CAUGHT “BETWEEN OUR MORAL AND MATERIAL SELVES”:

MISSISSIPPI’S ELITE WHITE “MODERATES” AND THEIR ROLE IN CHANGING RACE RELATIONS, 1945-1956

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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“I like middles. It is in middles that extremes clash, where ambiguity restlessly rules.”

-- John Updike
Dedication

To Susan
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview and Thesis</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historiography</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.) A Post-War Agenda (1945)</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.) “The Man” and the Quiet Judge (1946-1947)</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.) A Conservative “Progressive” Legislature (1948-1950)</td>
<td>316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.) Greenville Mills, and Parchman (1951-1953)</td>
<td>404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.) The “Magnolia Curtain,” and Tchula (1954-1956)</td>
<td>478</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion: Atticus Finch and Us</td>
<td>575</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Case Study: 127 Elite White Mississippi Moderates</td>
<td>589</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>620</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgements

This dissertation would not have happened without the support and contributions of a number of people. That may sound like a cliché, but it definitely is true in this case.

Let me start with my wife, Susan. I have no idea how many hours and hours of conversation she and I have had about this project. She has been an invaluable, patient, and loving counselor and source of support – spiritual, moral, financial, and otherwise. There is no way I would have attempted this without her by my side. There is no way I would have completed it without her.

Other family members likewise were behind me and generally speaking have been remarkably considerate and restrained in holding the “when are you planning to finish?” questions to a minimum and in nodding warmly while I explained in unnecessary detail what I was trying to do. Lydia, Tory, Dama, Kate, Dan, Allen, Dad, Gail – you all have been and were a huge help and you were wonderful in muting any bewilderment or misgivings.

I also wish to thank my committee. Dr. David Hammack of the Case Western Reserve University History Department, my teacher, advisor and dissertation committee chairman, has been with me on this project since its idea stage, when I wrote papers on race for his graduate courses nine years ago. He saw me through
comprehensive exams, a process he chaired, and helped in innumerable ways in shaping and encouraging this project. Drs. Renee Sentilles and Alexander Lamis, of the Case History and Political Science departments, respectively, worked with me in graduate courses, on the comprehensive exams and helped guide me through the various iterations of this project, especially by doing a lot of close and helpful reading of drafts and offering feedback. Dr. Rhonda Williams, a professor of history at Case, also served on my committee and, along with others, helped me considerably in seeing the elite white moderates in a more textured and balanced way. Dr. Lisa Gayle Hazirjian, formerly a visiting professor of history at Case, served for a time as an informal adviser to this project, and I feel grateful for her help. Thanks for all of your time and your assistance.

Speaking of Case Western Reserve University, I want to acknowledge the help of the History Department more generally, especially in providing research and travel funds, and then the University itself, which consistently waived my tuition throughout my time there. Professor Alan Rocke, the department’s graduate program director back when I started, was particularly helpful in arranging placement for me in the Ph.D. program and getting tuition waived. Thanks so much.

I also received dissertation funding for three consecutive years from the History Associates, an organization of patrons and historians associated with the Case History Department. Let me thank them and also acknowledge the faculty members who recommended me for the funding. I also was fortunate to receive an Arts and Sciences Dissertation Fellowship from Case and a dissertation research grant from the
Southern Jewish Historical Society, based in Jackson, Miss. Many thanks in both cases.

I want to thank my partners in my dissertation working group, Lyz Bly and Jon Wlasiuk.

To the staffs of the special collections divisions of the Mississippi State University library, the University of Mississippi library, the University of Southern Mississippi library, the Jean and Alexander Heard Library at Vanderbilt University, the Millsaps College library, and the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, I owe a dept of gratitude. I spent over four months at Mississippi State, for example, and the staff there became my good friends and helpers on the project. I also received considerable assistance at the William Alexander Percy Memorial Library in Greenville, Miss. Thank you all.

To Professor Charles W. Eagles at the University of Mississippi, who told me years ago that a biography of Hodding Carter was overdue, I owe a special thanks. In retrospect, that conversation helped shape the original conception of this project.

To friends, sources and extended family who took a genuine interest and helped in many ways, I say a heartfelt thank you.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the unique contribution of my mother, Robbie Oxnard. Born in Savannah in 1929 and raised in the Jim Crow South, she was an inspiration for this work and also was no doubt an original template for me on this topic. She in fact embodied many of the conflicts of educated whites “of conscience” living amid legal segregation in the mid-20th century. Thanks to her I have been aware of and probably overly sympathetic to the dilemma of the morally conflicted
“good” white Southerner all my life. To the degree that is an inherited bias on my part, I happily and gratefully acknowledge it, and add that hopefully in these pages it has been counteracted by healthy skepticism or properly placed within the professionalism I try to bring to my craft. But her example and that of others on her side of the family, especially her late father (and my namesake) Benjamin Oxnard, undoubtedly shaped my keen interest both in the South and in analyzing historical evidence of the larger moral ambiguity that in some way faces us all.

Benjamin O. Sperry
Cleveland Heights, Ohio
May, 2010
Caught “Between Our Moral and Material Selves”: Mississippi’s Elite White “Moderates” and Their Role in Changing Race Relations, 1945-1956

Abstract

by

BENJAMIN O. SPERRY

My dissertation is about the ambiguous process of historical change. I examine a group of conflicted individuals in a dynamic situation – early post-World War II Mississippi – as representative of a broader notion of how change occurs, or does not occur, in a democracy. Specifically, I consider the contribution of a small network of elite white “moderates” that took shape in the state of Mississippi in the years 1945-1956. The network I describe numbers 127 individuals, and among them were a handful of leaders who were particularly significant. Proceeding roughly on a chronological continuum, I explore several cases in which these white Mississippi elites were active. These situations include: the formation of a post-war agenda for the state (1945); the emergence of John C. Stennis as a political leader, replacing Theodore G. Bilbo in the U.S. Senate (1946-1947); the actions of a conservative “progressive” state legislature in Jackson in the face of the national States’ Rights “Dixiecrat” phenomenon (1948-1950); the fostering of industrialization in the state and the gradual reforms at the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman (1951-1953); and the issue of academic freedom, especially at the University of Mississippi.
(Ole Miss), and an incident of community vigilantism in the Delta town of Tchula (1954-1956). Relying heavily on the papers of several “moderate” figures, such as journalist Hodding Carter and Ole Miss history Prof. James W. Silver, I make the argument that while clinging to essential aspects of continuity and race privilege, these non-reactionary whites were also effective in pushing for a degree of social, economic and political change in Mississippi.
**Introduction**

This dissertation is foremost a study of ambiguity in history. It is about how change occurs in a democracy.

The thesis of this project is that a small network of elite white “moderates” took shape in the state of Mississippi in the early post-World War II years. While clinging to essential aspects of continuity, these moderates were somewhat effective in pushing their view that their state needed a degree of social, economic and political change. The change they sought was not explicitly about race. The moderates of 1945-1956 did not intentionally seek to foster progress on the race issue, by and large, and in fact much of what they embodied was what one author terms “practical segregation,” a stance which reinforced central tenets of white race privilege.\(^1\) They did not directly challenge the racial status quo. But, however consciously, they did, through indirection, serve to gradually undermine it.

Emerging from the experience of the war and moving into the context of post-war America, these moderates felt their state needed to become more modern and professional. They wanted Mississippi to be more closely interconnected with other

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areas of the country and the wider world, an extra-regional perspective that reflected their own relatively cosmopolitan experience and evolving interests. These elites were clearly committed segregationists and any change they espoused was done with the intent and expectation that they could control it and could maintain their dominant position. But in the late 1940s and early 1950s, they established a modern and professional structure and helped set in motion a process that contributed to more substantial progress in the future, including progress on race.

These non-reactionary whites believed in humanitarian evolution of the social fabric, as they saw it. In conventional historical situations prudent evolutionary change concocted in the political center is what might typically be called for. But it was the Mississippi moderates’ destiny and historical shortfall to believe in some evolutionary change at a time and place when in fact revolution ultimately was needed and was justified.

The experience of opening the state of Mississippi’s so-called “closed society” has been long, complicated and ultimately is not complete. The state has been transformed from its repressive antebellum slaveholding and narrowly agriculture-based phase to today’s multi-faceted industrialized modern society. As of 2010, Mississippi has the most African-American elected officials of any state in the union, it includes a growing black middle class, and it contains at least the legal framework if not the full realization of racial integration. The transformation, encouraged by a

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3 It should be added that while it is true that Mississippi has the most black elected officials of any state in the Union, in its case they very rarely come from majority-white districts.
decades-long push in Mississippi for racial reconciliation, is ongoing and remains subject to much scholarly debate about its extent, including the pessimistic view that given the essential history of whiteness, the state has not really changed since the 19th century at all. As Leon F. Litwack writes, for all the success stories of African-Americans in places like Mississippi, there remains a “larger number … left to endure lives of quiet despair.”

A number of developments, individuals and groups have played or are playing important roles historically in effecting social, economic, political, racial and cultural changes to the degree they have been made. For example, one could point to African-American activists in organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Regional Council of Negro Leadership, the Mississippi Negro Democrats Association, the Mississippi Progressive Voters League, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and acknowledge their heroic work in local communities. In that context, one could cite enabling liberal groups like the American Veterans Committee, which beginning in the early post-war years had chapters in the Southern states, or the Mississippi Council on Human Relations, an interracial pro-civil rights organization. One could mention the Southern black church generally and its role in helping instigate and lead the modern civil rights movement.


\[5\] In 1969, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee was renamed the Student National Coordinating Committee.
In crediting other change agents, one could cite externally-driven elements such as the national government and the impact in Mississippi of federal court rulings and of public accommodation and voting rights legislation enacted in the 1960s. Or one might emphasize technological and other extra-regional advances like railroads, growing literacy nationwide, air-conditioning, news photography, television, intercollegiate and professional sports, the Internet, national markets, interstate highways and the use of the automobile, interstate air travel, exchange programs sponsored by the State Department and others, and mechanization of the cotton industry and agriculture generally which had such a profound affect on the demands for black labor and on ensuing patterns of migration. Along those lines, one could point to the nationally unifying values of World War II and then the Cold War or to various trends in the post-war like mass consumerism and conformity pushing the Deep South to be more in line with other regions. Valid arguments have been or could be made crediting one or more of a wide range of internal and external factors that have contributed to Mississippi’s transformation. There is evidence today that any number of these and other variables have made a difference.

Not everything has fundamentally changed, and that is another equally important component of Mississippi’s recent history. “Mississippi has changed almost phantasmagorically in some ways, and in others it has changed hardly at all,” the writer Willie Morris observed nearly three decades ago. “It is a blend of the relentless and abiding.”6 Added journalist Curtis Wilkie, writing in 2001: “In a short span, we moved from enforcing segregation to accepting integration, from economic hardship to prosperity. We saw our politics turned on its head. Yet in the interior of

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6 A Cook’s Tour of Mississippi (Jackson, Mississippi: Hederman Brothers, 1980) p. 13.
our souls, I believe the Southerner remains unchanged, yoked to our history.”⁷ As these writers attest, along with the transformation has been persistent stasis. “The gloomiest social analysts would even argue that today, no less than in 1954, the United States is not one nation but two: one white and uneasy, the other nonwhite and alienated,” Neil R. McMillen wrote, in 1994.⁸ To be more specific geographically by way of example, Sunflower County, in the Mississippi Delta in the state’s northwest quadrant, was “transformed during the tumultuous decades of the mid-twentieth century,” one author wrote recently, but “it remained at century’s end resiliently separate and unequal.”⁹

In fact, Mississippi’s “closed society” has been perpetuated in many respects. There have been notable continuities, as for example from before the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s through to its aftermath, particularly regarding the question of which groups have held power and have controlled resources in society. The University of Mississippi and particularly its law school, the white church hierarchy, the Jackson-based media along with a small number of daily newspapers elsewhere in the state, large private landownership especially in the Mississippi Delta, a handful of elite and well-connected families, the clubby political and legal network centered in the state capital, the culture surrounding devotion to SEC football, the segregationist wing of the Democratic Party which morphed into an emerging and

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socially conservative Republican Party – all of these entities among others have endured across the decades (albeit, in an altered condition) and they thrive today.\textsuperscript{10}

In a different but related way, de facto segregation and ongoing white racial privilege in many aspects of the daily lives of many Mississippians, entrenched poverty, and the woeful quality of public education are also examples of continuity from, say, the 1940s to the present day. To take one specific instance, at the insistence of parents and others in the community, racial segregation was until 2008 the norm on high school prom night in Charleston, a town in Tallahatchie County in the Delta; one party for white students and one for black students.\textsuperscript{11} And yet another enduring element is what George Lipsitz calls the “possessive investment in whiteness,” namely the structured advantages in Mississippi and elsewhere in the country that over the years have produced – and continue to produce – unfair gains and unearned rewards for whites at the expense of blacks.\textsuperscript{12}

I have chosen to look at this overall issue of Mississippi’s complex and painful “opening,” involving as it does both change and continuity, because as a historian I am interested in the convoluted process of social change over time, or what the Rev. Alvin L. Kershaw called “the complexity and difficulty that attends the

\textsuperscript{10} By the “white church hierarchy,” I mean continuities in religious organization and religious commitment among whites. Examples would include: Southern Baptist dominance, the prominence of Presbyterians and Episcopalians among the small white elite, and the relative absence of Catholics, Jews and other non-evangelical Protestants. The exception to that would be that along the Mississippi Gulf Coast there were significant Roman Catholic populations. The Souttheastern Conference (SEC) includes both the University of Mississippi and Mississippi State University.

\textsuperscript{11} A mixed prom would, of course, bring to bear the most ancient of the old taboos, the prospect of black boys dating and dancing with white girls. See the film “Prom Night in Mississippi” (2008), directed by Paul Saltsman. In 2009, Charleston staged an integrated prom, paid for by actor and Charleston resident Morgan Freeman, and a separate prom for whites only. It should be noted that, of course, segregated high school proms occur in many parts of the nation outside of Mississippi.

transition of social patterns,” particularly with regard to dimensions of political and economic power. 13 The Magnolia State offers an especially rich and stark situation to explore historically. Mississippi was, in civil rights activist Bob Moses’ notable phrase, the “middle of the iceberg.”

Scholars in related fields have long felt the same way. In 1964, political scientist Donald S. Strong called Deep South states like Mississippi a “splendid laboratory” and “a fascinating area for study by social scientists. …The region is struggling to enter the mainstream of American but at a point pretty far upstream.” 14

In 1932, sociologist Rupert Vance called the Mississippi Delta “the deepest South, the heart of Dixie, America’s superplantation belt.” 15 As Vance suggested, Mississippi in particular so epitomizes America in many important ways, including, fundamentally and inextricably, with respect to race, which I see historically as the nation’s most persistent, difficult and painful societal conundrum. Race is our national story. The state of Mississippi, in the words of political scientist V.O. Key, “manifests in accentuated form the darker political strains that run throughout the South.” 16 I would add, “and throughout America.”

In this project, my vehicle for examining these complex matters in Mississippi is the elite white political “moderates” – a term always to be weighed and precisely situated in the rather extreme context existing in the Magnolia State – in the period 1945-1956. Particularly, among these moderates, I am studying a handful of elites in

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13 The Mississippian, February 3, 1956.
15 Asch, 66.
visible positions in society during that time who would seem to represent a much wider group of like-minded people. Totaling 127 persons, they are my case study. They are the example through which I intend to look at questions of social change and continuity, particularly regarding under what conditions change occurs and what impedes it historically.

In selecting these individuals, I have come to see that the white moderates were a factor – one among many – in bringing about change as well as in carrying forth continuity (or, put another way, “resisting change”) in Mississippi. The moderates definitely were not forcing or leading the state’s transformation, but they were bound up with it in interesting and important evolutionary ways. For example, and as this dissertation will enumerate, they helped recast the post-war context within which racial change was slowly and painfully taking place. One of the arguments this inquiry will make is that activists leading the call for change in all historical situations need credible moderate allies, particularly influential ones tied more closely to the institutional structure, to help effect any meaningful transformation. Both groups are historically important, and each is essential for lasting structural change, but regarding Mississippi only the former has gotten due historical notice heretofore. A related point is that often in history moderate change precedes and renders possible more fundamental and radical – and attention-getting – change. They are two phases of the same larger phenomenon.

The dissertation will contextualize and explore what is meant by “moderate,” and discuss how that term is relative, is ever-changing historically and how it differs from political dexterity and malleability, which themselves are present across the

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17 For a complete and detailed list of the 127 individuals, see page 589.
entire ideological range. In post-war Mississippi, the electorate and thus the power base was, and to a large extent still is, extraordinarily skewed toward wealthy conservative whites. Most lower-class whites and the overwhelming majority of blacks in the period I am considering could not and/or did not vote, and also the land and economic power was held in relatively few – white – hands. “The South is not yet a place where the majority exercises economic or even political self-determination,” Greenville, Miss., newspaper editor and publisher Hodding Carter wrote in 1949. “The politico-economic alignments, especially in the towns and smaller cities of the South, are made through the traditional coalition of the banker, the lawyer representing absentee corporate interests, the large landowner, and the executive of existing local or branch industry.”

The center of political balance, or relative moderation, thus was located far off to the white privileged side of the socio-economic spectrum, a scale particularly overweighed by conservative business interests. That awkward equipoise must be kept in mind when referring to Mississippi’s white political “moderates” who, by many appearances, bore many of the identical trappings and connections of their plutocrat and more fearfully racist neighbors and kin. The “silent bigots,” as moderate Owen Cooper, in a moment of candor, called his own ilk, were not always easy to distinguish from the vocal and ardent ones. “We haven’t any contests in Mississippi between liberals and conservatives,” Hodding Carter explained to an out-of-state friend, in 1950. “Our only political races down here are between

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conservatives and sons-of-bitches with the former getting the inside track at long last.”

Other observers agreed. As author J. Todd Moye writes, “there is no liberal tradition in Mississippi politics.” Added Betty Pearson, a moderate from the Delta town of Sumner, “moderates weren’t called moderates, we were called ‘flaming liberals’.” Alexander Heard, who observed the Mississippi political scene in the late 1940s as part of his research for the book *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, primarily authored by V.O. Key, stated, “I am more and more impressed with the political sterility of the state.”

Tupelo publisher George A. McLean concurred. “There is no fountain of liberalism in the state,” he said. “There is no source from which liberal ideas or liberal inspiration can enter the life of Mississippi. There is no labor organization which brings a spirit of sophistication to the working people. There is no CIO … to tell the working class that in order to raise the economic rewards of white laborers and white cotton choppers and white tenants you have to raise the rewards of the Negroes as well. There is no one to explain these basic economic facts to the working class.” In a mid-20th century electorate where blacks could not and were not voting in anything more than infinitesimally token numbers, Mississippi’s white

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22 Interview with Betty Pearson, September 12, 2006.
23 Upon interviewing scores of Mississippi lawyers and politicians, Heard wrote, “there is nothing pretending to ‘liberalism’ about any of them so far.” Heard interview with Erskine Wells, June 30, 1947. Southern Politics Collection, Vanderbilt University, Special Collections.
moderates became the effective opposition to the die-hard segregationist forces. These “practical segregationist” centrists “restrained further damage,” observed Hodding Carter III, the publisher’s son. The moderates were the extremists’ only political counterbalance, such as it was, and as a consequence the two groups of whites, while sharing so much in common culturally, were bitter enemies.

The reason for the blurring historically between white racial extremists and those whites of more moderate leanings has roots in the pervasive, if more subtle, racism of the latter group, according to George Lipsitz. He points to the “inability of white liberals to distance themselves sufficiently from the possessive investment in whiteness.” The moderates thus were plainly compromised in many respects.

Also, it should be noted that Mississippi’s elite “moderates” in the first post-war years were not particularly well organized ideologically among themselves, unlike the more politically and racially extreme whites. This has added to their relative lack, until now, of historical distinctiveness and recognition. The moderates had very strong social networks at extremely high levels of political and economic power, an exploration of which is an essential element of this dissertation. But they had no effective institutional rival to, say, the States’ Rights Democratic Party (the Dixiecrats), the White Citizens’ Council, or the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission. The Mississippi moderates had no official spokesmen along the lines of racist icons like Senators Theodore G. Bilbo or James O. Eastland. Their nuanced gradualist argument and calculated passivity (“quietism” was one pejorative label used by the moderates’ more liberal detractors) seemed no match, particularly in the

26 Lipsitz, p. xvii.
emerging age of television which relied so heavily on the blunt imperatives of immediacy, for the high-decibel neo-Confederate obsession with “NEVER!”  

For the moderates, the apparent quiescence was in part a coping strategy in the face of years of intense and at times overwhelming racist repression in their midst. Their modulated approach helped allow them to coexist with the rabid near-hysteria. “I know very well that there are people in Philadelphia (Miss.) and Neshoba County who would like to see discussion and efforts put on other things (besides race),” New York Times managing editor Turner Catledge, a native Mississippian, wrote in 1955. “But just let one of them stick his neck out to say, ‘listen, people, we are making fools of ourselves,’ and somebody will begin to shout, ‘nigger-lover, nigger-lover, nigger-lover.’”  

This is related to what Hattiesburg Rabbi Charles Mantinband described as the “conspiracy of silence in respectable middle-class society. Sensitive souls, with vision and the courage of the Hebrew prophets, are drowned out.”  

This dissertation challenges the notion that being temporarily drowned out equates to virtual non-existence historically. It also explores just why the moderates often chose to be quiet and what that selective silence amid so much other rancid braying represented and signaled, unmistakably, to a hyper-attentive populace. 

Moreover, the moderates upon whom I focus were quartered in a variety of venues having other, divergent, purposes – for example, churches, publications, university faculties, cooperative farms, and businesses. This diffusion and structural

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29 Silver.
informality – apolitical on its face – is also part of the reason why these people and their contribution, such as it was, have not heretofore gotten much notice as a group. What this dissertation does, in part, is trace, highlight and thematically unify a series of informal ties among a number of people scattered throughout the state that were quite sustaining and which existed in lieu of any formal organizational structure that would have otherwise served to consolidate their power and advance and protect their interests. This project in effect recreates and more clearly defines their relationship, non-traditional as it was. These social-network connections are a key to understanding the moderates’ important role in change, and in continuity. I am therefore covering relatively new territory. Hodding Carter touched on this institutional void, and informal web, when writing a letter of recommendation for funding for his embattled fellow editor, Hazel Brannon Smith of the *Lexington Advertiser* and *Durant News* in Holmes County in the Delta. He said of Lexington: “There are many decent people there, and Hazel has friends as well as enemies. But the enemies are organized and her friends are not, and in that fact lies an old lesson that too many men and women of good will have yet to learn.”

Related to this point is the often overlooked fact that especially in a state like Mississippi with historically a deliberately small and fettered state government, leadership has long been far bigger than just governance. So historians must look beyond the harsh and bitter arena of Mississippi’s electoral politics to spot indicators of change. The shapers of the culture and the society are and have been in fields other than politics, important and attention-grabbing though that realm has been.

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Therefore, the areas where the moderates held prominent positions, such as journalism, business, academia, the church, and so forth, have been comparatively outsized and exercised relatively greater influence, I would argue. Thus the moderates and the fields where they operated deserve a greater portion of historical awareness than has been forthcoming to date.

It should be added at the outset of this project by way of qualification that the 127 individuals who comprise the crux of this dissertation range across widely disparate strands of belief and activity. What truly unites them, beside subjectively interpreted tangible evidence of moderation in the period 1945-1956, is that virtually all were in movement for most of their lives, rather than frozen in some predetermined “moderate” or any other position. As historical examples, they are in many cases self-contradictory. The Hodding Carter of 1945 is of course not the Hodding Carter of 1956. The Hazel Brannon Smith of the early 1950s is not the Hazel Brannon Smith of the mid-1950s. Same for the other 125 “moderates.”

Surely, though the requirements of historical writing favor stark definitions and specificity – i.e., “Person X can be called a moderate given his stated position on segregation in such-and-such a document in the year 1952” – life experience and belief, of course, truly involve an organic process that often defies and belies such narrow labeling.

There are problems with the notion that a given statement or a particular action is definitional of anything except itself at that moment in time. The pace of movement in the society at large should not obscure these individuals’ own
gravitational response. The defining mass—a nation in the post-war in the midst of accelerating change, for instance—exerts gravitational force which some resist more ardently or successfully or bitterly than others, and some, once fully within the pull of its force field, move far more quickly than others to catch up. This is all very obvious except to a number of historians, writers and ideologues in the field who too often automatically or reflexively put people into rigid categories: the good and the bad; the brave and the cowardly; the prescient and the blind; the conservative, the liberal and the moderate.

That said, in order to cover any substantial narrative ground, and not be immobilized in scholarship by endless qualifiers and exceptions, one is compelled to risk informed generalizations. That process is exactly what makes the study of history an ongoing and dynamic “argument”—its subjectivity. As far as this project is concerned, the “moderate” label, when it is applied to a given individual, will be done so with maximum specific evidence to back it up, footnoted for all to have access and even to interpret otherwise should readers be so convinced. The sheer plethora of footnotes employed and the substantial number of pages in this dissertation can be ascribed in part to this cautious and deliberate approach. It is necessary to describe action at some length and to look at how people embody multiple impulses, and not to rely too heavily on labels, superficial and unsupported. Part of the point here, requiring a rounded and detailed view, is that people are a fascinating blend. But one must bear in mind the fluid general context that complicates even the most intentional attempts at articulation. Meanwhile, the seamless, unwavering archetype—“this person is good, this person is bad”—is best
left to the melodramatist or someone otherwise specializing in two-dimension, all due respect intended.

**Upholders of the orthodoxy**

I have chosen to focus on elites in part because historically across cultures and epochs elites sometimes have had the reputation as being anti-democratic. In extreme and classic cases – think of the oligarchs in Ancient Greece – they were the antithesis of democracy. Many have seen Mississippi’s elites in the same vein. “The crux of segregation is the monopoly by the dominant group over the political institutions of the state,” John W. Cell writes. And yet in the case of post-war Mississippi, the elites arguably were in some ways helping “open” Mississippi, i.e., making it *more* democratic. “To buck the sour tide down there, however tentatively, takes real fortitude,” the Chicago-based *Christian Century* argued, in 1956. In a very qualified sense, the Mississippi elite moderates’ example supports Richard Hofstadter’s claim that “whenever an important change takes place in modern society, large sections of the intellectuals, the professional and opinion-making classes, see the drift of events and throw their weight on the side of what they feel is progress and reform.”

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Many elite moderates in Mississippi certainly felt themselves allied with a new day. “I want to change things,” wrote Albin Krebs, editor of *The Mississippian*, the University of Mississippi student newspaper, in 1951, and a relatively liberal voice on campus. “I want to see progress. I want to see my fellow Southerners, fellow Americans, abandon many of the outdated, bigoted ideas they were born with and which they cling to simply and foolishly because Granddaddy did it that way.”

But one issue to be explored in these pages is to what extent such a self-image is valid and sustaining historically. For at the same time the moderates had some progressive credibility, they acted as a kind of buffer and impediment to calls for change and they often exploited divisions between more radical whites and blacks mostly so that they themselves could play a significant role. The Mississippi moderates of the late 1940s and early 1950s found themselves between poles, in favor of neither white extremism nor racial integration. I plan to analyze this case of post-war white moderates to raise questions about whether the traditional views of the elites, as either defenders of the status quo on the one hand or as throwing “their weight” behind reform on the other, need to be blended together or otherwise tempered with a renewed understanding of some of the ambiguities of their position, straddling in this instance as they did matters of self-interest and broader more altruistic concern.

Also, the elites are an interesting group to study because unlike other groups in society, as prominent upholders of the orthodoxy – or closely tied thereto – they typically expected the system to respond to their concerns. They felt, acted, and in a sense were entitled. And in the context of 1945-1956, the political system in

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particular was set against any suggestion of change, even from persons of some power who had plenty of association with the status quo. The result was acute tension among members of the state’s socio-economic upper echelon. As in many historical examples, the elites in this case were divided.

In singling out the white Mississippi moderates of the 1940s and 1950s, I wish to be careful not to glamorize or valorize them as somehow righteous figures and thereby be complicit with them in their own effective defense of the realities of their protected world, which clearly included institutionalized racism, segregation and class privileges, for example. The intent here is not to laud, but rather to explore and understand a complex historical situation. Thus I am aware of the need to be conscious of and, as necessary, when examining these moderates, to mitigate what Ruth Frankenberg calls the all-but-blinding “white gaze” of history. The white moderates of Mississippi made a contribution, as will be detailed in this dissertation, but they were not heroes and considering their role in continuity and what many interpret as their inertia they were nowhere near totally transformative. They certainly did not attack the racist power base, which to the extent it has occurred was the most essential and lasting determinant of change in post-war Mississippi. They in a sense comprised a third camp, pitched somewhere between the advocates of reform and the staunchest defenders of the old order.

Moreover, the moderates’ experiences and values cannot by default be considered the norm. I see the moderates as contradictory figures taking some

positive, often quite marginal, steps while inevitably remaining secure and limited within a cocooning bubble of white privilege, itself in many respects quite corrupt. The overall result, of appearing to move forward somewhat but still clutching stasis in so many fundamental ways, is therefore quite mixed and challenging to ascertain precisely. Meanwhile, the white moderates were part of a much bigger phenomenon of contending forces of change and continuity stretching back at least to the 19th century in Mississippi history.

Especially given that I have chosen elite whites as my focus, I understand and accept the risk that the project may be mistakenly construed as defending whites and their priorities at the expense of other groups. For example, race theorists like Frankenberg who address the issue of whiteness see the notion that white perspectives were normative as being at the heart of white privilege and any focus on white elites such as this dissertation has to contend with scholars skeptical or dismissive of “the certitudes of white discourse.” The main response I would offer is that, while it may be true, as Frankenberg says, that it is “extraordinarily difficult for white people to name whiteness,” a focus on whites should not automatically and categorically be interpreted as regarding their view as the given standard. I plan to prove it is possible for a white author to write about white subjects while maintaining something approximating objectivity, perspective and necessary balance. One can avoid wholly and uncritically accepting the views of given subjects, so long as one remains vigilant for the potential whiteness bias – historical, political and personal – and, more generally, applies the healthy skepticism that should accompany any exploration of human motivation in any context.

36Frankenberg, p. 80.
In that regard, this study is an exercise in self-awareness, perspective and the careful assessment of sources from the white elitist realm. A lot of the primary literature generated by elite Mississippi whites of the immediate post-war period reflects an often patronizing and paternalistic attitude and one needs to be rigorous today in analyzing and contextualizing these materials. To take one of the more obvious of many available examples, this one from 1948: “Most certainly our colored citizens are developing a conception of what their citizenship means and they are supported in this by their white friends,” wrote Harriet Gibbons, who was white and was editor of the *Laurel (Miss.) Leader-Call*, and was a relative moderate in that, in her condescending way, she advocated equal rights for African-Americans.\(^{37}\) Even if in cases like Gibbons the extent of the patronizing and paternalism was unconscious at that time while perhaps wrapped in “good” intentions, that does not mean that I as a historian in 2009 intend to simply amplify or repeat the old dubious pattern.

Such writings, in this instance representing a sampling of the views at the time of complacent prominent Mississippi whites, always need to be interpreted and historicized and not simply accepted at face value as an objective standard. They need to be weighed against criticisms, such as that of Tuskegee Institute director Lewis W. Jones, who decried “the interpretation and expression of a person of intelligence and integrity who cannot shed the fetters of firmly welded feelings and emotions” on race.\(^{38}\) The relevant cliché is that history is too often written by society’s victors, whose views become privileged uncritically at the expense of the perspectives of comparatively disenfranchised groups. Thankfully, the social history

\(^{38}\) Letter, Lewis W. Jones letter to Hodding Carter, August 30, 1954. Hodding II and Betty Werlein Carter Papers..
movement (“history from the bottom up”) in recent decades has helped move some distance away from that narrow gilded channel, but the temptation to go along with superficial and self-serving renderings of the past remains an issue and must still be vigilantly resisted. This is, of course, directly related to the perils of the “white gaze” of history. In the case of this dissertation, in relying rather heavily for sourcing on columns written in white-owned publications, the correspondence of privileged whites such as Hodding Carter, memoranda in official contexts that at the time were racially exclusionary, and similar highly subjective evidence, the motivations and assumptions underpinning the words in those documents need to be and will be critically examined and assessed and, as appropriate, discounted.  

It should also be emphasized that this dissertation is in no way making an argument for an enlightened group of whites out to “save” blacks. Again, in employing the white moderates as a vehicle, I see them as one group among many playing a role in Mississippi’s painful and never-ending transformation and I choose them as a focus, ultimately, to weigh broader historical questions. That said, I do understand that the elite whites’ racial privilege is an inescapable fact framing their

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39 A related technical point about the treatment of sources needs to be underscored here at the outset. In the narrative of this dissertation, in citing a newspaper editorial, credit for the words of that editorial will be attributed to the editor and/or the publisher of that publication, except in cases where an editorial is signed by another party. In other words, if there is an editorial written in the *Delta Democrat-Times* being cited, those words will be considered the writing of editor Hodding Carter and will be attributed as such.

