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THE DESIGN OF THE SOUTHERN FUTURE: THE STRUGGLE TO BUILD WHITE
DEMOCRACY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI, 1890-1948

A Dissertation
Presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
In the Department of History
The University of Mississippi

by

THOMAS JOHN CAREY

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines how ideas about the future and the past shaped the meaning and role of Mississippi's flagship state university during the Jim Crow period. "The Design of the Southern Future" is a story of contingency and contestation, of struggles over expansion and democratization, and of the burdens of founding myths and myths of the founding. It reveals the interior dynamics that shaped the University of Mississippi's development from the birth of Jim Crow until just before the desegregation crises of the 1950s and 1960s. These internal processes allowed the institution to overcome problems of exclusivity and class tension, but they also tied the future and identity of the university closely to the cause of white supremacy and segregation. By examining the building of the University of Mississippi as an element of an ambitious program to combine the promise of a white majoritarian future with the permanent exclusion of African Americans, "The Design of the Southern Future" treats the erection of a segregationist institution as a project in equipping Jim Crow for the long-haul by expanding and modernizing the services and possibilities that a dynamic form of white supremacy seemed to offer. By the 1940s, the University of Mississippi had succeeded in mending its internal divisions and harnessing the power and resources of the federal government to build itself into a laboratory for white democracy. Thus when African Americans challenged segregation at the university in the 1950s and 1960s, defenders of Ole Miss were not merely protecting a citadel of Jim Crow; they were fighting to promote future visions of white supremacy.

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation examines how ideas about the future and the past shaped the meaning and role of Mississippi's flagship state university during the Jim Crow period. "The Design of the Southern Future" is a story of contingency and contestation, of struggles over expansion and democratization, and of the burdens of founding myths and myths of the founding. It reveals the interior dynamics that shaped the University of Mississippi's development from the birth of Jim Crow until just before the desegregation crises of the 1950s and 1960s. These internal processes allowed the institution to overcome problems of exclusivity and class tension, but they also tied the future and identity of the university closely to the cause of white supremacy and segregation. By examining the building of the University of Mississippi as an element of an ambitious program to combine the promise of a white majoritarian future with the permanent exclusion of African Americans, "The Design of the Southern Future" treats the erection of a segregationist institution as a project in equipping Jim Crow for the long-haul by expanding and modernizing the services and possibilities that a dynamic form of white supremacy seemed to offer. By the 1940s, the University of Mississippi had succeeded in mending its internal divisions and harnessing the power and resources of the federal government to build itself into a laboratory for white democracy. Thus when African Americans challenged segregation at the university in the 1950s and 1960s, defenders of Ole Miss were not merely protecting a citadel of Jim Crow; they were fighting to

promote future visions of white supremacy.

From the 1890s through the mid-1920s, the university invented an institutional identity around the imagery of the Old South and attempted to use scientific methods of knowledge-production to interpret the present through the study of the past. These projects occurred in the midst of a convulsive political revolution within the state's Democratic Party and against the backdrop of several rounds of internal skirmishes over elitism and snobbishness at the university. By the end of the 1920s, educational reformers had articulated a forceful critique of the university and designed a greater, modern replacement for it. Though administrators and alumni succeeded in preserving "Ole Miss" and keeping the state university in Oxford, the New Deal years saw the institution harness federal money for ambitious projects to build up the university physically and to open its doors to a larger number of white Mississippians. By the mid-1930s, Mississippians had made significant progress in turning their state university into an agent of outreach and democratization. During and after World War II, as the state's political culture reacted defensively to developments in Washington and within the national Democratic Party, voices of racial moderation at the university and within the state affirmed their loyalty to Jim Crow and to Mississippi's leadership. By the Dixiecrat revolt of 1948 and the university's centennial, the state's founding myth of white supremacy and the militant opposition of civil rights had become synonymous with the name Ole Miss. The project of building a more expansive, a more democratic, and a greater University of Mississippi made the institution's future something that challengers threatened and something that defenders deemed worth protecting.

At first glance, the University of Mississippi seems an unlikely place to find

internal tensions or to uncover the outlines of a decades-long project of development. Indeed, because of the enthusiasm with which the institution supported the Confederacy and the deadly rioting by which it resisted desegregation, the university has seemed to be a place of recurring explosions of reaction, not the site of sustained change over time. A set of examples, one taken from the university's own yearbook, the others taken from a collection of interested observers, suggests something of the temptation to write *history*—and the contingency, contestation, and change over time that comes with it—out of the telling of the institution's past.

In 1948, to commemorate the University of Mississippi's centennial, the *Ole Miss* yearbook surveyed the institution's first hundred years. Eighty "scions of the southern hierarchy," "attended by their slaves and carrying their hunting dogs and guns," had comprised the university's first class of students. In the early days, students smuggled whiskey onto the Oxford campus in wagons carrying cotton and took "a sociable drink before breakfast" in preparation for classes. One rowdy evening, administrators caught one of the university's "eager young scholars" with "a 'lewd woman' in his room." Despite the "debauchery" of the student body, the antebellum years had brought "a great measure of scholastic progress" to the university. Under the leadership of F. A. P. Barnard, the institution expanded and "took its honored place as one of the best equipped universities in America." Then, thirteen years into the university's existence, the Civil War came and shuttered its doors. Through their gallantry at Gettysburg and at other battles, the University Greys, a company of Confederate student-soldiers, "made of a lost cause, a defeat, a thing of glory that remains for all time an inspiration to those who follow." During Reconstruction, the university chafed under the interference of a

“carpetbagged and scalleywagged” legislature which attempted to “change the school to suit [its] political views.” The “tyrants of the North and their cringing allies in the South,” though, proved unable to vanquish the spirit embodied in the Ku Klux Klansmen, those “ghosts of departed heroes [who] rode on errands of vengeance, lighted by the fires of unmerciful justice.” Following the overthrow of the Reconstruction government and the state’s political Redemption, the university found itself “once again coming into its own.” In six paragraphs, as compared to the twenty-four that had documented the history of the university through the end of the Reconstruction, the *Ole Miss* breezed through the next eight decades of the institution’s life, with references to such developments as the “softening” influence of female students on campus life beginning in 1882, the “throes of political change” that repeatedly rocked the faculty and administration between 1916 and 1932, the “bathtub gin” years of the 1920s, the “depression-riddled thirties,” and the building of a “new and greater Ole Miss” in the post-World War II era.¹

If, for the student editors of the 1948 *Ole Miss*, the era of the Civil War and Reconstruction was the defining period in their university’s history, since 1962 the rioting that marked the school’s desegregation has been the central event which observers and scholars of the institution have sought to explain.² Because the university endowed

¹ “A Century Of Ole Miss,” *Ole Miss*, Volume LLII, 1948, 33-36, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

² The definitive account of the desegregation of the university and the best work on the history of the university is Charles W. Eagles, *The Price of Defiance: James Meredith and the Integration of Ole Miss* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009). Histories of the university include: David G. Sansing, *The University of Mississippi: A Sesquicentennial History* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999); and Allen Cabaniss, *A History of the University of Mississippi* (University, MS: University of Mississippi, 1949). Works on the 1962 crisis and its legacy at the university include: Russell H. Barrett, *Integration at Ole Miss* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1965); Nadine Cohodas, *The Band Played Dixie: Race and the Liberal Conscience at Ole Miss* (New York: Free Press, 1997); William Doyle, *An American Insurrection: The Battle of Oxford, Mississippi, 1962* (New York: Doubleday, 1962); Paul Hendrickson, *Sons of Mississippi: A Story of Race and Its Legacy* (New York: Knopf, 2003); Walter Lord, *The Past That Would Not Die* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965); James Meredith, *Three Years in Mississippi*

the Civil War with a special place in its history, and the 1962 riots so neatly served as a centennial explosion of violent reaction against federal authority, narratives have stressed the relentless continuities and cyclical patterns of the institution's history. For a place "unreconstructed a century after Appomattox," the flagship university of a state whose history has been "fated" and marked by the recurring "inevitable response of the closed society," the events of 1962 seemed to represent "the last battle of the Civil War."³ Such descriptions have effectively flattened the university's history; what happened in 1962 seems to have as much—or more—to do with what happened in 1861 than in any of the years between the two events. This narrative has also made reactions to external forces, rather than the processes of internal development, the determining factors in the university's history.⁴ In short, the University of Mississippi has come to embody the recalcitrant, tradition-bound, and past-obsessed South. "The Design of the Southern

(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966); and James W. Silver, *Mississippi: The Closed Society* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1964).

³ First quotation is from Curtis Wilkie, *Dixie: A Personal Odyssey through Events that Shaped the Modern South* (New York: Touchstone, 2001), 80; second quotation is from Silver, *Mississippi: The Closed Society*, 3; third quotation is from Willie Morris, "At Ole Miss: Echoes of a Civil War's Last Battle," *Time*, 4 October 1982, 8.

⁴ Beyond the case of Ole Miss, scholars have of course long emphasized the significance of reactions to external scrutiny in shaping the development of southern institutions and the southern mind. Recently, Angie Maxwell has written of "public criticism" as the "cradle of southern consciousness" and stressed the role of the region's "heritage of inferiority" in shaping its efforts to preserve "white cultural supremacy and conservative political domination" through "strict allegiance to regional mythologies such as the Confederate Lost Cause and the post-Reconstruction New South." Maxwell has described "a sense of ostracism and inferiority" as "the undercarriage" of southern culture and written that public criticism "transcends the present moment and forms a bridge to a collective, regional past." "Southern whiteness," she writes, "thus becomes constructed by negative cultural feedback." Angie Maxwell, *The Indicted South: Public Criticism, Southern Inferiority, and the Politics of Whiteness* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), quotations from 3 and 12.

Maxwell's work builds on previous scholarship on the role of external criticism in the shaping of southern identity, including: Howard W. Odum, *Southern Regions of the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1936); W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1941); George B. Tindall, "The Benighted South: Origins of a Modern Image," *Virginia Quarterly Review* 40, no. 2 (Spring 1964): 281-294; Sheldon Hackney, "Southern Violence," *American Historical Review* 74, no. 3 (February 1969): 906-925; John Shelton Reed, *The Enduring South: Subcultural Persistence in Mass Society* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972); Jack Temple Kirby, *Media-Made Dixie: The South in the American Imagination* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978); and Fred Hobson, *Tell about the South: The Southern Rage to Explain* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983).

Future,” by revealing the clear vision for the future that drove the building of one segregationist institution, not only offers a fuller history of the University of Mississippi, but it also suggests a set of questions scholars might ask about development, modernity, and democratization across the larger Jim Crow South and throughout other racially-ordered societies in the twentieth century.

Two tracks run through “The Design of the Southern Future.” One track follows the role of tradition and the authority of the past at the University of Mississippi. In analyzing the invention of Ole Miss as an institutional identity, the project treats the deployment of the metaphor of the antebellum plantation and the imagery of the Old South as a conscious effort to provide the university with an aura of timelessness and to justify its special position within the state’s system of education. Scholars carrying with them the authority of professional training in the scientific methods of knowledge-production built archives and directed work that used an official version of the state’s history to legitimize rule by certain classes of men and to discredit the rise of others. But if one track of the dissertation follows the path of invented traditions that protected a contemporary order by invoking the authority of the past, a second traces the progress of ambitious and innovative forms of development that remade the university in the image of an expansive future of white majoritarianism. Anti-fraternity agitation at the university brought to the campus the revolt against privilege and elitism that convulsed Mississippi’s Democratic Party during the opening decades of the twentieth century. Debates regarding pedagogy and curriculum were part of a larger struggle to reform the university and to convert it into a mechanism for the development and modernization of the state.

Rather than imagining these tracks as crossing one another or envisioning them as running parallel through a vanishing point, “The Design of the Southern Future” depicts the two as converging in the era of the New Deal, when the university harnessed the power and resources of the federal government to build itself into a laboratory for white democracy. By the 1940s, allegiance to Ole Miss’s founding myths and invented traditions had become inseparable from the promotion of the University of Mississippi’s future. The institution had become something quite “new”—and, for an overwhelming number of white Mississippians, something quite worth fighting for—but the traditions, symbols, and myths that defined the university culturally suggested that fighting for its future was a rearguard action to protect its past. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that battles for the future of the university so often appear to be about its history.

“The Design of the Southern Future” is a story about the invention of traditions and the purposes which traditions serve once invented. Eric Hobsbawm wrote that as “responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by past by quasi-obligatory repetition,” invented traditions represent an “attempt to structure at least some part of social life within [the modern world] as unchanging and invariant.” Though, as Hobsbawm remarked, the relationship between invented traditions and the “historic past” has been “largely factitious,” they serve the purpose of establishing “continuity” in the midst of “the constant change and innovation of the modern world.”⁵ Beyond easing the convulsions of rapid social and political change, the invocation of the cultural past has the effect of legitimizing institutions, innovations, and new modes of thought geared for the future. Indeed, as

⁵ Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 2.

Benedict Anderson has written in reference to the cultural roots of nationalism, “If nation-states are widely conceded to be ‘new’ and ‘historical,’ the nations to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past, and, still more important, glide into a limitless future.”⁶

The late-nineteenth-century South was a time and place for the inventing of traditions, the legitimizing of new regimes, and the imagining of expansive futures. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s, Bourbon Democrats built and strengthened economic and political institutions by endowing them with the cultural authority of the Old South. C. Vann Woodward, writing about the Bourbon penchant for invoking the Lost Cause in the face of the agrarian revolts of the 1890s, remarked that “One of the most significant inventions of the New South was the ‘Old South.’”⁷ As Catherine Bishir has demonstrated, the memorialization of the antebellum era enabled late-nineteenth-century leaders to construct a narrative of “patrician Anglo-Saxon continuity, of order, stability, and harmony” and to proclaim “a legitimizing continuum from the Old South to the New South.”⁸ The invention of the Old South did more than legitimize the Bourbon order of the post-Reconstruction era, however; in mythologizing the region’s past, boosters pointed toward the South’s future. As Paul Gaston has written, “New South prophets” could provide a satisfactory “salve for the bitter wounds of defeat” only by offering “a vital substitute for the dream of independence and self-determination, a substitute that

⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983), 11-12.

⁷ C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), 154-155.

⁸ Catherine W. Bishir, "Landmarks of Power: Building a Southern Past, 1885-1915," *Southern Cultures* (Inaugural Issue, 1993): 6.

embodied an even nobler vision of the future than the abandoned Confederate utopia.”⁹

James C. Cobb has written of the thoroughness with which the New South Creed blended the cultural authority of the past with the mythical permanency of the Bourbon order. The combined effect of the invention of the “Old South/Lost Cause legend,” Cobb writes, was the creation of “an almost seamless and undeniably seductive mural in which a glorious past, a reassuring present, and a glittering future were fully integrated and virtually indistinguishable.” By the end of the nineteenth century, New South boosters, “[a]s champions of past, present, and future,” had established “an all but impregnable position while anyone who challenged them could readily be cast as the opponent of both progress, tradition, and, for good measure, the status quo as well.”¹⁰

By closely examining the ways that invented traditions have interacted with new modes of thought and development, “The Design of the Southern Future” builds upon the existing scholarship on the uses of traditional cultural symbols throughout modern societies and the specific processes of culturally anchoring political authority in the New South. While the established scholarship has pointed toward the role that visions of “limitless” and “glittering” futures have played in endowing institutions and regimes with

⁹ Paul M. Gaston, *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking*, revised edition (Montgomery, AL: New South Books, 2002), 107.

¹⁰ James C. Cobb, *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 98.

Other key works on the idea of the New South include: Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life after Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Numan V. Bartley, “In Search of the New South: Southern Politics after Reconstruction,” *Reviews in American History* 10 (1982): 150-163; Don H. Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); David R. Goldfield, *Still Fighting the Civil War: The American South and Southern History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002), chapters one and two; Wayne Mixon, *Southern Writers and the New South Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); and Charles Reagan Wilson, “The Invention of Southern Tradition: The Writing and Ritualization of Southern History, 1880-1940,” in Lothar Honninghausen and Valeria Gennaro Lerda, eds., *Rewriting the South: History and Fiction* (Tubingen: Francke, 1993): 3-21.

an aura of permanency and impregnability, this project excavates the processes through which the very institutions that cloak themselves in the symbols of an old world undertake projects to create fundamentally new and expansive ones. This is a story about imagining and making future visions through the creating of specific mechanisms for development and modernization, not merely pointing toward the future to legitimize or anchor the present. By asking questions about the dynamic relationship between invented traditions and new modes of development, “The Design of the Southern Future” combines the existing scholarship on invented traditions with the emerging field of “histories of the future.”¹¹ To borrow the language of Reinhart Koselleck, histories of the future treat the “horizon of expectation” in addition to the “space of experiencing.”¹² In other words, this methodology enables scholars to analyze how historical actors envisioned their futures, not just how they experienced the changes that had already come to their lives. The case of Ole Miss suggests much about the relationship between tradition, experience, and expectation. If the experience of building the institution over time expanded expectations for the promise of its future, the traditions and founding myths that anchored the university ensured that its horizon would not extend beyond Jim Crow’s waters. By unifying the invented traditions that root and legitimize institutions with the designs for the future that institutions pursue, this project suggests ways that scholars can project the significance of invented traditions and founding myths beyond what they anchor and protect in the present into the futures that they shape and determine.

As a project that deals with the intersection between politics and knowledge-

¹¹ For discussions of this emerging field and specific examples, see: Jenny Anderson, Matthew Connelly, David Engerman, and Manu Goswami, “AHR Forum: Histories of the Future,” *American Historical Review* 117, no.5 (December 2012): 1402-1485; Vanessa Ogle, “Whose Time Is It? The Pluralization of Time and the Global Condition, 1870s-1940s,” *American Historical Review* 118, no. 5 (December 2013): 1376-1402.

¹² Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 272.

production, “The Design of the Southern Future” engages with questions that scholars have asked about defining cultural and intellectual projects of the Jim Crow South. W. Fitzhugh Brundage has written powerfully of the processes by which “competing [white and black] histories divided southerners and how contests over the past eroded or strengthened public civility and democratic culture in the region.”¹³ Brundage has referred to the early-twentieth-century project in “the archiving of white civilization” as one “extension of the systematic colonization of public spaces by white elites.”¹⁴ In its analysis of the role of professional historians and the significance of knowledge-production, “The Design of the Southern Future” argues that the persisting class tensions and political divisions among white Mississippians ensured that *which type* of white men belonged in power remained the key question of the past well beyond the turbulence of the 1890s. By re-emphasizing class in debates about the making and remembering of the southern past, this project also challenges analyses of southern culture which have framed the making of “whiteness” as the key process in the creation of a regional identity.¹⁵

The same dilemmas and perspectives that informed the work of the Nashville Agrarians and the artists of the Southern Renaissance shaped debates about the future of the University of Mississippi. As Paul Conkin has written, the Agrarians forced southerners “to face the hard question—what type of progress did they want?”¹⁶ Daniel

¹³ W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2005), 3.

¹⁴ Brundage, *The Southern Past*, 121, 137.

¹⁵ See, for example, Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998); Tara McPherson, *Reconstructing Dixie: Race, Gender, and Nostalgia in the Modern South* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Trent Watts, *One Homogeneous People: Narratives of White Southern Identity, 1890-1920* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2010). Whiteness, beyond its specific use to explain southern history, has attracted significant criticism as an analytical tool. For two examples, see Eric Arnesen, “Whiteness and the Historians’ Imagination,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 60 (Fall 2001): 3-32; and Barbara J. Fields, “Whiteness, Racism, and Identity,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 60 (Fall 2001): 48-56.

¹⁶ Paul K. Conkin, *The Southern Agrarians* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1988), 35.

Joseph Singal has argued that the intellectuals of the post-World War I South engaged in “a task of deliberately and rapidly catching up” with the “Western world.” In the South, where the transition from Victorianism to Modernism occurred in “concentrated fashion” within a “comparatively self-contained” arena, “tension and drama” defined the “clash of cultures.”¹⁷ Leigh Anne Duck has written that the “antipodal images” of North and South compelled “southern modernists to think their way through the purported temporal divide between the South and the larger nation.”¹⁸ Ole Miss was not an institution at the avant-garde of cultural production in the South, but the struggles over its future played out along lines drawn over questions about the best ways to develop university, state, and region and in the form of an extended program to secure control over the pace and nature of change and the terms of the future.

“The Design of the Southern Future” ends where many readers might expect a story about the University of Mississippi to end: a campus filled with Confederate flags, a student body chanting states-rights slogans, and a band playing “Dixie.” But this is not a story about inevitability, reaction, or the road from Gettysburg to the riots of 1962. It is one of contestation and contingency, and of a design fitted to founding myths, expanded and projected into the future, partially realized, and violently and vainly fought for. This is a story about what segregationists attempted to build and the visions of a white majoritarian future that made institutions like Ole Miss seem worth fighting for. By telling this story, “The Design of the Southern Future” responds to a call for a historiography of segregation that matches the richness of the historiography of the civil-

¹⁷ Daniel Joseph Singal, *The War Within: From Victorian to Modernist Thought in the South, 1919-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 9-10.

¹⁸ Leigh Anne Duck, *The Nation's Region: Southern Modernism, Segregation, and U. S. Nationalism* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 3.

rights movement. While a number of important works have contributed to a fuller understanding of what Jacquelyn Dowd Hall has called the “long civil rights movement,” historians have been slower and less creative in tracing the development of segregation.¹⁹ This project, which treats key processes in what Jason Morgan Ward has called the “long segregationist movement,” offers, at the institutional and community level, an analysis of what segregation seemed to offer and what allegiance to Jim Crow mandated.²⁰ By taking seriously and treating thoughtfully the development of a university so closely associated with Jim Crow, “The Design of the Southern Future” responds to Charles W. Eagles’s remark that “scholars seem to have assumed that little remains to be learned about the segregationists or that they are simply too unattractive or unimportant to warrant further examination.”²¹ The dissertation that follows is a study in the kind of development that sought to equip Jim Crow for the long-haul and to modernize and expand segregation to guarantee a white majoritarian future. By treating invented traditions and cultural

¹⁹ Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” *Journal of American History* 91 (March 2005): 1233-1264. For examples of such work, see: Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950* (New York: Norton, 2008); Jane Dailey, Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, and Bryant Simon, eds., *Jumpin’ Jim Crow: Southern Politics from Civil War to Civil Rights* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Merl E. Reed, *Seedtime for the Modern Civil Rights Movement: The President’s Committee on Fair Employment Practice, 1941-1946* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991); Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); John Egerton, *Speak Now against the Day: The Generation before the Civil Rights Movement in the South* (New York: Knopf, 1994); Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Adam Fairclough, *Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995); Robert J. Norrell, *Reaping the Whirlwind: The Civil Rights Movement in Tuskegee* (New York: Knopf, 1985); Tomiko Brown-Nagin, *Courage to Dissent: Atlanta and the Long History of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Shannon Frystak, *Our Minds on Freedom: Women and the Struggle for Black Equality in Louisiana, 1924-1967* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009).

²⁰ Jason Morgan Ward, *Defending White Democracy: The Making of a Segregationist Movement and the Remaking of Racial Politics, 1936-1965* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 2.

²¹ Charles W. Eagles, “Toward New Histories of the Civil Rights Era,” *Journal of Southern History* 66 (November 2000): 842.

symbols as founding myths that both enabled and bounded the development of the University of Mississippi, “The Design of the Southern Future” argues that it was the convergence of ideas about Ole Miss’s past and its future that ultimately tied the identity of the institution so tightly to Jim Crow.

CHAPTER 1

THE INVENTION OF OLE MISS

I

In 1896, Theta Nu Epsilon, an inter-fraternity organization at the University of Mississippi, announced plans to publish a yearbook for the college. To select a name for the annual, a committee solicited the student body for suggestions. Elma Meek, a female student at the university, submitted the name “Ole Miss.”¹ This was a term with a history and a particular meaning; in the antebellum South, slaves had used it to refer to the mistress of the plantation. The evocative power of the term extended beyond its specific definition. In addition to conjuring up images of contented slaves who respected their masters and loved their mistresses, it referenced a harmonious world in which subordinates and superiors fulfilled mutual obligations. This vision cherished order and sentimentalized submission to authority and membership in a hierarchical community. The plantation stood at the center of this world, and its mistress was not only the matriarch of an extended family, but also the embodiment of the civilization of the antebellum South.² Meek recalled that she “had often heard old ‘Darkies’ on the Southern

¹ “Name ‘Ole Miss’ Given Years Ago,” *Mississippian*, 10 October 1936; *Ole Miss*, Volume XLIX, 1945, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

² For a depiction of the antebellum plantation as a civilizing and paternalistic environment, see Ulrich B. Phillips, *American Negro Slavery* (1918; rpt., Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966). For a discussion of paternalism and the extended family on the antebellum plantation, see Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage, 1976), 70-86. For a discussion of the image and the special burden of women and the plantation mistress in the Old South, see Anne Frier Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics 1830-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 3-21.

plantation address the lady in the ‘Big House’ as ‘Ole Miss.’ Forty years after the yearbook’s founding, Meek explained to an interviewer that the term “connoted all the admiration and reverence accorded the womanhood of the Old South.” The naming committee, which remembered that Meek’s suggestion “appealed to us at once,” adopted “Ole Miss” over other suggestions that included “The Cotton Boll.” In 1897, the first edition of the *Ole Miss* appeared.³ Two images graced the front pages of the inaugural volume. The first, titled “Down on the Mississippi Floating,” was a pastoral scene of a solitary boat meandering past the slopes of a river county. The second featured a handsome young host and his gowned hostess, both eager to welcome readers and to tell about their community.⁴ Through its name and its use of images, the *Ole Miss* made the plantation of the Old South the central metaphor for life at the university.

At first glance, it seems natural that students at the University of Mississippi would call their yearbook the *Ole Miss* and use scenes of the antebellum plantation to tell about their community. Indeed, within two years of the publication of the first *Ole Miss*, the term had become synonymous with the university itself and “a valued possession” of the institution.⁵ Moreover, the image of a playground for the sons and daughters of planters has played a large role in depictions of the university. Two acclaimed works that deal with the university, each written early in the twenty-first century, typify this emphasis. One, written by an outsider to the state and the university, describes the campus as a place of “sudden force and beauty,” “redolent of the old customs,” and

³ “Name ‘Ole Miss’ Given Years Ago,” *Mississippian*, 10 October 1936

⁴ *Ole Miss*, Volume I, 1897, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

⁵ Alfred Hume, “The University of Mississippi,” *Southern Association Quarterly*, V, No. 3 (August 1941): 361; “Name ‘Ole Miss’ Given Years Ago,” *Mississippian*, 10 October 1936

defined by its pillared fraternity houses and their “dewy white rockers.”⁶ The other, written by an alumnus of the university and a native of the state, describes the university as “an exclusive club for the planter class,” a “clearinghouse for the state’s political structure,” and the “finishing school for young women who ... marry the elite and preside over their mansions.”⁷ In each depiction, the name and the image seem to fit so well that they need not have been invented.

On second glance, though, several discrepancies between image and reality emerge. For one, three counties separate Oxford, the location of the university, from the Mississippi River. Lafayette County, of which Oxford is the county seat and the geographical center, hardly resembles the old plantation districts of the Delta river counties. North of Oxford, fertile soil once made hospitable ground for large plantations. East of Oxford, though, the land turns rough, marked by gullies and populated by scrub and hardwoods. Here, commercial agriculture was difficult, and the small farmer clawed to eke out a subsistence. In the rest of the county, lands between the fertile north and the hard-scrabble east provided homes for the middling classes of farmers and townspeople. In the 1890s, as in other counties outside of the state’s plantation belts, whites outnumbered blacks in Lafayette County.⁸ If plantations and bottomlands bordered Oxford and the university, so, too, did the rugged country of the Pontotoc Ridge.

The plantation and river-county imagery of the *Ole Miss* not only misrepresented Oxford and the university’s setting, but it also diverged from the careers and lives that

⁶ Paul Hendrickson, *Sons of Mississippi: A Story of Race and Its Legacy* (New York: Vintage), 305.

⁷ Curtis Wilkie, *Dixie: A Personal Odyssey through Events that Shaped the Modern South* (New York: Touchstone), 82.

⁸ Albert D. Kirwan, *Revolt of the Rednecks: Mississippi Politics, 1876-1925* (New York: Harper, 1951), 40-41, and maps following pg. 162. For a particularly strong description of the geography and demographics of Lafayette County as a cross-section of the South and Mississippi, see Don H. Doyle, *Faulkner’s County: The Historical Roots of Yoknapatawpha* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press), 74-76.

students at the university were to begin. A survey of the graduating class of 1897 found just one alumnus who had become a planter. Twenty-seven became lawyers. Those who did not take law degrees gravitated to other professions that served the needs of the commercial and town-centered economy of the New South. Three became teachers; others became physicians, insurance agents, accountants, and bankers. The class of '97 spread itself across the state geographically. Five graduates went on to live and work in the Delta. Another six made lives in the fertile loess counties that bordered the Delta and the black-majority counties on the state's eastern border with Alabama. Four went to Jackson, the state's capital and a center of power. But a majority of the class of '97 ended up outside the rich plantation counties or the capital. Four left the state completely, scattering from Memphis to Hawaii. Ten made lives in the hills of the north-central part of the state; three moved to the hill counties bordering the Tennessee River; two worked in the piney woods of the state's southeast; and one ended up on the Gulf Coast.⁹ For most students graduating from the university in 1897, the world of the plantation was something to imagine, not a reality to live.

This chapter analyzes the invention of Ole Miss by revealing the origins of the institutional identity, examining the purposes which it served, and pointing toward the ways it shaped the university's future. It depicts the University of Mississippi in the late-nineteenth century as an institution struggling to maintain enrollment and to legitimize its position within the state's system of education. In the aftermath of the Civil War and Reconstruction, as new and complex social, political, and economic arrangements

⁹ In 1899 and again in 1909, then-vice-chancellor Alfred Hume edited and published a historical catalogue of the university. The catalogue listed students by their year of entry into the university and (if applicable) their year of graduation. It also listed the occupations and addresses of alumni. For the class of 1897, the catalogue listed occupations for all but three of the graduates. *Historical Catalogue of the University of Mississippi, 1849-1909* (Nashville: Marshal & Bruce Company, 1910), 252-253.

emerged throughout the state, institutions which had occupied special places in the antebellum era faced the challenges of mastering a new world and demonstrating their continued relevance. For the University of Mississippi, the invention of an identity built around the imagery of the Old South defined the institution culturally through its connections to the antebellum era and the Confederacy. But even as the university tied itself symbolically to the cultural authority of the past, it struggled to defend itself against charges of elitism and attempted to promote the futures that it could offer to a wider percentage of Mississippi's white citizens. By the first decade of the twentieth century, then, the invention of Ole Miss had succeeded in endowing the University of Mississippi with the prestige of history and an aura of timelessness, but the project of making the institution a useful mechanism for uplift in the present and progress in the future remained unfinished and only faintly designed.

II

If lived experience did not account for the plantation imagery of the *Ole Miss*, the name and the motif reflected an attempt to tie the university to the order of an imagined past. In other words, what appeared at first glance a natural expression of social reality more closely resembled a conscious effort to use symbols and images to invoke tradition. The past takes on a special role in periods of turbulence. As Eric Hobsbawm has noted, in places "where the old ways are alive," the conscious invention of tradition is unnecessary. In times of change, though, what Hobsbawm calls "invented traditions" can mitigate the convulsions of social and economic transformation. Traditions, whether through ritualized behavior, stylized architecture, or the use of symbols, respond to

“novel situations” by referring to “old” ones. Moreover, traditions which tie specific groups or institutions to “a suitable historic past” can protect or even advance the position of those groups or institutions. Because the establishment of continuity with the past yields prestige and legitimacy in the present, tradition bolsters new orders as much as it refers to old ones.¹⁰

Hobsbawm writes of a world apart from Mississippi and Ole Miss. Late-nineteenth-century Mississippi was not late-nineteenth-century Europe, and neither the popular nor the scholarly mind associates the state with the kind of dynamic change that shook Europe in the centuries following the industrial revolution. Nonetheless, though it may have come slowly and in subtle form, change came to Mississippi and the university in the late-nineteenth century. By the 1890s, the “old ways” no longer prevailed. The shattering of the old ways began with the catastrophe of defeat in the Civil War. The war did more than crush the dream of a Southern Confederacy; it set off a revolution that altered the fundamentals of the social and economic structures of the South. By abolishing slavery, the war eliminated the foundation of the planters’ wealth, reduced dramatically the value of their land, and compromised their ability to offer collateral to lenders. Where the planters maintained their land, they now had to secure labor through wage agreements or the hybrid sharecropping arrangement. Neither of these arrangements reproduced the sovereignty that masters had held over slaves. As Harold Woodman has put it, planters who wanted to “survive and prosper” in the post-emancipation South had to do so in a “very new and different situation.”¹¹

¹⁰ Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), quotes from pgs. 8, 2, 1.

¹¹ Harold D. Woodman, “The Political Economy of the New South: Retrospects and Prospects,” *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 67, No. 4, “C. Vann Woodward’s ‘Origins of the South, 1877-1913’: A

The war not only changed the relationships between masters and slaves; it also changed the relationship between planters and plain white folk. Prolonged invasions, frequent raids, and the dispersal of men to faraway battlefields in the Upper South exposed the home front to pillage, starvation, and violence. The Confederate government often confiscated what Union armies left untouched. For small farmers, a war to protect the property of the planters brought conscription and general deprivation. The Confederate experience thus put great pressure on class relations. In the antebellum era, planters had earned political hegemony by providing services for small farmers, protecting them (to an extent) from an invasive market economy, and respecting the sovereignty of their households. Under the stress of war, though, planters revealed themselves not merely as insufficient protectors, but also as the agents of the yeomen's misery.¹²

The new credit structure that emerged in the post-war era further eroded the authority of the planters. Although they had exercised control over the antebellum banking system, post-war planters found themselves holding devalued land and lacking cash on-hand or the collateral to secure loans. Unable to pay cash wages or furnish

Fifty-Year Retrospective.” (November, 2001): 798.

¹² For a discussion of the antebellum arrangement between planters and yeomen, see Eugene D. Genovese, “Yeoman Farmers in a Slaveholders’ Democracy,” in Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, *Fruits of Merchant Capital: Slavery and Bourgeois Property in the Rise and Expansion of Capitalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983): 249-264; Eugene D. Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South* (New York: Vintage, 1967), 157-179; and Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

For a discussion of the impact of the war on the yeomen and their changed relationship with the planters, see Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Paul D. Escott, *After Secession: Jefferson Davis and the Failure of Confederate Nationalism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press), 1978; Armstead L. Robinson, *Bitter Fruits of Bondage: The Demise of Slavery and the Collapse of the Confederacy, 1861-1865* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005); David Williams, Teresa Crisp Williams, and David Carlson, eds., *Plain Folk in a Rich Man's War: Class and Dissent in Confederate Georgia* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press), 2002.

tenants with supplies, planters turned to merchants. When a merchant furnished a tenant on a planter's land, he gained the rights to a lien of the tenant's crop. Under this system, the planters kept their land but forfeited the surplus it produced. The profit not only escaped the planters; it enabled the ascent of their new rivals. Over time, merchants with the cash necessary to furnish tenants and extend credit to farmers picked up foreclosed properties, expanded their country stores, invested in ginning machinery, and opened banks.¹³ In the new era, the links in chains of debt meant more than the niches in the organic hierarchy of the plantation.

The changes that the war and the new economy brought to the South rocked the University of Mississippi. The state's secession and the formation of the Confederacy halted academic activity at the university. In February 1861, students at the university formed themselves into a company, named themselves the "University Greys," and headed north to fight in the Confederate army. The students who did not join the Greys or the Lamar Rifles of Lafayette County joined companies in their hometowns. In the fall of 1861, only four students arrived to register at the university, and the institution closed for the duration of the war. The Greys won glory on the battlefields of Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania, but they suffered severe casualties along the way. Not one Grey who participated in Pickett's charge at Gettysburg escaped without being killed, wounded, or captured. The few members who survived the war never returned to study at the university.¹⁴ Beyond the students enrolled at the time of secession, an estimated four-

¹³ Barbara Jeanne Fields, "The Advent of Capitalist Agriculture: The New South in a Bourgeois World," in Thavolia Glymph and John J. Kushma, eds., *Essays on the Postbellum Southern Economy* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1985), 73-94.

¹⁴ Sansing, *University of Mississippi*, 106-108; Allen Cabaniss, *The University of Mississippi: Its First Hundred Years* (Hattiesburg, MS: University and College Press of Mississippi, 1971), 55.

fifths of the university's living alumni fought in the Confederate army.¹⁵

Demographically, the war was an unmitigated catastrophe for the university.

Beyond the human cost of the conflict, the war scarred Lafayette County, Oxford, and the university's campus. In 1862, soldiers with gruesome wounds and enduring death agonies began arriving in Oxford from the battle fields of Shiloh and Corinth. The campus quickly became a military hospital. Between 1,500 and 2,000 men came to the makeshift hospital, and the operation sprawled to encompass all ten of the buildings on the campus. Dr. Thomas Dudley Isom, the reputed first white settler of Oxford, headed a team of fifteen physicians who staffed the hospital. Women from all over Lafayette County volunteered to care for the wounded. Eighty-five slaves, volunteered by their masters, served as orderlies. Those who died at the hospital, some seven hundred, lay first in a temporary morgue housed in the campus observatory. From there, they went to a cemetery on the edge of the campus.¹⁶

In December 1862, just months after the removal of the hospital, Ulysses S. Grant's troops reached Oxford. Panic engulfed the town and the surrounding country. Many families packed up and followed the rebel army south of town. The homes they left behind fell to the Union troops. Officers occupied some of the nicest homes; soldiers looted others. The homes of prominent Confederates, such as Jacob Thompson, made particularly appealing targets for men whose comrades had died fighting to put down the slaveholders' rebellion. For the citizens who remained, the invaders became a source of constant torment. Soldiers entered homes to secure whiskey, money, and luxury items. They stole valuable possessions from slaves and cheated others with Confederate money.

¹⁵ *Historical Catalogue*, 9.

¹⁶ Sansing, *University of Mississippi*, 110-112; Cabaniss, *The University of Mississippi*, 57; Doyle, *Faulkner's County*, 199.

The suffering grew worse as Grant became convinced that the harsh treatment of civilians and the confiscation of food and other necessities could feed and supply his own men while also breaking the will of the rebels. In effect, these policies sanctioned forage and pillage. Farmers watched as soldiers plundered their food supplies, slaughtered their livestock, and seized their wagons. Local women saw troops carry off silverware, china, linen, and silverware. When Grant left Oxford at Christmas of 1862, the town shuddered.¹⁷

Two years later, in August of 1864, Union troops returned to Oxford. This time, they came under the command of General Andrew Jackson Smith. Between visits from Grant and Smith, the town had served as headquarters for Nathan Bedford Forrest, the Confederate cavalryman and bane of the Union armies in Mississippi and Tennessee. On August 22, to punish the town's support of Forrest, Smith ordered the razing of the Oxford courthouse and the buildings on the town's square. For added measure, Smith's men moved about the town and the county, demolishing property, ringing church bells, looting jewelry chests, and torching the homes of the area's most prominent Confederates. When Smith's men had finished their work, only chimneys and smoldering ruins remained of old Oxford. As Don Doyle has put it, "[f]ew areas of the South learned the cruel lessons of war more painfully than Lafayette County, Mississippi." By the time the Confederate armies surrendered in 1865, the town and the county surrounding the university had been dead for a year.¹⁸

III

¹⁷ Doyle, *Faulkner's County*, 205-213.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 246-249, quotation from 210.

With the exception of some minor damage to the observatory, the university's physical plant escaped the war unscathed. Reopening the university required more than a campus and buildings, though, and post-Civil War Mississippi was a difficult place to rebuild an institution of higher education. When the university reopened in 1865, many students were unable to pay full tuition and boarding fees. Even more lacked the educational backgrounds necessary to undertake college course-work. Post-war students were, on average, older than their antebellum counterparts; nearly half were Confederate veterans. Their academic deficiencies necessitated the creation of preparatory classes, but faculty praised the new students for their maturity, "determination," and "manly character."¹⁹ Chancellor John N. Waddel defended the admission of "backward and ignorant" students by proclaiming it the duty of the university "to take them by the hand and raise them from the lower to the higher ... departments of education."²⁰ The contrast between old and new at the university was stark. A late-nineteenth-century historical sketch of the university remarked that, in antebellum times, many students were "sons of wealthy parents" whose "ideals of college life included much more of frolic than of labor."²¹ In the post-war era, conversely, students deficient in skills and learning but rich in ethic and decency came to the university. Defeat and the desolation that followed had changed the image of the student body and altered the purpose of the institution. If earlier the university had serviced the privileged sons of the state's wealthiest families, it now promised to uplift hard-working men on the make.

Despite the efforts of Waddel and others, charges of elitism continued to plague the university. In the hard economic times of the 1870s, enrollment began to plummet,

¹⁹ *Historical Catalogue*, 11.

²⁰ Quoted in Sansing, *University of Mississippi*, 118.

²¹ *Historical Catalogue*, 8.

reinforcing the popular image of the university as an enclave for the wealthy and the privileged. Between 1873 and 1876, enrollment dropped from 302 to 125. Even more ominously, only 47 new students entered the university in the 1875-1876 school year, compared with 105 in the 1872-1873 year.²² Falling enrollment did more than make the university look like a closed club for the elite; it threatened the very existence of the institution. In the summer of 1876, the university's Board of Trustees, freshly reorganized under the new Redeemer administration of Governor John M. Stone, set about restoring public confidence in the university. A key component of this process involved the distribution of a pamphlet titled, *Where Shall I Send my Son?*²³ The pamphlet sought to inform Mississippians about their state university and to boost enrollment, but it also represented an attempt to marry the university's antebellum heritage with a vision for expansion and uplift. Through the publication, the trustees were inventing an identity for the university that made use of its past to advertise its relevance in a new world.

The trustees bemoaned the "ignorance" and "indifference" that characterized Mississippians' feelings about their state university. It was, they wrote, an institution with a storied history. Its faculty had included "a number of the most distinguished men of literature and of science whom this country has produced." (Without irony, the pamphlet, intended to keep the state's brightest at home for college, testified to the strength of the faculty by listing the positions that former professors had accepted at Columbia, the University of Michigan, Vanderbilt, and the University of Virginia.) Its alumni filled

²² Sansing, *University of Mississippi*, 132; Cabaniss, *The University of Mississippi*, 79; *Historical Catalogue*, 165-172.

²³ *Where Shall I Send My Son? An Address to the People of Mississippi by the Trustees of the State University* (Oxford: University of Mississippi, 1876), Special Collections, J. D. Williams Library, University of Mississippi.

positions of prominence across the state and the country. The breadth of their fields, which included the law, politics, the ministry, education, medicine, and engineering, testified to the “usefulness” of an education from the university. The setting of the university befitted a place that trained and nurtured great men. The rebuilt town of Oxford, “distinguished for its high and healthy location, its fine schools and churches, [and] its refined society,” made a perfect location for a university. A magnificent grove, “beautified and adorned by luxuriant grass, well-kept walks, evergreen shrubbery and noble forest trees,” separated the academic buildings and the railroad depot. A number of brick buildings, arranged in circular form, contained classrooms, residences, a chapel, a gymnasium, and an observatory. In all, the trustees concluded, “there [were] few American colleges supplied with better or more extensive buildings.”²⁴

Beyond the beauty of its campus and the legacy of its alumni, the university offered all men in Mississippi an avenue for social and economic uplift. The institution was “emphatically a ‘Poor Man’s College.’” Indeed, the trustees boasted, there was not “an institution on the continent where such opportunities of obtaining a thoroughly finished education are offered at less cost.” Tuition, which students for the ministry did not have to pay, was only twenty-five dollars per year. Accounting for room, boarding, books, and other expenses, a student could attend the university for less than \$200 a year. The low cost of the university made it possible for individuals to work their way through school. “Quite a number of young men,” the trustees claimed, “educated themselves” with the money they earned working at night or when school was not in session. Hard work, in and out of the classroom, consumed the student body, because “no sons of rich men” attended the university. All but one member of the faculty belonged to a church,

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 2, 7, 10.

and “religious and moral influences” at the university inculcated a strong work ethic and good manners. “[F]rollicing and dissipation,” the past-times of wealthy students at “Northern and Eastern institutions,” had reached a “minimum point” at the university. Current students went so far as to assure the trustees that “they had never seen nor heard of a card being played for money in the University.” This was not, the trustees explained, the same antebellum college where the sons of planters had indulged in “drinking, gambling, extravagance and dissipation of every kind.”²⁵

To the farmer who sent his son to Oxford, or to the young man who worked his way through the university’s academic program, the trustees promised a better place on the “stage of life.” The university offered an education that enhanced knowledge and developed the mind, but it also produced an environment in which one could sharpen the skills necessary for success in a competitive business economy. Through “contact with [their] fellows,” students developed “the quick appreciation of the qualities and abilities of those with whom [they were] brought in contact,” “sound judgment,” “the dexterous exercise of [their] own gifts,” “and the ability to avail [themselves] of the powers and labors of others.” In short, the university was the place for an “eager [and] ambitious” young Mississippian to make himself the “perfect man” for a new world.²⁶

The pamphlet’s emphasis on low tuition and costs responded, in part, to the hard economic times of the mid-1870s. But the trustees’ appeals also reflected a conscious attempt to disassociate the university from the image of a small college with a classical curriculum that served only the state’s elite. Reaching beyond an enclave promised more than an increase in enrollment; it demonstrated that the university could play a

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 11-13.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 20-22.

progressive and dynamic role in equipping the citizenry for life in a new world and a new economy. This was an attempt at reinvention and self-fashioning. At every point, the pamphlet refuted the stereotype that the university served as nothing more than a playground that cultivated the laziness and moral degeneracy of planters' sons. In its most telling section, the pamphlet inverted the Yankee image of the southerner as intemperate, un-ambitious, and deficient in hard work and self-restraint. Forty years later, Henry Adams would immortalize southern college men as "simple beyond analysis," "ignorant," "childlike," "weak in vice," "helpless before ... complexity," and "as little fit to succeed in the struggle of modern life as though he were still a maker of stone axes, living in caves, and hunting the *bos primigenius*."²⁷ For now, though, the trustees reserved those traits for Yankees and the sons of rich men. Theirs was a university where men made their future. Thus, before it became Ole Miss, the University of Mississippi embarked upon a brief career as a "Poor Man's College."

IV

The university's tenure as democratic institution of uplift was short-lived. In 1878, the state established the Mississippi Agricultural and Mechanical College in Starkville. Mississippi A & M fashioned itself as a "people's" college that emphasized the "practical arts." A & M, one scholar of the institution has written, championed "down-to-earth matters" over the "sacred inheritances of arts and sciences" and favored the "tattered hat and overall" to the "cap and gown." In an era of "rapid ... commercialization and industrialization," A&M enabled students to seize the "fortunes

²⁷ Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams: An Autobiography* (1918; rpt. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1961), 57-58.

that could be made by mechanization of farm and factory and by turning little business into big business.”²⁸ The new agricultural college emerged not only as a more democratic alternative to the state university, but also one with a vocational curriculum that favored practicality over abstraction. In short, an education at Mississippi A & M represented the best opportunity in the state for social mobility and economic uplift.

From the time of its founding, the agricultural college served as a rival to the state university. In part, the tension between the two schools originated in the snobbish condescension with which the state university looked down upon the agricultural college. Animosity flared whenever the two institutions competed for funds from the state legislature. In 1880, the legislature approved an annual appropriation of \$32,000 to compensate for lost seminary funds owed to the state university. Trustees at the new agricultural college grumbled about the appropriation, but a full-blown controversy did not interrupt until later in the decade. In 1887, James Z. George, a U. S. Senator and an A & M trustee, publicly denounced the appropriation as an “unjust and illegal demand” and accused the state university of “making forays on the Treasury, whenever it suits its convenience or its tastes to do so.” He deemed the legislation a “debt-creating” measure in a state that could not afford such extravagance.²⁹ At the least, George demanded, the legislature should split the appropriation equally between the state university and the agricultural college. Edward Mayes, the chairman of the faculty at the university, reacted indignantly to George’s charges. The Senator, Mayes wrote, had “overlooked facts,” made claims “unsubstantiated by proof,” and concocted motives which had “no existence

²⁸ John K. Bettersworth, *People’s University: The Centennial History of Mississippi State* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1980), 3.

²⁹ *The State University: Reply of Prof. Edward Mayes to Senator J. Z. George* (Jackson: 1887), 4, 22, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

except in his fancy.” His argument was “fallacious and misleading,” and his conclusions were “wholly mistaken and untenable.” George’s “jealous eye,” Mayes wrote, was so “anxious to find offense” that he had resorted to “sophistries” which “reverse[d] the facts of history” and falsely suggested that the university had oppressed the people of the state.³⁰

David Sansing, the author of histories of the University of Mississippi and of higher education in the state, has noted that the “contempt” and “condescension” with which Mayes addressed George “smacked of class.”³¹ Mayes assailed not only George’s specific arguments, but also the very idea of George or anyone from Mississippi A & M questioning the special place of the state university. The personal backgrounds of the two men embodied differences that were important to stereotypes about both schools. George grew up on farms in Noxubee and Carroll counties and possessed no formal education. He dressed and spoke plainly, made no effort to hide his background, and did not affect the image of the southern gentleman. As one scholar put it, the Senator was “self-made and proud of it.” To his supporters, George was a friend of the common man and a symbol of social mobility in the New South. He was a man who, quite literally, had plowed his way to wealth and influence. To his detractors, George was a “blunt and tactless” rube who pandered to the ignorant and the unwashed.³²

Mayes came from an old southern family and possessed impeccable social credentials. His father, a native Virginian, had taught law, served in the state legislature,

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 1, 27, 6, 3.

