

By: Senator(s) Jordan, Jackson (11th),  
Harden, Walls, Butler, Frazier, Simmons,  
Horhn, Thomas, Jackson (32nd), Williamson,  
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To: Judiciary, Division A

## SENATE BILL NO. 2689

1 AN ACT ISSUING AN OFFICIAL APOLOGY FROM THE STATE OF  
2 MISSISSIPPI FOR THE MURDER OF EMMETT TILL AND CALLING FOR  
3 RECONCILIATION; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

4 WHEREAS, Emmett Louis "Bobo" Till (July 25, 1941-August 28,  
5 1955) was an African-American teenager from Chicago, Illinois, who  
6 was brutally murdered in the region of Mississippi known as the  
7 Mississippi Delta in the small Town of Money in Leflore County;  
8 and

9 WHEREAS, his murder was one of the key events that energized  
10 the nascent American Civil Rights Movement. The main suspects for  
11 the crime, both white men, were acquitted, but later admitted to  
12 committing the crime. Till's mother had an open casket funeral to  
13 let everyone see how her son had been brutally killed; and

14 WHEREAS, Emmett Till was the son of Mamie Carthan Till  
15 (Bradley, Mobley) and Louis Till. His mother was born to John and  
16 Alma Carthan in the small Delta Town of Webb, Mississippi. When  
17 she was two years old, her family moved to Illinois. Emmett's  
18 mother largely raised him on her own; she and Louis had separated  
19 in 1942. In 1955, Emmett was sent for a summer stay with his  
20 great uncle, Mose Wright, who lived in Money, Mississippi, a small  
21 town eight miles north of Greenwood; and

22 WHEREAS, Till arrived on August 21, 1955; on August 24th he  
23 joined other teenagers as they went to Bryant's Grocery and Meat  
24 Market to get some candy. The teens were children of  
25 sharecroppers and had been picking cotton all day. The market was  
26 owned by Roy Bryant and Carolyn Bryant, and mostly catered to the  
27 local sharecropper population. While in the store, Till allegedly

28 whistled at, or openly flirted with, Carolyn Bryant and this  
29 action greatly angered her husband when he returned home several  
30 days later from an out-of-town trip; and

31 WHEREAS, at about 2:30 a.m. on August 28th, Bryant and his  
32 half-brother, J.W. Milam, kidnapped Till from his uncle's house in  
33 the small cotton Town of Money, Mississippi. According to  
34 witnesses, they drove him to a weathered plantation shed in  
35 neighboring Sunflower County, where they brutally beat him until  
36 he was unrecognizable, cut off an ear, gouged out an eye, then  
37 shot him with a .45 caliber pistol before tying a 75-pound cotton  
38 gin fan around Till's neck with barbed wire. This was to weight  
39 down his body, which was dropped into the Tallahatchie River near  
40 Glendora, another small cotton town; and

41 WHEREAS, the brothers were soon under official suspicion for  
42 the boy's disappearance and were arrested August 29th after  
43 spending the night with relatives living in Ruleville, just miles  
44 away from where the murder took place. Both men admitted they had  
45 taken the boy from his great-uncle's home but claimed they turned  
46 him loose the same night; and

47 WHEREAS, after they found his body, a Tutwiler mortuary  
48 assistant worked all night to prepare the body as best he could,  
49 so Mamie Till Bradley could bring Emmett's body back to Chicago.  
50 The Chicago funeral home had agreed not to open the casket, but  
51 Mamie Bradley insisted she had a right to see her son. Mr. Raynor  
52 complied. After viewing the body, she also opted to leave the  
53 casket open for the funeral because she wanted people to see how  
54 badly Till's body had been disfigured. News photographs of Till's  
55 mutilated corpse circulated around the county, drawing intense  
56 public reaction. Some reports indicate up to 50,000 people viewed  
57 the body; and

58 WHEREAS, Emmett Till was buried September 6, 1955, in Burr  
59 Oak Cemetery in Alsip, Illinois. The same day, Bryant and Milam  
60 were indicted in Mississippi by a grand jury; and

61           WHEREAS, on September 23, 1955, the jury, made up of 12 white  
62 males, acquitted both defendants. Deliberations took just 67  
63 minutes; one juror said they took a "soda break" to stretch the  
64 time to over an hour. The hasty acquittal outraged people  
65 throughout the United States and Europe, and energized the nascent  
66 Civil Rights Movement; and

67           WHEREAS, the murder of Emmett Till was felt deeply by  
68 African-Americans, civil rights activists and many others. On May  
69 10, 2004, the United States Department of Justice announced that  
70 it was reopening the case to determine whether anyone other than  
71 Milam and Bryant were involved. Although the statute of  
72 limitations prevented charges being pursued under federal law,  
73 they could be pursued before the state court, and the Federal  
74 Bureau of Investigation and officials in Mississippi worked  
75 jointly on the investigation. As no autopsy had been performed on  
76 Till's body, it was exhumed from the suburban Chicago cemetery  
77 where it was buried on May 31, 2005, and the Cook County coroner  
78 then conducted the autopsy. The body was reburied by relatives on  
79 June 4. On August 26, 2005, *The Clarion-Ledger* in Jackson,  
80 Mississippi, announced that the exhumed body had been positively  
81 identified as that of Emmett Till; and

82           WHEREAS, in 2005, a 38-mile stretch of U.S. Highway North  
83 from Tutwiler to Greenwood, Mississippi, was renamed by the  
84 Mississippi Legislature in honor of Emmett Till, acknowledging the  
85 desire of the Mississippi Legislature to atone for this crime; and

86           WHEREAS, the murder of Emmett Till is one of the greatest  
87 crimes of history and its legacy still vexes the United States and  
88 the State of Mississippi. Small men took on the powers and airs  
89 of tyrants and masters, and years of unpunished brutality have  
90 produced a hardness of conscience. The perpetual pain, distrust  
91 and bitterness of many African-Americans could be assuaged and the  
92 principles espoused by the Founding Fathers would be affirmed,  
93 unifying all Mississippians, if on the 51st anniversary of this

94 infamous crime, the State of Mississippi acknowledges and atones  
95 for its pivotal role in the civil rights movement; NOW, THEREFORE,

96 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI:

97 **SECTION 1.** (1) That the State of Mississippi hereby  
98 apologizes for the murder of Emmett L. Till, which occurred on  
99 August 28, 1955, in Money, Mississippi, and calls for  
100 reconciliation in this matter.

101 (2) That the Secretary of State shall transmit a copy of  
102 this act to the surviving family of Emmett Till and to the State  
103 Superintendent of Education, the Director of the State Board for  
104 Community and Junior Colleges, the Commissioner of Higher  
105 Education and to members of Mississippi's congressional delegation  
106 for dissemination to their students and respective constituents so  
107 that they may be apprised of the sense of the Legislature in this  
108 matter.

109 **SECTION 2.** This act shall take effect and be in force from  
110 and after July 1, 2007.