40 So, it should be underscored that the focus of this inquiry on white elites and their moderate allies in Mississippi, and the viewpoint taken is not meant, by means of omission, as a belittlement of the contributions of others, particularly African-Americans. Related to this question is the phenomenon reigned by the 1980s film “Mississippi Burning” – the old myopia afflicting not only filmmakers but also generations of historians (mostly whites) who viewed (and, in some cases, continue to view) the Southern black as an acted-upon object residing in the background of power dramas and responding only to the vicissitudes of whites’ decision making. Such shortsightedness, of course, is an academic incarnation of paternalism, the old plantation-based pact whereby whites dominated blacks by minimally providing for them but allowing them no responsibility and no power to negotiate in a “white” world. That said, the focus here on white elites, again, is not by implication meant to devalue alternative historical forces.
story and their actions. This is, of course, a challenge for a white author approaching a project that falls within the subject of race and it calls on the capacity to be sufficiently conscious of self to be ever alert to one’s own racial and cultural biases, or what one writer calls “unmarked whiteness.” An exploration of white “moderate” activity in Mississippi in the 1940s and 1950s must not devolve into anything approaching what Frankenberg describes as the “paltry step forward” of “a liberal pity for the suffering Other,” which, she adds, “keeps intact the Self-Other binary and offers no insight into the Self’s self-designated authority and sanctity.”

In a somewhat related point, there is an emphasis and therefore a privileging in this dissertation of gradual change, as opposed to more abrupt or radical change, and of the role of large systems, or what I call “structures” – legal, economic, political, etc. – in effecting Mississippi’s transformation, to the degree it has occurred. “I am also an advocate of the evolutionary way rather than abrupt change,” wrote Hodding Carter, his white privilege fully intact, in 1955. I realize in highlighting the importance of structures, even with an approach that embraces certain criticism and credits alternate viewpoints, I am running somewhat counter to some of the recent historiography that elevates the role and contribution of human agency largely at the expense of such structures. I offer the case for a blending of these two essential elements. Surely, structures were and are created and maintained through the agency of particular individuals, such as elite white Mississippi moderates, often at a distance from local effort, but not rarely in collaboration with local activities. Moreover, to

41 Frankenberg, p. 80.  
the extent my argument does uphold the importance of structures, I am aware such a
focus challenges the skepticism many post-modern theorists have for metanarratives
about progress, growth, evolution, advancement, improvement, modernity and other
historical concepts grounded, in their view, in the Enlightenment and associated with
the white European male. 43

To offer an instance of structures, a great number of the white moderates
whom I have chosen as my case study served in the U.S. Armed Forces during the
Second World War, and thus with varying degrees of involvement and commitment
partook of the widespread social and economic changes brought on by the war. They
also were part of broader extra-regional trends in the post-war involving economic
development, education, the media, expanded travel, an enlarged federal government
role, and the like. It is useful to consider these white Mississippi moderates in
relation to various national groups and social, professional and economic formations.
In their conflicts and contradictions, these white moderates tended to embody gradual
and systemic changes. While using such individuals to make my points, part of my
overall argument is that broad trends were and are important. In this view, I agree
with such scholars as Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal who in the 1940s charted
what he saw as liberalizing currents in 20th century America. 44 While thus placing
my emphasis, I am mindful that the role of individuals and single acts of courage, for
example, are also notable and I acknowledge and respect the discourse, now dominant
in civil rights movement historiography, which highlights them. Both individuals and

43 See, for example, Jean-Francois Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge
(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).
44 Gunnar Myrdal, An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy (New York:
overall systems certainly played key roles in Mississippi, as they do in all historical situations, and the interplay between them will be explored here.

Regarding my intent to privilege gradual change in this dissertation, there are many examples of elite white Mississippi moderates eschewing extreme positions, often at considerable cost, or having an indirect role in social transformation – a placement that, I argue, helped alter the debate and facilitate long-term advances. I hasten again to add, this positioning always took place under the rubric of racial segregation in the 1945-1956 period, and thus the moderates had an ongoing investment in the continuity of existing racial norms. But in terms of change, for instance, moderate white journalists in the state and their allies in fields like the ministry and politics helped create a more favorable impression of African-Americans among whites which, when developed much further in later years and particularly on television in the 1950s and 1960s became decisive in garnering crucial sympathy for the civil rights cause. In that way the white moderates, in incremental steps, helped images of blacks emerge from behind what W.E.B. Du Bois called “a vast veil,” creating a context in which Americans could imagine a fuller role for African-Americans and even a somewhat more equal society.45

Small acts of conscience in Mississippi, and other places, gradually helped add up to a somewhat changed ambiance which in turn was contributory to racial progress. Little steps began to alter what Richard Wright in *Black Boy* called “a world in which one’s mind and perceptions meant nothing and authority and tradition meant everything.”46

For the writers and journalists among the elite white moderates, such steps as de-emphasizing crime news (long a byproduct of Southern white fears of rebellion and black domination), or abandoning in print the automatic presumption that in white-on-black crimes like lynching the victim got what was coming to him, or daring to criticize white police officers for mistreating African-Americans, or featuring front-page photographs of black figures of accomplishment like track star Jesse Owens, or including courtesy titles in newspaper stories featuring African-Americans, or publishing stories that associated blacks with patriotism, all would be examples of the framing of, for a white audience, a more favorable – or less degrading – image of Mississippi blacks.\(^47\) Certain white Mississippi editors were thus able to help readers to begin to move, however tentatively, beyond the perception of what Daniel Patrick Moynihan, to much controversy, would later call the “tangle of pathology” of the American black experience.\(^48\) “The evidence of the development of such an attitude is showing in newspaper references to Negro achievement and progress and a more sympathetic approach,” wrote H. Brent Schaeffer, a Lutheran minister and a member of the Mississippi division of the Southern Regional Council, a relatively progressive white group, in the late 1940s. As editor Hodding Carter, ever the paternalist, wrote

\(^47\) Regarding the de-emphasis on crime news, in 1949, the Greenville editor wrote, “as for leaving out the word Negro in identifying criminals, we, too, have cut that out.” Letter, Hodding Carter to Susan Myrick, November 7, 1949. Hodding II and Betty Werlein Carter Papers. George A. McLean, the moderate Tupelo publisher, told an interviewer in 1947 that many white Mississippians, particularly those in rural counties with a high percentage of black residents, “actually fear a Negro uprising and they believe the old wives tale concerning Negroes having stocks of guns.” Alexander Heard notes of interview with George A. McLean, July 10, 1947. Southern Politics Collection. Also here I could mention Hazel Brannon Smith’s criticism of the Holmes County sheriff in 1955. Regarding the issue of courtesy titles, white-owned newspapers in this period had policies refusing to use “Miss” or “Mrs.” when writing of a married African-American woman. This frequently made for awkward constructions. For example, stories about the Emmett Till murder, in 1955, appearing in many Mississippi papers would refer to Mamie Till Bradley, the victim’s mother, as “the Till woman” or “the Bradley woman” on second reference.

in 1953: “we are just as ready to award prizes or run pictures of our Negro children or any others who merit it as to do so for any other citizen.”

In any event, in the white Mississippi press of the 1940s and 1950s, the emerging “positive” portrait of blacks often was placed in a patronizing context, no doubt. For example, at the *Delta Democrat-Times* in Greenville, Carter assumed a judgmental opinion-molding pose, writing, “we use pictures of Negroes – both local and national – when we think the individual is contributing something worthwhile to his community, his race or to the country.” Nevertheless, a greater white receptivity, as encouraged and reflected in a thus somewhat more sensitized white Mississippi media and in other public forums, in turn, had, for example, political consequences. In a broad sense, the trend toward a more sympathetic – or at least less relentlessly negative or condescending – public image of blacks in the general white conversation helped begin to frame a wider political environment wherein it gradually became feasible for northern lawmakers, under more direct pressure from growing numbers of black constituents, to push for civil rights legislation in the 1960s.

Now, highlighting that particular arc of historical progression does not mean I am arguing here that the white Mississippi moderates of 1945-1956 ultimately deserve primary credit for civil rights advances. They absolutely do not. Those laurels rightly go to the leadership of the Southern black church, the local activists, and others. These (mainly) African-Americans, Patricia Sullivan points out, were the

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“generating force” in the struggle for civil rights and voting campaigns in the Deep South.\textsuperscript{51}

However I do contend that changing perceptions and the logic undergirding them are a part of the critical process that helps us to understand the evolution of white sentiments and its links to gradual changes that gives us a fuller picture of shifting race relations and racial opportunities. In this particular case it involved the transformation of the impression of black Americans among many whites from one dominated by sex, violence, crime and imminent danger to images, most famously, of fun-loving Chicago “child” Emmett Till, or grief-stricken but poised Mamie Bradley calmly addressing the cameras outside a sweltering Delta courthouse, or soft-spoken community pillar Rosa Parks, or four innocent little girls in a Birmingham church basement getting ready for a choir performance, or flag-waving Alabama children singing about freedom and “all men are created equal” in the face of fire hoses and biting dogs, or presentable Little Rock teenagers trying to get the best public education available, or dignified Southern clergymen in suit and tie standing before the statue of Abraham Lincoln on the Washington, D.C. mall. Growing numbers of white Americans could relate and identify with those images and what they represented, and that in turn was decisive in affecting lasting change.

At the local level in Mississippi newspapers run by elite white moderates in 1945-1956 the trend was increasingly expressed, however tentatively at first, in photographs of black student achievement, or articles about black charities exceeding their fundraising goals, or the dropping of race labels in news headlines wherein the

race of the subject was in fact irrelevant, or the curtailment of blatantly racist cartoons that had featured stuttering large-lipped clownish figures meant to represent African-Americans and had thus reinforced ancient negative stereotypes. The change in sensitivity, played out in countless ways across the post-war South, had evolved by the time of what Peniel E. Joseph calls the “heroic period” of the civil rights movement, periodized as 1954-1965, more and more into a fostering of white identification with the black cause.\(^{52}\) Or at least the changes helped shape the opinions of a white population that was no longer willing to go to greater lengths to impede black progress. The transformed environment was contributory but key. And the change depended in part upon, in certain quarters, white Southern – in this case, Mississippian – assistance in their presentation of African-Americans. The white moderates featured in these pages played a role, conflicted and compromised though it clearly was.

However reluctant or overly deliberative, the Mississippi moderates of 1945-1956 were actors in a paradox of social change. They helped facilitate the state’s eventual and ongoing “opening,” including, in indirect ways, the gradual end of a racially segregated structure which had so benefited them. In their often half-hearted

and glacially paced way, they helped render easier the bigger and more emphatic changes being initiated and carried forth by African-Americans and others. That is primarily why the white Mississippi moderates of 1945-1956 are historically important.

Theoretically, of course, they could have been far more important, in for example frontally challenging segregation and taking a stand of conscience. “The true Christian knows it is morally wrong to accept a compromise which is designed to frustrate the fulfillment of Christian principle,” Martin Luther King Jr. wrote, in 1957. “The time is always ripe to do right.”

Many Mississippi moderates today, of course, acknowledge the undeniable wisdom and simple justice – if, perhaps, naivété – of that position and harbor guilt and regret that at the time they did not take risks for what they knew was right. “I should have let those sons of bitches put me in jail,” Bill Reed, of the Quitman County town of Marks, remembered. “All of us who look back wish we could say we acted differently, that we had been more vigorous in our opposition to injustice. You just accepted in a sense the mores of your culture, even if you didn’t agree with it. That was a mistake.”

That enormous caveat set forth here at the outset undoubtedly casts a legacy of tragic disappointment in counter-balance of whatever the moderates’ contribution. In part because of their conflict between favoring some change on one hand and sticking so long in support of the old unfair system on the other, the elite white Mississippi moderates had obvious boundaries and factors weighing against any

54 Interview with Bill Reed, September 12, 2006.
positive influence on their part. That conflict and those limitations, bound up and in
tension with their contributions, are a large part of what makes their story so
confounding and thus interesting historically.

It is important to underscore and explain what this dissertation does not do.
For example, it does not include African-Americans as central narrative figures. And
such choices, as in privileging one group and not others, invariably represents a
distortion of the whole. In a comprehensive discussion of social change in post-war
Mississippi, blacks of course should be and would be highlighted and given due
attention and important roles. The opening paragraphs of this introduction
enumerates some of the other “factors” in change, among them the contributions of
heroic black activists in groups like the Regional Council of Negro Leadership and
others.

I have carved out a separate project, however.

My main explanation for the obvious and deliberate omissions is a practical
one every historian faces in any undertaking, in this case having to do with the
requirements to narrow a dissertation topic to something that can be managed and
explored in depth in a few hundred pages. Also, and more fundamentally, I feature
this group of elite white moderates in Mississippi at this particular time – 1945-1956
– because I have determined that their contribution and cross-pressured role has been
misunderstood and not fully appreciated in the scholarship. But I realize similar gaps
appear in the existing history of others as well. My choice concerned my research
interests, a selection that granted involves some degree of bias. All interests do. But
I am likewise aware that decision also means by necessity disregarding large and important parts of the story, and in particular the detailed contribution of black Mississippians.

For that matter, this dissertation largely leaves unexplored the question of to what extent there were moderates among the non-elite whites of the state. So the project has been narrowed in scope regarding both race and class.

The period 1945-1956 was selected for my study in part because the civil rights movement that basically followed these years was a response to a lack of progress on race in the immediate post-World War II period and before. I want to examine, among other things, why it is that some changes were made in Mississippi during the 1945-1956 span and why others were not.

It is necessary to say another word about my choices in sourcing. In concept, this project began as a biography of Hodding Carter (1907-1972). The dissertation quite quickly migrated and expanded to explore a much wider and more textured subject, but much of its roots remain embedded in the initial research in the Hodding and Betty Werlein Carter papers at Mississippi State University. The dissertation’s origins in this regard partly account, in derivative form, for what might seem to be an over-reliance on Hodding Carter at the expense of other elite white moderates of the 1940s and 1950s. Also, Carter’s papers, compared with those of his peers, are comparatively voluminous, largely intact and can be accessed without restriction. He made a point of saving his correspondence, for example, and his family preserved those letters and donated them en masse to Mississippi State after his death. Most of
the papers of Tupelo publisher George A. McLean, by contrast, for example, were thrown away after his death by his family. Given what is known about him, McLean is in many ways just as important among the post-war white moderates as Carter. But, for better or worse, historians inevitably are highly dependent on available documents, and thus there is greater relative focus in this project on Carter. Added to the availability matter is the fact that Hodding Carter was extremely articulate and often quite passionate in his letters and editorials, and thus his views typically are clear, concise and often pithy, and therefore very quotable. Carter loved a good fight, for example, wherein he could hurl his invective and sarcasm in editorial and letter, and the colorful rhetoric is readily useful in sharpening many points of the dissertation.

Finally, while I have narrowed the topic to one specific group of people in one state in one discreet period of twelve years, I am also making universal claims. The dissertation has wide relevance in part because it is common in the human experience to have apparently well-meaning individuals convinced that they are leading lives of conscience while at the same time they are bound up with and thus helping keep in place what seem to be immoral or unjust political, social, and economic systems. The ubiquity of that inherently compromised experience is worth noting. Moderate whites in Mississippi in the 1940s and 1950s comprised an extreme example of this

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55 Interview with Vaughn L. Grisham Jr., October 4, 2006. Partly as a consequence of the destruction of the McLean papers, historians are divided as to whether McLean or the editor of his paper, Harry Rutherford, deserve the most credit for the editorial content and tone of the *Tupelo Daily Journal.*
phenomenon, in for example generally abiding racial segregation while knowing in
their hearts it was indefensible and surely bound eventually for extinction.\(^{56}\)

But those of us in the early 21\(^{st}\) century who are somewhat bothered and
maybe minimally active but largely inattentive or unmoved in our daily lives by truly
troubling systemic realities around the world like poverty, hunger, disease pandemics,
homelessness, climate change, the wholesale industrial slaughter of animals for meat,
violence against women, the excesses of corporatism, a world awash in weapons, and
ongoing discrimination against various groups, among other issues, might well
understand the numbing power of inertia – what Gunnar Myrdal calls “mass
passivity” – and the daunting and sometimes immobilizing complexity of the
conundrum facing these white elites of mid-20\(^{th}\) century Mississippi. It is common to
succumb to one’s environment and live basically unstirred for years while something
gnaws away at the conscience. It is a familiar experience to live within – and by
insufficient corrective action, enable – a system one knows is wrong. The paradox in
its basic form goes back in American history for example at least to Thomas
Jefferson, the conflicted slaveholder and father of slave children who at the same time
wrote “all men are created equal.”

That is not meant as an excuse. But in considering the quandaries of the
present day, the analogy does guide us in appreciating some of the history and
thereby in learning unsettling but important things about ourselves. Moreover, an

\(^{56}\) In 1956, Hodding Carter wrote: “If we can put off violence in the present, time is on the side of
Werlein Carter papers. In a separate context, Carter wrote: “I do not see how the Supreme Court could
have done otherwise than declare segregation unconstitutional. I do not see how Christian churchmen
could do otherwise than declare it un-Christian.” Segregation and the South. TV Talk, p. 4. Hodding
II and Betty Werlein Carter Papers.
understanding of the historical pressures and contradictions endured by others, even those people with whom we feel angry, impatient, disappointed, or whom we are tempted to judge harshly, is helpful in effective human relations and in us achieving a level of forgiveness and peace of mind. Hopefully in a small way this dissertation can contribute to such understanding and even reconciliation.
Overview and Thesis

Mississippi and the South are so relentlessly associated historically with the question of race it has become almost something of a cliché. Mississippi has been called “The Closed Society.” That label, first affixed by University of Mississippi (Ole Miss) historian James W. Silver in 1963, served to describe a state which, he said, had long been “on the defensive against inevitable social change.”¹ In looking at the historical problem of Mississippi’s “opening” – i.e., becoming gradually more democratic, more of an interconnected part of the American mainstream, and less defensive about the rising tides of social change – especially in the period following the Second World War, scholars of the last 40 years have considered many of the participants in that development. They have focused on local African-Americans, on national forces like the Supreme Court or the leadership of the civil rights movement as a whole, and also on the forces of reaction such as the White Citizens’ Council that were fiercely endeavoring to defend the closure. A group whose role has yet to be taken fully into account, however, is Mississippi’s non-reactionary whites, or what

are referred to here as “moderates,” who in fact exerted a disproportionate influence on the process of opening the state for all, to the extent that has occurred.

The evidence indicates there was a significant population of white Mississippians in the 1940s and 1950s who, while steeped in the traditions of the state, including most definitely segregation and white race privilege, had at least some “moderate” leanings and a yearning for a measure of change. For the moderates, thus, theirs was a freighted and complex notion of progress.

For example, part of their advocacy for change was, ironically, about preservation. This essentially is Joseph Crespino’s “practical segregation” argument. In this view, the moderates cynically toned down their public rhetoric and ceded marginal points to release pressure and thus allowed at least the short-term maintenance of the essence of the status quo. In other ways, their stance for “progress” was inadvertent; divisions among Mississippi whites exemplified by the moderates’ evolving role in contrast with white extremists were not necessarily intended to concede anything to blacks let alone to serve the purpose of their advancement, and yet the whites’ intra-racial tensions created openings which African-Americans gradually were able to successfully exploit.\(^2\) “There are white people and white people,” observed one African-American community leader, Dr. P.W. Hill, chairman of the Clarksdale branch of the Mississippi Progressive Voters’

\(^2\) Percy Greene, a prominent African-American in Mississippi by virtue of his role as editor of the Jackson Advocate, the largest black newspaper in the state, told an interviewer in 1947 that “some white leaders have indicated a sympathetic attitude.” He continued: “although Mississippi is at the bottom of the list in virtually all things touching on the Negro and race relations, it is nevertheless making progress and becoming more liberal. The Negroes themselves are awakening and white people are taking a more intelligent view.” Mr. Greene added that generally speaking he was “encouraged and optimistic.” Alexander Heard summary of interview with Percy Greene, June 21, 1947. Southern Politics Collection, Vanderbilt University, Special Collections.
League. In still other ways, the moderates’ motives could be seen as quite selfish. For example, they sought for Mississippi a more professional society of the kind that, for its leadership, would increasingly need the skills, training, education and background possessed primarily by themselves.

Other aspects of the transformation were more altruistic, genuine and substantial, while inevitably including some trace elements of self-interest. To cite some of the more conspicuous moderates by way of example, many professional, business and political leaders came to view the closed society as greatly limiting their own ambitions and goals and also as constraining their ability to behave in accordance with what they regarded as American ideals – among them: honesty, fair play, tolerance, free and open debate, academic freedom, respect for others, non-violence, and honoring the rule of law. Such an outlook places these Mississippi figures in accord with what Anthony Lake Newberry calls the South’s “Middle-of-the-Road Liberals” of the early post-war period whose values and positions included: “an aversion to violence and intimidation; respect for the sanctity of federal law and the constitutional right of free expression; a concern for America’s image abroad; [and] a desire to preserve the schools and encourage industrial growth.” At least at

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3 Alexander Heard summary of interview with Dr. P.W. Hill, July 8, 1947. Southern Politics Collection. Dr. Hill was a dentist and is described by Nicholas Lemann as “one of Clarksdale’s two or three most prominent black citizens.” According to Lemann, because of her race Dr. Hill’s wife was refused admission to the county hospital in Clarksdale while she was in distress during childbirth. She and the baby died on the way to Memphis. Nicholas Lemann, The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America (New York: Random House, 1991), p. 35.

that time, the term “liberal,” as with “moderate,” had not been fully decoupled from racial segregation as both labels would irrevocably be in coming decades.

At the same time, among these Southerners, the white Mississippi moderates embodied most of the traditional elements of the society and they endeavored to keep, and even enhance, their positions of privilege. They were typical, in the words of Morton Sosna, of the “separate-but-equal liberalism” of white Southerners who “called for fairer legal treatment and improved educational and economic opportunities for Southern blacks, but all within the context of continuing segregation.”

Hodding Carter, the Greenville editor whose career peaked in the 1940s and 1950s, was a quintessential representative of the state’s moderates in his blend of new thinking and traditionalism. “Although Carter spoke of progressive reform and greater tolerance in racial relations, he largely symbolized the better-educated, conservative, entrepreneurial profile of the Delta planter,” Gary Boulard writes. The moderates’ preferred mixture of change and continuity therefore had some built-in conflicts and contradictions, as in simultaneously favoring racial tolerance and defending racial segregation.

The case study that has been chosen here involves a relatively small non-comprehensive number (127) of leading moderates in Mississippi and a brief period (1945-1956) that falls amid a longer timeframe in which these individuals were active. This group in these years represents a much wider phenomenon, however,

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which makes this topic a more significant historical problem worthy of in-depth examination. Members of this small network were leaders within a larger and growing moderate element of Mississippi’s white population overall and that 12-year span was a phase in the broader and longer-lasting (and uneven) opening up of the state that extended through the later period of desegregation and beyond.

It is important to extrapolate and glean lessons about change and continuity in Mississippi generally from the case of this small sample in these dozen years first by evaluating the support networks that were sufficient in number and power to, for instance, sustain these moderate leaders in the immediate post-war years. In spite of the boycotts, the ostracism, the threats and even the violence generated in the state – by whites – targeting white Mississippians who were perceived however accurately as insufficiently devoted to segregation, as breaching racial and social norms or as advocating reforms, all of which were certainly true and are well documented, there also were ample reservoirs of acceptance and sustaining patience on the part of large swaths of the white public. This web of effective support served as protection and even tacit encouragement for many of the most visible individuals among them who were facilitating some degree of change, complex, compromised and tainted by links to segregation though it clearly was.

One factor in this forbearance was that the moderate leaders had such apparent credibility as a byproduct of their prominent association with the state’s most important and visible sources of white traditionalism, such as Ole Miss, the state’s religious hierarchy, or Mississippi’s extensive and active network of women’s book
and study clubs.  Analyzing the scope of that wider willingness to permit some changes – and/or unwillingness to go to greater lengths to impede them – and not others in Mississippi, as represented by the experiences of these 127 individuals, is one of the main purposes of this dissertation.

There are many examples of supportive networks in that 12-year period in Mississippi that served to shield and even guide the actions of the elite moderates. For instance, enough advertisers and readers abided and thus kept in business a handful of newspaper editors who advocated in print for racial tolerance. “I think the fact that we have been able to continue publishing and succeeding at it in spite of strong differences of opinion with some of our fellow citizens is proof enough of change,” Hodding Carter wrote, in 1955. Meanwhile, however concerned or conflicted they may have been, alumni and student groups as well as state legislators controlling vital sources of funding stood by University of Mississippi administrators such as Chancellor John D. Williams who themselves protected “liberal” faculty members. With some notable exceptions and qualifications, Williams was given sufficient leeway to defend the principle of academic freedom in the teeth of an organized assault by advocates of “screening” – i.e., censoring and barring – campus speakers. Also, certain church and synagogue congregations accepted occasional departures from segregationist or racist orthodoxy on “the Negro question” from their

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7 Hodding Carter writes that “the multitude of women’s study and literary clubs in the South provide almost our only link with the great outside world of arts and letters.” Hodding Carter, Southern Legacy (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1950) p. 77.


9 The euphemism “screening” actually refers to the policy of censoring or banning certain visitors to Mississippi campuses based on the speaker’s political (primarily racial) views. This will be discussed as part of a wider analysis of academic freedom at Mississippi universities in Chapter Five.
clergy, particularly if the pastor had deep community ties. The congregants maintained their memberships and continued their financial support.

Similarly, customers and bankers continued to do business with “moderate” Mississippi merchants and businessmen, who themselves in a handful of cases were even chosen head of trade groups and other important commercial organizations in the state, a clear indicator of ongoing status and popularity despite potentially controversial “moderate” views. For example, Owen Cooper of Yazoo City, president of the Mississippi Chemical Corp., and a political moderate, was tapped as vice chairman and then chairman of the Mississippi Economic Council, the statewide chamber of commerce, and he also was elected president in the mid-1950s of the powerful Mississippi State Baptist Convention, the hierarchy of the state’s Baptist church. In addition, Cooper served as executive director of the Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation, the state’s largest farm group and perhaps its most politically powerful organization at that time.

Other moderates also went on to endure and even prosper in similarly highly political work environments, success in which required extensive networks of allies. Duncan M. Gray, Jr. continued up the ladder to eventually become Episcopal Bishop of Mississippi, for example. William F. Winter in time became a leader in the state legislature, then the state tax collector, lieutenant governor and eventually governor.

Voters elected and then re-elected a few “progressive” politicians, like Winter, who were pushing to modernize Mississippi in various ways. State and local bar associations declined to attempt to censure or discipline the centrist dean of the state’s

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10 Later, from 1972-1974, Cooper served as president of the Southern Baptist Convention.
11 Cooper was executive director of the Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation in 1946. The organization was affiliated with the American Farm Bureau Federation.
only accredited law school, at Ole Miss, and thus Mississippi’s tightly knit legal community allowed him to remain for 17 years in that uniquely prominent and politically sensitive job. Friends and neighbors continued to have close and mutually supportive relationships with white Mississippians who were known to hold idiosyncratic opinions – considering time and place – on race and change. Mississippi country clubs, for example, continued to admit known racial moderates like Hodding Carter as members and its cotillion societies kept inviting them back year after year, sometimes in prominent roles. White racial solidarity closing ranks around those perceived to be in positions of leadership, largely irrespective of the nature of the leader’s politics, was a protective factor. “My father was a member of the golden circle,” Hodding Carter III recalled. “He played the worst game of poker known to man with the Percys and the other people that mattered in Greenville every weekend, right at our kitchen table. Those kinds of associations paid off.”

Thus, there was a substantial supply of expressed or implied permission and sufferance among a broad group of whites, demonstrated by the evident license afforded in the immediate post-war years this handful of elite moderates at the center of this study, which in a symbiotic way allowed them the flexibility for a broadening range of actions which in turn helped gradually “open” the Magnolia State for all. “There was a small group agitating for change, but there was a much larger group that was open to challenges to the status quo,” recalled Joe Earl Elmore, director of the Wesley Foundation on the Ole Miss campus from 1952-1964. The fact that certain

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12 Carter was a longtime member of the Greenville Country Club.
13 Interview with Hodding Carter III, October 31, 2009. The Percys were one of the most prominent families in the Mississippi Delta.
14 Interview with Joe Earl Elmore, July 1, 2006.
moderates remained, even thrived, in the state while operating in highly visible positions with broad constituencies – ministers, rabbis, school administrators, university professors, newspaper editors, book-club presidents, corporate leaders, partners in law firms, elected officials, etc. – all of which were fraught with various political pressures from governing boards, patrons, readerships, clients, electorates, and the like is one testament to the extent of available “moderate” support or at least sufficient tolerance in the wider context. It also points to the enduring strength, resilience and credibility of the elites’ ongoing ties to traditional (primarily economic and political) sources of power in the state.\textsuperscript{15}

Of course, there were other more self-interested factors at work in these elites taking and maintaining certain relatively temperate positions. A moderate newspaper editor, in being backed by readers and advertisers, may have been representative of a network of relatively progressive thought, but he or she was also a business person who saw modern trends like community growth and development as good for the bottom line, and therefore helpful in reinforcing their own positions of power. Moderation, at least to that extent, was not necessarily bad for business or for the continuance of privileges; on the contrary. Moreover, such editors were not unmindful of their publications’ growing penetration among black readers and

\textsuperscript{15} A related point should be made here. It is ironic given the South’s reputation for rigidly enforced orthodoxy, but there was always the sense among whites in Deep South states like Mississippi that generally speaking intellectuals and other privileged elites were allowed to be ideologically eccentric. Typically supported by family money, such individuals were regarded as harmlessly and charmingly out-of-touch with the difficult realities of daily life, particularly those involved in having to make a living, a process which for many practical-minded whites supposedly meant control of black labor. These elites were tolerated – humored, even – and were accorded a certain leeway, even on matters related to racial views. William Alexander Percy, of Greenville, a poet, writer, landowner, lawyer and quintessential Delta aristocrat of the pre-World War II era, typified the breed. The elite white moderates of the early post-war years at the center of this dissertation, associated in the public mind somewhat with this archetype, were also permitted some latitude ideologically, given this longstanding tradition of forbearance.
advertisers, and the prescient ones adjusted their coverage and editorial tone accordingly.16

Meanwhile, ministers and rabbis speaking out about racial tolerance on the “Negro question” were not only articulating feelings among congregants about moving forward on a social issue but they were also being politically shrewd about where the center of balance of opinion lay in their congregation, sensitivity to which was essential to longevity on the job. Likewise, politicians in comparatively enlightened pockets of the state, such as the river city of Greenville, the university town of Oxford, or the Gulf Coast areas of Biloxi and Pascagoula where there were heavy concentrations of Roman Catholics, were attuned in their relative moderation, such as it existed particularly on economic questions, to the gradually broadening views of their voters. Those voting constituencies in the early post-war years, for example, were heavily comprised of one group in particular open to modernization: returning veterans.

The moderate leaders in these various fields were protected and even encouraged by allies and they thus can be considered embodiments of some broad-based modest push for progress, albeit one with many contradictions. Being human, the moderates were also motivated in part by their own needs and desires – for power, money, community status, job opportunities, political office, advancement, and the like. Their position was mixed and included elements of community altruism and self-interest, the latter always in their case carrying aspects of white privilege, including racial segregation.

16 Hodding Carter’s Delta Democrat Times had the greatest penetration among black readers of any white-owned Mississippi newspaper. Interview with Hodding Carter III, October 31, 2009.
“Counter to the culture” but not alienated from it

Mississippi’s long and painful transition from “closed” to more “open” can be framed as a contentious struggle – and an uneasy balance – between forces of continuity and of change. By having a clear stake in both realms, with ties both to established customs, including racial traditions like segregation and white supremacy, and to modernizing impulses like economic development, the elite white moderates of the early post-war, as representatives of a much wider like-minded group, played a pivotal role. In education, law, business, politics, medicine, religion, journalism, and other fields, the non-reactionary whites sought to modernize and make their version of progressive reforms, but they also remained associated with and in many cases held leadership positions in the state’s hidebound central institutions and entrenched systems. These latter entities included the state’s key continuities, such as: Ole Miss and its highly influential law school, large landownership in the Delta, the conservative and inbred political culture based in Jackson, the stable balance of religious denominations, the state’s small universe of daily newspapers, and a few others. The moderates influenced the decisions that in many cases maintained these continuities, which included racial segregation, but they also favored some degree of change.
They were, in the words of Tupelo newspaperman Lloyd Gray, “counter to the culture, but never became alienated from it.” In the 1945-1956 period, the most Mississippi’s white moderates generally felt compelled to do – with some notable exceptions – was encourage economic, social and legal adjustments, but always within the rubric of segregation. Along with that, they quietly opted not to participate in the extreme racial rhetoric and worst of the segregationist behavior of the time. “The moderates would lean against the wind,” Hodding Carter III stated.

Given the limitations in terms of how far they chose to push for change, the moderates otherwise occupied a subtle and evolving position. They favored some degree of adjustment, but they were very much connected to centers of white elite power, which were themselves in something of a state of flux. There is evidence of the white Mississippi moderates’ engagement within the state with establishment bulwarks such as important law firms, large insurance agencies, and with the trust and investment sides of banks, for example. In some cases, the moderates held top positions in those institutions or sat on key business boards such as the Delta Council, the Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation, or the Mississippi Economic Council.

Moreover, the moderate group not only had such commercial and professional ties within Mississippi, as well as to religious denominational offices and professional associations locally, but also had similar connections in cities in the region and nationally, including New Orleans, Memphis, Atlanta, Birmingham, Little Rock, New York and Chicago. This piece of correspondence serves as an example. “Please let

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17 Interview with Lloyd Gray, September 7, 2006.
18 Interview with Hodding Carter III, October 31, 2009.
19 The issue of insurance coverage was a particularly interesting case in point. One of the economic pressure tactics used by the White Citizens’ Council and other pro-segregationist forces was to force
me compliment you on your remarks made at Memphis, but more particularly for your durable and unostentatious courage which has made itself felt for so many years” Lucius E. Burch Jr., a Memphis lawyer wrote Hodding Carter, in 1955. “I am writing you merely to evidence something that you must have sensed, which is that every honest liberal has a greater constituency than he knows about.”