³¹ David G. Sansing, *Making Haste Slowly: The Troubled History of Higher Education in Mississippi* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1990), 74.

³² Dunbar Rowland, *Mississippi: Comprising Sketches of Counties, Towns, Events, Events, Institutions, and Persons, Arranged in Cyclopedic Form* (Atlanta: Southern Historical Publishing Association, 1907), Vol. I, 769-771; Willie D. Halsell, “The Bourbon Period in Mississippi Politics, 1875-1890,” *Journal of Southern History*, No. 11 (Nov., 1945): 524.

and sat on the bench in Kentucky before moving to Mississippi. Mayes received a formal education from childhood and earned a law degree from the University of Mississippi in 1869. Upon graduation, he married Frances Eliza Lamar, the granddaughter of Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, the second president of the University of Mississippi, and the daughter of L. Q. C. Lamar, the hero of Redemption, U. S. Senator, eulogizer of Charles Sumner, and justice of the U. S. Supreme Court. Upon leaving a private practice, Mayes joined the law faculty at the state university in 1877, became chairman of the faculty in 1886 and chancellor in 1889.³³ Mayes was a man with a distinguished bloodline who had increased his prestige through marriage. His connection to the Longstreets tied him to a storied antebellum family. His status as Lamar's son-in-law gave him access to one of the most powerful men in post-war Mississippi. Unlike George, Mayes owed his career as much to the Old South as the New.

When Mayes dismissed George's arguments as jealous and illegitimate complaints on behalf of an institution that had no right to challenge a special appropriation for the state university, he was, as Sansing has noted, using the logic of hierarchy on two levels. This was a personal attack on the right of a man such as George to challenge a man like Mayes. It was also an attack on the idea of the agricultural college challenging the institution at the top of the state's system of higher education. But the fact that Mayes went to such effort to refute George's claims betrayed a level of insecurity and anxiety that surpassed mere annoyance or contempt for a social inferior. George, after all, was a man who people like Mayes mocked for his lack of ancestry, his poor manners, and his appearance, but he was also one of the most powerful men in the state.

³³ Edward Mayes, *History of Education in Mississippi* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1899), 212.

Despite his humble past, George was a large landowner, one of the state's most successful corporate lawyers, and a leading political figure. With Lamar, he had orchestrated the Democratic campaign of 1875 that overthrew the Reconstruction government and "redeemed" Mississippi. Following Redemption, he served as chief justice of the state supreme court. In 1880, the Mississippi legislature confirmed George's place in the state's power structure and sent him to the U. S. Senate. Mississippi's "Great Commoner" lacked a distinguished name or ancestry, but he held the same power and influence as Lamar and the other leading men of the era.³⁴

George's political and economic standing revealed realities about his relationship to Mayes that the men's manners and lineages obscured. In terms of power and influence, this was not a patrician lecturing a commoner; it was the administrator of an institution that needed money responding to a senator with the authority to influence the distribution of state funds. Mayes regarded the state university as Mississippi's "most precious possession," but George, among others, clearly did not. Mayes detected a broad breakdown of the educational hierarchy in the state. In an ominous phrase, he warned of an "an influence outside of the University and hostile to it." Referring to the state's unpaid debt to the university, Mayes complained of the "generosity of the State to all other institutions of learning in her borders."³⁵ The inability of Mayes to address the Senator deferentially or even respectfully reflected snobbishness, but the urgency with which he responded to the Senator's objections and the seriousness with which he defended the university testified to a basic reality: Mayes was the leader of an institution whose special place in the state was no longer secure.

³⁴ Kirwan, *Revolt of the Rednecks*, 3-4, 308; Rowland, *Mississippi*, I, 769-771; Charles S. Sydnor, "The Senatorial Career of James Z. George," *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society* VII (1903): 245.

³⁵ *The State University*, 26-27.

The Mayes-George dispute demonstrated the cultural incoherence of a society whose symbols of authority had not caught up to a new social and economic order. Traditional markers of prestige, such as education and lineage, identified men like Mayes as natural leaders, but the rise of a man like George demonstrated the turbulent social climate of the era. That men could rise so high while bypassing conventional paths to success mocked the idea of a functioning system of hierarchy. That they made their money and consolidated their power through dealings with corporations and new business interests cast doubt upon the necessity of an education to prepare young men in the style of antebellum gentlemen. This incoherence created a bizarre phenomenon at the state university. In one breath, ambitious students trumpeted the progress that had come to Mississippi and proclaimed a limitless future for the state. In the next, though, they sentimentalized the civilization of the Old South and portrayed its virtues as impervious to changes in the economy or social relations.

In 1889, a member of the university's Phi Sigma Literary Society assessed the present condition of the South and its prospects for the future. The vision was breathlessly optimistic. From the lowest points of defeat in war and the "desolation and woe" of Reconstruction, the South had pulled itself up to prosperity. Its abundant natural resources rivaled the richness of other sections of the country. No region could compete with the South's supply of timber, and the coal and iron mines of the region "arous[ed] the fears of Northern capitalists and owners of Northern mines." The expansion of public schools and colleges made for a better-educated populace and a more skilled workforce. Railroad development made commercial activity and manufacturing profitable in all corners of the region. Now that the "strong arm of science" had driven yellow fever, that

“despotic scourge from the countries of the sun,” from the region, the South’s warm climate had become a great advantage. As an added bonus, “socialists,” “anarchists,” and other bogeymen of the North’s “alarming” “labor problem” had “no footing in the South.”³⁶ Henry Grady could not have made a stronger argument for the New South.

The central theme of the address was the rising of a people and a place. This was a story about a land, once the seat of “chivalry, eloquence, and statesmanship,” that had descended into material poverty and moral darkness before “casting off the gloom of defeat” and advancing to prosperity. But as neatly as the development of new rail lines, the opening of new factories, and the eradication of maladies indexed the material progress of the region, the spiritual, moral, and cultural condition of the New South remained in doubt. The speaker closed his address by praising the “grandeur, the glory, the brilliancy and the heroic generosity” of the Old South. The “memory” of the antebellum era, he affirmed, guaranteed a “warm place” in the hearts of the New South for the old ways. But he noted that the Old South had “passed away” and that the New, while “in accord with the spirit of the times,” was “less poetic” and “less grand” than its ancestor.³⁷ In short, the address cast culture, tradition, and manners as casualties of progress. In terms of reconciling the past and the present or endowing the material prosperity of the new era with the cultural richness of the old one, this was an unsatisfying and troubling conclusion.

Simultaneous feelings of confidence in the economic future of the South and uncertainty about its cultural and moral health often manifested themselves in conflicted

³⁶ *Mississippi University Magazine*, Vol. XIV, No. 1, November, 1889, 6-7.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

depictions of aging relics of the Old South.³⁸ Amidst advertisements for consumer items and manufactured goods, an Oxford newspaper printed a brief sketch of an elderly Confederate veteran. It dripped with bitterness towards the Yankee invaders who had violated his wish “to be left alone” and then “overpowered and cruelly wronged him.” But more tellingly, the sketch betrayed the guilt that a new generation of southerners felt about the suffering their elders had endured. The “Poor old Reb” lived in a world that “was fast forgetting him,” and the indifference of the community had left him in a state of “poverty and neglect.” His condition, one of “unutterable tragedy,” was as much an indictment of the moral deficiencies of the New South as it was of the ruthlessness of the Yankees.³⁹ Similar themes appeared in the university’s literary magazine. One short piece fetishized the swords that a pair of brothers had carried to their deaths in the rebel army. The “blood” of the brothers and the “sacred tears” of their loved ones stained the swords and made them mystical incarnations of the “honor and duty” that had guided the brothers. Hidden from sight, though, the sacred relics sat “useless” and forgotten, “gathering mold and dust” amidst spiders and moths. The author despaired that “progressive march of the New South” had consigned the swords and the values they represented to the dusty attics of the region.⁴⁰

These addresses and stories, which alternately boosted a new economic program and engaged in nostalgia for an old culture, exemplified the condition that C. Vann Woodward called the “divided mind of the New South.” According to Woodward, the

³⁸ For discussions of the use of the antebellum South and the Lost Cause as mirrors for the New South and Gilded Age America, see Charles Reagan Wilson, “A Southern Jeremiad: Lost Cause Critique of the New South,” in Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980), 79-99; and C. Vann Woodward, “A Southern Critique for the Gilded Age,” in C. Vann Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History* (New York: Vintage, 1960), 109-140.

³⁹ “Poor old Reb,” *Oxford Eagle*, 2 May 1889.

⁴⁰ *Mississippi University Magazine*, Vol. XXI, No. 1, Jan., 1897

cult of the Old South served as a “syrup of romanticism” to dissolve “the bitter recantation” of the old ways.⁴¹ At the University of Mississippi, though, the measuring of the mixture proved difficult. For an institution with a history bisected by war and an uncertain place in the new era, only a concoction that suitably combined images of the past with a vision for the future could legitimate the position of the university and restore order to a chaotic world.

V

The purpose of the *Ole Miss*, its editors proclaimed, was to “present life at the University in its various phases, to give the stranger to our institution some idea of our daily life, to keep the alumnus in touch with his Alma Mater, and lastly to give the student a partial diary of his life at the University during the present session.”⁴² For all its concern with “daily” and “present” life, though, the yearbook busied itself with establishing the university’s connections to the past. It not only took a name that made the antebellum plantation a metaphor for the university, but it also used dedications to construct a lineage that made the modern university the progeny of the Old South. The first volume of the yearbook dedicated itself to the University Greys, the students who had won glory and died for the Confederate cause.⁴³ One might think of the Greys as the blood and body of the university. The second volume honored L. Q. C. Lamar, a professor at the university, the author of Mississippi’s ordinance of secession, and a

⁴¹ C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), 142-174, 158. See also Paul M. Gaston, *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking* (1970; rpt., Montgomery, AL: NewSouth Books, 2002); and James C. Cobb, *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 67-98.

⁴² *Ole Miss*, Volume I, 1897, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, dedication page.

justice of the Supreme Court of the United States.⁴⁴ Lamar stood as the mind of the university. The third volume honored Jefferson Davis and proclaimed him the “epitome of the patrician South.”⁴⁵ As Davis had presided over the Southern Confederacy, he now served as the father of the university. The fourth volume honored the anonymous Confederate dead buried in the cemetery at the edge of campus. These men embodied the virtues of “sacrifice,” “devotion,” “valor,” and the “sublimity of courage.”⁴⁶ They provided a soul for the university. The fifth volume honored the “‘Ole Miss’ of the South” and named her the mother of “chivalry,” “honor,” and “manhood.” She was the mother of the university. Her “beauty and purity” gave meaning to the university, and her “goodness and mercy” sustained it.⁴⁷

The use of the dead to define the university’s heritage extended beyond the publishing of the yearbooks; indeed, it literally marked the institution’s grounds. From the Civil War through the first decade of the twentieth century, first in the Confederate cemetery at the edge of campus, and later in memorials located at the institution’s spatial center, monuments of the Lost Cause came to define the university physically. In 1889, the Delta Gamma sorority and the alumni association funded a memorial window in the university’s new library that depicted the University Greys parading on campus and fighting on distant fields. The window, made of Tiffany stained glass, covered three panels and cost over \$500. In 1906, the Albert Sidney Johnston Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy (U. D. C.) placed on campus a towering monument to the

⁴⁴ *Ole Miss*, Volume II, 1898, dedication page, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

⁴⁵ *Ole Miss*, Volume III, 1899, 5, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

⁴⁶ *Ole Miss*, Volume IV, 1900, 5, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

⁴⁷ *Ole Miss*, Volume V, 1901, dedication page, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

Confederate dead of Lafayette County. The local U. D. C. paid not only to acquire marble from a quarry in Georgia, but also to hire an Italian artist to sculpt the Confederate scout who topped the twenty-nine-foot monument. From the cemetery that housed the Rebel dead, to the window that glorified the Greys, and to the marble scout who peaked out between oak trees, the Lost Cause hung over the campus.⁴⁸

The funding, erection, and dedication of memorials did more than honor the dead. In sanctifying an approved version of the southern past, the Lost Cause provided both a righteous defense for secession and a suitable explanation for the defeat of the Confederacy. The ceremonies of the Lost Cause, moreover, brought order and coherence to the present by ritualizing the continuities that seemed to link the Old and New Souths.⁴⁹ The building and unveiling of the Confederate memorial on the Ole Miss campus exemplified these processes. Organizing and fundraising for the monument had a mythology of its own, one which spanned generations and organizations. Efforts to commemorate the Confederate dead of Lafayette County began shortly after the war, under the auspices of the Memorial Association of Oxford. Later, the memorial association merged with the new local chapter of the U. D. C. On the occasion of the memorial's unveiling, N. D. Deupree, the historian of the local chapter of the U. D. C. and the wife of a professor at the university, called the monument "the fruition of long

⁴⁸ For an analysis of the university as a space for memory, see Michael Alan Upton, "Keeping the Faith with the University Greys': Ole Miss as *Lieux de Memoire*" (M.A. thesis, University of Mississippi, 2002), 32-77; Sansing, *The University of Mississippi*, 153-154; Franklin E. Moak, *A History of the Alumni Association of the University of Mississippi* (University, MS: The Alumni Association of the University of Mississippi, 1986), 45-46.

⁴⁹ On the Lost Cause, see Wilson, *Baptized in Blood*; Rollin G. Osterweis, *The Myth of the Lost Cause, 1865-1900* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1973); Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Catherine W. Bishir, "Landmarks of Power: Building a Southern Past, 1885-1915," *Southern Cultures* (Inaugural Issue, 1993): 5-45; and David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001).

years of patient toil,” first by “the devoted women who had seen and known the trials” of the war and Reconstruction years and then by the “younger and stronger hands” of the U. D. C. women. Through both generations and both organizations, “loyal women” had taken up the “burden” of the “work so dear to Southern women, whose purpose has ever been to commemorate the chivalrous deeds of the men of 1861-65 and to hold aside the curtain of memory that those who will may read the story as it was written—as it was lived—in the bitter days of war and reconstruction.” Like “the Vestal virgins of ancient times kept ablaze the sacred fires of their deity,” Deupree wrote, “the fair women of Mississippi” “preserve and perpetuate the memorial flame of love and patriotism for the great cause that was overwhelmed, not lost; overpowered, not defeated.” The monument itself had impeccable Lost Cause credentials. Its stone—“Georgia marble taken from the famous Tate quarries, where Joseph E. Johnston fought some of the great battles of the war”—had “been baptized with some of the best blood of the South.” The “son of a Mississippi soldier” had designed it; “Southern hands” had “fashioned” it; and “Southern women” had “paid” for it.⁵⁰

May 10, 1906, the day of the monument’s unveiling, began with a procession from Oxford’s courthouse square to the university’s campus. Following a military band and a large crowd on foot, “beautifully decorated” carriages brought “prominent men and devoted women” on the westward path. A special wagonette carried “the fairest flowers of the county’s young womanhood” from the square to campus. The day’s “most honored” attendees, a contingent of aged, “battle-scarred” Rebel veterans, marched “with measured tread” and bore “aloft the sacred flag of the Confederacy.” Behind the “grim-

⁵⁰ N. D. Deupree, “Confederate Monument at Oxford, Miss.,” *Confederate Veteran* Vol. XIV, No. 7 (July 1906): 306-307. On the U. D. C., see Karen L. Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003).

visaged warriors,” boys from the local training school followed “in their gray uniforms, carrying the stars and stripes.” When the procession reached the monument, Clarence L. Sivley, a member of the university’s law department and a railroad attorney, welcomed the crowd. Rev. Winn David Hedleston, the pastor of the Oxford Presbyterian Church, then led the assembled in prayer. After the blessing, the “Confederate girls”—one for each of the southern states—gathered in a semicircle, sang “The Bonnie Blue Flag,” and laid garlands of white and red roses at the base of the monument.⁵¹

Sivley then introduced the featured speaker for the ceremony, Charles Scott of Rosedale, Mississippi. Scott’s remarks combined a defense of the southern past with a call for vigilance in the region’s future. He referred to the Confederacy as “the youngest, the noblest, [and] the bravest of all the nations of earth” and compared the civilization of the Old South to “all the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome.” The surrender at Appomattox, Scott stated, represented a day of sorrow and distress for “the enlightened lovers of liberty and justice in all countries and all climes.” Even after the Confederacy’s defeat, across Europe “the civilized world” “venerated and esteemed” “the memory of Southern valor and Southern chivalry.” Neither “unholy lust for conquest nor consuming love of martial glory” had motivated the Rebel soldier; he had “fought neither for gold nor other gain.” Scott spoke of his fellow veterans as men who had “battled for a principle, in which each believed with all his heart, soul, and mind.” Called from “their peaceful homes to tented fields,” Confederates had battled valiantly until the “countless numbers and the boundless resources of a hostile world” overwhelmed the South. Following the war, the soldiers “returned to their desolate homes and devastated fields” and “promptly assumed and faithfully discharged the duties of American citizens.”

⁵¹ Deupree, “Confederate Monument at Oxford, Miss.”: 306-307.

Through the war and Reconstruction, the soldiers had conducted themselves “with a southern grace and courtesy and good humor which in the course of time disarmed enmity and criticism and brought peace and good will to the whole country.” In the forty years since the end of the war, the “whole nation” had made progress towards “accepting the noble and patriotic sentiment of Oxford’s statesman and peerless orator, the incomparable Lamar.” But though the “animosities” of the war had “passed away,” Scott closed his remarks by reminding the assembled of their duty to “keep the record clean” for their children and for the “beloved Southland.”⁵²

Scott’s address and the ceremony that surrounded it demonstrated the purposes which the memorialization of the Lost Cause served. In eulogizing the Old South, Scott re-wrote the history of the Confederacy as one in which a people had reluctantly taken up arms to defend the principles of liberty and freedom, as opposed to one in which a generation of aggressive southern leaders had agitated for the expansion of slavery and welcomed the coming of a great war as an opportunity to establish a slaveholders’ empire. In place of bitterness, defensiveness, and recalcitrance, Scott substituted grace, courtesy, and reconciliation as the defining features of white Mississippians’ reactions to the war’s outcome. It befitted the exercise in general revision and inversion that Scott invoked Lamar, the author of the state’s ordinance of secession and an attorney for the Klansmen of north Mississippi who terrorized blacks and Republicans during Reconstruction, as the key figure in a process whereby North followed South down the path of harmony and forgiveness. If Scott’s version of history sanitized the southern past, the ceremonies that surrounded his address suggested how an approved history could serve the region in the present and the future. The unveiling of the monument was a

⁵² *Ibid.*, 307.

model of cohesion, order, and clarity. It physically brought together the white communities of Oxford and the university. It linked the leading men of the present, men whose wealth and status reflected a new economic order, to the cultural legacy of men who fought a war for an old order. In this sense, it performed the crucial function of creating the illusion of continuity in a world that had changed profoundly. And, perhaps most importantly, it inculcated in younger generations an expectation of roles that passed from father to son and mother to daughter and did not change in any fundamental way over time. In short, the ritual led participants to understand their world as being the same one their ancestors had inhabited.

Few men would have occupied a stronger position than Charles Scott to combine mastery of the New South's emerging economic order with the cultural prestige and social connections of the Old South. A native of Jackson and the scion of a prominent antebellum family that traced its lineage to Virginia, he had served in the Confederate cavalry as a teenager. After the war, Scott moved to the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta and established himself as one of the state's leading railroad attorneys and planters. By the 1890s, he owned fourteen thousand acres in Bolivar County alone. His holdings in other counties included plantations, grazing land, and lumber yards. The owner of several groceries and the chief stockholder in a hotel, Scott served terms as head of the Delta Levee Board, the Bank of Rosedale, and the Mississippi Central Valley Railroad.⁵³

If for men like Scott, service to the Confederacy and a lineage that connected them to the state's antebellum leaders legitimized their position atop the new order, an institution like the University of Mississippi could also put the past to use in the service

⁵³ *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Mississippi: Embracing an Authentic and Comprehensive Account of the Chief Events in the History of the State and a Record of the Lives of Many of the Most Worthy and Illustrious Families and Individuals, Volume II* (Chicago: Goodspeed, 1891), 728.

of its present and its future. The ability of ritual, the invocation of the past, and the use of symbolic language to forge a sense of continuity explains how the University of Mississippi became “Ole Miss” so quickly after the introduction of the name. The plantation metaphor inherent in the name itself suggested a vision of hierarchy that put the world back in order and soothed concerns for students and administrators at an institution enduring the indignity of competing for funds with an agricultural college. The term accessed the antebellum past in a way that made it possible for the university to craft a lineage that traced itself to the eminent men and rich cultural tradition of the Old South. And, as any effective symbol must, it served as shorthand for a broader set of assumptions and ideas. But if the invention of Ole Miss succeeded in rooting the university culturally and defining it through its timelessness, significant work remained if the university was to remake itself as an institution capable of serving Mississippi’s present and its future.

CHAPTER 2

FRANKLIN L. RILEY AND THE PRODUCTION AND USES OF MISSISSIPPI'S HISTORY

I

In 1897, the University of Mississippi hired Franklin L. Riley as its first professional historian. Riley had earned his doctorate at Johns Hopkins University under the direction of Herbert Baxter Adams, a University of Heidelberg-trained scholar and a founder of the New Historical School.¹ Studying under the direction of Adams at Hopkins placed Riley, a merchant's son from Lawrence County, Mississippi, in an environment that Wendell Holmes Stephenson called an "academic haven for students from the impoverished South."² Adams's training emphasized the use of scientific methodologies, the collection and preservation of source materials, and the responsibility of the scholar to publish and to teach. At a university where roughly one third of the faculty came from the South and where, in part because of scholarship programs which

¹ For a study of Riley's life through his departure from the University of Mississippi in 1914, see: Roger D. Tate, Jr., "Franklin L. Riley: His Career to 1914," M. A. Thesis, Department of History, University of Mississippi, 1971.

² Stephenson, the son of Midwestern Quakers, earned his Ph.D. from the University of Michigan under the direction of the Southern historian U. B. Phillips and taught at Louisiana State University. He was a key figure in the founding of the Southern Historical Society, the creation and editing of the *Journal of Southern History*, and the publication of the multi-volume *A History of the South* series. Thomas D. Clark, "Wendell Holmes Stephenson, 1899-1970: Master Editor and Teacher," *Journal of Southern History* 36, No. 3 (Aug., 1970): 335-349.

Quotation is from Wendell Holmes Stephenson, *Southern History in the Making* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), 54. Adams himself was not a native Southerner. Born in Massachusetts, he attended Philips Exeter Academy and Amherst College before traveling to Europe to study French and German before earning his doctorate at Heidelberg in 1876. His key publications on the history of the South included institutional histories of The College of William and Mary and the University of Virginia. *Ibid.*, 55-56.

specifically targeted southern students, a majority of the graduate students came from the South, Adams's program led to a rise in scientific studies of the region and produced scores of men who would teach at colleges and schools throughout the South. Indeed, by 1896, twenty years into Adams's tenure at Hopkins, multiple students from the university were on each of the faculties of southern institutions stretching southwestwardly from Baltimore to Austin, Texas. By 1900, two-hundred men trained at Hopkins were teaching history somewhere in the South.³

Riley was twenty-eight when he accepted the position of Professor of History and Rhetoric at the University of Mississippi. From the time of his hiring, he worked with the energy and enthusiasm of his mentor to bring the serious study of history to the university and the state. Riley carried a heavy teaching load. For much of his time at the university, he taught all of the school's history classes, which included junior-year surveys of medieval and modern history, senior-year classes in American political and constitutional history, and graduate reading classes in ancient, medieval, and modern history. In addition to the history classes, Riley taught freshman-level classes in rhetoric and composition during his first three years at the university. The resurrection of the Mississippi Historical Society, which involved recruiting and maintaining membership, badgering a stingy state legislature for appropriations, collecting and archiving historical materials throughout the state, and editing papers for the society's journal, perhaps required even more of Riley's devotion and zeal than did his considerable teaching responsibilities.⁴ During summers, Riley, whose history of Mississippi became the standard text for schools throughout the state, trained secondary school teachers from

³ *Ibid.*, 53-55.

⁴ Tate, "Franklin L. Riley," 14-46.

several southern states in methodology.⁵

The work that Riley did in Mississippi earned him a national reputation. With a group of prominent southern historians, he helped write and edit the multi-volume *The South in the Building of the Nation*. A member of the American Historical Association (AHA) since his time as a graduate student at Hopkins, Riley quickly became a key figure in the organization. By the time he was thirty-six, Riley served with two esteemed Midwestern scholars, Reuben Gold Thwaites of Wisconsin and Benjamin F. Shambaugh of Iowa, on the AHA's committee on state historical societies.⁶ In 1909, still just forty-one, he became a member of the AHA's executive council. That same year, colleagues in Virginia and North Carolina invited Riley to help write a textbook on American history, and scholars at the University of Chicago enlisted Riley's help in planning encyclopedias of American politics and biographies. As he advanced in the AHA and established connections with other academics, Riley attracted employment opportunities beyond Mississippi. Before leaving the university for Washington and Lee in 1914, Riley turned down job offers at Richmond College (now the University of Richmond) and the University of North Carolina. Following his election to the AHA's executive council, Riley even received mention as a possible chair of the history department at Hopkins.⁷

Riley attracted the most attention for his work with the Mississippi Historical

⁵ Howard D. Southwood, "Riley of Mississippi," *Journal of Mississippi History* XIII (1951): 208

⁶ Unlike the professional historians of Riley's generation, Thwaites had only one year of college education and one year of advanced study at Yale. A newspaper editor in Madison, Wisconsin, Thwaites helped build, maintain, and edit the collections of the Wisconsin Historical Society and represented a key figure in the national archival movement and the serious study of history in the Midwest. James A. Woodburn, "Reuben Gold Thwaites," *Indiana Magazine of History*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (December, 1913): 298-301.

Shambaugh, who held a doctorate from the University of Pennsylvania, was the founder of the department of political science at the University of Iowa and a founding member of the American Political Science Association and the Mississippi Valley Historical Society. A contemporary of Riley's, he was the key figure in transforming the State Historical Society of Iowa from an antiquarian club of amateurs into a modern organization. Rebecca Conrad, "Shambaugh, Benjamin Franklin," in *The Biographical Dictionary of Iowa*, University of Iowa Press, 2009. Accessed on Web, 19 July 2014.

⁷ Tate, "Franklin L. Riley," 68-80.

Society. According to the historian John Spencer Bassett, another of Adams's students at Hopkins and the founder of the *South Atlantic Quarterly*, Riley's work in Mississippi had, in less than five years, "given history a permanently beneficent impulse among a people who formerly cared little for it and perhaps but half realized its very nature." Bassett saw in Riley the traits that had made Adams an effective mentor and an evangelist for the serious study of history in the South. Identifying his colleague's professional training as a pre-requisite for inspiring a historical revival in Mississippi, Bassett contrasted Riley with the "well intentioned gentlemen" who had presided over Mississippi's historical society until its suspension in 1896. A man of enthusiasm as well as "steady and undespairing efforts," Riley possessed "the knowledge [and] inclination" to turn the society into something capable of publishing new histories and establishing a formal archival system, not the mere "collection of relics and documents." Bassett's lavish praise of Riley's efforts, which included the statement that a volume produced by the Mississippi Historical Society in 1900 represented the most "credible publication ... ever issued by a Southern historical society," had a clear message: in any other southern state, such as Bassett's own North Carolina, historical revivals were possible, so long as the state found its "man to lead." In other words, the right kind of man, one "capable of giving all his energy to one thing ... without wasting his energy in complaining of the lack of things which cannot be had," could produce for any southern state the kind of history "which people of common intelligence desire and understand."⁸

⁸ John Spencer Bassett, "How a Young Man Built Up History in Mississippi," *South Atlantic Quarterly* I, No. 4 (Oct., 1902): 372-377. Bassett attended Trinity College (now Duke University) before earning his Ph.D. at Hopkins under Adams in 1894 and then returning to Trinity as Professor of History. The *South Atlantic Quarterly* gained Bassett praise from some quarters in the South and even more in the national historical and literary communities, but Bassett's statements praising Booker T. Washington and critiquing racial attitudes and one-party Democratic rule in North Carolina nearly cost him his job at Trinity. In 1906, he left the South and North Carolina for a job at Smith College. See: Wendell Holmes Stephenson, "John

The design that Adams laid out at Hopkins, Riley implemented in Mississippi, and Bassett praised in the *South Atlantic Quarterly* made the study of history integral to the enrichment of life in the contemporary South. A serious investigation of the region's past, one by which professionals used scientific methods and carefully-preserved materials and evidence to produce comprehensive and accurate histories, could yield truths which not only told fuller stories about the Southern past, but which also revealed lessons and patterns useful for a place and a people struggling to emerge from decades of poverty, intellectual barrenness, and contentious political in-fighting.

This chapter follows the lead of Gregory P. Downs in taking seriously the role of universities and knowledge-production in the political campaigns that shaped the South at the turn of the twentieth century. Downs has shown that “intellectual networks” at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill were “at the center of the formation and dissemination of North Carolina white supremacy.” The “self-conscious group of public intellectuals” who advocated for the victory of Democrats over Populists and Republicans in North Carolina “were participants, if not leading or systematic ones, in a global project, one in which social scientific theories of progress, race, reproduction, and degeneration inspired new waves of statist reform programs across Europe and the United States.”⁹ As Downs has revealed how scholars at the University of North Carolina produced the knowledge and developed the ideas that legitimized the triumph of white supremacist Democracy over bi-racial Populism and Republicanism, this chapter examines the ways the work Franklin Riley undertook and directed at the University of

Spencer Bassett as a Historian of the South,” *North Carolina Historical Review* XV (May, 1949): 151-177; and Stephenson, “The Negro in the Thinking and Writing of John Spencer Bassett,” *North Carolina Historical Review* XXV (Oct., 1948): 427-441.

⁹ Gregory P. Downs, “University Men, Social Science, and White Supremacy in North Carolina,” *Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 75, No. 2 (May 2009): 268.

Mississippi deployed professional histories to identify the type of men fit to lead the state and to issue warnings about Mississippi's future. Because in Mississippi the struggle for political control occurred within an all-white Democratic Party, class, manners, and political style took on great significance in struggles for authority and control. By emphasizing the role that contemporary battles over class and political control played in the writing of Mississippi's history, this chapter suggests ways that scholars might build upon work that has revealed the significance of race in shaping popular and scholarly versions of the Southern past.

II

Riley arrived at an institution attempting to make the transformation from liberal-arts college to modern university. Under the chancellorships of Edward Mayes (1889-1892) and Robert Fulton (1892-1906), the university de-emphasized the classics, remade its academic program, and became a charter member of both the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools (SACSS) and the National Association of State Universities (NASU). In less than two decades, the number of undergraduate departments at the university more than doubled from ten to twenty-one, and four professional schools opened.¹⁰ The founding of new departments and schools meant that the university had to hire new faculty; between 1892 and 1906, the number of instructors and professors employed at the university increased from fifteen to thirty-one.¹¹ Recruiting a faculty

¹⁰ The undergraduate departments created during this period included: history, belles lettres, elocution, zoology, botany, geology, French, German, and philosophy. Schools of engineering, education, medicine, and pharmacy joined the law school as professional schools operated by the university. David G. Sansing, *The University of Mississippi: A Sesquicentennial History* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), 153-162.

¹¹ *Historical Catalogue of the University of Mississippi, 1849-1909* (Nashville: Marshal & Bruce Company, 1910), 77.

suitable for a modern university required more than adding mere numbers; it also required hiring men trained professionally and scientifically. As professionals replaced gentlemen-scholars on the faculty, those with doctoral and advanced degrees rose above older professors who possessed honorary degrees and lacked training in the new scientific methods. A system of professorial rank, which promised promotions and supplied funding and leaves of absence for research, favored those with doctorates and encouraged faculty publications. In addition to Riley, Howard Odum, a professionally-trained sociologist; Eula Deaton, the university's first dean of women and the holder of a master's degree; the prominent writer Stark Young; and Alexander Bondurant, a professor of Latin trained at Harvard, all joined the faculty under the administrations of Mayes and Fulton.¹²

The arrival of new faculty and the modernization of the curriculum coincided with a makeover of the university's campus and physical plant. Under Mayes and Fulton, a carefully-planted and maintained grove of trees and shrubs, bordered by hedges, became a defining and cherished physical space on the campus. Between 1889 and 1909, the university erected a new library, a gymnasium, a natatorium, an infirmary, an expanded dining hall, a new men's dormitory, a women's dormitory, a science building, and homes for faculty and married students. In this same era, wells and a metal water-tower replaced cisterns and a wooden water-tank, and the university installed water-closets, telephones, and modern heating, electric, and sewage systems throughout the campus.¹³ By the turn of the century, the college that students, faculty, and alumni had come to call "Ole Miss" was beginning to resemble a modern university.

¹² Sansing, *The University of Mississippi*, 164.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 153-161.

As it modernized, the university dealt with internal tensions among students and an increasingly turbulent external political environment. In 1903, James K. Vardaman won the state's gubernatorial election through an emotional combination of aggressive black-baiting, promises to curb corporate wealth and influence, and attacks on entrenched power-cliques. Vardaman's election called into question conventional assumptions about the kind of men who belonged in power and put institutions like the state university, long regarded a bastion of Mississippi's elite, under increased scrutiny.¹⁴ In this environment, one in which convulsions in Mississippi's political scene had upset basic ideas about privilege and proper leadership, charges of elitism and special treatment at the university took on added significance.

Franklin L. Riley thus worked at the University of Mississippi during a period of institutional growth and development set against open class and cultural warfare among the state's leadership. Early in his tenure at the university, Riley began to worry about the negative effects of political turmoil on higher education in Mississippi and the rest of the South. By 1901, the young professor confided to Herbert Baxter Adams that he felt "dissatisfied" at the university and that, though he was "very averse to giving up academic work," he was considering taking a position as director of the new Mississippi Department of Archives and History. Riley described the university as experiencing "a great deal of trouble," all attributable to the presence of "so much politics in [the] institution." He decried that trustees who were "men of political turn" had such influence on affairs at the university and compared the uncertainty of serving under a politically-appointed board with walking "on the crater of a volcano." The "turmoil of politics"

¹⁴ The definitive study of Vardaman is William F. Holmes, *The White Chief: James Kimble Vardaman* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970).

convinced Riley that, even for good men who appeared secure in their positions, “decapitation is only a question of time.” While Riley personally enjoyed harmonious relations with his students, he was particularly dismayed that the political troubles in the state had raised “a spirit of unrest” among the students and “arrayed [them] against the faculty.” As troubling as the situation at his own university had become, Riley detected a larger pattern in the South by which “a wave of politics ... has ruined many other state institutions.” Political interference in the region’s universities brought instability to the institutions, eroded morale among the faculty, and infected students with divisiveness. Referencing the methods of governance in use at Hopkins and universities in other sections of the country, Riley wrote in frustration that he “fear[ed] it will be a long time before our southern institutions will be characterized by the spirit of conservatism that prevails in those of the North.”¹⁵

In this environment of debate about the proper uses of power and the kind of men who made for legitimate rulers, ideas about knowledge, authority, justice, and duty took on complicated and contested meanings. For a man like Riley, a member of a family whose name carried with it both antebellum prestige and New South economic prominence, the rise of Vardaman and other new men threatened basic assumptions about society and represented something more significant than a change within the state’s government or the emergence of a new power-clique within Mississippi’s Democratic Party.¹⁶ Open questions about what kind of men belonged in positions of leadership and

¹⁵ Franklin L. Riley to Herbert B. Adams, May 8, 1901, in Charles S. Sydnor, ed., “Letters from Franklin L. Riley to Herbert B. Adams, 1894-1901,” *Journal of Mississippi History* II (April, 1940), 109-110.

¹⁶ Riley’s ancestors were early participants in the nineteenth-century migration out of the older, eastern parts of the South and into Mississippi and other newer, western parts of the region. The first Rileys arrived in Pennsylvania from Ireland, and his grandfather moved to Simpson County, Mississippi, by way of South Carolina and Georgia, in 1816. The grandfather’s early arrival in Simpson County made him a leading man in the county’s and South Mississippi’s development, and the family’s prestige increased with Riley’s

how responsible men of authority behaved once in power added significance to any examination of the state's political history. In this context, assessing the legitimacy and methods of men who rose to power in previous periods of turbulence not only told stories about Mississippi's past; it also revealed the patterns essential to diagnosing problems in the state's contemporary political scene.

The pattern of political concerns that led Riley to consider leaving academia for the archives recurred in the work that he oversaw at the university. Because he so enthusiastically answered Adams's call for the historian to establish colonies of the Hopkins graduate program throughout the South and to inspire original research by younger scholars, examining the theses that Riley directed at the University of Mississippi is a useful way of understanding how contemporary debates influenced research undertaken and directed in the scientific and objective style of the New Historical School. The theses that Riley most cherished were county-level histories of Reconstruction in Mississippi. In the crossed-out sentences, corrected spellings, and added footnotes, Riley's fingerprints (almost literally) covered the theses. The structure of the histories conformed to his ideas about professional history. Each thesis began with an overview of the county under consideration—its founding and development, its topography and bodies of water, its agricultural products and natural resources, and its railroads. From there, the theses described the parties and political leaders active in the county during Reconstruction, the elections that occurred during the era, the

father's service in the Confederate army under Stonewall Jackson during the Civil War. By the time of Riley's birth, his father, who owned a thousand acres of land when he died, had established himself as a leading merchant in neighboring Lawrence County, thus uniting the family's antebellum prestige with economic prominence in the commercial order of the New South. Dunbar Rowland, ed., *Mississippi: Comprising Sketches of Towns, Events, Institutions, and Persons, Arranged in Cyclopedic Form* (Atlanta: Southern Historical Publishing Association, 1907), III, 695-96; *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Mississippi* (Chicago: The Goodspeed Publishing Company, 1891), II, 683-84.

organizations and leagues that formed in the county, and the character of the governments that ruled during the period. Riley instructed his students on which sources to examine and what statistics to include. This structured process, which addressed what Riley called the “clearly defined phases of life,” would, in theory, yield a comprehensive and balanced assessment of the subject under consideration.¹⁷ The theses thus reflected the basic tenet of the New Historical School: that scholars should approach the past critically and arrive at objective conclusions through the weighing of evidence, not the filtering or interpreting of analyses through their own ideologies and values.¹⁸ The theses also conformed to a basic idea about localism and community. Because the state government had been “more or less remote” to people throughout Mississippi, it was at the “county and municipal” level that residents of the state experienced and observed Reconstruction. In this way, the methods of scientific history might explain how political convulsions affected things like harmony and unity within local communities.¹⁹

Despite Riley’s conscious use of the objective methods of the New Historical School in directing the theses, contemporary forces, assumptions, and anxieties clearly shaped the histories that his students produced. Each of the theses, for example, repeatedly deployed racial stereotypes and tropes.²⁰ To dismiss the Reconstruction

¹⁷ Franklin L. Riley, *School History of Mississippi* (Richmond: B. F. Johnson Publishing Company, 1900), 5.

¹⁸ Raymond J. Cunningham, “Is History Past Politics? Herbert Baxter Adams as Precursor of the ‘New History,’” *The History Teacher* 9 (1976): 244.

¹⁹ Franklin L. Riley, “Remarks on the Importance of County Histories of Reconstruction,” *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society* XI (1910): 12-13.

²⁰ The use of racial stereotypes and assumptions that contemporary readers would regard as biased, unsubstantiated, and subjective often appeared in the “scientific” and “objective” work of the time. For example, William A. Dunning, Riley’s contemporary and the key scholar of Reconstruction in the era, produced and directed studies which most scholars now regard as vituperative, racist, and dogmatic. In his time, though, Dunning won praise as an “objective chronicler” who produced works superior and truer than the subjective interpretations of “dogmatic philosophers.” For one example of this praise of Dunning, see: Charles E. Merriam, “Masters of Social Science: William Archibald Dunning,” *Social Forces* 5 (1926): 4, 8. For a collection of recent assessments of the Dunning School, see John David Smith and J. Vincent

histories as basically “racist,” though, overlooks a current of arguments about social class and demagoguery running through the theses. The papers emerged from seminars that Riley taught between 1906 and 1914. This meant that the students researching and writing about Reconstruction in Mississippi were living in a world reacting and adjusting to the changes in the state’s political culture that the abandonment of the convention system and the adoption of the primary system had initiated. What was more, Riley personally had worried since early in his time at the university that irresponsible political behavior threatened to inject divisiveness and instability into a naturally harmonious community of faculty and students. In this context, a professor and his students at an institution that was enduring convulsions directly attributable to the rise of Vardaman and to changes in the state’s political culture presumably felt greater or more immediate anxiety about the behavior of irresponsible white men than the political activity of black Mississippians, whom the state had constitutionally disfranchised in 1890 and whose inferiority the young scholars most likely took as a given. Reading the Reconstruction histories as tragedies about the effects of rule-of-the-wrong-kind-of-white-men does not remove black inferiority as a key premise of the theses, but it does involve understanding active and passive roles in the assessments and identifying the issues that Riley’s students regarded as central to the tragedy of the era. If Reconstruction becomes a story about the demagogic and irresponsible manipulation of the state’s black population, then arguments about things like class and morality, not general statements of racial bias, become the central focus of the studies.

A typical student of Riley’s defined the Reconstruction-era Republican Party as a

Lowery, eds., *The Dunning School: Historians, Race, and the Meaning of Reconstruction* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013).

coalition of: old Whigs; Scalawags, or “men who were southerners and had become democrats [sic] before the war and who changed political allegiance for the sake of the revenue to be gained in the shape of an office”; Carpetbaggers, or “unprincipled and corrupt men who came to the county immediately following the war”; and “the southern negro under radical dominance.”²¹ Against the Republicans stood the Democrats, made up of “native whites” and “old family slaves that still had the old love for their former masters.”²² Riley’s students stuck to this basic composition with notable consistency. All over Mississippi, it seemed, traitorous Scalawags, greedy Carpetbaggers, and gullible blacks had clashed with beleaguered natives and loyal ex-slaves.

Individual figures gave color and substance to the general types of the local Reconstruction dramas. In Clarke County, for instance, F. C. Jenkins wrote that the Scalawag J. W. Wynn, “a man of fine address and well educated” and a “fire-eating democrat [sic]” before the war, showed his cowardice by failing to join the Rebel army after secession and becoming a Republican during Reconstruction. The betrayal, combined with his professional ineptness, cost Wynn his home, his business, and the “respect of the people” of Clarke County. Jenkins closed his summary of Wynn’s life by noting that he died a “pauper” in Chicago.²³ Wynn’s story read like a parable: alliance with illegitimate authority stripped even the well-born and well-educated of their status as reputable southerners, resulted in their symbolic (and in some cases physical) exile from the region, and consigned them to the lowest orders.

Other Scalawags did not have as far to fall. John W. Kyle wrote that J. H. Pierce

²¹ F. C. Jenkins, “Reconstruction in Clarke County,” 1910, 7, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

²² John Arthur Bell, “Reconstruction in Leflore County,” 1911, 6, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

²³ Jenkins, “Reconstruction in Clarke County,” 7-8.

of Panola County, a Confederate veteran from eastern Mississippi, embodied “the most despicable elements of a Southern scalawag [sic].” A dual-office holder who lived in Lafayette County while representing Panola County, Pierce regularly skipped meetings and generally failed to serve his constituents. To emphasize Pierce’s illegitimacy as an office-holder and to confirm his status as a man without honor, Kyle included an anecdote about the Redeemer hero L. Q. C. Lamar beating Pierce “with a chair in open court.”²⁴ F. C. Jenkins described N. A. Davis of Clarke County as “a man uncultured, uncouth, and uneducated.” The North Carolina-born Scalawag epitomized “the type that was called by the negroes, ‘Poor white trash.’”²⁵ In Lawrence County, Hattie Magee wrote, the Scalawags came from the “floating, drifting population.” The fact that “their ancestors had never achieved anything” made the Scalawags susceptible to “the glitter of public office,” and they filled “their purses at the expense of the county whenever occasion offered itself.”²⁶ In these cases, Republicanism did not turn a southerner into a man of no account; it merely confirmed the low origins and debased character of a member of the despised class.

Riley’s students described Carpetbaggers in similarly classed language. E. F. Puckett wrote that a Yankee Republican known only as “Woodmansce” came to Monroe County “like driftwood from the ocean.” Fond of drink and “more or less illiterate,” Woodmansce allegedly got so drunk and disoriented on his way to assault a local Democratic leader that he ended up “nailed in a wagon bed ... trying to break out of his

²⁴ John W. Kyle, “History of Reconstruction in Panola County,” 1912, 23, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

²⁵ Jenkins, “Reconstruction History in Clarke County,” 13.

²⁶ Hattie Magee, “Reconstruction in Lawrence County,” 1909, 6, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

prison by kicking furiously.”²⁷ No legitimate man of authority needed to get drunk to defend his honor, and an honorable man did not fall victim to a primitive trap, like a bear or a raccoon. In Leake County, the Carpetbagger sheriff W. H. Wood, a “proud, haughty, boastful spendthrift,” became involved in a particularly embarrassing affair of (dis-) honor. A group of local people found the sheriff bound, gagged, and bloodied in his office. Wood explained that a man had robbed and beaten him; many in Leake County believed that he had staged the incident to explain the disappearance of a large sum of tax money.²⁸ Whichever story one chose to believe, Wood was either a thief or a sheriff whose citizens felt comfortable robbing him in his own office. Legitimate sheriffs did not steal, and their citizens certainly did not beat and gag them in their own offices. The meaning of the affair was clear: Wood the Carpetbagger was a man unfit for authority. Even the Carpetbaggers who possessed wealth, education, and a degree of competence failed in other areas. Henry Musgrove, originally of Terre Haute, Indiana, was a shrewd financial operator, but F. C. Jenkins noted him more for his “extremely ugly” personal appearance, “coarse and rugged” features, “very dark” skin, “black” hair, “awkward” stance, and “very large feet.” Jenkins described Musgrove’s chief associate, R. H. Scales of St. Louis, as “a lawyer by profession, but a jack-leg.”²⁹ Even the wealthy and educated Carpetbaggers looked like poor men and acted like hucksters.

Of the Republican coalition, blacks generated the least attention and condemnation in the theses. A typical account of the political behavior of “lazy negroes” remarked that “everything went smoothly until the Freedman’s Bureau ... [put] all kinds

²⁷ E. F. Puckett, “Reconstruction in Monroe County,” 1909, 23-24, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

²⁸ R. B. Walker, “Reconstruction in Leake County,” 1912, 2, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

²⁹ Jenkins, “Reconstruction in Clarke County,” 15.

of ideas into the heads of the negroes and free salt pork into the stomachs.”³⁰ A student who observed relative agency in the actions of the freedmen wrote that “the proverbial ‘forty acres and a mule,’ and ... the expectation of being able to hold the places and positions held by the former masters” motivated blacks to join the Republican Party.³¹ In every instance, however, Riley’s students asserted that blacks had acted “under the control” of white Republicans.”³² E. F. Puckett called the blacks of Monroe County an “ignorant and prejudiced majority.” White Republicans, he wrote, had “actuated” local blacks; when the Scalawags and Carpetbaggers succumbed to “inevitable defeat” at the hands of the Redeemers, black “enthusiasm vanished,” and the freedmen reverted to their natural state of passive “cowardice.” The black police officer J. P. Hogan, for instance, was an “ignorant slave” who had made money during Reconstruction and then “lost it by lending it to his political friends.” Puckett mocked Hogan’s communitarian spirit by characterizing his preaching as a self-fashioned attempt to “uplift his race.” Hogan concluded by calling Puckett an “honest negro.”³³ These depictions of black political activity insulted black people and portrayed the freedmen as ignoramuses comically unfit for public office, but the theses did not frame “Negro Domination” or black assertiveness as the central traumas of Reconstruction.

The full weight of the infamy of Reconstruction fell on the shoulders of white men who had obtained and then used authority illegitimately. In Leflore County, the Scalawags and Carpetbaggers had come to the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta “with the idea of

³⁰ Charles Arthur Williamson, “Reconstruction in Lafayette County,” 1912, 2, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

³¹ Ruth Watkins, “Reconstruction in Marshall County,” 1909, 6, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

³² Bell, “Reconstruction in Leflore County,” 6.

³³ Puckett, “Reconstruction in Monroe County,” 16, 29.

making money out of the negroes.”³⁴ Likewise in Desoto County, the fortune-seeking Republicans used “oppressive measures and scheming methods” to trick blacks into joining their party.”³⁵ Carpetbaggers, Scalawags, and agents of the Freedman’s Bureau all shared one unforgivable sin: upsetting the order of a natural and harmonious world. When the Republicans and the Bureau offered blacks the “vain illusory promise of 40 acres and a mule,” they “diminished [the black man’s] economic value by throwing into his path irresistible [sic] temptations to idleness.”³⁶ What was worse, Republicans stirred up local blacks by luring them in with “barbecues and fish fries” and then launching into “harangues ... about their rights, and their power.”³⁷ In an era when Vardaman men were campaigning across Mississippi to democratize every institution in the state, the disastrous impact of pandering to the lowest orders of society would have rang out loudly in the heads of Riley’s students like so many fire bells in the night.

