

Kirt Jacobs: Welcome to MoxieTalk with Kirt Jacobs. This is an archived edition when our program was called Leadership Landscape TV.

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Kirt Jacobs: Welcome to another installment of Leadership Landscape where we go inside the minds of local community leaders and allow them a chance to offer some keen insights into how they see themselves and most importantly explore just what makes them tick. I'm Kirt Jacobs host of Leadership Landscape where previous interviews have included former mayors, state politicians, and nationally renowned sports writers, sports legends, and heads of major business concerns, community activists and developers. Today our guest is none other than Teddy B. Gordon better known as Teddy Gordon. He is an attorney at law in private practice and he rose to national prominence in the recent Supreme Court decision of Meredith versus Jefferson County Public Schools. I'm going to read a bit of his bio to you.

He was born in 1946 and he is a native Louisvillian. Mr Gordon received a bachelor's degree in Russian studies from the University of Kentucky in 1967 and a jurist doctorate degree from the University of the Louisville School of Law in 1972. He then became a teacher from 1967-72 and has been in private practice since 1972. Even though, listen to this, he is in private practice in his office is an old brick two-story surrounded by high rise office buildings in downtown Louisville Gordon has been successful in a variety of pioneering litigation from taking on the Department of Jefferson Corrections and their failure to properly classify inmates to redefining violations of electioneering to zero tolerance and the rights of custody for non-parents. He ran for a seat on the Jefferson County School Board in 2004 promising to work end the district's desegregation plan. He finished last behind three other candidates.

His goal was to eliminate quote unquote the box on the application form that a child should not be judged by the color of his or her skin when it comes to where they go to school. However his most controversial legal case Meredith versus Jefferson County Board of Education and what made this private practitioner of law arise to national prominence was how to define the method that Jefferson County Public School system allocates student admittance to various schools. Let me be perfectly clear Leadership Landscape is not standing on any side of this decision. I'm just reading the following facts of the case and it's timeline for the sake of the audience to get a background and what Mr Gordon had accomplished here. There are three types of public schools in Jefferson County Public School system there's magnet, traditional, and regular. Now to give the audience a flavor of this landmark case I'm going to quickly go through the key bullet points of Mr Gordon's odyssey. It begins like this in 1998, excuse me, Hampton versus Jefferson County Board of Education dealt with five African-American students being denied admittance to Central High School in Louisville due to race. Judge ruled race cannot be the determining factor considered for magnet or specialized study schools.

Then 2002 McFarland versus Jefferson County Board of Education ultimately ended the use of race for student assignment to the traditional schools only. Two thousand and three Mr Gordon's client Crystal Meredith joins the 2002 McFarland case against the Jefferson County Board of Education to stop the current Jefferson County public school system's policy of determining admittance to the regular public schools based on race. Then in May of '03 presiding Judge Haven rules Meredith must represent every parent and child in the regular school program regardless of race. And here we go folks. In June 2006 the United States Supreme Court agrees to hear Meredith's case along with one in Seattle on December fourth 2006. Then on June 28, 2007 United States Supreme Court rules in favor of Meredith versus Jefferson County Board of Education on a 5-4 ruling that race cannot be the determining factor in the United States when terminating public school assignment. Let this be a story of a lesson and a testament that one man, woman, or person can make

a difference and mainly that dreams can come true no matter how late in life and that's why we invited Mr Gore to Leadership Landscape. I want to put that in for the audience so they would know the story and the timeline of what you've achieved. And you and your wife Suzanne along with your children Abby and Miles reside here in Louisville with your grandsons Joshua and Warren. Welcome to Leadership Landscape.

I'm going to have a drink of water.

Teddy Gordon: Thank you for having me. It was an honor and privilege to represent Crystal throughout this process. To have a successful oral argument and litigation before the Supreme Court of the United States.

Kirt Jacobs: Well the first question we like to ask all of our guests is what drives you to do what you do? I mean those who aren't familiar with how law works. You're not in a big law firm. You're a private practitioner. Why do you do what you do?