Atlanta attorney Herbert Johnson sent Carter a similar letter that same year. “I agree with you entirely that the growth of the Citizens’ Councils [sic] is dangerous and is inconsistent with orderly government operations,” Johnson wrote.

Bolstered by such extra-regional associations, the elite Mississippi moderates themselves essentially were the establishment, or at least a significant part of it.

The conflicted position of the elite moderates in the gradual transformation of Mississippi during the early post-war years is in a general sense not unique to that place and time. The historical problem examined here thus has wider relevance and application and could readily be subject to comparative history. Privileged and educated whites with relatively progressive leanings played a role in “openings” elsewhere in the 20th century American South, as did similarly positioned individuals.

Mississippi insurance companies and local insurance agents to cancel policies on those targeted as pro-integration or otherwise suspect. This was potentially a crippling blow for businesses and homeowners. The elite white moderates had extra-regional contacts with insurance companies located elsewhere. In some cases, through those contacts, they acted to arrange insurance for Mississippians who had had their locally-based insurance cut off. Thus, in this indirect way, the moderates were acting to sustain forces of change.


in post-colonial African countries like Zimbabwe and South Africa. Post-World War II Germany and Japan were guided through a period of rapid and convulsive transformation by certain elite figures who had a stake in both the old pre-war tradition and the new imperatives of inevitable change. Konrad Adenauer, the statesman and chancellor of West Germany from 1949-1963, epitomized the breed. The Ba’ath Party in Iraq until its forced dissolution in 2003 held a similarly pivotal role that, had it remained intact and in power, conceivably might have helped facilitate an achievable balance of change and continuity in that country. Given such examples in various locales, cultures and time periods, it can be argued that elites in any polity work to maintain functional relations and activities both within the entity and between it and the outside, while simultaneously working to maintain the legitimacy of the system that supports the elites despite the objections or resistance of disadvantaged or frustrated groups within the polity.

Mississippi in the 1945-1956 period was chosen for close analysis here partly because its closure at the outset of that time-frame seemingly was so stark and so powerfully protected. Moreover, and in ways directly related, Mississippi during those years was the most politically reactionary and economically impoverished state in the Union. The conditions there shaped Mississippi’s unique emerging post-war

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23 Chapter One will include an exploration of many of the ways in which Mississippi stood out in its poverty, its racism and in its radical political culture. The state, for example, had the most racially
reputation as “a public symbol of the sickness at the center of race relations in the United States,” George Lipsitz argues. Considering those extreme circumstances, combined with the paradoxical fact that Mississippi in so many ways typifies or is the quintessence of America, the elite non-reactionary whites’ efforts to moderate – to “open” – their society while maintaining establishment position and power was all the more dramatic, relevant and illustrative historically. These individuals embodied in many ways a deeply conflicted larger American society.

The 1945-1956 span also was selected because it was the final period – mostly just prior to the climactic events of the civil rights movement – when many white Mississippians were still convinced or had convinced themselves that the issue of race was bound up with and even subordinate in importance to other economic and social factors with which they appeared more immediately concerned. One example of this involves the special election to the U.S. Senate held in the late summer and fall of 1947, which is discussed in detail in Chapter Two, featuring the campaign of John C. Stennis, which was supported by many of the state’s elite white moderates. The Kemper County circuit judge and former state lawmaker was a clear example of, for Mississippi at that time, a centrist figure, however plainly if subtly segregationist and racist. In that campaign, Stennis attempted to de-emphasize the race issue, at least in public discussion, in favor of other concerns. Similarly, William F. Winter, a rising leader in the legislature in the late 1940s and 1950s, generally eschewed talk of race in favor of “good-government” issues like education. “What we need is peace and quiet” on the race issue, Mississippi Gov. J.P. Coleman, a moderate figure given

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24 Lipsitz, p. xvi.
Mississippi standards, said a few years later.\textsuperscript{25} Of course, it is a relatively easy and cynical matter to espouse silence on an issue that rests for the moment so grossly unfairly in your own favor.

In any case, in that immediate post-war period, the white moderates had not consciously focused on race in isolation from other issues to the degree they would – and would be forced to – in subsequent years. Their stated priorities basically remained professionalism, modernization and other broader social changes, not directly tampering with the racial status quo. James C. Cobb writes about white Southern writers, scholars and journalists of the mid-20\textsuperscript{th} century who saw race as “simply one strand in a complex, tightly woven tapestry of problems, and they seldom addressed it apart from economics, politics, culture or class.”\textsuperscript{26} White liberal organizations active in Mississippi at that time, such as the Southern Conference for Human Welfare and the Southern Regional Council continued to make statements about the importance of making economic improvements within the context of segregation, or what was more hopefully and euphemistically termed “interracial cooperation.”\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{25} \textit{Time}, March 4, 1957.
\textsuperscript{26} Cobb, p. 185.
\textsuperscript{27} In 1947, the Birmingham, Ala.-based Southern Conference for Human Welfare (SCHW) was declared a Communist front organization by the House Committee on Un-American Activities. Beset by funding problems, SCHW folded the following year. Other sources confirm that prior to the civil rights movement the measure of progress regarding race for both white moderates and blacks in Mississippi was not social but economic. Thus segregation was not overtly challenged on a large scale because economic problems were so much more immediate and acute. Chris Myers Asch writes of a talk given at a black church in the Delta: “At one 1930s Sunflower County church service that Hortense Powdermaker attended, an old man spoke passionately, with nods of approval and murmurs of support, and emphasized that economic equality, not social equality, was what blacks wanted more than anything else.” Asch, p. 63. The state affiliate of the Southern Regional Council was called the Mississippi Council on Human Relations. The Southern Regional Council’s predecessor organization was named the Commission on Interracial Cooperation.
The white moderates of Mississippi were very much in this mixed tradition, particularly before the broader moral lessons of World War II and the Cold War began to take hold by the 1950s culminating in the *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling, the national and international fallout from the Emmett Till murder and legal case, and then the full onset of the civil rights movement. In the interim, between the racist bombast emblemized by white supremacist figures like Senator Theodore G. Bilbo in 1946-1947 and the Dixiecrat harangues of 1948 on the one hand and the civil rights era from the mid-1950s onward led by figures emerging from the Southern black church on the other, these elite white moderates represented and fostered something of an effort to tone down the issue of race in Mississippi.

Instead they stressed economic change and other gradual social adjustments. The white moderates of 1945-1956 were transitional in this respect. However much they were conscious of doing so, they attempted to de-emphasize and defuse questions of race and focused instead on broader themes – including ones that benefited them – within which they placed the issue of race. This delicateness and caution on their part when it came to race blunted for a time the sharpness of the attacks the moderates would have otherwise faced from more traditionalist quarters, and allowed them to dissent somewhat from orthodoxy and yet effectively remain within that established structure. By around 1954-1955 and the period of the *Brown* decision, that vagueness, ambivalence and vacillation became far less tenable. In Mississippi after *Brown*, Hodding Carter wrote, “a white man was either with you or against you.”

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In considering the straddle these moderates endeavored to maintain, the following situations are cases in point. The examples represent six of the most important efforts on behalf of the moderates to change the state, while they simultaneously stayed faithful to segregationist and racial tradition. As the evidence suggests, the changes were often complex and even contradictory. For instance, the examples include steps toward moderation amid counter veiling efforts to do the following: (1) to temper segregation only marginally, at least in part to preserve the essence of segregation itself; (2) to maintain the existing social hierarchy; and (3) to bolster the statewide, regional and national credibility of key institutions, such as certain religious denominations, the historical community and the Ole Miss law school.

In the first example: from the 1930s to the early 1950s, the Intercollegiate Council, an inter-racial church-based group comprised of students and faculty from six Mississippi colleges – all-white Millsaps and the traditionally black schools of Jackson College for Negro Teachers, Rust, Tougaloo, Campbell Junior College and Alcorn – met together on a regular basis to pray and to discuss “the emerging racial and political landscape and what they might be able to do to promote the New South.”\(^{29}\) Terms like “the New South” always carried a weighty subtext regarding race. The mere fact of integrated meetings on the campuses involving Mississippians, of course, was in and of itself a challenge to segregation. Over a period of years, at

\(^{29}\) Maria R. Lowe and J. Clint Morris, “Civil Rights Advocates in the Academy: White Pro-Integrationist Faculty at Millsaps College,” The Journal of Mississippi History, 67 (Summer, 2007), 128. Jackson College for Negro Teachers was the name (from 1944-1956) of what is today Jackson State University. Prior to 1944 it was known as the Mississippi Negro Training School. It was started in 1877 as Natchez Seminary.
least 50 to 60 students from Millsaps participated. Medgar Evers, a student at Alcorn in the late 1940s and early 1950s, was a prominent member of the Intercollegiate Council. “Frank and open discussion of integration and its implications were not part of my experience until my college days,” a student participant in the Council, George Maddox, recalled.31

A second example: in the fall of 1945, Barbara Kirschner, a white youth from Greenville, Miss. who was then a junior at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York, was asked to write an essay about prejudice for an English class. The assignment was “to describe a prejudice we had, to tell how it was developed, and to explain how it evolved and/or changed.” She wrote about her childhood and adolescence in Greenville, and then noted that as a high school student in 1943, upon hearing a talk by NAACP lawyer Thurgood Marshall, her prejudice “was shattered. What I had grown up learning was not true. And I no longer accepted generalizations based upon a person’s race.”32

Thirdly: in the late 1940s a group of historians chosen by the Mississippi Historical Commission drafted the wording for a new set of markers to be erected across the state at historically significant buildings and sites. In defiance of such powerful heritage organizations as the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC),

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30 Memorandum to Don Fortenberry from Rod Entrekin, November 17, 2004. “Born of Conviction” Collection, Millsaps College, Special Collections. The bi-racial composition and work of the Intercollegiate Council, based in the student Christian movement, was apparently replicated at other colleges and universities throughout the South in the decades prior to the civil rights movement. At Vanderbilt University, for example, Morton B. King, an activist in the campus YMCA and the Student Christian Association, recalls a “completely desegregated” mass meeting of black and white student YMCAs in 1933 and an integrated region-wide conference in Atlanta in 1932. “Recollections: The Christian Student Movement, Vanderbilt, 1930-1934.” Morton B. King Papers, Vanderbilt University, Special Collections.


the historians unanimously decided that new markers would reference the “Civil War” and not the “War Between the States.” The UDC was just one group which resisted this attempt at historical reinterpretation. “Control of the past concerned segregationists, who knew well that to protect their ‘way of life’ they had to keep close guard over memories of ‘the war’ and Reconstruction,” Dennis J. Mitchell writes. “Their version of Southern history was central to the segregationist mindset.” The late 1940s were only two decades removed from a time when incoming Mississippi governors would ritually, unfailingly and elaborately pay tribute to the “Lost Cause” in their inaugural address.

Fourth: Albin Krebs, a senior at Ole Miss, was the editor of the Mississippian, the weekly student newspaper, during the school year 1950-1951. On Oct. 27, 1950, the paper published an editorial he wrote titled “Stand for the Negroes,” arguing, “We believe that qualified Negro applicants should be allowed to enter the School of Law and any other professional school that will enable them to better themselves, and thus everyone else in the state.” In response, Hodding Carter wrote Krebs: “Your editorial stand on admission of Negroes to the post-graduate schools of the University is an honest statement of a conclusion the University must itself reach in short order. Congratulations on stating the facts so unequivocally.” Ralph J. Bunche, a black American official at the United Nations and that year’s winner of the Nobel Peace

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33 The UDC “helped forge a shared white Southern identity by perpetuating the ‘Lost Cause’ through reunions, monuments and historical preservation efforts.” Asch, p. 37. The term “War Between the States” was used by Mississippi authorities when commemorating the war’s centennial in 1961-1965.
35 The last governor to do so was Theodore G. Bilbo in 1928.
Prize saw a clipping of Krebs’ piece and called it “a very significant editorial.”

Meanwhile, in the weeks following the editorial’s publication, a student-led petition to recall Krebs from his elected position as editor was dismissed at a special meeting of the campus senate.

In the fifth example: in 1953 – some three years after Krebs’ call for integration at Ole Miss – Charles Herbert Thomas Dubra, the African-American pastor at St. Mark’s Methodist Episcopal Church in Gulfport, Miss., applied for admission to the university’s law school. The dean of the school, Robert J. Farley, recommended that Dubra be admitted. Moreover, “Dean Farley discussed calmly with the Board (of Trustees) the possibility of seeking out a couple of likely Negro prospective law students in order to avoid court costs and the setting up of a separate law school,” James A. Silver writes. Farley’s integration proposal was unsuccessful and Dubra was denied admission. Then in March of 1954, at a time when trustees were attempting to screen speakers to state university campuses, Farley hosted liberal Supreme Court justice Felix Frankfurter at a conference marking the law school’s centennial, a visit that went off without incident. Later, in the summer of that year, following the Brown vs. Board of Education decision, Farley urged state politicians who were considering closing the public schools in response to the Court’s ruling, “not to try to outsmart the Supreme Court of the United States and sacrifice our own

40 James W. Silver, Mississippi: The Closed Society, p. 108.
41 The Eighth Annual Southern Law Review Conference, held in Oxford as part of the University of Mississippi Law School centenary celebration, took place March 26-27, 1954. The conference was composed of representatives from 23 law schools from the Southeastern United States. Justice Frankfurter was the featured speaker at the conference’s concluding banquet.
children just to keep an occasional Negro from getting into a school." Meanwhile, in the spring semester in 1956, the Ole Miss sociology department offered a course titled, “The Negro in the U.S.”

And finally, sixth: on Friday evening, Nov. 25, 1955, Gus Courts, an African-American grocer and NAACP member from the Mississippi Delta town of Belzoni was shot and critically wounded while standing at his store’s cash register. If not for the metal cash register protecting his chest, Courts likely would have been killed outright. Witnesses said the shots came from a group of white men who had pulled up in a car and fired through the store windows. The following Monday, Gov. Hugh L. White, mindful of a similar incident that had taken place a few blocks from Courts’ store the previous May in which a prominent local black minister had been gunned down, sent a telegram to Ike Shelton, the county sheriff in Belzoni. “The economy of this state is being severely injured because of recent shootings,” the governor wired, “and I want to urge that you do everything in your power to find party or parties guilty of recent shooting of Gus Courts. I very much fear federal action against us.”

These six situations all are drawn at least in part from the period 1945-1956, from the end of World War II to the full mobilization of both the civil rights movement and the white backlash the budding movement helped engender.

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43 Wilson F. “Bill” Minor Papers, Special Collections Department, Mitchell Memorial library, Mississippi State University. The minister who had been killed the previous May was the Rev. George Lee.
Secondly, the examples all focus partly on actions by white Mississippi elites – students and faculty at Millsaps (a private college in Jackson affiliated with the Methodist church), a Vassar-bound Greenville teenager, a committee of academics, a student leader at the state’s flagship university, the longtime dean of the state’s only accredited law school at the time, and a governor – who were rooted in a number of the established, traditional institutions of the state and thus also benefited from what George Lipsitz calls the “possessive investment in whiteness,” or namely all the advantages of white racial privilege.\textsuperscript{45}

Third, and relatedly, the elites in question were all segregationists, or at least, given these particular examples, they all were active within what were at that time plainly segregated entities, namely Millsaps, Greenville schools and the city of Greenville more generally, the state historical commission, the state university, and the state government. Fourth, the examples offer impressions of what arguably could be termed moderation, considering the time and place. Albeit, it was a moderation which, in retrospect: (1) was tepid – Krebs’s “Stand for the Negroes” call for integration only extended to graduate schools, not the whole university, for example; (2) was tinged with paternalism, as in Krebs’s comment about blacks bettering themselves; (3) was mostly done as a practicality and a token and not from any change of heart, as in Dean Farley’s move to integrate the law school to avoid the higher cost of doing otherwise; and (4) a moderation which, particularly in the case of

\textsuperscript{45} Dr. Farley was dean of the University of Mississippi law school from 1946-1963.

\textsuperscript{45} Dr. Farley was dean of the University of Mississippi law school from 1946-1963.
Gov. White, was commingled with expedience and, ironically, expressed a concern for the “severely injured” economy rather than the gravely wounded store owner.

But, the complex matters of degree and of motivation aside, at least in these six instances here specified there is no doubt these white elites were advocating or acting in ways to moderate or even challenge aspects of the Mississippi traditionalism to which they themselves were so tightly connected. They did so in part, of course, as a politically shrewd way of preserving in the near-term the essence of their privileges. The word moderation, though historically loaded and constantly evolving, is applicable and appropriate in these examples because they appear to contain: efforts at racial reconciliation or at least some ongoing inter-racial contact on terms suggesting a meeting of equals, an attempt to move beyond historical myth and the “states’ rights” past, support for racial integration at Ole Miss, and a call to bring to justice the guilty party in an apparent race shooting, among other reforms.46

So, given the evidence presented in these six examples, there were some Mississippi elites in the early post-war years, who while clearly rooted in tradition, segregation and white supremacy, were acting in at least several ways that would serve to moderate their state and its institutions with incremental change. Notably, the changes they were advocating were no threat to their race-based positions of privilege, and in fact a less-flattering interpretation of the six cases would see them

46 I use the term “racial reconciliation” to describe the Intercollegiate Council and their inter-racial discussions about promoting a “New South.” I am aware, however, that in the 1940s and 1950s that New South vision contained many aspects of racial unfairness and that, arguably, “reconciliation” might be an overstatement and that a more accurate label for these student meetings might even be “racial subordination.” The students, for example, continued in this period to attend their segregated colleges and the whites continued to live in a society which provided them all of the racial advantages. So, we need to be careful about ascribing too much meaning to this small gesture of contact between the races.
not so much as moderation but mostly as forced adjustment with the intention of maintaining the fundamentals of a race-based status quo.

On the other hand, one must remember the context of the time in Mississippi. Any call for even the most modest change in those years had to confront segregationist forces which were increasingly zealous, even hysterical, in guarding the state’s tradition which, they vowed, would yield “not one inch.” Given that extreme environment, incremental change was noteworthy. As keyed up as they were, Mississippians were hyper aware at the time of even the most subtle adjustments and mild breaches of the norm, and they fought bitterly about them. As Joseph Crespino writes, Hodding Carter’s “liberal credentials had to be judged relative to the highly illiberal context in which he operated.” Historians today thus need to understand the true importance of what, in retrospect, may otherwise look like mere nuance or window-dressing.

There also is embedded in the six enumerated examples an indication of a few of the forces among which these elite Mississippi moderates were operating which thereby suggests context for how they were simultaneously traditionalists and advocates of some moderate change. Sketching their position in overly plain and metaphorical terms, on one side were massed the established and fundamentally racist forces within which the elites had deep roots and extensive connections, such as: those struggling to maintain segregation at private colleges and local school districts; defenders of Southern heritage and the “Lost Cause;” the all-white state university and those of its backers who were fighting desperately to keep it that way; and entrenched and racially discriminatory local law enforcement. Conversely, in the

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Crespino, 30.
direction the moderates apparently – given these examples – were trying to move, were: forums for inter-racial dialogue; more dispassionate, sophisticated and modern interpretations of history; calls to upgrade and even ennoble the state university; and attempts to further develop Mississippi economically.

These elite whites were, in a sense, somewhere in the middle with ties, credibility and sympathies with a complex array of contending historical, political, social and racial imperatives. “I tend to feel that extreme stands or activities accomplish very little in the long run,” Morton B. King, an Ole Miss sociologist and noted moderate, stated in 1956. “What most Mississippi communities need, it seems to me, is to create, strengthen, and preserve channels of communication by which citizens can seek together for a solution to common problems.”48 Thus the elite moderates and the large group they represented were at the pivotal juncture between “closure” and tentative “opening” of Mississippi’s society. Their position had many inherent contradictions, surely. To cite one apparent conflict: the moderates welcomed, or at least were willing to acquiesce to, some degree of change at the same time they were trying to maintain their prerogatives of privilege – prerogatives which of course were predicated on elements of the racial status quo.

An important point about the extent of the white elites’ support and flexibility needs to be underscored. There is little doubt in these six examples that the individuals cited were part of systems that in fact bolstered and protected them, either tacitly or explicitly, in their moderation. The Millsaps students and faculty and their integrated council were sponsored by college authorities and the various student,  

48 Letter, Morton B. King letter to Mrs. R. S. Lyell, March 19, 1956. Morton B. King Papers, University of Mississippi, Special Collections.
faculty, alumni and church networks that, in turn, backed up the college itself. The academics who recommended updated wording on historical markers all kept their professorships at Mississippi universities, their affiliations with the Mississippi Historical Commission, their influential roles at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, and their seats on the board of the Mississippi Historical Society. Albin Krebs continued in his role as editor of the *Mississippian*, where advertisers maintained their ties and supportive letters-to-the-editor (granted, along with many that were hostile) poured in from across the state after his “Stand for the Negroes” piece was published. Robert J. Farley held his deanship at the law school for a full decade after his comments on the *Brown* decision were made.

These elite moderates represented an extensive like-minded segment of Mississippi’s population which tolerated, or at the least did not effectively block, attempts at gradual moderation – always in this period, of course, within the boundaries of maintaining white racial privilege.

**Elaboration on the thesis**

The central research question of this dissertation is: To what extent did the white moderates play a role in “opening” Mississippi’s closed society, its “Magnolia Curtain,” in the mid-20th century and how, why and in what ways did they simultaneously preserve their positions of power – racial, social, economic, and otherwise – while doing so. Bill Reed, of the Delta town of Marks, claims that “in
almost every Mississippi community there were white people who were not sympathetic to the racist system. There was a ‘passionate moderate network’.  

This dissertation is an attempt to verify or to disprove that statement and to determine just how “passionate” and extensive that network was and what specific conditions governed its effectiveness. The 127 elite white moderates at the center of this study represented and in many ways led the substantially larger number of whites who were not reactionary, vocal hard-core racists. This latter group of Mississippi white moderates facilitated or permitted the elites’ moderation such as it was. The activities of the period 1945-1956 are suggestive of many changes over a much longer span of time in the post-war era.

And the thesis is twofold. First, this group of elite Mississippi white moderates sought to improve and modernize their state, as they defined those concepts, primarily through their advocacy of what might be termed enhanced professional standards. This is not meant to refer only to professions strictly labeled, as in expertise and control over special knowledge – in accounting, law, medicine, etc. – but rather to professionalism in a more generic sense, as in a broad-based societal upgrade involving the economy, the state and private institutions. The improvement they espoused, in this case, generally did not include issues of racial justice and racial equality directly, although it did in aspects embrace tolerance, equal funding between the races in some grudging instances and equality of treatment before the law.

49 Interview with Bill Reed, September 12, 2006.
By pushing to render their state somewhat more modern and more professional, the moderates had a definite self-interest, it again should be noted. As cultural sociologist Magali Sarfatti Larson writes, a more professional society enhances the power and control of those with education, training, literacy, and specialized and technological skills – i.e., people like these white moderates.\(^{51}\) The Mississippi moderates wanted an enhanced society first of all for themselves, in their own image. To the extent it could be realized, the more modern society they envisioned would in fact serve to fortify their dominant position which of course had abiding elements of race privilege. And ironically given that, this more modern society would, indirectly, lead to a fairer racial climate, the near-certainty of which they were completely aware.

The second component of the thesis is the elite moderates fostered these modern and professional enhancements in their state at least partly through means of extra-regional contacts and concerns. This was especially the case emerging from the moderates’ experience in World War II and from their burgeoning connections with what arguably was a growing national liberal establishment in the 1940s and 1950s, as such ties took form through universities, foundations, prizes, fellowships, travel, foreign exchange programs, lecture series, magazines and other publications, political organizations, and other sources.

The extra-regional networks as they pertained to Mississippi, of course, had been developing at least since the 19th century and the global reach of the cotton industry and the ambitions of the post-Civil War Bourbons and Redeemers, and they

had taken form in the early 20th century through such national phenomena as the Social Gospel movement as it was expressed in the Deep South. But the extra-regional links were greatly expanded and strengthened during World War II and in the immediate post-war period and the elite white moderates were important facilitators and enablers of that broadening trend within their state. Through their varied experiences, they thus brought a certain objectivity to the way they processed life in post-war Mississippi. “I have hoped that prejudice is a form of provincialism,” Hodding Carter wrote in 1956. To the extent that the elite moderates were disrupting provincialism through their extra-regional contacts and perspectives they were acting to erode or at least question racial prejudice.

The moderates saw extra-regional interaction and all of its inexorable egalitarian influence as a given reality that Mississippi, clinging too tightly to the illusion of isolation in their view, had best recognize. In such a fluid context, racial segregation in its legal framework in states like Mississippi was doomed eventually they fully realized, though it was rare in the 1945-1956 period that any of them said so publicly. “If we can put off violence in the present, time is on the side of integration,” Hodding Carter wrote in 1956, within the sanctuary of a private letter.

52 One source says: “The Bourbons of the New South perfected a political alliance with northeastern conservatives and an economic alliance with northeastern capital.” George Brown Tindall and David E. Shi, America: A Narrative History (seventh edition) (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007), p. 532. Regarding Mississippi’s cotton industry and its global connections in the early years, Chris Myers Asch writes: “At the turn of the (20th) century, nearly 100 years before ‘globalization’ became a buzzword, the Western powers had tied the world together in a web of trade, and cotton was one of its major strands.” Asch, 18.
H.H. Crisler Jr., the editor of the Jasper County News in Bay Springs, expressed similar sentiments. In commenting on the Brown ruling, for example, he wrote: “The decision, sooner or later, was inevitable. However, the only question being that the South, in time, might become reconciled to this
To voice such sentiments too openly in Mississippi in the late 1940s and 1950s was to risk total ostracism, among other dangers and complications. One of the few who dared was Nobel laureate William Faulkner, of Oxford, who by the post-war was relatively protected from backlash by his growing renown and achievements, his vaunted eccentricity, and his tight devoted circle of literary and academic friends. In a speech to the Southern Historical Association in 1955 Faulkner made an unequivocal statement: “to stand against equality of race or color is like living in Alaska and being against snow.”55

It is important to examine both elements of the thesis in turn.

First of all, the elite white Mississippi moderates of the early post-war years believed their state badly needed to modernize and diversify, as they defined those notions of change.56 Exactly why they wanted this modernization and diversification, and to what extent it was for self-interested versus altruistic reasons, is a separate matter which will be explored here as well. Particularly, they favored improving what could be called professional standards and professional authority. These elites stressed a number of such societal enhancements, many of which will be reviewed in detail in the succeeding chapters, but it is illustrative to just briefly offer the most

inevitability, both psychologically and through proper facilities, for the decision.” “The Supreme Court’s Decision,” Jasper County News, May 20, 1954.
56 Obviously, the white moderates’ ideas of what the state of Mississippi needed and what constituted modernization and improvement were constructed concepts, defined by race and whiteness specifically, and also by class, education levels and other factors. In other words, black Mississippians may have had very different and equally valid post-war priorities, such as full equality and securing the right to vote. Poor whites and other groups may have had still another agenda. And so on. The white moderates’ version of “progress” and “societal enhancement” and the like therefore, while being examined in the dissertation, should not be taken as normative. Because the elite whites tended to control Mississippi society, it is easy to mistake their vision for an exclusive and comprehensive standard, when in fact it was but one (albeit important) viewpoint.
important cases of 1945-1956 where the moderates believed modernization was needed.

For instance, the moderates wanted Mississippi to have a teaching hospital, combined with a four-year medical program, and they pushed the idea of building one. They called for the state legislature to pass a workers’ compensation law as, by 1945, every other state in the Union had. They wanted state prison superintendents to be required to have earned at least a high school diploma and they wanted state-sanctioned whippings – administered with the dreaded “Black Annie” bull-hide lash – outlawed at the state penitentiary at Parchman. Similarly, at the more local level, the moderates advocated improved police work generally and specifically called for an end to jailhouse beatings and other informally sanctioned violence. As an overall principle, the post-war moderates – at least in the abstract – believed law and order, administered impartially, was essential for progress. Also, they pushed for raising entrance requirements for the Ole Miss law school and favored tightening standards for admission to the state bar. They wanted equality of sentencing regardless of whether the victim of a crime was black or white. They wanted the state’s secretive spy agency, the Mississippi Bureau of Investigation (MBI), abolished.

57 Up until the early 1950s, Mississippi had only a two-year medical school, at Ole Miss. Medical students thus had to go to schools in other states to complete the last two years of their medical training. This situation had long led to an exodus of potential doctors from Mississippi. Students would leave Mississippi to train in another state and frequently they would stay there. The moderates, noting the acute shortage of doctors in the state, saw the building of a teaching hospital and the creation of a four-year medical program as a possible solution to the problem.

58 Though later, in 1956, the state did create a successor agency, the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, with the support of a “moderate” governor, J.P. Coleman, and some “moderates” in the state legislature, such as there were. The backlash of the mid-1950s made many of these modernizing and professionalizing measures of the years just prior, particularly those touching in any way on the issue of race, much less politically palatable.
The moderates wanted certain governmental and legislative reforms, many related to the state’s (not unique, in this respect) culture of political corruption of the time. For example, they opposed what was called “shakedown legislation,” wherein measures would cynically be put forward in the legislature primarily to coerce well-heeled opponents of the bills, such as road contractors and other corporate interests, to resort to bribery or favor-trading to get the bothersome proposals stopped. One commentator called the “shakedown” tactic “the biggest racket of them all.” It essentially was a form of legislative blackmail of the sort which had been practiced, at least at the federal level, since the Gilded Age. The moderates also felt it was a corrupting practice to allow legislators (in what was clearly against the law) to be quietly placed in other state government jobs, often sinecures like “highway inspector” or even phantom jobs where the “occupant” simply collected an additional paycheck. Such “jobs” were doled out by legislative leaders to ensure loyalty among the rank-and-file. One estimate in 1947 was that 107 – a majority – of the current legislators were moonlighting on the state payroll illegally in such positions. On the broader question of governmental reform, the moderates emphasized improved civil service qualifications. They felt the state government needed to be strengthened,

One of the many functions of the Sovereignty Commission was to funnel financial support to Mississippi black leaders to encourage support for the preservation of segregation. This was thus an attempt on the part of Mississippi’s white-controlled government to mitigate calls for desegregation in the black community, to create divisions among blacks, and to make black accommodationist leaders beholden to white officials. There is evidence for example, that state payments went to black ministers and to black newspaper editors, such as Rev. H.H. Humes at the Delta Leader and Fred Miller at the Mound Bayou News Digest.

In retrospect, it was probably a mistake for the supporters of the Mississippi Bureau of Investigation to use that name for the new agency. It invited immediate comparison with the FBI and the name helped draw national ridicule, in the form of an article in the New Yorker, and other scrutiny.

59 Alexander Heard summary of interview with Wilbur Buckley, June 24, 1947, Southern Politics Collection.
60 Alexander Heard summary of interview with Weaver E. Gore, June 27, 1947, Southern Politics Collection.
salaries of government officials needed to raised in order to attract better-qualified applicants and to encourage longer tenures, and that the decentralization of power to county and municipal governments at the expense of the state was a trend that should be reversed.\textsuperscript{61}

Meanwhile, the moderates favored reconstituting and reorganizing the long-dormant Mississippi Historical Society.\textsuperscript{62} They wanted an end to the political patronage hodge-podge of “beat” jurisdictions for maintenance of county roads. They wanted improved roads generally, especially those arteries in rural areas known as “farm-to-market” roads. In a related matter, they favored improved bridges and more extensive rural electrification. They saw the system of local Justice of the Peace courts as outmoded, corrupt, nepotistic and incompetent local fiefdoms dating to a bygone, rural and isolated Mississippi. The “JP courts,” in their view, needed to yield to systematized, modern, broader and more able jurisdictions; the moderates wanted the local courts abolished. The moderates favored a state program to care for mentally retarded and physically disabled African-American children.\textsuperscript{63} They promoted what in the Cold War era was termed “social hygiene” and specifically wanted something done to curb the state’s rampant juvenile delinquency problem. They called for programs to combat syphilis and other venereal diseases, which were

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{61} For example, in 1950, William C. Keady, a Greenville lawyer, former state senator and noted moderate, was urging support for House Bill No. 286, which would raise salaries for county judges to a level adequate “to secure the services of a man trained in the law and who must forfeit any chances for building up a private law practice by taking the job.” Letter, William C. Keady to Senator William McGraw, February 29, 1950. William C. Keady Papers, Special Collections Department, Mitchell Memorial Library, Mississippi State University. Moreover, in the 1948 session of the legislature, there was a bill introduced to increase the salaries of court reporters in the state.
\item \textsuperscript{62} The Mississippi Historical Society was reorganized in 1952.
\item \textsuperscript{63} Mississippi did have a state Eleemosynary Board to administer, in the languid euphemism of the day, all services to the unfortunate, i.e. mentally and physically handicapped. Many of those services in the period under review did not extend to the state’s African-Americans.
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especially prevalent among the state’s black population. They wanted more funding for public libraries and generally stressed the importance of greater literacy. And they pushed for Mississippi’s white-owned newspapers (a group which, according to historian James W. Silver, stood “vigilant guard over the racial, economic, political and religious orthodoxy” of the state)\(^6^4\) to cover the black community more comprehensively and specifically wanted African-American achievement highlighted and crime news de-emphasized.

Furthermore, the white moderates wanted teacher salaries raised and equalized between those working at black schools and those at white schools. They favored agricultural diversification, beyond the state’s longtime dependence on cotton. In general, the moderates wished to see a managed transformation from the cotton-based monoculture, as some historians call it, of the Old South. They wanted, for a historically agricultural state with wide swaths of the population so long mired in farm-based debt and dependency, more consumer power and choice and greater participation in what Lizabeth Cohen would come to call a post-war “Consumers’ Republic.”\(^6^5\) They sought more parkland for state residents, black and white. They wanted Mississippi to industrialize and favored aggressive “smokestack-chasing” state programs to persuade Northern-based firms to locate factories – “branch plants” – in the state. Relatedly, the moderates favored the strengthening and growth of Mississippi’s middle class to stabilize the society and mitigate the state’s great extremes of wealth and poverty.


