

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 1178

By Ramsey

A RESOLUTION to honor Ronald Coffin, Frank Young, Constance Hooper Scott, Sylvia Porter, and Gervy Howard, the African-American students who integrated Maryville High School.

WHEREAS, this General Assembly takes great pride in recognizing five citizens who courageously played a significant role in the Civil Rights Movement during the desegregation of Maryville High School in the fall of 1963; and

WHEREAS, Ronald Coffin, Frank Young, Constance "Connie" Hooper Scott, and Sylvia Porter were the first African-American students to end desegregation at the school, and Gervy Howard joined them on September 6, 1963; and

WHEREAS, all five students and their parents were members of St. Paul AME Zion Church in Maryville, and they utilized their faith to survive trial by fire in their pioneering roles; and

WHEREAS, due to the hostilities and racism of the day, the students met at one of their houses to pray before being escorted to school by a police cruiser that was dispatched to ensure their personal safety; and

WHEREAS, once there, they waited in the principal's office until assembly was over and the halls were cleared; the African-American students were then escorted to their classrooms, which included only one black student per class; and

WHEREAS, in the afternoon, the process was repeated in reverse, and throughout the day, the five African-American students were subjected to jeers, whistles, and racist remarks from white students that were intended to intimidate and frighten them; and

WHEREAS, realizing that they were being tolerated, at best, the students nevertheless persevered and adapted, thankful to have access to quality educational materials that were unavailable at their previous segregated school; and

WHEREAS, during the 1963-1964 school year, these five young men and women became champions of the Civil Rights Movement and secured their rightful place in American history, enduring mistreatment and threats of violence to pave the way for improved educational opportunities for future generations; and

WHEREAS, after completing his first year, Frank Young did not return to Maryville High School; Gervy Edwards became the school's first African-American graduate in 1965, and Ronald Coffin, Constance Hooper Scott, and Sylvia Porter all graduated in 1966; and

WHEREAS, while only teenagers, these five heroes suffered intolerance, abuse, and even hatred from members of their own community, all in the interest of attaining civil rights and equality for all people, and they should be appropriately recognized; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED TENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we honor Ronald Coffin, Frank Young, Constance Hooper Scott, Sylvia Porter, and Gervy Howard, the African-American students who integrated Maryville High School, salute their courage and perseverance during difficult times, and extend to each of them our gratitude and our best wishes.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.