Republicans came from the lowest orders, behaved like men from the lowest orders, and pandered to the lowest orders. In myriad ways, they sowed discontent and strife by upsetting the natural harmony of Mississippi’s communities. Democrats, conversely, embodied the cohesion, loyalty, and stability of idyllic agrarian communities. John W. Kyle wrote that years of “fighting for a common cause” had “obliterated” “all factional lines” among the white population of Panola County. The trauma of Reconstruction, coming on the heels of war, had strengthened the unity of the county and formed an unbreakable bond.³⁸ Riley’s students thus made united, faction-less, one-party rule the natural order. For examples of natural leaders and men who understood the duties

³⁴ Bell, “Reconstruction in Leflore County,” 6.

³⁵ I. C. Nichols, “Reconstruction in Desoto County,” 1908, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

³⁶ Puckett, “Reconstruction in Monroe County,” 50.

³⁷ Jenkins, “Reconstruction History in Clarke County,” 15.

³⁸ Kyle, “History of Reconstruction in Panola County,” 18.

inherent in holding authority, they looked to the heroes of the past. In Marshall County, for instance, the Democratic leaders “were pre-eminently intellectual and ... exercised a salutary influence over the community.” Ruth Watkins wrote that Henry C. Myers, a Democratic hero and an organizer for the Ku Klux Klan, had come from a “splendid family” and possessed the “highest integrity.” Likewise, W. C. Featherston, “an able lawyer, profound thinker and a man of incorruptible integrity,” had made brigadier-general in the Confederate army before serving dutifully at the constitutional convention of 1890. Unlike Myers and Featherston, J. W. C. Watson had opposed secession. But like both men, as a “conservative, trust-worthy, public-spirited citizen,” he had served the Confederate government dutifully and then taken “many responsible positions” after the war.³⁹

The Democrats and the Redeemers thus looked and acted like men of authority were supposed to look and act. They came from the best families, possessed the highest levels of education, and served the best interests of their communities. They did not pander to any class of society, and they certainly did not encourage one class to view its interests as distinct from those of the greater good. No one beat, stole from, or cheated these men because the community recognized their suitability for public office and authority. In short, these men preserved harmonious relations in orderly communities because their status and their behavior generated esteem and respect. In the context of Vardaman’s Mississippi, the theses read as allegories about what happens when the wrong kind of men ascend to power.

³⁹ Ruth Watkins, “Reconstruction in Marshall County,” 1909, 6-7, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

III

The Reconstruction theses serve as useful subjects for consideration in the context of important long-term and recent patterns in the historiography of Reconstruction and the historiography of memory in the South. In the early-twentieth century, a group of native southerners who studied under William A. Dunning at Columbia University produced a series of state-level histories of Reconstruction. The Dunning-school histories made use of scientific techniques, were well-documented, and analyzed a wide range of topics, but the sectional and racial biases of the scholars led to monographs which depicted Reconstruction as an era in which the South suffered under the incompetent and chaotic rule of freedmen, Scalawags, and Carpetbaggers.⁴⁰ Decades of revisionist and post-revisionist scholarship, begun in the 1930s by African-American scholars and expanded during the civil-rights era of the 1960s, critiqued the assumptions, methods, and findings of the Dunning school. This scholarship ultimately led to Eric Foner's landmark work, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution* (1988). Foner's synthesis represented a final overthrow of the Dunning school and framed Reconstruction as a story about freedmen building communities and erecting political foundations in the face of ferocious planter resistance and against the backdrop of eroding national support.⁴¹ In the decades since the publishing of Foner's work, liberated from the need to engage the arguments of the Dunning school, scholars of Reconstruction have explored an increasingly wide and deep pool of topics. As Michael W. Fitzgerald has noted,

⁴⁰ Thomas J. Brown, "Introduction," in Thomas J. Brown, ed., *Reconstructions: New Perspectives on the Postbellum United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 3-4. For an analysis of Dunning and his students that acknowledges the racial biases and other problems of the Dunning school while raising some questions about revisionist critiques on Dunning, see Philip R. Muller, "Look Back without Anger: A Reappraisal of William A. Dunning," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 61, No. 2 (Sep., 1974): 325-338.

⁴¹ Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988).

contemporary debates and changes in national attitudes—particularly racial attitudes—have heavily influenced historiographical debates about Reconstruction. Indeed, Dunning himself noted the connections between the versions of the past his students created and the defense of contemporary practices of segregation and disfranchisement. Similarly, revisionists of the 1960s explicitly linked their efforts to recover the history of the freedmen with the freedom struggles of the civil-rights era. Moreover, the so-called “postrevisionists” of the 1970s, who “stressed the conservative implications of reform and took a jaundiced view of American institutions,” created histories of Reconstruction that reflected patterns of thought in the New Left, Black Power, and neo-Marxist movements.⁴² In short, as Foner has recently noted, “[i]nterpretations of Reconstruction always reflect, in part, contemporary race relations.”⁴³

Clearly, what historians write about Reconstruction often has as much to do with the present as the past. Something similar could be said about the way southerners have imagined and written their history. In recent decades, scholars have explored the ways in which early-twentieth-century southerners used historical narratives and stories to bring order to their contemporary world, to justify present conditions, and to suggest policies for the future. The politics of race have occupied a central role in many of these analyses of how and why white southerners remembered the past in the ways that they did. In some cases, this has centered on an argument that symbols and representations of “whiteness” culturally defined segregation as the traditional way of life in the South.⁴⁴ In other cases, scholars have looked more closely at the activities of professional historians

⁴² Micahel W. Fitzgerald, “Reconstruction Politics and the Politics of Reconstruction,” in Thomas J. Brown, ed., *Reconstructions: New Perspectives on the Postbellum United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 91-93, quote from 93.

⁴³ Eric Foner, “Foreword,” in Smith and Lowery, eds., *The Dunning School*, xii.

⁴⁴ See, for example, Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998).

and other direct forms of tradition-making. For W. Fitzhugh Brundage, one prominent historian of Southern memory, the archival movement that Riley and his colleagues throughout the South led in the first decade of the twentieth century was a movement “for whites only” that “removed competing groups and historical alternatives from the region’s past.” A suitable past was particularly important in legitimizing power won by means of “coercion and anti-democratic constitutional manipulations.” A history which documented the “elevated goals” that the white men and institutions of the South had pursued in the past would make “vote buying, violence, ballot stuffing, and other tawdry practices ... historical anomalies” and prove “that the South had fostered democratic institutions and nurtured enlightened statesmen, and by extension, would continue to do so.”⁴⁵ In Brundage’s analysis, the archival movement and the professionalization of history represented a kind of double-elitism: professors and archivists, “[e]nsconced in university faculties and stage agencies,” expanded their own power while aiding “Southern state governments, now securely in the hands of white elites,” in the cause of “promoting a shared white historical consciousness.”⁴⁶

Without doubt, the theses that Riley directed, by presenting freedmen as unfit for political participation and making one-party rule the natural order, framed Reconstruction as an anomaly of history and offered evidence of the legitimacy of a white, Democratic regime. But Riley’s career in Mississippi hardly resembles the vision of the professional historian of the South laid out in Brundage’s analysis. For one, if professors were safely “ensconced” in academic departments in some parts of the South, they certainly were not at the University of Mississippi. By the time Riley left the university in 1914, he had

⁴⁵ W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 107, 114.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 135-136.

become convinced that turmoil on the Board of Trustees and incompetence in the state government had made Mississippi an untenable place for a serious historian. In his time in Oxford, numerous faculty members had lost their positions as a result of turnover in the governor's office and on the Board of Trustees, a nationally-respected chancellor had been dismissed from office, and three of Riley's own assistant professors had lost their jobs.⁴⁷ Riley's 1901 letter to Herbert Baxter Adams, in which he confided his anxieties about the future and predicted that few men at the university would survive permanently in the state's political climate, had not been paranoid or melodramatic; it had been prescient. At least in the case of Mississippi, the notion of an elite-created, archived, and maintained "white" version of the past, administered and disseminated ably and effectively by a united state apparatus, seems too tidy to imagine.

For a man like Riley and for an institution like the University of Mississippi, the first two decades of the twentieth century saw the rise of new men and a new style of politics that threatened both their positions and their conceptions of the proper uses of authority. One recurring theme of the Reconstruction theses that suggests something of the anxieties of the era for conservative men and traditional institutions was the penetration of illegitimate authority into local communities. According to the theses, part of what made Reconstruction a trauma and a tragedy was the deleterious effect it had on local cohesiveness. The danger of the arbitrary imposition of illegitimate or incompetent authority on a community or an institution figured prominently in Riley's anxieties about his own university. When Riley longed for the "conservatism" of a board removed from political control, he longed for stability, control, and predictability. The theses he directed produced an official version of Mississippi's past which drew clear distinctions between

⁴⁷ Tate, "Franklin L. Riley," 84.

the types of men who legitimately held authority and the types of men who obtained and used it unscrupulously. If the theses used the past to produce models of what good leaders and good government might look like, they also used the past to produce warnings about how the wrong kind of men ascended to power and the damage they could cause once they held control. In the context of Vardaman's Mississippi, men like Franklin Riley and institutions like the University of Mississippi could not have helped but think of their own worlds when they imagined the state's past. If for ascendant regimes, the authority of scientific knowledge could serve to legitimize the power of the state and to advance ambitious projects, for men and institutions in retreat from unwelcome forces, the production of official versions of the past could protect their positions in the present and point toward alternative futures.

CHAPTER 3

“THE MUD BENEATH THE WHITEWASH”: THE FRATERNITY TROUBLES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI

I

One afternoon in November, 1903, a confrontation occurred between two first-year students at the University of Mississippi, John Ricks and R. C. Morris. In a common area of the campus, near the offices of the Chancellor and other faculty members, Ricks met and struck Morris with brass knuckles. In response, Morris pulled a knife and slashed at Ricks. Two of Ricks's and Morris's classmates intervened before serious injuries occurred, but each student was hurt in the fight, and Ricks suffered a cut on his throat. In the aftermath of the incident, Chancellor Robert B. Fulton advised both Ricks and Morris to withdraw from the university. Ricks left the university immediately. Morris, who felt he had acted in self-defense and with provocation, decided to take his case before the faculty. Ultimately, the faculty decided against suspending or dismissing Morris from the university, and he was able to continue his studies after receiving a reprimand from Chancellor Fulton.¹

Morris and Ricks were both first-year students at the university, but they shared nothing else in common. Ricks was a member of a prominent Mississippi family. His grandfather, Benjamin Sherrod Ricks, Sr., had come to Madison County in 1830 from

¹ *Record of the Testimony Taken by the Joint Committee on Universities and Colleges in the Investigation of the Charges Made Against Chancellor Robert B. Fulton by D. H. Chamberlain* (Jackson, MS: Tucker Printing House, 1906), Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, MS.

North Carolina and established himself as one of the leading planters in the area. By 1860, he had accumulated real estate worth \$400,000 and personal property worth over \$600,000. John Ricks's uncle, Benjamin Sherrod Ricks, Jr., attended Princeton University until the outbreak of the Civil War and served as a lieutenant in the Confederate cavalry. After the war, he presided over an 18,000-acre plantation in Yazoo County, served as a major general in the state militia, and held a seat on the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta's powerful levee board. Marriages directly tied the Ricks family to many of the wealthiest and most prominent families in Madison, Yazoo, and Sharkey counties. Prestige and business connections extended the family's influence throughout the Jackson area and the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta.² Three of Ricks's older brothers had attended the university ahead of him. His aunt, Fanny Jones Ricks, had made substantial donations to the university and had a campus building and a summer program of study named for her.³

Morris did not come from a prominent family. No siblings had preceded him at the university, and certainly no one who shared his name was a benefactor of the school. Whereas Ricks came to the university as a teenager, Morris was in his late-20s, had already married, and had taught for five years in Lowndes County when he enrolled at the university. Members of the faculty described Morris as a "poor young man" whose "poverty" meant "that he needed to practice economy in order to secure an education."⁴

² *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Mississippi* (Chicago: The Goodspeed Publishing Company, 1891), II, 680-681.

³ *Historical Catalogue of the University of Mississippi, 1849-1909* (Nashville: Marshal & Bruce Company, 1910), 390, 11; David G. Sansing, *The University of Mississippi: A Sesquicentennial History* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi), 159, 162; Allen Cabaniss, *The University of Mississippi: Its First Hundred Years* (Hattiesburg, MS: University and College Press of Mississippi, 1971), 111. The 1902 edition of the *Ole Miss* yearbook was dedicated to Fanny Jones Ricks. *Ole Miss*, Volume XI, 1902, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

⁴ *Record of the Testimony Taken by the Joint Committee on Universities and Colleges in the Investigation*

He impressed faculty members as a “mature,” “grown up” man of “experience and quietness of temperament” who possessed a “very great desire to get a college education which had been denied him in early life.”⁵ A year after the fight with Ricks, Chancellor Fulton, who recalled arranging rent-free accommodations for Morris and his wife, remarked that the student had “won the esteem” of the university’s faculty.⁶

Ricks and Morris represented not only different types of men at the university, but also different ideas about the purposes of the university. For a student like Ricks, attending the university presented an opportunity to associate with the sons of other prominent families throughout the state, to make friendships and establish connections with students from similar backgrounds, and, perhaps as in the case of one of his older brothers, to take a law or professional degree that would equip him for an adulthood befitting the family’s status.⁷ If for students like Ricks, the university was a place that served to solidify, maintain, preserve, and protect the status that a family and a name already carried, for men like Morris, the university was a place to acquire the education and the skills or credentials necessary to advance their economic and social position.⁸ On the university’s campus, no marker of status more clearly divided students into these two

of the Charges Made Against Chancellor Robert B. Fulton by D. H. Chamberlain, 47, 5.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 47, 64.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁷ William Barry Ricks, Jr., who practiced law in Vicksburg, was a member of the Delta Psi fraternity and the president of the university’s law school class of 1899. *Announcements and Catalogue of the University of Mississippi, Forty-Eighth Session (Fifty-First Year), 1899-'00* (New Orleans: L. Graham & Son, Ltd., 1900), 92; *Ole Miss*, Volume III, 1899, 32, 119, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

⁸ Morris taught for five years in Lowndes County and served as county examiner for teachers’ licenses there before he entered the university. The B. S. in education that Morris ultimately earned at the university would have qualified him for a position as a principal or administrator as school consolidation and other educational reform movements swept the South and Mississippi. *Record of the Testimony Taken by the Joint Committee on Universities and Colleges in the Investigation of the Charges Made Against Chancellor Robert B. Fulton by D. H. Chamberlain*, 38, 65; *Historical Catalogue of the University of Mississippi, 1849-1909*, 307; Spencer J. Maxcy, “The Idea of Consolidation in Southern Education During the Early Decades of the Twentieth Century,” *Peabody Journal of Education* (Apr., 1976): 216-22.

large groups than membership in a Greek-letter fraternity. Ricks was a fraternity man; Morris was not.⁹

The trouble between John Ricks and R. C. Morris was one dispute amid much larger struggles. This chapter uses the scuffle between the two students as an entrée to an analysis of the meaning of anti-fraternity agitation at the university. It will argue that opposition to fraternities went beyond criticizing the organizations themselves and raised larger questions about the purposes of the university, who within the university had the authority to speak for the institution, and how the university determined its values as a community. This chapter also places the fraternity troubles at the university in the larger context of Mississippi's early-twentieth-century political revolution. It will argue that the logic and rhetoric that critiqued the secrecy, exclusivity, snobbishness, and corruption of the fraternity system resembled the logic and rhetoric used by politicians like James K. Vardaman in their attacks on entrenched power-cliques in the state's Democratic Party establishment, the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta, and Jackson. In this analysis, agitation against fraternities at the state university becomes one act in the drama of democratic reform throughout Mississippi.

While anti-fraternity agitation at the university occurred in the context of a larger and broader era of reform, it dealt with a specific place and a specific community. Fraternities embodied one very traditional idea of what the university was, who belonged there, and what defined the Ole Miss community. As this chapter demonstrates, non-fraternity men at the university struggled with the realization that the Ole Miss

⁹ *Record of the Testimony Taken by the Joint Committee on Universities and Colleges in the Investigation of the Charges Made Against Chancellor Robert B. Fulton by D. H. Chamberlain*, 37. Ricks, like his older brother, was a member of the Delta Psi fraternity. *Ole Miss*, Volume VIII, 1904, 13, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

community, as defined by the fraternities, regarded them as second-class citizens, viewed their accomplishments condescendingly, and ignored their value to the university. To question the place of fraternities at the university was to propose a reevaluation of not only what should matter at the university, but also who should decide what mattered at the university. Reforming the university community from within was a difficult and problematic task, and this chapter demonstrates the extent to which changing the university necessarily involved making arguments to people outside of the university community. Anti-fraternity activity thus challenged the idea that the Ole Miss community should define itself exclusively on its own terms. This chapter, using the specific issue of fraternities, demonstrates that reform within the university necessitated and depended upon appeals to external sources of authority. The existence of fraternities at the university, in this analysis, not only sustained a particular vision of what Ole Miss was; it sustained the idea that the university could exist as an enclave immune to external sources of scrutiny and change.

II

Greek-letter fraternities had a long history at the University of Mississippi. Within a year of the institution's opening, students established the university's first fraternity. By 1860, at a college just twelve years old and with barely two-hundred students, eleven fraternities existed.¹⁰ Beginning with the establishment of a new fraternity during the university's first year of classes following the Civil War, the Greek system expanded throughout the late-nineteenth century. By 1900, 56 percent of the university's students

¹⁰ Cabaniss, *The University of Mississippi*, 86; Sansing, *The University of Mississippi*, 63.

were members of a fraternity or a sorority.¹¹ Though fraternities did not have on-campus chapter houses, the prominence of Greek students ensured for the societies a position of dominance at the university.¹² An examination of key positions on campus during the 1903-1904 school year sheds some light on the world which John Ricks and R. C. Morris briefly shared. The editorial board of the 1904 *Ole Miss*, a publication which purported to “present life at the University in its various phases,” consisted of eight fraternity men and two sorority women.¹³ Of the thirty students who held positions as class officers in the university’s undergraduate and law departments that year, twenty were fraternity men.¹⁴ The president of the *University Magazine* was a fraternity man; so, too, were the captains of the football and baseball teams.¹⁵ For added measure, a full third of the university’s male faculty, including Chancellor Fulton, were fraternity men.¹⁶

The university’s Greek community explained the secrecy and exclusivity of fraternities as necessary characteristics of organizations dedicated to “the solemnization of friendship and the purpose of awakening serious endeavor.” Fraternity men committed themselves to “the highest ends of brotherly love and mutual benefit.” Entering the brotherhood of a fraternity not only put a man on a path to becoming a “chivalrous, honorable, faithful, earnest and true” gentlemen; it also taught a man the value of the

¹¹ Sansing, *The University of Mississippi*, 177.

¹² Fraternity and sorority chapter houses did not exist on campus at the university until they were built with federal money during the 1930s. Previously, Greek societies met in off-campus chapter houses or private homes and establishments in Oxford. Thus, “frat row” at Ole Miss was a creation of the New Deal. “Ten Fraternities and Sororities Receive Aid,” *Mississippian*, 14 March 1936; “Fraternity House Plans Underway,” *Mississippian*, 16 March 1935; “Sigma Alpha Epsilon Build Modern Lodge During Summer,” *Mississippian*, 21 September 1935; “New Fraternity Houses Draw Attention of Local Greeks,” *Mississippian*, 18 September 1937.

¹³ *Ole Miss*, Volume I, 1897, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi; *Ole Miss*, Volume VIII, 1904, 4, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 50-75.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 100, 120, 122.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 11-39.

“union of hearts and a separation of self, a magnanimity of common purpose glorious in its inception.” Organizations which turned college freshmen into gentlemen and taught boys lessons about unity over self served a particular purpose within university communities. Fraternities had a special role in protecting institutions of higher learning from “chaos” and in “stimulat[ing] order and encourag[ing] systematic education.”¹⁷ According to this view, there could be little wonder and even less worry that fraternity men occupied so many positions of importance at the University of Mississippi.

Despite what Greeks themselves saw as the virtuous nature of their societies, the university’s fraternities had been controversial from the moment of their creation. Indeed, the antebellum fraternities met in secret because the university’s trustees would not sanction them.¹⁸ On June 30, 1881, the state Board of Trustees briefly abolished the university’s Greek organizations, but rescinded the ban on fraternities the very same day.¹⁹ Opposition to fraternities intensified in the early-twentieth century. In 1902, Lee Russell, a future governor of Mississippi who had waited tables and taken odd jobs to pay his way through the university, testified before the Board of Trustees that Greek students discriminated against non-fraternity men. During his time at the university, Russell had won the presidency of his senior class, earned the junior medal from the Phi Sigma Literary Society, and served as captain of the track team.²⁰ When he graduated in 1901, students voted him the “slickest politician” at the university, and the *Ole Miss* called him

¹⁷ *Ole Miss*, Volume IV, 1900, 17-18, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

¹⁸ Sansing, *The University of Mississippi*, 63.

¹⁹ Cabaniss, *The University of Mississippi*, 86. Sansing speculates that the vote to ban fraternities was likely connected to the discovery of a “lewd woman” in a campus dormitory and suggests that the presence of Hampton Sullivan, an 1870 graduate of the university and a member of the Delta Psi fraternity, on the Board of Trustees explains the decision to rescind the ban on fraternities. Sansing, *The University of Mississippi*, 139-140.

²⁰ *Historical Catalogue of the University of Mississippi, 1849-1909*, 269; *Ole Miss*, Volume V, 1901, 106, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

“the Mark Hanna of the non-frat faction.”²¹ The condescension with which the *Ole Miss* treated Russell’s accomplishments fittingly capped a career of frustration at the university. When he began his studies in 1897, Russell, already 22, was older and poorer than his classmates. The Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity blackballed him when he attempted to join. Another group of fraternity members later humiliated Russell by dumping a bucket of water on his head.²² Russell’s testimony before the trustees was powerful enough to lead to stricter regulations on fraternity activities and a moratorium on the pledging of new members.²³ Two weeks after Russell’s testimony before the Board of Trustees, the state legislature began considering a bill that would have made appropriations for the university dependent upon the findings of an investigation into accusations of “gross immoral practices ... in some or all of the Greek Letter Fraternities” at the institution. As more trustees and legislators came to view fraternities as organizations which were “crippling” the university’s “general good,” the controversy surrounding the societies threatened the institution’s funding.²⁴

Scrutiny on fraternities increased over the next several years. In the summer of 1902, the Board of Trustees voted to require faculty approval before any new chapter could establish itself and forbade any student from pledging a fraternity during the first

²¹ *Ole Miss*, Volume V, 1901, 191, 194, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

²² Don Doyle has effectively told Russell’s story not only in the context of Oxford and the university community, but also in the broader scope of early-twentieth-century Mississippi’s political scene. After he graduated from the university, Russell became a lawyer and a key supporter of Vardaman in Lafayette County, which positioned him well for his own entrance into politics. In 1912, then a state senator, Russell got his ultimate revenge when he won passage of a bill that forced fraternities at the university to dissolve or to go underground. Don H. Doyle, *Faulkner’s County: The Historical Roots of Yoknapatawpha* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 357-364.

²³ Cabaniss, *The University of Mississippi*, 119. Sansing, *The University of Mississippi*, 178.

²⁴ *Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Mississippi, 1902* (Nashville: Brandon Printing Company, 1902), 119-120, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, MS.

eight weeks of his time at the university.²⁵ In 1904, the joint legislative committee on colleges and universities produced two reports, both of which warned of how serious the fraternity troubles at the university had become. A majority report warned that controversies surrounding Greek organizations were affecting the ability of the university to function and recommended that students be forbidden from joining fraternities until they had completed a year of course work. A minority report called for the abolition of fraternities, sororities, and secret societies at all state-supported colleges and universities.²⁶ Only when the “rich and poor” possessed “an equal chance in the great battle of life” and when “no high-flown artificial distinctions” divided the student body, the minority wrote, could the university do its work.²⁷ A bill to abolish fraternities failed to win passage, but the Greek organizations remained objects of contention.²⁸

In part, anti-fraternity sentiment reflected concerns about discipline and behavior at the university. During Fulton’s chancellorship, the faculty expelled students for public intoxication, assault, possessing deadly weapons, lying, theft, and destroying property. Many of the incidents also led to criminal charges. Fraternity members were over-represented in the disciplinary cases. That the resolution of some of the incidents involved Greek leaders pledging to enforce better behavior within their own organizations suggests that faculty looked at the problem of discipline as something connected to the existence of fraternities. Outside of the university community, the public associated fraternities with rowdy behavior.²⁹ Concerns about discipline alone, though, do

²⁵ Cabaniss, *The University of Mississippi*, 119.

²⁶ William F. Holmes, *The White Chief: James Kimble Vardaman* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970), 168-169; Sansing, *The University of Mississippi*, 178.

²⁷ *Journal of the House of Representatives of Mississippi*, 1904, 408.

²⁸ Holmes, *The White Chief*, 169; Cabaniss, *The University of Mississippi*, 119; Sansing, *The University of Mississippi*, 178.

²⁹ Cabaniss, *The University of Mississippi*, 115-116; Holmes, *The White Chief*, 168.

not explain the intensity of anti-fraternity agitation or the time period in which the organizations came under the most consistent scrutiny. Fraternities bothered people who viewed them as organizations that preserved illegitimate socio-economic distinctions. One's support of or opposition to the presence of fraternities at the university aligned with a person's idea of what the university should be and what it should do. In a political environment which imperiled any institution or organization regarded as aristocratic or elitist, traditional ideas about the University of Mississippi were on trial alongside its fraternity system.

III

The trouble between John Ricks and R. C. Morris, which seemingly had resolved itself in December of 1903 when Ricks withdrew from the university and Morris continued his studies after a reprimand from Chancellor Fulton, became the center of a full-blown controversy in 1906. That January, while the state legislature was in session, Duncan H. Chamberlain, Jr., a graduate of the university's law program, published a pamphlet that accused Fulton of favoring Greeks over non-fraternity men and portrayed the university as an institution dominated by the fraternities.³⁰ In the pamphlet, Chamberlain made Fulton's handling of the Ricks-Morris affair an example of the Chancellor's discriminatory treatment of non-fraternity men. That charge, along with others contained in the pamphlet, led Fulton to request an investigation by the legislative committee on colleges and universities.³¹

³⁰ Duncan H. Chamberlain, Jr., *The Facts about the Troubles of the University of Mississippi: The Jim Crow Law Against Whites at the University* (Oxford, MS: 1906), Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, MS.

³¹ *Record of the Testimony Taken by the Joint Committee on Universities and Colleges in the Investigation*

Chamberlain was an honored graduate of the university. In 1905, he earned his law degree with distinction, served as a graduation speaker, and won a law prize which carried with it a set of encyclopedias worth \$250.00.³² Chamberlain's pamphlet, however, read like something from a man profoundly alienated from his university. From its sensational title—*The Facts about the Troubles of the University of Mississippi: The Jim Crow Law Against Whites at the University*—to its accusations of conspiracies involving the university's faculty and the state's newspapers, the pamphlet described a level of corruption that made fraternities and those who protected them at the university enemies of democracy and basic fairness. The pamphlet was not a mere examination of a particular case or an argument on a single issue; it was a fundamental critique of the administration of the university and the use of power in the state.

Chamberlain began his pamphlet by explaining its necessity. Because newspapers in the state were “controlled by the forces of misrule that now dominate the University of Mississippi” and because papers in Memphis and New Orleans would not print his attacks on Fulton or on the fraternities, publishing the pamphlet at his own expense was the only way to “get the facts to the ears of the common people of Mississippi.”³³ Chamberlain connected the refusal of newspapers in the state and surrounding areas to publish his letters to the efforts of the “so-called upper classes” to hold a “monopoly on information pertaining to the University.” Because the “common people” constituted “the great majority of taxpayers,” they had “the right to know ... of the abuses” at the

of the Charges Made Against Chancellor Robert B. Fulton by D. H. Chamberlain, 1-2.

³² *Historical Catalogue of the University of Mississippi, 1849-1909*, 295-296; *Record of the Testimony Taken by the Joint Committee on Universities and Colleges in the Investigation of the Charges Made Against Chancellor Robert B. Fulton by D. H. Chamberlain*, 28.

³³ Chamberlain, *The Facts about the Troubles of the University of Mississippi*, 7, 1.

“unhappy institution” which they made “many sacrifices” to support.³⁴ Thus “actuated by high motives of principle” and “imbued by the spirit of reform,” Chamberlain set out to emulate the muckraking “courage of an ‘Everybody’s’ or ‘McClure’s’ magazine ... and to expose the miserable condition of affairs at the University.”³⁵

Chamberlain’s conception of a society composed of self-styled aristocrats on one hand and common people on the other derived from his experiences as a non-fraternity man, or an “independent,” at the university. He charged that fraternities “arrogated to themselves the function of fixing the social status of every student at the University.” By this arrangement, Greek-affiliation made students “persons of quality,” and independent-status made non-fraternity men “pariahs.”³⁶ In several instances, beginning with the pamphlet’s striking title, Chamberlain compared the distinctions between fraternity men and independents to those between white and black Mississippians. The presence of a few token independents at a Greek social function, for example, merely filled the need for “dummies and boot-licks.”³⁷ This was a provocative comparison, one which suggested that discrimination against non-fraternity men was severe enough to render them second-class members of the university community. The effect of “such arbitrary and artificial classification,” Chamberlain wrote, was “strife and ill feeling” between classmates.³⁸ But the pamphlet argued that a system that segregated fraternity men from “goats,” or independents, did more than hurt people’s feelings. Chamberlain traced the origins of fraternities to “the caste-cursed continent of Europe,” and he argued that the Greek system was “antagonistic to the principles of republican institutions” and had no place in

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 1-2

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 1, 12, 10.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

higher education “in a democratic country.”³⁹ A system by which “one portion of the boys come to look upon themselves as superiors and the other portion are treated as inferiors,” Chamberlain wrote, destroyed “our young manhood and convert[ed] the raw material of our republic into the finished product of a monarchy.”⁴⁰ The issue of fraternities in public institutions of higher learning, he concluded, represented nothing less than a “battle between American republicanism and European caste spirit.”⁴¹

Greek dominance of the university, Chamberlain argued, resulted from the unwillingness and the inability of Chancellor Fulton and the faculty to discipline the organizations. At a university divided between Greeks and “goats,” where laws applied differently to different students and rights and status depended upon one’s affiliation, students became “demoralized” as “internecine squabbling and Kilkenny cat performances” disrupted the serious business of “educational work.”⁴² Chamberlain described a general pattern in which Fulton and the faculty treated students from prominent families and fraternity men differently than independent students from undistinguished backgrounds. In one case, he noted that the faculty regarded it “a matter of extenuation” that one fraternity boy facing disciplinary charges “was the son of a former Chancellor of the University and the grandson of L. Q. C. Lamar.” In another, charges against members of a fraternity which Chamberlain called the “especial protégés of the Chancellor” resulted in Fulton “consult[ing]” “the law ... for another and different meaning” in order to protect the brothers of Delta Psi.⁴³ Fraternities and their members,

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 4. Lucius Mayes was the son of Edward M. Mayes, who was chancellor of the university from 1886-1892, and the grandson of L. Q. C. Lamar. Despite Chamberlain’s accusations against Fulton, it was more likely Vardaman who ordered the reversal of the discipline against Mayes and a number of other

Chamberlain argued, behaved in a lawless fashion because Fulton and the faculty had granted them “singular immunity from punishment.”⁴⁴

Fulton’s handling of Morris’s trial before the faculty took a central role in Chamberlain’s attack against the Chancellor. In Chamberlain’s telling, the affair exemplified the discriminatory way in which Fulton treated non-fraternity men. At Morris’s trial, the Chancellor had abandoned his “usual post as presiding officer” and “undertook to act as prosecuting attorney against Morris.” So aggressive and “adroit” was the Chancellor’s prosecution, Chamberlain wrote, “that Morris would have been assuredly convicted” if a sympathetic faculty member had not permitted Morris to question witnesses and to prove that he had acted in self-defense.⁴⁵ Even after the faculty voted to allow Morris to remain at the university with a reprimand from the chancellor, Fulton engaged in a “disreputable game” through which he attempted to use “dirty, disreputable trickery” to convince Morris that the faculty had, in fact, expelled him. Chamberlain’s explanation for this behavior was a simple one: “It is needless to state,” he wrote in concluding his version of the affair, “that the Chancellor is a great friend of the Ricks family, which is very wealthy, and that Morris is only a poor country fellow.”⁴⁶

Behind this simple reality, that Fulton and the faculty favored the affiliated and the prominent over the independent and the humble, Chamberlain detected an elaborate network of powerful men and interests. That the “secret fraternities at the University of Mississippi have come to be more powerful than the Faculty” was a logical consequence of the Greeks’ “policy ... to secure as members all students prominently connected.”

fraternity men. Holmes, *The White Chief*, 171

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

Across Mississippi, Chamberlain wrote, “nearly every influential man ... has strings tied to him leading to some one or more of the fraternal camps.” The Board of Trustees, for example, could hardly be trusted to regulate fraternities, as it was “packed with men who were ‘frats’ at college.”⁴⁷ The trustee or professor who, if he was by some chance not a fraternity man himself, dared to criticize Greeks was “certain to incur the enmity of powerful associations which number among their members, adherents, and supporters” the most powerful men in the state.⁴⁸ Given the extent of their power and the injustice of their activities, fraternities and their supporters had “every reason to fear publicity.”⁴⁹ The refusal of newspapers in Mississippi, Memphis, and New Orleans to publish Chamberlain’s exposés of “public abuse” implicated even the “greatest apostles of reform” in a campaign of “discouragement and suppression,” all done with the design of “keeping the people of Mississippi ignorant” of Greek domination.⁵⁰

Viewed from one perspective, Chamberlain’s attack on the fraternities tended toward the paranoid and conspiratorial. Fraternities did not survive on the university’s campus because their members came from important families; they survived because a vast network of their former members operated throughout the state. Fulton, the faculty, and the trustees did not fail to discipline the fraternities because regulations were difficult to craft and enforce; they failed to regulate the fraternities because they were fraternity men themselves or beholden somehow to the Greek network. Newspapers did not refuse to print Chamberlain’s charges because they contained unverified and potentially libelous statements; they refused to print them because they were “particeps criminis to the

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 12, 8.

maladministration” of the university.⁵¹ Fraternities did not merely promote snobbery and engage in rowdy parties; they inculcated in the young a class system that threatened the future of the republic and the existence of democracy. And the anti-fraternity movement was not a campaign for regulations or policies; it was a “religion” that would “some day” result in the “public” learning “how badly it has been deceived.”⁵²

When a majority of the legislative committee that investigated the charges against Fulton exonerated the Chancellor, Chamberlain denounced their report as a “whitewashing.”⁵³ He complained that fraternity men and friends of the Chancellor sat on the committee. Chamberlain claimed the committee “made no effort whatever to discover” or question witnesses who could have supported certain charges that the pamphlet made.⁵⁴ The faculty who supported Fulton and the committee majority that exonerated him, Chamberlain wrote, resorted “to sophistry, confusion, misdirection and trimming of quotations to shape into form specious refutations.”⁵⁵ Such “specious and questionable methods,” combined with “legal juggling” and “quibbling evasions,” produced a report which diminished the seriousness of the fraternity troubles, falsely exonerated Fulton, and “artfully” mislead the “uniformed reader” and general public about the state of affairs at the university.⁵⁶ Chamberlain reserved a special level of disdain for the Fulton and the faculty members who presented the findings of their “secret

⁵¹ Chamberlain, *The Facts about the Troubles of the University of Mississippi*, 14.

⁵² *Ibid.* 15.

⁵³ A majority of the committee found that Fulton had not abused his powers as chancellor. A minority report denounced Fulton’s handling of the Morris case and recommended that the Board of Trustees investigate the matter further. Holmes, *The White Chief*, 172. Quotation is from Duncan H. Chamberlain, Jr., *The Mud beneath the Whitewash* (Harrison, MS: 1906), Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, MS.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 17, 18, 5.

... contortions” before the committee.⁵⁷ He denounced Fulton as “a trixster and placeman” and called one professor a “slave” and “a tool and willing puppet of the Chancellor.”⁵⁸ Other faculty who rose above puppet and slave status left Chamberlain “truly disappointed” when they failed to prove themselves “too honorable to stoop to such dishonest quibbling.”⁵⁹

Amid his outrage, Chamberlain portrayed himself as “a martyr to the cause of reform.”⁶⁰ He had earlier charged that fraternities had survived the 1904 investigation due to “wire-pulling tactics [and] the doctoring of the evidence by the stenographer of the Investigation Committee.”⁶¹ Under scrutiny again, the fraternities and their protectors at the university and in the legislature had naturally “combine[d] and act[ed] in unison toward securing a mutual whitewashing.”⁶² But an individual engaged in a cause against an interest aligned with the most powerful forces in society had to measure success in relative terms. Determined that “the public should hear the pure and unvarnished truth,” Chamberlain had spent \$150.00 of his own money in an effort that left him able to “rest content that [he] had fearlessly [done his] duty and fought a good fight.”⁶³ Thus, in defeat, Chamberlain remained a proud defender of democracy and fairness against the forces of “discord, favoritism, snobbery, clanishness, and sycophancy.”⁶⁴

If Chamberlain tended toward conspiracy and martyrdom, his arguments strongly referenced broad patterns in Progressive-era reform. First, there was a basic critique of concentrated and entrenched power in Chamberlain’s writings. He argued that the secrecy

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 7, 12, 11.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁶¹ Chamberlain, *The Facts about the Troubles at the University of Mississippi*, 3.

⁶² Chamberlain, *The Mud beneath the Whitewash*, 7.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 1, 8.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

of the fraternities and their networks in the state's power-structure led to corruption at the university and poor governance in the state. Second, Chamberlain made the argument that the university was not fulfilling its duties to the public. The exclusivity of the fraternities and the narrowness of their vision for the university prevented the institution from acting as an agent of uplift in the state. So long as the university remained under the sway of the fraternities, not only would non-fraternity men suffer, but the institution as a whole would fail to fulfill the proper role of a state university. Third, Chamberlain contrasted the illegitimate and corrupt authority of Fulton, the fraternity men, and their affiliates within the state government with the legitimate authority and judgment of the public. In classic Progressive-era fashion, Chamberlain took his campaign directly to the public as a means of circumventing an entrenched and unresponsive establishment. The public was not merely an audience to win over; it was the external agent which could affect meaningful change within the university community.

IV

Chancellor Robert B. Fulton won exoneration from the committee that investigated Chamberlain's accusations, but the controversy played a large role in his removal from the university in June of 1906. As Chancellor, Fulton was the head of a university directed by a Board of Trustees made up of the governor, the state superintendent of education, and sixteen trustees. The governor appointed the trustees, who served six-year terms, and sat on an executive committee which decided most issues related to the university. After two years in office, a new governor's appointees became a

majority of the board.⁶⁵ By June of 1906, then, trustees appointed by Governor James K. Vardaman constituted a majority of the board. During his first two years in office, a number of reform efforts, most notably an ambitious program to revamp the state's prison system, consumed much of Vardaman's attention. Even before the spring of 1906, though, tensions between Fulton and the trustees were becoming apparent.⁶⁶

In June of 1904, the first time the trustees met after Vardaman's inauguration, the board declared open all faculty positions. During the course of the summer, the board ultimately re-hired the entire faculty, but the re-appointments were not unanimous and occurred only after extensive lobbying by supporters of several of the professors in question. The board also began to take greater control of the daily administration of the university. It appointed a business manager, for instance, to perform tasks that had previously fallen to Fulton or to the university's proctor. The executive committee of the board, because it controlled the institution's finances, could take some action without Fulton's support.⁶⁷ In certain cases, the board acted in direct opposition to the Chancellor. In 1905, for example, after Fulton had personally secured funds from the Carnegie Foundation to build a library at the university, the board turned down the grant.⁶⁸

Against the backdrop of the struggle between Fulton and the trustees for control of the university, the fraternity investigations, even when they resulted in exonerations of the Chancellor, lent credence to the idea that he was a man incapable of leading the university. Fulton's personal background, moreover, made him an attractive target for

⁶⁵ Grover Cleveland Hooker, "The Origin and Development of the University of Mississippi with Special Reference to Its Legislature Control" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1932), 2-4, 151-153.

⁶⁶ Holmes, *The White Chief*, 167-171.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 170; Hooker, "Origin and Development of the University of Mississippi," 159-161.

⁶⁸ Cabaniss, *University of Mississippi*, 120. In 1909, by the time a completely new set of trustees sat on the board, the trustees accepted a second grant from the Carnegie foundation. Sansing, *University of Mississippi*, 186. William F. Holmes suggests that Vardaman's concern that "corporate wealth threatened academic freedom may explain the rejection" of the 1905 grant. Holmes, *The White Chief*, 171.

those who believed the university needed an infusion of new blood. Born in 1849 in Sumter County in the Alabama black-belt, Fulton was the son of a wealthy planter and received a formal education at a private academy as a youth. He then attended the University of Mississippi, where he graduated first in the class of 1869 and was a member of the Chi Psi fraternity. First as a tutor in the department of physics and later as professor of physics and astronomy, Fulton taught at the university for twenty-one years before he became chancellor in 1892. By 1906, no man had served the university longer than Fulton, and his terms as president of both The National Association of State Universities (NASU) and the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools (SACSS) suggested the respect he had earned throughout the national academic community.⁶⁹

In May of 1906, Vardaman, convinced that Fulton could no longer effectively lead the university, appointed three new trustees to the board. Each of the new appointees supported Fulton's removal. In the month before the newly constituted board held its first meeting, friends of the Chancellor unsuccessfully lobbied individual trustees to support Fulton. When the board met in Oxford in June, Vardaman angrily ordered out a group of university students bearing a petition in support of Fulton. When it became clear to Fulton that with the new Vardaman appointees sitting on the board, he no longer had the support of a majority of the trustees, he offered his resignation. On June 8, the board accepted it by a vote of 10-8. After declining a position as professor of astronomy, Fulton left Mississippi and became a school superintendent in Albemarle County, Virginia. In the year following Fulton's forced resignation, two men refused the chancellorship before

⁶⁹ *Historical Catalogue of the University of Mississippi*, 76-78; Alfred Hume, "Robert Burwell Fulton: Chancellor of the University of Mississippi," *Southern Association Quarterly* III (1939): 537.

the board finally hired a successor in July of 1907.⁷⁰

V

The idea that Fulton favored fraternity men over independents mattered not only because it suggested divisions within the university community; it also spoke to much broader concerns about unfair advantages that the privileged enjoyed and shared through secret and closed arrangements. From the end of Reconstruction through the first decades of the twentieth century, virtually all movements for political reform in Mississippi centered on the idea that cliques and closed circles held power at the expense of the public good. The power of the executive committee of the state's Democratic Party, which controlled all aspects of party affairs from 1876 until 1902, produced a "ceaseless clamor" "among those who were outside [its] magic inner circles."⁷¹ When a constitutional convention met in 1890, residents of white-majority counties believed reapportionment and the disfranchisement of black Mississippians were necessary to oust the "corrupt ring ... kept in office by 'the power and fraud of the Democratic clique in the black counties.'"⁷² Advocates of replacing the convention system of nominations with primary elections charged that the objective of the convention "was 'to ignore the will and wish of the majority, and to carry into effect the designs of the few who exercise control.'"⁷³ As the historian Albert D. Kirwan noted, the passage of the primary law of 1902 was "the most democratic measure" in that era of Mississippi's history and represented a transfer of power from "a small group acting through the medium of a state

⁷⁰ Holmes, *The White Chief*, 174-175; Cabaniss, *University of Mississippi*, 120; Sansing, *University of Mississippi*, 180-181.

⁷¹ Albert D. Kirwan, *Revolt of the Rednecks: Mississippi Politics, 1876-1925* (New York: Harper, 1951), 33.

⁷² Quoted in *Ibid.*, 60.

⁷³ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 123.

convention” to “the mass of voters in the state.”⁷⁴

Vardaman was the first governor elected through the new primary system, and, as the historian William F. Holmes has demonstrated, his rhetoric as well as his major policy initiatives targeted the corruption inherent in concentrated power. While campaigning in 1903, Vardaman promised to “curb the abuses of corporate wealth, to clean out the ‘Jackson ring,’ and to work for an elective judiciary.”⁷⁵ Once in office, he used vetoes to prevent further railroad consolidation in the state and to block lumber companies from exercising unlimited purchasing rights in south Mississippi.⁷⁶ His administration’s greatest achievement came when it abolished the state’s convict-lease system and established a new system of penitentiary management. The goal of replacing the convict-lease system with state prisons was to break up a system of “graft and corruption” through which “a few wealthy men ... exploited the convicts’ labor.”⁷⁷

In 1910, a caucus of Democratic legislators voted through secret ballots to elect LeRoy Percy over Vardaman to fill Mississippi’s vacant seat in the U. S. Senate. Vardaman and his supporters responded by waging a campaign almost entirely around the danger of secret conspiracies of the powerful. Percy’s election, the pro-Vardaman press charged, was the result of “the political wire pullers of the state working in double time, aided and abetted by whiskey, money and the concentrated influence and patronage of the commonwealth’s chief executive.”⁷⁸ Not only was Percy the chief beneficiary of “the ‘conspiracy’ against Vardaman,” he was a man “of large affairs” and “that spirit of haughtiness” and “air of distinction and distance” associated with “the wealthy and

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁷⁵ Holmes, *The White Chief*, 115.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 146-148.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 160.

⁷⁸ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 231.

powerful.”⁷⁹ Holmes has noted that Vardaman’s victory over Percy in 1911, and the whopping margin of 79,380 votes to 21,521 votes by which it occurred, owed itself to “the widespread belief ... that the ‘secret caucus’ had ignored the will of the people.”⁸⁰ Vardaman’s rise to prominence and his electoral success, then, relied upon widespread resentment of closed circles of privilege which maintained themselves through secret and corrupt means.

Resentment of the privilege, wealth, and status of members of circles of the elite had the effect of inverting the meaning of words and re-defining how one assessed virtue. Recalling the 1911 election, William Alexander Percy wrote with a mixture of bewilderment and disgust that his father’s status as “a prosperous plantation-owner, a corporation lawyer, and unmistakably a gentleman” had been an “unanswerable charge” that doomed him to defeat.⁸¹ All of the things, in other words, that should have identified his father as virtuous instead disqualified him for election. For the younger Percy, this was evidence of a world turned upside down, one which made “evil triumphant” and consigned “valor and goodness” to “the dust.”⁸² For many of the nearly 80,000 Mississippians who voted for Vardaman, the rejection of Percy must have meant something quite different. In a state whose economic and political arrangements favored planters from the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta, whose lax regulatory system benefited railroads and other corporate interests, and whose well-born invoked their gentility to denigrate their political opponents, some voters may have looked at a candidate’s status as a planter-lawyer-gentleman as damning evidence of his role in a conspiracy, not a

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 243, Quoted in *Ibid.*, 247-248.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 254.

⁸¹ William Alexander Percy, *Lanterns on the Levee: Recollections of a Planter’s Son* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1941), 146-147.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 153.

marker of virtue.

Duncan Chamberlain's campaign against fraternities and the administration of Robert Fulton emerged from a worldview that was deeply suspicious of those who possessed markers of status and prominence in a society that many Mississippians had come to believe was corrupted. By denouncing the secrecy of the "internal workings" of the fraternities and questioning their "fear" of "publicity," Chamberlain suggested that the organizations engaged in practices indefensible in the light of public scrutiny.⁸³ By emphasizing the "supercilious airs, the exclusive arrogance and insufferable behavior" that Greeks exhibited, he tapped into class resentments about the behavior of the genteel.⁸⁴ By juxtaposing a "wealthy" "aggressor" like John Ricks with a "poor country fellow" acting in self-defense like R. C. Morris, he marked clearly the villainous and the virtuous.⁸⁵ And by identifying Fulton as a man who "deserved to be summarily dismissed from the position he has disgraced," he offered an individual as the face or embodiment of a general regime of secrecy, corruption, and usurpation.⁸⁶ Above all, as someone "morally certain" of his cause, Chamberlain could write with absolute conviction regarding who and what organizations best served the interests of the University of Mississippi and the people of the state.⁸⁷

Chamberlain's attacks on the fraternities and their protectors, which reflected changing attitudes in the state at large about elitism, privilege, and closed networks of prestige, may have resembled the arguments that won men like Vardaman and Lee Russell elections, but their popularity within the university community was another

⁸³ Chamberlain, *The Facts about the Troubles of the University of Mississippi*, 18, 14.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 8, 9.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁸⁷ Chamberlain, *The Mud beneath the Whitewash*, 3.

matter. Russell and Chamberlain appealed, respectively, to the Board of Trustees and to the general public because they knew change would not come to the university without external pressure and intervention. As this chapter has shown, anti-fraternity agitation raised questions about the purpose, identity, and values of the university. Who was involved in the settling of these questions would largely determine their answers.

Fraternity men and defenders of a traditional notion of Ole Miss possessed the advantage of being able to react defensively. So long as decisions about the university remained in the hands of those entrenched at the institution, fundamental change was unlikely.

Would-be reformers thus faced the double challenge of, first, opening the university to external scrutiny, and, second, affecting meaningful changes. In subsequent decades, the attempts of Governor Theodore Bilbo to reform the university would test the effectiveness with which traditional notions of Ole Miss could be deployed in the cause of conservation and preservation.