On the morals front, which was always controversial in a state with such a large and vocal contingent of fundamentalist Protestants, the moderates were calling for some laws to be tightened and others relaxed. The common theme here, again, was a combination of professionalization and modernization. The moderates advocated action taken against prostitution (the operation of so-called “assignation houses”), bootlegging and other vice crimes and wanted a stop to the casual cooperation of – and even, in some cases, the literal business partnership between – local law enforcement with such organized crime, which was particularly widespread in some rural areas. They wanted curtailment or tighter restrictions on “quickie marriages” allowed under extremely lax state law. “Quickie marriage” was a colorful and double-entendre description of the practice favored by rebellious hormonal teenagers driving in from neighboring states for a fast weekend of “marriage” in one of Mississippi’s rural border counties, with the tacit cooperation both of cash-starved county governments, so eager for licensing fees they scheduled all-night office hours, and of a similarly compliant local motel trade.

And then, somewhat paradoxically, given the calls to clamp down in other morals-related aspects, the moderates wanted the ironclad “blue laws” eased to allow “local option,” so that, if the community so wished, movies could be shown and ball games could be legally played on Sunday. They likewise wanted an official end to what they regarded as silly antiquarian bans on bowling alleys and pool tables in the vicinity of college campuses. Though widely ignored and ridiculed, such laws were still on the books in the late 1940s. The moderates wanted the prohibition on drinking officially ended and with it what they saw as the hypocrisy of a state “black
market tax” on alcohol. People marveled at the Machiavellian cynicism that would allow one to acquire a state license (in bootlegging) to break the law.

Also, again regarding professionalization and modernization, the moderates wanted the tone and content of their political dialogue to be elevated intellectually and specifically wished to see the end to the coarse and baldly racist, tasteless, scatological and sexual language too often used on the political stump. Political speeches of the day, particularly in the state’s rural areas, often in their presentation merged the discussion of public issues with the imperatives of a bawdy show intended to draw a large and lively crowd. The moderates favored an end to the poll tax, the subjective literacy test and other creative and conniving means by which blacks and poor whites had long been excluded from the electorate. They had decidedly mixed feelings about the widespread black and poor-white suffrage which would result from expansion of the voting franchise, but felt it was inevitable and that the state needed to prepare for its eventuality. Meanwhile, they sought an array of state programs to support returning veterans. They favored a child labor law. They thought women should be allowed to serve on state juries and they rejected the old shopworn excuse that this exclusion needed to remain intact because most Mississippi courthouses did not have women’s restrooms and taxpayers should not be burdened with the expense of providing them. “Courthouses are not equipped with facilities to

\[66\] In Clarksdale, for example, “the circuit clerk does not make it easy for Negroes to register,” a leader of the Mississippi Progressive Voters’ League reported in 1947. “He employs three devices which make it difficult sometimes. He requires the Negroes to present two poll tax receipts at the time they register. He does not require this of white persons and it is obviously not legally justified. He also frequently requires Negroes to read the Constitution and to answer questions, sometimes questions which are very hard. … Thirdly … he sometimes makes Negroes (read an oath at the top of the registration book).” Alexander Heard summary of interview with Dr. P.W. Hill, July 8, 1947. Southern Politics Collection.
accommodate the fair sex,” as John Herbers of United Press delicately described the problem.67

Also, the moderates wanted a state university system that not only was not constantly being cited as woeful by accreditation agencies, such as the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, but one that in fact strove for excellence and embraced the ideal of academic freedom. They favored funding to build more trade schools and junior colleges for African-Americans. They wanted available and efficient local train service along the main north-south Illinois Central line and along the IC’s subsidiaries in the state, such as the Yazoo and Mississippi Valley Railroad.68 They wished to see something done to address the acute housing shortage following the war. And they wanted more extensive child immunization programs.

**Favoring greater professional standards, but only to a point**

Again, the issue of racial segregation and a priority of racial equality were not generally included in any direct sense in the white moderates’ immediate post-war agenda of enhancing professional standards. They were not looking to upend the

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67 “New Provision Would Let Women Serve on Mississippi Juries Where Separate Accommodations are Available,” *Delta Democrat Times*, February 21, 1954. Some of the other arguments that women should not be allowed to serve on juries included: jury service would force mothers to neglect their children; “women and men jurors would be locked up in the same room overnight,” and women are too emotional to serve on juries and to make rational judgments. A pamphlet published by the League of Women Voters of Mississippi in 1955 attempted to refute these arguments. “State Should Accept Women as Jurors,” *Jackson State Times*, November 26, 1955. Perhaps the most famous jury trial of this era, the Emmett Till murder case of September 1955, featured an all-male (also all-white) jury.
68 The Yazoo and Mississippi Valley Railroad – the “YMV” – was also known in the Mississippi Delta and elsewhere as the “Yellow Dog” railroad. The name is derived from the YMV’s predecessor, the Yazoo Delta Railway, which had the letters YD painted on freight cars. Legend maintains that locals created the nickname “Yellow Dog” from the initials.
existing system. In fact, much of what the moderates favored, such as funding for black schools and colleges, served to reinforce segregation. This is relevant to the question of professions and professionals more narrowly defined, as in the law, science, medicine, and the like. For a period of time in the early post war, for leading Mississippi moderates, the concurrence or capitulation to segregation and other racial norms within the state sometimes came at the cost of difficult compromise with accepted and overarching professional standards, codes and practices, which often were extra-regional in nature, as in the case of some national accreditation, certification or governing bodies. This was true in academia, corrections, religion, health care, the military, and journalism, among other professions. The tension between practices in Mississippi and standards in the wider context was very much related to the broader conflict between state and national laws and prerogatives that came to define the civil rights struggle. The moderates, with their growing extra-regional sensibility in the late 1940s and early 1950s, were acutely aware of this bind and struggled to come to terms with it. They wanted Mississippi’s professional structure updated, but meanwhile they kept their leading positions within the old system they knew was deeply flawed and eventually doomed.

To analyze a prominent example, Ole Miss and other Mississippi colleges were in constant danger of losing important accreditation during the mid-20th century years. This threat was quite real and painfully brought reminders of the “Bilbo Purge” of 1930, when then-Gov. Theodore G. Bilbo, motivated by political aims and the desire to settle a score from his first term as governor in the 1916-1920 period, had dozens of university professors and administrators fired for non-academic
reasons. The ensuing investigations in the early 1930s by accrediting agencies wreaked disaster on the already woeful reputations of Mississippi schools. Ole Miss law school was expelled from the American Association of Law Schools; the medical school was placed on probation by the two medical accrediting agencies; and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, the Society of Civil Engineers, the American Association of University Professors, the American Association of University Women, and the Association for American Universities “either dismissed, expelled, or placed the university on probation,” David G. Sansing writes. In part to articles in national publications, including one entitled “The Spoils System Enters College” appearing in the New Republic, and other negative publicity, the image of Mississippi’s universities sank to a new low.

In a related sense, some Mississippi academics of the post-World War II years were concerned about the reputation nationally of Ole Miss and Mississippi’s other state colleges and universities, constricted and increasingly isolated nationally as they were by their entrenched racial segregation. Ole Miss law school alumni, for example, while readily claiming favored spots in the small and inbred legal hierarchy of the state, often found their options limited when competing in the extra-regional context with graduates of national schools with far broader and more sophisticated

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69 Bilbo’s plan as discussed in his first term was to close all of the state’s universities and, in their place, build one large university in Jackson. He blamed the defeat of his consolidation proposal on a number of academics and administrators at the various Mississippi campuses. When he was re-elected governor in 1928, he sought to get even.

70 David G. Sansing, Making Haste Slowly: The Troubled History of Higher Education in Mississippi (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1990) p. 108. The accreditations were restored by 1934, two years after Bilbo left office.

programs and constituencies. Ole Miss was at a distinct disadvantage when compared with schools and in states which relied more heavily on merit and objective testing in admission and in bar acceptance. Degrees from Mississippi professional programs were highly questionable beyond the state’s borders. Similarly, Mississippi scholars who wanted to attract high-quality speakers and attendees to Deep South academic and professional conferences were stymied by the rigors of segregation.

In a related example of the state’s, and the moderates’, growing professional conundrum, Parchman state penitentiary, the large prison farm located in the Delta, with its prisoner whippings, system of armed trustee guards and other primitive practices, compared with (at least somewhat) more humane national norms in the field, was increasingly regarded as defying the standards of the American Prison Association. Parchman also ran afoul of national experts from interest groups like the New York-based Osborne Association for penal reform. Similarly, church organizations in Mississippi found themselves isolated and in violation of the rulings of their national governing bodies. Mississippi’s network of inadequate and

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72 In the period covered by this dissertation, graduates of Ole Miss law school automatically qualified for the state bar upon receiving their diplomas. For them, there was no bar exam per se. Similarly, any graduate of the Ole Miss journalism program was guaranteed a job at the Jackson Clarion-Ledger or the Jackson Daily News. Curtis Wilkie, Dixie: A Personal Odyssey Through Events That Shaped the Modern South (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), p. 113.

73 In 1954, historians James W. Silver of Ole Miss and Bell I. Wiley of Emory University were unsuccessful in their attempt to get John Hope Franklin, an African-American historian then at Howard University, to serve on the program committee of the Southern Historical Association. The reason, Franklin said, was the “inconveniences and risk of humiliation” of segregated association meetings in Deep South cities like Memphis where Franklin feared he would have trouble finding hotel accommodations, taxi service and places to eat because of his race. “There are times,” Franklin said, that “in order to retain one’s sanity and self-respect he must have periods of time in which he unrealistically insulates himself from such experiences.” Letter, John Hope Franklin to Bell I. Wiley, November 26, 1954. James W. Silver Collection, Special Collections, University of Mississippi.

74 For example, Ellis Ray Branch writes that “the Methodist Church in Mississippi was a microcosm of the clash between the state’s national and regional ecclesiastical identities. A unite of a connectional organization whose overall policies were set, for the most part, beyond its regional boundaries and outlook, the church on the local level was composed of Mississippians who had been reared in the ‘Southern way.’” Ellis Ray Branch, “Born of Conviction: Racial Conflict and Change in Mississippi
underfunded “charity hospitals” were the subject of critical studies by the American College of Surgeons. And Mississippi’s largest daily newspapers, the jointly owned *Jackson Clarion-Ledger* and the *Jackson Daily News* were described in a 1967 article in the *Columbia Journalism Review*, a publication associated with what was then and is today one of the nation’s leading journalism schools, as “quite possibly the worst metropolitan newspapers in the United States.”75 By the mid-1950s, the two papers were known primarily as propagandists for the White Citizens’ Council.76 The post-war moderates noted this series of bottom-rung rankings and lowly regard from professional peers, of course, and were increasingly concerned about it.

At the same time, gifted black Mississippi students could find only paltry professional opportunities, at best, in the state. In 1955, Hodding Carter wrote a letter to a Michigan hospital on behalf of Matthew J. Page, an African-American medical student originally from Greenville. “I am ashamed that in our state there is no opportunity for internship for members of his race,” Carter stated.77 The state’s leading institutions were grossly out of tune with national professional norms and standards. The moderates were certainly aware of this situation, but they only went so far in trying to rectify this cross-regional discordance across many professions.

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76 The two Jackson papers were the largest published in the state, but the Memphis papers, particularly the *Commercial-Appeal*, were highly influential in northern Mississippi, and the New Orleans newspapers, especially the *Times-Picayune*, were widely read in Southern Mississippi.
77 Letter, Hodding Carter to Dr. James C. Neering, December 13, 1955. Hodding II and Betty Werlein Carter Papers. One study by the Mississippi State Medical Education Board in 1951 found that of the “301 Mississippians who have received state medical education loans to date, 17 are Negroes.” The Board found that those 17 students studied exclusively at two schools, both located outside Mississippi: Meharry Medical College in Nashville and Howard University School of Medicine in Washington, D.C. Walter Sillers Jr. Papers, Special Collections, Delta State University.
Carter, for example, as in the case of Matthew J. Page, found it most expedient to place African-American medical students in internships outside the state, as opposed to insisting more vociferously and courageously on their rights within Mississippi.

Such ready compromises notwithstanding, the moderates knew their state’s system was professionally badly flawed but considered it racially tolerable and realistic for the time being. But coming themselves from leading educational institutions which by the 1940s and 1950s were increasingly influenced by the rationalism of sociologists and economic theorists like Max Weber, Edward Shils and Talcott Parsons, combined with their own leveling experiences in World War II, the post-war moderates evidently were affected somewhat by the notion of professional meritocracy and the idea that excluding people or restricting their opportunity on arbitrary grounds, conceivably including race, mostly hurts the excluders, by diminishing them and their bedrock institutions. The mid-1950s debates about admitting African-Americans like Charles Herbert Thomas Dubra to Ole Miss law school is an example; an apparently worthy candidate was arbitrarily barred.

This idea of meritocracy unfairly stymied was in fact a region-wide issue in the post-war. “The South can never realize its full potential as long as a substantial portion of its population is functioning far below its capacity,” Luther H. Hodges, the U.S. Commerce Secretary and a former North Carolina governor, wrote in 1964. “We cannot maintain the … traditions of a plantation economy and expect to be a leader or even a full participant in a highly technical national and international
economy.” Of course, getting rid of a plantation economy does not equal elimination of racial hierarchies or believing in racial integration or equality.

The imposition of racial distinctions blatantly contradicted certain professionals’ commitment to best practices, scientific analysis and systematic approaches, in academia and also in fields like medicine, the military, law and education. “Our good sense will not permit us to continue to sanction the waste of the talents of our Negro citizens,” Hodges wrote. “We are educating all of our citizens at great expense, and then allowing a large number of these trained people to be used in jobs far below their potential.” In a related sense, the rigidity of racial strictures locally, and the attending conditions of poverty and paucity of opportunity, helped lead to a “brain-drain” exodus from the state in various professional fields by certain relatively enlightened Mississippians, particularly college-educated young people.

But with a few notable exceptions, there was not, at least among the moderate group discussed in this dissertation, any real effective resistance to the arbitrariness and capriciousness of the strict racial rules in this pre-civil rights movement period, however much they may have realized and expressed privately the short-sightedness and self-inflicted harm of such limits and however much they tried to upgrade professionalism generally, as was stipulated earlier. And with the moderates’ acquiescence or inertia, of course, the local norms were tacitly legitimized and thereby reinforced.

79 Hodges, 42.
One of the ways the moderates did address the “brain drain” problem, particularly as returning World War II veterans grew frustrated with the lack of non-agricultural middle-class job options in the state and began to migrate elsewhere, was through an aggressive industrialization program. This topic will be explored further in Chapter Four. But in the 1945-1956 period, the moderates never favored developing anything in the state approaching the ideal of a professional meritocracy. Their own positions of power were not anywhere near based strictly on pure merit, but were in fact enhanced if not predetermined by race, class and inherited privilege. They wanted to maintain social control for themselves and therefore were not eager to encourage rival systems, regardless of privately expressed misgivings. They were torn between what was advantageous for them in the immediate sense and what they knew was right and beneficial for the state in the long term.

In some cases the moderates themselves – under considerable pressure, no doubt – imposed parochial and arbitrary rules, or believed they had to incorporate them as their own in order to continue in power, based on their upbringing and their assumptions grounded in racial caste. Racism was so endemic, and was enforced by such a panoramic variety of sources, it tended to prompt the invention of justifications for violating or compromising best professional practices. Educators like John D. Williams, chancellor at Ole Miss, might (according to his correspondence) have thought of himself as committed to the free and full academic inquiry, for example, but during his long tenure at the university’s helm – from 1946-1968 – he all-too-frequently bowed to the die-hard political leanings of segregationist trustees, legislators and fund-raisers to whom he owed his job. Also, he hired J. Edgar
Hoover’s FBI assistant director, Hugh Clegg, to be his vice chancellor and enforcer (to the point of employing on-campus spies) on racial matters. “Clegg is doing good work here,” Williams assured the president of the University of Oklahoma in 1954. “He catches on quickly.”80 One of Clegg’s jobs, for example, was to send the names of proposed campus speakers to the American Legion which in the early post-war decades kept files on “un-American” activities.81 Clegg, moreover, regularly exchanged information with Robert “Tut” Patterson of Indianola, the head of the White Citizens’ Council.82

Chancellor Williams was a “tragic figure,” former Ole Miss chaplain Will D. Campbell said. He was trapped between what he knew was right and professional for the big-time university that he so wanted Ole Miss to become on the one hand and his obligation to protect the university from the whims of Jackson-based pro-segregation lawmakers, particularly some who represented poor rural highly conservative areas, who regularly threatened to shut the school down on the other.83

Likewise, physicians such as Leslie V. Rush, the doctor in charge at the Rush Memorial Hospital in Meridian; Charley Paul Eastburn, the U.S. Army colonel heading the Mississippi Military District based in Jackson; Eleanor Harkins, president of the Mississippi Library Association; and scores of other white moderate professionals in the state repeatedly expressed awareness of the ethical compromises they had to confront in weighing their broader professional duties and responsibilities with the general repressive and intimidating atmosphere they accommodated as the

80 Letter, J.D. Williams to P.K. McCarter, March 31, 1954. John Davis Williams Papers, University of Mississippi, Special Collections.
81 Interview with Joe Earl Elmore, July 1, 2006.
83 Interview with Will D. Campbell, June 30, 2006.
price of continuing to operate in the state. Eastburn, for example, understood he was risking the hostility of influential people in the state by publicizing the fact that white and black recruits from Mississippi were passing Army entrance tests by identical percentages, an empirical refutation of the white racist claim that blacks’ intelligence, as measured on such tests, was inferior to that of whites. “The failures were equally divided between white and colored,” Eastburn explained, in 1954. “Quite frankly, though, I do not care to get into any controversy on the subject.”84 Once desegregation of public space became the law if not completely the practice beginning in the 1960s, Mississippi’s public libraries, under the control of local library boards, typically removed all the seats from reading areas rather than risk the chance that members of both races might find themselves reading side by side, as literary equals. Such denuding of common reading spaces obviously violated the library ethic of encouraging reading and the unhampered use of public information. The priority of literacy and enhanced education yielded, as with so much else, to the ancient racial norms.

In compromising the meritocratic imperatives of their professions, to the extent they did, Eastburn and the other white elite moderates were in much the same quandary as their like-minded peers in the clergy, retail, law, politics, journalism, entertainment and other areas. For example, Mississippi churches for years debated the merits of “open-door” policies – namely, allowing worship by members of all races and by whomever walked through the church door. While the issue simmered in the 1950s, moderate clergy, like Methodist W.J. “Jeff” Cunningham who led

churches in Greenville and then Tupelo, stifled their inclusive interpretation of Christianity, such as it was, and put up with the “closed-door” whites-only stance imposed by local governing church boards. Meanwhile, moderate leaders of the merchant community, such as Milton Waldorf, owner of a department store bearing his family name in Hattiesburg; Jake Stein, who ran the SteinMart store in Greenville; and Abe Rubel, proprietor of Abe Rubel & Co., “The Store of Satisfaction,” in Corinth, felt a similar tension between what might have been best for business – encouraging maximum patronage from customers of any race – with imposed segregation laws and rules about trying on clothing that in fact served to inhibit shopper traffic by fostering a less-than-welcoming ambiance in the stores. The moderates’ sensibilities, and their business judgment, not to mention blacks’ growing post-war purchasing power, had to confront, and for a time bow to, the old obstacles.

The moderates’ conundrum was faced by others, black and white, from both within and outside the state. Entertainers, for example, had to choose between performing before segregated audiences or simply not doing a show in Mississippi at all, a circumstance which to a degree left the state bereft of a dynamic cultural life.

It was, in fact, a complete dilemma. For not only did the moderates for a long time act in accommodation with racist repression that was undermining their very own (if often unexpressed) sense of best professional practice, that repression existed in a sense to keep themselves in positions of power. It was a hypocrisy that they both fostered and also tried, slowly, to undo, on their own limited and gradual terms.

Typically, these conflicted moderate professionals straddled the same bifurcated world as other Mississippians “of conscience” and they either dealt with it
as they felt they could (in some of the ways discussed in this dissertation), kept their doubts mostly private, or in some cases left the state, either for long stretches of the year or for good. Those elite white moderates who eventually ended up moving elsewhere in the early post-war years for reasons of professional controversy having to do, at least tangentially, with race included: Ole Miss historian James W. Silver, Ole Miss sociologist Morton B. King, Jr., Ole Miss sociologist and criminologist Alfred C. Schnur, Petal editor P.D. East, Mississippi State political scientist William Buchanan, Ole Miss chaplain Will D. Campbell, Providence Farm director A. Eugene Cox, Ole Miss law school dean Robert J. Farley, Pascagoula editor Ira Harkey, Hattiesburg rabbi Charles Mantinband, Jackson newspaper editor Norman Bradley, Durant minister Marsh Callaway, Dr. David Minter of Providence Farm in Holmes County, and Starkville Presbyterian minister Robert Walkup, among many others.  

Wrote one colleague when Morton B. King resigned and left the state in 1956 over the issue of academic freedom: “I regret that Ole Miss is losing you as it has lost too many men on essentially the same score.” According to one study in 1957, “of the 136 assistant, associate and full professors at Ole Miss, 31 have resigned to seek ‘greener and freer pastures’ elsewhere,” *Time* reported.

Quite often, of course, the departure was not so voluntary. “Criticism of the reigning orthodoxy has resulted in expulsion of the critic,” James W. Silver noted in 1963, perhaps anticipating his own decision to leave, for jobs in Indiana and then

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85 Bradley’s departure from the job of editor of the *Jackson State Times* resulted from differences of opinion with his publisher over editorial policy. In a letter to Hodding Carter, Boston University theology professor Allan Knight Chambers refers to “Norman Bradley’s difficulties with his publisher, causing him to move out of the state.” Letter, Allan Knight Chambers to Hodding Carter, February 15, 1956. Hodding II and Betty Werlein Carter Papers.

86 Letter, Robert B. Highsaw to Morton B. King, February 8, 1956. Morton B. King Papers, University of Mississippi, Special Collections.

Florida, beginning the following year.\textsuperscript{88} Prior to that, Silver had spent academic years in Scotland and then at Harvard. Meanwhile Hodding Carter spent three to four months each summer at his home on the Maine coast. During the rest of the year he spent considerable time traveling, for work-related reasons, away from the repressive and difficult atmosphere of Mississippi. As Walker Percy wrote of his uncle William Alexander Percy, the Delta planter, poet and civic leader of the pre-World War II era, “though he loved his home country, he had to leave it often to keep loving it.”\textsuperscript{89}

In a related vein, Greenville writer and political moderate Josephine Haxton assumed the pen name Ellen Douglas because she did not want to scandalize her father and other relatives by writing sympathetically about blacks and critically about Mississippi’s race dilemma while still using her family name or her married name.\textsuperscript{90} The segregation issue had so compromised her that she felt she had to disguise herself professionally and personally.\textsuperscript{91} The vast network of race rules and limitations, and the culture of intimidation surrounding them, were an enormous check on modernization, at least regarding the retention or full expression of talented people, overall productivity and the unfettered exercise of the highest calling of society’s most important professions. The elite white Mississippi moderates were in the conflicted position of wanting changes in those rules in order to encourage greater meritocracy but also at the same time enabling their continuance by maintaining

\textsuperscript{90} In reviewing Douglas’s fourth novel, \textit{The Rock Cried Out}, Jonathan Yardley wrote Douglas “deals with a theme that so far has received little attention in Southern fiction: the corrosive effect upon whites and their families of massive, violent reaction to the civil rights movement.” “Old Southern Theme,” \textit{New York Times Book Review}, September 23, 1979, p. 13.
leading positions within the system and muting their objections by challenging the old
rules only to a mild and oblique extent.

To reiterate a general point, racial tolerance, equality before the law, color-blindness in sentencing and some other issues related to race were included in the moderates’ agenda, but a direct challenge to the overall racial status quo was not given serious consideration in the late 1940s and early 1950s by the overwhelming majority of elite white moderates in Mississippi. On the contrary. Their notion of progress had definite limits, many of them grounded in a view structured upon white racial privilege. As they were advocating enhanced professionalism and modernization, the white Mississippi moderates only pushed that advocacy so far. They lived in a segregated world complete with enormous historic advantages predicated on race, and their priorities for post-war change and growth did nothing to immediately jeopardize that elevated position.

That all acknowledged, these elite white moderates on the other hand did advocate that the state of Mississippi take steps to advance its civilization and develop modernity, to no longer be last or next-to-last in seemingly every meaningful category by which they themselves measured states’ living standards and progress. In this way, and under considerable constraints, many of which were related to their establishment position and their race, the elite white moderates expressed the opinion that their state needed to be more “open.” In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the elites featured here pushed (in many cases, successfully) for such changes in everything from the state’s economy to its physical infrastructure to the arts to public health to

92 The word “progress,” is, of course, subject to historicization.
education to the law to politics to sports to journalism to the treatment of prisoners to regulations regarding marriage licensure. They sought what they considered to be an upgraded, more professional, more modern, more literate, more educated, more widely interconnected, more economically competitive and diverse society – even a marginally fairer society, within the admittedly narrow bandwidth that dedicated segregationists and paternalists could bring to such a concept.

That assessment is valid even after, in the words of Ruth Frankenberg, separating the “white gaze” from that history.\textsuperscript{93} For all of the compromises that place the elite white Mississippi moderates in a dubious light, they did enable some progress. The actions of the historians drafting more dispassionate wording for site markers, of Albin Krebs and Robert Farley seeking to integrate and improve Ole Miss and to draw nationally regarded speakers to campus, and of Gov. Hugh White and his concern for the state’s image and economy can, among many other examples, be viewed within the broader framework of the effort for what the white elites considered greater professionalization and modernization in Mississippi. In this regard, the moderates particularly focused their efforts on the state’s government, in the private sphere and in the areas where the two realms overlapped where the elites and their informal networks of contacts tended to be especially active and influential.

\textsuperscript{93} Frankenberg, p. 81.
Extra-regionalism

Beyond the notion of professional standards and authority, but directly linked with it, the second part of the thesis is that to the extent these white elites found success in prodding Mississippi to modernize and improve, they did so at least in part by means (directly and indirectly) of their extra-regional associations, influences and concerns. This was part of a wider phenomenon wherein the South and specifically Mississippi was becoming much more integrated with the rest of the country and the world through means of a range of post-war modernizing and liberalizing forces.

The early and extensive globalization of the cotton industry is but one factor belying the “isolation” theory of Mississippi, namely that the state historically has been cut off from the rest of America. To the extent the theory has been true, however, and the state has indeed been isolated, part of it was due to internal historical factors, such as Mississippi’s cultural distinctiveness, rural character, and comparative under-development or late development of essential links like railroads. But another part of the isolation was long imposed upon Mississippi from outside, by post-Reconstruction forces in other states that bitterly fought to inhibit black migration from places like Mississippi. Highly restrictive housing and employment policies in Northern cities and communities discouraged black emigration from Deep South states, up through the early decades of the 20th century. This deep prejudice and resistance was only cracked starting in the 1920s when immigration of European whites was cut off, thus causing an acute need for new labor in Northern factories which in turn finally opened the door to the Great Migration of African-Americans.
moving up from the South. Black settlement in the Plains states and the West similarly for decades was restricted institutionally in favor of white European immigration. So for decades, Mississippi’s blacks were somewhat trapped economically and in terms of mobility and opportunity. The general point is that Mississippi had in many respects historically been quarantined from the rest of the country.

As late as World War II, Mississippi was considered so removed from the rest of America that it was deemed the safest and logical place to place German and Italian prisoners of war. There was deemed so little opportunity for escape, particularly from small towns in the Delta like Merigold and Rosedale where camps were set up, that the prisoners had relatively lax supervision and were entrusted to do work in the community and for private individuals. But such isolation as that arrangement represented was ending beginning with the Great Migration and accelerating by the 1940s, thanks to a variety of post-war factors. The effect of this gradual change and widening immersion into the nation as a whole was “the South is under a spotlight now,” Hodding Carter wrote in 1955. “Each significant incident that occurs here, which may have been considered commonplace or not worthy of mention previously, is now immediately magnified for the world to see.”

In those first post-World War II years, and especially emerging from the broadening and even international experience of the war, Mississippi’s white moderates studied in these pages were increasingly tied to elite financial, legal, educational, trading, media, non-profit and other networks operating outside the state and they thereby were becoming ever more acutely aware of the disparities between

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local custom and practice and norms in the extra-regional context. The moderates were coming to fully realize that the composition and history of Mississippi’s racial hierarchy differed from that of much of the rest of the country, as this dissertation will explore, though, as they also knew, surely racism and discrimination, much of it institutionalized, did extend nationwide. The discouragement of black immigration on the part of entities in other states would be a case in point. With their extra-regional perspective, the post-war Mississippi elite moderates maintained standing within their home region – and sometimes found themselves in a position to facilitate change – with the aim in part, of course, of preserving and even improving their own situations in the process.

Extrapolating from a few of the examples cited earlier: Barbara Kirschner’s reflections from Vassar College on her youth in Mississippi and the impact of Thurgood Marshall, the national NAACP lawyer, upon her thinking; the historians’ connections with universities, foundations, publications and communities of scholars located outside Mississippi and, through those contacts, their sense of Mississippi’s need to move beyond the intellectually parochial; Albin Krebs’ vision of Ole Miss as a university with a higher calling on campus and more broadly; Dean Farley’s facilitation of a link between the U.S. Supreme Court and Ole Miss law school; and Gov. White’s concerns about the state’s economic development (particularly as it might have related to investment originating from outside the state and the state’s image externally as a factor therein) and his sensitivity to the views and power of the federal government, are all some of the many ways in which the elite moderates of
Mississippi brought extra-regional experiences and sensitivities in fostering enhanced professional standards concerning a primarily state or local issue.\textsuperscript{95}

The motivation for all this, of course, contained definite cross-currents. The white moderates were looking to improve their state in these various ways both because they believed certain changes were necessary and doable and because in their limitations and contours the priorities they advocated ultimately benefited them. The elite white moderates were increasingly concerned about some very practical things. They were worried about their own employment and career opportunities in the wider world outside Mississippi, which were now seen as threatened and limited by the low standing of the state’s educational, professional and governmental institutions. The moderates noted the difficulties faced by employers in the state when they sought to persuade people who possessed economically essential knowledge to move to the state. Many potential employees refused to consider moving their families to a state with such woeful educational standards and such inferior public facilities. “Business leaders should understand that a healthy modern industrial structure cannot be raised upon the sands of segregation, minimum wages, poor schools, anti-intellectualism,

\textsuperscript{95} It should be added, somewhat parenthetically, that these widening networks tended to spread influence in both directions; the far-flung ties among elites helped support and promote changes that were not limited to Mississippi. One of the byproducts of these growing extra-regional connections was that Mississippi elites were not only becoming more aware of how the social and racial environment of their home area compared with those of other places, but they also began weighing in on external issues in a newly informed way. The Mississippi elites’ support in the 1950s for statehood for Alaska and Hawaii, often expressed by them in the context of a subject they were coming to understand very well – race and race politics as it impacted the balance of power in the U.S. Senate – is an example of their broadening reach and projection outward of lessons being (painfully) learned at home.
Negrophobia, meager social services, anti-unionism, and a general policy of ‘hate the federal government,’” wrote James W. Silver, in *Mississippi: The Closed Society*.  

The perceived overall lack of modernity and professionalization in the state thus was a direct threat to the moderates’ vision of a positive, economically healthy living environment and, in particular, to their own financial well-being and ongoing position of power which was connected to a more vibrant whole. The issue in the immediate post-war of the state’s population loss, particularly among Mississippi’s educated young people, was a constant source of worried commentary among the more discerning and future-oriented white moderates as evidenced by their correspondence, newspaper editorials and other writings.

In any event, the white moderates’ proposed changes to the state, however profound they may have been, were evolutionary and certainly not revolutionary. Without fundamentally altering the balance of racial power, they only went a limited distance. For all their supposed progress, the reforms the moderates advocated still kept intact their own perch securely atop Mississippi’s social, political and economic pyramid.

As has been stated, the case study of this dissertation involves 127 individual Mississippians who lived and worked in the state for either part or all of the period 1945-1956. They were journalists, lawyers, members of the clergy, students, legislators, politicians, business leaders, writers, housewives, plantation owners, military officers, university administrators and professors. The fact that they

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97 For a complete and detailed list of the 127 elite white Mississippi “moderates,” see page 589.
espoused “moderate” ideas in those positions suggests each of the areas and professions of Mississippi life they represented were at least somewhat permeated with like-minded sympathies that allowed these figures to continue to operate, using considerable political dexterity, in high-profile roles. However reluctant or conflicted, that broader acceptance or allowance is the source of the moderates’ strength in the public sphere and is therefore a key focus of this dissertation. These individuals were among the leaders of the state. They were literate, educated, employed in key positions, many from landed families or otherwise independently wealthy, and in some cases highly influential. The common element uniting these men and women is that they were privileged whites in the state in the immediate post-World War II period who were associated with two overlapping and also diverging forces – segregation and white racial privilege on the one hand and a desire for modernization and professionalization as they saw it on the other.

