law. He returned to East Central Community College and at age 21
24 enrolled in the University of Mississippi and received his
25 bachelor's degree and later his law degree in 1959; and

26 WHEREAS, he entered private practice in Decatur with his
27 older brother, Rex, and practiced with the Gordon Law Firm from
28 1959 through 1977 with offices in Decatur and Union. His
29 extensive record of public legal service is as follows: Attorney
30 for the City of Union, Fall 1959 through March 1977; Attorney for
31 the Union Special Municipal Separate School District, Fall 1959
32 through March 1977; Newton County Prosecuting Attorney, 1964-1968;
33 District Attorney for the Eighth Circuit Court District (Leake,
34 Neshoba, Newton and Scott Counties), January 1972 through March
35 1977; Attorney for the Newton County Board of Supervisors (various
36 time periods); and Circuit Judge for the Eighth Circuit Court
37 District (Leake, Neshoba, Newton and Scott Counties), March 1977
38 through March 2016; and

39 WHEREAS, in the "Mississippi Burning" trial, a reference to
40 the title of the fictional 1988 film that was loosely based on the
41 case, Edgar Ray Killen was convicted of manslaughter in 2005 by a
42 racially mixed jury, exactly 41 years after the murders of the
43 three Civil Rights workers in Neshoba County, Mississippi; and



44 WHEREAS, for Judge Gordon, the trial hit close to home. Mr.
45 Killen, a Sawmill Operator and part-time Minister, had grown up
46 just down the road from him. He had preached at the church that
47 Judge Gordon's parents attended and presided over their combined
48 funerals just a year after the murders; and

49 WHEREAS, Judge Gordon gave Mr. Killen the maximum sentence:
50 60 years in prison. He was confined to the State Penitentiary at
51 Parchman and recently died; and

52 WHEREAS, "It is my responsibility to make that decision, and
53 I have done it," Judge Gordon said at the conclusion of the trial,
54 which was televised. "Each life has value. Each life is equally
55 as valuable as the other life, and I have taken that into
56 consideration. Law does not recognize the distinction of age."
57 Judge Gordon said he viewed the crime as a stain on his state and
58 county and their citizens. The crime was "not the act of Neshoba
59 County," he told *The Los Angeles Times*. "That was the act of a
60 mob"; and

61 WHEREAS, Judge Gordon was the longest-serving Trial Judge in
62 the history of the State of Mississippi, serving for 37 years,
63 1977 through 2016, and kept one of the best Trial Judge records in
64 the state; and

65 WHEREAS, after Mr. Killen's arrest, Judge Gordon said he
66 intended to treat the case routinely, despite its infamy and his
67 familiarity with the defendant. "I accepted this case like any
68 other," he told *The Clarion Ledger*. "My responsibility is to



69 provide a fair trial. The verdict of the jury will be the verdict
70 of the jury; and

71 WHEREAS, he is survived by his wife, the former Polly
72 Matthews; three sons: Craig, Darin and Brian; daughter, Teresa
73 Parker; four grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren; and

74 WHEREAS, Judge Gordon served as a leader and mentor to
75 practicing attorneys. He consistently lectured on professional
76 standards of the practice of law, including ethics, integrity,
77 civility, courtesy and adherence to the Golden Rule. His public
78 service honored both The Mississippi Bar and this great state that
79 he served:

80 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE STATE OF
81 MISSISSIPPI, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING THEREIN, That
82 we do hereby remember the legacy and distinguished legal career of
83 Circuit Court District Judge Marcus D. Gordon, Mississippi's
84 longest-serving Trial Court Judge who presided over historic
85 Mississippi Civil Rights criminal cases, and expressing belated
86 condolences to his surviving family.

87 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That this resolution be presented to
88 Judge Gordon's surviving family, forwarded to The Mississippi Bar,
89 and made available to the Capitol Press Corps.