Teddy Gordon: I have the mundane cases as all or any sole practitioners would have. Such as the contested divorces, criminals, etc. but I've always loved a good fight and I've always loved a good fight where I think the underdog or or someone in that category is being denied justice or fair access to the courts. So to keep the fire in the belly so to speak

Kirt Jacobs: Sure

Teddy Gordon: I always try and accept a case they had gives me that fight. Gives me that opportunity to go against big firms, big odds something that just doesn't smell right. It doesn't pass my smell test and this case from day one did not pass my smell test.

Kirt Jacobs: OK. Whom do you credit most influential in your life Teddy? Can be more than one.

Teddy Gordon: That probably it has to start with my parents.

Kirt Jacobs: OK

Teddy Gordon: Who were so supportive. My dad's sense of humor. My mom's determination in life. Further my lovely bride of 41 years who has stood by probably a degree of insanity and craziness but a wonderful ride.

Kirt Jacobs: Now now

Teddy Gordon: She's been the stable rock of Gibraltar in my entire life. And a lot as she got older it was actually my daughter that taught me that I didn't have to always win a fight and that out of love I could compromise and still win and not always have to be right.

Kirt Jacobs: What was the most defining moment in your life Teddy? Can be more than one.

Teddy Gordon: This one is pretty well obviously the most defining moment at 11 AM on December 4, 2000 Supreme Court of the United States at 11 AM on December 4, 2006 having the case called and having my name and being the humble and unbeliever opportunity to say Mr Chief Justice may it please the court and start an oral argument before the Supreme Court of the United States. I mean this is a man who was born behind a mom and pop grocery store in Highland Park that no longer is there. It really has been as you said a dream that true. An odyssey an unreal journey and it's just an overwhelming event and the defining moment in my life. And then if we have to have a second which is interesting. On June 28 when I got the news that I won it really wasn't as defining because I was there in my office it was a quote unquote the national stage.

Kirt Jacobs: I have a picture from that day. Go ahead Teddy. I want to hold it up for the camera.

Teddy Gordon: But I was sitting in my office and the Supreme Court clerk called before it became public. Which I thought it was was a wonderful procedure and she advised me that I had indeed

the petitioner had prevailed in a 5-4 decision. And at that point all I could do was probably just have tears coming out of my eyes. Two defining moments in a life of what has been a wonderful exciting practice a law.

Kirt Jacobs: With that it will lead into our next question. If there is one Teddy what is your biggest professional regret? In other words is there something you would have done differently? It can be persona as well.

Teddy Gordon: Well personal but clearly I probably didn't tell my wife and my daughter and my son that I love them every day of my life. It's always too much time working and maybe and I know I probably should have spent more time with them. I had one case that without going into names or places..

Kirt Jacobs: Sure

Teddy Gordon: ..or dates.

Kirt Jacobs: Not necessary.

Teddy Gordon: I had one case it a wrongful death of a college student involving alcohol within an approved fraternity event or sorority.. Fraternity event and I thought it was a great case. We got a little some funds in on some of the insurance policies and the client thought that was too much money for a fee even though I'd given her all the money/ I hadn't even divided the money. And we fell out on the case and I thought it was a tremendous case to try and send a lesson to fraternities and sororities on organized campus events that they should be more careful. It was one of those cause cases that I really love. And unfortunately there was a disagreement with the client and I couldn't satisfy her and I should have done a better job on that case.

Kirt Jacobs: Honest answer. On the flip side of that Teddy what is your biggest professional triumph? I think we probably for you we kind of know the answer before it's asked the question.

Teddy Gordon: We come back to the Supreme Court of the United States in the in the basic honesty that I've had representing all of the individuals involved but at last Crystal Meredith is I can't say enough about how humbling the event has been. And if anybody ever argues or has the opportunity to argue before the Supreme Court of the United States and they want to take any ego away from that. I mean they're a better person than me.

Kirt Jacobs: Do you mind holding that up for the camera? Turn that around.