For all of their considerable support networks, these elite white individuals were in a sense hardly typical of the Mississippians of their time. They were in fact in many ways the exception, as members of the leadership and the intelligentsia of the state. First of all, in terms of simple numbers, this case study is an infinitesimally small group – 127 individuals out of a total state population in 1950 of 2,178,914 people. Also, they were extremely privileged. At a time when the average adult Mississippian had less than a ninth grade education, members of this profiled group had attended some of the nation’s leading colleges, graduate schools and professional

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98 On the issue of family support, and how family connections were an important factor in allowing moderates some flexibility, newspaperman John Herbers said: “Family is so key to all this. If your family was known and respected, it went a long way.” Interview with John Herbers, January 15, 2005.

While the median annual family income in Mississippi was $1198 and 27.2 percent of the state’s families were living on less than $500 per year, many of these elites had large land holdings, second homes, substantial incomes and other resources. In a very hierarchical and stratified society, this group had virtually every advantage of class and especially race. So while being representative of evidently considerable moderate leanings in the state, this group of individuals was also quite extraordinary and exceptional in their demographic composition.

Snowball sampling

The findings in this dissertation are based on a combination of archival research and some interviews. The universe of 127 names was assembled using a research method called snowball sampling, an approach employed in the field of social network analysis to study contacts and relationships within a given community. These ties among elites existed at the same time those same elites had alliances within their particular constituencies. To take a simple example, a minister might have close connections with other ministers across Mississippi and elsewhere as well as with members of his or her own congregation. They were at the nexus of varying but overlapping communities. As Joseph Harris reminds us, “one is always

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100 Ibid. For the year 1950, the median school year completed for adult whites was 9.9 years and for non-whites was 5.1 years.
101 Ibid.
102 Most of the 127 individuals were males, so they also had the advantage of gender. This aspect will be discussed in the text at a later point.
103 A full listing of interview subjects is available in the Bibliography which begins on page 589.
simultaneously a part of several discourses, several communities, … always already committed to a number of conflicting beliefs and practices.”

By researching the extent of a subject’s associations with other people, as in with other prominent individuals, and garnering a sense of the frequency of contact, one can construct a universe of names somewhat like rolling an enlarging snowball. In this case, as was indicated before, the starting point in compiling a database of elite white moderates of mid-20th century Mississippi was the papers of Hodding Carter, the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist associated, according to many accounts, with the doctrine of racial tolerance and with the economic development of Mississippi.

Carter’s voluminous record of correspondence – fortunately, preserved for posterity – indicates he was in frequent contact with James W. Silver, a professor of history (specializing in the Civil War) at the University of Mississippi from 1936-1965 and chairman of the Ole Miss history department from 1945-1954. The two men were mutually supportive allies, the documentation shows. Carter wrote favorable editorials about Silver. Carter published Silver’s articles when the historian was writing from Aberdeen, Scotland while on a Fulbright fellowship during the academic year 1949-1950. Silver in turn hosted Carter at Ole Miss events such as the ODK-Mortar Board forum lecture series which he (Silver) had helped start in

105 See, for example, “Love of Truth Makes Professor X Suspect,” Atlanta Journal, April 20, 1948.
106 Silver was teaching American history at the University of Aberdeen on a grant from the U.S. Board of Foreign Scholarships. Silver wrote occasional articles from Scotland that appeared in several Southern newspapers.
1940.\footnote{Letter, Hodding Carter to James W. Silver, August 6, 1946. Hodding II and Betty Werlein Carter Collection. “ODK Mortar Board forums” refers to the Omicron Delta Kappa honor society, the Ole Miss chapter of which invited various speakers to campus, some of them quite progressive for the Deep South at that time, and therefore quite controversial.} The two men were active together in the Mississippi Historical Society.\footnote{At Silver’s instigation, Carter was elected president of the Mississippi Historical Society in February, 1955. Letters, James W. Silver’s to Hodding Carter, February 27, 1955, and Hodding Carter to James W. Silver, March 2, 1955. Hodding II and Betty Werlein Carter Papers.} And Silver and Carter were friends and exact contemporaries.\footnote{Hodding Carter and James W. Silver both were born in 1907.}

Meanwhile, Silver’s papers document his kindred association with, among others, Frank E. Smith, a Greenwood congressman from 1951-1962 who had been a student of Silver’s at the University of Mississippi in the late 1930s. So the snowball has expanded in this simple example from Carter to Silver to Smith. One could continue, citing intertwining connections in the network, and note that Smith, a journalist early in his career, had worked for Carter at one point or that Carter subsequently boosted Smith’s political career in the Mississippi Delta or that Silver had a number of other former students one could place in the “moderate” category, such as William F. Winter, a future governor, and plantation owner Betty Pearson of the Delta towns of Sumner and Webb.\footnote{In a letter to Smith in 1951, praising him on the occasion of his maiden speech in the House of Representatives, Carter wrote, “We are going to do all we can to make the folks down this way know that you are essential to the Delta and I hope we can prove it to the state at large.” Letter, Hodding Carter to Frank Smith, January 24, 1951. Hodding II and Betty Werlein Carter Papers. William Winter served as governor of Mississippi from 1980-1983.}

Rolling further, one could note the fact that Carter helped Episcopal minister Duncan M. Gray Jr. write his 1954 pamphlet, “The Church Considers the Supreme Court Decision,” regarding the Brown case; or that Carter was close to Gray’s father, Bishop Duncan M. Gray Sr., through their work together in the Episcopal diocese; or that Carter wrote a recommendation for Petal, Miss. journalist P.D. East who was...
applying for a Nieman fellowship at Harvard in 1956, an application also supported by Jackson State Times editor Norman Bradley; or that Duncan M. Gray Jr. was a good friend of Ole Miss chaplain Will D. Campbell; or that Campbell in turn was close to East.

Duncan M. Gray Jr., Duncan M. Gray Sr., East, Bradley and Campbell were all prominent Mississippi moderates at the time and are key figures in this inquiry.

From Carter, Silver, Smith, Winter, the Grays father and son, East, Bradley, Campbell and their extensive webs of interaction with like-minded fellow Mississippians, the social and professional network is traceable even further, even exponentially, to include associates of associates through the channels of school connections, board memberships, business arrangements such as loans or investments, intermarriage, military service, work experience, fraternities and sororities, church affiliation, and major elite social events such as the Delta Debutante Ball held each Christmas season in Greenville, the Rosedale Plantation Derby mule races held each October at the Rosedale Country Club, and the annual Sugar Bowl football game played on or about New Year’s Day in New Orleans. The purely subjective determination that a given figure falls ideologically into the “moderate” category is based in part on analysis of published works, correspondence, or other primary sources where political, social and racial views were expressed. It is important to again emphasize that each of the various major sub-groupings of this network—schools, churches, fraternities, etc.—had broad and powerful

111 Letter, Hodding Carter to Lewis Lyons, February 20, 1956. Hodding II and Betty Werlein Carter Papers. East was not accepted into the Nieman program.
constituencies which tolerated and supported — or at least did not summarily challenge successfully — these various elite white moderates. The larger group of Mississippian thus enabled these prominent moderates and their conservative “progressive” (considering time and place) actions.

Theoretically, this process of using historical documents to discern a network could go on almost indefinitely as personal contacts of varying degrees of formality involving influential people in an increasingly mobile society extend the picture more and more widely. But practicality and reason do suggest limits. First, of course, the focus of this inquiry involves a single state and a defined period of 12 years. Second, in the collections at the four major research libraries in the state certain names appear repeatedly and in the context of positions of leadership. Based on frequency of occurrence in the documentation along with subjective factors such as a person’s prominence and their degree of civic involvement, of the 127 total names, a core group of four leaders can be identified – Hodding Carter, James W. Silver, William F. Winter and Duncan M. Gray Jr. – all of whom served as mentors and sponsors of many of the others on the list who evidently shared many of their views and/or with whom they interacted professionally and personally. Each of these four men held leadership positions, in the fields of journalism, academia, politics and religion, respectively, and they enjoyed widespread influence.

Carter, for example, was at the center of a small sub-network of moderate journalists in the state. One source writes, “For progressive reporters and editors in Mississippi, occasional refuge and uplift came in the form of salubrious but not

\[\text{113} \text{ Namely, the libraries at the University of Mississippi, Mississippi State University, and the University of Southern Mississippi, and the Mississippi Department of Archives and History in Jackson.}\]
especially abstemious weekend pilgrimages to Greenville, where Hodding and Betty Carter opened their home.” And Hodding Carter was in many ways the most important journalist in the state, an assessment supported both empirically and anecdotally. Carter’s flagship publication, the Delta Democrat-Times, won the Mississippi Press Association’s award in the “best newspaper” category five out of six years in the 1950s. “Hodding and Betty Carter cut a wide swath at those press association meetings,” recalled Wilson F. Minor, longtime Jackson bureau chief of the New Orleans Times-Picayune. “They were celebrities.” And the DDT, as the newspaper was known, was just one of Carter’s many journalistic outlets, which also included other Mississippi papers, a radio station, magazine articles, lectures, media appearances and books. In a clear example of extra-regional concerns and influences, a major aspect of this dissertation’s thesis, in the Northern and national press Carter was frequently referred to as “the South’s Fighting Editor.”

Silver, Winter and Gray, likewise held unique positions within their specific fields of academia, politics and religion, respectively. Silver, for example, was a leader of what he called the “wide-awake members of the faculty” at Ole Miss and he had productive working relations with John D. Williams, the university chancellor from 1946-1968.

Certain elite institutions in the state clearly served as important frames of contact for many of the 127 individuals. These organizations therefore are focal points of this study. For instance: the Mississippi State Legislature; the Mississippi

116 Letter, James W. Silver to Leo Pasvolsky, September 14, 1951. James W. Silver Collection, Archives and Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries.
Planning Commission; the Mississippi Municipal Association; the Mississippi Council on Human Relations (the state affiliate of the Southern Regional Council); the Mississippi Historical Society; the National Cotton Council; the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen; Church Women United; the Delta Council; the League of Women Voters of Mississippi; the YMCA; the Mississippi Press Association; Sigma Delta Chi, the journalism fraternity; the Mississippi Historical Commission; the Alumni Committee of the University of Mississippi; the Mississippi Department of Archives and History; and a series of women’s book clubs, study clubs and “women’s” organizations such as the Prentiss (Miss.) Woman’s Club, the Woman’s Club of Poplarville, Pen Women in Rosedale, Miss., the Business and Professional Women’s Club of Mississippi, the Business and Professional Women’s Club of Cleveland, and the Mississippi Library Association, are all among those cited consistently in the documentation as groups where this collection of elite moderates were active and overlapped in service. Again, when considering this web of organizations, it is important to consider the extent of support for the small group of prominent moderates. The memberships of these various groups virtually sustained these 127 Mississippians in their activities.

117 For a more detailed discussion of the role of women’s clubs and associations in Southern history, see the work of Anne Firor Scott. For example: Natural Allies: Women’s Associations in American History (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1992).
118 Julia Kirk Blackwelder writes that “Southern club women, many of whom affiliated themselves with national women’s organizations, facilitated the dissolution of regional insularity.” Women and Leadership: A Century of Change in the South, ed. Craig S. Pascoe, Karen Trahan Leatham, and Andy Ambrose (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005), p. 54. Or, as Hodding Carter wrote, “the multitude of women’s study and literary clubs in the South provide almost our only link with the great outside world of arts and letters.” Southern Legacy (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1950), p. 77 The Business and Professional Women’s Club of Mississippi is referred to, in a 1944 source, as Mississippi Federation of Business and Professional Women’s Clubs. Letter, Walter Sillers Jr. to Pauline Smith, June 20, 1944. Walter Sillers Jr. Papers, Delta State University, Special Collections.
Regarding these clusters of individuals associated with given institutions, typically the elite whites served together on the boards of trustees or in many instances worked side by side on some program sponsored by one of these organizations. An example, previously mentioned, would be the Mississippi Historical Commission’s work right after World War II rewriting and replacing historical markers throughout the state, an effort that brought together several of the elite moderates – among them James W. Silver; John K. Bettersworth, a history professor at Mississippi State University; and Frank E. Smith – to grapple with the politically treacherous task of reinterpreting Mississippi’s past, particularly regarding the antebellum period, slavery and the Civil War.

Another example of these close professional associations: a number of the leading moderates served together in the state legislature in the late 1940s and early 1950s in a rump and amorphous group some members jokingly called the “telephone booth caucus” because of its supposedly negligible size. But in fact, the moderate faction, many of whom were World War II veterans first elected in the 1947 as part of the incoming conservative “progressive” legislature of 1948-1950, was numerous enough to be able to help enact a relatively moderate platform in the late 1940s and then evolved into a substantial minority by the early and mid-1950s, enough so as to provide a respectable show of support for William F. Winter’s ultimately unsuccessful bid for House Speaker in late 1955.

120 For a full discussion of the conservative “progressive” legislature of 1948-1950, see Chapter Three.
121 In the 1955 election for House Speaker, Walter Sillers Jr. defeated William F. Winter by a vote of 94-40.
Many of the 127 elite moderates also interacted with each other or had known each other through a connection with certain leading colleges and graduate and professional schools. For example, two women in this study, Florence Mars and Betty Pearson, had roomed together at Millsaps College and again at Ole Miss in the early 1940s. The *Jackson State Times* editor Norman Bradley and Rev. Garland (Bo) Holloman, a Methodist minister who served in Greenville and Clarksdale, among other places, were both members of the Millsaps Class of 1934. Albin Krebs and Paul Pittman worked together on the staff of the Ole Miss student newspaper, the *Mississippian*, as editor and managing editor, respectively, in the academic year 1950-1951. Two leaders of the Ole Miss religious community, University chaplain Will D. Campbell and Wesley Foundation head Joe Earl Elmore, had attended Yale Divinity School together.

The web of ties among these and others of the 127 individuals, many of whom were contemporaries with one another, often ran parallel with the alumni networks of such schools as Millsaps, Mississippi State, Vanderbilt, Tulane, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and, most especially, Ole Miss. The extent of University of Mississippi undergraduate and law school connections among the group lends credence to the old wisecrack that, for the small group of elite whites at

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122 Interview with Betty Pearson, September 12, 2006.
123 It could be argued that Ole Miss historically and symbolically has long been the most important institution in Mississippi, a highly agricultural state with few competing centers of comparable cultural power and significance. Ole Miss constitutional law professor William P. Murphy stated that the University of Mississippi Law School “was the only accredited law school in the state of Mississippi” in the immediate post-war years, “and almost all of the people who became practicing lawyers and judges and influential politicians at that time went to the Ole Miss Law School.” Interview with William Patrick Murphy, by Sean Devereux, Southern Oral History Program, Center for the Study of the American South, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, January 17, 1978. Curtis Wilkie writes that in the 1950s, “Ole Miss functioned as a clearinghouse for the state’s political power structure as well as a finishing school for the young women who would marry the elite and preside over their mansions.” *Dixie: A Personal Odyssey Through Events that Shaped the Modern South* (New York: Scribner, 2001), p. 82.
least, Mississippi is not a state, it is a club.125 “If you went to Ole Miss, you know pretty much everybody in the state,” said journalist and author Curtis Wilkie, an Ole Miss graduate, class of 1963.126 The “club,” of course, was exclusive and exclusionary on many grounds – most notably, race – so Wilkie’s observation is obviously elitist and racially insensitive if colloquially perceptive.

Of those among the 127 post-war white moderates whose vital statistics could be ascertained, four were born before the year 1890 and five were born after 1930; the overwhelming majority, therefore, were born at some point within the four decades 1890-1930. A given individual born at the midpoint of that 40-year range – in 1910 – would, during the span covered by this dissertation, 1945-1956, be between the ages of 35 and 46. As a group, they therefore would be old enough to be of the generation just beginning to grasp and exercise power. The median age of the population as a whole in Mississippi in 1950 was only 24.6 years, so individuals such as these elite moderates in their late 30s and 40s, and thus half a generation older than the average, would be ideally positioned in terms of age and experience to be emerging community leaders.127 At the same time, these moderates were still presumably young enough to want to remake their state in their own image. “I personally believe that we must have young far-sighted men and women for the major posts of the government if we are to travel forward on the road of progress,” wrote Philadelphia (Miss.) physician Shed Hill Caffey, a moderate, in 1955.128

126 Interview with Curtis Wilkie, September 6, 2006.
128 Letter, Shed Hill Caffey to J.P. Coleman, December 17, 1955. J.P. Coleman Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
In the case of the elite moderates cohort, the mantle of leadership would not only be applicable for chronological reasons—though those advantages, along with factors of education and class, were substantial—but also because of the added element of credibility and respect resulting, in many cases, from having had military and specifically war experience, a factor to be explored further in Chapter One. This group of elite moderates generally belonged to the World War II generation—many of them, judging from the median 1910 birth year, in the older (and therefore presumably more powerful) tier of that generation—whose members black and white, some of them having served as officers, returned home in 1945 in many cases determined, consciously or not, to reshape life in Mississippi, even if they might not have articulated their intentions in such grandiose terms.

Some of the younger elite white moderates, such as William F. Winter and Hodding Carter’s managing editor at the Delta Democrat-Times, Tom Karsell, also were part of the cohort of Korean War veterans, many of whom came back to Mississippi from that conflict around 1953-1954, the eve of the modern civil rights movement, with a similar fervor, one which blended idealism and ambition. Sociologists Maria R. Lowe, J. Clint Morris and Madeline L. Pizzo, commenting on the subjects they interviewed for their study, write of “the importance of leaving Mississippi in helping to sharpen their awareness and understanding of the state’s segregated system” with which they interacted upon their return.129

It should be underscored that this is an overwhelmingly male network. Of the 127 individuals in the case study, only 21 were women. This was an era and a place,

of course, when cases of upper-class or otherwise elite white women who worked outside the home were extremely rare. Zelma W. Price, for example, a member of the state legislature in the 1940s and 1950s and later a county judge was the only female lawyer in Washington County, population approximately 70,000, as late as 1965. Typically in news stories of the day Price would be called, on second reference, “the woman legislator,” as if that alone made her identifiable and singular, which indeed it virtually did.

To reiterate, and as an extensive review of the snowball sampling suggests, each of the 127 individuals was supported by a much larger group (or groups, plural) – be they newspaper subscribers and advertisers, parishioners, voting constituents, business associates, neighbors, or others – which allowed the elite moderates the flexibility to push for some modest adjustments in Mississippi. So, while the prominent individuals are the most visible actors in various episodes and events studied in these pages, they are important historically because they represented a wider population whose cumulative transformation was essential to the historical problem of opening, to the extent it indeed has been opened, the “closed society.”

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130 In the period which is the focus of this dissertation, Price was a partner in the Greenville law firm of Price and McIlwain. According to the 1950 Census, Washington County’s population totaled 70,257.

131 For example, the “woman legislator” term is used in the story, “Sillers Supports House Ballot on Senate Liquor Bill,” Jackson Daily News, January 26, 1950.
Succeeding chapters

Following an upcoming discussion of the historiography of Mississippi and race in the 20th century, the bulk of this dissertation is laid out in five chapters – arranged chronologically to focus on sequential segments of the period 1945-1956 – each taking on different specific aspects of the thesis.

Briefly, to outline the contents: Chapter One, titled “A Post-War Agenda,” looks at the ways in which the elite moderates, particularly veterans returning to Mississippi from the service, articulated areas where they felt the state needed to modernize and upgrade. These expressions favoring some limited change appeared in newspaper editorials, political commentary, private letters, books, and other forums. The chapter serves in this way as a kind of template for the complex post-war vision the moderates had for their state.

Chapter Two, “’The Man’ and the Quiet Judge,” focuses on the U.S. Senate Democratic primary election of 1946, the death the following year of Senator Theodore G. Bilbo and the subsequent campaign to replace him, eventually won by Judge John C. Stennis. Specifically, this chapter looks at the role of Mississippi’s white moderates in advocating a shift away from the old harshly and unapologetically racist politics, as exemplified by Bilbo, and toward more modern, professional and seemingly more reputable political leadership, albeit one firmly entrenched in racial segregation, as personified by Stennis. The white moderates were driven in this regard by extra-regional considerations, including concerns over Mississippi’s image. Chapter Three, titled “A Conservative ‘Progressive’ Legislature,” looks at the myriad
attempts in the state legislature in 1948-1950 to pass legislation that would modernize Mississippi, as in for example such areas as workers’ compensation and overturning Sunday “blue laws.” The legislative sessions, particularly the one taking place in early 1948, was overshadowed (and continues to be so in the historiography) by the Dixiecrat phenomenon occurring at the very same time.

The fourth chapter, “Greenville Mills, and Parchman,” is not only about the Alexander Smith Co., a New York-based carpet manufacturer, which in 1951 located a carpet mill in Greenville, called Greenville Mills, but also about the broader effort to attract industry to Mississippi, a campaign encouraged and led by the elite white moderates of the state. Also, the chapter is rather specifically devoted to professionalization as it applies to the reform of particular professions and disciplines, as in – in this case – penology and prison management, and local justice courts. The main situation studied in this regard is Parchman, the iconically brutish state prison farm set in a remote section of the Delta.

Meanwhile, Chapter Five, not only takes the story up through 1956, but also offers two final case studies, in this instance on the topic of academic freedom and Ole Miss and on the infamous Tchula (pronounced Choo-luh) incident in September 1955 in which leaders of nearby biracial Providence Farm were, with threats of violence, told in a town meeting that they had to leave the community. The elite moderates, again seeking to modernize the state, focused on the issue of academic freedom at Ole Miss, not only the state’s leading university but also its most important institution in many ways. Academic freedom was connected to the controversy of the screening of speakers to the university and other state campuses.
The issue of academic freedom also points up the ongoing contest in the post-war Deep South over the meaning and definition of public space.

The dissertation wraps up with a brief conclusion.

All of these examples, thus organized in chapters, serve to illustrate the dissertation’s basic thesis: namely, that white Mississippi moderates pushed their notion of progress in updating their state professionally and in terms of modernization, and that they did so in part via the influence of extra-regional factors, among the most notable being those emerging from World War II. But all the while they remained vigilant about protecting their privileges, including most importantly those associated with being white.
Historiography

Since the early 1990s, the field conjoining Mississippi, race and 20th century civil rights has been dominated by two books more than any others: John Dittmer’s *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (1994) and Charles M. Payne’s *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (1995). The two titles have been part of what Steven F. Lawson sees as a second generation of civil rights scholarship. The first generation, as Lawson defines it, mostly started to appear right after the civil rights movement crested in the 1960s, and it involved a “top-down” focus on the movement as a national phenomenon featuring Martin Luther King Jr. and a handful of other major charismatic male figures. Much of this first-generation writing was done by

1 Urbana: University of Illinois Press
2 Berkeley: University of California Press
4 Taylor Branch’s three-part biography of Martin Luther King was perhaps the apotheosis of this genre of King-centered civil rights scholarship. See: *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-1963* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988); *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963-1965* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998); and *At Canaan’s Edge: America in the King Years, 1965-1968* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006). David Garrow’s *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1986) is another study that falls into this category.
journalists. The second generation, including Dittmer, Payne and others, saw more of an emphasis on developments in local communities and the contributions of grassroots organizations. This recent trend has been part of a larger movement toward social history more generally.

In Southern historiography as opposed to that of just Mississippi, William H. Chafe’s *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (1981), a community study of Greensboro based heavily on oral histories, was perhaps the pivotal book transitioning from the first to the second wave as Lawson describes it. Howard Zinn’s *A People’s History of the United States: 1492-Present* (1980), was likewise a seminal/herminal book in countering the top-down, elite-centered tradition in American historiography as a whole. But as far as the particular history of Mississippi, social change and civil rights is concerned, in the last 15 years or so Dittmer and Payne, above all the other scholars, have framed the discussion. Among other things, the two scholars reject as normative the white, educated, elite view of Mississippi’s post-war history. They also challenge the idea that larger systems and influences alone were decisive in addressing and overcoming the state’s racial problems. Instead, the authors put stock in the actions of individuals and small groups within the indigenous population.

Thus the Dittmer and Payne books have a number of similarities, perhaps the main one being their emphasis on people at or near the bottom of the socio-economic

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5 Oxford: Oxford University Press.
6 Though, notably, community studies, of Southern towns in particular, have been integral to disciplines related to history – such as psychology, social science and anthropology – since at least the 1930s. Examples would be books such as John Dollard’s *Caste and Class in a Southern Town* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937) and Hortense Powdermaker’s *After Freedom: A Cultural Study in the Deep South* (New York, Viking Press, 1939).
ladder – especially African-American activists – and the contribution of these “local people” to changing Mississippi’s apartheid racial status quo.\(^8\) For example, both authors explore voter registration efforts, particularly by black World War II veterans, under the aegis of such groups as the Mississippi Progressive Voters’ League, the Mississippi State Democratic Association, local branches of the NAACP, and the Regional Council of Negro Leadership. Dittmer and Payne were not only staking their claim in reaction to the earlier top-down model, a brand of discourse Payne describes as “more theatrical than instructive,” but also in opposition to what is known in scholarly debates as the “Mississippi Burning” effect, namely the impression promulgated in a popular 1988 feature film of that name that the civil rights period in the state was essentially about heroic whites saving blacks.\(^9\)

These two authors scorn that notion and dispute the earlier King-centric, Supreme Court-centric, U.S. Justice Department-centric historical focus, and instead privilege the work and the power of common but extraordinary black Mississippians. Payne specifically takes issue with interpretations that overly ascribe the achievements of the civil rights movement to a supposed growing generalized liberalism – related to what he calls “normative thinking” – in 20\(^{th}\) century America all while neglecting what he sees as the key component: human agency.\(^{10}\) He cites Gunnar Myrdal’s influential study *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and*

\(^8\) It should be added that not all “local people” in the Dittmer and Payne studies were working class. Many were not identified as low-income or poor, so to speak. “Local people” often referred to actors at the grassroots despite (but taking into consideration and bringing into focus) class, status and socioeconomic conditions.

\(^9\) Payne, 418.

\(^{10}\) Normative thinking can be defined as the way things ideally should be, as opposed to the way things really are and the tough work it takes to improve them.
*Modern Democracy* (1944)\(^{11}\) as an example of analyses that, in Payne’s view, put too much stock in the role of evolving moral values among elites in bringing about race change.\(^{12}\)

It should be noted by way of qualification on that point that Dittmer’s discussion of individual determinism makes the argument that rank-and-file “local people” working in their communities also simultaneously interacted with an overall political and economic structure, intact and powerful. And Payne would not disagree. For example, Dittmer’s opening sequence about a group of black World War II veterans – Medgar Evers among them – attempting to register to vote in Decatur, Miss. in 1946 highlights the heroism of individual African-American actors (and also gives an indication of a definition of progress that many blacks, convinced of the central importance of the vote, viewed as necessary in the state that was quite different from that of the white moderates of the period). But to Dittmer, the ex-servicemen saw an opportunity to register mostly because of broader structural changes, such as the Supreme Court’s decision two years earlier outlawing the all-white political primary.\(^{13}\) So Dittmer, while rejecting any rigid hegemony of the top-down model, suggests there are some elements of “top” and “bottom” factors interconnecting in constructive ways. In this blended respect, Dittmer’s book belongs amid Stephen Lawson’s third generation of civil rights scholarship, crediting a mix of structural forces and human agency. In creating this construct, Dittmer places poor and minority activists, among others, under the rubric of human agency.

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\(^{11}\) New York: Harper and Brothers.

\(^{12}\) Though, notably, Myrdal was quite critical of the Southern white “liberal,” particularly those connected with the Commission on Interracial Cooperation.

\(^{13}\) *Smith vs. Allwright*, 321 U.S. 649 (1944).
To the extent it is fair to generalize, a number of texts that have come out in the past few years have further honed what could be described as the Dittmer and Payne genre, featuring the African-American and community activist role in forcing change. In so doing, these books atomize the provincial scope even more specifically, down to the level – within Mississippi – of section, county, neighborhood, local organization and individual.\textsuperscript{14} As with Charles M. Payne’s text and that of William H. Chafe, a number of these books have the word “freedom” somewhere in the title or subtitle (or both). Mark Newman’s \textit{Divine Agitators: The Delta Ministry and Civil Rights in Mississippi} (2005);\textsuperscript{15} J. Todd Moye’s \textit{Let the People Decide: Black Freedom and White Resistance Movements in Sunflower County, Mississippi, 1945-1986} (2004);\textsuperscript{16} Nan Elizabeth Woodruff’s \textit{American Congo: The African-American Freedom Struggle in the Delta} (2003);\textsuperscript{17} Kenneth T. Andrews’s \textit{Freedom is a Constant Struggle: The Mississippi Civil Rights Movement and Its Legacy} (2004);\textsuperscript{18} Emilye Crosby’s \textit{A Little Taste of Freedom: The Black Freedom Struggle in Claiborne County, Mississippi} (2005);\textsuperscript{19} and, most recently, Chris Myers Asch’s \textit{The Senator and the Sharecropper: The Freedom Struggles of James O. Eastland and Fannie Lou Hamer} (2008)\textsuperscript{20} (which, like Moye’s book, also

\textsuperscript{14} Also, this more recent raft of books, in rejecting the earlier top-down focus, either consciously or subconsciously mimicked the equalitarianism of grassroots organizations like the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, SNCC, a youth-oriented group which in a sense departed from the formal hierarchical traditions dominated by established elders enconced in mainline organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

\textsuperscript{15} Athens: University of Georgia Press.

\textsuperscript{16} Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

\textsuperscript{17} Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

\textsuperscript{18} Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

\textsuperscript{19} Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

\textsuperscript{20} New York: The New Press, 2008. Asch’s book relies quite heavily on the work of two Yale Institute of Human Relations scholars, whose work was previously cited, from the 1930s: anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker, and psychologist and social scientist John Dollard.
focuses on Sunflower County), are a handful of recent titles that each look at particulars within the Dittmer-Payne pattern. They fit into that category because they are ground-level studies of the contributions of Mississippi blacks in the civil rights struggle and, also, they look mostly at the classic period of the movement – 1954 to 1965 – as well as more recent years.

Notably, given their particularism, these books do telescope broader concerns through the lens of Mississippi. Moye’s text, for example, by stressing so strongly and at such length an especially horrific lynching carried out by Senator James O. Eastland’s father in 1904 emphasizes the violent underpinnings of white domination in the Deep South.

However, for all of the needed correction away from “Mississippi Burning” and the welcome highlight of African-American agency that the Dittmer-Payne school offers, there are some noteworthy areas that are largely overlooked in this social history trend of Mississippi scholarship. The most obvious groups whose role is characterized as minimal, or wholly obstructive, are the whites, and particularly the elite whites, though Dittmer notably does avoid the blanket claim that all defenders of segregation were hopeless racists and he does acknowledge a range of white opinion, by mentioning a handful of white liberal newspaper editors, for example. But as a general matter, the white elite moderate contribution such as it was is all but invisible in these books and others of their ilk. For example, Kenneth T. Andrews basically ignores white viewpoints and white individuals altogether.

The pattern of omission is deliberate. Payne, for one, places the elite whites among the forces he is arguing against. Meanwhile, in Leon F. Litwack’s How Free
is Free? The Long Death of Jim Crow (2009), an account of the black experience since the Civil War, there are quotations from many black sources and from white bigots.  

But the moderate whites are not really represented. Some whites do occasionally appear in these books, but often in the guise of straw men, or worse. Asch’s work, for example, is of course partly devoted to Senator Eastland, a shrill spokesman for white supremacy; Dittmer offers some credit to white outsiders important in the civil rights movement such as Allard Lowenstein; and Moye gives extensive treatment to Sunflower County’s white business establishment and reactionary “white resistance movements” generally.

But, as in those books, the scholarship, even when somewhat attentive to whites, is not particularly sensitive to differences among them, the Dittmer exception previously noted. More typically, white actors are placed in broad and/or negative categories. To Crosby, for example, all the whites in Claiborne County were odious racists, a monolithic view seen in recent books in the popular press, such as journalist Paul Hendrickson’s Sons of Mississippi: A Story of Race and Its Legacy (2003) and, in the broader Southern context, as in Diane McWhorter’s Carry Me Home: Birmingham, Alabama: The Climactic Battle of the Civil Rights Revolution (2001).  

Hendrickson’s book looks at a handful of the state’s ironically labeled “leading citizens” – club-wielding white sheriffs determined to thwart James Meredith’s attempt to matriculate at the University of Mississippi in 1962. McWhorter focuses on the Alabama city’s reactionary white business and legal community – the “Big

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21 Cambridge: Harvard University Press.  
22 New York: Alfred A. Knopf, and New York: Simon and Schuster, respectively.
Mules” – that propped up racist icons like Birmingham Police Commissioner Eugene “Bull” Connor and his fire-hose wielding platoons.

So, given this dominant trend since the 1990s, the question arises: where in the recent historiography are the deeply nuanced studies of Mississippi whites, and especially the white elites, and of their possible contribution to change in the post-war period, or was their role (in a positive sense, as opposed to obstructionism) so marginal and their encasement in the myopia and defensiveness of white privilege truly so seamless as to deserve a certain scholarly dismissal? Has the Dittmer-Payne school’s move away from post-war liberalism and elite thinking been so pendulous and all-encompassing as to effectively negate the role of the whites?