CHAPTER 4

BILBO, THE MISSISSIPPI IDEA, AND THE FUTURE OF OLE MISS, 1927-1932

I

In 1927, Michael V. O'Shea, a professor of education at the University of Wisconsin, published the findings and recommendations of the first professional study of public education in Mississippi.¹ Henry L. Whitfield, the governor of Mississippi from 1924 to 1927, had commissioned the study in the summer of 1925 as part of a broad program to bring about "more active, intelligent, and continuous interest in public affairs on the part of the thinking people of Mississippi."² With the assistance of Francis S. Harmon, Assistant Attorney General for Mississippi, Whitfield prepared a series of key questions about the state that began with the most basic—"What is the population of Mississippi? What proportion of our population is white; what proportion is negro?"—and moved through more complicated and specific issues such as taxation, education,

¹ The investigation began in 1925 and carried through 1926 and the early part of 1927. In addition to O'Shea of the University of Wisconsin, national experts involved in the investigation included: Franklin Bobbit, Professor at the University of Chicago; H. W. Foght, President of the Northern Normal and Industrial School; David Sneed, Professor at the Teachers's College of Columbia University; and Emeline S. Whitcomb of the United States Bureau of Education. M. V. O'Shea, *Public Education in Mississippi: Report of a Study of the Public Education System* (Jackson, MS: Jackson Printing Company, 1927).

² Henry L. Whitfield, with the assistance of Francis S. Harmon, *Know Mississippi: A Syllabus on Present Conditions in Mississippi* (Jackson: Jackson Printing Company, no date), 1, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi. Every section of the syllabus that quoted from the state of Mississippi's laws, referred to appropriation sums, or discussed tax revenues listed 1923 or 1924 as the relevant year for the legal codes, appropriations, or tax revenues. This suggests the syllabus was written in 1925 or perhaps late 1924. The syllabus also spoke of the need for "a carefully written monograph on each of [the key] subjects, prepared under expert direction with the sole aim of arriving at the true facts" and urged the state legislature to appropriate the money necessary for such studies. In other words, the syllabus predated the commission of the O'Shea study in the summer of 1925. A hand-written date on the copy of the syllabus in special collections, however, lists the date as 1926. *Know Mississippi*, 1-2, 21, 37, 106.

agricultural diversification, industrial development, the prison system, public health, financial and corporate regulation, and infrastructural development.³ In asking such a broad range of questions with the intent of producing answers and knowledge applicable to conditions in the state, Whitfield presented the syllabus as an early outline of his design “for a better, more progressive, more prosperous Mississippi.”⁴

Regarding higher education, Governor Whitfield raised a series of questions with direct implications for the future of the University of Mississippi. One set of questions involved the purpose and function of the state university. What, Whitfield asked, was “the modern conception of a state university, supported by the state, in its relation to the various phases of the State’s activities?” Should the state university be a source of “expert information to all the political divisions of the state in regard to concrete and scientific problems of the state, county, and municipality?” Because the state university “should be a dynamo, generating power which is felt throughout the State,” Whitfield asked plainly, “To What extent is the University of Mississippi contributing to a more prosperous and happier Mississippi?”⁵ Whitfield also addressed the issue of curriculum. “Speaking generally,” he asked, “should courses of study offered by the State University look solely to mental discipline as an end or should the course of study emphasize that subject matter which is necessary to the solution of the industrial, political, social, and moral problems of the State? In other words, is the end in view the attainment of culture or the training of men and women along practical lines for actual leadership in the

³ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 2. For a nuanced discussion of Mississippi politics that contrasts the “business” Progressivism of Whitfield with the “populist” or “redneck” Progressivism of James Vardaman, Edmund Noel, Earl Brewer, Theodore Bilbo, and Lee Russell, see: Chester M. Morgan, *Redneck Liberal: Theodore G. Bilbo and the New Deal* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), 5-23.

⁵ Whitfield, *Know Mississippi*, 42, 47-48.

State?”⁶ The composition and role of the faculty naturally arose as issues in the context of questions about the university’s purpose and its course offerings. “Does teaching as conducted in Mississippi institutions today,” the governor asked, “tend to destroy the vision of the members of the faculty by taking them out of active participation in State affairs and accentuating the cloistered life which scholarship often times tends to promote?”⁷ Lastly, in surveying the interest of Mississippians in increasing appropriations to their state university, Whitfield called for a comparison of the “dormitories, class rooms, [and] laboratories” in Oxford with the physical plants “of the other State universities in the South, in the Middle West, the far West, [and] the Nation as a whole.”⁸

The set of questions that Whitfield asked about the University of Mississippi was a way of indexing the state university’s standing in comparison with other institutions throughout the South and the United States. By assessing the extent to which the state university provided leadership and expertise to the government and people of Mississippi, the way its curriculum addressed the problems of the state, the composition and role of its faculty, and the ability of its physical plant to serve as a site for the production of scientific knowledge, Whitfield was creating a means of evaluating the modernity and utility of the university through its practical applications as an institution.

This chapter uses the questions that Governor Whitfield asked and the findings of Professor O’Shea’s study as starting points for an analysis of competing visions for the University of Mississippi’s future. Within the university community and throughout the state as a whole, advocates of reform in the style of the O’Shea study’s recommendations

⁶ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

saw a greater University of Mississippi as an institution capable of playing a progressive role in the state as it entered a new era of modernity. This was a movement to build a great university to serve the state as it entered a new stage of history; it was not merely a reaction to current deficiencies at Mississippi's state university or in its system of higher education. Opponents of reform invoked the past when they argued against dismembering the university or removing it to Jackson. In arguing against reforms they believed would sever the university from its history, they wrote and spoke of the institution as the material embodiment of a set of cherished beliefs and ideals. Importantly, opposition to reform was also not just about the past; it argued that preserving the university as presently constructed was the only way to allow the institution to continue to serve Mississippi in the proper fashion. Though this was an argument that made the past a source of authority and legitimacy, it had key implications for the future.

In documenting, first, the manifest necessity of reform at the university by the late-1920s and, second, the means by which the university staved off those reforms in this same period, this chapter makes clear the extent to which the invocation of traditional ideas about "Ole Miss" could be both useful and problematic for the university. On one hand, "Ole Miss" connoted a clear identity for the university and endowed the institution with a sense of immortality even when its future was in serious doubt. This made crafting defenses of the university easier and provided an argument that even some proponents of reform ultimately found compelling. On the other hand, using the timelessness, permanence, and immortality of the university as arguments to protect it from change or alteration defined the institution as a place whose identity was so tied to continuity and preservation that growth, development, and expansion appeared inimical to its existence.

In examining the uses of “Ole Miss,” this chapter builds upon earlier sections of the dissertation by demonstrating the effectiveness with which conservatives at the university could deploy “traditions,” once invented, as “heritages” to be preserved even in the face of reform. At the same time, this traditional identity provided reassurances about the institution’s uncertain future.

This chapter analyzes the significance of Theodore Bilbo’s role in the movement to modernize the University of Mississippi. It argues, first, that Bilbo was genuinely interested in reforming an institution and a system of higher education that badly needed an overhaul. At the same time, it demonstrates the catastrophic effects of Bilbo’s methods in pursuing those reforms. The chapter not only argues that Bilbo’s methods proved counterproductive in winning specific reforms at the university, but it also examines the broader patterns by which the behavior of Bilbo has tarnished reform and intervention in Mississippi and at its state university and strengthened the claims of legitimacy and authority of traditionalists and conservatives within the state and at the University of Mississippi. The concluding section on Bilbo builds upon earlier sections of the dissertation by examining the logic used in determining what kind of men legitimately can speak for or represent Mississippi and its university.

II

The decision to commission Michael V. O’Shea to study Mississippi’s schools and its institutions of higher learning was a logical one given the place of Professor O’Shea’s institution, the University of Wisconsin, in American higher education. By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, the “Wisconsin Idea” had distinguished

the state and its university from the rest of the country. Frederick Rudolph identified “the conviction that informed intelligence when applied to the problems of modern society could make democracy work more effectively” as the emanating spirit of the Wisconsin Idea.⁹ Hallmarks of the Wisconsin Idea included: the close partnership between the university and the state government; the use of academic expertise and scientific techniques to produce reports and craft policies; the leadership of faculty members on state boards and agencies; and the creation of extension programs that brought knowledge produced at the university to the people of the state.¹⁰ Educational reformers in other sections of the country looked to the model as an example and used the Wisconsin Idea as a means to generate support for increased appropriations and a closer partnership between their own universities and state governments. In 1904, for example, Chancellor Walter B. Hill of the University of Georgia (UGA) led a trainload of trustees, state legislators, and journalists to Madison to see the Wisconsin Idea in practice. The visit led directly to the expansion of UGA’s school of agriculture and a dramatic increase in state appropriations for the university.¹¹

Whitfield commissioned the O’Shea study in the summer of 1925, less than a year after he and group of farmers, bankers, and businessmen had traveled to Wisconsin to

⁹ Frederick Rudolph, *The American College and University: A History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), 363.

¹⁰ For discussions of the origin and development of the Wisconsin Idea, see: Vernon Carstensen, “The Origin and Early Development of the Wisconsin Idea,” *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, vol. 39, no. 3 (Spring 1956): 181-188; Charles McCarthy, *The Wisconsin Idea* (New York: Macmillan, 1912); and Lincoln Steffens, “Sending a State to College: What the University of Wisconsin Is Doing for Its People,” reprinted in James C. Stone and Donald P. DeNevi, eds., *Portraits of the American University, 1890-1910* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc., Publishers, 1971), 118-133. Both Rudolph, in *The American College and University*, and John R. Thelin, in *A History of American Higher Education* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 137-138, situate Wisconsin as the leading state university during the Progressive era.

¹¹ Thomas G. Dyer, *The University of Georgia: A Bicentennial History, 1785-1985* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1985), 160-162.

observe the state's dairy industry.¹² The report, which drew upon two years of investigation conducted by professionals from the University of Wisconsin, the University of Chicago, Columbia University, and the United States Bureau of Education, warned of serious deficiencies in the state's system of education. O'Shea and his team of national experts began by surveying the general difficulties that Mississippi faced. They regarded the state's natural climate an advantageous one, but noted that poor dietary and hygienic standards had infected a large percentage of Mississippians with "lethargy."¹³ The state's racial arrangements had produced a burdensome situation which required an educational system capable of addressing the "native traits and tendencies" of both white and black Mississippians. More broadly, defeat in the Civil War and humiliation during Reconstruction had left the state "prostrate economically, socially, and psychologically," as the Mississippian had "become disheartened" over violations of his "sense of fair play and decency."¹⁴

The report saw economic development as a mechanism to cast off the malaise of defeat and humiliation. "Mississippi can and should become an increasingly prosperous agricultural state," O'Shea wrote. He specifically identified "dairying, poultry raising, gardening, [and] nut growing" as potential areas of growth within the state's agricultural economy.¹⁵ In addition, the report called Mississippi "unusually favorably situated for trade and commerce" and cited railroad access to and from Jackson and the proximity of the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico in stating that "[t]here are few if any states better situated than Mississippi for the distribution of its products throughout the world."

¹² Bill R. Baker, *Catch the Vision: The Life of Henry L. Whitfield* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1974), 111.

¹³ O'Shea, *Public Education in Mississippi*, 6.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

O'Shea even voiced optimism that, as access to "cheap power" came to the state, Mississippi could "develop manufacturing industries of great importance."¹⁶ But changing Mississippi's future and obliterating the "memory of the past" required an educational system that would make the state's residents "keen in detecting new ways of developing human and natural resources" and a new "open-mindedness ... of educational values and educational procedures." In short, deliverance from poverty and shame could come only after Mississippi had undertaken "a reconstruction of curricula and methods of instruction."¹⁷

O'Shea's report found that, from its elementary schools through its institutions of higher learning, Mississippi's educational system over-emphasized "studies of an ancient, remote detached character" and produced graduates who "knew nothing about and could not engage in occupations such as agriculture, manufacturing, or even homemaking." The state had "resisted" the national "movement to 'modernize' and 'vitalize' courses of study." It persisted in "clinging to a type of curriculum" that other states, ones which were "forging ahead in hygienic, industrial, economic, social, civic, and intellectual well-being," had abandoned or modified "fifty years ago." As a result, Mississippi was "comparatively underdeveloped." The report concluded that the state would "not progress comparably with some of the other states of the Union so long as the work of the schools, colleges, and University remains as formal, conventional, and unrelated to the actual situations of daily life as it is at present."¹⁸

The colleges and the state university of Mississippi, O'Shea found, did not aim to "promote the highest physical, social, political, moral, and intellectual well-being of the

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 349-351.

people.” Instead, the state’s institutions of higher education, through curriculums heavily focused on the liberal arts, emphasized objectives like “the ‘building of character,’ ‘thorough scholarship,’ ‘inculcation of good habits,’ ‘training for citizenship,’ ‘development of a religious life,’ ‘making of men and women,’ ‘training the mental faculties,’ and the ‘cultivation of moral conduct.’” Such a program of higher education meant that students graduated from the state’s colleges and university “isolated from the actual situations of life in Mississippi.”¹⁹ O’Shea found particular fault with the University of Mississippi, where, he wrote, the general critique of higher curriculums in the state “applies with peculiar force.”²⁰ There he found a curriculum where “[f]oreign languages, formal mathematics, the technical aspects of the English language, formal science, and formal history and English literature constitute the principal and ... practically the sole materials of instruction.”²¹ The state university was an institution “confined too largely within its academic walls.” Its school of education did “not adequately” “prepare students for service in the schools of the State.” As an example of the curriculum’s misplaced emphases, O’Shea commented that questionnaires collected in the study revealed a startling number of teachers in the state who had studied one or more foreign languages in college but whose “mastery of every-day English is very defective.”²² To take another example, the university’s “well-equipped” chemistry department gave “effective instruction in text-book and laboratory chemistry,” but did little to further “all the ways that chemistry can be made to apply to the betterment of the industrial and other interests in the State.” Across the university’s liberal-arts

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 200-201.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 221.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 201.

²² *Ibid.*, 201-202.

departments, O'Shea found that "culture and discipline" were the ends of instruction and saw insufficient efforts to make subjects useful in interpreting and solving "problems in present-day life." In short, the university's curriculum insufficiently "oriented [graduates] in present-day life," failed to enhance their "capacity to deal with their environments," and left them "to dwell in another time or place remote from the present era in Mississippi."²³

In addition to critiquing the curriculum at the university, O'Shea called for an overhaul of its faculty. The year the report appeared, only eleven of the thirty-four members of university's liberal-arts faculty held a Ph. D.; five held no advanced degree of any kind.²⁴ O'Shea regarded the deficiencies in the university's faculty so dire that he advocated prioritizing the hiring of new instructional staff over any expansion or improvement of the physical plant. Specifically, the report called for developing "a research atmosphere" at the university and recommended the hiring of men and women "interested and gifted in investigating problems that arise in the every-day life of the people of the State."²⁵

O'Shea's study made twenty-six recommendations for public education in Mississippi. The recommendations directly affecting the state's system of higher education included: the creation of a State Board of Education; the creation of a Chancellor of Higher Education; and the merging of the state university at Oxford, the agricultural and mechanical college at Starkville, and the women's college at Clinton into one "University of Mississippi."²⁶ On one hand, consolidation was a move for greater

²³ *Ibid.*, 221-222.

²⁴ *Bulletin of the University of Mississippi*, Series XXV, Number 3, (March, 1927), 71-72.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 223.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 32-36.

efficiency. It addressed problems with “wasteful rivalries” for students and resources among the schools, and it also would lessen the “needless duplication of work” that plagued the state’s institutions of higher learning. More broadly, the creation of a greater university, composed of separate colleges with specific and clearly-defined functions, would allow for the development of the curriculum and programs necessary to make higher education a force to “enhance the general public welfare” of Mississippi.²⁷

The O’Shea study was an effort to diagnose the problems in Mississippi’s educational system and to suggest remedies for those maladies. It portrayed the University of Mississippi as the dysfunctional capstone of a greater system which failed to serve the needs of the people of the state. With its obsolete curriculum and poorly-trained faculty, the university embodied larger problems with education in Mississippi. It was an institution, as presently constructed, both incapable of and unwilling to adopt the modes of instruction necessary to make it a force for progress in the state. Consolidating the university with Mississippi’s two other white colleges, then, represented not only an effort to increase efficiency and avoid duplication in the state’s system of higher education, but also an attempt to turn the University of Mississippi into a truly modern institution. The O’Shea report thus revealed not only the problems with the university as presently constructed, but also the possibilities that would open with the building of a modern institution. The vision of a University of Mississippi designed in the image of the Wisconsin Idea—a “Mississippi Idea” in the making—suggested both the challenges and the possibilities that the state and its university faced in the 1920s.²⁸

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 214-215.

²⁸ Significantly, this era saw the early stages of debates across the American South about the possibilities of the university in a key period of the region’s development. For a discussion of the contest between Howard Odum’s vision of the modern university in a regionalist framework and the sectionalist critique of the

Several key patterns emerged in both the questions that led Whitfield to commission the O'Shea study and in the report itself. One involved the relationship between an outmoded university and an underdeveloped state. O'Shea's study portrayed Mississippi as a place of unfulfilled potential. If development involved the better and more efficient use of human and natural resources, modernizing the University of Mississippi was essential to any plan to produce the knowledge and techniques necessary to move the state forward economically and socially. In other words, the state could not develop so long as its university remained an educational backwater. A second key pattern involved concerns about the state's place in the region and the larger nation. The O'Shea report noted repeatedly that the University of Mississippi continued to make use of a curriculum and modes of instruction that institutions in other parts of the country had long ago abandoned. The Wisconsin Idea may have been an exceptional example of the promise of a great university working in partnership with a state government, but, as this chapter will discuss, Mississippians did not have to look beyond their own region to see other examples of the potential benefits of a modern university. Lastly, the general derogation of the archaic and the obsolete in the O'Shea report suggested that Mississippians would do better to look to the future and to the innovative, not to the past and the traditional, as they charted a course forward.

III

By the time O'Shea published his report in June of 1927, the man who had

modern university articulated by the Nashville Agrarians, see Amy E. Wells, "Contested Ground: Howard Odum, the Southern Agrarians, and the Emerging University in the South During the 1930s," *History of Higher Education Annual*, Volume Twenty-One (2001): 79-101.

commissioned the study, Governor Henry L. Whitfield, had died, and a gubernatorial race between Whitfield's successor, Dennis Murphree, and Theodore G. "The Man" Bilbo, the flamboyant governor of Mississippi from 1916-1920, consumed the state. O'Shea's recommendations and the troubled state of education in Mississippi played a key role in the election of 1927. Murphree campaigned in defense of Whitfield's pro-business record and pledged "to defeat Bilbo and remove the scourge of Bilboism" from Mississippi.²⁹ Bilbo campaigned on improving the state's highway system, reducing the cost of textbooks, and the consolidation of the University of Mississippi and Mississippi A & M into one greater university to be located at Jackson.³⁰ Throughout the campaign season, several officials at the University of Mississippi openly opposed Bilbo. William Hemingway, a former mayor of Jackson and a member of the university's faculty, denounced Bilbo in his classes and mocked The Man's persona and behavior. Robert Farley, an assistant professor of law at the university, warned friends and students that Bilbo's election would mean the removal of Chancellor Alfred Hume. Farley also wrote letters and circulated petitions against Bilbo.³¹ When Bilbo complained to Hume and

²⁹ Quoted in Chester M. Morgan, *Redneck Liberal: Theodore G. Bilbo and the New Deal* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), 41.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 41-42; A. Wigfall Green, *The Man Bilbo* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1963), 70.

³¹ David G. Sansing, *Making Haste Slowly: The Troubled History of Higher Education in Mississippi* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1990), 91-92. Both Hemingway and Farley had long and distinguished careers in Mississippi. Each lost his job during the purge of 1930; each regained his job in 1932. Hemingway was mayor of Jackson from 1901 to 1905. He joined the university's law faculty in 1921. For many years, he served as chairman of the faculty athletic committee. Vaught-Hemingway stadium, where the university's football team plays its home games, was originally named Hemingway Stadium in honor of Hemingway. Farley was an alumnus of the university who later earned a Ph. D. at Yale and taught at Tulane. His father had been the law school's dean from 1913 to 1921. Farley himself became dean of the law school in 1946 and was one of the very few key figures at the university who opposed segregation during the crises of 1950s and early 1960s. When he reached the mandatory retirement age in 1963, the trustees broke with custom and refused to allow Farley to continue to teach classes at the university. For Farley's consistent opposition to segregation and frequent conflicts with militant segregationists in Mississippi, see Charles W. Eagles, *The Price of Defiance: James Meredith and the Integration of Ole Miss* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 72, 160, 168, 193-196, 433.

asked him to order Farley to desist, the chancellor refused and explained that professor's politics were not the business of the university's administration.³² Thus, by the time Bilbo narrowly won the election in August of 1927, members of the faculty had established themselves as enemies of the Man, and the future of the state university at Oxford was in doubt.³³

In his inaugural on January 17, 1928, Bilbo identified the construction of a \$12,000,000 to \$15,000,000 state university at Jackson as the "one thing that would do more to develop Mississippi and bring to her the highest degree of progress and future glory." To begin financing the university, Bilbo called for the state to contribute \$5,000,000 and Hinds County and the city of Jackson to contribute a combined \$5,000,000. He recommended locating the new university on the site of the state's old insane asylum. In accordance with the removal of the state university to Jackson, Bilbo proposed that the "plant and equipment, now located at Oxford, be converted into one of Mississippi's greatest colleges for teachers." This plan, Bilbo assured Mississippians, was best both for the area surrounding Oxford and for the entire state. A college capable of training teachers from North Mississippi to work in the section's schools would better serve to "lift and lead her people to higher cultural ground" than did the state university at Oxford as presently constructed. For the state as a whole, once Americans heard "the story of Mississippi's Fifteen Million Dollar University," "people everywhere [would] change their opinion of Mississippi, and her people." Bilbo projected that within a decade of the new university's opening, the institution would have an enrollment approaching

³² Hardy Poindexter Graham, "Bilbo and the University of Mississippi, 1928-1932," (M. A. thesis, University of Mississippi, 1965), 14.

³³ Bilbo won the election, which required a run-off and included such intrigues as a secret letter from a Masonic leader, by fewer than 10,000 votes. Morgan, *Redneck Liberal*, 41; Green, *The Man Bilbo*, 70.

10,000 students, the population of Jackson would double, and “taxable values” in the capital city would increase “four fold.” Beyond the immediate enhancement of the state’s reputation and the growth of its capital city, Bilbo saw the new university as the key to a limitless future for Mississippi. Such an institution, once created, “would give to Mississippi such an impetus in the growth and development of her educational, agricultural, manufacturing, and industrial life that no one dare dream of the height to which she would ascend in reaching the highest destiny of her glorious future.”³⁴

Bilbo’s plan was an ambitious one for the future of Mississippi and its state university. Economically, Bilbo was envisioning a future when aggressive spending at the municipal, county, and state level increased taxable valuables. Spending, in other words, was a way to guarantee future revenues. By projecting the greater university as an agent of agricultural and industrial growth, Bilbo was connecting the consolidation and expansion of the University of Mississippi with the future of the state’s economic development. Building the greater university in the central location of Jackson was a way to bring the institution to the state and the state to the institution. Because it would be physically located in the state’s capital city and center of power, Bilbo’s university would encourage partnerships between the faculty and the members of the state government. If the state government served and represented the people, bringing the university into a closer relationship with the state government meant the university would more directly serve the people of Mississippi.

When Mississippians heard or read Bilbo’s plans for a greater university, they did not have to look beyond the South for examples of what a modern public university could do for a state. To take one case, during the presidencies of Edward K. Graham (1915-

³⁴ “Here’s Text of Governor’s Address,” *Jackson Daily News*, 17 January 1928.

1918) and Harry W. Chase (1919-1930), the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC) launched a series of programs to bring the university into the direct service of the state. Under Graham, UNC worked on infrastructural development throughout North Carolina and launched programs to promote public health, rural economic development, and city and county planning. As state appropriations increased throughout Graham's tenure, the university built up an extension program through which faculty at UNC oversaw programs and classes in fields ranging from rural economics and education to business administration and community drama. The accomplishments of Chase's administration included the establishment of the School of Public Welfare, which, under the direction of Howard W. Odum, attracted national attention and made Chapel Hill a center for economic and social planning.³⁵

Bilbo's announcement of his plans for the University of Mississippi occurred as Huey Long was building his own "greater" Louisiana State University (LSU). During Long's governorship (1928-1932), LSU began a program of dramatic expansion that continued through the 1930s. Between 1925 and 1935, the university's faculty increased in number from 168 to 394. Many of the faculty hired during this period joined LSU as a result of competitive national searches. New faculty hired in this era included Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren. Together, Brooks and Warren launched the *Southern Review*. During this same period, LSU established its own press. Enrollment boomed from 1,600 in 1928 to over 4,000 by 1933. Students at the university chose classes from an expanded curriculum that included offerings in new programs of education, law, engineering, agriculture, commerce, applied science, music, library science, and forestry.

³⁵ William D. Snider, *Light on the Hill: A History of the University North Carolina at Chapel Hill* (Chapel Hill: 1992), 155-180; Wells, "Contested Ground": 83-86.

Beyond the main campus in Baton Rouge, located just three miles from the state capitol, LSU offered classes at a facility in Monroe and operated a medical school in New Orleans. The university also oversaw a state-wide network of agricultural experiment stations dedicated to agronomy, animal and dairy husbandry, animal pathology, agricultural economics, entomology, horticulture, parasitology, plant pathology, poultry, sugarcane, and truck farming. An Agricultural and Home Economics Extension staff included nineteen supervisors, twenty specialists, two editors, and over one hundred parish agents.³⁶ By 1937, Don Wharton of *Scribner's Magazine* called LSU the “fastest-growing school in America.”³⁷

Bilbo's plan to overhaul Mississippi's system of higher education, based as it was on the O'Shea study, carried with it the authority of national experts. The movement for a greater University of Mississippi, as the cases of UNC and LSU demonstrated, could point to examples within the South where states had used or were using elements of the Wisconsin Idea to build up their universities and develop their economies. Importantly, Bilbo's vision attracted much support throughout Mississippi and among students and alumni of the state university at Oxford. Indeed, a poll conducted in January 1928 by the *Mississippian*, the university's newspaper, found that a majority of students favored the removal of the university to Jackson.³⁸ The *Jackson Daily News* noted that, “almost

³⁶ William Ivy Hair, *The Kingfish and His Realm: The Life and Times of Huey P. Long* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), 229; Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 247-248.

³⁷ Don Wharton, “Louisiana State University,” *Scribner's Magazine*, Volume CII, Number 3 (September, 1937): 33.

³⁸ Because the poll asked students to vote for or against removing the university to Jackson and for or against removing only the medical and law schools to Jackson, it's not entirely clear how to read the results. The newspaper's editor, W. A. Lomax, called for the creation of a “greater University of Mississippi at Jackson for the good of Mississippi,” but it's unclear if the student vote more accurately represented support for removal or opposition to separating the law and medical departments from the rest of the university. ““Entire Removal Is Favored And Split Opposed In Ballot,” *Mississippian*, 13 January 1928; Graham, “Bilbo and the University of Mississippi,” 8-9.

without exception,” the “goodly number of graduates of the University of Mississippi” sitting in the state legislature supported removal.³⁹ In addition, Andrew A. Kincannon and Joseph Neely Powers, the two men who had preceded Hume as Chancellor, supported Bilbo’s plan for a greater university.⁴⁰

What the *Mississippian* called “the many deficiencies” at the university partly explained support for Bilbo’s plan.⁴¹ In the fall sessions of 1926 and 1927, approximately one third of the students enrolled at the university were unable to secure campus housing.⁴² A study conducted in 1928 found that the university’s library, which held 41,000 volumes, lagged badly behind its peers. The libraries at the Universities of Florida and Georgia held approximately 20,000 more volumes; LSU’s library held 30,000 more volumes. The Universities of Arkansas’s and Tennessee’s libraries held more than two times the number of volumes; the Universities of Oklahoma and South Carolina held approximately two and a half times the number; the University of Virginia’s held nearly four times the number; the University of North Carolina’s almost five times the number; and the University of Texas’s library held over ten times the number of volumes than the University of Mississippi’s. Of state universities in the South, only the University of Alabama held fewer volumes in its library. The two-person staffs at Mississippi and Alabama’s libraries compared unfavorably with the library staffs that ranged from four at Georgia and seven at Arkansas to twenty-two at North Carolina and twenty-nine at Texas. Faculty salaries showed a similar pattern. For the 1927-1928 academic year, the university’s average salary for a professor of \$3,600 ranked the lowest of any state

³⁹ “Removal of University Looming Up Largely,” *Jackson Daily News*, 19 January 1928.

⁴⁰ Sansing, *University of Mississippi*, 221; Graham, “Bilbo and the University of Mississippi,” 31.

⁴¹ “Homecoming Day,” *Mississippian*, 4 November 1927.

⁴² “New Enrollment Mark Predicted,” *Mississippian*, 15 September 1926; “Homecoming Day,” *Mississippian*, 4 November 1927.

university in the South. In the words of Chancellor Alfred Hume, the state's meager appropriations "through the long years" had affected the ability of the university to "keep abreast of the times and hold its own in the educational world."⁴³

A telling humiliation for the university came when the Association of American Law Schools (AALS) inspected the school of law in November 1926 and subsequently revoked its accreditation. In its report, the AALS noted that the law department failed to meet minimum requirements for library holdings and was deficient in even such basic areas as office-space for instructors, classroom facilities, bookshelves, chairs, and desks. The AALS expressed further concern when it discovered that, of the four rosters of enrolled students that the law school kept, no two contained an identical list of names. The report also found that the faculty of the law department, whose members kept offices in their private homes, was wholly unaware of current trends in legal education.⁴⁴ An editorial in the university's student newspaper, after cataloguing the law department's "cramped and inadequate" physical plant, quipped that its tables and chairs were "being saved from a sentimental standpoint, for they certainly must have served in the class rooms of the revered L. Q. C. Lamar."⁴⁵ Reports such as these contributed to a general sense, as one member of the faculty put it, that the university "needs something, and needs it soon."⁴⁶

By the middle of the 1920s, students at the University of Mississippi found themselves living and studying on a campus they could compare to ruins. A note in the university's newspaper dutifully praised the three stained-glass windows that depicted the

⁴³ University of Mississippi, *Biennial Report of the University of Mississippi to the Legislature of the State and to the Board of Trustees of the University and Colleges* (July 1, 1929), 28, 30, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

⁴⁴ Graham, "Bilbo and the University of Mississippi," 2-4.

⁴⁵ "On to Jackson," *Mississippian*, 15 September 1927.

⁴⁶ Green, *The Man Bilbo*, 74.

history of the University Greys, remembered the anonymous Confederate dead buried at the edge of campus, and paid homage to the legacies of Frederick Augustus Porter Barnard, L. Q. C. Lamar, and Augustus Baldwin Longstreet. These pieces of tradition, the *Mississippian* wrote, were reminders of “the glory that was ‘Rome’s.’” Such a comparison, of course, suggested that the university’s post-bellum history had been one of decline. What was more, even in noting the “traditions and past glories” that hung over the campus, the paper remarked that “past achievements or performances” were insufficient guarantors of a university’s reputation and warned that “no school can live in anything but the future, if it is to continue and advance its standing.”⁴⁷ Evidence of decline and decay abounded at the university. The law department had already once lost its accreditation and showed no signs of regaining its former status. A report from the American Medical Association (AMA) warned of the urgent need to expand the university’s two-year medical program to four years, to upgrade its faculty, and to build hospital and training facilities. Beyond the inadequacies of the law and medical programs, the university had not hired enough faculty to teach undergraduate classes and had not built enough housing to accommodate the student body. The *Mississippian* described the “overflow of students and lack of facilities” as general problems at Mississippi’s colleges and universities and compared the state’s system of education unfavorably with ones in the rest of the country. To emphasize the extent to which Mississippi had fallen behind even her “sister states” of the Deep South, the paper pointed to the construction of the new “greater Louisiana University.”⁴⁸

An inadequate physical plant, meager library holdings, an archaic curriculum, and

⁴⁷ “Know the University,” *Mississippian*, 9 December 1927.

⁴⁸ “What Will You Do with Your State University?” *Mississippian*, 13 January 1928.

a declining reputation alarmed students at the University of Mississippi not only because they saw their institution falling behind its peers, but also because they believed they were living on the cusp of a new age. Echoing O'Shea, William Alexander Lomax, editor of the *Mississippian*, wrote breathlessly about the potential for development in the state. Technological developments, such as the spread of electricity throughout portions of the state, suggested that a "new era of prosperity" was "dawning" and that the state was "entering into a great destiny."⁴⁹ Lomax described dairying as a previously "underdeveloped" sector of the agricultural economy that was "at last being awakened" and even expressed optimism for the prospects of industry in the state. The final years of the 1920s, he predicted, would bring "more development and more prosperity than the entire span of fifty years since Reconstruction Days." This was a time, in other words, for Mississippians to imagine "opportunities hitherto impossible."⁵⁰ If such a forecast suggested a limitless future, it also injected urgency into debates about the university. New possibilities abounded, but many agreed that the creation of a modern institution was essential to fulfill the promise of Mississippi's destiny.

Students who advocated for removal and expansion saw complacency with present arrangements and an insufficient concern for the future as obstacles to improvements at the university. "Too often," Lomax argued, alumni who "wholeheartedly fought for the continuance of Ole Miss at Oxford, have after the question was decided, forgotten their love for the old institution and continued to ignore exigencies and necessities." He imagined "the average Mississippian" asking: "What's this about the state going in debt several million dollars to build a University? What's the

⁴⁹ "Homecoming Day," *Mississippian*, 4 November 1927; "What Will You Do with Your State University?" *Mississippian*, 13 January 1928.

⁵⁰ "What Will You Do with Your State University?" *Mississippian*, 13 January 1928.

matter with the one we have?” To the “happy and contented” citizen of the state, “the present looks quite alright ... Building bridges for the future passerby does not interest him. The future can take care of itself.”⁵¹ For students advocating reform, of course, present conditions were something short of “alright,” and the university’s stagnation since the Civil War hardly suggested that history and the future “took care of themselves.” Importantly, the logic articulated in the *Mississippian* suggested that reforming the university should involve not only finding remedies for current deficiencies, but also projecting into the future new roles and uses for the institution.

A sense that college campuses had become the sites of a new culture and a new morality pervaded social commentary in the 1920s.⁵² Students at the University of Mississippi reacted strongly to depictions of campus life. Often, criticisms of behavior and morality at the university elicited a mocking, defensive response. One student wrote, with apparent boredom, “we hear much nowadays about the revolt of youth, new moral standards, plasticism, and other forms of modernistic tendencies.”⁵³ A note in the *Mississippian* addressed itself “to those who lift their hands and voices in holy horror at

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² For discussions of this general pattern, see: Paula S. Fass, *The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920's* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 46-49; Lawrence J. Nelson, *Rumors of Indiscretion: The University of Missouri "Sex Questionnaire" Scandal in the Jazz Age* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 30-42. Several novelists of the 1920s, including F. Scott Fitzgerald, Percy Marks, and Lois and Lynn Montross, used college campuses as settings for stories that involved the new culture. Fass, 25-29, 119, 260.

⁵³ “More Modernism,” *Mississippian*, 29 October 1926. The use of “plasticism” almost certainly was a reference to Percy Marks’s best-selling novel, *The Plastic Age* (1924). Marks was a World War I veteran and an English instructor at Brown University. The novel, which was made into a film in 1925, contained depictions of hazing rituals, wild parties, and “petting” at a fictional college called Sanford. It was both popular among youth and college students of the era and a source for concerns about the culture on American campuses. According to Lisa Lindquist Dorr, students at the University of Alabama considered *The Plastic Age* “required reading.” Paula Fass has included the novel among those which the youth of the 1920s considered “*de rigueur*” reading and has called reading it a “fad.” The same *Mississippian* article cited here identified Marks as an author who was regrettably absent from the classes offered by the English department. Lisa Lindquist Dorr, “Fifty Percent Moonshine and Fifty Percent Moonshine: Social Life and College Youth Culture in Alabama, 1913-1933,” in Ted Ownby, ed., *Manners and Southern History* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2007), 66-67; Fass, *The Damned and the Beautiful*, 232.

the trend of modern youth.”⁵⁴ The student publication took particular issue with “numerous small town newspapers” that aimed “to create and ferment a constantly growing sentiment among certain people that the University is becoming a worse den of iniquity.” Accounts of “drunken revelry” in Oxford, combined with works of fiction or drama set on college campuses, contributed to the “erroneous conception” “that college students do nothing but dance, drink, gamble, and waste time with wild co-eds.” The effect of such press coverage and social commentary was that many small-town and rural Mississippians had come to “regard Ole Miss the citadel and outstanding example” of the new (im)-morality. In “every corner of the state,” “gossip” circulated about students at the university. Too often, the *Mississippian* bemoaned, neighbors commented that the “nice boy” who went off to Ole Miss came home “a drunken snot and dissipated gambler.”⁵⁵

By the 1920s, it seemed, traditional ideas about elitism at the university had blended with heightened concerns about immorality and excess to form a new—and worse—stereotype about students at Ole Miss. Indeed, as earlier anti-fraternity agitation had revealed, Mississippians had long worried that their state university inculcated snobbishness by serving only a particular type of student and excluding or marginalizing those who came from more humble backgrounds. Now it appeared that the university not only served too narrow a class of Mississippians, but that it was doing a poor job of turning even that small group into decent citizens. Such criticism clearly stung students at the university. For example, when a Y. M. C. A. survey found that 99% of students at the university believed in God, 97% believed in the divinity of Christ, 94% believed the

⁵⁴ “Facts Denounce Charge Against State Colleges,” *Mississippian*, 4 February 1927.

⁵⁵ “A Defence Against ‘Constructive Criticisms,’” *Mississippian*, 16 December 1927.

Bible was divinely inspired, and that over 90% were members of a church, the *Mississippian* gleefully reported the findings, pronounced them “vindication of the attitude of Ole Miss,” and stated that they “established the indisputable fact that the students at a state University are no more prone to depart from religion than they would be at a strictly denominational school.”⁵⁶

Not all commentary from students at the University of Mississippi was defensive. The 1920s heard voices on campus not only responding to negative depictions of their school, but also projecting into the future their own visions for the institution. This was a moment of possibility, when reform in the style of O’Shea’s recommendations clearly appealed to elements within the university community. Dean Wasson, a student who advocated for “more modernism” in the curriculum, wrote that universities, “with their spirit of intellectual freedom and their spirit of everlasting youth,” must serve as “outlets for inspiration” and stand “with open arms ... eager to receive any new change bearing the marks of truth.” “Youth,” the defining feature of a university, stood for “Progress,” and this spirit made the institutions the key sites where “advanced ideas and unhampered thought” triumphed over “fossilized” modes of thought and “senile minds.” Wasson expressed dismay that students at the university were left to “hunt in vain for the new school of writers, as Percy Marks, Warner Fabian, Thomas Arkle Clark, and countless contemporary writers of the period.”⁵⁷ Apparently the English department’s courses on American literature since 1870 and Mississippi folklore had insufficiently enlivened the offerings in Anglo-Saxon English, Shakespeare, Wordsworth, the Victorians, and

⁵⁶ “Facts Denounce Charge Against State Colleges,” *Mississippian*, 4 February 1927.

⁵⁷ “More Modernism,” *Mississippian*, 29 October 1926.

American literature of the colonial, Revolutionary, and national eras.⁵⁸

One striking component of the reformist vision for the University of Mississippi was the desire to connect the institution—literally—to the rest of the state. In advocating for removal to Jackson, the *Mississippian* pointed out that 75% of the state’s residents could drive to and from the capital city in a day and that it was a railroad center. The “most central and most accessible” city in the state was not merely a logical site for a greater university because of convenience. The spatial dynamics of locating the university in Jackson would facilitate mutual interaction between the university and Mississippians. The proximity of the campus to “sinews” of government and the “heart of the most progressive part of the state” would make students “more interested and more wrapped up in the progress of the state and in a better position to observe the possibilities of Mississippi.” These connections were, of course, key to making the Wisconsin Idea into a Mississippi Idea. While Jackson could have a modernizing and progressive effect on campus life, removing the university from a location as remote as Oxford promised to increase the likelihood that students could interact with the state’s citizenry and “carry back into their communities new ideas for progress and uplift.”⁵⁹ If the Mississippi Idea involved re-making the state university in the image of the Wisconsin Idea, the modern institution that would produce new knowledge and new ideas would also play a new and expanded role in the state as a whole.

Removing the state university from Oxford to Jackson and remaking it as a truly modern institution attracted support more for what it designed to make possible than for what it proposed to repair. By the late-1920s, the University of Mississippi lagged badly

⁵⁸ University of Mississippi, *Bulletin of the University of Mississippi*, Series XXV, Number 3 (March, 1927), 88-90.

⁵⁹ “What Will You Do with Your State University?” *Mississippian*, 13 January 1928.

behind peer institutions in funding, was struggling to maintain its already-poor reputation, could not house its student body, and did not possess the faculty—in number or quality—to provide adequate instruction. Plainly, the institution was in need of an overhaul. But Bilbo’s plan and the one students at the university were advocating was a sweeping, visionary one, and support for it within the university community evidenced a desire not merely to fix a broken institution, but to create an entirely new kind of one. This was a design of ambition, not renovation. This was a design premised on the idea that Mississippi could build great things and that those institutions would play active, dynamic, and progressive roles in fulfilling the state’s destiny. Thus, at least for a time, a greater University of Mississippi—a Mississippi Idea modeled on the Wisconsin Idea – appeared not merely possible, but, indeed, essential for the future of the state.

III

When Bilbo took office in January 1928, Chancellor Alfred Hume had been a member of the faculty of the University of Mississippi since 1890. A native of Beech Grove, Tennessee, Hume held a Doctorate of Science and two other degrees from Vanderbilt University and began his career at the university as a professor of mathematics and astronomy. Before he became Chancellor of the University in 1924, Hume had served multiple terms as a dean, acting chancellor, and vice-chancellor.⁶⁰ A gentleman of the old school, Hume held traditional ideas about the purpose of a liberal-arts education and the special place of the University of Mississippi in the state. In 1915, he warned an audience in Jackson not to be “misled by educational reformers, so-called,

⁶⁰ For an overview of Hume’s career at the university, see: Francis Egger Watson, “Dr. Alfred Hume: His Leadership as Vice Chancellor, Acting Chancellor, and Chancellor of the University of Mississippi (1900-1945),” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Mississippi, 1987); Sansing, *University of Mississippi*, 231.

who advocate extreme measures and propose numberless innovations among which are pedagogical freaks, dangerous fads, and silly crazes.” When legitimate reforms were undertaken, Hume argued, they “should cleave to all that was good in the old.” The development of a sound curriculum required “reject[ing] new errors” as much as “discard[ing] old ones.”⁶¹ Hume was deeply skeptical of what he called “utilitarian” or “applied” theories of education. He believed the liberal-arts curriculum should “keep alive the truth that the hidden, the invisible, the silent, the spiritual, forces ultimately and surely shape and determine things visible and material.” A curriculum “intended to broaden sympathies, widen horizons, deepen the foundations of character, [and] strengthen manhood and womanhood” not only “furnish[ed] and equip[ped] [students] for intelligent and contented citizenship”; it also provided a public service by “fit[ting] young men and women for safe and wise leadership.”⁶² Hume’s vision for the university thus was a traditional one in two important ways. First, it endowed the liberal-arts curriculum with special importance as the “heart of the institution and its pulse-beat.” Second, it saw the university as fulfilling its obligations to “the welfare of the entire state” by grooming men and women for positions of leadership throughout Mississippi.⁶³

As chancellor, Hume banned dancing and drinking on campus, attempted to eradicate hazing, and made regular attendance at chapel a requirement. These regulations were necessary, he wrote, to ensure that the university remained a place where “character

⁶¹ The statements were part of an address Hume made before the Mississippi Synod’s Training School for Christian Workers in Jackson in 1915. The address was reproduced in a master’s thesis compiled by a granddaughter of Hume. Myra Hume Jones, “Tenets and Attitudes of an Old-Time Teacher (Alfred Hume),” (M. A. thesis, University of Mississippi, 1949), 6, 7.

⁶² Hume outlined this theory of the university’s purpose in an article on the University of Mississippi for the *Official Statistical Register of the State of Mississippi* that was published in 1917 and used the text of that article in numerous addresses upon his elevation to the chancellorship in 1924. Reproduced in Jones, “Tenets and Attitudes of an Old-Time Teacher,” 62-63.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 61-62.

is supreme and honor and virtue preeminent.”⁶⁴ The fraternity troubles of previous decades, of course, may have also suggested more practical reasons for stricter disciplinary codes. Because the university was charged with developing leaders for the state, it was not merely training students, but making “future citizens,” “moulding [sic] character,” and “shaping life.”⁶⁵ Importantly, this emphasis on “character” and “honor” reinforced traditional ideas about whom the university educated, how it trained those students, and how it served the state. If the university was to continue to educate a relatively narrow slice of the state’s elite, it would be serving the state indirectly by producing honorable citizens of high character to serve as leaders throughout Mississippi. Ensuring that the university inculcated certain standards of behavior and morality, in other words, was essential if the institution was to justify some degree of exclusivity in whom it directly served. Hume’s policies, despite his justifications, raised howls from segments of the student body and led some observers to refer to the state university as “Hume’s Presbyterian University.” In 1927, the *Mississippian* complained that Hume’s administration showed “a rather large disregard for the wishes of the student body.”⁶⁶ The Chancellor, known affectionately as “Little Alley,” was beloved by many within the university community, though.⁶⁷ His popularity among students, faculty, and alumni, combined with his traditional ideas about the role of the state university, made Hume the ideal figure to lead resistance to Bilbo’s plan for removal and consolidation.

Hume began organizing resistance to Bilbo’s plan even before The Man’s

⁶⁴ This quote comes from a passage in the university’s biennial report to the legislature and the Board of Trustees, dated July 8, 1925. Reproduced in Jones, “Tenets and Attitudes of an Old-Time Teacher,” 95.

⁶⁵ These statements come from an address Hume made before a meeting of the National Association of State Universities in Chicago in November, 1927. Reproduced in Jones, “Tenets and Attitudes of an Old-Time Teacher,” 103.

⁶⁶ “Where Are We Headed?” *Mississippian*, 21 October 1927.

⁶⁷ Graham, “Bilbo and the University of Mississippi,” 36-37; Sansing, *University of Mississippi*, 232.

inauguration. Throughout the fall and winter of 1927, Hume and other opponents of removal published letters, circulated pamphlets, and made public statements against the plan to move the university from Oxford. The location of the campus played a large role in these arguments. Hume, pointing in part to The Man's own plans for highway development, noted that Oxford's "isolation" and "inaccessibility" had been "exaggerated."⁶⁸ A pamphlet circulated by "friends of the University" also invoked the state's growing highway system and further noted that six passenger trains passed through Oxford on a daily basis when it stated that "the University is more accessible now than it has ever been."⁶⁹ Beyond arguing that Oxford was not as inaccessible as Bilbo or other proponents of removal had claimed, defenders of the state university made the campus's location and relative isolation a virtue. Hume described the university's setting, adjacent to the town of Oxford and amid a "large grove of magnificent forest trees, with a carpeting of grass," as combining "the quiet, the beauty, and the vigor and physical healthfulness of the country, with the conveniences of urban life."⁷⁰ The "friends of the University" pointed to the UNC as evidence that, from a remote location, the "most progressive university of the South" was "prospering, influencing, and serving" its state. Even those who disagreed with plans to apply the Wisconsin Idea in Mississippi apparently saw value in its most basic premise. This line of argument raised the most

⁶⁸ In early December 1927, Hume sent a letter to the editor of the *Oxford Eagle* that was widely published in newspapers throughout the state and eventually published as a pamphlet. Quotations here use the version of the pamphlet that the *Eagle* reprinted when the legislature visited Oxford and the university campus in February 2, 1928. "Chancellor Hume Strongly Opposes the Removal of University of Mississippi," *Oxford Eagle*, 2 February 1928.

⁶⁹ *Some Facts Against the Removal of The University of Mississippi*, submitted by the friends of the University, no date, reprinted in the *Oxford Eagle*, 9 February 1928.

⁷⁰ "Chancellor Hume Strongly Opposes the Removal of University of Mississippi," *Oxford Eagle*, 2 February 1928.

fundamental question of location: “But why should a university be accessible?”⁷¹ If, as Hume argued “what a student need[ed], first of all, [was] to study,” then the university’s isolated location was a positive attribute.⁷² In this case, the question of the ideal location of the university was not a mere choice between a city or a college-town; it was a question about whether the state university should be an enclave that molded the elite for enlightened leadership or an institution engaged in direct outreach to the citizens of Mississippi.

Opponents of removal were not only defending the setting and location of the Oxford campus, though; they were invoking and defending the idea that Ole Miss was more than a state university. The “friends of the University” wrote that “only [the] naked name ‘University of Mississippi’” could be “moved to Jackson.” They listed the sacred associations between the university and L. Q. C. Lamar, the University Greys, and the alumni who had participated in Redemption and other noble causes of service to the state. They endowed the trees and buildings that made up the campus with special significance as the site where the university had formed a community of great men. These connections, they wrote, were part of “the traditions, the heritages from the past, the invisible and inseparable vestments of memories which both within and outwardly transform a state university into Ole Miss!”⁷³ If the Mississippi Idea suggested the power of a reform-minded vision of the future, this use of the idea of Ole Miss demonstrated the effectiveness with which ideas could be deployed in the defense of tradition.