Teddy Gordon: These are the quill pins that I had framed.

Kirt Jacobs: Wow

Teddy Gordon: That were at... We say at a table number two because Seattle went first. And they were cross just in this manner where I got to sit at the Supreme Court of the United States and the only individuals in the world which is less than one percent of all practicing attorneys that are allowed to have this type of quill pen are attorneys that are.. have the the opportunity to argue before the Supreme Court of the United States. And so. Interestingly enough and you talk about defining moments in my practice.

Kirt Jacobs: Sure

Teddy Gordon: The other thing that was sitting right next to this if you've ever seen my office are a series of teddy bears. And of course I have..

Kirt Jacobs: Makes sense

Teddy Gordon: My nickname is Teddy B or Teddy Bear and one of the great moments in my entire practice has been where we finalize an adoption. And it's the most courageous act that a mom ever does for her child. And it's just a wonderful blessing for the child to go to a new home. And the last thing that I say to the client if they if they say do they do we owe you anything else. I said yes you owe

me a teddy bear. And if you see my office you see the teddy bears and you see names on the teddy bear that represents the new life and beginnings of about 15-20 babies that have gone through the adoptive process. That is another wonderful defining moment of my life..

Kirt Jacobs: Great.

Teddy Gordon: and career.

Kirt Jacobs: What do you find exciting about all this Teddy? Again you probably I would assume may have been asked over the years hey want to come join our firm you're a good guy what have you good lawyer. I don't know but use your flying solo in a day and age that at least to my knowledge great deal people don't do that.

Teddy Gordon: I have been told that it has to be my way or no way. That I'm too stubborn.

Kirt Jacobs: So something excites you about this.

Teddy Gordon: I really am very fortunate that I'm still high on life.

Kirt Jacobs: OK

Teddy Gordon: I live.. Attempt to live

Kirt Jacobs: I'm sure that's help pump some adrenaline into it.

Teddy Gordon: It's beyond belief to have these type of opportunities and of course I have my family. share and we're all together in this battle journey and they were very supportive. But I enjoy I've always told you know my children adult children I said that if you enjoy what you're doing and you live according to your means that you are 98 percent ahead of the rest of the world and I've achieved that. And hopefully they have too. Hopefully everybody in life can. I enjoy going into the office each day. It's been a little bit tougher since the spring quarter but I enjoyed going to the office each day.

Kirt Jacobs: What was the best advice ever given you to Teddy? And it can be more than one piece of advice.

Teddy Gordon: My dad always said you know as you grow up you always have these catch expressions that you think you'll never repeat. When something went wrong when I was trying to do something right he would always have this expression that said the road to hell is paved with good intentions but son then you just earned yourself another layer of asphalt. And I always appreciated that. I've set a slogan for myself and I'm sure my kids remember more than theirs but my personal slogan for me or advice has been to strive for perfection never rest.

Kirt Jacobs: OK

Teddy Gordon: And I've always tried to live up to that. And I never leave a task undone. And I've always had the ability regardless of how late it takes because I was in the office until about 1 AM when I finished the petition for writ of certiorari. To be task-minded. To finish it and to get the job done.

Kirt Jacobs: And I'm sure there's many quiet nights when you do that. You're alone is my point.

Teddy Gordon: Oh yes there was no one in the office.

Kirt Jacobs: You're flying solo.

Teddy Gordon: There was no one with me at 1 AM. That also is of course the difference that when big firms go to the Supreme Court of the United States they have all the paralegals and all of the support system. And and of course I didn't and I did have the opportunity if I wanted to to turn the case over to a Washington lawyer but my wife again, and others my niece, my nephew they all said it's your case. Take the opportunity. Take the risk.

Kirt Jacobs: Family kind of carries a big stick doesn't it. In that regard.

Teddy Gordon: Well

Kirt Jacobs: When they speak.