Given this recent historiography, other questions occur. Were Mississippi whites indeed monolithic as so many of these books in the Dittmer-Payne school contend, or were they in some ways divided? Is it possible that Mississippi whites split among themselves so that, while they may not have intended to concede anything to African-Americans let alone to advance African-American purposes, they created opportunities of which blacks were able to take advantage? In other words, one possibility is that white moderates sought changes that indirectly and against any white purpose resulted in openings for blacks. Another possibility is that white moderates did nothing that helped African-Americans, even indirectly, except to weaken white solidarity in pursuit of their narrow personal and class interests, as against less advantaged whites.
The first response to these speculations and questions would be that the white actor has been bypassed in civil rights scholarship regarding Mississippi because s/he did not in fact exist in any positive and comprehensive sense in the civil rights cause, some very rare exceptions to the contrary. And there is no attempt in these pages to refute that. For sure, occasionally, an exceptional white Mississippian was visibly supportive regarding the main action in civil rights per se in the state, and some white outsiders took part in the movement’s latter stages, as in Freedom Summer of 1964. That basic caveat acknowledged, this dissertation asserts that the role that a number of white Mississippians did instead play, particularly in the early years right after World War II, was about a conflicted version of social and economic change as opposed to civil rights defined more narrowly. The white moderates of 1945-1956 were not focused on black Mississippians’ rights per se. They by no means accorded a priority to those rights. To the extent they favored change, these whites wanted an improved and upgraded Mississippi primarily for themselves, not for anyone else particularly, and certainly not specifically for African-Americans. The elite moderates wanted a stronger and more dynamic Mississippi that would bolster their own positions of extreme privilege.

Those broader themes were tangentially related to civil rights in that they helped facilitate a transformation in the context and structure of Mississippi’s post-war society, through professionalization and modernization, for example. And though individual whites might or might not have intended such reforms to have eventual consequences related to race, the changes subsequently, invariably, did indirectly impact civil rights in some ways. The discussion in the Introduction about
the evolving image of African-Americans in the white Mississippi press would be an example. But that is different than a claim that Mississippi whites were important or active in the civil rights struggle per se. They were not, especially in any direct sense. The historiography largely – and correctly – reflects that particular reality, while simultaneously it has missed a related but more subtle phenomenon, until now.

Namely, what the historiography has not fully reflected previously is the reality and complexity of the white contribution in the pre-civil rights years in Mississippi, namely the late 1940s and early 1950s. Indeed, there are some fragments of the whites’ story in several places in the historiography of both civil rights and of the broader questions of societal transformation post-Second World War. There have been, for example, a number of studies in the past few years of different religious denominations – Methodists, Baptists, etc. – and their work in civil rights in the South or in Mississippi. Not surprisingly, whites are discussed within the overall context of such books, among them Gardiner Shattuck’s *Episcopalian and Race: Civil War to Civil Rights* (2000) and Clive Webb’s *Fight Against Fear: Southern Jews and Black Civil Rights* (2001).

But in recent relevant scholarship other than these inquiries of various religions in the South, Mississippi whites typically have been given superficial or starkly critical treatment, or both. The state’s whites either: are considered as part of wider scholarly commentary on the white South, as in David L. Chappell’s *Inside Agitators: White Southerners in the Civil Rights Movement* (1994); are included (sometimes fleetingly) within narrative histories, such as John Egerton’s *Speak Now*...

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24 Athens and London: University of Georgia Press.
25 Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
Against the Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement (1994),\textsuperscript{26} Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff’s The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle and the Awakening of a Nation (2006),\textsuperscript{27} or Jason Sokol’s There Goes My Everything: White Southerners in the Age of Civil Rights, 1945-1975 (2006);\textsuperscript{28} or are discussed in association with an extremist or discredited viewpoint, group or institution, such as David M. Oshinsky’s “Worse Than Slavery”: Parchman Farm and the Ordeal of Jim Crow Justice (1996)\textsuperscript{29} or Yasuhiro Katagiri’s The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission: Civil Rights and States’ Rights (2001).\textsuperscript{30}

There are biographies of elite white Mississippians of the mid-20\textsuperscript{th} century, of course, but here again the portrait is mixed at best. For example, Hodding Carter’s legacy of some moderation and racial tolerance was summarized in a 1993 biography with the subtitle The Reconstruction of a Racist.\textsuperscript{31} And Lawrence J. Nelson’s King Cotton’s Advocate: Oscar G. Johnston and the New Deal (1999)\textsuperscript{32} does place Johnston (1880-1955) in the tradition of somewhat enlightened “business progressives” of the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century and their efforts at economic-based reforms, but there also emerges in the book a portrait of him as a ruthless Delta capitalist and power broker fully exploiting black agricultural labor by the thousands. The book, moreover, discusses Johnston’s compulsive womanizing and leaves the reader to compare that with his treatment of black workers and draw inferences about his maltreatment of people generally. The business progressives, Nelson adds, favored,

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\item \textsuperscript{26} Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
\item \textsuperscript{27} New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
\item \textsuperscript{28} New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
\item \textsuperscript{29} New York: The Free Press.
\item \textsuperscript{30} Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.
\item \textsuperscript{31} Ann Waldron, Hodding Carter: The Reconstruction of a Racist (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 1993).
\item \textsuperscript{32} Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press.
\end{itemize}
“an advocacy of efficiency and public services, if not necessarily increased
democracy and social justice.”

Historian C. Vann Woodward called such a stance
“progressivism – for whites only.”

When reviewing this recent overall record, therefore, it is not difficult to
conclude that it may be incomplete in its study of elite Mississippi whites, particularly
in their complex post-World War II role regarding positive social change in the broad
sense, as opposed to strictly civil rights and/or the civil rights movement.

It should be noted that generalizations about these various books are not
meant to categorically dismiss their relevance to a dissertation about white elites and
their broader support networks in Mississippi. Sokol’s work, for example, makes the
basic point in reference to the wider South, in a kind of counter to the Dittmer-Payne
school generally, that both the civil rights movement and the wider racial
transformation of the South involved whites, too. In banishing the “Mississippi
Burning” image, it is necessary to underscore that nuance, and Sokol and others are
helpful in readjusting the balance in reference to the South as a whole.

Another factor to bear in mind is that, while the recent ascendant trend may
focus mainly on the “movement” and the “freedom struggle” as being a function of
the traditional 1954-1965 civil rights periodization embraced by scholars such as
Peniel H. Joseph, Robert Weisbrot and William H. Chafe, a bracketing indelibly
imprinted on the scholarship in part by the popular but tightly delineated 1987 PBS

33 Nelson, page 7.
34 C. Vann Woodward, Origins of the New South, 1877-1913 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State
University Press, 1951).
series *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years (1954-1965)*, there has also been an even-more recent counter development in the historiography which highlights the “long” civil rights movement, and especially the years from the New Deal through the Second World War to the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955-1956. With its 1945-1956 focus, this dissertation of course covers a period that falls within this “long” civil rights movement.

Among the works taking the broader view, Egerton’s book – plainly subtitled “The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement” – is a notable case in point, though its 1994 publication does predate the coining of the term “long civil rights movement.” Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore also studies the early stages of racial transformation in the South with her book, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950* (2007), though, like Dittmer-Payne generally, she has scant regard for the contributions of “moderate” whites. Gilmore thus takes the long civil rights movement, or civil rights “struggle,” all the way back to the World War I era. In doing so, the author looks at the radical origins of the civil rights movement, particularly within the labor movement.

Along those lines, in *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics and the Black Working Class* (1994), Robin D. G. Kelley looks at the important contributions of working-class African Americans, many of them tied to the Communist Party, and their

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37 New York: W.W. Norton & Company
activism years before the conventional dates of the civil rights movement. Also, in *The Color of the Law: Race, Violence and Justice in the Post-World War II South* (1999), Gail Williams O’Brien traces emerging black militancy back to a race riot in Tennessee in 1946. And in a recent book of essays edited by Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard, Charles M. Payne argues that “the beginnings of the movement occurred in the years surrounding World War II, not in the framework posited by scholars and popular texts, i.e. mid-1950s to mid-1960s.” On the question of periodization, Dittmer also takes the civil rights struggle beyond the conventional 1965 terminal date, to look at issues such as the fight in the mid- and late-1960s over millions of dollars of Head Start funds in the Mississippi Delta, a battle that featured a coalition of moderate whites and old-line NAACP leaders arrayed against representatives of poor black farm workers.

Therefore, there are both some detectable alternate trends in the scholarship amid the preeminence of the “local people” African-American focus, as well as some examples to follow for scholars of race and Mississippi examining the immediate post-war years as opposed to the more classic 1954-1965 period.

That said, in pursuit of an interest in Mississippi specifically, it is difficult to find a recent state-level study devoted to elite whites and social change in the post-Second World War period. Only in a wider pan-Southern sense does an approximate template exist, namely J. Douglas Smith’s *Managing White Supremacy: Race*,

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38 New York: The Free Press
Politics and Citizenship in Jim Crow Virginia (2002).\textsuperscript{41} The book features a handful of privileged Virginia whites, such as Richmond newspaper editor Virginius Dabney and historian Douglas Southall Freeman, and the bind they were in between the fading genteel paternalism of the old world they knew and embodied and the growing forces besetting them of racial democracy, especially those emerging from World War II.\textsuperscript{42} Though the book is quite damning and pessimistic about the Old Dominion elites, portraying them as segregationists clinging to a doomed, outmoded and unjust way of life, the concept of management remains an intriguing one. This is not because in Smith’s context it may be another way of describing raw self-interest and racism-based control (after all, the title asserts it is white supremacy itself that is being managed), but because it otherwise introduces the idea of a systemic even businesslike approach on the part of whites negotiating a wave of racial demands and social transformation.

The White Citizens’ Council and other bigoted organizations associated (in a general sense) with the white elites surely applied theories and economic terror tactics partly rooted in business such as housing eviction, credit curtailment and other forms of economic pressure in attempting to thwart racial progress, so any possible linkage or comparison between Virginia paternalists and Mississippi’s moderates on this basis has to be made with care.\textsuperscript{43} Nevertheless, Smith’s book does suggest some of the

\textsuperscript{41} Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
\textsuperscript{42} In a sense, Dabney was to Virginia what the elite white moderates of this dissertation were to Mississippi. In fact, Dabney was a close friend of Hodding Carter, James W. Silver and other key centrists in Mississippi. In January 1949, “V” Dabney, as he was known, appeared at an Ole Miss public affairs forum run by Silver to speak on the topic “The South’s Future: Dixiecrat and/or Democrat.” The previous year, Dabney, editor of the Richmond Dispatch, had won a Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing.
\textsuperscript{43} Hodding Carter called the Citizens’ Council “the business suit Ku Kluxes.” Letter, Hodding Carter to Herbert Bruckner, September 29, 1955. Hodding II and Betty Werlein Carter Papers.
middle ground occupied by white elites “of conscience” everywhere in the South and it does discuss a framework of non-violence and economic improvement for African-Americans, albeit one that in Virginia was tightly locked, for a long time, under the rubric of paternalism. The book’s real value as a signpost for a project on Mississippi, however, is a broader one: it demonstrates the precedent of a study within a Southern state of a small group of elite whites and their complex reaction to the calls for racial justice, desegregation and overall social change in the post-World War II years.

Beyond Smith’s book, which is therefore mostly relevant to a project on Mississippi by way of possible parallel, outline, contrast and inference, the field as far as the Magnolia State and the elite whites in the 1945-1956 period are concerned seems rather sparse and fragmented. That is the primary reason why this dissertation is important historiographically; it addresses that shortfall. This inquiry is an attempt to fill a void in the historiography particularly evident in the last 15 years or so. The previous scholarship, generally speaking, has either: emphasized the work of other groups in Mississippi (especially African-Americans active in local communities); looked at the South on a macro scale as opposed to a state-level focus; more often than not limited its study to the traditional years of the civil rights movement (1954-1965) and has, in its narrow look at specific actions during this discreet period and at the hysteria of the white backlash of those years that has left such a searing legacy, neglected the tangential but important role of whites in a broader social transformation of post-war Mississippi; or has treated all whites in Mississippi with the same broad and damning brush. Some books have employed a combination of
these approaches. The focus in this dissertation on elite white moderates in Mississippi, and their networks of support, in the immediate post-World War II period stands out from most if not all of that scholarship.

**Nuance amid a ‘Solid South’**

This project also is an exception to the existing historiography in another important respect. It straddles, somewhat, the two opposing sides in the longstanding debate over the “white Southern monolith,” namely the controversial idea that historically the white South has been united in its outlook, one which has been dominated by concerns about race. “To outsiders, the region may seem to be the ‘Solid South,’ and many insiders are lulled into this same monolithic view,” sociologist and religious scholar Earl D. C. Brewer wrote, defining the longstanding argument. “But to students of the South, it is a land of contrasts, a region of subregions, a mosaic of vivid differences.”

Various authors have privileged either side in the debate, but this dissertation, essentially about calls and momentum for some degree of reform within a segregationist structure, has, much like the elite subjects themselves, ties to both sides. This longstanding scholarly discussion, all contained within the general category of race, concerning both Mississippi and the greater South has pitted two viewpoints against one another: the focus on the white monolith versus an emphasis on differences.

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on dissent among whites. The debate, over the true degree of commonality, cohesion and shared interest among Southern whites, of course mirrors the history of the region and the intense pressures dating to the slavery period and the run-up to the Civil War for whites to coalesce around a single defensive and racialized ideology. It is the contention of this dissertation that the elite moderate Mississippi whites of the 1945-1956 period and the broader group of moderates they represented fit squarely in the narrow overlap between two fundamental historical viewpoints of the white South.

It is illustrative to discuss examples, first from the “dissent” school and then from the “white monolith” viewpoint.

Regarding the former, David Goldfield in his book *Black, White and Southern: Race Relations and Southern Culture, 1940-Present* (1990) examines the idea that the history and culture of the white South has long been one of unsettled unanimity and conformity. He acknowledges the deep and systemic resistance to change that by the 20th century had calcified into an outmoded and irrational fealty to old Civil War and antebellum myths under the rubric of race, and he probes the widespread fear among Southern whites of a revival of the supposed “nightmare” of Reconstruction. Against such a backdrop, Goldfield underscores the relative importance of the slightest deviation from white Southern orthodoxy and thereby emphasizes why such early skeptics as the Southern Renaissance of writers and academics of the 1920s and 1930s, like William Faulkner and the “Fugitives” at Vanderbilt University, are so worth highlighting as historically significant. They represented early cracks in what had seemed to those observers focused on broad

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45 Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.
46 Faulkner is one of the moderate elites examined in this dissertation.
themes to be – or, for some, was hoped to be – a “solid” white South. Given
Goldfield’s book, there is therefore scholarly precedent for a study that explores as
significant very modest differences and gradual reform within the context of racial
segregation and overarching white self-interest.

Goldfield in the broader Southern context makes the contrast between a
widespread rigid defensiveness and small, but meaningful, departures from the norm,
a nuanced argument largely missing from the work of, among others, the previously
mentioned Ole Miss historian James W. Silver, who was writing in an earlier era than
Goldfield and focusing exclusively on Mississippi. Silver’s title – *Mississippi: The
Closed Society* – would seem to succinctly describe his highly charged thesis of
(some might say “attack on”) the state’s intractable and, as he sees it, monolithic
racism dating to the antebellum years but which was particularly fervid, even
hysterical, when re-energized in the period of the 1950s and early 1960s. Silver was
a moderate academic working for nearly 30 years at the state’s top university and was
therefore himself prominent evidence of divisions among Mississippi whites,
ironically. Nevertheless, his famous book would represent the opposite side – from
Goldfield – in the “white monolith” debate. If Goldfield is emphasizing the (albeit
gradual) “opening” of Mississippi and other places in the region, Silver’s work
stresses, self-evidently, its closure.

The difference in the two interpretations of white Southerners might be
ascribed to the relative intensity, which was certainly palpable and verifiable, of the
white resistance in Mississippi that Silver was describing, compared with that of

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47 An irony here, of course, is that Silver himself, an outspoken progressive by Mississippi standards
who is numbered among the 127 elite moderates profiled in this dissertation, is a prominent exception
to any thesis claiming Mississippi was “closed” to diversity of opinion.
virtually all other areas in the wider South, a composite which comprised Goldfield’s focus. Another possible explanation for the Silver-Goldfield contrast was that Silver, writing at Ole Miss in 1963, not only was directly in the midst of some of Mississippi’s worst turmoil, but also was himself personally a prime target for the white supremacists, from Gov. Ross Barnett on down. In the heat and even physical danger of that sort of conflict, an absence of dispassion, nuance, and scholarly detachment is perhaps understandable. Moreover, the evidence indicates Silver with his caustic and contemptuous “closed society” broadside was being polemic, aiming to goad his opponents and ventilate, in strong language, questions and issues he deemed as vital to the current public conversation.

The fact that Silver’s thesis was initially delivered (in November, 1963) in the form of a presidential address at an annual meeting of the Southern Historical Association, a meeting where front-page coverage by the New York Times was meticulously courted and assured beforehand, strongly suggests that political considerations helped frame Silver’s argument and that he may deliberately have been trying to be provocative and newsworthy.48 Given the extreme conditions existing on the ground in Mississippi at that historical moment, one can contextualize both personal and political motivation in painting hostile systemic adversaries as a

48 Claude Sitton, “Mississippi Professor Declares That His State is ‘Totalitarian’,” The New York Times, November 8, 1963, p.1. The contention that press coverage of Silver’s “Closed Society” speech to the Southern Historical Association was courted and assured beforehand comes in part from a reference in Dennis J. Mitchell, Mississippi Liberal: A Biography of Frank E. Smith (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi). On page 175, Mitchell writes, “Silver planned with Smith to make it a denunciation of the state that would attract national attention. Silver worked on the address with (Southern Regional Council) assistance, and the SRC alerted the press to cover the speech.” In his own memoir, Silver states: “Before the speech was delivered I had gone over it with Claude Sitton, the southern reporter for The New York Times, to select what I considered the most important paragraphs, thus assuring a front-page story the next day.” James W. Silver, Running Scared: Silver in Mississippi (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1984), p. 90.
single vast and irredeemable braying mob – a monolith, a closed society. Goldfield, writing in more recent and (regarding race) calmer years, had a comparatively unencumbered and discerning vantage point. Goldfield was also highlighting stretches of Southern history which were not so volatile and frenzied, whereas Silver mostly studied the angry cauldrons of the 1850s-1860s and 1950s-1960s.

But regardless of the exact and likely complex reasons for the varying interpretations, the debate over the “white monolith” or “closed society” question is most immediately relevant because this dissertation resides in the space between the scholarly interpretations of mosaic and monochromatic wall, in the origins of the monolith’s – to the extent it did exist – nascent and gradual weakening, as the closure was beginning to open, at least as the budding aperture took shape in the first post-World War II years. In 1945-1956, Mississippi’s segregation structure still very much stood, but within it expressions of dissent and urgings for limited reform were beginning to appear – in part, in the lives and work of the previously mentioned elite white moderates (for example, in their push to upgrade professional standards) – to eventually undermine what had seemed, perhaps mistakenly, to be an absolute.

This inquiry is therefore somewhat in contrast with Silver and the “closed society” argument, as well as with other scholarly works that in their generalized characterizations too often portray the South, Mississippi, Southern whites, Southern white moderates, and Southern elites in overly broad and too-often undifferentiating terms. This is not to argue, however, that Silver is in any way mistaken in the thrust of his presentation, i.e., that Mississippi circa 1963 was and had been an exceptionally repressive and brutal place, for people of color especially, and, to a
much lesser but still considerable extent, for those whites holding unpopular opinions. In the words of NAACP executive director Roy Wilkins following the assassination of Medgar Evers that year, Mississippi was “a savage, uncivilized state – the most savage, the most uncivilized state in the entire 50 states.”

In conjunction with Silver in emphasizing the monolith of white self-interest, one arguably could relate everything from Ulrich B. Phillips’ 1920s notion of a “central theme” of Southern history being the maintenance of a “white man’s country” and how that ideal served to unify Southern whites, to the consensus history interpretation of the South associated with figures such as Wilbur J. Cash in the 1940s, to William H. Chafe’s 1970s idea that moderation (what he called “civility”) among white Southern elites in fact impeded real progress to racial justice and equality. Also in the 1970s, J. Morgan Kousser documented longstanding attempts by Southern whites, dating to the 19th century, to maintain white supremacy by means of denial of voting rights to blacks. As far as the state of Mississippi in particular is concerned, added to this broad “monolith” grouping would be many books, previously mentioned, in the Dittmer-Payne school, including Chris Myers Asch’s 2008 work on James O. Eastland and Fannie Lou Hamer. Asch emphasizes black-white polarity and the lengths to which powerful white figures such as Senator

49 “Mississippi: Is this America?” *Eyes on the Prize: America’s Civil Rights Movement*. Produced by Blackside, A Special Presentation of American Experience.
Eastland ventured to cling to the old caste system which benefited him, among others, so extensively.

Of course, though the form of scholarly discussion makes a certain amount of generalization practically a requirement if one is to hope to cover any ground, it may not be entirely accurate or fair to gather all these books just mentioned under a single “monolithic” grouping, or at least in doing so it is necessary to state a point of caution. For example, Ulrich B. Phillips and Chris Myers Asch, writing some 80 years apart from one another, may both offer an argument and a lasting impression of white solidarity, but Phillips sees that as a noble triumph and a defensive necessity while Asch makes that case in service of a larger point about just how extreme and unjust the Mississippi system was. There has been, in short, an evolving sub-genre of historiography regarding the purpose and meaning of Southern white cohesion that is, itself, anything but unified.

Meanwhile, Kousser, in addition to examining the effort around 1900 to exclude African-Americans from the electorate, also explores simultaneous efforts by elite whites to disenfranchise a majority of whites through the poll tax, literacy tests and other methods. So, in this aspect of his argument at least, whites were hardly monolithic in outlook or intent.

Recent studies of meaningful diversity of opinion among whites in Mississippi or even the South as a whole, along the lines of Goldfield’s thesis, have been relatively scarce, and therefore to contextualize the topic historiographically in a comprehensive way, it is necessary to reach back a bit further in time. The work of C. Vann Woodward, writing in the mid-20th century period partly covered by this
dissertation, is an important touchstone, for example. In looking at Mississippi whites dissenting however moderately from the majority, this dissertation is in a sense following historians like Woodward, who, from his own Ph.D. thesis in the 1930s – which later became a book – on Georgia Populist leader Tom Watson, to his look at white class tension in the period between Reconstruction and World War I in *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (1951), and throughout his career, emphasized contrast and contradiction in the white South. The Woodward book that is most directly relevant to this inquiry, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (1955), like his earlier works, undermined the idea, politically convenient and widespread in the Deep South at the time of its publication, that Southern racial segregation was natural or unchangeable. Woodward made this argument by emphasizing examples of exceptions to segregation, i.e. integration, dating to the late 19th century, in which whites (including Mississippi whites) actively participated.

This dissertation also is, in effect, derivative of political scientist V.O. Key’s look at distinctions among whites in the Magnolia State, though Key’s conclusions were based primarily on political alignments (which, by the late 1940s when he was writing, had in general terms held rather steady for decades) and factions and were rather categorical. Key cleaved Mississippi with broad and dramatic labels he admits

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56 According to Woodward who cites a study of conditions in 1870s Mississippi by Vernon Wharton, after the Civil War there were tentative but hopeful signs of inter-racial cooperation, and even integration, in certain quotidian aspects of daily life. “For some years ‘most of the saloons served whites and Negroes in the same bar. Many of the restaurants, using separate tables, served both races in the same room,’” Woodward writes. *Ibid.*, 41-42.
were becoming increasingly obsolete, both geographically – the “Delta vs. the Hills” – and, somewhat redundantly, by class – the “planters vs. the rednecks.”\(^57\) William Alexander Percy’s 1941 memoir, *Lanterns on the Levee: Recollections of a Planter’s Son*,\(^58\) likewise stressed class and regional differences among Mississippi whites, albeit from his viewpoint as the quintessential planter aristocrat, and his account evidently had a great influence in shaping Key’s Mississippi chapter. Meanwhile, Albert D. Kirwan, writing in the same general era as Woodward, Key and Percy and covering some of the same subjects, argues that the portrait of political unanimity that Mississippi historically has offered to the outside world is inaccurate. In particular, within the state’s Democratic party, he says, there has long been fierce factionalism. His focus is the period 1876-1925.\(^59\)

Other notable books, published more recently than were the Woodward, Key, Percy and Kirwan texts, also looked at class differences among Southern whites, thereby providing a kind of preface for this dissertation on elite white moderates in Mississippi. For instance, Drew Gilpin Faust, writing about the mid-19th century, concludes in *The Sacred Circle: The Dilemma of the Intellectual in the Old South*,

\(^{57}\) V.O. Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949). Chris Myers Asch, too, discusses the Delta-Hills divide in Mississippi history. “Geography, economics and history conspired to split Mississippi into these two major regions that fought a perpetual battle for control of the all-white Democratic Party. With its rich soils and flat land, the Delta always had been the province of the plantation owner, where wealthy families amassed huge fortunes by exploiting legions of black laborers; to the east and south lay much poorer counties, areas where white small farmers struggled to make ends meet. These hardscrabble hill farmers resented the lifestyle and power of the Delta’s plantation owners – the ‘Delta aristocracy’ – and tensions flared in the legislature over issues ranging from taxes to prohibition. The divisions hardened into cultural stereotypes and both ‘Hill people’ and ‘Delta people’ often assumed that differences in attitude, personality, or character could be attributed to region.” Chris Myers Asch, *The Senator and the Sharecropper: The Freedom Struggles of James O. Eastland and Fannie Lou Hamer* (New York: The New Press, 2008), p. 35.


1840-1860 (1977) that in the antebellum South “critical thinking existed within a society too often regarded by historians as monolithic.” Faust describes the predicament of upper-class, educated moderates during the growing secessionist fervor in the South of the years 1840-1860. “Because such a society was at best infertile ground for the growth and nurture of an intellectual class, the dilemmas of the Southern man of knowledge appeared with particular acuteness in this era.”

Great pressures were applied to fall in line under one ideology, but also, as Faust suggests, various forms of dissent on the part of the privileged whites remained adamant as well. Faust’s subjects, a small group of educated elites, in many ways serve as predecessors and role models for 20th century elite moderates in Mississippi.

A more recent book that looks at the white South as a “complex whole” with various important and different components is David L. Chappell’s previously discussed Inside Agitators: White Southerners in the Civil Rights Movement (1994). While Chappell’s approach is to focus on how Southern black leaders studied and understood the fine distinctions among whites – who held nearly all the traditional sources of economic and political power – and thus were able to exploit that knowledge to leverage white sympathy and support for their own purposes. While his timeframe is a slightly later period than does concern this dissertation, the book’s most useful ideas serving as a framing device for this inquiry is Chappell’s tri-part categorization of Southern whites. Borrowing his outline from Martin Luther King

60 Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, p. xi.
61 Ibid., p. ix.
62 A similar dynamic among privileged Southerners had occurred in the 1831-1832 debate in the Virginia state legislature over slave colonization in Africa and eventual emancipation. In that case, there was a moderate faction, which included the grandson of Thomas Jefferson, contending with majority pro-slavery opinion in the state stirred to fever pitch in part by the recent Nat Turner rebellion. See Louis P. Masur, 1831: Year of Eclipse (New York: Hill & Wang, 2001), 48-62.
Jr., Chappell explains that there were: "extreme segregationists who were willing to fight; middle-roaders who favored segregation but would sooner see it destroyed than take risks to defend it; and the tiny minority who would, with varying degrees of caution, support action to undermine segregation." The focus of this dissertation is the Mississippi elites, and the like-minded people in the state they represented, who tended to straddle the latter two groups of white Southerner, as Chappell and King delineate them as they were comprised in the 1945-1956 period.

So this dissertation and its focus on elite white moderates and their networks of support should be understood historiographically as being situated within a longstanding discussion over the degree of unanimity among Southern whites. The thesis here, exploring moderate and indirect change within an overall structure of segregation, definitely borrows from both sides of that discussion, but it trends more in the direction of those books that privilege nuance, difference, and tentative signs of opening the closed society.

As was stated in the Overview and Thesis, part of what the moderates did was help Mississippi negotiate various strains of extra-regionalism, modernization and professionalization in a rapidly changing historical time. By way of comparison, in his book *The Search for Order, 1877-1920*, Robert H. Wiebe describes Gilded Age America, particularly in its more rural areas such as the Deep South, as comprised of a series of isolated "island communities" gradually being connected and woven into a more unified whole society by modern innovations bridging the remoteness. The

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revolutionary instruments of that period included the telegraph, railroads, the growth
of mass media, and national markets. Stephen Skowronek and Ballard C. Campbell
write of parallel and (approximately) simultaneous changes as autonomous local
political organizations gradually yielded power beginning in the late 19th century to
more professionalized national government institutions such as the civil service,
federal courts and interstate regulatory bodies. The new developments, Wiebe
argues, brought with them to places like Mississippi adjustments in living patters,
more cosmopolitan attitudes, a greater sense of nationhood via the breakdown of
America’s lingering regionalism, among numerous changes. They also brought
displacement and other proximate causes for locally generated resentment, backlash
and even violence. Wiebe maintains that Progressivism, in the period leading up to
World War I, was a response to such dislocation in society.

Wiebe’s thesis of technological determinism is persuasive, especially when
coupled with the added dimension of the similar political science argument of
Skowronek and Campbell. And certainly this dissertation with its stress on the
importance of the role of extra-regional factors and of growing modernization and
professionalization in bringing some change to “Magnolia Curtain”-draped
Mississippi in the early post-World War II period embraces much of the general spirit
of their work and applies it in this more recent case. In 1956, in the wake of the Rev.
Alvin L. Kershaw debacle which will be discussed in detail in Chapter Five, for
example, a member of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP)

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65 Stephen Skowronek, Building a New American State: The Expansion of National Administrative
Capacities, 1877-1920 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); and Ballard C. Campbell,
The Growth of American Government: Governance from the Cleveland Era to the Present
(Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995).
from Alabama named Wallace Herbert wrote Benjamin Franklin Hilbun, president of Mississippi State College, that “it is … as a free citizen in a free land that I wish to write, protesting the denial of free expressions of opinion on our college campuses.”  

People such as Herbert and professional groups such as the AAUP based outside Mississippi, having ties with elite white Mississippi moderates, and with a conception of freedom more expansive than what they were seeing more generally in Mississippi, were involving themselves in trying to change matters within the state.  

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66 Letter, Wallace Hebert to Benjamin Franklin Hilbun, February 13, 1956. President Ben F. Hilbun Papers, Special Collections Department, Mitchell Memorial Library, Mississippi State University.  
67 Herbert was acquainted with William D. Buchanan, the political science professor ousted by Mississippi State in 1956.
The legacy of World War II was interpreted by elite white Mississippi moderates as a call and an opportunity for a kind of economic and social change in the state, within definite limits, to be led primarily by themselves. This chapter examines how the moderates made that interpretation and how it took the form of their civic agenda in the months immediately following the war’s conclusion. It looks at how that agenda included certain reforms and priorities, particularly in the area of economic improvement, and neglected what others, particularly blacks, in the state might see as pressing needs, especially any attempts at dismantling segregation, enabling widespread black suffrage or directly challenging white supremacy.

From the elite white moderates’ perspective, a notion taking shape of Mississippi’s needed post-war progress began with a wide-ranging discussion taking place in many venues across the state. Many of Mississippi’s problems, Frank E. Smith recalled later, “had been postponed for five or six years because of the war, and many others … were being recognized for the first time.”¹ This process of review

and analysis was an attempt by a new generation of white Mississippians to reassess the scope of the state’s challenges as they saw them. The public conversation that ensued was led in part by certain white moderates and it specifically concerned what they defined as social and economic priorities and the steps the state needed to take to move forward. The transition that accompanied the close of World War II in the summer of 1945 and the subsequent return to the state of thousands of GIs offered an opportune and pivotal moment for taking stock. William F. Winter, a future governor, called it the veterans’ “war-born mission of improving the quality of life in their own communities.” The result after intensive soul-searching and debate was the white moderates’ post-war agenda – one that came to include both change and continuity.

The white elite Mississippians’ mid-1940s agenda was part of a much broader national conversation and political debate taking place as part of the transition from war to a peacetime economy. President Truman’s State of the Union address to Congress in January 1947, for example, “called for far-ranging improvements in labor-management relations, a strengthening of the anti-trust laws, a national health insurance program, including support for mental health, child care, and hospital construction,” Truman biographer David McCullough writes. “He wanted a ‘fair level of return’ for farmers, aid to veterans, an aggressive program of home construction. … He advocated a balanced budget, a streamlining of the military establishment, international control of atomic energy.” Mississippians, looking at

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conditions within the state, were similarly enumerating a long list of things that, in their minds, needed to be changed, upgraded, created, eliminated, and so forth.

Notably, the agenda formation in Mississippi was clearly a racialized and constructed process that, from the white elites’ perspective, tended to exclude via formal channels the input of virtually all African-Americans, and all poor whites for that matter. True, a parallel conversation about change was as animated in the pages of African-American newspapers, among black veterans groups and in black churches as it was in similar white venues, and it is also true that many Mississippi communities had inter-racial committees, often as an advisory part of the formal structure of governance, that were themselves coming to grips with a range of issues. But there is little evidence the white power structure was sufficiently influenced to place certain racial priorities, like making universal suffrage a reality, onto its own overall agenda.⁴ An African-American leader from Clarksdale, in the northern part of the Delta, for example, noted a meeting in the mid-1940s among a group of blacks from the surrounding Coahoma County. “They listed all of the basic fundamental dissatisfactions of the Negro with the Delta: poor education opportunities, poor health conditions, lack of political rights, etc.”⁵ Such specific concerns of black Mississippians, however, were not high – or even situated at all – on the whites’ agenda.

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⁴ In the fall of 1945 there were meetings held at the (then) all-white Galloway United Methodist Church to address the concerns of black war veterans. On the topic of inter-racial committees in Mississippi towns, Greenville’s inter-racial committee met every two weeks. Alexander Heard summary of interview with Leroy Percy, July 4-5, 1947. Southern Politics Collection.