Hume made a more elaborate argument about Ole Miss possessing a “spirit and

⁷¹ *Some Facts Against the Removal of the University of Mississippi*, reprinted in *Oxford Eagle*, 9 February 1928.

⁷² “Chancellor Hume Strongly Opposes the Removal of University of Mississippi,” *Oxford Eagle*, 2 February 1928.

⁷³ *Some Facts Against the Removal of the University of Mississippi*, reprinted in *Oxford Eagle*, 9 February 1928.

an atmosphere of its own.” He, too, invoked the memory of the Greys and Lamar, comparing Lamar’s significance to the university’s identity to Thomas Jefferson’s at the University of Virginia and Robert E. Lee’s at Washington & Lee. In describing the campus’s Confederate cemetery and monument, the stained-glass window commemorating the Greys, the old chapel, and the buildings which had served as hospitals after the battle of Shiloh, Hume wrote that the campus was the site of memorials “as sacred as any shrine, altar, or temple.” Rather than moving the university to Jackson, the state should encourage Mississippians to come to Oxford “as a holy pilgrimage.” Keeping Ole Miss in Oxford, rather than building a greater university in Jackson, was a way of preserving something sacred, but also of ensuring that the state possessed a university capable of performing its “duty” “to proclaim the pre-eminence of principle, the power and permanence of the spiritual, and the practical value of the ideal.”⁷⁴

On February 2, 1928, the university and Oxford chartered a special train to bring the state legislature from Jackson to North Mississippi to inspect the campus and the town. Prominent townsmen and officials from the university met the legislatures at the train station and led them on tours of various places in Oxford and on the campus. Following lunch, cigars, and a late-afternoon meeting in the university’s chapel, the town and the university treated the legislators to an evening banquet.⁷⁵ All told, Oxford and the university spent \$3,000 on the day of entertainment.⁷⁶ At the banquet, various leaders from the town and the university made speeches before Chancellor Hume delivered a final oration. Hume’s address included all of the points he had made in various letters and

⁷⁴ “Chancellor Hume Strongly Opposes the Removal of University of Mississippi,” *Oxford Eagle*, 2 February 1928.

⁷⁵ “Legislature Here Today Inspecting University,” *Oxford Eagle*, 2 February 1928.

⁷⁶ Green, *The Man Bilbo*, 74.

speeches throughout the preceding months. At its conclusion, though, he made clear that removal and the building of a greater university necessarily meant the death of Ole Miss. “Gentlemen,” Hume intoned, “you may move the University of Mississippi. You may move it to Jackson or anywhere else. You may uproot it from the hallowed ground on which it has stood for eighty years. You may take it from these surroundings that have been dear to the thousands who have gone from its doors. But gentlemen, don’t call it Ole Miss.”⁷⁷ At the conclusion of the speech, the feted legislators cheered; after they returned to Jackson, the house voted 109 to 9 to keep the state university in Oxford.⁷⁸

Several things stand out about the deployment of the idea of Ole Miss in the battle to keep the university in Oxford. The invocation of the University Greys, Lamar, the Redeemers, and other great men of Mississippi’s past suggests the connections between the university’s identity and historical deeds to establish and preserve order in the state. Physical descriptions of the campus’s setting and buildings converted the university at Oxford into a hallowed site. Tying great men of the past and the university together in a sacred place endowed the university with a timelessness and immortality. This also made the campus and its shrines the physical and material embodiment of a set of ideals. Importantly, this adhered to Hume’s conviction that ideals endowed the material with meaning. In other words, what made a university important were the ideals it inculcated in its students, not the applied knowledge it produced and disseminated or the development it sponsored. Another striking feature in the deployment of Ole Miss involved the effectiveness with which Hume and defenders of the university converted invented spaces like the university’s chapel, monuments, and shrines into heritages or

⁷⁷ “Legislators Make Thorough Inspection of the University of Mississippi,” *Oxford Eagle*, 9 February 1928.

⁷⁸ Sansing, *Making Haste Slowly*, 97.

pieces of history that could not be moved. Thus traditions invented in the 1890s had become material pieces of history by the late-1920s.

Ole Miss, once invented, was an identity that not only rooted and defined the university, but also suggested that any effort to alter or harm the institution was an unnatural act that would sever the state's connection with its past. In this way, Ole Miss defined the meaning of the university community at the same time that it made the institution something worth preserving for all of Mississippi. When Hume and the "friends of the University" argued that removal would mean the death of "Ole Miss," they were not merely appealing to sentiment; they were making an argument about the role of the state university of Mississippi that was quite different than the role that Bilbo and other educational reformers were imagining when they envisioned the construction of a greater university in Jackson.

IV

His plan for a greater university at Jackson defeated, Bilbo asked the legislature to appropriate \$5,000,000 to improve the state university at Oxford. The legislature appropriated only \$1,600,000, but that figure represented the largest appropriation in the history of the university.⁷⁹ The money went to improvements in the university's physical plant, notably the construction of seven new dormitories and new buildings for the law and graduate schools.⁸⁰ Construction and upgrades to facilities did nothing to address the academic deficiencies at the university, though, and Bilbo remained convinced that the

⁷⁹ Sansing, *The University of Mississippi*, 223.

⁸⁰ Graham, "Bilbo and the University," 12.

institution's leadership and faculty needed an overhaul. In the summers of 1928 and 1929, The Man twice attempted to have Hume removed from office, but could not muster the necessary votes from the board of trustees.⁸¹ By 1930, though, Bilbo appointees controlled the board, and The Man set about reorganizing the University of Mississippi. On June 13, the board replaced Hume with Joseph Neely Powers, who had preceded Hume as chancellor of the university from 1914-1924. Unlike Hume, Powers had supported consolidation. He also believed that the university's highest purpose was "to serve all the people" and that the institution should be "democratic in spirit and useful in service."⁸² Powers was a man whose vision for the university, clearly, more closely aligned with Bilbo's than Hume's. Importantly Powers's emphasis on direct service to the people of the state adhered to Bilbo's conception of a truly modern university's role in development and outreach, not the mere training of a special class of leaders.

The replacement of Hume with Powers began a turbulent summer for the university's faculty. Meetings of the board of trustees on June 27 and July 5 resulted in the dismissal of seventeen members of the faculty. Hardy Poindexter Graham's case-by-case research of the firings reveals that, with the lone exception of Hume, no dismissed faculty member was replaced by a professor or administrator with inferior credentials. Across the university's departments, Graham's study finds that "Bilbo and the board of trustees substantially upgraded the quality of the faculty" and that "definite improvements were made by the reorganization."⁸³ To take the English department as one example, the dismissal of David Horace Bishop as department chairman and the hiring of Henry August Pochman meant the replacement of a man who held only a master's degree

⁸¹ Sansing, *The University of Mississippi*, 226-228; Graham, "Bilbo and the University," 13-15.

⁸² Graham, "Bilbo and the University," 30-31

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 66.

with a man who held a Ph.D. from UNC. Under Bishop's chairmanship, the English department hired two Ph.D.s to replace a man with a bachelor's degree. At the administrative level, the reorganization led to such changes as the demotion of a graduate dean who held only a master's degree and the elevation of a Ph.D. to that position.⁸⁴ Even in the case of replacing Hume with Powers, Graham notes, Bilbo was replacing a man whose "educational philosophy was more in line with the needs of a denominational or a military school than it was with the needs of a large state university" with a "more progressive and agreeable educator."⁸⁵

However the dismissals of 1930 may have upgraded the university's faculty, reaction to the firings was immediate and negative. Within Mississippi, prominent voices in the press, members of the legislature, and alumni of the university all criticized the actions of Bilbo and the board.⁸⁶ National writers also condemned Bilbo's actions. John B. Hudson's article in *The New Republic* provided a notably sensational account of the purge. The article began by describing Bilbo, as he "swaggered out of a meeting" with trustees, resplendent in his "flaming red tie" and "diamond horseshoe pin," boasting about the three college presidents he had "bounced" and promising "that's just the beginning of what's going to happen." Hudson called the purge "a declaration of war upon the immunity of education from political influence and corruption" and attributed Bilbo's motives to a desire "to rid the state colleges of his enemies and replace them with his friends." The article claimed Bilbo's "dummy board of trustees" had dismissed "more than 50" faculty members from the state university and appointed a "small-lot

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 46-47, 57-58.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 65

⁸⁶ Larry T. Balsamo, "Theodore G. Bilbo and Mississippi Politics, 1877-1932" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Missouri, 1967), 212-221.

real-estate salesman” “who had never earned a college degree” as chancellor of the university. Bemoaning the “ruthless political slaughter of presidents, deans, professors and instructors,” Hudson declared that “[a]cademic freedom in Mississippi has become a memory and a hope.”⁸⁷

One striking feature of Hudson’s account was its numerous inaccuracies. On the basis of the article’s grossly inflated numbers of the faculty dismissed from the university (“more than 50” as opposed to eighteen); mischaracterization of the board of trustees (every member of the board had a college degree, and two held graduate degrees from the University of Chicago); and incorrect statements regarding Powers’s background (the “small-lot real-estate salesman” had been Chancellor of the University of Mississippi from 1914-1924), Hardy Poindexter Graham has called Hudson’s article “the extreme example of distortion and falsification” in coverage of the firings.⁸⁸ Beyond the article’s use of blatantly inaccurate information, it made political corruption and demagoguery, not underdevelopment and an insufficient system of higher education, the principal issues and problems of the affair. Here, then, one encounters the supreme irony of a liberal publication like *The New Republic* doing the work for traditionalists and conservatives to fend off movements for modernity and reform.

Various national accrediting agencies began reviews of the university’s status as a result of the firings. By the end of the summer, the American Medical Association (AMA), the American Bar Association (ABA), the Association of American Law Schools (AALS), and the American Chemical Society (ACS) all had written to Powers to voice their concerns over the dismissals and to notify the chancellor that they were

⁸⁷ John B. Hudson, “The Spoils System Enters College,” *The New Republic* LXV (September 17, 1930): 123, 125.

⁸⁸ Graham, “Bilbo and the University,” 71.

reviewing the accreditation or rating of the university. On October 2, the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) discredited the university's school of engineering. On October 31, the Association of American Universities (AAU) removed the university from its membership. The next month, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) expelled the university as well. Finally, and most damagingly, in December the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) announced that it was suspending the university's accreditation.⁸⁹ In each of the cases, the associations or agencies cited some combination of the number and method of the faculty dismissals and the clear evidence of political interference in the process when they revoked the university's accreditation, removed it from their membership, or downgraded its rating. The AAUP, for example, explained its decision to expel the university from its membership by pointing to the "insecurity of tenure of members of the staff ... which has been made fully evident by the arbitrary dismissal of a very large proportion of the faculty."⁹⁰ When the AMA placed the medical school on probationary status, it cited the "undue political influence" at the university.⁹¹

As the general crisis of accreditation imperiled the status of the university, it turned opinion in Mississippi against Bilbo and his plans for educational reform. The Jackson *Clarion-Ledger* denounced The Man for "ruthlessly firing scores of the state's most experienced educators ... to satisfy his own vengefulness" and charged him with "despoiling the University."⁹² After SACS suspended the university's accreditation, the Mississippi Educational Association announced it would not permit any student who had

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 76-98.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁹² Jackson *Clarion-Ledger*, 7 December 1930.

graduated from the university after September 1, 1931 to teach in an accredited high school in the state.⁹³ That same week, students gathered on campus, dressed a cotton-stuffed effigy of Bilbo in red pajamas, and burned it atop a flagpole.⁹⁴ The *Mississippian* ran no straw-poll following the burning of Bilbo's effigy, but, apparently, student opinion regarding the wisdom of The Man's plans for the university had shifted.

Beyond turning public opinion against a radical overhaul of the state's system of higher education, the purge did strange things to the reputations of the men involved in the controversy. In June 1932, a board of trustees now loyal to Bilbo's successor, Martin Sennett Conner, reinstalled Hume as chancellor. By the end of the year, he had re-hired a number of the dismissed faculty members and secured the university's provisional re-accreditation by SACS. National publications credited Hume with his successful efforts to fend off "a menace to higher education" and his graceful handling of the situation.⁹⁵ To Mississippians and members of the university community, the chancellor who had saved Ole Miss from removal now had restored its status and dignity. That Hume would go down in history as a loyal, devoted, and faithful servant and defender of the university is fitting and unsurprising; there is tremendous irony, though, in the notion of Hume as protector of the sanctity of enlightened higher education.

In 1929, Hume had denounced the teaching of "[p]ernicious doctrines ... that are subversive of the best in our Christian civilization" and declared that "[a]cademic freedom is sometimes academic nonsense."⁹⁶ As an example of such "nonsense," he presented a hypothetical scenario in which a professor who "has no sympathy with the

⁹³ Graham, "Bilbo and the University," 104.

⁹⁴ Green, *The Man Bilbo*, 76.

⁹⁵ Graham, "Bilbo and the University," 122.

⁹⁶ Hume's statements about academic freedom were part of his 1929 biennial report of July, 1929 to the board of trustees and the legislature. Portions of the report were published in newspapers throughout the state. Reproduced in Jones, "Tenets and Attitudes of an Old-Time Teacher," 38-39.

sacredness of the home, as we know it, disregards the sanctity of the marriage relation and the responsibilities of life.” In this situation, he wrote, if the head of the institution failed in his duty to remove the offending professor, “the citizenship of the state should arise in wrath and righteous indignation and demand his immediate dismissal.” Another hypothetical presented a situation in which a professor “believes that Robert E. Lee was a traitor and teaches men so.” In this circumstance, Hume asked, “[o]ught not that chair of history to become instantly vacant?”⁹⁷ Hume’s re-installation as chancellor, on one level, may have represented a victory over political interference and external influence at the university, but his ideas about academic freedom were a menace of their own kind to higher education.

Careful examinations of Bilbo’s plans to implement the recommendations of the O’Shea study and to build a greater university for Mississippi have viewed The Man’s actions sympathetically. Hardy Poindexter Graham, in a thorough study of Bilbo and the University of Mississippi, has concluded that the belief “that Bilbo interfered with the state’s educational system in 1928 and in 1930 solely for personal and political reasons ... is substantially inaccurate.” Bilbo’s vision for the university and for higher education in Mississippi as a whole, Graham has argued, “was remarkably progressive and indicated that the governor possessed a keen insight into the problems plaguing higher education in the state.”⁹⁸ David Sansing, the author of histories of the university and of higher education in Mississippi, has written that “Bilbo did try to do right, so the evidence suggests, in reorganizing Mississippi’s system of higher education” and that

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁹⁸ Graham, “Bilbo and the University of Mississippi,” 124.

Bilbo “tried to do what needed to be done.”⁹⁹ That Bilbo has gone down in history not as a visionary of educational reform but as an agent of undue political interference and the man who imperiled the existence of the University of Mississippi has much to do with the means The Man used to carry out his design.

A. Wigfall Green, a professor of English who became a member of the faculty in the midst of the purge and enjoyed a distinguished career at the university, once noted ironically that “Mississippi yet wears mourning for the rape of education by The Man, who meant only to cherish it.” Green attributed the notoriety of Bilbo’s actions regarding to the university to The Man’s “methods.” While affirming the sincerity of The Man’s desire to improve education in the state, Green also wrote that it was “undeniable” that Bilbo ordered the keeping of a “secret record” and a “blacklist” of faculty who had “made themselves obnoxious.” Green also wrote that Bilbo, in the sincere “hope of improving” higher education in Mississippi, had “injected more politics” into a system already under too heavily under their influence.¹⁰⁰

The keeping of secret lists, the firing of enemies, and the blatant injection of politics into higher education all have contributed to the sense that Bilbo used, at the least, questionable means to pursue a desirable end. Scholars have long struggled, though, in assessing Bilbo’s actions, largely because they have struggled to untangle the style of The Man’s politics with their substance. If historians have been unable to reconcile Bilbo the reformer and Bilbo racist, perhaps this has something to do with the potentially radical implications of dramatic change in the style of the Wisconsin Idea in a place like Jim Crow Mississippi, where the cherished founding myth of white supremacy and the

⁹⁹ Sansing, *Making Haste Slowly*, 109-110.

¹⁰⁰ Green, *The Man Bilbo*, 73-77.

system of racial segregation mandated supreme loyalty. Bilbo's complicated place in the political history of Mississippi and the relation of the state to the rest of the South and the nation requires special comment.

V

In William Stryon's *Sophie's Choice*, Stingo, a Southerner from a genteel family, grapples with the demise of The Man. As a "right-thinking" Southerner, Stingo loathes Bilbo the "petty tyrant" for his "straightforward public promiscuous use of words like 'nigger,' 'coon,' [and] 'jigaboo.'" He expresses revulsion that The Man once referred to Mayor Fiorello La Guardia of New York as a "dago" and addressed a Jewish congressman as "Kike." Stingo blames Bilbo for "foully tarnish[ing] the image of the modern South ... and thus polluting the name of whatever was good and decent and even exemplary in the South." He finds The Man so vile that, upon reading a report of the advanced state of Bilbo's cancer, Stingo feels "awfully glad to see the old devil go." Even in the midst of his initial savoring of the irony of a man notorious for his use of poisonous words succumbing to cancer of the mouth, Stingo feels overtaken by a sense of "regret" over Bilbo's fate. In part the regret is a response to the agonizing death that he imagines The Man enduring. But the "odd and vagrant pang" emerges from the problem of making sense of Bilbo's career and reconciling its combined elements of the "enlightened principles" of "democratic idealism and honest concern for the common man," the exploitation of "the poor-white rednecks' ancient fear and hatred of the Negro," and the aggrandizement of "shoddy ambition and lust for power." As he ruminates on a haunting photograph of Bilbo dying in the Oschner Clinic in New

Orleans, Stingo comes to regard The Man not only as one of the “nastiest abettors of the hateful dogma” of the South’s racial politics, but also “one of its chief and most wretched victims.”¹⁰¹

When Nathan Landau, an American Jew, proposes a toast to Bilbo’s “slow, protracted, agonizing death” and compares The Man to Adolph Hitler, Stingo objects by exclaiming, “*Of course* I would toast the death of Hitler. But that’s a fucking different matter! Bilbo’s not Hilter!” Stingo eventually finds himself listing “the series of important reforms” that Bilbo brought to Mississippi. In response, Nathan asks, “You want me to point out that the glory of the Third Reich was a highway system unsurpassed in the world and that Mussolini made the trains run on time?” Unable to answer this retort, Stingo listens as Nathan revokes his standing as “a *good* Southerner ... a man emancipated, one who had somehow managed to escape the curse of bigotry which history has bequeathed to the region” and finds, in Stingo’s refusal to join in the “execration of Bilbo,” devastating evidence of his “‘ingrained’ and ‘unregenerate’ racism.” Stingo describes feeling “vulnerable” and “engulfed by swift despair” at Nathan’s condemnation. He recalls that he “began to feel certain crucial underpinnings of my very soul shudder and disintegrate” and that “his heart fairly shriveled away at these words.” The self-acknowledgement that his defense of Bilbo had emerged from “regions of deep asininity” makes Nathan’s denunciation all the more “unutterably crushing” for Stingo.¹⁰²

Robert Brinkmeyer has analyzed Styron’s treatment of the debate between Stingo and Nathan in the long context of the Southern writer attempting to explain the region

¹⁰¹ William Styron, *Sophie’s Choice* (New York: Random House, 1979), 189-191.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 204-208.

and its people “with the ghostly presence of European Fascism lurking on the cultural horizon.”¹⁰³ For Brinkmeyer, Stingo’s inability to argue against the equivalency of Bilbo and Southern racial politics with Hitler and Nazism demonstrates the “fundamental irrationality” of his “cherished southern allegiances.”¹⁰⁴ Thus when Stingo the narrator, thirty years removed from his confrontation with Nathan, acknowledges the inanity and irrationality of his defense of Bilbo, he evidences a level of maturity in terms of understanding the ethical and moral responsibilities of the individual.¹⁰⁵ It is significant that Styron makes use of Bilbo, a man whose political style combined vile racial rhetoric with the use of the spoils-system and the black-listing of enemies, to examine the process whereby the “good” Southerner grapples with the region’s past. Indeed, no Southerner has more effectively served as an embodiment of the most depraved aspects of the region’s political culture.

In 1936, Hugh Russell Fraser wrote in the *American Mercury* that Bilbo’s wretchedness stood him alone even among “the gaudy crew of cracker paladins who have cast their puckish shadows on Southern demagogic history since the downfall of the Confederacy.” Fraser compared The Man unfavorably to politicians such as Ben Tillman and Coleman Blease, arguing that Bilbo had delivered nothing to the voters of Mississippi beyond “thirty years’ orgiastic titillation of the political glandular centers.”¹⁰⁶ For Fraser, the substance of Bilbo’s policies did nothing to explain his enduring popularity in Mississippi; The Man’s appeal owed itself entirely to his ability to make “the musks of juicy scandal and of persecution for a holy cause [cling] to his glamorously

¹⁰³ Robert H. Brinkmeyer, Jr., *The Fourth Ghost: White Southern Writers and European Fascism, 1930-1950* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009), 2.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 319.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 324.

¹⁰⁶ Hugh Russell Fraser, “Bilbo: Mississippi’s Mouthpiece,” *American Mercury*, XXXVIII (August, 1936): 424.

ascetic body” and to a style of speech and campaigning which could “pack more sulphur into a string of adjectives than any pietist since the Great Revival of 1800.”¹⁰⁷ Fraser’s attack included the kind of physical description of Bilbo that many discussions of The Man have featured in one form or another :

"He wore the flaming red tie and hard straw hat of current fashion, and affected the slightly soiled linen suits which in those days set the cross-roads town sports apart from the mere nigger-beating yokelry. But these touches of rustic elegance had their charm for the sartorially starved sharecroppers, and, to atone any offense their frivolous quality may have given, young Mr. Bilbo also had the thin-lipped mouth, the beady eyes, the sullen frown, and the hatchet-hacked features which pass in the Deep South for symbols of evangelical piety."¹⁰⁸

The passage used Bilbo’s clothing, at once, to place him below any class of natural or legitimate aristocracy in the state while at the same time distinguishing him from Mississippi’s rural poor. This made him, in other words, no gentleman, but also an inauthentic or disingenuous representative of the plain folk. Fraser’s description of The Man’s physical features made his face and countenance the outward manifestations of moral degeneracy. Lastly, the mentions of “evangelical piety” and the “nigger-beating yokelry” suggested the susceptibility of Bilbo’s constituency to emotional and irrational appeals to myriad prejudices. Every negative stereotype of the Southern demagogue appeared in Fraser’s attack on Bilbo.

By the time of his death, Bilbo’s racial rhetoric had made him a national pariah. After The Man had warned Mississippians that they were “sleeping on a volcano” and called on “every red-blooded white man to use any means to keep the niggers away from the polls” during a 1946 senatorial campaign, his colleagues in the U. S. Senate blocked

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 427.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 425-426. In the era of Fraser’s attack, numerous attacks on Bilbo appeared in prominent journals. See, for example: Louis Cochran, "Mussolini of Mississippi," *Outlook and Independent* CXXXI (June 17, 1931): 209-11; and Raymond Gram Swing, "Bilbo the Rabble-Rouser," *Nation*, CXL (1935): 123-125.

Bilbo from taking his seat.¹⁰⁹ In the months between the 1946 campaign and Bilbo's death on August 21, 1947, the *New York Times*, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, *Boston Globe*, and the *Los Angeles Times* all editorialized for his removal from the senate, and the *Saturday Evening Post* called The Man the nation's "most notorious merchant of hatred."¹¹⁰ Bilbo's reputation has not improved over time. Because he so neatly fits what Stingo calls the "shingle-flat cartoon ... the papier-mâché stock villain from Dixie," invoking The Man and one of his numerous outrages easily and forcefully provides an example of the region's history of racist politics.¹¹¹ In 2014, for example, when the journalist Ta-Nehisi Coates wrote an article in *The Atlantic* advocating reparations to African-Americans, Bilbo appeared in the second paragraph, described as "a Mississippi senator and proud Klansman," blustering and shouting about the "best way to keep the nigger from voting."¹¹²

Bilbo's political style and rhetoric was both so appalling and so striking that historians have struggled to separate his substantive policies and achievements from his vile speech and flamboyant behavior. The historian George Tindall credited The Man for a strong record of progressivism during his first gubernatorial term, while also describing Bilbo as "a man whose political career began under the cloud of attempted bribery and progressed through accusations of fornication, adultery, graft, and slander." Tindall judged Bilbo's second term as governor much less favorably, pronouncing it a series of "fruitless wrangles with the legislature over proposals for highways, education, and other programs." The Man's legacy to Mississippi, Tindall concluded, was "the unabashed style

¹⁰⁹ John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 2; Robert L. Fleegler, "Theodore G. Bilbo and the Decline of Public Racism, 1938-1947," *Journal of Mississippi History* 66 (Spring, 2006): 9.

¹¹⁰ Fleegler, "Bilbo and the Decline of Public Racism," 18, 25.

¹¹¹ Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 190.

¹¹² Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations," *The Atlantic* 313, no. 5, (June, 2014): 56.

of redneck politics" that "continuously bedeviled" the state.¹¹³ Alan Brinkley has written with apparent bewilderment about the appeal of "a short and by no means handsome man" with "a magnetic personality (particularly appealing, apparently to women--his romantic liaisons were legion and fabled) and a gift for rabble-rousing rhetoric matched by no other politician in the state." It was The Man's "political style, more than the substance of his program," Brinkley concludes, that distinguished Bilbo.¹¹⁴ Chester M. Morgan has used the terms "redneck" and "liberal" effectively to portray The Man as a politician whose career combined a flamboyantly uncivil style with a substantially progressive record on social and economic issues. Thus, for Morgan, while The Man's legislative record made him perhaps the most liberal senator of his era, Bilbo's incivility and vile racial language marked him down in history not as a great progressive liberal, but as a pariah whom no national liberal would claim as one of his own.¹¹⁵

A comparison of the way historians have treated Bilbo and Huey Long of Louisiana reveals the extent to which The Man's exceptionally vile behavior and speech have poisoned the legacy of his policy and achievements. Adam Fairclough, for example, while noting that Long's power "built upon Louisiana's well-established traditions of political thuggery, electoral chicanery, flagrant disregard for civil liberties, and racial oppression," places Long in a separate category from politicians like Bilbo. Whereas Long was a politician whose "principal rhetorical targets were the 'thieving' oil companies, the 'lying' newspapers, and the 'crooked' politicians," Bilbo belonged to the group of politicians who "deliberately stirred up white racial hatred in a vicious and

¹¹³ George Brown Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), 24, 233-234.

¹¹⁴ Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and the Great Depression* (New York: Vintage, 1983), 218-219.

¹¹⁵ Chester M. Morgan, *Redneck Liberal: Theodore G. Bilbo and the New Deal* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), 1-4, 247-253.

calculating manner.” This distinction not only makes Long’s racism appear “subdued” in comparison to Bilbo’s, but it also suggests that while “nigger-baiting” was the “occasional political device” for a politician of Long’s type, it was the principal source of “public appeal” for a politician of Bilbo’s type.¹¹⁶ Here, several clear effects of The Man’s racist and rhetorical excesses become apparent. First, the vileness of Bilbo’s racial language, by its mere power to shock and appall, has suggested that racial antagonism and black-baiting motivated The Man and his supporters more than the spirit or promise of reform. Second, Bilbo’s language and the hatreds that it both tapped and fueled represent an evil that requires condemnation and eradication. Finally, if The Man’s speech and political behavior were unredeemable, it becomes increasingly difficult to recover any noble or useful elements of his substantive policies. No wonder, then, that the “good” Southerner, like the fictional Stingo, or particularly the “good” Mississippian, feels compelled to distance himself from anything that could be construed as a defense of Bilbo or any element of Bilboism.¹¹⁷

The objective of this extended discussion of Bilbo’s political style and its effect on his legacy has been to reveal patterns which may be useful in recovering and

¹¹⁶ Adam Fairclough, *Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 21-22. This explicit contrast between Long’s use of black-baiting as “the small change of campaign rhetoric” with black-baiting’s place at the “core of [Bilbo’s] appeal” also appears in Anthony J. Badger, “Huey Long and the New Deal,” in Stephen W. Baskerville and Ralph W. Willett, eds., *Nothing to Fear: New Perspectives on American in the Thirties* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), 73. William Ivy Hair states more plainly that “By comparison with many contemporary southern politicians, especially Theodore Bilbo of Mississippi and Eugene Talmadge of Georgia, [Long] was not a racist demagogue; he came to power by appealing to class antagonism, not hatred of blacks.” William Ivy Hair, *The Kingfish and His Realm: The Life and Times of Huey P. Long* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), 170.

¹¹⁷ A telling and typical example of the “good” or “right-thinking” Mississippian denouncing Bilbo can be found in Curtis Wilkie, *Dixie: A Personal Odyssey through Events that Shaped the Modern South* (New York: Touchstone, 2001), 57-60. Wilkie provides a three-page account of various outrages from The Man’s career and describes Bilbo, a man whose “name could have been invented by Faulkner,” as someone who “emerged from the mists of Pearl River County early in the twentieth century” and as “a racist and scoundrel who latched on to the burgeoning populist movement.” Wilkie also remembers his mother referring to Bilbo “as a ‘disgusting demagogue’” and exclaiming, “Hallelujah!” when The Man died.

understanding both the general history of reform efforts in Mississippi and the more specific history of reform efforts at its state university. In 1931, at the height of outrage over the Bilbo purge, Clarence E. Cason described Mississippi as a “bulwark of passive resistance.” Conditions in the state, he wrote, had produced a political culture “held in abeyance between antiquity on the one hand and immaturity on the other.”¹¹⁸ The political culture of the state seemed unlikely to produce visionaries who could clearly envision the future, let alone master it. Cason quite accurately captured the key dynamics at play in the failed effort to reform the state university. Modernization of the university was necessary because the institution was outmoded and had fallen behind its peer institutions in the rest of the South and the rest of the country. As the O’Shea study and other investigations of 1925-1927 had demonstrated, the university, with its obsolete curriculum, poorly-trained faculty, remote location, decaying physical plant, and outmoded ideas about service, was an institution wholly insufficient for the needs of a modern and developing state. In a word, the university was antiquated. Bilbo’s vision for a greater University of Mississippi aimed not merely to renovate the existing institution, but to make an entirely new kind of one with the ability to push the state forward into a new future of economic prosperity and development. That Bilbo’s political style, with its vile language, flamboyant behavior, and corrupt methods, offended the “good” and “right-thinking” people of accrediting boards and respected publications has made easier the work of conservatives and traditionalists in fending off The Man’s specific plans for the university and tarnishing the general idea of reforming the institution. The failed effort to build a greater University of Mississippi thus fits into the larger pattern that Cason described. Because reformers in the style of Bilbo have carried out their efforts in

¹¹⁸ Clarence E. Cason, “The Mississippi Imbroglio,” *Virginia Quarterly Review*, VII (Spring, 1931): 229.

a style some might call politically immature—others might use another term—the protection of the antique and traditional in Mississippi too often has come to appear to be the protection of the decent. If even radical reformers were incapable of envisioning a future that abandoned or undermined white supremacy, the project of making a modern state university in Mississippi would have to adhere to the state's most cherished founding myth and to established ideas about what Ole Miss was.

CHAPTER 5

OLE MISS'S NEW DEAL: BUILDING WHITE DEMOCRACY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI, 1933-1941

I

On the afternoon of September 19, 1936, 3,000 spectators sat in the “sulky humidity” of a “beaming sun” and watched the University of Mississippi’s football team defeat the visiting team from Union University in Jackson, Tennessee, 45 to 0.¹ The game was the first that the football team at the University of Mississippi played as the “Ole Miss Rebels.” Commentators at the university were unable to resist the play of words made possible by a game which saw the Rebels maul a squad from Union; one account described the game as a reenactment of the Battle of Bull Run.² Despite its auspicious beginning, the 1936 season was not a spectacular one for the University of Mississippi’s football team. It finished the year with five wins, five losses, and two ties. In 1937, the team’s record dropped to four wins, five losses, and one tie. In general though, the era in which the university’s football team became the Ole Miss Rebels was one of success, growth, and increasing prominence. On New Year’s Day of 1936, the 1935 team, which set a school record with nine wins, played against Catholic University in the prestigious Orange Bowl in Miami.³ Even the mediocre squads of 1936 and 1937 gained national attention for their strong performances in games in Philadelphia and Washington, D. C.

¹ “Ole Miss Rolls Over Union in Opener, 45-0,” *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 20 September 1936.

² *Ole Miss*, Volume XLI, 1937, 194.

³ Lawrence Wells, *Ole Miss Football* (Oxford, MS: Sports Yearbook Company, 1980), 50-51.

and saw Frank “Bruiser” Kinard earn recognition as an All-America.⁴ Between 1938 and 1941, the Rebels amassed a record of thirty-one wins, eight losses, and one tie and emerged as a power.⁵ On November 29, 1941, 28,000 spectators packed the university’s Hemingway Stadium to watch Ole Miss play a “brilliantly bitter game” against Mississippi State for the Southeastern Conference championship.⁶ Although that day ended with a loss to the hated rivals from Starkville, the university community would remember the pre-World War II years as a “ ‘Golden Era’ of Ole Miss football.”⁷

While Ole Miss was becoming the Rebels, the University of Mississippi was benefiting from the largesse of the federal government. Through President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal, the university received well over one-and-a-quarter-million dollars in direct aid between 1933 and 1941. Federal money paid for the football stadium that fans packed to watch the Rebels play for the Southeastern Conference championship. It also paid for a swimming pool, a student union, an astronomical observatory, dormitories, faculty cottages, and over a dozen fraternity and sorority houses. In other ways, federal money remade the university’s campus by funding basic maintenance projects, providing for landscaping, and paving roads and walkways. Beyond these and additional construction projects, the New Deal employed students whose poverty otherwise would have forced them to suspend their studies and expanded the university’s clerical and research staffs.⁸

⁴ Wells, *Ole Miss Football*, 52-54; Sorrels and Cavagnaro, *Ole Miss Rebels*, 114-119.

⁵ Sorrels and Cavagnaro, *Ole Miss Rebels*, 120-129.

⁶ “State Victor, 6 to 0, over Ole Miss Foes to Take First Crown,” *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 30 November 1941.

⁷ *Ole Miss*, Volume LI, 1947, 283, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

⁸ According to Davis Douglas Buchanan, Jr., federal money used in construction projects alone at the university under the New Deal surpassed \$1,250,000. Buchanan’s calculations do not include aid that

This chapter examines Ole Miss's New Deal. In this era, when the university branded itself as the Rebels, it was New Deal programs and relationships with the federal government that enabled the building up of the institution. Federal money presented opportunities for two chancellors not merely to carry the university through the Great Depression, but to turn an inadequate and decaying physical plant into an expansive and modern one. The promise of grants, matching funds, and low-interest loans spurred renovation and construction at the university and allowed the institution to accommodate increasing enrollments and broaden its offerings. With federal money there for the spending, administrators drew up lists of repairs to be made and buildings to be erected, and abstract worries that modernization would carry with it the elevation of the material and the degradation of the spiritual wafted away into the atmosphere. Between 1933 and 1941, in the form of bricks and mortar and concrete and steel, the New Deal brought an ambitiously modern, more democratic, and securely white future to the University of Mississippi.

This chapter treats Ole Miss's New Deal as a case study in the ways white southerners strengthened Jim Crow by using federal money and programs to design a future that combined the expansion of white democracy with the exclusion of African Americans. Ole Miss's use of the New Deal is one example of what Jason Morgan Ward has called the "long segregationist movement." Ward has argued that the white supremacists who defended "white democracy" against challenges to segregation were

students at the university received through FERA and NYA programs. Buchanan's study of federal spending at the university under the New Deal bases its numbers on a combination of local reports and university records. Davis Douglas Buchanan, Jr., "A Million Dollars in Concrete and Steel: Federal Aid to the University of Mississippi in the New Deal Era," (M. A. thesis, University of Mississippi, 1997), 25-75. For the years 1935-1940 alone, David Sansing cites "more than a million dollars" in federal money coming to the university. David G. Sansing, *The University of Mississippi: A Sesquicentennial History* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), 252.

doing more than resorting to “knee-jerk insurgency”; instead, they were engaging in a “carefully constructed political project” to protect “a racial worldview and a political order.”⁹ Though this chapter responds to Ward’s call for a “new periodization that complicates the linear narrative of scholarship that dates organized segregationist opposition from the 1950s,” it breaks with two components of Ward’s argument.¹⁰ First, in describing the worldview of white supremacists, Ward writes of “longstanding anxieties” and “intertwined fears of social equality and political parity.”¹¹ In other words, this is a narrative of defensive white supremacists imagining the future through their fears, not their aspirations—a story of politicians and policy-makers who sought to use the Democratic Party to take “refuge,” and to make use of “resistance politics” in their “struggle to defend the color line” and the “segregated status quo.”¹² Second, Ward portrays the New Deal as a period of “racially charged confrontations” between southern and national Democrats that called into question the “mythical permanency” of white supremacy and “fueled southern unease with the changes, rumored and real, taking place around them.”¹³ Ward’s analysis of the meaning of the New Deal for white supremacists adheres to ones made in other influential works. Glenda Gilmore, for example, has argued that New Deal represented a pivot when white supremacists who had attempted to extend and export segregation in the 1910s and 1920s retreated and “circled their wagons to defend Jim Crow.”¹⁴

⁹ Jason Morgan Ward, *Defending White Democracy: The Making of a Segregationist Movement and the Remaking of Racial Politics, 1936-1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 7, 4.

¹² *Ibid.*, 2, 6, 2, 4.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁴ Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950* (New York: Norton, 2008), 6. Other key works that have emphasized the extent to which the New Deal represented an early threat to Jim Crow include: Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal*

This chapter, however, tells the story of white supremacists' enthusiastic embrace of the New Deal as a mechanism to build up white democracy; it is not a story about anxiety, defensiveness, or preservation. Instead of trying to shelter or protect segregation against external threats, students and administrators at the University of Mississippi sought to build a greater university that served a broader white community and moved beyond the problems of exclusivity and class tension of the institution's past. In this vision, white supremacists confidently harnessed the New Deal for what it made possible as opposed to fearing it for what it threatened to challenge. This chapter thus follows Ira Katznelson in thinking of the New Deal as an era when southerners "did more than defend the racial status quo" and, indeed, "fortified Jim Crow."¹⁵ Operating from a position of security and safety, Katznelson argues, southern New Dealers seized "a golden opportunity" and "almost giddily propelled the New Deal's radical economic policies, a program that offered the South the chance to escape its colonized status keeping its racial order safe."¹⁶ As the position of southerners in Congress became increasingly significant strategically, the region "became the self-conscious arbiter of what could, and what could not, become law."¹⁷ If, as Ward suggests, some forward-thinking white supremacists looked with concern at the possible racial implications of some New Deal policies, Katznelson's work demonstrates that the political realities of the era offered countervailing evidence that white southerners were the masters of their

Era (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), chapter 2; Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), chapter 5; John Egerton, *Speak Now against the Day: The Generation before the Civil Rights Movement in the South* (New York: Knopf, 1994), 104-120; and Kari Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt and the End of the Solid South, 1932-1968* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), chapter 1.

¹⁵ Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2013), 163.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 158.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 192.

own future when it came to the making of federal policy on race and economics. By enabling southerners to build up opportunities for whites, the New Deal strengthened white democracy and put further socio-economic distance between white and black southerners.

This chapter uses the interpretive lens developed by Jason Scott Smith to connect the physical building up of the university to the emergence of a new set of ideas about funding the institution and to the alteration and expansion of the university's identity. Smith has argued that the public-works programs of the New Deal "revolutionized the priorities of the American state" by "radically transforming the physical landscape, political system, and economy of the United States." The benefits of the new physical nation that the New Deal built enabled reformers to construct "the intellectual scaffolding to justify the federal government's investment in public works." The "far-reaching federal efforts" necessary to fund public works and "the long-term impact of the infrastructure itself" legitimized, both "intellectually and physically," a new kind of state and a new form of economic development.¹⁸ In the South, a region which lagged behind the rest of the nation in indexes of economic development like mileage of paved roads, rates of public health, and the availability of electricity, the kind of revolution that Smith describes on a national scale was particularly impactful. As Gavin Wright has noted, New Deal programs that built up the South not only carried "immediate effects," but they also "set the stage" for the region's "rapid economic growth during and after World War II."¹⁹ As much as the public-works revolution pointed toward a new future of development and

¹⁸ Jason Scott Smith, *Building New Deal Liberalism: The Political Economy of Public Works, 1933-1956* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), quotations from 1, 136, 3.

¹⁹ Gavin Wright, "The New Deal and the Modernization of the South," *Federal History*, 2 (January 2010): 72.

building, New Deal programs adhered to and even strengthened existing “gendered and racial boundaries.” Thus as public-works projects built up a new nation physically and the New Deal opened new worlds of possibility for millions of white, male Americans, some traditional hierarchies remained intact or became more firmly established.²⁰

On a smaller scale, Ole Miss’s New Deal provides an example of an institution building itself into one that was more modern and more democratic in its appeal and service to a larger percentage of the white population, but also more firmly connected and committed to white supremacy. Fifteen years ago, Charles W. Eagles commented on the “asymmetry” and “imbalance” of civil rights scholarship which has “assumed that little remains to be learned about the segregationists or that they are simply too unattractive or unimportant to warrant examination.”²¹ This chapter is an attempt to provide one example of how segregationists built worlds they deemed worth protecting. Only by taking seriously the future that the building of segregationist institutions like the University of Mississippi seemed to make possible can scholars understand the intensity of white opposition to the dismantling of Jim Crow.

During the New Deal, the University of Mississippi grew physically, expanded the scope of its purpose, and broadened its constituency. The availability of federal money did not merely enable the university to expand and upgrade its physical plant; it contributed to a larger spirit of optimism and ambition for the institution’s future. In this way, the history of the university during the New Deal represented a higher stage of the process that began during Theodore Bilbo’s second gubernatorial term (1928-1932).

Though Bilbo’s plan to build a greater institution at Jackson failed, New Deal money

²⁰ Smith, *Building New Deal Liberalism*, 15.

²¹ Charles W. Eagles, “Toward New Histories of the Civil Rights Era,” *Journal of Southern History*, 66 (November 2000): 842.

funded a program of expansion, development, and democratization that reflected the spirit of The Man's vision for the University of Mississippi. As the institution expanded its physical capacity to educate a larger number of Mississippians and emphasized direct service and outreach to the state, it became a site for the building of white democracy. The promotion and branding of Ole Miss's athletic program, particularly its football team, was a key component of a greater plan to connect the university more directly to a larger percentage of Mississippians and to increase enrollment by raising the profile of the institution throughout the South and the nation. As the institution used federal money to expand and to plan more ambitious development, it chose a nickname and crafted an identity that appealed to a national appetite for local color. With Mississippi's place in the political order of the New Deal secure, the sports-pages of regional and national dailies of the 1930s were places safe for Rebels. Federal money and the political realities of the New Deal not only enabled the building of a greater University of Mississippi; they also seemed to ratify a vision for the institution's future that strengthened white supremacy and drew a clearer color line as the university expanded the number of white Mississippians it educated, served, and welcomed to its community. This chapter thus frames the simultaneous federally-funded expansion of the University of Mississippi and the creation of the Ole Miss Rebels not as a paradoxical, ironic, or strange coincidence, but as two parts of a logical, interconnected, and cohesive vision for the institution's future.

II

One salutary effect of the controversy surrounding Governor Theodore G. Bilbo's

failed plan to remove the University of Mississippi to Jackson was the special appropriation of \$1,600,000 the state legislature granted the university in 1928. Within a year, the university had begun planning and constructing a hospital, a gravel well, a new building for the law school, an enlarged cafeteria, a gymnasium, a dormitory for women, and six dormitories for male students.²² While the boom in building that followed the special appropriation allowed for the expansion and improvement of the physical plant at Oxford, the necessity of such projects demonstrated how severely the state had neglected its university over the years. Even after the new construction of 1928 and 1929, the university lacked buildings for the departments of engineering, physics, biology, geology, music, journalism, commerce, pharmacy, and art. The new dormitories still could not accommodate all of the university's students, and faculty requests for housing frequently went unmet.²³ In a 1929 report to the state legislature, Chancellor Alfred Hume wrote that the difficulty of securing reliable funding from the state had created a physical plant that was both practically insufficient and aesthetically unappealing. Decades of meager legislative appropriations had prevented the university from acquiring "the physical equipment commensurate with the growth and development of the institution." Irregular funding led to the planning, suspension, and resumption of construction and landscaping projects over a number of years and under different architects and builders. The result was a campus that Hume gingerly described as "lacking somewhat in complete harmony and a thoroughly orderly and satisfactory arrangement."²⁴

The onset of the Great Depression did not threaten to close the University of

²² University of Mississippi, *Biennial Report of the University of Mississippi to the Legislature of the State and to the Board of Trustees of the State University and Colleges, July 1, 1927 to July 1, 1929* (July, 1929), 10, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

²³ *Ibid.*, 54-55.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

Mississippi. It ensured there would be no more special appropriations from the state legislature, though, and led to dramatic reductions in annual funding. For the fiscal year beginning on July 1, 1932, for example, legislative appropriations to Mississippi's institutions of higher learning declined by 42% from the previous term. At the university, these cutbacks cost two faculty members their jobs and led to a 25% decrease in salaries for employees of the institution. Faculty took on heavier teaching loads as unfilled positions stayed vacant, and the university was only able to continue offering certain courses by enlarging their size and by hiring inexperienced and lowly-paid instructors and graduate students to teach the classes. Some courses and programs did not survive the cuts in funding. The School of Engineering discontinued its program in electrical engineering, the School of Commerce and Business eliminated its course in cotton classing, and the College of Liberal Arts reduced its offerings in sociology.²⁵

Broad patterns of under-funding and inefficiency in Mississippi's system of higher education added to the negative effects of dramatic reductions in state appropriations. In 1933, the state's Board of Trustees for State Institutions of Higher Learning remarked with alarm that some buildings on Mississippi's public campuses had "stood for twenty years without a coat of outside paint and thousands of dollars will be necessary to restore property that could have preserved with a few hundred dollars if applied where first needed." Given that earlier deficiencies in funding and maintenance had led to such a situation, the reduced Depression-era appropriations were plainly insufficient "to take care of any appreciable part of badly needed repairs and

²⁵ State of Mississippi, Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning, *Biennial Report of the Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning from July 1, 1932 to June 30, 1933* (July, 1933), 6, 9, 49, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

renovations.” The trustees also remarked with regret upon the “all the confusion caused by the present method” of allocating funds and noted that inconsistencies in how the state legislature used fiscal and calendar years had created a system by which, technically, all state-supported institutions of learning would either have to close on New Year’s Day of each year or “violate the law daily until the Legislature makes the new biennial appropriation.”²⁶

These patterns in the history and character of state funding for the University of Mississippi provide an essential context for understanding the significance of the New Deal specifically and federal money more generally to the institution. By the onset of the Great Depression, the university was an institution whose campus displayed physical evidence of the negative effects of chronic under-funding and irregular patterns of appropriations. Even after a flurry of building in 1928 and 1929, the university still lacked many basic components of a flagship institution of higher learning. The coming of hard economic times meant a dramatic drop in funding levels that in the first place had proven insufficient to provide for even basic repairs and regular maintenance. Money from the federal government would mean several important things for the university. First, it provided immediate funding for a university in need of basic projects of maintenance and construction. Second, it brought relief for a population of students whose poverty threatened to suspend their educations. Lastly, because New Deal programs required matching funds, the promise of federal money spurred an often reluctant and austere state legislature to allocate money to an institution it had insufficiently and irregularly funded in the past.

New Deal money first came to the University of Mississippi through the Civil

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

Works Administration (CWA). The CWA was the first federal program to engage in direct unemployment-relief and hiring without working through state and local intermediaries or private entities. It put some four million Americans to work during its brief existence from November 1933 to March 1934.²⁷ In November of 1933, Chancellor Alfred Hume presented the Board of Trustees with a plan composed by John L. Gainey, the university's business manager, to acquire and use CWA funds on campus. Though Gainey's plan brought a relatively small initial allotment to the university, it established important patterns in how the university sought federal money and primed trustees and the state legislature to allocate more funds to the institution. Hume used Gainey's plan, which included a detailed accounting of how the university would spend the money to make repairs to the physical plant and to beautify the campus, to ensure the institution received its "proper share" of federal money. By bringing such a plan to the trustees, the university was not only actively seeking federal money, but also pressuring the board to deliver the required matching funds from the state legislature. Importantly, this established a pattern which tied the pursuit of funding to planning for the future of the institution and used the promise of federal money to compel the state to make appropriations. The strategy worked, and the university received \$16,000. Half of that sum came directly from the CWA; half of it came from a matching allocation by the state. Between December 1933 and February 1934, the CWA employed approximately 75 men on the university's grounds. \$12,000 of the total \$16,000 went directly to hiring workers.²⁸ Wages for laborers began at 40 cents an hour, and workers could not work

²⁷ Bonnie Fox Schwartz, *The Civil Works Administration: The Business of Emergency Employment in the New Deal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), vii-x.

