

By: Representative Hines

To: Rules

HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 8

1 A RESOLUTION APOLOGIZING FOR THE ROLE MISSISSIPPI PLAYED IN
2 THE MURDER OF EMMETT TILL AND THE ACQUITTAL OF HIS KILLERS, ROY
3 BRYANT AND J.W. MILAM, WHICH WAS BASED UPON AN UNSUBSTANTIATED LIE
4 TOLD BY CAROLYN BRYANT.

5 WHEREAS, in January 2017, author Timothy Tyson released an
6 interview he had with Carolyn Bryant regarding the role she played
7 in the horrific murder of 14-year-old Emmett Till, and how the
8 story she told her husband, Roy Bryant, that led to Emmett's death
9 was fabricated, false, made up, a lie; and

10 WHEREAS, Carolyn Bryant, now 72 years old, admitted to Tyson
11 that the most sensational part of her testimony, that Emmett Till
12 had physically assaulted her, or made sexual advances toward her
13 at all, was not true, but while Carolyn Bryant may have a clearer
14 conscience now, the fact that Mississippi and its leaders brought
15 no one to justice in the most notorious racially motivated
16 lynching of the 20th century serves as a constant reminder that
17 allegations implicating African Americans of misconduct were in
18 essence a death penalty upon the implicated at the hand of the



accuser, who became the judge, jury and executioner, even when the allegations were premised on unsubstantiated lies; and

WHEREAS, on August 28, 1955, Emmett Till, a young African-American teenager from Argo, Illinois, who was visiting his great uncle in Money, Mississippi, found himself the central target of implication which ultimately resulted in being kidnapped, bludgeoned, and brutally murdered by Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam for allegedly whistling at a white woman, Carolyn Bryant, an act whites considered a crime at that time in Mississippi, a crime that carried the punishment of death for the adolescent and unsuspecting Emmett Till; and

WHEREAS, after Till's beaten, broken, disfigured and drenched body was recovered from the Tallahatchie River, it was returned to Chicago, where his mother, Mamie Till Bradley, insisted on an open casket so that the world could witness the horrendous nature of her son's killing; however, the world was not only exposed to Emmett Till's bloated and mutilated body, but also to the immense problems with American racism and the barbarism of lynching, which sparked public outcry and ultimately became the catalyst for the Civil Rights Movement; and

WHEREAS, since 1882, when statistics on lynching began to be collected, more than 500 African Americans have been killed by extrajudicial violence, a lawless penal code of vigilante justice, in Mississippi alone, and more than 3,000 across the South, where white people publicly prohibited interracial relationships as a



means to maintain their white supremacy, as even the suggestion of sexual contact between black men and white women could carry severe penalties; and

WHEREAS, the case of a 14-year-old boy who had been killed for breaching a social caste system aroused negative feelings throughout the nation about segregation, law enforcement, relations between the North and South, the social status quo in Mississippi, and the activities of the White Citizens' Councils, yet Mississippians failed to feel the same outrage and understand the severity of what had happened within its own borders; and

WHEREAS, during the initial stages of the Till case and prior to the indictment of Bryant and Milam, certain Mississippi officials and residents denounced the killing as "deplorable" and promised to prosecute the murderers to the fullest extent of the law, but when groups such as the White Citizens' Council got involved and repeatedly called for the support of racial segregation policies as a means to prevent this type of attack, the angry tone changed and local newspapers began falsely reporting about riots at the Chicago funeral home, printed pictures of Bryant and Milam in military uniforms and smiling, and lauded Carolyn Bryant's beauty and virtue; and

WHEREAS, Mississippians and the officials that governed them at the time transitioned from compassionate individuals enraged at the atrocious murder that occurred on their beloved Delta soil to resolute defenders of the two men who ended the innocent life of



69 Emmett Till, as even the Tallahatchie County Sheriff Clarence
70 Strider, who initially positively identified Till's body as the
71 one pulled from the river, walked back this fact and began
72 disseminating conspiracy theories that Till was still alive and
73 the recovered body had been planted by the NAACP, undoubtedly one
74 of the theories concocted by the racist White Citizens' Council;
75 and

76 WHEREAS, the trial for the murder of Emmett Till began in
77 September 1955, and lasted for five, blistering hot days inside
78 the 280-spectator capacity county courthouse in Sumner,
79 Mississippi, that was completely packed with people like a can of
80 sardines and seated attendees as well as members of the press in
81 "separate but equal" areas as they patiently waited for the guilty
82 verdict while jury members drank beer and white men in the
83 audience sat with handguns holstered to their belts; and