Meanwhile, a mass meeting of African-American citizens held in Jackson about this time passed resolutions calling for full and equal education in all fields, the establishment of a full-fledged state university for blacks equal to the University of Mississippi, a four-year medical and dental school for blacks, full justice in the courts, and better pay for black teachers. “Many thousands of Negro soldiers of Mississippi have and will soon return from the army, desirous of availing themselves of the educational opportunities promised them by the government, but for which no preparation has been made by neither the government or this state,” one of the resolutions noted.\(^6\) That cluster of concerns expressed by groups of Mississippi African-Americans such as the group meeting in Jackson did in some ways overlap with the priorities of the white elites, but not completely and in all cases.

Thus the elite white moderate group and the black activists were working on separate issues, generally speaking, and often at cross-purposes. As at the “reconciliation” sessions mentioned earlier involving students from Millsaps College, Tougaloo, Rust, Campbell, Jackson State and Alcorn, or in the few cases of bi-racial boards or mixed women’s teas, some peer-to-peer contact between the races would go on in the 1940s and 1950s and even accelerate and become more extensive in some ways. But without the vote or significant economic power, black perspectives and demands went largely unappreciated – or were only perfunctorily recognized – by elite moderate Mississippi whites in the first post-war years.\(^7\)

\(^6\) The mass meeting was chaired by A.W. Wells and the recording secretary was Mrs. T.B. Brown. Walter Sillers Jr. Papers.

\(^7\) The failure of whites in the 1940s and early 1950s to properly address black concerns, of course, led to the necessity of the civil rights movement beginning in the mid-1950s.
As such, the “post-war agenda” that most mattered in immediate practical political terms with the existing structure was the moderate whites’ list of priorities. But again, theirs was actually just one of perhaps several competing agendas. It was not the agenda. It treated race obliquely while focusing more directly on issues of modernization and professionalization, as this group of elite whites saw those concepts. Of course, black dissatisfaction was an implicit if temporarily mostly dormant threat to social stability and therefore to white control, so the priorities of African-Americans were noted, understood and grudgingly factored in by white elites, to the extent they politically had to be, often via the inter-racial councils set up in Mississippi counties among other forms of dialogue.

The post-war agenda as moderate whites articulated it was therefore racialized and limited from the start in perspective, experience and vision. The white moderates put forth an agenda that while embracing some degree of racial tolerance and tepid concern about the “lack of political rights” for blacks, initially did little to directly confront the more intractable and systemic issue of racial injustice. It clearly differed, therefore, from an agenda that might have been – and was – put forward by African-Americans and others as authors such as Charles M. Payne and John Dittmer discuss. The white moderates’ agenda therefore was framed by the strictures of white privilege, which those moderates, however consciously, were endeavoring to maintain. So, while the focus of the agenda may have been on professionalization and modernization, it also was in this fundamental sense about race.

Meanwhile, other Mississippians besides the elite white moderates and the blacks were also developing their own “to-do” list of public priorities. Whites who
could be described as more politically conservative or radical were pushing a raft of issues they believed the state needed to face in the immediate post-war period.

Walter Sillers Jr., elected in 1944 as Speaker of the House in Mississippi, an office he would hold continuously until his death in 1966, was as much as anyone the personification of the ruling segregationist ideology in state politics of the time.

Interestingly, a flyer promoting a Sillers speech in 1946 called the Speaker “long an advocate of progress – exponent of agriculture, education, roads and community health.”

Therefore, if rigid establishmentarians like Sillers were presented – and saw themselves – as progressives and advocates for improvement in the mid-1940s, it is apparent that the state’s overall agenda was a highly contested matter and that the moderates were only one of the groupings vying to shape the state’s future. The Sillers example also shows that language itself – as in which Mississippians truly stand for “progress” – was also a contested concept. All sides could say they wanted improvements in agriculture, the penitentiary, public schools, facilities for the aging, etc., but the various groups had sharply divergent ideas as to what specifically constituted such improvement.

The conservative whites for their part had a unique vision of the state’s pressing needs. A big item on the post-war agenda of Sillers and other members of the so-called Old Guard of 1940s and 1950s Mississippi politics was a sweeping revision of the Wagner Act, the 1935 federal labor relations law limiting employers’

8 The Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation printed a flyer in preparation for a Sillers speech on November 7, 1946. See 1946 Walter Sillers Jr. subject file, Mississippi Department of Archives and History. The Farm Bureau, a group with ongoing business before the legislature and therefore with an inherent interest in keeping good relations with politicians as important as the Speaker of the House, might have been indulging in a bit of flattery with this promotional piece. Or perhaps terms like “progress” and “advocacy” are simply highly elastic.
response to workers trying to engage in collective bargaining. Conservatives also
gave high priority to a plan to repeal state primary election laws as a way to
circumvent the Smith vs. Allwright U.S. Supreme Court ruling of 1944 in a Texas
case that outlawed the all-white Democratic primary. A flurry of resolutions on the
matter were passed in the mid-1940s under headings such as “The White Democrats
of Bolivar County.”

Meanwhile, the white moderates considered their own post-war agenda as not
only necessary for the immediate future but also as setting up a structure in
Mississippi for more profound change later on when such adjustments, particularly
regarding race, presumably would become more politically feasible, as they saw it.
To the extent they accomplished that groundwork, they deserve some specific credit
historically. While their mid-1940s agenda perhaps can be faulted for its timidity,
especially on race, it also must be acknowledged for its role in incremental change.
Alexander Heard’s notes of his 1947 interview with Tupelo publisher George A.
McLean are illustrative on this point. “This kind of effort [i.e., a post-war agenda] is
the only solution which Mr. McLean sees can lead to any fundamental improvement
in Mississippi. This improvement he considers basic and a necessary underpinning
for the eventual progress in education and the intellectual and emotional and moral
advancement of the people. He sees it as contributing ultimately to the development
of a political liberalism in the state.”

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9 Alexander Heard summary of interview with George A. McLean, July 10, 1947. Southern Politics
Collection.
Partly because the elite moderates’ call for “progress” remained in the first post-war years mostly within the limits of racial stasis, they were able to hold sufficient if tacit approval among traditionalists and were therefore encouraged and somewhat protected by enough of a wider white constituency. The fact that the moderates’ agenda, for all its progressive pretension, was not seen as racially disruptive in 1945 and for years afterward, in that it omitted basically any challenge to segregation and any overt attempt at racial fairness and equality – such as the effective enforcement of universal suffrage – helped ensure its relative popularity or at least lack of major controversy among a large cross-section of whites. So, in the mid-1940s anyway, continuity was maintained along with some degree of change, including the structure for eventual race change.

Also, the elites were bolstered and protected while serving as agents of change, however mild and seemingly conflicted that service looks according to contemporary standards, by their perceived high-level association with the state’s bedrock institutions – the state university, the church, the political structure, and so on – and thus they were deemed safe and logical stewards of gradual change. Judging by the fact that some elite whites were permitted the latitude to urge a relatively progressive platform, there evidently were many Mississippians of the mid-1940s who were at least somewhat receptive to an agenda that their state modernize, professionalize and thus become marginally more “open” and this larger group allowed the discussion to proceed, within the general confines of the racial status quo.

Thus limited in scope though it was, the elite moderate whites’ conversation about improving and reshaping society, which began in late 1945, took form in
newspaper editorials, magazine articles, exchanges of letters, in public statements made by prominent Mississippians, and in meetings and mailings of women’s clubs, churches, synagogues and community organizations. Later in the 1940s, it found expression, to some degree, in the political process and specifically in the accomplishments of the state legislature. Each of these forums had extensive constituencies among white Mississippians – subscribers, advertisers, supporters, parishioners, members, donors, voters, etc. – that by remaining loyal effectively made possible and accommodated this discussion about social and economic “progress.” This disparate population of relatively moderate-leaning white Mississippi residents condoned, financed, participated in, and, in a few cases, led this public conversation. Ultimately they were responsible for a new – but racially limited – agenda in the post-war.

**The agenda as framed by the war**

Support for the public discussion and for the agenda which followed not only was considerable in white Mississippi, it also was connected in complex ways with feelings about the war itself and about those who had served, ranks which included many of the elite white moderates. For example, as the conversation developed, white Mississippians tended to appropriate the symbolic rhetoric of war, for their own purposes, in addressing peacetime domestic problems. The fact that anti-fascism was a primary ingredient of that rhetoric, and that war-forged lessons were now to be

10 A further explanation on this point is available in Chapter Three.
applied in an arena in Mississippi of rampant racial unfairness that carried for many an echo of repressive regimes, was a hugely complicating factor for whites “of conscience” who were looking to balance a conception of progress with their own historic, political and personal prerogatives and self-interest. In the end, they dealt with the inherent conflict and irony by employing indirection and partial measures regarding what they saw as politically doable. This political realism, as they saw it, came to accept a favorable stance on racial tolerance and on equal treatment before the law, areas where in the 1940s there emerged fairly wide agreement and support among moderate whites. Such support was contingent, however, on maintaining the rubric of racial privilege for the benefit of the broader white group.

In the case of a number of non-reactionary whites in the state, this push for what they considered social advancement, which in some form had long been present in Mississippi, was given new impetus and legitimacy in the mid-1940s by its attachment to certain ideals that many understood as underpinning America’s rationale for its role in the war. There was widespread public yearning to settle on a noble and transcendent narrative for the war to justify its enormous cost and, as a result, and amid a true clash pitting new awareness against the old calcification, there developed a cautious willingness following the war to consider at least moderate societal change, as a kind of tribute as well as a necessity. “We must make a land fit for heroes to live in,” wrote Clarence Poe, editor of the Progressive Farmer, a Southern agricultural magazine.11

A number of former service members returned to Mississippi in 1945-1946 freshly mindful of terrible wartime sacrifices, accepting these complex and layered

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hometown projections and accolades – fully deserved or not – for their particular part in the great endeavor, and ready to take advantage of the heroic interpretation that they had fought, their families had sacrificed, and their friends had died for something lofty and grand. In their minds, they had gained moral authority by dint of their war experience, a newly acquired power accentuated externally by a white Southern culture that tended to reward old-fashioned manifestations of masculinity and patriotism – strictly among whites only – and particularly military service. Many white veterans’ longstanding ties with community leadership structures which had predated the war provided a sturdy foundation upon which to extend – in business, politics, and other realms – their newly gained post-war positions of stature.

The repatriating white Mississippi veterans, with the support of much of an obliging public, thus accorded the social and economic issues awaiting them with added, and in some cases profound, meaning. From their experiences many veterans had gleaned a sense of confidence in their ability to overcome challenges and they possessed training and a newfound faith in professionalism and technology and organizational management and the other modern systems that had proven so successful in the military but, as of 1945, were still largely absent from daily life in small-town, agricultural, economically colonial, non-industrial, staunchly segregated Mississippi. For racial moderate and future Delta congressman Frank Smith, a veteran of the war in Europe, “decision-making in the war effort had given [him] the confidence that he was ‘capable of decisive action in the new world that the war had made’.”

A new ethic of professionalism, nurtured in part in the extra-regional

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context of wartime service, was running counter to Mississippi’s stubborn race-based traditionalism, its tightly held ruling political oligarchy and its one-crop agricultural economy.

In his memoir, Smith wrote that “more men came home from World War II with a sense of purpose than from any other venture.”

In so doing, these ex-servicemen and –women – at, in many cases, quite young ages, in spite of their maturing experiences – assumed and asserted for themselves a home-front mantle of authority, one that tended to obscure the self-interest that was very much bound up with their claim on leadership in calls for progress and modernization. Jennifer E. Brooks writes that the veterans expressed “an energetic sense of civic duty and entitlement derived by and large from their service in the war.”

The leadership entitlement such as Brooks describes may also, at least in the case of Mississippi, have been rooted in the fact that a number of the white moderates were associated, either directly or through family connections, with prominent structural elements of the society. This gave them a secure base upon which to call for some needed reforms, the framing of which had been influenced by war experience. Kari A. Frederickson writes that “as more white men left the South during World War II, Southerners became exposed to other models that threw light on their own dysfunctional political arrangement. Motivated by the language of autonomy,

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independence and modernity, these … sons of the Southern political family began to strike out on their own, albeit no less committed to upholding white supremacy.”

Mississippi’s white moderate post-war agenda thus emerged in part from a wartime mindset and, not surprisingly, it often became phrased in the familiar language borrowed directly from mobilization and the military triumph. From 1945 on, many of the state’s complex and historically rooted social and economic issues were newly simplified down to the level of right versus wrong, in a not-too-subtle replay of the freedom-vs.-tyranny themes popularized during the rise of Nazism in the 1930s and then the war itself. John T. Kneebone, for example, writes that Hodding Carter’s post-war editorials for improved race relations “flowed out of the campaign” against Hitler. The post-war problems became labeled as “targets” and “enemies” and peacetime Mississippians were exhorted to join the “battle against” or the “war on” or the “victory over” various items on the newly articulated domestic agenda. Likewise, they were called upon to “protect the peace” by backing certain farm programs, fundraising drives, community development initiatives, and the like.

A post-war health program organized in the Delta town of Lexington, for example, was announced with patriotic gung-ho fervor: “Every reader of The Advertiser is urged to support the war to be launched tomorrow (Friday) by the Holmes County Health Department against venereal disease, particularly syphilis,” a news article from 1950 declared. “The campaign is to be conducted by a crew of seven specially trained people and will be in two divisions, an educational program

and a free blood-testing program.” As in this case involving *Lexington Advertiser* editor Hazel Brannon Smith, the elite white moderate Mississippians were thus attempting in unsubtle exhortation and mobilization rhetoric to leverage the still-palpable commitment and support for the war to promote their own agenda of social and economic priorities.

Notably, the Hodding Carter example partly notwithstanding, during the 1945-1956 period, the white moderates all but refused to apply the “right-vs.-wrong” wartime dialectic to surely Mississippi’s most blatantly obvious home-grown analogy to fascist tyranny – race. The relevance of the parallel was clearly apparent to them, however, particularly to relatively progressive groups like the American Veterans Committee, and was publicly underscored by others, as in the “Double V” for victory campaign waged during the war by black activists. The white moderate agenda’s limitation – its *failure*, during those years – on the race front was a function of white self-interest. The moderates of the mid-1940s generally were not considering any action that would directly threaten their racial prerogatives and they were not taking up controversial causes that might possibly imperil their own considerable ambitions. That caveat understood, the moderates can be credited with an agenda which urged Mississippi to subscribe to their vision of a modern industrial state, and in their “battles” and “wars” and “campaigns” against other, less socially combustible, problems, the white moderates following the war experience did set some modest templates for less-inhibited Mississippians to employ in the future when at long last the society more openly confronted the issue of civil rights. Moreover, as the Carter

17 “War Against Syphilis Will be Launched In Holmes County Friday; Free Movies,” *Lexington Advertiser*, July 20, 1950.
example indicates, in the 1940s the moderates to a degree did apply the war’s lessons to racial issues such as toleration and equal treatment before the law.

A limited historiography

The World War II veteran per se is a familiar, even iconic, figure in historical scholarship about late 20th century America. The former service members have figured prominently in debates over women’s rights and gender politics, the presidency, the suburbs and Federal Housing Administration policy, consumerism, the emergence of television, corporate culture, education, militarism and the Cold War, Vietnam, the U.S. space program, and a raft of other post-war topics. Added to that considerable amount of scholarly attention is a hagiographic treatment in the popular history and wider culture where the “Greatest Generation” has long since been marbleized in the American pantheon of imagination.

However, even given all that notoriety for the ex-servicemen, Jennifer E. Brooks appears alone among recent historians to look exclusively at Southern veterans of the war, to study their role in political and racial change, to conduct a state-level focus (her setting is Georgia), and to make the argument that veterans white and black were central actors in various aspects of the civil rights struggle.18 James Forman, in The Making of Black Revolutionaries, points to the war as an essential breeding ground for future black leaders of the civil rights struggle in the

South, but Brooks’s work by comparison is broader in many ways, as in its focus on both races. Brooks, with the veterans as key figures, studies movements in population associated with World War II, which ultimately had the effect of challenging old hierarchies of power and set in motion the process for recasting Southern social and racial practices. Other scholars agreed on that point. John R. Skates Jr. writes, “Mississippians during the war were introduced to the country, and the country discovered Mississippi, and, psychologically, things could never be the same.”

While Brooks’s work, *Defining the Peace*, is a useful source for this dissertation on Mississippi, as it offers comparisons with kindred parts of the Deep South, the specific areas of concentration of her book and this project are quite different. For example, Brooks looks at both whites and African-Americans, as opposed to just whites featured in this inquiry. Also, she studies a whole spectrum of ideological groupings among the former servicemen, from committed civil rights activists to die-hard white supremacists. In this study, by contrast, veterans and other leaders of a notion of change (and continuity) are considered as representative of the indirect subjects of the dissertation – the larger group of white Mississippi moderates who essentially permitted them to operate – who fall within a comparatively defined ideological space. The white moderates of this inquiry did embrace some apparent oppositionals and conflicting elements – support for segregation and pushing for a

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post-agricultural industrial economy, say. But the group highlighted in these pages is a more targeted sampling than the Brooks case study.

The focus in this dissertation both on the contribution of non-reactionary Mississippi whites after the war and on the role of such individuals in the extraregional context is at least somewhat controversial, based on a further reading of the historiography. For example, in *Mississippi: The Closed Society*, James W. Silver, reflecting on the 1940s, stresses the most hidebound elements of the state’s white population and their practice in the early post-war years of capitalism at its most selfish and ruthless. The numerous “supporters of the orthodoxy,” Silver writes, held “a position comparable to their predecessors of the Civil War period.” After World War II, he continues, “bold entrepreneurs enamored as their forefathers had been of the prevailing social order, too busy making money to think deeply about changes bound to accompany progress, pleased with the ‘right to work’ principle embedded in the constitution and with a colossal program of state socialism to entice the Yankee carpetbagger industrialist, sat by quietly” and proceeded to enable what Silver sees as an ongoing ultra-conservative and repressive social climate.  

This chapter, by contrast, emphasizes comparatively moderate voices among post-war whites, including ones who in fact did think deeply about changes bound to accompany progress, and it thus takes issue with Silver on this particular point. And also, as will be discussed further in Chapter Four, the dissertation sees state attempts to industrialize and attract investment in less cynical and more positive extra-regional terms than “state socialism to entice the Yankee carpetbagger industrialist,” though,

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no doubt, there were elements of rank calculation involved in such “smokestack chasing” efforts.\(^{22}\)

Previous scholars studying World War II and the early post-war in Mississippi have focused some on extra-regional influences, such as the effect of war and mobilization and attendant infusion of federal money on the state’s home front. Specifically, there have been writings on the transformative aspect of military bases, prisoner-of-war camps, shipbuilding, and other wartime activities and government spending in the state; the “Double V” campaign; and related factors.\(^{23}\) Other historians and political scientists, taking a more interpretive and analytical (as opposed to primarily descriptive) tack, have tended to see the post-war struggle over social change in Mississippi and other Southern states as a contest between national and state imperatives. The civil rights movement – again, periodized in much of the historiography as 1954-1965 – for example, is correctly framed in the writings of both Richard Franklin Bensel and Jordan A. Schwarz as the triumph of federal force over states and localities on racial matters.\(^{24}\) The concept of extra-regionalism as explored in this dissertation is related to nation vs. state, but takes that familiar dialectic a bit

\(^{22}\) Meanwhile, authors like Charles M. Payne have dismissed the importance of “normative thinking” and notions of an emerging 20\(^{th}\) century liberalism (such as it might have been furthered by the ideals and the extra-regional impact surrounding the war) as determinative factors in social change in Mississippi. In this respect, this segment of the dissertation parts company with Payne, whose emphasis in *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom*, as was described in the Introduction, is on human agency at the local level. This inquiry argues, for example, that, quite apart from community activism, extra-regional forces (like the role of the federal government), many based on national norms, eventually helped undermine states’ rights, the constitutional argument upon which so much of segregation and white supremacy rested. The term “smokestack chasing” comes from, among other places, David L. Carlton, “Smokestack Chasing and Its Discontents: Southern Development Strategy in the Twentieth Century,” *The American South in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Craig S. Pascoe, Karen Trahan Leathem, and Andy Ambrose (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005).


further to, for example, see certain individuals – notably, many of the 127 elite white moderates – as effectively brokers between Mississippi and other areas of the country. And again, this project also looks not so much at the civil rights struggle per se as at the earlier and more generalized pattern of social and economic change of the 1945-1956 period.

Other scholars also have weighed in on the extra-regional phenomenon and the South. Dewey Grantham calls the subject “regional convergence.” It was a generalized exposure to broad experience and influences that many authors, Grantham among them, believe transformed the South. Modernizing trends, which were greatly accelerated by the war, confronted what Grantham calls “Southern sectionalism” or what C. Vann Woodward terms “the old monuments of regional distinctiveness.” William A. Link explains the traditional pattern as clannishness, localism and suspicion of outsiders. “Encircled by their kin and churches, Southerners recognized a fundamental individual and group identity, and, at this community level, they forged their strongest allegiances,” Link writes. Southerners of the early decades of the 20th century, Link added, “tolerated the functioning of local, state and federal governments only under strict constraints. This tradition of governance placed near-absolute control in the hands of local instrumentalities, which, in turn, functioned more or less independently of outside control.”

26 Ibid., 194
28 Ibid., 3.
Numan V. Bartley, meanwhile, calls the cross-regional trend, which encountered the Southern parochialism Link and the others describe, the "Americanization of Dixie," though this idea of Americanization needs to be seen alongside – and in contrast to – the argument of Howard Zinn who saw the South as already the “essence” of American society. In this latter view, therefore, “Americanization” was scarcely necessary in a state that was arguably America’s quintessence. It was in places like Mississippi, Zinn writes, where the country could see its most intractable national problem – race – in highest relief. Or, as Malcolm X once put it, memorably and succinctly: “America is Mississippi.”

Meanwhile, Robert H. Wiebe describes an earlier stage of extra-regional forces in *The Search for Order, 1877-1920*, focusing on not only technological changes (railroads, the telegraph, the new media, etc.) impacting the remote rural areas of the country like parts of Mississippi but also the nascent reach of government policies and proposed legislation, such as the Lodge “force bill” of 1890-1891 regarding federal oversight of elections in the South. Wiebe also writes of Southern


31 “What Does Mississippi Have to Do with Harlem?” Malcolm X speech, 1964. Chris Myers Asch, writing about Sunflower County in the heart of the Mississippi Delta, made the same point. “Sunflower crystallizes issues of race, class and history that can be obscured elsewhere in the country,” he writes. Asch, 4.

32 There also is an extensive historiography on topics directly related to extra-regionalism. For example, the Great Migration of African-Americans, both within Mississippi from the rural areas to the towns and then the exodus from Mississippi to the cities of the North beginning around World War I and then accelerating during and after World War II with the mechanization around that time of the cotton industry, has been documented and discussed by scholars. See, for example, Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992). As part of that debate, the extra-regional aspect of the migration and its impact on civil rights, the national Democratic Party and other pertinent matters has thus been examined.
Bourbons, or political “Redeemers,” namely Democrats who forged alliances with Northeastern political and economic powers in the post-Civil War decades.

But these related historical writings notwithstanding, the overall contribution of Mississippi’s white moderates in the extra-regional context regarding the World War II and its aftermath has received comparatively little attention.

Like free people in any culture that has democratic pretensions, civil society and a representative government at least in structure, white Mississippians at every stage of their history have had public discourse about the need for certain kinds of progress and societal improvement (though granted, in their case, these discussions in mainstream forums prior to quite recently all but excluded African-Americans). To take just one example, in 1929 Francis Stuart Harmon, editor and publisher of the *Hattiesburg* (Miss.) *American*, published in his “Boasts and Knocks” column an annotated list of eight progressive steps the city of Hattiesburg and surrounding Forrest County needed to undertake, including: tick eradication, a paved road program, support for the public library, and obeying the law. Harmon also was a vehement opponent of lynching and convict flogging. The political process, the church, and the media, among other sources, have always (however imperfectly) been structured around accommodating such calls – especially by people and institutions with power – for change.

Of course, with Mississippi’s Civil War-era race and class hierarchy, its tightly controlled political apparatus and its cotton-based economy still all very much

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34 For example, see: “Remedy for Lynching,” *Hattiesburg American*, November 27, 1926; and “Another Lynching,” *Hattiesburg American*, August 5, 1931.
intact, in derivative form, in the mid-1940s, the platform in the state, constitutional and otherwise, permitting debate about social progress existed only in theory for many residents, black and white. So, even while crediting the post-war moderates for leading an agenda for modest, mostly incremental, change, one could detect more than a dollop of irony in discussions about social and economic progress that proceeded amid a society that the discussants, judging by the limitations of their program, helped allow to remain repressive in major fundamental ways. The situation was complex and not without contradictions and hypocrisy. “Historians have pointed out, often with some surprise, that reformers not only accepted but often enthusiastically endorsed white supremacy,” William A. Link writes, referring to the period before World War II. “An assumption of black inadequacy and white superiority typified not only reformers but also the modernizing officials who subsequently executed their policies.”35 With the rhetoric of white supremacy mostly being dogma employed to rationalize a cotton-based and race-based economic system that had long benefited all of Mississippi’s white elites, the white moderates of early post-war Mississippi operated with some of these same basic complications, albeit in somewhat diluted form by 1945.

By focusing on Mississippi’s white elites and their moderate allies, this dissertation considers individuals who ostensibly did have the privilege of impacting the system from within, so to speak. The point of this chapter in examining the end of World War II in the context of an agenda for change is that the war experience and aftermath, specifically, led to invigorated calls for transformation in particular ways – among them, enhanced professionalism and modernization as the white elites defined

35 Link, 240.
those concepts. They did so, of course, within the strict boundaries of white
privilege. But that evolution in turn, and in combination with a number of other
factors, arguably helped the ongoing process of “opening” the state for all. In their
haphazard and contradictory way, the moderates made a contribution that in its
evolved form is felt today. They also, at the same time, held back certain kinds of
fundamental advances on race, and that too is part of the state’s current inheritance.

**In the service**

Many of the elite white Mississippi moderates of the 1940s and 1950s
belonged to a generation that en masse automatically was called upon to serve during
World War II. For example, William F. Winter, a future state lawmaker and governor
born in 1923, was an undergraduate at Ole Miss in the early 1940s at the war’s
outbreak. He pointed to the obvious, that virtually his entire cohort of contemporaries
and schoolmates joined the service after Pearl Harbor. “There was no question that
we would go. Everybody in my age group I knew – the men – were all in uniform,”
he recalled.\(^{36}\) Within a year or so, Mississippi towns had largely emptied out of men
of fighting age.\(^{37}\) Winter himself ended up serving in the Army in the Philippines at
the end of the war.

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\(^{36}\) Interview with William F. Winter, November 7, 2006.
\(^{37}\) For example, Walter Sillers Jr., of Rosedale, wrote in 1944 that his town’s population “has been
greatly reduced, especially among the young. All of the boys 18 years of age and older up to 40, and
even some above that age, have gone to war, and nearly all the girls have gone to some sort of war
Winter’s age-mates and those a bit older were off to war. Hodding Carter was an Army officer stationed in Cairo and Tel Aviv where he ran news bureaus for the military publications *Stars and Stripes* and *Yank*. From his post in the Middle East he traveled frequently to India and Burma. Betty Pearson, later a plantation owner and activist who registered blacks to vote in the Mississippi Delta towns of Sumner and Webb, in Tallahatchie County, served in the Marine Corps in California from 1943-1945.  

Meanwhile, Frank E. Smith, the future congressman, was in an artillery unit in Europe under General Patton and served in the Battle of the Bulge. Tom Karsell, who after the war became Hodding Carter’s managing editor at the *Delta Democrat-Times*, saw combat in North Africa, Sicily, Italy and Germany and before the war was over he had been wounded five times. Incredibly, he later was called back to service during the Korean conflict. Chalmers Alexander Whitfield, who subsequently became a lawyer and politician in Jackson, was a captain in the Army Air Corps during the war. Joel Blass, a future state legislator from Wiggins in Stone County, won the Bronze Star while serving in the Army infantry in Europe under General Patton. Oscar Clark Carr of Clarksdale, later a businessman and political figure, served aboard the U.S.S. *Wisconsin* as an Assistant Gunnery Officer in 1945. West Point graduate Charley Paul Eastburn, later head of the U.S. Army’s Mississippi Military District, based in Jackson, served in Europe during the war and later published a book about it.

Also, Lomax Lamb, a lawyer from the Delta town of Marks who would be a candidate for U.S. Congress in 1950, was a naval officer serving in the Southwest
Pacific; he eventually was stationed in China. David Minter, the doctor at Providence farm, a co-operative enterprise in Holmes County, a remote area on the eastern edge of the Delta, won the Bronze Star during the war. He became a lieutenant colonel and was an Army surgeon in the Pacific theater. C. Brinkley Morton, of the North Mississippi town of Senatobia who would become a state senator, lawyer, minister and eventually an Episcopal Bishop, served in the Army infantry in Europe and earned a Silver Star, a Bronze Star and a Purple Heart. Phillip E. Mullen, the future associate editor of his father’s newspaper in Oxford, served in the armed forces from 1943-45. Jack Reed, later a Tupelo businessman and civic leader, served in the war and then in the Army’s Signal Intelligence Service in the post-war occupation of Japan. Ole Miss professor James W. Silver was an assistant field director with the Red Cross in the Marshall Islands in the Pacific when the atomic bombs were dropped over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He also served in Hawaii. And Karl Wiesenberg, later a state legislator from Pascagoula, fought in the war’s China-Burma-India theater.

The post-war agenda that is the subject of this chapter was in part an outgrowth of the mixture of broadening experiences these individuals represented. Considering the above examples, certain white Mississippi moderates clearly had opportunities for wide exposure in the armed forces – travel, various kinds of training, interaction with different cultures, leadership experience, and friendships with others around the globe – at a relatively young and impressionable age.\textsuperscript{39} Given these moderates’ subsequent work and leadership in their push for modernization and

\textsuperscript{39} Information about the age range of the dissertation subjects is included in the Introduction. See page 105.
professionalization, this is a clear instance of extra-regional forces potentially at
work, indirectly, in transforming Mississippi following the war.

For those in uniform, the service was an education in many senses of the
word. Jennifer E. Brooks writes: “In traveling around the nation and throughout the
European and Pacific theaters during World War II, soldiers from the South
encountered cultures, economies, and political ideas beyond the realm of Southern
tradition.” According to Eric Foner and other scholars, this kind of interaction, and
particularly regarding the fight against Adolph Hitler and the racist theories he
espoused and represented, helped shape American soldiers’ ideals leading into the
post-war period. Those sentiments, according to Foner, evolved from anti-fascism of
the late 1930s and early 1940s to a more expanded sense of humanity and a broader
definition of freedom by the mid-1940s. Historian Steven F. Lawson writes that,
“Fighting Hitler’s atrocities abroad shifted the focus of racism at home from an
economic to a racial issue, prompting liberals to try to prove that their society did not
behave like Nazi Germany.” Gradually and even reluctantly, Southern (and
particularly Mississippi) veterans, however tentatively in many cases, inevitably
became part of that trend. Part of their experience was to consider their homeland
through the perceptions of others they encountered and respected. “A lot of young
Mississippians,” Alexander Heard writes, “learned a lot from the jibes and ridicule to

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which they were subjected in the armed forces. … (Northerners and westerners made fun) of the southerners, telling them what fools the South has been politically.”

In any event, in reviewing this record of service, it is possible to assume two interrelated things: many Mississippians had opportunities for maturing and eye-opening experiences during the war and one of the factors involved was extra-regional (i.e., outside Mississippi) exposure. In November, 1945, a lead editorial in the Greenville-based *Delta Democrat-Times* made a similar argument: “Thousands of boys and girls who would never have wandered more than a few miles from a farm have become world travelers in the past war years,” editor Hodding Carter wrote. “They have suddenly learned that other sections are not like this one in which we live. Those same kids, a big slice of several generations, have been educated in thinking beyond the next year’s crop. They have become aware of trends. They have read papers and heard lectures in the Army. And their way of thinking will often influence other members of their families, people who would never have made decisions before. In other words, one thing this war accomplished was to raise the educational level of Mississippi and other states like it quite a few notches above the previous poor standards.”

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The longstanding extra-regional trend

If extra-regional factors personified by the veterans and emerging from war experience were important in moderating, modernizing and professionalizing post-war Mississippi, an argument can be made that such factors had been developing on related fronts in the state for some time. For example, as an essential part of the global cotton and slavery network dating to the early 19th century, the Deep South of course had longstanding interconnections with other far-flung places, especially throughout the Atlantic World. Some of those ties proved moderating to the home area and some did not. In any event, there was a structure of cultural, social and economic intercourse between Mississippi and other areas in place well before 1945 that, in increasingly sophisticated ways, had allowed for a range of outside thinking to permeate the state, and vice versa.

Some of these trans-sectional connections were quite deliberately intended to foster closer extra-regional links. In 1925, for example, prominent Mississippians hopped aboard something called the “Know Mississippi Better” train, which traveled the country promoting the state. By then, a series of liberalizing influences – many of them externally driven – involving the elite and moderates generally had taken such forms as the Social Gospel movement and related missionary and philanthropic work, new and more powerful expressions of the media, the national academic community, the growing reach and prominence of the University of Mississippi, and the federal government.45

45 The fact that liberal forces from the North supported these various developments, or were connected therewith, made the institutional manifestations of liberalism in Mississippi targets for white backlash.
Northern philanthropies like the Chicago-based Rosenwald Fund, which contributed to the building of 633 black schools in Mississippi in the 1930s, would be a specific institutional example of the extra-regional trend.\(^46\) A measure of the Rosenwald schools’ impact can be seen by how fiercely they were resisted by white authorities, particularly in rural areas where control of black labor was considered paramount and black education was deeply suspect.\(^47\) Meanwhile, and in a similar way, the New York-based Rockefeller Foundation supported the Yale Institute of Human Relations, with which were associated two important scholars of the 1930s, anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker and psychologist and social scientist John Dollard. Powdermaker and Dollard did ground-breaking field studies in the Mississippi Delta in the New Deal period. Also, the Field Foundation, funded by a Chicago-based family fortune, showed its interest in race relations in Southern states like Mississippi by backing the work of the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen. The New York City-based Phelps-Stokes Fund made grants to Ole Miss for library books on race. And Carnegie money built public libraries across the South.