²⁸ "CWA Will Begin Campus Work This Week," *Mississippian*, 16 December 1933; Buchanan, "A Million Dollars in Concrete and Steel," 27

more than 30 hours per week. V. C. Cagle, a graduate student in engineering at the university, served as foreman and supervised the laborers.²⁹ The workers were a mixed group of students from the university, unemployed people from surrounding Lafayette County, and unemployed veterans of the U. S. armed forces.³⁰

The crews of unskilled workers accomplished a variety of basic but badly needed projects. One such task involved the painting of a large number of buildings. From the Lyceum, the university's antebellum administration building, down to its laundry facility, structures across campus received their first coatings of paint in "many years."³¹ Workers used 36 gallons of paint on the columns of the Lyceum alone.³² Basic repairs to Peabody Hall, the Lyceum, the building for the department of chemistry, and fifteen university-owned faculty cottages brought a number of neglected structures into serviceable condition.³³ Work on the laundry included the adding of floor space that increased the facility's capacity and the erection of separate rooms for dry-cleaning and pressing. The expansion of this particular facility led the *Mississippian* to boast that the university possessed "one of the most modern and best equipped laundries of any school in the South." The removal of two decrepit affairs, an abandoned kitchen and pump-house,

²⁹ "Many Improvements Are Made on Campus by CWA Workmen," *Mississippian*, 13 January 1934.

³⁰ The precise composition of the laborers is unclear. Various articles in the *Mississippian* identified veterans, students, and the unemployed population of Lafayette County as preferred groups in the hiring of workers. Enough veterans worked on the project that the American Legion post of Lafayette County passed a resolution honoring the local supervisors of the program for giving veterans "first choice" in the hiring process. For that reference to the American Legion resolution, see: "Many Improvements Are Made on Campus by CWA Workmen," *Mississippian*, 13 January 1934. For a reference to the unemployed of Lafayette County as a referred group in hiring, see: "\$16,000 To Be Spent on Campus by CWA," *Mississippian*, 9 December 1933. For a reference to students as a preferred group in hiring, see: "CWA Will Begin Campus Work This Week," *Mississippian*, 16 December 1933.

³¹ "\$16,000 To Be Spent on Campus by CWA," *Mississippian*, 9 December 1933; Quotation from "Many Improvements Are Made on Campus by CWA Workmen," *Mississippian*, 13 January 1934.

³² "CWA Work Almost Ended on Campus," *Mississippian*, 3 February 1934.

³³ "\$16,000 To Be Spent on Campus by CWA," *Mississippian*, 9 December 1933; "CWA Work Almost Ended on Campus," *Mississippian*, 3 February 1934.

eliminated two unsightly structures from the campus and opened space for new construction projects.³⁴

The most visible effect of CWA work at the university was the beautification of the campus. Painting buildings which had not received a fresh coat of paint for years or decades, making rudimentary repairs to buildings and homes, and removing collapsed and abandoned structures addressed basic aesthetic problems on a campus that quite visibly betrayed its state of disrepair. The planting of 1,800 shrubs fundamentally altered the appearance and atmosphere of the university. Much of this beautification occurred in the areas in front of the hospital, the building for the graduate school, the cafeteria, the gymnasium, and the new dormitories that the university had built with the 1928 special appropriation. Planting this new area of the campus made it more aesthetically pleasing and more effectively integrated it with the older sections around the Lyceum. When CWA projects at the university concluded in February 1934, the *Mississippian* remarked that the workers had produced “a very different and much more scenic campus.”³⁵ This early stage of New Deal activity at the school represented a key phase in the process of transforming the University of Mississippi from a place where even the chancellor worried about the aesthetic qualities of its campus to a place whose scenic landscaping would become a defining feature of its self-image and national reputation. The university’s first experience with the New Deal, though modest in scale, had been a thoroughly satisfying one if judged by the unanimously positive comments it elicited.

A parting benefit from the CWA came early in the spring of 1934 when the Mississippi legislature matched \$200,000 in CWA funding in a package to repair public

³⁴ “Many Improvements Are Made on Campus by CWA Workmen,” *Mississippian*, 13 January 1934; “Laundry Allotment Increases For This Year,” *Mississippian*, 22 September 1934.

³⁵ “CWA Work Almost Ended on Campus,” *Mississippian*, 3 February 1934.

buildings across the state. The State Repair Commission allocated \$100,000 of that money to Mississippi's institutions of higher learning. Later that spring, the legislature matched a Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) grant of \$65,000 for repairs to the buildings of the state's colleges and university. All told, the Board of Trustees for State Institutions of Higher Learning was able to allocate \$230,000 for building repairs at Mississippi's colleges and university during the spring and summer of 1934 alone.³⁶ Over the summer of 1934, the University of Mississippi benefited tremendously from its share of this round of funding. Buildings that earlier CWA work had left untouched or only minimally improved now received thorough overhauls. The renovation of Ricks Hall, the women's dormitory, included the painting of floors, the re-plastering of walls, and the adding of closets to individual rooms. The *Mississippian* made particular note of this final component of the renovations; the absence of closets had apparently made life "extremely inconvenient" for its past inhabitants. Workers renovated one male dormitory "from top to bottom." A number of classroom buildings received new floors and fresh coats of paint, and workers converted several structures into living quarters for faculty and staff. By the beginning of classes in the fall of 1934, the *Mississippian* could note that "at the present time every building on the campus is in an excellent state of repairs."³⁷

Beyond its role in funding repairs and stimulating spending by the legislature, FERA enabled students in need of financial assistance to remain at the university and helped to build up the workforce of the institution. Beginning in February 1934, FERA grants made part-time employment available to students at the university. FERA wages

³⁶ State of Mississippi, Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning, *Biennial Report of the Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning 1934-1935 to the State Legislature* (July, 1935), 9, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

³⁷ "University Gets Quarter Million For Improvement," *Mississippian*, 22 September 1934.

paid 30 cents per hour, and an eligible student could earn up to \$20 in an individual month and up to \$15 on a monthly average. Students qualified for FERA employment by demonstrating their need for financial assistance and being in good academic standing. Hiring practices favored students who had dropped out of their programs due to financial difficulties or who were at risk of having to suspend their studies.³⁸ By October of 1934, FERA monthly grants of \$1,965 provided for the employment of 153 students at the University of Mississippi. The university's Faculty Committee for Student Employment, headed by Dr. William Lee Kennon, handled FERA applications and oversaw the work of qualified students. The 116 male and 37 female students employed under FERA grants were engaged in a wide range of activities.³⁹ Under Lee Baggett, the university's supervisor of buildings and grounds, FERA students worked "as carpenters, masons and general handy men." Others performed clerical work in various departments and offices and assisted faculty in grading and research. In the university's dining halls, students served as "cashiers, clerks, and waiters."⁴⁰

Although both the CWA and FERA operated on campus for relatively brief periods, the two programs had significant effects for the University of Mississippi. On one level, CWA and FERA projects began the process of turning a dilapidated campus into a picturesque one. On another level, the process through which officials at the university sought and acquired federal money established important patterns that enabled the institution to use the promise of matching funds to prime the state legislature and the board of trustees to allocate higher and more regular levels of support. Perhaps most importantly, by taking advantage of federal programs to put students to work, the

³⁸ "One Hundred Students Receive Government Campus Positions," *Mississippian*, 17 February 1934.

³⁹ "\$2,000 is Alloted [*sic*] Ole Miss by FERA," *Mississippian*, 6 October 1934.

⁴⁰ "FERA Helps Students To Secure Degrees At University," *Mississippian*, 29 September 1934.

university was able both to maintain enrollment numbers and to bind students and the institution together in projects that mutually benefited both the student-workers and the university.

III

Beginning in the fall term of 1935, the university used funding from the National Youth Administration (NYA) to expand programs of work-study. Dr. William Lee Kennon, Chairman of the Faculty Committee for Student Employment and the local administrator for the NYA, reported that the university received 1,800 initial applications for only 175 positions when the NYA began operations on campus. That applications (1,800) far exceeded the number of students enrolled at the university (roughly 1,300) suggested the dire economic circumstances of the time as well as the strong desire for opportunities in higher education among the population in areas surrounding the Oxford campus. NYA funding not only presented students with a chance to work their way through college, but it also offered new Chancellor Alfred Benjamin Butts (1935-1946) an opportunity to continue to use federal funds, as Chancellor Alfred Hume had, to put students to work “doing things which the University has needed for some time but has been unable to afford.”⁴¹ The NYA operated continuously at the institution until the program folded in 1943, and it benefited countless students and every department at the university. In the 1936-1937 school year, for example, 175 undergraduate students and five graduate students held NYA positions. NYA wages were 30 cents an hour; monthly earnings ranged from \$10 to \$20 and had an average of \$12.50. Twenty of the students employed that year worked at the university’s Y. M. C. A.; another fifteen worked at the

⁴¹ “175 Students Aided by N.Y.A. Program; Dr. Kennon Director,” *Mississippian*, 5 October 1935.

library. The schools of medicine, law, pharmacy, education, engineering, and music each employed between six and ten students; each department within the college of liberal arts employed between three and six students.⁴² For the 1940-1941 school year, over \$20,000 in NYA allocations provided employment for 16 percent of the university's 1,449 students. Those 238 students came from sixty of Mississippi's counties, nine states, and Puerto Rico. Men and women received NYA employment in equal proportions; 159 of the university's 1,024 male students, or 15.5 percent, and 69 of its 425 female students, or 16.2 percent, worked NYA jobs. In addition to serving in every academic and administrative department at the university, that year's NYA workers assisted the band and the baseball and basketball teams; performed maintenance work on the grounds; prepared and served food in the cafeterias; and helped write and edit the law journal, yearbook, and campus newspaper. All told, NYA funds provided for student workers in 50 divisions and sub-divisions at the university.⁴³

NYA funding positively affected every department at the university, and it was essential for the students who received it. In many cases, students employed through the program applied their paychecks directly and immediately to the payment of tuition and fees.⁴⁴ Of the 238 students receiving NYA employment in the 1940-1941 school year, 89 percent came from families with combined annual incomes of less than \$2,000; 131 of those students came from families with annual incomes below \$1,000. 13 NYA students, none of whom was over 24-years old, came from families unable to offer any financial support for their educations. Only 25 students receiving NYA funding came from

⁴² "NYA Aids Receive \$2250 Per Month," *Mississippian*, 19 September 1936.

⁴³ William Lee Kennon, *Preliminary Report on the National Youth Administration in the University of Mississippi for the Session 1940-1941* (University, MS: University of Mississippi, 1941), 3-9, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

⁴⁴ "Funds Uncertain For Completion of NYA Program," *Mississippian*, 9 January 1937.

households with annual incomes exceeding \$2,500; those students received funding only after securing special approval from an NYA official by satisfactorily demonstrating that they could not remain at the university without federal aid. Several of these cases involved students who came from large families or from households enduring severe economic hardships due to illnesses or unexpected financial reverses. The 39 students from Lafayette County who received NYA funding represented 27 percent of the university's enrollment from its home county.⁴⁵ For these students, many of whom came from families who had moved to the county while they put multiple children through college, NYA employment meant a chance to endure through the Depression while securing an education that could provide for a more prosperous future. These statistics suggest that NYA funding kept students at the university who otherwise would have faced great difficulties in continuing their educations. What was more, the students who worked NYA jobs for one of the various departments at the university represented, to say the least, a very different socio-economic profile from the one traditionally associated with the University of Mississippi.

The university benefitted from NYA students beyond the work they performed for the institution. Students receiving NYA funds consistently outperformed the overall student body academically. In the fall of 1940, for example, the grade-point average for NYA students was a full 40 percent higher than the grade-point average for the university as a whole. 39.8 percent of NYA students that semester amassed grade-point averages that earned them the status of distinction, honor roll, or special distinction. NYA students accounted for a quarter of the perfect grade-point averages earned at the university that semester. Four of the eight Taylor Medals the university awarded in 1941 for excellence

⁴⁵ Kennon, *Preliminary Report on the National Youth Administration*, 3-5.

in special fields went to NYA students. The President of the Associated Student Body was an NYA student, and students receiving NYA aid were members of both of the university's literary societies, its band, chorus, glee club, and numerous other clubs campus organizations.⁴⁶ NYA workers who organized a tutoring program for struggling freshmen literally kept other students in the university while working their own way through the institution.⁴⁷ In the enthusiastic words of the *Mississippian*, NYA programs embodied the promise of the New Deal. Through the NYA, the paper wrote, "the strong arm of the government has taken a progressive step in its administrative affairs and has thrown the doors of learning open to striving youth."⁴⁸

Plainly, the NYA not only kept students in school who otherwise would have had to suspend their studies; it employed and funded students who made positive contributions to the institution and earned strong marks academically. This was truly an experiment in "cooperative undertaking" that taught quite different lessons about "service" than membership in a Greek-letter society or a course of study designed to cultivate character in the sons of the state's elite.⁴⁹ The NYA was a program, then, with key implications regarding whom the university educated and how it served the state. Federal support for students whose families would have been unable to pay their way through college democratized who could come to and remain at the university, and the work that NYA students did at the university pointed toward new ideas about the meaning of service, leadership, and higher education.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 5, 10.

⁴⁷ "Free Coaching Made Possible by N. Y. A. Cooperation With Y," *Mississippian*, 16 November 1935.

⁴⁸ "NYA A Step Forward," *Mississippian*, 9 November 1935.

⁴⁹ "175 Students Aided by N.Y.A. Program; Dr. Kennon Director," *Mississippian*, 5 October 1935.

IV

If the NYA student-worker seemed to represent a new type at the University of Mississippi, no figure more neatly embodied traditional stereotypes about the institution's student body than the fraternity man. However large a role fraternities may have played in the ways Mississippians imagined their state university socially and historically, Greek organizations had a limited physical and spatial presence on its campus until the New Deal. For a period during the antebellum era, the university's administration had banned fraternities, and the societies had existed only as *sub-rosa* organizations with no official houses, lodges, or meeting spaces on campus. Between 1912 and 1926, the state's anti-fraternity laws again forced the organizations underground. Even before the legislative action of 1912, though, only the Delta Psi and Sigma Chi fraternities had erected meeting houses on the campus. In 1934, Chancellor Alfred Hume announced a tentative set of regulations that would have permitted the construction of meeting houses under the supervision of the university. Under this plan, houses could serve as the site for meetings, initiations, and social functions, but not as living quarters for fraternity members.⁵⁰ As late as September 1935, though, only the Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity had built a lodge under this arrangement.⁵¹ While the Sigma Chi fraternity had begun the early phases of planning a house, no plans existed for thirteen other available lots on campus.⁵²

The availability of New Deal money made the erection of fraternity and sorority houses at the University of Mississippi possible, and the institution's need for housing

⁵⁰ "Chancellor Hume Announces Rules For Frat Houses," *Mississippian*, 13 October 1934; That five of the sixteen members of the Interfraternity Council and two of the twenty-one members of the Pan-Hellenic Council for the 1940-1941 school year were NYA students further complicates the neat dichotomy between Greeks and non-Greeks at the university and undermines the idea that Greek organizations, at least by the era of the New Deal, served to reinforce rigid class lines between students and the university. Kennon, *Preliminary Report on the National Youth Administration*, 11.

⁵¹ "Sigma Alpha Epsilon Build Modern Lodge During Summer," *Mississippian*, 21 September 1935.

⁵² "Fraternity House Plans Underway," *Mississippian*, 16 March 1935.

made such construction a necessity. In March of 1936, the university announced that the Public Works Administration (PWA) would build campus houses for eight fraternities and two sororities. Under the arrangement, the houses could not exceed \$5,000 in cost, and each Greek-letter organization had to provide \$3,000 of its own funding before becoming eligible for PWA aid. Each house came with a twenty-five year lease on its lot. The construction of this initial group of houses, which went to the Chi Omega and Phi Mu sororities and the Sigma Nu, Delta Tau Delta, Kappa Alpha, Sigma Chi, Pi Kappa Alpha, Kappa Sigma, and Delta Kappa Epsilon fraternities, represented the first step in establishing fraternity and sorority “rows” at the university.⁵³ All of the new houses, the *Mississippian* assured readers, were “either English or colonial” in design, and none showed “modernistic strains.”⁵⁴ Befitting the style and arrangement of the homes, the university named its new fraternity row “Lamar Road” in honor of L. Q. C. Lamar, “the greatest of all Mississippians to be identified with the University.”⁵⁵ Inside the Sigma Alpha Epsilon house, guests could admire a portrait of Lamar that his daughter-in-law had painted in 1899.⁵⁶

The PWA sorority houses occupied a separate space on campus, but the structures on “Sorority Circle” largely resembled the stately fraternity houses—if in a more feminine form. The Kappa Delta house, colonial in style, featured “slender columns and green shutters.” A red porch ran along the west and north sides of Delta Delta Delta’s white-brick early colonial house. The most notable feature of Phi Mu’s two-story English cottage was a “luxurious sun parlor.” The women of the Chi Omega sorority could enjoy

⁵³ “Ten Fraternities and Sororities Receive Aid,” *Mississippian*, 14 March 1936.

⁵⁴ “Seven Frats Build Houses,” *Mississippian*, 19 September 1936.

⁵⁵ “Frat Houses Are Rapidly Nearing Completion Here,” *Mississippian*, 17 October 1936.

⁵⁶ Lamar had been a charter member of the university’s SAE chapter. “Sigma Alpha Epsilon Build Modern Lodge During Summer,” *Mississippian*, 21 September 1935.

an “exceptionally high-ceilinged living room” in their Middle English house. A white picket fence surrounded the front yard of the Delta Zeta house, and green shutters adorned the white brick of the colonial. The women of the Delta Gamma sorority worked with contractors to design a home to “follow antebellum or late colonial lines.”⁵⁷

Greek organizations raised their share of the money through a combination of methods. Some borrowed money from their national organizations, some received donations from alumni, and some borrowed substantial amounts directly from the university.⁵⁸ The combination of PWA grants and various forms of Greek funding allowed the university to add \$100,000 worth of housing in 1936 and 1937 alone.⁵⁹ By 1938, fourteen fraternity houses and six sorority houses stood on the university’s campus.⁶⁰ “Greeks, Greeks, Greeks,” the *Mississippian* marveled, “from every quarter they come, fraternity ‘eds and co-eds.” Taken together, the newspaper concluded with approval that “the entire unit on ‘Fraternity Row’ ... and ‘Sorority Circle’ is a thing of beauty.”⁶¹ As early as the first semester of the existence of the Greek houses, campus organizations announced plans for a decoration contest among the fraternities and sororities in advance of the football game against Mississippi State. Almost before the paint was dry on the houses, students at the University of Mississippi were celebrating the institution’s “unique setting of fraternity and sorority houses.”⁶² Tri Delta’s display,

⁵⁷ “Kappa Delta, Chi Omega, Tri Delta Have New Houses Completed on Ole Miss’ Sorority Row,” *Mississippian*, 1 May 1937.

⁵⁸ “No Deadline Set For Matching Of Funds By P. W. A.,” *Mississippian*, 18 April 1936.

⁵⁹ State of Mississippi, Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning, *Biennial Report of the Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning from July 1, 1935 to June 30, 1937 to the State Legislature* (July, 1937), 27, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

⁶⁰ “Progressing With Ole Miss Buildings,” *Oxford Eagle*, 21 July 1938.

⁶¹ “New Fraternity Houses Draw Attention of Local Greeks,” *Mississippian*, 18 September 1937.

⁶² “ODK-Mississippian Sponsor Contest For Greek Houses at State Game,” *Mississippian*, 12 November 1937.

which won the sorority category, included a cow with the name “State” signed on it.⁶³

Old jokes, apparently, accelerated the invention of new traditions.

The construction of fraternity and sorority rows at a university that had seen intense anti-Greek activity and even banned the organizations from campus in two separate eras may have seemed an odd use of PWA funding, but insufficient housing was a problem so longstanding at the university that it necessitated and justified any number of measures. The housing shortage had reached a point of crisis in late August of 1934 when a fire destroyed Gordon Hall, a three-story, one-hundred-room building that was the university’s largest dormitory.⁶⁴ For the 1934 fall term, the university filled “every available” room on campus and converted unused portions of several buildings into living quarters. 44 students in the school of medicine took rooms in the new hospital on campus. 62 athletes lived in sections of the gymnasium; eight members of the football bunked in the field house next to the playing field. 26 undergraduate students lived in converted lecture halls and laboratories in the old biology building.⁶⁵

Throughout the last year of Chancellor Alfred Hume’s tenure (the 1934-1935 school year) and Chancellor Alfred Butts’s first year in office (the 1935-1936 school year), the university attempted unsuccessfully to convince the state legislature to replace Gordon Hall and the bed-space that had burned with it.⁶⁶ From the time of his appointment, Butts repeatedly identified the lack of housing at the university as the primary impediment to increasing enrollment at the institution.⁶⁷ Relief for the

⁶³ “SAE, DDD Greeks Take Decorations Day Competition,” *Mississippian*, 4 December 1937.

⁶⁴ *Biennial Report of the Board of Trustees*, 1935, 46.

⁶⁵ “Emergency Housing Plan Is Adopted By University,” *Mississippian*, 29 September 1934.

⁶⁶ *Biennial Report of the Board of Trustees*, 1935, 46; *Biennial Report of the Board of Trustees*, 1937, 25.

⁶⁷ “2000 Students at Ole Miss Await Only Erection of Additional Dormitories,” *Oxford Eagle*, 24 June 1937.

university's housing shortage ultimately came through a series of PWA projects. In addition to the Greek houses it constructed between 1936 and 1938, the PWA built six new dormitories at the university in the spring and summer of 1938. Butts began the process of conferring with an architect and courting PWA money for the new dormitories in October, 1936.⁶⁸ Funding for the dorms came in August, 1937 in the form of a PWA package of \$438,181. Of the PWA money, \$197,181 was an outright grant, and \$241,000 was a low-interest loan that the university could repay with housing fees it charged students to occupy the new rooms.⁶⁹ Plans called for the construction of four dormitories for male students with the capacity to house 288 students and two dormitories for females with space for 158 students.⁷⁰

Construction of the new dormitories began on December 27, 1937.⁷¹ The general contractors for the project were W. J. McGhee & Sons of Jackson and Rogers & Sons of Tuscaloosa, Alabama. Richard L. Newton, of the PWA office in Atlanta, served as accountant for the project, and W. E. Johnson of Jackson represented the university as the project's clerk.⁷² By July 1938, officials at the university announced that construction of the dormitories was nearly complete and that the residences would be ready for occupancy at the start of the fall term.⁷³ That September, students moved into the new

⁶⁸ "Chancellor, Naef Confer This Week on Dorm Situation," *Mississippian*, 17 October 1936; "Chancellor Works for WPA [sic] For Ole Miss Dormitories," *Mississippian*, 24 October 1936. The headline in the *Mississippian* incorrectly identified the PWA as the WPA, but the text of the article referred to the correct organization.

⁶⁹ "Ole Miss Gets Dorm Project," *Oxford Eagle*, 2 September 1937; State of Mississippi, Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning, *Biennial Report of the Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning from July 1, 1937 to June 30, 1939 to the State Legislature* (July, 1939), 21, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

⁷⁰ "Dormitory Figures List 438 Additional Rooms For 1938-1939," *Mississippian*, 18 September 1937.

⁷¹ "Chancellor Butts Enthusiastic Over Fall Dormitory Situation," *Mississippian*, 15 January 1938.

⁷² "Contracts Are Let For \$438,000 PWA Dormitory Project," *Mississippian*, 8 January 1938.

⁷³ "New Dormitories Are Practically Ready; Quarters are Luxurious," *Mississippian*, 8 July 1938.

dorms, which the *Oxford Eagle* described as “ultra modern.”⁷⁴ The *Mississippian* gushed that the living quarters featured “the latest and most modern in campus room equipment” and made special note of the maple furniture that adorned the individual rooms and the hardwood and tile that lined the floors, baths, and showers of the halls.⁷⁵

The modern dormitories that the PWA built were part of what the *Mississippian* described as a larger project to “add impressiveness” to the university’s campus.⁷⁶ In addition to the new dormitories, PWA money built a student union building which housed eleven offices, four guest bedrooms, three auditoriums, a post office, a grill, a dancehall, a game room, a beauty parlor, and a barber shop. The union’s main lobby and several other rooms contained stone and marble fireplaces. The building’s south end opened to a terrace furnished with umbrellas and porch furniture.⁷⁷ When the union opened in the spring of 1939, its total cost exceeded \$100,000. A direct PWA grant provided for at least 35% of the funding. The university also paid some of the costs through the sale of timber from its holdings in South Mississippi. \$35,000 in funding came from the estate of Rush C. Weir, a business man from Vaiden, Mississippi who left over \$100,000 to the university and for whom the trustees named the union building. \$27,000 of the Weir money went to construction, and \$8,000 went to furnishings.⁷⁸ The Walter L. Perry Construction Company of Philadelphia, Mississippi handled the building of the structure.⁷⁹

Another result of the university’s courting of federal money was an outdoor

⁷⁴ “Four of Six New and Ultra Modern Ole Miss Dormitories Occupied First Time This Year,” *Oxford Eagle*, 22 September 1938.

⁷⁵ “New Dormitories Are Practically Ready; Quarters are Luxurious,” *Mississippian*, 8 July 1938.

⁷⁶ “New Building [sic] Add Impressiveness To Campus,” *Mississippian*, 14 October 1939.

⁷⁷ “New Student Union Will Be Ready For Inspection May 20,” *Mississippian*, 13 May 1939.

⁷⁸ “Union Building Is Named in Honor of Rush C. Weir,” *Mississippian*, 14 October 1939; *Biennial Report of the Board of Trustees*, 1935, 21.

⁷⁹ “New Student Union Will Be Ready For Inspection May 20,” *Mississippian*, 13 May 1939.

swimming pool. Nearly \$15,000 from the Works Progress Administration (WPA) went to the construction of \$23,000 pool, which reached depths ranging from three to ten feet and was capable of accommodating 750 swimmers at a time. A boardwalk surrounded the pool, and construction included the erection of a refreshment stand and extensive landscaping of the area between the gymnasium and the pool. The WPA initially put up \$13,000 for the project, with the university contributing \$7,000 of its own money. A firm with offices in Clarksdale and Corinth, one that had built a similar pool at Mississippi State, oversaw the project. The pool was open to students, faculty, and staff at the university, as well as white members of the public who paid a small fee. Supervision and maintenance of the facility fell to the university's athletic department.⁸⁰ Poor weather conditions delayed construction of the pool through March and April of 1936.⁸¹ When the pool finally opened in the summer of 1936, its total cost had risen to \$23,296.40, with the university paying \$8,442.01 for the project and the WPA's portion coming to 14,854.39.⁸² 216-feet long and 90-feet wide, equipped with steel diving boards and a chlorination and filtration system, the pool was "one of the most modern in the state."⁸³

At first glance, clear differences separated the erection of badly-needed campus housing from the construction of expensive luxuries like a modern swimming pool and an ample student union building. All of these projects, though, were part of a larger plan to boost enrollment at the University of Mississippi through the selling of the institution. Enrollment at the university declined, improved, and then plateaued in the era of Depression and the New Deal. During the 1928-1929 school year, 1,162 students

⁸⁰ "University of Mississippi To Receive \$20,000 For Swimming Pool Is Announced By Gainey," *Mississippian*, 11 January 1936; *Biennial Report of the Board of Trustees*, 1937, 27.

⁸¹ "Swimming Pool Will Not Be Completed By School End," *Mississippian*, 18 April 1936.

⁸² *Biennial Report of the Board of Trustees*, 1937, 27.

⁸³ "Ole Miss Swimming Pool Opened for Student Use," 19 September 1936.

attended the university's regular sessions.⁸⁴ Between 1929 and 1933, the combined effects of the financial disaster and the accreditation crisis that followed the Bilbo purge caused enrollment to plummet below 800 students. Beginning with the 1933-1934 session, which coincided with the increased availability of federal money to assist students whose families could not afford their tuition and the early stages of the restoration of the university's reputation, enrollment began to climb until it settled at around 1,400 for the duration of the 1930s.⁸⁵

From the time he became Chancellor on July 1, 1935, Alfred Butts identified increased enrollment as the key index of the health of the institution and the best way to guarantee that the university served the people of Mississippi. Butts repeatedly pleaded with trustees to pressure the state legislature to allocate more money for campus housing. In 1937, he urged the state to give "earnest attention" to the inadequate housing at the university and called the lack of dormitories "one of the outstanding needs" of the institution.⁸⁶ Once the PWA dormitories enabled the university to house its existing students, Butts warned the trustees that annual allocations from the State Building Commission were "far from adequate" and that the university was having difficulty keeping older dormitories "in a state of preservation and in a livable condition."⁸⁷ Even when arrangements with the PWA permitted the building of enough dormitories to solve the immediate housing shortage, Butts expressed frustration that the state would not fund building projects capable of increasing the university's capacity for enrollment. Before a meeting of the Oxford Junior Chamber of Commerce in June 1937, Butts encouraged

⁸⁴ *Biennial Report of the University of Mississippi*, 1929, 9.

⁸⁵ For annual enrollment figures and general trends in these years, see the annual *University of Mississippi, Bulletin of the University of Mississippi*, for 1928-1941, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

⁸⁶ *Biennial Report of the Board of Trustees*, 1937, 25.

⁸⁷ *Biennial Report of the Board of Trustees*, 1941, 30.

attendees to prod the state to make allocations during the 1938 legislative session that would allow the university to build for a greater future. “Give us the facilities,” the Chancellor urged, “and we’ll have 1700 students at the University within a year; 2000 students within five years.”⁸⁸ Butts’s frustration with the refusal of the state legislature to replace Gordon Hall or to make allocations that went beyond the matching funds required by PWA grants was a product of a basic reality: the university could not enroll more students if it could not physically house them.

Constructing housing was about building up the university’s future, not merely ensuring it could function in the present. Projects like the student union and the swimming pool did not literally produce spaces to house students, but their construction was part of an active campaign to “sell” the university and to make it more appealing to prospective students.⁸⁹ In the spring of 1938, the university formed a faculty committee on high-school publicity and launched an aggressive plan to increase enrollment by reaching out to towns and schools throughout Mississippi. More than 7,000 white graduating high-school seniors received bulletins outlining the advantages of their state university and highlighting its recent expansion and upgrades. Campus organizations sent speakers to schools throughout the state, and the Omicron Delta Kappa society produced a short publicity film, “Ole Miss,” to be shown in every town throughout the state. 50 newspapers in the state received weekly copies of a bulletin titled, “Your University,” which provided updates on various developments on campus. The *Mississippian* challenged every student at the university to “boost the school to your neighbors and friends at home” and to encourage five graduating high-school seniors in their hometown

⁸⁸ “2000 Students at Ole Miss Await Only Erection of Additional Dormitories,” *Oxford Eagle*, 24 June 1937.

⁸⁹ “...High School Day,” *Mississippian*, 8 October 1938.

to come to Ole Miss.⁹⁰

On November 12, 1938, the university held its first “high school day.” The event brought 2,500 high-school students from across Mississippi and from several counties in Tennessee and Arkansas to the Oxford campus on the day of the football game between Ole Miss and Sewanee. The day began with an assembly that featured addresses from Chancellor Butts, the head coach of the football team, the captain of the football team, and the President of the Associated Student Body. Following the football game, interested students could attend open houses on Fraternity Row or a tea hosted by the Pan-Hellenic society. A theatrical performance and a dance provided evening entertainment.⁹¹ The *Mississippian* pronounced the event a “big success” and reported that all attendees “went away with a smile and a good word for the University of Mississippi.”⁹² It was, after all, an opportunity to show that Ole Miss was “the friendliest school in the country.”⁹³

High school day and the campaign that led up to it were the creations of an institution in the process of developing modern techniques for marketing and publicity. The selling of the University of Mississippi to prospective students marked an important shift in the history of the institution. Reaching out directly to towns and schools throughout the state inverted the old process whereby local communities sent off their young people to an unfamiliar and remote campus with which they had limited direct contact and about which they had only vague ideas. Now the university, in the form of touring speakers or various forms of media, brought itself to the people of the state, or

⁹⁰ “Administration Launches Publicity Program To Enlarge Enrollment,” *Mississippian*, 5 March 1938; “...Ole Miss Publicity,” *Mississippian*, 9 April 1938; “...It’s Up To You,” *Mississippian*, 21 May 1938.

⁹¹ “High School Day Attraction Draws Thousands To Campus,” *Mississippian*, 12 November 1938.

⁹² “...A Good Job Well Done,” *Mississippian*, 19 November 1938.

⁹³ “... Words of Welcome,” *Mississippian*, 12 November 1938.

invited students to make themselves at home on the Oxford campus. This was a program through which the university sold itself by pointing—literally—to the concrete buildings and material benefits it could offer to prospective students, not the spiritual or abstract atmosphere of an exclusive and mysterious campus. Increasingly, Ole Miss was attempting to open its doors to a larger number of white Mississippians.

V

While recruitment programs brought larger numbers of high-school students to campus each year, and publicity campaigns kept interested citizens all over the state informed about developments in Oxford, the Ole Miss Rebels were becoming the embodiment of the institution for many Mississippians—and for a growing number of people outside the state. The name “Rebels” had emerged from a process whose explicit design was to increase publicity for the university’s football team. During the spring of 1936, the *Mississippian* acknowledged that “the Flood” and “the Red and Blue” had failed to gain wide usage among journalists, lamented that that the university’s football team “has no real nickname with which to be properly identified,” and announced a contest for a new nickname. In remarking upon the high expectations for the university’s football squad in the fall of 1936, the paper emphasized the urgency of efforts to “publicize the team” and noted that the selection of a “name to catch the public eye and fancy” had become “essential.”⁹⁴ After two weeks of “insufficient interest” in the contest, the *Mississippian* issued a second call for submissions. In addition to re-issuing its call for nicknames, the paper announced the formation of a “South-wide” selection

⁹⁴ “New Name Needed by Ole Miss Football Team; Contest to Decide Successor to Flood Being Held by Mississippian—Award Prize,” *Mississippian*, 2 May 1936.

committee. The committee included three members of the university's alumni association; the outgoing and incoming presidents of the student government; Ed Walker, the head coach of the football team; C. R. "Tex" Nelson, the captain of 1935 football team; William Hemingway, the chairman of the university's athletic committee; and sportswriters from newspapers in Jackson, Meridian, Memphis, New Orleans, Nashville, and Atlanta.⁹⁵

In this second round of solicitation, Ben Guider, an alumnus of the university from Vicksburg, suggested "Rebels" as the nickname for the school's football team. In addition to its "short, musical, inspiring, [and] simple" style, Guider wrote, the name carried the effect of calling "to mind the glories of the Old South and that historic struggle of the Civil War in which the State of Mississippi took so noble and outstanding part, and for which every Mississippian should feel proud." Sportswriters from across the South apparently shared Guider's logic; an overwhelming majority of those who responded to a questionnaire from the university chose the name from a list of possibilities that included "Raiders," "Stonewalls," and "Confederates." After approval by the university's athletic committee and its chancellor, "Rebels" became the official nickname for the school's athletic teams in July of 1936.⁹⁶ In announcing the new nickname, the *Mississippian* pointed to its "news value" and predicted that Rebels would "prove a valuable whip" in attracting attention to the university's football team. It was a name "suggestive of a spirit native to the old south and particularly to Mississippi," one which "not only catches the sportswriters' [*sic*] eye but also the eye of every sport fan."

⁹⁵ "Final Effort Made to Give Ole Miss Teams a Name," *Mississippian*, 16 May 1936.

⁹⁶ "Guider To Receive Loving Cup Today," *Mississippian*, 24 October 1936; "'Ole Miss Rebels' - It's Permanent," *Mississippian*, 19 September 1936; William L. Sorrels and Charles Cavagnaro, *Ole Miss Rebels: Mississippi Football* (Huntsville, AL: The Strode Publishers, 1976), 107-109.

Because Rebels possessed “local color,” it would “enhance national interest” in the institution.⁹⁷ Just as the Congressional realities of the era made Southern Democrats a key group within the Democratic Party and the New Deal coalition, an athletic team from the Deep South held special appeal to sports-fans across the nation. The following spring, a goateed cartoon of an antebellum gentleman called “Colonel Rebel” made his debut on the cover of the university’s yearbook.⁹⁸

Because the name Rebels emerged from a contest organized by a student publication, used a term that invoked a particular version of the Southern past to personify the university, and took on an aura of permanence almost as soon as it appeared, its origins invite obvious comparisons to the invention of Ole Miss in the 1890s. But the University of Mississippi was a very different institution in the 1930s than it had been in the 1890s, and “Rebels” served a very different purpose than “Ole Miss” had. Ole Miss had used the metaphor of the antebellum plantation to make the university the heir to the civilization of the Old South and to restore a hierarchy that would protect the sons and daughters of the state’s elite from the rise of new challengers and to protect the state university from the striving ascendancy of other colleges; this was an identity, in other words, that protected the exclusive and special position of Mississippi’s university and its elite within the state. Rebels invoked a broader, more inclusive version of the Southern past. By referencing a sanitized version of the Confederate experience, it emphasized the broad unity among white Mississippians, not the hierarchies and stratifications that divided them and endowed certain ones with higher levels of prestige or special privileges. Rebels, in other words, was more democratic than Ole Miss.

⁹⁷ “Ole Miss Rebels,” *Mississippian*, 26 September 1936.

⁹⁸ *Ole Miss*, Volume XLI, 1937, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

Importantly, Rebels emerged as the university sought to boost enrollment, attract publicity, and brand itself within the South and the larger nation. This was a name and an identity designed to attract attention by standing out in headlines in regional and national dailies. If the invention of Ole Miss in the 1890s was an attempt to preserve the prestige of the university through its exclusivity and its connection to the antebellum past, the branding of Rebels in the 1930s was an attempt to increase the popular appeal and publicity of the institution as it embarked on a program of expansion and growth for the future. That the federal government funded this expansion seemed to ratify its vision. “Rebels,” then, was a name that used local color to reference the secure and special place of Mississippi within the United States, not one that emphasized the state or the university’s alienation from the larger nation.

Selecting a catchier nickname was one way to use athletics to boost the university’s profile, but an ambitious national schedule represented a more aggressive attempt at attracting publicity through the football squad. Between 1933 and 1938, the university’s football team played three times in Washington, D. C., three times in Milwaukee, three times in New Orleans, twice in Philadelphia, twice in St. Louis, and twice in Miami. The 1936 season alone took the Rebels to six states and the District of Columbia. Nine off-campus engagements, including road games at Tulane, Temple, George Washington, Marquette, and the University of Miami, contributed heavily to the 11,000 miles of train travel the team logged that season.⁹⁹ On September 30, 1937 two planes carried 33 players, coaches, and trainers from Memphis to Philadelphia for a game with Temple, making the Ole Miss Rebels the first college football team to travel by air

⁹⁹ “12 Engagement [*sic*] For Rebel Team,” *Mississippian*, 19 September 1936.

to a contest.¹⁰⁰ George Boehler, the assistant coach and trainer who arranged the flights, calculated that flying the squad out on a Thursday and back on a Sunday was more efficient in terms of cost and time than traveling by train and paying for meals and lodging over the course of a week. “Travel by air,” Boehler commented, “is definitely a thing of future for football teams.”¹⁰¹ In a playful blend of new ideas and old animosities, the *Mississippian* praised its Rebels and called air travel a “fitting entrance for a progressive team, returning to seek victory and prestige among the doubtful Yankees.”¹⁰²

There were several reasons that the University of Mississippi arranged for 11,000-mile seasons on the road, week-long train trips, and airline flights for its football teams. The most basic was that the schedules made the school money. Billy Gates, the sports editor for the *Mississippian*, explained the team’s heavy road schedule for 1936 by noting that the share of gate receipts from games played as the visitor in front of crowds numbering in the tens of thousands would bring in more money than hosting games in front of small groups in Oxford. Ole Miss, Gates wrote, needed “all the money a terrific alien card can bring.”¹⁰³ In response to comments from students at Mississippi State that officials at the state university were “losing the real point of the game in an effort to fill their athletic coffer,” the *Mississippian* wrote that “[c]ollege football is a business proposition as well as an entertaining feature of university life.” The university, the paper concluded, would “profit in more ways than one” from such an ambitious schedule.”¹⁰⁴ A national schedule also allowed alumni who had moved out of Mississippi or surrounding sections of the Deep South to re-connect with their university and former classmates.

¹⁰⁰ “Rebels First Team To Turn Airminded,” *Mississippian*, 18 September 1937.

¹⁰¹ “‘Air-Minded’ Word For Reb Gridders Prior To Excursion To Philadelphia,” *Mississippian*, 2 October 1937.

¹⁰² “...Progressive Rebels,” *Mississippian*, 2 October 1937.

¹⁰³ “Sideline Chatter,” *Mississippian*, 26 September 1936.

¹⁰⁴ “What Now, Mis-A-Sip?” *Mississippian*, 26 September 1936.

During the football team's trip to play Marquette during the 1935 season, for example, alumni living in Chicago, Iowa City, Evanston, Illinois, and Madison, Wisconsin met in Milwaukee, gathered behind the Ole Miss bench, and shouted for the alma mater to "Give 'em Hell."¹⁰⁵

Beyond the direct monetary benefits of gate receipts or the connections with far-flung alumni that a national schedule offered, sending the football team on the road to play established powers brought publicity and name recognition to the university. When the athletic committee secured an invitation for the 1935 squad to play against Catholic University in the Orange Bowl on New Year's Day of 1936, the *Mississippian* wrote with pride that the team had assumed a position as the "cynosure of the football eyes of America."¹⁰⁶ An appearance on such a prominent stage promised to "mean more to the school than any appropriation ever could" by providing "favorable advertisement" for the university.¹⁰⁷ Even when Ole Miss lost games, as it did in that Orange Bowl and in many of its intersectional contests between 1933 and 1938, it won when it traveled by moving the university "into the national spotlight of sport fans."¹⁰⁸ By squaring its football team off against national opponents, in other words, the University of Mississippi was affirming its ties to the rest of the nation, not engaging in another act of civil war with feared or hated outsiders.

To play more favorable schedules and to host more games in Oxford, the university had to expand and upgrade its athletic facilities. Beginning in the fall of 1934, New Deal money played a direct role in the promotion and building up of Ole Miss's

¹⁰⁵ "Sport Slants," *Mississippian*, 2 November 1935.

¹⁰⁶ "Ole Miss To Play Post Season Game With Catholic University in Orange Bowl on New Year's," *Mississippian*, 4 December 1935.

¹⁰⁷ "Congratulations, Red and Blue!" *Mississippian*, 4 December 1935.

¹⁰⁸ "...Progressive Rebels," *Mississippian*, 2 October 1937.

football team. That October, William Hemingway, chairman of the university's athletics committee, secured funds from the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) to begin the process of converting a dusty campus football field into a modern stadium. First, the construction of "a heavy wire fence ... of the most modern type" made it "impossible for one to enter the field other than through the gates." Second, FERA workers built walkways to and from the football field and the bleachers that alleviated the problems of "dust or mud" making playing conditions difficult and negatively affecting the experience of fans. FERA workers also erected a press box made of pine, tin, and brick above the bleachers that surrounded the field. This was a "most needed addition," as visiting reporters had found it "especially distasteful ... to write up games without shelter or necessary materials." What was more, a modern press box, equipped with "wires direct to Western Union," ensured "that no time will be lost in dispatching details of games."¹⁰⁹ Fred Glass, the editor of the *Mississippian*, called the construction of the press box "one of the wisest moves that could be made in the interest of the University." According to Glass, Ole Miss received "less publicity than perhaps any university in the South." The student-editor attributed the "near hostility on the part of various newspapermen" to the lack of appropriate facilities at the institution. A press box that would make covering games at the university more convenient for regional dailies, Glass assured the administration, "will more than repay the cost of its construction in additional publicity for the University."¹¹⁰

The early allotment of FERA funds for upgrades to the football field was only an opening sequence in a larger series of federal aid to the Rebel athletic program. In

¹⁰⁹ "Hemingway Gets FERA Funds For Athletic Department," *Mississippian*, 27 October 1934; University Gets New Press Box to Aid Game Reporters," *Mississippian*, 3 November 1934.

¹¹⁰ "The Press Box," *Mississippian*, 6 October 1934.

November of 1936, Congressman Wall Doxey assisted Chancellor Butts in securing aid from the Works Progress Administration (WPA) to build a planned \$54,000 concrete football stadium at the university.¹¹¹ Delays in approval at the state level meant that construction on Hemingway Stadium did not begin until the following summer. Work continued throughout the 1937 football season.¹¹² \$37,500 for the stadium came from the WPA, and the university's athletic committee contributed an additional \$12,500 to the project. The initial phase of construction involved the clearing of ground, the removal of 2,400 existing bleachers, and the erection of concrete grandstands capable of seating 9,500 spectators. The Stephens & Johnson construction firm of Corinth, Mississippi oversaw the project. (This was the same firm that had built Mississippi State's new WPA-funded football stadium the previous year.)¹¹³ By Thanksgiving of 1937, workers had completed two concrete sections with a seating capacity of 2,400 and erected wooden bleachers capable of holding an additional 19,600 spectators.¹¹⁴ On May 11, 1938, the university received an additional grant of \$28,348 from the WPA.¹¹⁵ Before workers had completed the new concrete stands on the stadium's west side, a third grant in January of 1939 provided funds necessary to build identical stands on the stadium's east side. This grant brought the total sum of WPA aid for the stadium to \$72,908. WPA aid also provided for the construction of a sprinkler system underneath the football field, a new practice field for the football team, a baseball diamond, and several tennis courts. When workers completed the east-side stands in 1941, Hemingway Stadium had a permanent

¹¹¹ "Stadium For Ole Miss Needs State Approval," *Mississippian*, 21 November 1936.

¹¹² "Work Advancing On Grid Stadium," *Mississippian*, 23 October 1937.

¹¹³ "Stadium Work to Start Soon," *Oxford Eagle*, 22 July 1937. Chancellor Butts and the university's athletic committee began working in October 1936 to secure WPA funding for the stadium project. "Chancellor Works for WPA For Ole Miss Dormitories," *Mississippian*, 24 October 1936.

¹¹⁴ "Work Progressing On Grid Stadium," *Mississippian*, 30 October 1937.

¹¹⁵ "New Grant For Football Stadium," *Mississippian*, 21 May 1938.

seating capacity of over 19,000 and temporary room for several thousand more spectators.¹¹⁶ Thus when 28,000 spectators overflowed Hemingway Stadium a week before the attack on Pearl Harbor to watch Ole Miss and Mississippi State square off for the Southeastern Conference championship, they were occupying a monument to the benefits that Mississippi's university derived from its relationship with the federal government.

VI

No person who walked the University of Mississippi's campus during the era of the New Deal could have ignored the material benefits and physical changes that federal programs brought to the institution. But the university underwent a transformation of expectations and ideas during this era that extended beyond the overhaul and expansion of its physical plant. As early as September 1933, leading students at the university spoke of "our 'New Deal' here on the campus" and called for the "undivided support and enthusiastic cooperation of the student body" in the pursuit of a "University of Mississippi like we have dreamed of and desired—a competent and sympathetic administration, the official respect of the state and South, a beautiful and well-equipped institution, a growing student body, and above all a cheerful spirit of optimism and determination that will overcome any obstacles."¹¹⁷ A year later, Fred Glass of the *Mississippian* described the campus as "imbued with a new spirit of optimism and self-confidence unequal in the history of the institution."¹¹⁸ Throughout the era, students

¹¹⁶ "Football Stadium Will Be Enlarged Thru WPA Aid," *Mississippian*, 11 February 1939; "WPA Grant For Stadium Is Approved," *Mississippian*, 9 May 1941.

¹¹⁷ "Our New Deal," *Mississippian*, 23 September 1933.

¹¹⁸ "To The Alumni and Visitors," *Mississippian*, 27 October 1934.

watched their campus transform so rapidly as to make it possible “to look ahead and see a real change.”¹¹⁹ The continuous development of campus and the stacking of projects had the effect of producing tangible evidence that the university had “reached a new era of progress” and entered the “topmost point in its existence.” More importantly, though, the New Deal created an expectation that more programs and more building were coming—that the university, in other words, was “still marching forward to even higher standards.”¹²⁰ If Bilbo’s vision for the University of Mississippi had required imagining a distant future, New Deal projects made development material and tangible. The future of the university was becoming something to see and touch. A limitless future for the institution was now something that students and administrations did not have to imagine or to project, but something they could experience, anticipate, and plan.

Students at the University of Mississippi were loyal Democrats and enthusiastic New Dealers. Beyond championing funding that directly benefitted their institution, several editors of the *Mississippian* promoted New Deal programs “foreign to [the university’s] local interests.”¹²¹ Following the 1934 mid-term elections, the *Mississippian* cheered the Democratic landslide as “the most convincing display of confidence that has as yet been evidenced by the American people in Roosevelt and the New Deal.” The paper attributed the poor performance of the Republicans “to the fact that they have not issued a constructive idea or plan during the past two years.” In contrast, the Democrats had “gone forward” and responded to the nation’s desire for “aggressive, inspired leadership.”¹²² In advance of the 1936 presidential election, a poll found that 82% of

¹¹⁹ “The Old Order Changeth,” *Mississippian*, 18 April 1935.

¹²⁰ “University Is Now At Topmost Point In Its Existence,” *Mississippian*, 8 July 1938.

¹²¹ “Price Fixing And the N. R. A.,” *Mississippian*, 20 October 1934.