Teddy Gordon: You know they do and you I had to get to the mindset because I had a practice session out at Berkeley at Boalt Law School where I would I thought I was very poor. And if if anyone in some type of leadership role or representing someone else has one of these poor performances. I don't sleep the whole night I was mad at me. And I said to myself either we're going to be able to do this and we're going to be able to do it to the best of my ability or we're not. And it was it was an epiphany a truthful moment when I came tried to sleep that night and came back on the plane and it was pouring down rain drive from Nashville. I fly out on Nashville because of the plane connections and by the time I got home and reviewed it all I said you know this is your opportunity and you're going to take this opportunity. It's your job to do. It's your case. And with all the family support the job got done.

Kirt Jacobs: Beautiful. This show's about leadership. That's why it's called Leadership Landscape. Can you can you define leadership in one word Teddy? Can be more than one.

Teddy Gordon: Charisma

Kirt Jacobs: Really.

Teddy Gordon: Charisma.

Kirt Jacobs: I don't think we've ever had that one.

Teddy Gordon: I mean people have to believe in you. And you have to lead by example and it it's some type of special aura [inaudible] word but to me it's charisma. And when I think of presidential leaders last one the really had charisma it was John Kennedy and we all follow.

Kirt Jacobs: Yeah

Teddy Gordon: You know.

Kirt Jacobs: Wasn't here then.

(laughter)

Teddy Gordon: But another defining moment in life you know if you're a 60s child and you lived through the assassination of John Kennedy. Some of those dreams that died on that day just as some of the music says. But to me you lead by example. You have some type of ability that when clearly that when you direct request ask the people respond. They will do what you want. And a greatest stage in the world of course is the Supreme Court the United States and nine justices to make sure that you retain five. But many years you know it's twelve people in a jury.

Kirt Jacobs: Let me ask you this question here. Without naming names. Today's leaders local, national do you think they have charisma by and large or you think it's something that's kind of fallen short.

Teddy Gordon: Fallen way short.

Kirt Jacobs: Has it?

Teddy Gordon: Very sad. Very sad. You know there are. We we see the individual that appears on the scene from from time to time. I mean when I first heard Barack Obama at the Democratic convention and I saw him he was close to Hillary to Louisville Slugger Field. He was close. He was close and somebody's lost the spark. I don't know if it's the campaign.

Kirt Jacobs: Maybe it's what we do as a culture to them. Now a days. Who knows?

Teddy Gordon: But Colin Powell

Kirt Jacobs: Ok

Teddy Gordon: I've always believed in. And then he had that sad performance at the U.N. on weapons of mass destruction.

Kirt Jacobs: Right

Teddy Gordon: And I thought we all lost a little bit of faith in Colin Powell who I thought was supreme.

Kirt Jacobs: Moving on I'm going to ask you this next question. If you could change one thing Teddy be it in life or in general what would it be?

Teddy Gordon: That one I had the most difficulty in answering at all. But I think I've said it before. I think growing up I wish I'd had more time although I thought I devoted a considerable amount of time to being a better husband and a better father.

Kirt Jacobs: It's an honest answer. Fair answer. Now this next next question we like to ask all our guests. It's kind of a lengthy question. Could you describe in detail a particular incident or scenario in your personal or professional life where you utilized your style and philosophy on leadership?

Teddy Gordon: Once again I think I am a person that just takes charge. And ever since a young age. If there's been a job to do I try and take care of that job. My dad in the grocery store used to send me to the vegetable and fruit market when I was 10-12-years-old. Give me a price list to buy the fruits and vegetables and I could not go over that price list. There's various situations where there's sort of they don't get any type of publicity but there was one time on the expressway where there were black guys and there were cars on the sides of the road and there was already a wrecked. So I got out and and basically stood there and stopped the cars and then along with the help of other drivers we created a path that got through. I was told by my secretary and I had forgotten this incident which I had she had trouble with childbirth and as soon as I got there I said cus I saw her in a room with other moms