84 WHEREAS, the murder trial proceeded as one might expect, and
85 on September 23, 1955, the all-white, all-male jury, as both
86 African Americans and women were banned, acquitted both defendants
87 after only 67 minutes of deliberation, a time frame that might
88 seem short for such a serious offense but would have admittedly
89 been shorter according to one juror if they "hadn't stopped to
90 drink pop"; and

91 WHEREAS, in later interviews, jurors acknowledged that they
92 believed Bryant and Milam were guilty, but simply did not believe



93 that life imprisonment or the death penalty were fit punishment
94 for white people who had killed a black man; and

95 WHEREAS, furthermore, protected from retrial by double
96 jeopardy, Bryant and Milam decided to profit from the murder they
97 committed and struck a deal with *Look* magazine in 1956 to tell
98 their story to journalist William Bradford Huie for approximately
99 \$4,000, where they admitted to committing the murder, albeit
100 bragged about its completion, and conceded that neither of them
101 believed they were guilty or had done anything wrong, despite the
102 blow of their fists and the pull of the trigger that robbed a
103 young man of his precious life; and

104 WHEREAS, in light of the recent confession by Carolyn Bryant
105 that her story, which led to the death of 14-year-old Emmett Till,
106 was fabricated and nothing but falsehoods, the time has come for
107 Mississippi to apologize for its part in creating a toxic
108 environment breaming with racism and segregationist ideals that
109 ultimately led to the murder of Emmett Till, the murder's defense
110 by Mississippi's citizens and leaders who were assuredly fueled by
111 propaganda produced by the White Citizens' Council, and the
112 acquittal of the murderers that was based on a total and complete
113 lie, a lie which exacerbated the hypocrisy evidenced by supposedly
114 adamant Christians towards the Biblical principal recorded in
115 Matthew 25:40, which reads in part, "Inasmuch as ye have done it
116 unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have also done it
117 unto me"; and



118 WHEREAS, while an apology from the state will not erase the
119 lie told or the crime committed, nor will it resurrect the
120 mutilated and lifeless body of a child unfamiliar with the pomp
121 and circumstance of the deep south's social order, it will help to
122 quell the racist undertones and actions many African Americans
123 still experience today, as recently as October 2016, when the sign
124 that marks the site where Emmett Till's body was exhumed from the
125 Tallahatchie River was riddled with more than 40 bullet holes and
126 continues to be defaced each time it is replaced, marking the
127 tremendous progress that is left to be made in Mississippi so that
128 all are treated as equals; and

129 WHEREAS, the distrust and bitterness that many African
130 Americans have toward the Mississippi government for its role in
131 segregation after *Brown v. Board of Education*, its role in the
132 murder of numerous Civil Rights leaders, and particularly, its
133 role in the acquittal of Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam for the brutal
134 murder of Emmett Till, could be assuaged, and the principles
135 espoused by the founding fathers would be affirmed, and great
136 strides toward unifying all Mississippians and inspiring the
137 nation accomplished if the state acknowledged its role in the
138 murder of Emmett Till and the acquittal of his killers:

139 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF
140 REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI, That we express our
141 profound regret for the State of Mississippi's role in providing a
142 hospitable environment for the toxic beliefs and ideologies that



143 led to the horrific and unnecessary murder of 14-year-old Emmett
144 Till and that we apologize for the part the state played in the
145 acquittal of Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam, the men who pummeled,
146 tortured and murdered Emmett Till, an acquittal that was based on
147 an unsubstantiated lie, and express deepest sympathy and solemn
148 regrets to the family of Emmett Till, for depriving him of his
149 life, human dignity and those constitutional protections accorded
150 to all citizens of the United States, regardless of race, and we
151 encourage the remembrance and teachings about the history of the
152 Civil Rights Movement, both the stories of change and progress and
153 the gory details of the trials, tribulations and murders,
154 particularly that of Emmett Till, to ensure that the tragedies
155 will neither be forgotten nor repeated.

156 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That it is the intent of the House of
157 Representatives that this resolution shall not be used in, or be
158 the basis of, any type of litigation.

159 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That copies of this resolution be
160 furnished to each state elected official of Mississippi; the
161 Commissioner of Institutions of Higher Learning; the President of
162 the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People,
163 Mississippi Chapter; the Director of the Southern Christian
164 Leadership Conference, Mississippi Chapter; requesting that they
165 further disseminate copies of this resolution to their respective
166 constituents so as to apprise them of the sense of the Mississippi



167 House of Representatives in this matter; and to the members of the
168 Capitol Press Corps.