¹²² “The New Deal And Confidence,” *Mississippian*, 10 November 1934.

students at the university favored President Franklin D. Roosevelt over his challengers.¹²³

The *Mississippian* explained the wide support that Roosevelt enjoyed at the university and among college students nationally by stating that “the youth of today is liberal in its thinking.” The experience of living through the Depression and observing the benefits of aggressive public assistance and development, the paper concluded, had convinced young white Americans of the necessity of “a government that will be able to take care of the needs of its people.”¹²⁴

The embrace of the New Deal and the championing of ambitious and innovative expansions of government programs kept students at the University of Mississippi in step with the political leaders of their state. In 1934, Bilbo won election to the U. S. Senate by pledging to support Roosevelt and the New Deal. Once in Washington, The Man, in the words of Chester M. Morgan, “backed the president faithfully” and “marched on with enthusiasm” “as a loyal soldier in the New Deal army.” Bilbo’s voting record on relief spending, labor legislation, public housing, and additional programs of social and economic welfare made him one of the strongest and most reliable supporters of the New Deal.¹²⁵ The Man’s support for the New Deal may have been notable for its tenacity and endurance, but Mississippi’s congressional delegation as a whole offered reliable and prominent support for many of Roosevelt’s programs. A 1937 biographical sketch described Pat Harrison, the state’s senior U. S. Senator, as “right hand man of President Franklin D. Roosevelt” and boasted of Harrison’s role in the creation of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, the passage of the Social Security Act, and the winning of

¹²³ “Roosevelt Given 5 to 1 Majority In Student Poll,” *Mississippian*, 24 October 1936.

¹²⁴ “... Youth Marches On,” *Mississippian*, 7 November 1936.

¹²⁵ Chester M. Morgan, *Redneck Liberal: Theodore G. Bilbo and the New Deal* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), 57-77; 161-185; quotations from 161 and 185.

appropriations for secondary education and a number of public works programs.¹²⁶

Congressman John Elliot Rankin of Tupelo and the state's first district was likewise "a firm administration man."¹²⁷ In 1936, a staggering 97% of voters in Mississippi voiced their support for the New Deal by re-electing Roosevelt.¹²⁸

Under the first administration of Governor Hugh L. White (1936-1940), Mississippi enacted an aggressive plan of economic development known as Balance Agriculture With Industry (BAWI). Under BAWI, a state industrial commission oversaw the public financing of manufacturing plants throughout Mississippi with the intent of developing the state's local communities through outside investment. Twelve firms ultimately came to Mississippi under BAWI. Though only two of the new plants—the Ingalls Shipyard in Pascagoula and the Armstrong Tire and Rubber Company in Natchez—brought high-wage, heavy-industry jobs to the state, BAWI improved the economic prospects for depressed local communities and enhanced rates of consumption and tax revenues throughout the state. Connie L. Lester has referred to BAWI as a "home-grown New Deal" and notes that the program "mimicked New Deal initiatives" by creating a two-tiered system of state sponsorship and local operation. More broadly, the ambitious plan adhered to the spirit of the New Deal by moving Mississippi towards state-sponsored development and central planning. BAWI reflected a "breathtaking change in attitude," as " [f]or the first time in the state's history, Mississippi actively sought and accepted responsibility for economic growth and the general welfare of its

¹²⁶ W. H. Grayson, "Pat Harrison," in *The New Mississippi: A Magazine Dedicated to the Achievements of the New Administration* (1937): 16, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi.

¹²⁷ "John Elliot Rankin," in *The New Mississippi*, 81.

¹²⁸ Katznelson, *Fear Itself*, 165.

citizens.”¹²⁹

During White’s administration, communities across Mississippi attempted to sell and market themselves in ways that resembled the publicity project at the state university in Oxford. The unifying theme of municipal promotion was the modernity of the state’s local places and their potential for future development. The city of Gulfport pointed to its brand new \$1,500,000 pier, 40-mile seawall, \$350,000 recreation center, and \$885,000 yarn mill in explaining why its citizens were “highly optimistic over the future development” of the city.¹³⁰ Boosters for Laurel advertised their community as one that had made the “transition from a primitive wilderness into a thriving city of 25,000 people in a comparatively few short years” and assured potential investors that “Laurel is looking just as far down the future’s path as possible.”¹³¹ In Brookhaven, “a thriving and wide-awake industrial center,” citizens believed in “doing things now, instead of trying to live up to their past reputation.”¹³² Meridian, which advertised itself as “the commercial hub of eastern Mississippi and western Alabama,” boasted that it had “made more industrial, agricultural and commercial growth in the years of 1934, 1935, and 1936 than during the entire preceding quarter of a century!”¹³³ The expansion of natural gas and electric services and the recent construction of “schools, academies, churches, paved thoroughfares, new sand beaches, and seawalls” ensured that Biloxi, “a city of progress,” was “truly up-to-date in every respect.”¹³⁴ In Hattiesburg, where the population had increased from 8,000 to 21,000 between 1900 and 1937, the chamber of commerce

¹²⁹ Connie L. Lester, “Balancing Agriculture with Industry: Capital, Labor, and the Public Good in Mississippi’s Home-Grown New Deal,” *Journal of Mississippi History* LVII, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 235-263; quotations from 235, 237, 247, and 262.

¹³⁰ M. P. Smith, “Port of Gulfport: Mississippi’s ‘Gateway to the Seven Seas,’” in *The New Mississippi*, 48.

¹³¹ “Laurel and Jones County,” in *The New Mississippi*, 58-59.

¹³² “Brookhaven,” in *The New Mississippi*, 61.

¹³³ “City of Meridian, An Ably Managed Municipality,” in *The New Mississippi*, 66.

¹³⁴ “Biloxi—City of Paradise and Progress,” in *The New Mississippi*, 73-74.

conceded that “[t]here may be somewhere in these United States a more desirable place to live,” but concluded, “if that be true, then a beneficent providence has thoughtfully hidden such a place from the ken of man!”¹³⁵

As Mississippi’s congressional delegation enthusiastically supported an expansive federal program with dramatic implications for the nation’s physical landscape, political system, and economy; its state government embraced a new role in the planning of the economy and the promotion of public welfare; and its local communities imagined unlimited economic development and growth, one old idea remained safely protected from challenge or alteration: that Mississippi was and would remain a white man’s country.¹³⁶ At the state level, BAWI officials blocked black Mississippians from the overwhelming majority of new industrial jobs. Advertisements from local communities and promotional materials from chambers of commerce did not count African Americans when they compiled statistics of available laborers. When Armstrong Tire and Rubber Company hired a small number black workers at its Natchez plant, the industrial commission sought assurances from the firm that it would set wages for African-Americans well below the wages for white workers. As Connie Lester has noted, BAWI regulations “intended to sustain ... Mississippi’s finely crafted racial” arrangements. Even in communities where BAWI plants modernized the local economy, black Mississippians “would continue to provide cheap agricultural labor in a sharecropping system built on white supremacy.”¹³⁷ Experiments in economic development were safe—desirable, in fact—so long as they elevated white Mississippians while keeping African

¹³⁵ “Hattiesburg and Progress Are Synonymous,” in *The New Mississippi*, 77.

¹³⁶ This phrase, of course, borrows from Ulrich B. Phillips, “The Central Theme of Southern History,” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Oct. 1928): 31. As Katznelson notes, it is not insignificant that Phillips wrote his famous essay late in the 1920s and that his thesis “expressed the era’s common sense across the ideological and racial spectrum.” Katznelson, *Fear Itself*, 136-138.

¹³⁷ Lester, “Balancing Agriculture with Industry,” 238, 258.

Americans in their special place in the state.

On the national level, the support that Bilbo and other Democrats from the South offered to the New Deal granted tremendous leverage to proponents of white supremacy. As Ira Katznelson has demonstrated, southern Democrats held votes that Roosevelt (and later Harry Truman) simply could not lose if they wanted to pass domestic or international legislation. “The Jim Crow South,” in Katznelson’s words, “was the one collaborator America’s democracy could not do without.”¹³⁸ The Democratic South used this position to great effect—not merely in protecting white supremacy, but in strengthening its structural basis. For Roosevelt’s first term and into the early years of his second, southern Democrats felt confident that “economic policies crafted in Washington might transform [the South]’s desperate plight without endangering Jim Crow.” In other words, for a time it was possible to support the New Deal fully, bring home federal money to states and congressional districts, and not worry that federal policies would alter the region’s racial arrangements. Even after the second half of the 1930s, when anxieties increased regarding the potential effects of labor legislation and other programs on racial hierarchies, southern Democrats used “strategic voting behavior” and a temporary “coalitions” to block or alter laws that might have undermined white supremacy.¹³⁹ Whether supporting or blocking federal legislation, segregationists took an active and commanding role in securing the rigidity of the color line.

Because state policies barred African-Americans from holding BAWI positions and congressional voting behavior blocked federal legislation from undermining Jim Crow, it became possible for Mississippians to imagine that economic development and

¹³⁸ Katznelson, *Fear Itself*, 95.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 156-194; quotations on 161 and 194.

aggressively forward-thinking planning could proceed without altering existing racial arrangements. On a smaller scale, a similar pattern emerged at the University of Mississippi. During the course of Ole Miss's New Deal, administrators worked with federal and state officials to find innovative means of funding and building up Mississippi's state university, and students at the institution heralded the coming of a new era and celebrated all forms of material progress on campus. In various ways, the university community embraced new ideas for the future during this era. Ideas about white supremacy, however, underwent no such alteration.

A telling example of the strengthening of the old racial ways came in September 1936, when the university responded to a crisis involving a cherished figure named James E. Ivy. Known on the campus as "Blind Jim," Ivy was a black man who had been born in Alabama in 1872 and come to north Mississippi in the 1890s. He lost his sight permanently after an accident while painting a bridge over the Tallahatchie River in 1894. Beginning in 1896, Ivy made a living by selling candy and peanuts to students on the university's campus. His booming voice made him famous for his cheers and yells at sporting events, and Ivy became a beloved figure at the university.¹⁴⁰ On September 26, 1936, the *Mississippian* announced that the "loveable old Negro," a "vital part of this institution for many years," was in danger of losing his home through foreclosure and called on students and alumni to raise money to assist Ivy.¹⁴¹ Subsequent notes in the paper explained that "the old 'darkey'" was \$450 behind on a two-year-old loan that he had used to erect "a one-room shanty" on the outskirts of Oxford. The *Mississippian*

¹⁴⁰ For discussions of Ivy, his background, and his significance at the university, see: Anthony James, "Paternalism's Demise: Blind Jim Ivy and Ole Miss, 1896-1955," *Mississippi Folklife*, Volume 28, No. 1 (Winter/Spring 1995): 17-24; Charles W. Eagles, *The Price of Defiance: James Meredith and the Integration of Ole Miss* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 43-48; Sansing, *The University of Mississippi*, 275-276.

¹⁴¹ "Help Blind Jim," *Mississippian*, 26 September 1936.

reminded students and alumni that “Jim is an integral part of the university.”¹⁴²

Aid to Ivy came from a variety of sources. 55 black cafeteria workers, the employees with whom Ivy ate lunch each day, pooled money from their paychecks for him.¹⁴³ Students contributed a small sum as well. The overwhelming majority of the money came from alumni of the university. In announcing that the university community had paid off Ivy’s debt, the *Mississippian* described Ivy as a “faithful negro,” free of “troubles,” and now holding “in his trembling hands for the first in over three years” the “deed of trust on his humble dwelling.”¹⁴⁴ The *Jackson Daily News* described Ivy as a “harmless, inoffensive, lovable old darkey, loyal unto death to the team, and always the most enthusiastic rooter for any form of sport, whether the home boys were winning or losing.” The article explained that, while Ivy had “borrowed beyond his ability” and possessed “no way to pay” his mortgage, he “didn’t worry much,” as he “felt sure white folks would come to his rescue.” For the *Daily News*, the saving of Ivy’s home was evidence of a basic truth that “while folks who dwell above the Mason and Dixon line” would never understand: “Down here we love our negroes and our negroes love us. We are willing and ready to go to the limit for them and they are ready and willing to do the same thing for us.”¹⁴⁵

On one level, the language and images in the coverage of the Ivy affair were notable for the cartoonish and paternalistic tropes that newspapers used to discuss Ivy and his white saviors. More significantly, though, the affair revealed that the New Deal had actually strengthened the old racial ways by putting further distance between white and

¹⁴² “Mortgage is Due; Blind Jim Broke,” *Mississippian*, 17 October 1936; “Come On, Folks,” *Mississippian*, 24 October 1936.

¹⁴³ “Alumni, Students Contributing To Save Jim’s Home,” *Mississippian*, 24 October 1936.

¹⁴⁴ “... The Case of Blind Jim,” *Mississippian*, 21 November 1936.

¹⁴⁵ “The Case of Blind Jim,” *Jackson Daily News*, 17 November 1936.

black Southerners. Consider, for example, the different living conditions that distinguished students at the University of Mississippi from Jim Ivy or the other African-American employees with whom he took his noon meal each day. As a result of the New Deal, students walked a scenic and beautified campus, one undergoing continuous expansion and filled with newly-built and freshly-renovated buildings and classrooms. Some lived in PWA-built dormitories that featured maple furniture, hard-wood floors, and tiled showers; others occupied PWA-built fraternity and sorority houses that included such amenities as sun parlors. For entertainment, students could swim in a brand-new, two-hundred-foot pool or play in the game-room of the new student union. Ivy, by contrast, occupied a small lot on the outskirts of town and lived in what the *Mississippian* referred to variously as a “shack” or a “one-room shanty.”¹⁴⁶ For entertainment, none of these new facilities would have been available to Ivy or any African-Americans who worked at the university. Throughout the state, bowling alleys, roller rinks, and tennis courts were for whites only. Not until World War II did a single swimming pool exist in the state that was open to blacks.¹⁴⁷

In April 1937, a feature in the *Mississippian* reported on the summer destinations of students at the university. Some planned to vacation in England, Scotland, Mexico, Pasadena, California, and Chautauqua, New York. Others had accepted scholarships for summer study at institutions including the University of Virginia. The feature concluded with a description of the summer plans of an African-American woman who worked in one of the campus’s dormitories: “And Isom Hall’s Jetty said, punctuating her remarks

¹⁴⁶ “Mortgage is Due; Blind Jim Broke,” *Mississippian*, 17 October 1936; “Alumni, Students Contributing To Save Jim’s Home,” *Mississippian*, 24 October 1936.

¹⁴⁷ Neil R. McMillen, *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 10-11.

with gum as she made a bed,” the passage began, “‘I’s gwine work, But Ah hopes to git a month off and ef Ah do den Ah’s gwine play ‘round a little. Ah’s gwine pick cotton an’ wuk my garden an’ raise chickens an’ enjoy mysef. Ah’s gwine com’ back to wuk.’”¹⁴⁸

Ivy, Jetty, and other black presences at the university may have played, as students and alumni put it, “an integral part” in life on the campus, but it was a circumscribed and limited part. Although “an entirely new student body passed through the portals of this institution every four years,” the *Mississippian* noted, figures like Ivy and Jetty remained “here all the time.”¹⁴⁹ As the university modernized, built itself up, and opened its doors to a wider community of white Mississippians—in other words, as it became a laboratory for white democracy—stories about Blind Jim Ivy’s shanty or Jetty’s chickens became a way of indexing white progress against black immobility. Ambitious programs for expansion and experimental forms of development threatened nothing so long as white supremacy appeared secure. In the halls of Congress, white Mississippians could observe state and regional politicians who had achieved mastery and control of federal policy regarding race. At home in Mississippi, an ambitious plan for diversifying the state’s economy was underway and had secured guarantees that outside investors would do nothing to upset or alter the state’s racial ways in hiring or compensation. And at the state university in Oxford, white students occupied sparkling new dormitories and attended class on a growing campus, black men who depended on the charity of white folks peddled peanuts and candies and shared witticisms with freshmen, and black maids chewed gum while they contentedly changed linens. The New Deal had opened new possibilities for Mississippi’s state university and made possible the building of a more

¹⁴⁸ “Students To Scatter Over Entire Nation,” *Mississippian*, 24 April 1937.

¹⁴⁹ “Help Blind Jim,” *Mississippian*, 26 September 1936.

democratic and more economically prosperous future. It had not, however, imperiled the state's most important and most cherished founding myth. If experience was any lesson, no reasonable observer of life at the University of Mississippi would have imagined that more federal money and more ambitious expansion would endanger the white democracy that had become integral to the institution's identity and future.

CHAPTER 6

“[T]HE OPPOSITE OF CIVIL RIGHTS”: OLE MISS AND THE SOUTHERN FUTURE

I

In July 1942, Brooks Atkinson of the *New York Times* reported on conditions in Oxford, Mississippi, home of the state’s university. As the larger nation transformed in the midst of a global war, Atkinson found in Oxford “a self-contained scene” of a “little town in the Deep South.” During the busy parts of Oxford’s days, farmers from surrounding Lafayette County parked their trucks on the town’s square to sell watermelons off “rickety benches” and to bring fresh tomatoes to local restaurants. Police officers who mingled with townsfolk smoked cigars and waved to friends while they watched traffic move through the square. During the cooler periods of the day, there were “gatherings of talkers in shirt sleeves on the weather-beaten benches around the old Court House.” In the evenings, Atkinson watched “people drift leisurely through the square, drop into the drug store for cold drinks under the whirring fans or talk softly in groups under the store balconies.” The town remained a place where “[p]eople find time for fishing by day and for visiting by night.” To all appearances, Atkinson reported, “life in Oxford is moving along the old comfortable grooves with a good deal of charm, friendliness, and rural beauty.”¹

The serene mood that pervaded Atkinson’s report reflected, he acknowledged,

¹ “Oxford, Miss., in This Year of War,” *New York Times*, 26 July 1942.

“hardly more than a surface impression.” Though neither Oxford nor Lafayette County housed a military training camp or an industrial plant, and while the war had not yet “dislocated life” in the area or subjected it to “violent economic and social upheavals,” Atkinson wrote that the “war tides” were sweeping toward the country town and that the community was “slowly and steadily yielding up its detachment.” A second glance around the square revealed some evidence of the new world the war was making. One set of store windows featured pictures of local boys who had, in the words of the shop-owner, “valintaired” for the army. On a large sign in the court-house, a drifter working off a thirty-day sentence for public drunkenness had begun painting the names of every white man in the county engaged in military service. One store on the square sold war bonds and stamps; others displayed stickers for the Red Cross, Navy Relief, and the United Service Organizations. The local rationing board, struggling to process applications from Lafayette County’s 5,000 families, had sprawled to the point that it consumed large portions of the court-house and the post office. On Van Buren Avenue, just off the square, a Red Cross sewing room operated on Tuesday and Thursday mornings. Throughout the county, families worried that the draft would deprive them of badly-needed labor on small farms that produced cotton, corn, livestock, and vegetables. Requests for postponements until after the planting and growing seasons flooded the Selective Service Board, and local officials worried that the draft would force some family farms to go out of production.²

To the west of the Oxford square, the effects of the war on the University of Mississippi were impossible to ignore. Prior to American entrance in the war, regular-session enrollment had reached nearly 1,500; by the spring of 1944, the number had

² *Ibid.*

fallen to 589. The demands of the war effort also depleted the university's faculty, staff, and administration. Between 1943 and 1945 alone, thirty-six members of the faculty and staff took military or service leave from the university. From the summer of 1942 through the fall of 1943, Chancellor Alfred Butts was absent from the university while serving in the Judge Advocate General's Corps.³ The university provided facilities for a number of army and navy training programs and offered accelerated programs of study for civilians eager to complete their educations before joining the military. Administrators suspended or greatly curtailed extracurricular and athletic programs during the fighting. As the university adjusted to declining civilian enrollment, the presence of army and navy training programs, and the altering of pre-war patterns of student life, it came to resemble, in the words of one post-war historian of the institution, a "military outpost."⁴

This chapter examines the dilemmas the University of Mississippi faced in the aftermath of World War II. The post-war years saw rapid increases in enrollment and the expansion of both the university's physical plant as well as its identity. In this way, the era seemed a continuation of the heady New Deal years, when the university confidently harnessed federal money and giddily built an institution capable of serving a wider number of white Mississippians. But in important ways, the post-war years also necessitated balancing the pursuit of an expansive future with the protection of the state's

³ State of Mississippi, Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning, *Biennial Report of the Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning from July 1, 1943 to June 30, 1945 to the State Legislature* (July 1945), 22, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi; State of Mississippi, Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning, *Biennial Report of the Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning from July 1, 1941 to June 30, 194 to the State Legislature* (July 1943), 23, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

⁴ James Allen Cabaniss, *A History of the University of Mississippi* (University, MS: University of Mississippi, 1949), 177. For the strongest published discussion of war-time conditions at the university, see Charles C. Bolton, *William F. Winter and the New Mississippi: A Biography* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2013), 34-41.

racial orthodoxies. In addition to remaking the state demographically and economically, the war altered Mississippi's political culture. A series of war-time confrontations between the national Democratic Party and leaders in Mississippi and other parts of the South foreshadowed the escalation of tensions between party and region in the post-war years. Politicians like James Eastland, Walter Sillers, Jr., and Fielding Wright warned Mississippians that federal and Democratic support for a range of reforms were evidence of broad conspiracies of special-interest groups and radicals with sinister designs for the South. Reactions to Theodore Bilbo's final electoral campaign lent credence to claims that increasingly hostile outside opinions exerted too great an influence on thought within the state. And even political moderates worried that white Mississippians were losing control of race relations in their own state. Debates and controversies at the University of Mississippi reflected both the fire-breathing hysteria of the militants and the paralyzing brooding of the moderates. As tensions between state leaders and the national Democratic Party erupted into a full-blown revolt, key segments of the student body offered prominent support for the Dixiecrat movement. Other, more moderate voices at the university recoiled from outright rebellion, while at the same time affirming their loyalty to Jim Crow and denouncing any external movements to initiate the dismantling of segregation. In this era, students at the University of Mississippi defended and fought for a southern future which blocked or deferred black equality. The university that the New Deal money and federal resources built—a brick-and-mortar embodiment of a future premised on increasing white democracy—now would serve as an apparatus to regain control of the state's future. As the university prepared to celebrate its centennial, Ole Miss served the state's cherished founding myth of white supremacy by adopting an

institutional identity that defined the university almost exclusively through its opposition to civil rights. In the years following World War II, students at the university mobilized the mythical permanence of Ole Miss to promote a future of continued white supremacy and black exclusion.

II

As Ira Katznelson has written, “[n]o other New Deal initiative had as great an impact on changing the country as the Selective Service Readjustment Act.” The legislation, better known as the G. I. Bill of Rights, enabled millions of veterans to attend college, receive job training, acquire farms, start businesses, and purchase homes. It was legislation, in other words, that “created middle-class America.”⁵ The G. I. Bill had a particularly dramatic effect on higher education in America. As early as 1946, total enrollment at colleges and universities increased from the pre-war figure of 1.3 million to over 2 million. Some 2.2 million veterans attended college through the G. I. Bill; in the immediate post-war years, returning servicemen accounted for approximately 70% of American college students. By covering tuition and providing stipends that reduced or eliminated the “opportunity costs” of attending college, the G. I. Bill democratized higher education in America.⁶ Or, at least it did for white Americans.

In crucial ways, racial disparities in the democratizing effects of the G. I. Bill adhered to patterns established through the administration of earlier New Deal programs. Despite the race-neutral language of the legislation, the G. I. Bill disproportionately aided

⁵ Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), 113.

⁶ John Bound and Sarah Turner, “Going to War and Going to College: Did World War II and the G. I. Bill Increase Educational Attainment for Returning Veterans?” *Journal of Labor Economics*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (October 2002): 785.

white veterans and often excluded or offered limited benefits to African Americans. In Mississippi, the discrepancies in real benefits for whites and blacks were particularly dramatic. To take one example, from 1944-1947, African-American Mississippians who sought the job-placement assistance for which veterans were eligible under the G. I. Bill would have found zero black employment counselors working for the Veterans Administration (VA) in the state and only one working for the United States Employment Service (USES). In October of 1946, forced either to go without employment assistance or to take positions offered by white counselors, 92 percent of the black veterans who made use of USES counseling in Mississippi accepted un-skilled, service-sector positions. For comparison, 86 percent of the professional, skilled, and semi-skilled positions that the USES filled in the state that month went to white veterans. Black veterans who attempted to secure positions in on-the-job-training programs under the G. I. Bill had difficulty finding employers who would train them in a particular trade or skill. A survey conducted in May 1946, for example, found that less than 9 percent of the 3,700 African-American veterans living in Jackson had enrolled in job-training programs. African-American Mississippians encountered similar difficulties in accessing the government-guaranteed loans that the G. I. Bill promised. An agent from the Southern Regional Council (SRC) reported that, in a state where blacks made up roughly half of the population, precisely one of the thirty-six veterans' loans that the state of Mississippi issued between June and December 1946 went to an African American. In the summer of 1947, a study by *Ebony* magazine found that, in Mississippi's thirteen most populous cities, black veterans received two of the 3,229 loans that the VA had guaranteed.⁷

⁷ David H. Onkst, " 'First a Negro... Incidentally a Veteran': Black World War Two Veterans and the G. I. Bill of Rights in the Deep South, 1944-1948," *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (Spring 1998):

In the cases of employment placement, job training, and subsidized loans, the failure of the G. I. Bill to deliver full benefits to black Mississippians derived from discriminatory patterns of administration at the state and local level. In the case of higher education, the rigid maintenance of segregation at white institutions of course effectively blocked African-American veterans from many opportunities at the college and university level, but decades of neglect and under-development of the state's African-American institutions limited the ability of federal legislation and money to open opportunities even at black colleges. Mississippi's funding of its first (and, until 1940, its only) black institution of higher education provides a telling example. Between 1871, when Alcorn Agricultural and Mechanical College (now Alcorn State University) opened at the abandoned site of a defunct Presbyterian college, and 1947, state-funded new construction at Alcorn amounted to two office buildings, one classroom building, one dormitory, and one maintenance building. Put another way, through nearly eight decades, the state of Mississippi had spent a grand total of \$205,591 to construct new buildings of a combined space of 80,403 square feet at its college for African Americans. Under the New Deal, Alcorn's administrators encountered resistance from white legislators in Jackson when they requested matching appropriations for federal grants. The school ultimately received just over \$35,000 in funding from the Civil Works Administration (CWA), the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), and the Public Works Administration (PWA). While federal money was modernizing the physical plant at the all-white University of Mississippi, students and faculty at Alcorn choked on the dust generated by the log trucks that traversed a highway running through the center of their campus and endured the frequent power outages that occurred whenever the single diesel

engine that supplied the campus with electricity malfunctioned.⁸ Little wonder that by the fall of 1947, even after a special appropriation of \$250,000 from the state legislature, Alcorn could only accommodate 389 veterans and 462 total students.⁹

The situation at Alcorn, where a historically under-funded and neglected state institution proved physically incapable of housing and educating large numbers of black veterans to whom the G. I. Bill seemed to promise a free college education, was representative of broader patterns throughout the South. The colleges that were open to black Southerners were not just smaller than those which served white Southerners; they possessed fewer resources and thus were poorly equipped for rapid expansion. For the 1949-1950 school year, the average enrollment for white colleges in the South was nearly 1,500; for historically black institutions, it was 729. In 1944, 94 percent of state spending on colleges and universities went to white institutions. Because black colleges, which were more likely than white colleges to be private, were smaller than white institutions and received dramatically lower amounts of funding, they lacked both the existing capacity to house and educate returning veterans as well as the potential to expand and accommodate rising enrollments.¹⁰ By 1947, limited capacity forced black colleges to

⁸ Josephine McCann Posey, *Against Great Odds: The History of Alcorn State University* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), ix-x, 154-157. At least \$15,900 of the costs for a women's dormitory that opened in 1939 came from a Public Works Administration (PWA) grant. Alcorn also received an additional \$20,000 in funds from the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) and the Civil Works Administration (CWA). State of Mississippi, Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning, *Biennial Report of the Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning from July 1, 1934 to June 30, 1935 to the State Legislature* (July 1935), 82-83, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi; State of Mississippi, Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning, *Biennial Report of the Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning from July 1, 1939 to June 30, 1941 to the State Legislature* (July 1941), 49, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

⁹ Martin D. Jenkins, "Enrollment in Institutions of Higher Education of Negroes, 1947-1948," *Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (Spring 1948): 209.

¹⁰ Sarah Turner and John Bound, "Closing the Gap or Widening the Divide: The Effects of the G. I. Bill and World War II on the Educational Outcomes of Black Americans," *Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 63, No. 1 (March 2003): 152.

turn away some 20,000 veterans. One survey found that African-American institutions turned away 55 percent of qualified veterans for lack of space; the rate for white colleges in the South was just 28 percent.¹¹

The for-white-veterans-only nature of the G. I. Bill in the South was no less accidental than the patterns of African-American exclusion that defined the administration of so many New Deal programs in the region. John Rankin, Representative from Mississippi's First District and one of Congress's most outspoken segregationists, chaired the House Committee on World War Legislation that crafted the G. I. Bill. With strong support from the American Legion, which operated segregated posts and barred African Americans from national leadership positions, and the VA, which practiced segregation in its housing and hospitals, Rankin engineered the passage of a bill which "combined complete federal funding with state and local control under the auspices of the Veterans Administration." Local administration appealed to groups like the Legion and the VA by taking power away from federal agencies and placing more of it directly in the hands of veterans groups; for segregationists like Rankin, local control, of course, safely ensconced Jim Crow in the custody of white administrators. For white Southerners, the passage of the G. I. Bill recalled earlier phases of the New Deal. In the words of Katznelson, through Rankin's mechanizations, "[t]he G. I. Bill's remarkable bounty thus could be directed to the country's poorest region while keeping its system of racial power intact."¹²

The inability of colleges like Alcorn to accommodate black veterans demonstrates the long-term effects of discrepancies in state funding for white and black higher

¹¹ Keith W. Olson, *The G. I. Bill, the Veterans, and the Colleges* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1974), 51.

¹² Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White*, 122-129, quotations from 126 and 125.

education, as well as the enduring significance of a New Deal that built a more democratic white future while excluding African Americans. As Gavin Wright has noted, New Deal-era spending in the South was as important for what it made possible in the future as for what it actually accomplished during the Depression. Indeed, though the accelerated pace and increased scale of economic development in the region during and after World War II has tended to make the changes of the 1930s look insignificant in comparison, “none of these wartime developments were independent of prior changes promoted by the New Deal.” If, as Wright has pointed out, the New Deal had not led “to improvements in regional infrastructure and public health [that] made the South much more suitable and attractive for essential defense activity,” the region would not have seen the kind of development in infrastructure, military bases, and industry that came during and after the war.¹³ This is an insight with direct implications for higher education in the South. Because white institutions like the University of Mississippi harnessed the New Deal to build up and modernize their physical plants, they were not only better equipped to house swelling enrollments when veterans returned from the war, they were also primed for expansion and further investment in the years and decades following the war. Indeed, the colleges and universities best positioned to take full advantage of the G. I. Bill specifically and increased federal investment in higher education more generally were the “public institutions with the economies of scale, economies of scope, and funding of research universities.”¹⁴ As the war ended and the G. I. Bill began to take effect, the University of Mississippi had not yet achieved the scale of northern institutions like the Universities of Wisconsin or Michigan, but the development of the New Deal

¹³ Gavin Wright, “The New Deal and the Modernization of the South,” *Federal History*, Issue 2 (January 2010): 66.

¹⁴ Turner and Bound, “Closing the Gap or Widening the Divide,” 153.

years enabled administrators at the university to envision new scales of funding, enrollment, and scope. Conversely, the failure of the New Deal to deliver a full or even partial share of federal money and infrastructural development to the state's African-American institutions had, quite literally, left schools like Alcorn in the dust.

Increased enrollment at the University of Mississippi in the post-war era reflected the scales of expansion that the G. I. Bill facilitated at white colleges throughout the South. In the fall of 1946, 2,826 students registered at the institution; the final regular-session enrollment before the onset of war mobilization had been 1,473.¹⁵ In the fall of 1947, enrollment was 3,017; by the fall of 1948, it reached 3,473.¹⁶ Such rapid increases in enrollment presented the institution with a new set of challenges and necessitated new scales of planning. Initially, new students and returning veterans overwhelmed the university's physical and human resources. In the summer of 1946, newly-installed Chancellor J. D. Williams commented that the institution possessed "too little of everything." He remarked upon the "grievous shortage of faculty members, of housing for both faculty and students, of classrooms and offices, of all the utilities and auxiliary facilities that are necessary for healthful and comfortable living in such a community as the University." Williams reminded the legislature that the increased enrollment was "not a temporary bulge" and projected that, within the next decade, the university would find itself with 5,000 Mississippians seeking admission each year. The chancellor wrote that the institution currently found itself in an "emergency stage ... when we must utilize

¹⁵ State of Mississippi, Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning, *Biennial Report of the Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning from July 1, 1945 to June 30, 1947 to the State Legislature* (July 1947), 21, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi; *Biennial Report* (July 1941), 29.

¹⁶ State of Mississippi, Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning, *Biennial Report of the Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning from July 1, 1947 to June 30, 1949 to the State Legislature* (July 1949), 14, Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

every available and stopgap measure to accommodate as many people as possible.” He forecasted a subsequent stage of “catching up with ourselves” and emphasized the importance of planning for a third stage during which the institution would become capable “of providing for normal operations with an enrollment of 5000 students.”¹⁷

When classes began in the fall of 1946, the *Mississippian*’s front page carried a series of photographs that showed registration lines that “like an endless serpent ... stretched ... and stretched” across the campus. One group of coeds passed the time playing bridge, but other students grew “restless” as the wait-times extended.¹⁸ Over 1,700 veterans were among the more than 2,800 students that crowded the campus. The housing shortage forced students to occupy trailer camps around Oxford or to take rooms as far away as Batesville, Water Valley, and Grenada.¹⁹ If the crowds produced enormous logistical problems, they also embodied new possibilities for the university and the state in the post-war era. In the lines that stretched and twisted across campus, the *Mississippian* saw the “new, enlightened youth” of the state. The students “braving the inconveniences and the hardships of living and trying to accomplish a goal in such crowded conditions” were evidence of the promise of higher education. The *Mississippian* wrote of a “two-way responsibility between” the university and its students. The university owed to its students “the best education possible”; students, in accepting such an education, “assume the responsibility of making use of this education in a way that will be beneficial not only to ourselves but to our state as well.” On a practical level, “[t]he new-found skills and knowledge of an educated Mississippi will be

¹⁷ *Biennial Report* (July 1947), 18.

¹⁸ “LIKE AN ENDLESS SERPENT ... IT STRETCHED ... AND STRETCHED ... TO COME TO THIS,” *Mississippian*, 27 September 1946.

¹⁹ “Ole Miss Faces Problems In Taking Care of Load,” *Mississippian*, 27 September 1946.

used to bring more material wealth to our state and in turn raise our standard of living.”²⁰

Even as the physical plant that the New Deal had built proved inadequate to meet the University of Mississippi’s increased enrollment, administrators were able to plan the kind of development that would go beyond satisfying present needs and make possible further and more ambitious expansion. Students at the university, meanwhile, were envisioning the role higher education could play in improving their own lives and delivering greater prosperity to their state. The future for the university that Chancellor Williams articulated and his students imagined was evidence of both the enduring power of Theodore Bilbo’s vision of a laboratory for white democracy as well as the power of federal money to turn ideas about the University of Mississippi into material realities. First, by directly funding construction throughout the 1930s, and, second, by paying the tuition of students who would pack the campus and fill the institution’s coffers in the post-war era, federal spending was the key element in the execution of any design for the future of Mississippi’s state university. By the mid-1940s, using federal money to expand the capacity of the institution to serve the state’s white population had become a tradition at Ole Miss.

The enrollment boom that the G. I. Bill produced fundamentally altered life at the university. In the first term of the post-war era, the spring semester of 1946, returning veterans made up nearly half of the student body.²¹ Even before the massive bulge in enrollment that would push the university’s numbers past 3,000, campus leaders felt that the influx of new students necessitated a re-assertion of the institution’s traditions. The *Mississippian* reminded new students that, while Ole Miss was “an institution of higher

²⁰ “Cause for Optimism...,” *Mississippian*, 27 September 1946.

²¹ “Enrollment Reaches 1721 To Top All Former Records,” *Mississippian*, 8 February 1946.

learning,” it was specifically a “southern college which intends to make you at home and intends to make you admire its standards and its customs.” The paper noted that Colonel Rebel, the school’s “age-old mascot does not die with the football season ... and continues to represent the southern hospitality, friendship and prestige that goes with YOUR University.”²² The Colonel, significantly, had not yet reached his tenth birthday in the spring of 1946. Of the proper social etiquette on campus, the paper wrote: “Ole Miss is the founder of an old tradition, and this tradition is that ‘EVERYONE SPEAKS.’ Old students heard this over and over again at the first of last semester, but you who are new here this semester, deserve to know that you do not have to know the passer by to speak to him. Rebels are Rebels, and because they are, they recognize each other as such by speaking in the southern manner of hospitality. So when a student passes you by saying ‘hey-eeee,’ or ‘hi yuall!,’ do not let recognition govern your friendliness, but follow the custom that we have always recognized and ‘tip your hat and say a few words.’”²³ On an increasingly crowded and democratized campus, the common bonds and customs of a generic form of white southernness took on added significance.

To open the fall semester of 1947, Colonel Rebel, writing with “an unusual amount of pride,” welcomed the university’s 3,000 students to campus. Barely ten years past his debut in the 1937 *Ole Miss*, the Colonel looked back fondly on his “98 years of existence” and recalled the “generations of students” he had “seen pass through his beloved Ole Miss.” The Colonel pointed to the current year’s “record-breaking enrollment” as evidence “that the University is rapidly becoming a part of the ‘big-time’ system.” Throughout the institution’s history, “many changes” had altered its “physical

²² “Your Ole Miss...,” *Mississippian*, 8 February 1946.

²³ “‘Everyone Speaks’...,” *Mississippian*, 15 February 1946.

campus,” but the Colonel reminded students that an “everlasting spirit... dwells within the University campus that makes it ‘Ole Miss!’” The university, with its academic programs, faculty, administration, and physical plant was “a school and a group of people;” Ole Miss, conversely, was a “spirit” and an “intangible commodity which every student seems to absorb at some time from his freshman year until the tassel changes position at graduation.” Once a student became a graduate of the University of Mississippi, the spirit of Ole Miss “follows him as an integral part of his own life so long as he lives.”²⁴ As emblems of the “spirit” of Ole Miss, the Colonel introduced incoming students to the university’s attractive co-eds, the customized automobiles or “wheels” that populated the campus, the school’s football team, and its “mighty fine parties and well known dances.”²⁵

During the summer of 1947, while the Colonel would have been preparing his letter of welcome to incoming and returning students, a photographer from the New Orleans *Times-Picayune Magazine* ventured to the “rolling hills of Oxford, Miss.” to take in and document the “lovely Ole Miss co-eds.” The cover of the magazine’s July 27, 1947 edition featured Camae Purvis, a senior from Corinth and a member of the Chi Omega sorority, descending into the university’s WPA-built swimming pool. “Ole Miss Mermaid,” read the cover-photo’s caption. Inside the magazine, readers could find several more color photographs documenting “the luscious sun tans” of “Mississippi’s lovely bathing beauties.” Under a photograph that showed Esther Riley of Duck Hill posing on a diving board, a caption remarked, “We call this a streamlined skyline.” “No

²⁴ “Colonel Rebel Looks With Pride to Past, Future,” *Mississippian*, 26 September 1947.

²⁵ “Colonel Rebel Proudly Presents His Ole Miss Coeds,” *Mississippian*, 26 September 1947; “The Colonel Has His Group Of Student ‘Wheels,’” *Mississippian*, 26 September 1947; “Colonel Reb Packs A Wallop On The Gridiron,” *Mississippian*, 26 September 1947; “His Mighty Fine Parties And His Well Known Dances,” *Mississippian*, 26 September 1947.

wonder Ole Miss football players become lifeguards by summer,” the magazine quipped, “with such pulchritude as this around the pool.”²⁶ The *Mississippian* found it “gratifying to see such excellent publicity” and “prominence” for the university in “large newspapers with such tremendous circulations.” Stories and photo-spreads like the *Times-Picayune*’s would ensure that “people throughout the South will realize, as we have known for so long, that Ole Miss co-eds represent the acme in feminine beauty.” The reputation of the school’s co-eds, the *Mississippian* concluded, “will do much to spread the fame of the Ole Miss Rebels throughout the South and the nation.”²⁷

Colonel Reb was, of course, not the first member of the university community to invoke the spiritual in an attempt to shroud Ole Miss in a mystique which transcended time and enlisted the authority of tradition in the promotion of the institution. The invention of Ole Miss in the 1890s had been part of a larger project to make the university the progeny of the Old South. As a shorthand for a lineage that traced itself back to Jefferson Davis, L. Q. C. Lamar, the University Greys, and the white womanhood of the antebellum South, Ole Miss had, from the moment of its invention, legitimized the special position of the university in the state by identifying it as the custodian of the civilization of the Old South. In 1928, Chancellor Alfred Hume had argued that the Oxford campus was not a mere physical plant, but a shrine to the elevation of the spiritual, the power of ideals, and the importance of principle. By 1947, though, the New Deal and post-war expansion had created a very different Ole Miss from the one that, in 1897, fraternity men had founded an annual to commemorate or the one that, in 1928, Hume had saved from removal. When the freshly-invented Colonel invoked the timeless

²⁶ “Ole Miss Mermaid,” “The Cover,” “Right Smart Rebels,” New Orleans *Times-Picayune Magazine*, 27 July 1947.

²⁷ “New Orleans Publicity,” *Mississippian*, 31 July 1947.

“spirit” of Ole Miss, he was using an old term to suggest continuity at a place that had not only changed physically and spatially over the decades but also one that had come to serve fundamentally different purposes and to exalt a new set of images and values. One suspects, for example, that when Alfred Hume compared a trip to the remote Oxford campus to a holy pilgrimage, he did not imagine that experiencing the Ole Miss mystique would leave visitors drooling over co-eds in bathing suits. By the post-war era, though, the images that Ole Miss carried with it had expanded beyond the original connotations of the term. Sun-tanned co-eds, sparkling swimming pools, customized automobiles, themed parties, and football teams that attracted national attention had come to be emblematic of the institution. These were images of modernity and contemporary culture, not the past or a set of ideals that existed outside the realm of time.²⁸ What was more, these were images reflective of a generic white southernness—indeed, in some cases a generic white Americanness. As the university’s mission had expanded and developed over time, so, too had the meaning of the name which served as shorthand for its mystical spirit.

III

World War II, as it did for the rest of the American South, fundamentally changed Mississippi economically and demographically. Per-capita annual income in the state increased from \$313 in 1941 to \$627 by 1945. In the same period, Mississippians’ bank deposits increased from \$148 million to just under \$672 million. Farm mortgages

²⁸ For discussions of changing cultural patterns in the post-war South, see Pete Daniel, *Lost Revolutions: The South in the 1950s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), chapters 1, 5, and 6; and Jason Sokol, *There Goes My Everything: White Southerners in the Age of Civil Rights, 1945-1975* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), chapter 1.

declined during the war years from \$102 million to \$83 million. Mississippians, in other words, ended the war making more money, saving more money, and decreasing their debts. The war also moved Mississippians around as never before. By 1945, the state's farm population had declined by 26 percent. Thirty percent of white tenants left farms during the war; 14 percent of black tenants left farms during the war. As the farm population dropped, areas such as the Gulf Coast and metropolitan Jackson grew dramatically. Migration out of the state may have been even more significant than movement within Mississippi. By 1947, over 60,000 of the state's 237,000 World War-II veterans no longer lived in the state. Some 400,000 Mississippians left the state during the 1940s; the rate of out-migration was particularly high for blacks, who accounted for roughly 75% of the exodus.²⁹

The war also created a new political climate in Mississippi and throughout the larger South. Beginning in 1941 with the establishment of the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC), the war years brought a series of conflicts between leaders in Mississippi and the South and the national Democratic Party. In addition to the controversies surrounding the establishment of a permanent FEPC, southern Democrats spent the war years fending off challenges to the poll tax, attempting to preserve the white-primary system, seeking to block absentee voting by black southerners in the military, and filibustering anti-lynching legislation. As Jason Morgan Ward has demonstrated, the skirmishes of the war years suggested to many southerners that segregation faced "unprecedented threats." In the face of these challenges and in the

²⁹ John R. Skates, "World War II as a Watershed in Mississippi History," *Journal of Mississippi History* 37 (May 1975): 136-137; For an excellent discussion of black out-migration from Mississippi between 1910 and 1960, see Neil R. McMillen, *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 257-281.

midst of a global political and military struggle, southern Democrats increasingly linked the effort to protect Jim Crow at home to efforts to triumph over communism, socialism, and totalitarianism abroad.³⁰

Developments in Mississippi's political culture adhered to these broader regional patterns. During the war years, James O. Eastland, U. S. Senator from Mississippi who in the post-war decades would succeed Bilbo as the state's most prominent national figure, emerged as a leading voice in the campaign to ensure that southerners and Americans remained vigilant in the defense of white supremacy and Jim Crow as they waged a global conflict. On July 29, 1943, in a typical war-time address, Eastland told the Rotary Club of Tunica that "Southern democracy must be preserved" in the post-war world. "The racial integrity and the social systems of the South," the Senator alerted his audience, "must be maintained at all costs." Eastland identified the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) as "the spearhead of the drive for social equality." In linking the organization to war-time rioting in Detroit, he warned that the NAACP was a "trouble making organization which is out to make money." Eastland predicted an escalation in the tactics and demands of such "Northern meddlers" and warned that measures to promote political equality would lead to "social equality, and the destruction of the Nation that grants it."³¹

The speech before the Tunica Rotary Club echoed statements Eastland had made the previous month before an audience of the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC). In honoring the memory of Jefferson Davis, Eastland looked towards the post-

³⁰ Jason Morgan Ward, *Defending White Democracy: The Making of a Segregationist Movement and the Remaking of Racial Politics, 1936-1965* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 40.

³¹ James O. Eastland, Address before the Tunica, MS Rotary Club, 29 July 1943, quotation from page 2, James O. Eastland Collection, J. D. Williams Library, University of Mississippi, File Series 2, Subseries 6, Box 1, Folder 2.

war era as a time when the “South’s social structure must be recognized, and her culture protected.”³² He proclaimed segregation essential for the maintenance of “the purity, integrity and creative genius” of the white race. Segregation and white supremacy, according to Eastland, were not merely foundational elements of southern political and social life; along with “pure womanhood,” they were “sacred principles” which must guide politicians as they sought “to protect the future of America.” By linking segregation to white supremacy, white supremacy to pure womanhood, and pure womanhood to Americanism, Eastland was able to equate defending Jim Crow with defending “the American System of free enterprise” and any number of cherished national ideals.³³ Those who would dismantle Jim Crow and “tear down the social institutions of the South” were un-American adherents of an “alien creed.”³⁴ Conspiracies of un-American radicals, meddlers, and special interests figured prominently in Eastland’s depiction of a besieged South. In May 1944, he defended the poll tax by calling the practice “as old as America itself” and citing anti-poll-tax agitation as evidence of “the infiltration of the Communists into the American System.” Communists, Eastland pointed out, “correctly realize that they must destroy the States, destroy the Constitution and set up a strong central government before they can set up a communist state in America.” At the least, increasing support for abolishing the poll tax suggested that men who “are not lovers of Democracy” had infiltrated Congress. At the worst, the growing momentum against the tax was evidence of “‘front’ organizations” executing the

³² James O. Eastland, “Jefferson Davis Memorial Day Speech,” 3 June 1943, quotation from page 6, James O. Eastland Collection, J. D. Williams Library, University of Mississippi, File Series 2, Subseries 6, Box 1, Folder 3.

³³ *Ibid.*, 3-4

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

early stages of a larger design to install a totalitarian state in American.³⁵

For some leading Mississippians, the campus of the state university seemed a particularly strategic spot in the ideological battles the come in the post-war era. To Eastland's war-time rhetoric about the imperiled state of the white democracy in an increasingly hostile and communist-infiltrated nation, Walter Sillers, Jr. added specific concerns about the ideas floating in the air that young Mississippians breathed and the types of knowledge that the state's university was producing. First elected to the Mississippi House of Representatives in 1916, Sillers served as speaker of the house from 1944 until his death in 1966. He was one of the most powerful and influential political figures in Mississippi during the middle part of the twentieth century. In 1941, Sillers expressed concerns about the "hold communism and socialism have taken and are continuing to obtain in the minds of our people, in the affairs of government, and in the councils of our political parties." He wrote with particular urgency regarding the "ignorance of our young people." Sillers wondered "if anything is being taught in the institutions of learning in this state on the fundamentals of our form of government, and if the students are bing [*sic*] warned of the dangers of permitting these other doctrines [socialism and communism] to encroach on our principles." The "decided socialistic and communistic ideas" of young people, Sillers warned, had direct implications on "the race question this nation is confronted with." Sillers feared that communism and socialism threatened to convince a generation of students "that the only and ultimate solution is amalgamation of the races. SOCIAL EQUALITY." In despair, Sillers asked his friend A.

³⁵ James O. Eastland, Poll Tax address on American Forum radio program, 2 May 1944, quotations from page 1-2, James O. Eastland Collection, J. D. Williams Library, University of Mississippi, File Series 2, Subseries 6, Box 1, Folder 7.

H. Stone, “Who in our generation could ever have dreamed of such in Mississippi.”³⁶ In another letter, Sillers referred ominously to rumors “that at the University of Mississippi communism is getting a fast hold.” Some of the students at the university, Sillers wrote, could only “reconcile [their] communistic views and teachings with the racial question” by embracing “[a]malgamation” and social equality.”³⁷ In this atmosphere of heightened anxiety about the security of segregation, even an institution that had served to strengthen white supremacy required constant monitoring, lest it become an agent in dismantling Jim Crow. Because the state university was a center for the production and dissemination of knowledge and a site where the youth of Mississippi congregated and absorbed ideas about governance and leadership, protecting the institution from dangerous teachings about racial equality took on profound importance. Ensuring that pernicious, outside doctrines did not penetrate Mississippi in the post-war era would necessitate fortifying the campus of its state university.