and they had their babies and her baby was very critical at that stage to separate her and put her in a private room so she wouldn't have to go through that. I believe this case is more than Teddy B Gordon. It's more than Crystel Meredith though. I thought it all along since 1998 for equal educational opportunity for all. It was never about race. It was never about white or black it was about making sure that each child got the best possible public education. And we're the only community that hasn't gone forward. Communities across this country are seeing if they can reduce class size. Improve the experienced teachers in these large concentrations of poverty and whether or not they'll have equal resources. So I have... The person I hope proudly at the forefront to improve educational opportunity to all. That we cannot be satisfied in this great United States of ours just merely to sit a child of one color next to another color and say we're going to have 25-40 point achievement gaps and that's what public education is all about. And so if this starts the change and I am the leader of that change and we do have hope when the kids go to school at age five or even six and we do improve their educational outcomes my life has clearly been satisfied.

Kirt Jacobs: I'm going to ask you about that in a moment. That a spect of it. We've kind of talked about the difference in leaders today from your charisma comments. I love asking this question to all our guests because I think it gives a great insight into the person. If you were granted two weeks today Teddy. You know course you're kind of running your own boat there. Your own training. You know you can do anything you want. Take a mini vacation from life. You know put down the Blackberry whatever it is you use a computer. Disappear for two weeks. How would you spend those two weeks?

Teddy Gordon: Well I'm a beach person.

Kirt Jacobs: Really? OK.

Teddy Gordon: I love a beach bum and from time-to-time I do spend time on the beach Fort Lauderdale the last two weeks of the year .And then my last second crave I think from Tim McGraw was

Ride a Bull Named Foo Man Choo. But but my second love... I used to go white water rafting. That got a little bit precarious but and I haven't had time for it. Then I enjoy handicapping horses. So I go to handicap contests.

Kirt Jacobs: Now I would family go with or would you fly solo since it seems to be your nature.

Teddy Gordon: The handicapping contest I fly solo because that's a little bit boring for my shopping wife but the beach we always go. She always goes with me and we always go together as a family and when kids were young they would come with us. And when they went to college we would fly down during winter break and the last two weeks we'd be at the beach in Fort Lauderdale. So I love it.

Kirt Jacobs: I'm really looking forward to this next question because we've not had a guest on this show that achieved something we have but it's more tangible usually it's buildings or what have you. You've done something that's going to live long well after you're long gone. Passed on. I'm gone on. Most of my generation. Fifty years from now hundred years from now when someone opens up the American history book and they see Teddy B. Gordon's name what do you think it will say next to it?

Teddy Gordon: That

Kirt Jacobs: What do you hope?

Teddy Gordon: I hope it says that he lead the change in a public school system that all children regardless of their race, color, creed, ethnicity are provided the best public education possible. That they are not color coded by their skin color of their skin and they are not their self-worth is not denigrated because they have to check a box. That they're all appreciated for their educational outcome.

Kirt Jacobs: And you kind of I guess in a way you quasi answered this but I do want to ask this question. When the great day comes

on a personal level how do you want to be whatever?

Teddy Gordon: Well first and he enjoyed life to the fullest.

Kirt Jacobs: OK.

Teddy Gordon: That he enjoyed a good party. That he enjoyed a good laugh. And that Teddy B Gordon in the lives of his clients made a difference. Fought to the best of his ability and the history of our great nation made a difference for public education for all in the United States of America.

Kirt Jacobs: I think that's a great note to end on. It's quite a pleasure having you on Leadership Landscape.

Teddy Gordon: Thank you very much for having me

Kirt Jacobs: Thank you sir. You've really done something. I want to hold this up. This was on the day when the decision came down. Picture of your family.

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Kirt Jacobs: Thank you for listening to MoxieTalk with Kirt Jacobs. This episode was archival audio from when we were known as Leadership Landscape TV. If you have any feedback, general comments, or a recommendation for a suitable guest feel free to email me at kirt@moxietalk.com or catch us on Facebook under MoxieTalk with Kirt Jacobs, or on Twitter under [@kirtjacobs](https://twitter.com/kirtjacobs) or our extensive website at www.moxietalk.com