

HOUSE RESOLUTION No. 6018

A RESOLUTION in memory of Gordon Parks.

WHEREAS, Gordon Parks, one of Kansas' most famous sons, died March 7 in New York City at age 93. Born in Fort Scott as the youngest of 15 children, few would envision that he would become internationally recognized as one of America's true Renaissance personalities; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Parks attended a segregated grade school and an integrated high school in Fort Scott, but a high school in which black students could not participate in school sports or attend school social events. His mother died when he was age 15, and he was sent to live with an aunt in Minnesota. Subsequently he married, had three children and worked as a railway dining car waiter and porter. His life might have continued uneventfully but for the fateful purchase of a Voitlander Brilliant camera for \$7.50 in Seattle, Washington, in 1937; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Parks called his camera his weapon against poverty and racism. He became a photographer for the Farm Security Administration creating documentaries. His most famous photograph was shot in 1942 showing charwoman Ella Watson in front of an American flag which he entitled "American Gothic". In 1948 he was hired as a staff photographer for Life Magazine, and for the next 20 years he established himself as a premier photojournalist covering Harlem gangs, the Black Panthers and poverty in America and abroad; and

WHEREAS, His career expanded when he wrote a childhood memoir called "The Learning Tree". He later directed a movie version of this book to become the first African-American to direct a major Hollywood production. He won an Emmy for his documentary, "Diary of a Harlem Family", and returned to Hollywood to direct the movie "Shaft" which would be the first of many black oriented movies. He wrote the musical score for a PBS special ballet "Martin" which was shown on Martin Luther King's birthday in 1990; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Parks was named the Kansan of the Year in 1986, received the Kansas Arts Commission's Distinguished Arts Award in 1988, was awarded the National Medal of Arts in 1989 for his autobiographical film "Moments without Proper Names", was inducted into the International Photography Hall of Fame in 2002 and received the University of Kansas' William Allen White Foundation National Citation for journalistic merit in 2006; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Parks' attitude toward Kansas changed over the years, and he declared in 1998 that he had made peace with Kansas. Parks announced last month he wanted to be buried in his hometown of Fort Scott. "That is my home and this is what I want to go back to," Parks said near the end of a videotaped interview played February 10 at The University of Kansas, where he was honored with the William Allen White Foundation National Citation. He will be buried at Fort Scott on March 16: Now, therefore,

Be it resolved by the House of Representatives of the State of Kansas: That we honor a great Kansan who used his unique skills to combat prejudice and for the enjoyment his work gave many people. We are proud to have his final resting place in Kansas soil.

I hereby certify that the above RESOLUTION originated in the HOUSE, and was adopted by that body

Speaker of the House.

Chief Clerk of the House.