Even if there was no basis in reality for Sillers’s anxiety about the wide appeal of communism or racial equality for young Mississippians generally and students at the state university more specifically, his and Eastland’s concerns reflected the prevailing sense that the post-war era would require the reassertion of orthodoxies about race and social equality. During and after the war, the university served as a home to moderates whose racial views may have made them appear insufficiently vigilant to the likes of Sillers and Eastland. In March 1942, Huey Howerton, a senior at the university and the son of a political scientist on the faculty, commented in the *Mississippian* that “the complexity of

³⁶ Walter Sillers, Jr. to A. H. Stone, 3 June 1941, Walter Sillers Jr. Papers, Delta State University Archives and Museum, Box 6, Folder 29.

³⁷ Walter Sillers, Jr. to W. M. Wittington, 11 June 1941, Walter Sillers Jr. Papers, Delta State University Archives and Museum, Box 10, Folder 18.

the race question increases as the scope of the war widens.” Howerton was careful to note that the university was “not the place to advocate what should be done with the negro following the war,” but he commented that service in the military “afforded the negro another opportunity to say that the discrimination against him is unfair.” Remarking upon the recent graduation of the first group of Tuskegee airmen, Howerton predicted that, “If they are successful as flyers, they will be the vanguard of an ever-increasing number of negro trainees in the air corps.” The mere training of black pilots represented “a concrete example of the elevation of the negro’s status which this war is bringing.” Howerton went no farther than stating that the “effect the war will have on the racial conflict in the South is going to be interesting,” but his equivocations, at the least, undermined assertions like Eastland’s that Jim Crow dealt “honestly, fairly, and with justice to all peoples regardless of their race, creed or color.”³⁸

Howerton was not alone among the university’s students in expressing uncertainty about the meaning of the war for race relations in the South. In April 1942, the United Sons of the South, a student organization which included in its membership the future governor of Mississippi William F. Winter, published a column on “the negro problem.” The Sons dutifully reproduced Jim Crow’s official version of the southern past before addressing the region’s current dilemma. They recounted the infamy of Reconstruction, denounced the “violent abolition of legal-slavery,” and condemned “the occupation of the South by northern troops, which upheld the ‘carpet-bag’ regime for almost a decade [and] brought about the ‘Tragic Era’ ” of southern history. The relatively peaceful racial relations that followed “the resumption of nominal home rule,” the Sons declared, were

³⁸ “Always With Us,” *Mississippian*, 27 March 1942; Eastland, “Jefferson Davis Memorial Day Speech,” 3.

"undeniable proof that the negroes and whites of the South can live in peace and harmony IF LEFT ALONE and ONLY if left alone." The organization conceded, however, that "the racial situation in Dixie is today far from satisfactory" and advocated some gradual alterations to Jim Crow. "We agree that if possible the negro should have equal status with the white in an ECONOMIC sense," the group wrote, before expressing hope that eventually, though not "in the near future," "peaceful negroes" "may gain equal protection in the civil courts." The Sons were steadfast, though, in denouncing "attempts that have been made to force negro and white social equality." The group went on to warn "that immediate enfranchisement of the negro race can only bring another 'Tragic Era' with extreme corruption in government and such civil strife that outsiders would, no doubt, send occupation troops into the South again." The column closed by insisting that "outsiders ... allow the South to settle her own southern problems in her own southern way!"³⁹

Even if moderate voices at the university differed in tone and rhetoric from those of Eastland and Sillers, Howerton and other students clearly shared the anxiety that social change and racial relations were slipping beyond the control of white southerners. Both Howerton and the United Sons of the South were imagining what a reformed version of Jim Crow might look like and grappling with the processes that might allow the South to accommodate some elements of change without dismantling segregation or enduring major social and political convulsions. By the post-war era, the figure in Mississippi most closely associated with racial moderation was Hodding Carter, editor of the Greenville *Delta Democrat-Times*. In May 1946, Columbia University awarded Carter a Pulitzer Prize and elevated him to a new level of national prestige. That summer, as Theodore

³⁹ "The Southern Negro—How Will This War Affect His Future Status?" *Mississippian*, 10 April 1942.

Bilbo ran for election to a third term in the U. S. Senate, Carter relentlessly attacked The Man as a liar, a bigot, and an incompetent. The coverage and the after-effects of Bilbo's final campaign revealed much about the difficulties and limitations of moderate thought in Mississippi's post-war political climate. As the affair demonstrated the strange position of the moderate in post-war Mississippi, it also foreshadowed the difficult choices the state's university would have to make about its loyalty to Mississippi's founding myths and its mission to serve as a serious center of knowledge production and free expression.

Carter's anti-Bilbo columns appeared in the *Delta Democrat-Times* as national journals were publishing their own condemnations of The Man. Even in the context of Bilbo's long and controversial public career, the extent of the negative coverage he received in advance of the 1946 primary was notable. Regular denunciations in journals such as the *New York Times*, the *New York Herald-Tribune*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, the *New Republic*, the *Nation*, *U. S. News & World Report*, *Time*, *Collier's*, and *Life* contributed to the image of The Man as the personification of the deplorably racist South.⁴⁰ For Mississippians who already sensed a troubling shift in national attitudes towards southern segregation, coverage of Bilbo's 1946 campaign took on special significance. By attacking The Man from within his home state in the midst of a national campaign to besmirch his reputation, Carter and other home-grown moderates seemed to be engaging in acts of disloyalty to Mississippi, the South, and white supremacy. For C. O. Hyde of Natchez, Carter's editorials were "blows ... under the belt." Hyde suggested to The Man that he make a special trip to Greenville to deliver "a couple of nice clean

⁴⁰ Garry Boulard, " 'The Man versus 'The Quisling': Theodore Bilbo, Hodding Carter, and the 1946 Democratic Party," *Journal of Mississippi History* 51 (August 1989): 201-217.

upper cuts” to the editor.⁴¹ Another Bilbo supporter warned that “The South ... may have less to fear ‘from afar’ than it has from lethargy, pussyfooting, and misguided crackpot sociology from within its own borders.”⁴² Other Mississippians bristled at the notion that national ideas about race should influence state elections. “If we’re going to agree with all other outsiders that hinder our representatives,” Robert P. Stringer, a Mississippian serving in the United States Marine Corps Reserve in Japan, asked, “why even have representatives from Mississippi?”⁴³

For increasingly defensive white southerners, the barrage of attacks on Bilbo actually heightened The Man’s credibility. When Bilbo won the July 2 Democratic primary, admirers mixed celebrations of The Man’s vindication with cheers for the discrediting of his critics. From Memphis, Lloyd T. Binford wrote of Bilbo’s re-nomination as a second Redemption. “The descendants of the fearless men composing the ‘red shirt’ Brigade, who redeemed Mississippi from ‘carpet baggers’ and negro domination,” the film censor wrote, “are rejoiced to know that the ‘spirit of 75’ still exists in their native state, despite the effort of ‘baboon-faced Eleanor and ‘negro phile’ [sic] Claire Luce, and may their infamous tribe diminish.” Binford took particular glee in attributing The Man’s victory to a backlash against the anti-Bilbo press. “Your friends,” he wrote, “are grateful to Walter Winchel, who is a disgrace to the Jewish race, lying Drew Pearson, and the negro-phile magazines and newspapers of the North—not omitting Governor Arnold the Georgia ‘misrepresentative’ and the ‘quizzling’ [sic]

⁴¹ C. O. Hyde to Theodore G. Bilbo, 10 May 1946, Theodore G. Bilbo Papers, Special Collections, McCain Library, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, Box 926, Folder 22.

⁴² Paul B. Williamson to the New Orleans Item-Tribune, 3 July 1946, Theodore G. Bilbo Papers, Special Collections, McCain Library, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, Box 934, Folder 13.

⁴³ Robert P. Stringer, “IS IT MISSISSIPPIANS, OR THE OTHER 47 OTHER STATES TELLING US HOW MISSISSIPPI SHOULD BE RUN??”, 1 May 1946, Theodore G. Bilbo Papers, Special Collections, McCain Library, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, Box 925, Folder 8.

Greenville editor.”⁴⁴

As national outrage over Bilbo’s re-election mounted, even moderate white Mississippians protested efforts to undo the results of the 1946 campaign. In January 1947, Republicans and some northern Democrats, arguing that Bilbo’s violent black-baiting had intimidated African Americans into staying away from the polls, attempted to block The Man from taking his seat in the Senate. In the *Mississippian*, Brinkley Morton wrote that “liberal thought in the south is heartily embarrassed and concerned with these insinuations and charges by outsiders, and rightfully so.” Nonetheless, Morton denounced the effort to remove Bilbo from the Senate and charged that it was “a plan ... to capture the northern negro vote.”⁴⁵ He dismissed the sworn testimony of black Mississippians regarding the climate of terror during the campaign as the work of “forty-eight disgruntled Negroes” and “attorneys from certain northern Negro groups.”⁴⁶ “The issue is not Bilbo but the principle,” Morton wrote, “and regardless of whether we support Bilbo in his campaigns, we should recognize the fact that he was duly, constitutionally, officially elected by the people of this state to represent them in the Senate, and it is a slap in our face when the cheap politicians of the Senate refuse to seat Bilbo who probably is more savory than many of them.” Though he believed that “[c]hanges are coming” to Mississippi, Morton expressed confidence that “they will be made in accordance with conservative thought, which predominates this state.” To “outside meddlers,” he recommended that they “attend to their own knitting” and made specific reference to “the communists” and “stinking political machines” of northern cities.

⁴⁴ Lloyd T. Binford to Theodore G. Bilbo, 3 July 1946, Theodore G. Bilbo Papers, Special Collections, McCain Library, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, Box 934, Folder

⁴⁵ “A Mississippian Looks at the World,” *Mississippian*, 10 January 1947.

⁴⁶ “A Mississippian Looks at the World,” *Mississippian*, 6 December 1946.

“Those who would make political expediency out of our delicate and touchy racial problems,” Morton indignantly concluded, “are committing the real wrong in this whole episode.”⁴⁷

Morton’s reaction to the controversy surrounding Bilbo’s re-election, like the war-time pieces from the United Sons of the South and Huey Howerton, exemplified the inconsistencies and the limitations of the moderate position in Mississippi politics. By acknowledging the inevitability and desirability of change, but stating that such change would occur only gradually and conservatively, moderates identified a goal while at the same time ensuring its indefinite deferment. By insisting on southern control over race relations and delegitimizing northern efforts to alter or dismantle Jim Crow, moderates effectively shielded militant segregationists from any external pressure for reform. And by responding to accounts of southern horrors by crying hypocrisy and pointing to northern troubles, moderates protected other white southerners from taking a serious moral inventory of Jim Crow. Even when moderates used rhetoric and wrote in tones that departed from the fire-breathing of the likes of Rankin, Eastland, and Sillers, their views on segregation and their conceptions of social change placed them firmly and clearly on the side of a line that protected the Mississippi’s racial arrangements.

In December 1946, in the midst of the controversy surrounding Bilbo’s re-election, Hodding Carter made an appearance at the University of Mississippi’s Fulton Chapel. The event said much about the dilemmas that moderates faced in post-war Mississippi. It also revealed a university struggling to promote universal ideals of higher education while remaining loyal to local orthodoxies. Carter’s appearance was part of an impressive speakers’ forum organized by the campus chapter of Omicron Delta Kappa

⁴⁷ “A Mississippian Looks at the World,” *Mississippian*, 10 January 1947.

(ODK), a national leadership fraternity. In the 1946-1947 school year alone, ODK brought Carter, John Rankin, Ralph McGill, Alexander Kerensky, and the former Chancellor of Austria to campus.⁴⁸ In advance of Carter's appearance at the university, a group of alumni from Gulfport sent urgent telegrams to the president of the State Board of Trustees and to Chancellor J. D. Williams in an effort to prevent the editor from making his "anti-South address."⁴⁹ Carter, the alumni charged, was "antagonistic to Southern ideals."⁵⁰ His "acts and utterances" were "a desecration to the ideals of the Old South as well as a blight to the ideals of loyal Mississippians."⁵¹ If the ODK forum reflected a vision of a university as a place where young Mississippians would encounter a range of ideas and perspectives, the alumni group from Gulfport articulated a vision of the university as a "loyal" Mississippi institution that protected its students from the "public appearance" of dangerous men like Carter.⁵² In the name of academic freedom, Williams declined to revoke Carter's invitation, and on the night of December 12, the editor spoke before a packed crowd of over 1,200 spectators in Fulton Chapel.⁵³ Carter's speech, "The Liberal Sprit and the South," stressed the importance of elevating the "economic, health and education of the negro" while at the same time denouncing "any program which would end segregation of races in the south as unrealistic and dangerous to the hope of progress in race relations." Though Carter was "emphatically convinced

⁴⁸ For a discussion of the ODK forum and William Winter's roll in it, see Bolton, *William F. Winter and the New Mississippi*, 63-65.

⁴⁹ Telegram from Ole Miss Alumni in Gulfport to Martin Miller, President of the State Board of Trustees, 12 December 1946, Theodore G. Bilbo Papers, Special Collections, McCain Library, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, Box 954, Folder 15.

⁵⁰ Telegram from Ole Miss Alumni in Gulfport to Chancellor J. D. Williams, 12 December 1946, Theodore G. Bilbo Papers, Special Collections, McCain Library, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, Box 1128, Folder 7.

⁵¹ Telegram from Ole Miss Alumni in Gulfport to Martin Miller, 12 December 1946.

⁵² Telegram from Ole Miss Alumni in Gulfport to Chancellor J. D. Williams, 12 December 1946.

⁵³ "Hodding Carter Speaks Here Despite Protest; Promotes Awakening of South to Dangers," *Mississippian*, 13 December 1946; "Let Him Speak..." *Mississippian*, 13 December 1946.

that [black suffrage] is coming whether we like it or not,” he affirmed his opposition to extending black voting rights. The “betterment of the Negro’s position in the South,” Carter told his audience, “must come within the pattern of racial segregation.”⁵⁴

That a public appearance at a university by an editor who repeatedly pledged allegiance to Jim Crow and affirmed the basic assumptions of white supremacy was so controversial that it almost never happened suggests something of the ideological narrowness of post-war Mississippi. The ferocity with which men like Carter denounced Bilbo or the urgency with which groups like the Gulfport alumni warned of the need to protect students at their state university from men like Carter should not distract from the basis of unity between moderates and militants in post-war Mississippi. In important ways, even if their tone differed from that of men like Rankin, Sillers, and Eastland, moderates like Howerton, the United Sons of the South, and Carter had emerged from, sought to protect, and imagined a future for the same world that had produced the militant segregationists. Consider, for example, the shared anxiety that the South had lost the ability to control the future of its own race relations, let alone continue to set racial policies nationally. Even as Rankin was speaking to a capacity audience at a campus overflowing with beneficiaries of the whites-only G. I. Bill he had designed and shepherded to passage, the representative from Tupelo warned Ole Miss students about the “racial commotions” that communists and northerners were inciting throughout the South.⁵⁵ Moderates may not have spoken of communist conspiracies or NAACP- or northern-inspired plots, but they shared a sense that, in Carter’s words, change was

⁵⁴ “Economic Advancement Within Pattern of Segregation Advocated In Speech By Carter,” *Delta Democrat-Times*, 13 December 1946; “Hodding Carter Speaks Here Despite Protest; Promotes Awakening of South to Dangers,” *Mississippian*, 13 December 1946.

⁵⁵ “Hon. John Rankin. First Forum Speaker, Gives Address On Evils Of ‘Communism,’” *Mississippian*, 11 October 1946.

coming to the South “whether we like it or not.”⁵⁶ The war years thus had initiated a shift in perspective and posture as well as in thought and politics in Mississippi. If it had been possible during the 1930s to embrace the type of economic development that an aggressive and ambitious set of federal programs could deliver, it was imperative in this new era to safeguard white supremacy and segregation at all costs. If in the earlier era the national Democratic Party and the federal government had enabled the building up of white democracy, those two entities now appeared capable of furthering the cause of social equality and dismantling Jim Crow. One did not need the incendiary rhetoric or keen nose for conspiracy of the most militant politicians in the state to share in the foreboding that external forces threatened to seize from the South control of its own racial future. Even for moderates at the University of Mississippi, then, the climate of the post-war years necessitated balancing the promotion of the institution with protecting and adhering to the state’s racial orthodoxy.

IV

For southerners who sensed that the war years had seen their region lose its special place in the Democratic Party, a series of events beginning in late 1946 and carrying into 1948 confirmed their suspicions. In December 1946, President Harry S. Truman created a President’s Committee on Civil Rights (PCCR). The following October, the PCCR produced a report, *To Secure These Rights*, that called for: the expansion of the Justice Department’s civil rights section; a federal anti-lynching law; the abolition of the poll tax; federal protection of voting rights; an end to employment

⁵⁶ “Hodding Carter Speaks Here Despite Protest; Promotes Awakening of South to Dangers,” *Mississippian*, 13 December 1946.

discrimination; increased scrutiny of restrictive housing covenants; an end to discrimination in the armed forces; and the denial of federal funding to any public or private program that engaged in segregation. In February 1948, a month after his State of the Union had declared segregation to be at odds with basic American ideas about democracy and liberty, Truman asked Congress for a law against the poll tax, a permanent FEPC, a civil-rights commission, a ban on segregation in interstate travel, and an anti-lynching law.⁵⁷

Democratic leaders in Mississippi and throughout the South reacted to Truman and the national party with a sense of betrayal and anger. On January 29, 1948, Eastland channeled the spirit of this reaction in an address to a joint assembly of the Mississippi legislature. “Southerners,” he stated, “are being penalized because of our loyalty to the Democratic Party.” Eastland spoke of the region’s “great dilemma.” Because white southerners were “in the bag” as reliable Democratic voters, the national party paid no attention to their concerns. Republicans, who knew they could get “no political support” from southerners, likewise “care nothing about us.” The region’s “social institutions,” Eastland explained, “are despised today by all political leaders of the two major parties.”⁵⁸ The South now faced an “intolerable situation.” Its “own party, the Democratic Party, waves this banner of social equality and the destruction of segregation, the destruction of our social safe guards.” Republicans, with no hope of capturing southern votes, had “taken up” the cause of social equality in an attempt to compete with national Democrats for “minority groups ... organized with a program for our destruction.”

⁵⁷ William E. Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South: Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, and Lyndon B. Johnson* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 165-178.

⁵⁸ James O. Eastland, “Joint Assembly of the Mississippi Legislature in Jackson, Mississippi,” 29 January 1948, quotation from page 7, James O. Eastland Collection, J. D. Williams Library, University of Mississippi, File Series 2, Subseries 6, Box 1, Folder 29.

According to Eastland, minority organizations such as the NAACP, “one of the most powerful organizations in the country,” combined with groups like the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), “the Committee to abolish the poll tax, the Federal Council of Churches in America,” and various unnamed “northern mongrel groups” to “interlock with the communistic party.” When bills involving civil-rights issues came before Congress, Eastland explained, northern and western legislators voted to appease the members of some combination of the minority, communist-affiliated organizations. “When one of those bills are [*sic*] up,” Eastland continued, “there haunts the galleries of your Capitol, mongrels, blacks, tans, yellows and browns and white by the hundreds.” Walter White, “a negro,” the Senator quipped, “has more power in your government than all of the southern states combined.”⁵⁹

Eastland’s address included a particular version of race and politics in American history. During Reconstruction, the Republican Party had “attempted to destroy the South,” “to bring about racial emasculation,” and “to create a negro republic.” The era was deserving of a special kind of infamy; according to Eastland, “[t]here have been but few times in history that there has been such a hard peace settlement as was given the south after the Civil War.” Because the Reconstruction-era Democratic Party had aided in the Redemption of the South, because its national leaders “did everything within their power to retain the constitution and to help the south,” southerners had become loyal Democrats. Following the Compromise of 1877, which Eastland attributed largely to the skillful diplomacy of L. Q. C. Lamar—“a great Senator from Mississippi, a great southerner, a great American”—federal troops left the South, “and from that time until 1937 the south was not molested.” Left alone, Eastland continued, the South had “built

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

up a racial system ... that is the envy of any section in the world where the two races in great numbers live side by side.” The good southerner wanted “the negro to have a square deal ... to enjoy the fruits of his labor ... [and] to prosper and do well and make a good citizen. The only rule that we of the south lay down is that he must stay out of politics, because he would use the power of the ballot to destroy the laws on which our social structure is built.”⁶⁰

Eastland warned that the South was losing its defenses within the Democratic Party and proposed a radical alternative. In order to prevent its own party from “bartering our social structure for the favors of these red mongrel groups in the north [*sic*],” he called on the region to withhold its 127 electoral votes from the national party in order to “stop [it] in its tracks.” Eastland dispensed with the old faith that the southern dilemma “had to be solved in the Democratic Party.” Indeed, he overturned this logic by stating that remaining loyal to the party “through thick and thin” “would destroy the South.” Only by withholding votes from the national party could southerners demonstrate to Democrats that they could no longer count on southern loyalty while waging a “fight on our institutions.” In a preemptive response to arguments that bolting the national party would be akin to “jumping out of the frying pan into the fire ... [and] wasting our vote in electing a Republican,” Eastland claimed the South had a strong chance of victory by throwing the presidential election into the House of Representatives. From there, Eastland reasoned that Republicans would favor a southern Democrat over a northern one and that Democrats from any section of the country would prefer even a southern Democrat to a Republican. If successful, the plan would make the South “the most powerful section of the country.” “We are a sleeping giant,” Eastland told his audience,

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

“if our people would but act.” Brandishing the works of John C. Calhoun, the Senator concluded by invoking the South Carolinian as a fitting model of a great leader “who loved the Democratic Party, but a man who lived [*sic*] the south [*sic*], her people, her customs and her culture more than he did any other consideration.”⁶¹

Eastland’s speech was remarkable not only for its impact on the growing States’ Rights, or “Dixiecrat,” political movement, but also for the force with which it articulated the anxieties and grievances of southern Democrats in the post-war era.⁶² One striking feature of the speech was its use of history.⁶³ Eastland invoked a particular version of Reconstruction as an origin story that explained the traditional loyalty to the Democratic Party and hostility to the Republican Party of Mississippians and southerners. Writing the political history of the South as one of Democratic betrayal and Republican predation served to set apart the region from the rest of the country politically. If the national party system had created a dilemma that left the South with an ally it could not trust and an enemy it could only fear, perhaps the region could only promote its interests outside of the existing arrangement. Another striking feature of the speech was the dramatic swings from expressions of profound helplessness to extreme confidence. In one paragraph, the South faced an unsolvable dilemma and suffered at the hands of an international conspiracy; in the next, it had only to act dramatically to assume its rightful place as king-maker in the electoral system. Clearly, something about the intense anxiety regarding the future of segregation and white supremacy that southerners had come to

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 12-14.

⁶² For a discussion of the post-war political culture of Mississippi, the Dixiecrat revolt, and this relatively early stage of Eastland’s career, see Maarten Zwiars, *Senator James Eastland: Mississippi's Jim Crow Democrat* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015), 33-65.

⁶³ In a slightly earlier context, Eastland invoked the lessons of Reconstruction in debates about post-war policy in Germany and post-war racial policies at home. For an insightful discussion of this phase of Eastland’s career, see Chris Myers Asch, “Revisiting Reconstruction: James O. Eastland, the FEPC, and the Struggle to Rebuild Germany, 1945-1946,” *Journal of Mississippi History*, 67 (Spring 2005): 1-28.

feel in the post-war era produced a sense that drastic action was necessary to save the South from a passive position within the Democratic Party and the larger nation.⁶⁴

Eastland's ideas clearly affected students at the University of Mississippi. Against the backdrop of southern hysteria over Truman's actions, the university's Associated Student Body (ASB) debated the merits of affiliating with the new National Student Association (NSA). Established in 1947 through a founding convention at the University of Wisconsin, the NSA had grown out of the experiences of twenty-five American students who attended the 1946 meeting in Prague that led to the formation of the International Union of Students. The NSA concerned itself with a variety of causes, including the promotion of cultural programs, the expansion of student rights, and the protection of academic freedom.⁶⁵ Even in the organization's planning stages, the NSA's stance on segregation had caused problems for student leaders at the University of Mississippi. In the spring of 1947, ASB President Jim Barnett attended a meeting at Louisiana State University of student leaders from colleges across the South and Southwest. There, Barnett led a group that opposed plans to include language advocating integrated education in the organization's constitution. In support of Barnett, the *Mississippian* remarked that, while the proposed organization "has fine possibilities and it will offer advantages that the Southern schools will certainly want to benefit from," it would be "foolhardy for the University of Mississippi or any other Southern school to

⁶⁴ Writing about plans to reopen the international slave trade and to expand the Old South's plantation system into the Caribbean and Central American in the 1850s, Walter Johnson has remarked upon the "contradictory extremes" and the "contradictory images of destiny and decline" that characterized so much of the rhetoric associated with both of those expansionist movements. I would argue that the Dixiecrat movement, if only in rhetoric and perhaps not in action, recalled some of the wild swings of the 1850s. Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2013), 418.

⁶⁵ Martin M. McLaughlin, "National Student Association," *The Journal of Higher Education* 22, No. 5 (May 1951): 258.

become a member of an organization advocating anything else than segregated education for the South.” The paper commended its ASB president for his duty and his loyalty. In taking his “stand” in defense of the “social barrier between the two races,” Barnett “was truly representing the Ole Miss student body as was his bounden duty.”⁶⁶

As the university’s delegate to the NSA founding convention in the summer of 1947, Lewis Nobles was “thoroughly disappointed” that “discussion over the racial question, particularly the Negro problem in the South, dominated and forced from the floor consideration of anything worthwhile.” Nobles expressed particular irritation with delegates from northern private schools, who “were perfectly willing to light the fuse of the powder keg involving sectionalism, and then draw back into their shells of self-righteousness.” “In no southern school anywhere,” Nobles remarked, “is discrimination practiced in the degree that we find it in many of these private schools. To many of these, there are far more social graces required for admittance than merely stipulating the color of the appellant’s skin!” After enumerating a list of “organized pressure groups” present at the meeting that included “the Communist Youth Club of America, American Youth for Democracy, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People,” Nobles left his readers to “draw your own conclusions as to the political integrity of this organization.” For Nobles, the NSA’s concern with the race issue and the “red tinge” of its politics placed it at the opposite end of the ideological spectrum from the university he represented. The question of joining the organization was a choice between disavowing “an organization the basic principles of which you could never subscribe to,” or affiliating in an effort to “derive some secondary benefits.”⁶⁷

⁶⁶ “Segregated Education...,” *Mississippian*, 25 April 1947.

⁶⁷ “Report Of NSA Delegate,” *Mississippian*, 6 February 1948.

On January 6, 1948, the ASB's Executive Council voted unanimously to reject affiliation with the NSA. "As students at a state-sponsored institution in Mississippi," the Executive Council found the "aims and objectives" expressed in the NSA's constitution "distasteful and unsavory." The council pointed specifically to the "disgraceful provision" of the constitution that promoted the goal of "securing the eventual elimination of all forms of discriminatory education systems anywhere in the United States." In "wholeheartedly" denouncing the provision, the council asserted that "such aims and intentions are alien to Mississippi, and are not a matter for student organization or association concern, but the province of our elders and duly elected officials." Beyond affirming their loyalty to segregation and their respect for the "elders and duly elected officials" who built up and maintained Jim Crow, the members of the council linked their "flat, unqualified rejection of affiliation with the National Student Association" to their "faith in the Mississippi Constitution and government." In the council meetings of the state university's student government in Oxford, just as in the legislature in Jackson, this was a time to "be wary and vigilant"; there could be, after all, "no compromise with segregation."⁶⁸

Some student voices of dissent questioned the Executive Council's action. Frank Kennedy asked why the council had not put the matter before a vote of the full student body. By deciding the matter in a closed meeting and providing "too little actual information" about the NSA, he wrote, the council and the *Mississippian* had engaged in behavior that "smacked of Rankinism and Bilboism."⁶⁹ George Thatcher complained that the "unanimous" action of the council "leads one to believe that the entire student body is

⁶⁸ "Report Of Committee On NSA," *Mississippian*, 9 January 1948.

⁶⁹ "Our Views Smack Of 'Bilboism, Rankinism,'" *Mississippian*, 16 January 1948.

in accord with the action.”⁷⁰ Beyond these procedural issues, Frank Moak articulated a broader critique of what he called “isolationism.” “Even though the national student organization now operating has non-segregation as one of its principles,” he wrote, “that doesn’t necessarily mean that our only move is to withdraw from it and isolate ourselves with the other schools in Mississippi into a Mississippi Inter-Collegiate Council.” Instead, Moak argued that the university should join the national organization, and then attempt “as best we can ... to change the undesirable attitudes in an un-antagonistic manner, recognizing sectional differences, overlooking unjustifiable criticism of others which might be directed toward us, and not being so quick to take offense.”⁷¹

Moak’s brief for inter-sectional diplomacy was a voice in the wilderness on a campus where rhetoric and thought increasingly reflected the surrounding political climate. In forceful rejoinders to Moak and other critics of the council’s action, the *Mississippian* used language and arguments that reflected the warnings of Mississippi’s political leaders and the logic of the emerging Dixiecrat movement. One editorial noted the dangerous tendency of the NSA to stray “from the realm of student problems into that of political questions.” Students, the paper warned, “must always be wary of organizations ... which attempt to present a concentrated front for a worthwhile cause, but are underneath actually hotbeds of activity with which we must have no accord.”⁷² The NSA’s goal of desegregating education, another editorial stated, “is as foreign to Mississippi as the FEPC.” In response to calls for a campus-wide referendum on the NSA question, the *Mississippian* cited “the marvelous support now being given throughout the South to the stand taken by our own Governor Wright, Senator Eastland, other high

⁷⁰ “Opening the Mail,” *Mississippian*, 16 January 1948.

⁷¹ “What About NSA,” *Mississippian*, 16 January 1948.

⁷² “The NSA Principles Are Not Ours,” *Mississippian*, 9 January 1948.

government officials, and our state legislature” as definitive “evidence as to Southern majority opinion.” The militancy of Mississippi’s political leaders became its own justification for decisive action on the NSA issue. “We feel that the University students feel just as strongly on the matters at hand,” the paper wrote, “as is evidenced by the overwhelming sentiment of our representative state legislature.” With approval, the *Mississippian* observed, “We are now seeing the South at last take a stand.”⁷³ In rejecting membership in the NSA and pledging their loyalty to segregation, student leaders at Ole Miss, too, were determined to stand up and be counted.

In the midst of the NSA controversy and the escalating tensions between Mississippi’s leaders and the national Democratic Party, moderates on campus grew uneasy about the drift of politics in the state and region. Jack Napier worried that “the pressure of Northern groups” and “recent legislative judicial actions in Washington” were forcing “[m]en of goodwill and with liberal viewpoints in the South ... to the right.” While he warned against the tendency of the South “to fall back on conservatism [and] reaction,” Napier denounced desegregation as “totally unacceptable to any intelligent, liberal Southerner.” Resigned to “the fact that there is no present workable solution to our race problem,” he expressed incredulity that “honest, well-meaning people” could “be so stupid as to fail to see where this program of trying to force racial equality on us will lead.” As northern Democrats “wielded” “the big stick” “against the South,” Napier worried that the “moderate is being forced from the middle of the road and his balancing influence is lost.” At universities, the need to block the penetration of “subversive” ideas threatened to “kill liberal thought in Southern colleges.” Napier brooded over the disastrous consequences of educating “the Southern leadership of the future” on

⁷³ “The NSA And Mississippi,” *Mississippian*, 6 February 1948.

campuses “insulated against intelligent thinking.”⁷⁴ As the Dixiecrat movement gathered momentum in Jackson and supporters at the state university, Napier looked increasingly prescient about the future of Ole Miss and Mississippi.

On February 12, two weeks after Eastland’s address to the state legislature, Governor Fielding Wright addressed an audience of 5,000 Mississippi Democrats in Jackson. There, speaking to a crowd that packed the city’s municipal auditorium to its balconies, Wright accused the national party of “treason.” The national leaders, he claimed, had assumed the people of the South “were too supine and helpless to do more than verbally protest.” In vivid language, he described the arrogance of northern Democrats who expected to be able to quiet Southerners’ “outraged cries ... with gentle admonitions to behave [and] with pleasing pieces of patronage.” All the while, national party leaders, Wright continued, “flaunted in our faces their proposals for legislation which would bring down on us grievous misery and untold hardships.” According to the *Jackson Daily News*, the meaning of the meeting had been clear: “We have declared our willingness to go to any lengths to preserve the real traditions and principles of the Democratic party and to uphold the Southern way of living that to us is precious beyond price.” If, as Wright suspected, there was any doubt among the leadership of the national party about the commitment of the “Democracy of Mississippi,” the *Daily News* affirmed, “we don’t mean maybe about that, either.”⁷⁵ At the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia that summer, the Mississippi delegation walked out of the meeting and removed any lingering doubts about the seriousness of threats to bolt the

⁷⁴ “‘Reform’ Can’t Be Forced,” *Mississippian*, 20 February 1948.

⁷⁵ “Wright Calls On Citizens Here For Action Against Democratic Party Leaders,” *Jackson Daily News*, 12 February 1948.

party.⁷⁶

Students at the University of Mississippi were prominent in the efforts to mobilize support for the Dixiecrats throughout the state and across the South. An eleven-car motorcade carried fifty-five students from Oxford to the States' Rights Democratic Party convention in Birmingham on July 17. Before departing campus, the student Dixiecrats passed a resolution of support for Governor Wright and for the Mississippians who had walked out of Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia. The campus states' righters also declared "that the hearts of true Southerners enrolled at the University of Mississippi beat in unison with the hearts of our valiant delegation at the Philadelphia fiasco."⁷⁷ A photograph in the *Jackson Daily News* showed a contingent of Ole Miss students in the lobby of Birmingham's Tutwiler Hotel wearing black broad-brimmed hats, "giving out a rebel yell," and carrying Mississippi and Confederate flags.⁷⁸ Inside the convention hall, some of the students unfurled an Ole Miss banner and shouted, "To Hell with Truman." Others went through renditions of the Hotty Toddy, but substituted, "States' Rights, by damn," in the usual place of "Ole Miss, by damn" at the conclusion of the cheer.⁷⁹

Following the convention, a meeting of 330 students created the Ole Miss States' Rights Democratic Organization and named John H. "Buddy Bowen," the senior quarterback of the Ole Miss football team, as its chairman. Remarking upon the burst of

⁷⁶ For the strongest discussion of the development of the Dixiecrat movement and of the two conventions of the summer of 1948, see Kari Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt and the End of the Solid South, 1932-1968* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), chapters three and four.

⁷⁷ "Fifty-Five Ole Miss Students Attend States' Rights Meeting," *Mississippian*, 22 July 1948.

⁷⁸ "Rebel Students Add Color To 'Bama Conference," *Jackson Daily News*, 18 July 1948

⁷⁹ "Fifty-Five Ole Miss Students Attend States' Rights Meeting," *Mississippian*, 22 July 1948. For other secondary accounts of the Ole Miss delegation at the convention, see John M. Coski, *The Confederate Battle Flag: America's Most Embattled Emblem* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2005), 101-102; Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt*, 136; and Kevin Pierce Thornton, "Symbolism at Ole Miss and the Crisis of Southern Identity," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 86, no. 3 (Summer, 1987): 257-258.

student activism in the defense of states' rights, Walter Sillers, Jr. wrote, "Never have I ever been prouder of Ole Miss than last Saturday at Birmingham when I saw the splendid group representing our great University." The Speaker, who earlier in the decade had worried about the creeping appeal of communism and integration at the Oxford campus, now found it "most inspiring and encouraging to know that our young men of today, our leaders of tomorrow, are so wide awake, patriotic and determined to stand by our cause and fight for the fundamental principles of American government."⁸⁰

The Ole Miss students who caravanned to Birmingham, showed up at the convention hall dressed like come-to-life Colonel Rebs, and blended school-spirit cheers with chants about states' rights and insults to the President of the United States were not the only political voices at the University of Mississippi, but they were the loudest and the ones that gained the most support. In August 1948, after the Mississippi Democratic Party held a state convention and formally pledged their support to the Dixiecratic ticket, a group of 26 students at the university wrote to Howard McGrath, the national Democratic Party chairman, to enlist his help in placing Truman electors on the ballot in Mississippi for the November general election. The letter to McGrath included a statement that the Ole Miss delegation at Birmingham "did not represent a majority of the student body." The loyal student Democrats added, "there is a great need for intelligent leadership in the state and from the national committee in order that the misconceptions of the States' Rights bolters in the South may be counteracted and that the people as a whole be informed as to the true course loyal Democrats should take." In response to the loyal challengers, N. S. "Soggy" Sweat of Corinth, a leader of the campus states' righters, retorted that "[t]he names on that petition pretty well represent the strength of the

⁸⁰ "Bowen Is States' Right Chairman At Ole Miss," *Clarion Ledger*, 29 July 1948.

opposition here.” He predicted that support for Truman and the national party was “scattered and weak, and will continue to wane as the States' Rights program is carried to the people.”⁸¹ If polls were any indication, Sweat’s assessment of sentiment on campus was accurate. By a 12:1 margin, students at the university favored the States’ Rights Democrats over national Democrats. W. J. Caperton, a student from Louisville, Mississippi and a supporter of the Dixiecrats, explained his feelings by pointing to history: “States’ rights are just what we fought the Civil War for, white equality in the South.” For David Roberts, a senior from Memphis, “States’ rights [were] to prevent the Negro’s having the right to sit next to you in the picture shows, schools, and buses. Kenneth Floyd of Vicksburg explained the importance of states’ rights in the simplest of ways. “They’re the opposite of civil rights,” he said, “It’s a defense of white supremacy. Up North the Negroes have privileges that they won’t get down here.”⁸² One could indeed imagine Walter Sillers’s pride in what his state university had become.

On October 9, 1948, the university celebrated its centennial with a day of homecoming festivities. The day began with a parade depicting scenes from the university’s history. A highlight of the event was the performance of a group of Army and Air Force ROTC students who dressed in Confederate uniforms shipped express from a Philadelphia company and paraded as the “University Greys.” Prior to the afternoon football game against Vanderbilt, Sillers served as master of ceremonies at a luncheon for a group that included prominent alumni, one hundred members of the state legislature, two congressmen, and Senator John C. Stennis. Twenty fighter planes flew over the 22,500 spectators in Hemingway Stadium in “combat cruising formation” before

⁸¹ “Students Write McGrath Asking For Truman Electors,” *Mississippian* 12 August 1948.

⁸² “States’ Rights Movement Favored In Student Poll,” *Mississippian*, 12 August 1948.

one dropped the game ball onto the field for the 2:00 kickoff.⁸³ At half-time of the game, with the Rebels trailing Vanderbilt, 7-0, the school's 80-piece marching band covered itself with a 40 by 70-foot Confederate flag and marched the length of the field playing "Dixie."⁸⁴ In the second half, Ole Miss out-scored Vanderbilt 20-0 and rallied to take the homecoming victory.⁸⁵

Long after the Dixiecrat movement failed to throw the 1948 presidential election into the House of Representatives, the Confederate imagery that had figured so prominently in the revolt and the university's centennial celebration remained closely tied to popular images of Ole Miss. Both John M. Coski and Kevin Pierce Thornton have noted the striking rapidity with which Ole Miss and Confederate symbols like the battle flag and "Dixie" became linked after the university deployed them. As Coski has pointed out, though supporters of the University of Virginia had used Confederate flags to cheer their football team at least eight years before the emblem became associated with Ole Miss, and fans of the University of North Carolina claimed an even longer history of using the flag at games, "[r]arely has a tradition taken root faster than the Confederate battle flag did at Ole Miss."⁸⁶ For Thornton, the "outburst of defiant display and its simultaneous anointment as tradition" was all the more remarkable for how quickly "these symbols were taken to be at the heart of the university's tradition and primary expressions of its values."⁸⁷ By 1948, of course, the University of Mississippi was well

⁸³ "University Greys Depicted by ROTC," *Mississippian*, 15 October 1948; "Huge Parade New Attraction Centennial Day," *Oxford Eagle*, 30 September 1948; "Biggest Crowd In 100 Years Headed This Way," *Oxford Eagle*, 7 October 1948; "Alumni Rate Homecoming 'Huge Success,'" *Oxford Eagle*, 14 October 1948.

⁸⁴ "Huge Confederate Flag Shown By Ole Miss Band At Saturday Half-Time," *Mississippian*, 15 October 1948.

⁸⁵ "Rebs Vanquish Vandy in Centennial Fray," *Mississippian*, 15 October 1948.

⁸⁶ Coski, *The Confederate Battle Flag*, 95-96, 107.

⁸⁷ Thornton, "Symbolism at Ole Miss," 259

practiced in the invention of tradition and the alteration of its identity. In the context of the institution's long history, though, what was remarkable about 1948 was not how quickly Ole Miss embraced Confederate symbols, but how thoroughly the university had elevated the protection of Jim Crow above any other priority. For moderates and militants alike at the University of Mississippi, a southern future with a secure place for white supremacy and segregation had become a burden that necessitated narrowing how the institution defined itself, what ideas it allowed to penetrate its campus, and how seriously it championed the mission of a public university. If before, myths about the founding of the university served to anchor it as it embarked upon projects of expansion and development, now the myth of Ole Miss served Mississippi's segregationist leaders and the Dixiecrat movement in a battle for the future of white supremacy and black exclusion. The optimism and sense of possibility that defined the outlook of the university as it built itself during the New Deal era had given way to something quite different. If for one period, planners had designed the University of Mississippi as a mechanism for development and the building of an expansive future, the centennial of 1948 suggested the university had entered a new era, one in which segregationists would mobilize the mythology and symbolism of the institution in the service of protecting Mississippi's oldest and most cherished founding myth.

CONCLUSION

On September 30, 1962, a mob of over two thousand protested the registration of James H. Meredith at the University of Mississippi by cursing and beating reporters, smashing and setting fire to automobiles, hurling bricks and firing guns, and driving a fire truck and a bulldozer toward U. S. marshals stationed on the campus. The mayhem, which lasted into the morning of October 1, resulted in two deaths, major property damage, and countless severe injuries. Twenty-nine of the more than five hundred marshals on the campus took gun-shot wounds; others suffered broken bones, lacerations, and chemical burns. Peace returned to the campus only after federalized units of the Mississippi National Guard and regular U. S. Army troops put down the riot. The explosion of violence and the political chicanery that preceded it suggested that white Mississippians would have rather destroyed their state university—either by smashing and burning it with bulldozers and Molotov cocktails or by enacting one of many schemes to close the institution —than have seen it desegregated. If by 1948 the process of mobilizing Ole Miss in the defense of Jim Crow was under way, by 1962 Governor Ross R. Barnett and the state legislature had transformed the university into a fortress of segregation.¹

¹ The definitive account of the desegregation of the university is Charles W. Eagles, *The Price of Defiance: James Meredith and the Integration of Ole Miss* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009). On the riot, see Eagles, *The Price of Defiance*, chapter 18; Curtis Wilkie, *Dixie: A Personal Odyssey through Events That Shaped the Modern South* (New York: Touchstone, 2001), chapter 6; Russell H. Barrett, *Integration at Ole Miss* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1965); and William Doyle, *An American Insurrection: The Battle of Oxford, Mississippi, 1962* (New York: Doubleday, 1962). On the aftermath of

One month after the riot, with the university's accreditation in jeopardy and its reputation at a nadir, Chancellor J. D. Williams addressed an audience of alumni and civic groups in Greenville. In keeping with the university's invented traditions, Williams dutifully invoked L. Q. C. Lamar as an "inspiration and example" as he charted a course forward for the institution. The chancellor praised Lamar for returning to the university after the Civil War, when the "South was defeated, his fortune was lost, his health was broken, [and] the university was in desperate financial straits." Rather than succumbing to "despair," "Lamar looked only ahead [and] put the past behind and built sturdily for the future." The chancellor reminded his audience that, though "[n]o man served the Confederacy more bravely or more loyally than L. Q. C. Lamar," "no man was more loyal to the re-united nation." Using the past to point to the future, Williams repeated Lamar's "charge to his fellow Mississippians": "first and foremost, they must be Americans. The future lay with the United States. We must build within that frame and put behind us bitterness and hatred."²

Williams acknowledged the university's "shame" that students had participated in the rioting, but he lamented that national media coverage of the event had made "[r]iot, lawlessness, destruction, [and] murder" the "image of the university." He urged observers to "weigh the thousands upon thousands [of students] who by deed and word have stood up for law and order, for human dignity, and for the high principles of education" "against the scores who were lawless and irresponsible." In one of many passive-voice constructions in the address, Williams explained that the "University had become a pawn

the riot for the university, see Eagles, "The Fight for Men's Minds: The Aftermath of the Ole Miss Riot of 1962," *Journal of Mississippi History* 71 (Spring 2009): 40-51.

² "Ole Miss Chancellor Defends State Board," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 1 November 1962; "Text of Chancellor Williams' Speech," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 1 November 1962. President John F. Kennedy himself invoked the legacy of Lamar when he called for compliance with federal law in a national radio and television address the night of the rioting at Ole Miss. Eagles, *Price of Defiance*, 357-358.

in combat between powerful political forces. With little consultation with administrative officers, without giving adequate notice, the effective control of the university was taken out of our hands.” Williams remarked upon the cohesiveness and loyalty of the extended Ole Miss community as its members had their “souls tried.” He pointed to professors “who met their classes ... that first day and ever since” the riot. He described students who made their way to classes on the morning of October 1 by “circling around the still-burning cars [and] picking their way among the gas canisters.” He praised the “faithful” “secretaries and clerks ... physical plant workers [and] library employees.” Williams took particular pride in the “loyalty of our colored workers,” who “by the time the last of the rioters were being cleared off the eastern end of the campus ... were in the cafeteria preparing breakfast for the students.” Alumni had served their alma mater by “meeting with us, counseling us, [and] quietly exerting their influence for us across the state at every economic and political level.” And “Mississippi’s leaders in private business and public life,” who “knew the indispensable part a great university must play in the development of a great state,” had offered their assistance and support to Ole Miss.³

Williams concluded his address with a challenge to Mississippians. Despite the riot and despite Meredith’s successful desegregation of Ole Miss, the chancellor reminded his audience that “[t]he University—as an institution that conducts courses, carries on research, and grants degrees—has been preserved.” “It is not enough, however,” he remarked, “simply to keep our doors open.” A university must be “a place of ideas, an institution dedicated to the courageous pursuit of truth. We cannot be a university and deny our teachers and our students the freedom to teach and to learn. Every new idea is in some degree dangerous, but none is so dangerous to a free society as

³ “Text of Chancellor Williams’ Speech,” *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 1 November 1962

mental stagnation and intellectual dry rot.” The chancellor left his audience with a basic question about the future of Mississippi’s state university: “Shall we continue to have a real university, or only the outward husk and mere appearance of a university?”⁴

This dissertation has examined the tensions, complexities, and contingencies of Mississippi’s struggle to build a real university. It has treated the development of University of Mississippi from the 1890s through 1948 as a study in the ways southerners developed segregationist institutions to expand and modernize the services the state offered its white citizens. Inventing Ole Miss and developing the University of Mississippi required unifying ideas about the past and the future. The creation of an institutional identity built around images of the antebellum past anchored the university culturally in a time of social and political turmoil and endowed it with an aura of prestige and timelessness that justified its special position within the state’s system of education. Even as the university fashioned itself as the progeny of the Old South, though, it attempted to demonstrate its relevance in the present by advertising the futures it could help white Mississippians make in a New South. The same techniques of knowledge-production that defended Bourbon rule and discredited the rise of new men like James K. Vardaman and Theodore G. Bilbo were part of a larger educational movement that called for an overhaul the university’s curriculum and the transformation of the institution from a liberal-arts college to a mechanism for the development and modernization of the state. In the 1930s, though Ole Miss remained in its Lost Cause shrine at Oxford and Bilbo’s vision of a greater institution in Jackson had failed to materialize, the university ambitiously used New Deal money to make itself into a laboratory for white democracy. The symbols, traditions, and myths that defined the institution culturally may have

⁴ *Ibid.*

suggested continuities with the past, but the university was now something quite new and something designed with the future in mind.

By the post-World War II era, Mississippi's founding myth of white supremacy had come into conflict with the federal government and the national Democratic Party. If during the 1930s, Mississippians had built up their state university to serve a mission that the New Deal seemed to ratify, the post-war political climate suggested that the future of white democracy would require vigilant defense. The events of 1948, as students enthusiastically followed their elders out of national organizations and into the Dixiecrat revolt, were harbingers of things to come for the university. Through the New Deal years, the University of Mississippi had been a site for the development of an expansive future, but by 1948, the process of mobilizing Ole Miss in the defense of Jim Crow had begun. The 1962 riot, in an explosive and violent way, dramatized how the relationship between Mississippi, its state university, and the federal government had changed since the end of World War II. The lawlessness and destruction also suggested much about the blind spots and flaws in the vision and design that had guided the building of Ole Miss. If, on one hand, invented traditions had rooted the university symbolically and eased the processes of developing the institution into a mechanism of modernization and democratization, militant resistance to desegregation and the 1962 riots were painful lessons in the burdens that come with the most elemental of founding myths.

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