

By: Representative Williams-Barnes

To: Rules

## HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 29

1 A RESOLUTION EXTENDING THE RECOGNITION OF THE MISSISSIPPI  
2 HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES TO NOVELIST JESMYN WARD AS THE RECIPIENT  
3 OF THE 2021 GOVERNOR'S ARTS AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN LITERATURE.

4 WHEREAS, the Governor's Arts Awards Program has announced its  
5 2021 recipients, which include Novelist Jesmyn Ward for Excellence  
6 in Literature; and

7 WHEREAS, established in 1988, Governor's Arts Awards are  
8 given to individuals and organizations to recognize outstanding  
9 work in the artistic disciplines, as well as arts-based community  
10 development and arts patronage in Mississippi, and the awards are  
11 presented in partnership with the Governor's office and signify  
12 the important relationship between government and the arts; and

13 WHEREAS, born in 1977 and raised in the coastal Mississippi  
14 Town of DeLisle, Jesmyn Ward was a bookworm from an early age, a  
15 regular at her school library, she sought out tales featuring  
16 strong-willed, smart girls; and as she read all of the books she  
17 could get her hands on, she noticed none of the characters she



18 admired looked like her or came from a place like rural  
19 Mississippi; and

20 WHEREAS, after earning bachelor's and master's degrees from  
21 Stanford University, Jesmyn Ward considered doing something  
22 "practical," rather than pursue writing; but, the tragic death of  
23 her brother, Joshua, was the impetus for pursuing writing full  
24 time, and in 2005, she received her masters in fine arts in  
25 creative writing from the University of Michigan, where she won  
26 several writing awards, and in 2008, her first novel, *Where the*  
27 *Line Bleeds*, was published, which she says was inspired by the  
28 story of her late brother; and

29 WHEREAS, three years later, her second novel, *Salvage the*  
30 *Bones*, was released and after quite a critical reception, the  
31 novel surprised the literary world and Jesmyn Ward by winning the  
32 National Book Award and in 2013, she published her memoir, *Men We*  
33 *Reaped*, about the loss of her brother and four friends, who all  
34 died in a four-year span, the memoir having received rave reviews  
35 and several prize nominations; and

36 WHEREAS, Jesmyn followed the memoir with the anthology, *The*  
37 *Fire This Time*, which she edited in response to the deaths of  
38 Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown; her third novel, *Sing, Unburied,*  
39 *Sing*, made history by winning her second National Book Award and  
40 she was the first woman and the first person of color to be a  
41 two-time winner of the fiction award, others including William  
42 Faulkner, Philip Roth and John Updike; and



WHEREAS, Jesmyn received the Mildred and Harold Strauss Living Award for literary excellence from the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 2016 and a MacArthur Fellowship, commonly referred to as a "Genius Grant," in 2017; and

WHEREAS, her latest book, *Navigate Your Stars*, is an illustrated version of the stirring commencement speech she delivered at Tulane's graduation in 2018; and

WHEREAS, in September 2020, Jesmyn Ward penned a personal essay for *Vanity Fair* magazine about the COVID crisis and the Black Lives Matter movement that included the shocking news of the death of her partner, Brandon Miller, likely from Coronavirus-related respiratory distress at the age of 33; and most recently, Jesmyn interviewed President Barack Obama about his memoir *A Promised Land*, also for *Vanity Fair*; and

WHEREAS, Jesmyn Ward still lives in her hometown of DeLisle and is a professor of creative writing at Tulane University in New Orleans; and in 2017, Jesmyn was added to the state's literary map; and

WHEREAS, it is the policy of the House of Representatives to pay tribute and express appreciation for the talent of a world-class Mississippi writer who has made Mississippi a better place and exemplifies the literary traditions of our great state:

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI, That we do hereby extend the recognition of the Mississippi House of Representatives



68 to Jesmyn Ward, the recipient of the 2021 Governor's Arts Award  
69 for Excellence in Literature, and extend congratulations to this  
70 world-class writer on this auspicious occasion.

71 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That copies of this resolution be  
72 furnished to Jesmyn Ward as part of the Governor's Arts Awards  
73 presentation, and to the members of the Capitol Press Corps.