That kind of extensive philanthropy, based in the North, continued into the post-war years. The Ford Foundation, for example, sponsored the Southern Education Reporting Service, which published the *Southern School News*, a monthly comprised of the work of Southern journalists covering developments regarding

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Examples would be progressive church-related organizations, certain university professors, newspapers calling for tolerance, and the like.


\(^47\) Chris Myers Asch writes: “Sunflower County planters resisted the establishment of Rosenwald Schools, named for Chicago businessman Julius Rosenwald, who spent millions of dollars building schools for black children across the rural South. Planters feared that the northern philanthropists who funded the schools would be able to influence their workers.” Asch, p. 57.
desegregation in the schools in the wake of the *Brown* decision. The Rockefeller Foundation funded V.O. Key’s landmark political study of Southern states, including Mississippi, in the late 1940s.\(^{48}\) The Southern Regional Council, headquartered in Atlanta with an affiliate in Mississippi, among other states, got its funding from many different organizations based in the North.\(^{49}\) And the elite whites of Mississippi, as “liaisons to the North,” in Gunnar Myrdal’s phrase, for some time were important facilitators in the movement to bring in such awareness, change, modernization, financing and growth.

These developments coexisted with other extra-regional influences which were fostered more directly by other demographic, social and economic groups, such as labor unions and the black press. (The activism of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America in Mississippi, the growing reach and influence in the region of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, and the penetration of the *Chicago Defender* newspaper in the Mississippi Delta would be examples there.)\(^{50}\) Highlighted by the various northern philanthropies, this extra-regional structure, which expanded and gained further integrity around the time of World War II, helped frame a mid-1940s conception of progress, particularly in the ways it had influenced moderate white Mississippians.

\(^{48}\) The book emerging from this study was, of course, *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, previously cited
\(^{50}\) The *Chicago Defender* was renamed the *Chicago Daily Defender* in February of 1956.
It is useful to examine in detail one of these earlier extra-regional influences and how it took form in Mississippi.

The Social Gospel creed of liberal theology essentially was one of Protestant church activism, namely to apply so-called Christian principles to social issues. Much of the Social Gospel movement, like other expressions of Progressive-era reform, was concerned with redeeming the cities, particularly in the North, from the ravages of poverty, disease, crime, ignorance and other problems. As part of the movement more broadly, medical missionaries and teachers came into the South in the early 20th century, primarily from the North, to work under the auspices of various church-affiliated groups. In the 1930s, the Social Gospel was associated with the student Christian movement, an expression of “liberal Protestantism,” at schools like Vanderbilt, according to Morton B. King, one of the student leaders there at the time. “Heavy emphasis was on the ‘social gospel,’ addressing the issues of war-peace, racial justice, poverty/economic justice,” King recalled.

With the aid of Northern philanthropy, Social Gospel adherents took a particular interest in the plight of Southern black and white sharecroppers, who typically were exploited by landowners, and to that end the Social Gospel forces, loosely speaking, helped found a number of alternative “cooperative” bi-racial farms

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51 In 1955, one elite Mississippi moderate – a minister – would refer to “the field of Christian Social Relations,” in a case where he was asking for support for fellow clergy on a current political question. Letter, Rev. A. Emile Joffrion, November 5, 1955. Rev. Alvin L. Kershaw Papers, Special Collections, the University of Southern Mississippi Libraries.


in Southern states.\textsuperscript{54} Socialism and socialist ideals were also part of these cooperative farm ventures. These included two (among others) that were formed in Mississippi in the 1930s – Delta Cooperative Farm, a 2,100-acre tract in Bolivar County, and Providence Farm, a 2,700-acre site outside Cruger and Tchula in Holmes County. (A further discussion of Providence Farm appears in Chapter Five.) Both Bolivar and Holmes counties are located in the Delta. The bi-racial farms, in a sense, took inspiration from the precedent established by 19\textsuperscript{th} century New York businessman and Christian idealist Chester Pond who sought to start a “prohibition industrial colony” in the Mississippi Delta. Pond’s vision led to the founding of the Sunflower County town of Moorhead. In the early 1890s, Pond “aimed to avoid the excesses he saw in surrounding plantations by promoting Christian virtue and giving black workers a fair shot at enjoying the fruits of their labor,” Chris Myers Asch writes.\textsuperscript{55} Pond sought an economic arrangement that would avoid the exploitation of sharecropping that, Asch writes, “degraded planter and picker alike.”

As with Moorhead’s ties to a New York businessman, Delta Cooperative Farm too was supported by external sources, in its case the Federal Council of Churches. The farm was founded in part by Harry Emerson Fosdick, a liberal clergyman, pastor of Riverside Church in New York City, confidante of John D. Rockefeller Jr. and brother of the longtime head of the Rockefeller Foundation.\textsuperscript{56} Delta Cooperative’s staff, according to author Jonathan Daniels, “seemed to me like

\textsuperscript{54} Related generally to support for sharecroppers were such Northern philanthropic groups as the Julius Rosenwald Fund and the Jeannes Fund, which gave aid to black education in the rural South. Other similar private Northern-based efforts to help African-Americans in the South were the Peabody Education Fund, the John F. Slater Fund and the Virginia Randolph Fund. Several of these philanthropies merged in 1937 to form the Southern Education Foundation.

\textsuperscript{55} Asch, 20.

\textsuperscript{56} Sam H. Franklin, \textit{The Delta Cooperative Farm}, pamphlet 1936, p. 8.
Robinson Crusoes washed up by good will on the Delta of Mississippi where they were applying their city brains and missionary Christian enthusiasm energetically and ingeniously to the hard problems of the isolated land.”

Providence, like Delta Cooperative and other cooperative farms, also was guided by a quasi-utopian concept characteristic of some elements of the Left during the Depression and New Deal years. For example, Providence aimed for greater worker control over their own lives, an active religious community, fair prices for farm products, credit at interest rates well below the typically usurious level available at plantation stores, education for children of both races, medical and dental clinics, decent housing, and other egalitarian – and modernizing – priorities. Groups like the Quakers, the Socialist Party, the YMCA, and the Southern Tenant Farmers Union were influential on Providence’s governing board and in its policies. The enterprise was also mostly underwritten by Northern money. Like Delta Cooperative Farm, Providence was sponsored by powerful individuals from the North, such as, in its case, YMCA leader Sherwood Eddy, theologian Reinhold Niebuhr and Eleanor Roosevelt. Meanwhile, in a harbinger of an extra-regional strategy utilized by national civil rights groups in the 1960s such as SNCC and others sponsoring Freedom Summer of 1964, Northern college students were brought to Providence Farm in the summertime beginning in the 1930s to work in the fields, teach the children, do building projects, cook, and perform other tasks.

57 Jonathan Daniels, A Southerner Discovers the South (New York: Macmillan, 1938) p. 149.
58 The farms, and Eddy in particular, were viewed with deep suspicion by the surrounding planter class and its guardians. For example, in 1943 state Rep. Walter Sillers Jr. of Rosedale wrote: “I do not have any particular information with reference to Eddy other than that he is a man of socialistic and communistic tendencies and some kind of evangelist.” Letter, Walter Sillers Jr. to W.C. Trotter, April 17, 1943. Walter Sillers Jr. Papers.
The cooperative farm movement in Mississippi, generated by Social Gospel ideology transplanted in the South, thus is a clear case of Northern modernizing influences reaching into the state – influences that found expression in certain elite white individuals there, among others. Several of the leading Mississippi moderates of the 1940s and 1950s were or had been an integral part of Providence and in this way can be seen as derivative of historic and progressive elements that were, at least in part, Northern in origin or of Northern or otherwise extra-regional influence.

These particular Mississippians had elite-level contacts in the North. For instance, Dr. David R. Minter, a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania Medical School, was the medical director at Providence and is described in letters as a “medical missionary.” Notably, Minter was the son of a Presbyterian minister who had served in China as a Christian missionary. A. Eugene Cox, the director of Providence, drew on the New York City-based National Sharecroppers Fund for loans and other financial support of the farm. The woman who would later marry Cox, Lindsay Hail, who was a registered nurse, originally was sponsored at Providence Farm through the support of the Board of National Missions of the Presbyterian Church, USA, and its social policy programs. Ole Miss chaplain Will D. Campbell, graduate of the Yale Divinity School and later an official with the National Council of Churches, was an active supporter of Providence.

Other important moderates of the post-war who were associated with Providence as either board members or supporters included Christian activists Helene

60 Charles Mantinband, letter to the editor, Hattiesburg American, October 7, 1955.
61 See correspondence between A. Eugene Cox and Pat Bennett, executive secretary of the National Sharecroppers Fund, May 1956. Allen Eugene Cox Papers, Special Collections Department, Mitchell Memorial Library, Mississippi State University.
Alford and Cora Rodman Ratliff, and journalists Hodding Carter, P.D. East, and Hazel Brannon Smith. In their connections with prominent Northerners through their work and their backing of Providence, these moderates were manifestations of longstanding liberalizing and modernizing extra-regional trends affecting Mississippi that culminated in the post-World War II period.

A. Eugene Cox, the associate director and then director at both the Delta Cooperative Farm and Providence Farm, was 31 years old when he came to Mississippi from Texas in 1936. Cox was thus a representative figure of a wider pattern; the 1930s was the period when many of what would become the most influential of the post-war moderates either began to develop their careers in Mississippi and/or arrived there as young adults, supported in many cases by a number of resources including contacts with elites and elite institutions located in the North and other regions.

To cite another example, George A. McLean came to Tupelo to buy the *Tupelo Journal* in 1934 at age 31, armed with degrees from the Boston University School of Theology, Stanford University and the University of Chicago. Also, J. Oliver Emmerich, editor and publisher of the *McComb Enterprise-Journal*, turned 34 in 1930 and in the succeeding decade was head of the Mississippi Planning Commission and through it was an advocate in the state of economic development and economic diversity, two key parts of the moderate post-war agenda. Phillip E.

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62 In November of 1945, Cora Rodman Ratliff helped organize a statewide meeting, held at Galloway United Methodist Church in Jackson, to help African-American veterans with post-war planning. Ratliff gave the opening statement at the meeting.

63 The newspaper was later named the *Tupelo Daily Journal*. Today it is the *Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal*. 

182
Mullen was associate editor of his father’s newspaper, the *Oxford Eagle*, beginning at age 20 in 1933. Three years later, 29-year-old Hodding Carter was brought to Greenville from Hammond, Louisiana to start his newspaper, the *Delta Star*, by a group of Greenville businessmen led by lawyer and planter-aristocrat William Alexander Percy. That same year – 1936 – James W. Silver, also 29, arrived at Ole Miss with degrees from Chapel Hill and Vanderbilt to begin his long stint as a history professor in Oxford and Hazel Brannon Smith (then Hazel Brannon), a 22-year-old recent graduate of the University of Alabama, bought the weekly *Durant News* in Holmes County, pledging, according to the masthead, to fight for “the people’s right to know, law and order, and the freedom of all citizens in our society.”

The phenomenon of Northerners and other outsiders supporting young Mississippians of promise or underwriting fledgling liberal institutions in the state – exemplified in the cases of the cooperative farms – was expressed in the 1940s and 1950s in a variety of other notable ways. Not only did groups like New York-based Guggenheim Foundation, the Pulitzer committee associated with Columbia University and the Neiman Foundation at Harvard, and also Harvard University more generally go out of their way to recognize the work of Mississippi writers and journalists, but also individual donor organizations, comprised at least in part of

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64 Brannon bought the *Lexington Advertiser*, the county’s only other newspaper, in 1943.
65 The John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation dispensed annual Guggenheim Fellowships for scholarship and work in the creative arts. Such Mississippi figures as Hodding Carter and Shelby Foote were Guggenheim Fellowship recipients in the early post-war years.
66 For example, Hodding Carter was a Neiman Fellow in 1940 and was a Pulitzer recipient in 1946. He received an honorary degree from Harvard University in 1947. Ira Harkey in Pascagoula and Hazel Brannon Smith in Lexington and Durant won Pulitzers in the 1960s. Tom Karsell, an editor at the *Delta Democrat-Times*, and Bob Brown, who got his start as a reporter and editor at the *Democrat-Times*, were both Nieman Fellows in 1954-1955. Tennessee Williams and William Faulkner, both with Mississippi ties, won Pulitzers in 1955. In 1954, Albin Krebs, an Ole Miss graduate and an applicant to Columbia University School of Journalism, wrote: “I understand the Columbia people are
Northerners, sprang up to bolster specific progressive-leaning publications in the state. Examples of this would be the Friends of P.D. East backing East’s *Petal Paper*, based in the small Mississippi community of Petal outside Hattiesburg, and the Tri-Anniversary Committee set up to aid Hazel Brannon Smith at the *Lexington Advertiser* and the *Durant News*. In 1956-1957, with the help and national connections of Hodding Carter and others, Smith secured a Ford Foundation Study Grant and financial assistance from the New York-based American Traditions Project. Smith also received help from the NAACP and its national network of supporters. Neither East’s nor Smith’s publications, both of which were moderate or (in East’s case) iconoclastic on the race question and were subject to economic boycotts, would have survived without this infusion of mostly Northern financial support.

Similar to what was happening in Mississippi, but in a pan-Southern context, Northern money and/or a cross-regional missionary fervor were behind progressive camps, schools, conferences and colleges springing up in the mountainous areas of the South, such as Laurel Falls in Georgia, Huckleberry Mountain Workshop Camp in North Carolina, Highlander Folk School in Tennessee, Black Mountain College in western North Carolina, Blue Ridge (N.C.) Southern Regional Conference (sponsored by the YMCA), and various Methodist Church summer camps dotted alongside lakes throughout the Appalachian chain. A number of these Methodist camps in fact were located in the hills of northern Mississippi. Regarding the latter, Joe Earl Elmore,

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interested in giving every consideration to applicants from the South and West, and I’m sure that’s one reason I’m being given more than passing consideration.” Letter, Albin Krebs letter to Hodding Carter, April 7, 1954. Hodding II and Betty Werlein Carter Papers.

67 Crespino, 33.
head of the Wesley Foundation at Ole Miss from 1952-54, recalled that, “there were Methodist programs for students in the summer to go away to some mountaintop and study and discuss religious issues together. Mostly women would go, but also some men. And you could always tell who had gone on these retreats because their consciousness was raised and they were speaking out. Their attitude was different” upon their return.\textsuperscript{68}

**Extra-regionalism in the academic realm**

The extra-regional connections enjoyed by Mississippi’s post-war elite white moderates can also be seen in patterns in academia. In the early 1950s, some Northern students were studying at Ole Miss “as part of the military program,” Joe Earl Elmore recalled, and to a degree those individuals helped ventilate an otherwise stifling political environment on campus.\textsuperscript{69} This cross-regional influence at Ole Miss dates at least to the Civil War period when Massachusetts-born and Yale-educated Frederick Augustus Porter Barnard served as professor of mathematics and then university chancellor, before leaving to eventually become president of Columbia University where adjacent Barnard College was named in his honor. Ole Miss in the late 1850s was known as a “nursery of Yankeeism,” not to mention a “hotbed of abolitionism,” in the words of radical critics, David G. Sansing writes.\textsuperscript{70} To many

\textsuperscript{68} Interview with Joe Earl Elmore, July 1, 2006.
\textsuperscript{69} Interview with Joe Earl Elmore, July 1, 2006.
observers in the early post-World War II period, the same distinctive outlook,
particularly when compared with many surrounding areas, still prevailed in Oxford.

Meanwhile, a number of Mississippian who became instrumental in a post-
World War II notion of modernization and professionalization – i.e., the elite white
moderates – received their advanced degrees in the 1930s either in the North or the
Upper South, or even overseas. John K. Bettersworth, for instance, a professor of
history and government at Mississippi State, got his Ph.D. at Duke. William “Buck”
Buchanan, another moderate on the faculty of Mississippi State, did graduate work at
Princeton. Joe Earl Elmore graduated from the Yale Divinity School – one of a
number of contacts between Ole Miss and Yale. 71 Homer Ellis Finger, president of
Millsaps College, also had a degree from Yale Divinity School as did a leading
Methodist minister in Jackson, William B. Selah. Ole Miss law school dean Robert J.
Farley had a doctorate from Yale. Meanwhile, Morton B. King, a sociology professor
at Ole Miss, had advanced degrees from Vanderbilt and the University of Wisconsin
and he also did graduate and post-doctoral work at the University of North Carolina at
Chapel Hill and at the University of Michigan. King spent a year as a Julius
Rosenwald fund fellow, so that particular funding source, the Chicago-based
Rosenwald philanthropies, had multiple entry points in the state.

Meanwhile, Alfred C. Schnur, a sociologist at Ole Miss specializing in
criminology and prisons, had done his undergraduate work at the University of

71 Vaughn L. Grisham, professor emeritus of sociology at Ole Miss, said, “There has historically been
a feeder connection, involving students and faculty, between Ole Miss and Yale and between
Mississippi itself and Yale.” Interview with Vaughn L. Grisham, September 13, 2006. Two of the
most important studies of rural life in Mississippi in the pre-World War II era were conducted by
scholars at the Rockefeller-funded Yale Institute for Human Relations, namely social scientist John
Dollard and anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker. Both studies were previously cited.
Pittsburgh and had a Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin. Civil War historian James W. Silver, as was mentioned, had degrees from Vanderbilt and the University of North Carolina. Ole Miss constitutional law professor William P. Murphy had a law degree from the University of Virginia and a doctorate from Yale. And Robert H. Spiro, a professor of history at Mississippi College, took his doctorate at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland. Through those years of schooling, teaching and research in the extra-regional context, Mississippi’s educated moderates of the post-World War II period had national and even international peer-to-peer contacts and relationships with fellow elites living elsewhere. These ties came to be formalized in the 1940s and 1950s through academic networks like the American Association of University Professors as well as groupings within various academic disciplines such as the Southern Historical Association (SHA). 72

College campuses, as in the case of the examples of Millsaps and Ole Miss mentioned in the last chapter, have to varying degrees long been centers of conscience and passion in support of necessary changes in society. The elite white Mississippi scholars just mentioned – Bettersworth, Buchanan, Elmore, Finger, King, Silver, Murphy and Spiro – who were among the group of 127 post-war moderates who are central to the dissertation, arrived in the state to begin their careers with substantial exposure to leading institutions of the outside world and their often modernizing influences. In the 1930s, for example, the period most of these individuals had matriculated, such exposure and influences included various strands

72 It should be noted here that until very recently groups like the Southern Historical Association were or could be quite parochial and chauvinistic in their practices and their apologies for the white South. So an SHA connection in the 1940s and 1950s should not be considered prima facie evidence of cosmopolitanism or enlightenment, no disrespect intended.
of liberalism, socialism, progressivism, anti-fascism and support for the New Deal. “I was an FDR liberal,” Morton B. King recalled.\footnote{Interview with Morton B. King, July 1, 2006.}

The Mississippi scholars of the post-war years therefore had been associated with universities which were themselves leading centers of “liberal” thinking, new research and, considering the time period, modern ideas. King, for instance, was at Vanderbilt in the early 1930s and came under the influence there of the Agrarians such as John Crowe Ransom, “my departmental hero,” as King called him.\footnote{Morton B. King, “The Agrarians and Race: 1930s and 1956.” Morton B. King Papers, Vanderbilt University.} And those contacts continued through the 1940s and 1950s with the moderate scholars involved in grants, fellowships such as James W. Silver’s Fulbright for the academic year 1949-1950 in Scotland, visiting professorships, lectureships, and other ties with institutions elsewhere. As Silver, the chair of the Ole Miss history department in the late 1940s, recalled of the immediate post-war period, “I was able to expand the history department gradually until when I voluntarily gave up the chairmanship a decade or so later, there were eleven members, nine of them full professors. They had earned their doctorates at top universities throughout the nation, no two from the same institution.”\footnote{James W. Silver, \textit{Running Scared: Silver in Mississippi} (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1984), p. 47.}

A parallel factor was that many non-academics among the post-war white Mississippi moderate elites also had similar ties with leading Northern universities and the influential people associated with them. For instance, Lomax Lamb, a lawyer following the war in the Delta town of Marks, attended Yale College and Yale Law School in the 1930s and early 1940s. While at Yale, Lamb was friendly with and
afterwards maintained ongoing contacts with a number of figures at the university who would go on to help form the liberal bulwark of the Kennedy-Johnson administrations (and, in the case of several of them, its civil rights policies), such as Cyrus Vance, R. Sargeant Shriver, Nicholas Katzenbach, Abe Fortas, McGeorge Bundy, William Bundy, Burke Marshall and Byron “Whizzer” White.76 “Lomax knew something like 200 people in the national government during the Kennedy years,” a friend remembered. “When those guys thought about Mississippi and wanted to do any business down here, they thought about Lomax and got in touch with him.”77 Lamb, for example, served as a crucial contact person during the tense negotiations between federal and state officials over James Meredith’s admission to Ole Miss in 1962.

To take another example of non-academics among the moderates and their extra-regional exposure, Hodding Carter’s post-war experience had been preceded by education at Bowdoin, Columbia, Tulane and Harvard and also by a five-month stint

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76 Interview with Bill Reed, September 12, 2006. The Lomax connection with Cyrus Vance was particularly helpful during the Ole Miss crisis in the autumn of 1962. Vance was U.S. Secretary of the Army at that time and Army units eventually were called in to secure the campus after the famous riot there of September 30-October 1, 1962. Lamb was a prominent lawyer in the Delta and was involved in negotiations between federal and state officials over getting James Meredith safely enrolled at the university. An obituary of Lamb states, “In 1962, Mr. Lamb was the confidential liaison in Mississippi for the Kennedy Administration during James Meredith’s attempt to become the first black student at the University of Mississippi.” Memphis Press-Scimitar, March 13, 1981. A fellow member of Lamb’s legal club at Yale Law School was future President Gerald R. Ford. Future U.S. Supreme Court justice Potter Stewart was also a lifelong friend.

Also on the subject of extra-regionalism and Mississippi, in 1937 Lamb, a Yale undergraduate, won a scholarship given by the Experiment in International Living which funded his subsequent stay in Sweden. During the winter of 1938-1939, Lamb “worked his way around the world,” according to a profile in the Lexington Advertiser, March 16, 1950.

77 Interview with Bill Reed, September 12, 2006.
at the New York-based liberal publication *PM*. Similarly, moderate Pascagoula
editor Ira Harkey earned a doctorate in political science from Ohio State University.

Meanwhile, and more broadly, examples of extra-regionalism involving
Mississippi and external economic, technological and political forces in the 1940s
could and did include national and international forces that transcended the
individual. In that category would be included: the Supreme Court rulings outlawing
the all-white primary, in 1944, and segregation on interstate bus travel, in 1946; the
unifying effect in America of the dropping of the two atomic bombs on Japan in
1945; the arrival in Jackson of the Freedom Train, bearing original copies of the Bill
of Rights and other founding documents, in early 1948; the impact of the Cold War;
President Truman’s civil rights commission and their work in 1946-1948; the
(ultimately unsuccessful) effort following World War II to make the Federal
Employment Practices Commission permanent; the effect of air-conditioning on
economic development in Mississippi; the work of national groups like the YMCA,
the American Jewish Committee, the Commission on Inter-racial Cooperation,
National Conference of Christians and Jews, the Southern Conference on Human
Welfare, the Southern Tenant Farmers Union, the National Council of Churches,
among many others; the phenomenon of travel editors moving around the South and
reporting to home readers elsewhere; the (albeit tepid) expansion of chain stores like
Sears, Roebuck into the rural South; and the keen interest in the Deep South and race

78 It is important to note that an Ivy League or Big Ten degree did not in and of itself ensure that in all
cases the recipient was smitten with liberal ideas in an extra-regional setting and subsequently brought
those notions home to Mississippi as a basis to fight for progressive change. After all, Tom P. Brady, a
Brookhaven judge, author of the racist screed *Black Monday* and an intellectual paragon of the
Citizens’ Council, was a Harvard graduate. So it is worthwhile to stop short of wholesale
generalizations about the modernizing effect of elite-institutional exposure.
of widely circulated national magazines such as *LIFE, Time, Reader’s Digest* and *The Saturday Evening Post*.

These trends suggest a state in some degree of transition, and Mississippians as a whole, with the elite whites in the vanguard, were partaking in varying degrees of all these and other new forces. In the immediate post-World War II period, Mississippi, while clinging fast to racial segregation and its own unique culture, was gradually and haltingly becoming more integrated into the American mainstream in a number of identifiable ways. So the war and the broadening experiences it allowed people like the Mississippi moderates was, in its extra-regional effect, part of a larger cross-migratory pattern involving a range of economic and social factors over a long period of time.

The weight of the evidence favors the view that war-related service was a defining experience, at least in the lives of the moderates, in terms of the formation of their more progress-oriented thinking, such as it was, and that these individuals were thereby imprinted with a different – and extra-regional – perspective upon their return to Mississippi in 1945. Notably, it was a progressivism that while not explicitly reserved “for whites only,” as C. Vann Woodward termed the earlier Progressive Era in the South, it did, for much of the immediate post-war period, have something of the same racially exclusionary effect, with some exceptions.\(^8\) Those modifications would include the concept of racial tolerance, the push for equal treatment before the law and the idea, only expressed privately, that professionalism and modernization would eventually, as a byproduct, render racial segregation increasingly unworkable

and obsolete. But even those exceptions still existed throughout 1945-1956 within an ongoing framework of white racial privilege, and nothing the white moderates of the post-war period tried to accomplish altered that structural reality in the short term in any fundamental way.

Conclusions about the importance of the war and its domestic impact in Mississippi can be gleaned from Frank E. Smith’s memoirs, William F. Winter’s recollections, James C. Cobb’s book on the Mississippi Delta, James Forman’s study of black leadership after the war, and the correspondence of Hodding Carter both during the war and afterwards, among other sources. In a letter to his wife, Betty Werlein Carter, upon shipping out for North Africa in February, 1943, Carter eagerly anticipated the great cause he was about to join: “It may be hard for outsiders, and perhaps for you, to understand why I am relinquishing you for a while, seemingly so readily and so gladly,” he wrote, perhaps somewhat caught up in the romance and drama of the war-bound soldier. “Some of us have a compulsion to seek out the evil that menaces us, and to try to come to close grips with it. The hideous force that weighs on this world is the magnet that draws me. It brought me into the Army. …Now, I am going toward it, to attempt in my small way to help end its menace, so that the world of you and my boys and the people I love will be surer and brighter.”

Two years later, upon his arrival back in the Delta and resuming the editorship of the Democrat-Times, Carter’s writings remained very much imbued with a

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82 Frank E. Smith, Congresswoman from Mississippi, previously cited.
83 Interview with William F. Winter, November 7, 2006.
84 James C. Cobb, The Most Southern Place on Earth: The Mississippi Delta and the Roots of Regional Identity, previously cited.
professed idealism and with lessons learned while in the service. In 1945, he wrote a friend: “There are many reasons prompting my return. In the least of them is my belief that Greenville is not only a good place to live but also a good testing ground for the things which I believe. I think that I profited from my four years in the Army. …Whatever I can do in Greenville as a citizen and editor in the interest of tolerance I will do to the full extent of my capabilities. There is a big job ahead for all of us.”

Years later still, Carter reflected on the war years and his Army service in the 1940s both in Washington, D.C. and overseas and their influence on his attitudes. “It was in this latter time particularly that I found a great many of my concepts changing,” he said. Based on the sampling delineated earlier of various Mississippians serving in the war, it is apparent that at least some of this generation collectively had global experiences when they were quite young and one might therefore presume that extra-regional exposure had a deepening and even moderating effect.

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89 But, as with academic experience, a blanket presumption that such applied to all cases would be problematic. However impressive and indicative of the potential for greater social awareness the record may seem, when standing by itself its meaning is potentially ambiguous and subject to debate. The reason for this is that many of the well-known reactionary and even violent figures in post-war Mississippi also served in the Second World War in far-flung places, and it would be hard therefore given subsequent evidence to the contrary to argue that for them the experience helped engender enlightenment or a broader view. Those individuals include J.W. “Big” Milam, who in 1955 would be one of Emmett Till’s killers; future White Citizens Council head Robert “Tut” Patterson; Byron de la Beckwith, the man who assassinated Medgar Evers in 1963; and staunch segregationist and race-baiter John Bell Williams, a future congressman and governor. According to Hodding Carter III – the Greenville publisher’s son – who wrote a book on the subject, the ranks of the White Citizens Council were mostly comprised of World War II veterans. The “veterans took the lead in organizing the Citizens’ Council,” Carter noted. Interview with Hodding Carter III, October 31, 2009. Carter’s book was titled The South Strikes Back (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1959). For example, Charles C. Jacobs Jr., a Marine artillery officer who saw combat in the Marshall Islands, Tinian, Saipan and Iwo Jima campaigns and won two Bronze Stars in the process, returned to Cleveland in the Delta after the war, set up a law practice, served 12 years in the state legislature and eventually became head of the local chapter of the Citizens’ Council. The white backlash, which gained great power in Mississippi particularly starting in the mid-1950s after the Brown decision, had standing in many communities partly because it was populated by many World War II veterans, among others. “Those who assaulted
One editorial writer, surveying the public mood in the Greenville in early 1946, stated: “we have noticed most individual people have much more progressive ideas than were evident when the war began.”\textsuperscript{90} On December 1, 1946, the \textit{Delta Democrat-Times} ran an editorial cartoon depicting a scolding Uncle Sam wagging his finger and looming over a stout-looking figure dressed in white Klan robes. The caption read: “Son, I just fought a war against your sort of ideology.”\textsuperscript{91} These primary sources are supported by interpretations in the secondary literature. For instance, World War II ostensibly was pursued in the name of what Franklin D. Roosevelt called the Four Freedoms, a set of liberal ideals that Eric Foner describes as “embodying principles associated with the New Deal.”\textsuperscript{92} Foner noted specifically that the Freedoms, “suggested that Roosevelt’s policies of the 1930s were an expression of deeply held American values worthy of being spread worldwide.”\textsuperscript{93}

Discussing similar themes, Dewey Grantham writes that, “in the late 1930s and early 1940s, the threat of totalitarianism and alternative ideologies gave rise to a renewed interest among Americans in the meaning of democracy. The result was an extensive the citadels of Southern racial tradition confronted other veterans policing the ramparts of white supremacy,” Jennifer E. Brooks writes. (“Winning the Peace: Georgia Veterans and the Struggle to Define the Political Legacy of World War II,” \textit{The Journal of Southern History}, Vol. 66. 2000.) War service thus was not in all cases necessarily a humanizing experience for Mississippians, particularly as it might have been expressed regarding the issue of race. These more blatantly bigoted, or more devotedly segregationist, figures were stark examples that war service and sensitivity to the issue of race were in many ways mutually exclusive. Meanwhile, while examining the ties between war-related ideals and support for social progress in Mississippi, it should be noted that the legacy of the war was used and misused to promote all manner of causes and points of view, many of them contradictory. For example, some Mississippians took a view in favor of organized labor based on their interpretation of ideals of the war and others in the state staked out a diametrically opposite position based on a much different interpretation of the exact same set of events.

\textsuperscript{91} \textit{Delta Democrat-Times}, December 1, 1946.
\textsuperscript{92} In his State of the Union speech on January 6, 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt spoke of a world order founded on four “essential human Freedoms”: freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear.
\textsuperscript{93} Foner, p. 223.
literature on the subject and a wide-ranging discourse on the nature of Americanism and the nation’s common ideals.”

The sense that war experience had prompted a renewal of values associated with democracy and moderation among Mississippians in the armed forces, and that these individuals returned home more open to accepting changes that would help transmit those ideals into concrete action, informs a great deal of the moderates’ correspondence in the summer and fall of 1945. For instance, Hodding Carter received a letter in August of that year from William L. Cohn, of New York City, in which he stated: “I have just returned from Europe where I fought one phase of the battle for democratic progress and liberty. Through the life of an infantryman is an unpleasant and dangerous one, I take off my hat to you who despite the security of a home and business are risking everything for your ideals. ...Best wishes for continued success in your endeavor to raise Mississippi out of the depths to which poverty and bigotry have consigned her.” A year later, Carter wrote in an editorial: “we came back from the war willing to honor and assist anyone with constructive ideas.”

“Poor standards”

What Hodding Carter called Mississippi’s “previous poor standards,” in his case in reference specifically to education levels, and the criteria whereby NAACP director Roy Wilkins would term it “the most uncivilized state in the entire 50 states”

94 Grantham, p. 191.
were well-documented by the 1940s. In order to fully understand the post-war transition as it began to play out in Mississippi, it is helpful in framing the discussion to first remember the bleak and desperate situation, fundamentally but by no means exclusively regarding the economy, existing there around 1945. An overly simplistic explanation of the basic issue is that the state was suffering from having been tethered so tightly for so long to large-scale cotton growing and the poverty, institutionalized racism and other deep-seated inequities that went along with it.

As a result, the almost uniformly woeful record, as measured by census data, other government records, foundation studies, and other quantitative surveys of social and economic issues, reflected a grim and stark reality in Mississippi immediately confronting the elite post-war moderates. Mississippi “is a poor state, the poorest in the Union by every index of material and concomitant cultural assets,” Hodding Carter wrote in 1946.97 The barren situation contrasted sharply with the global industrial-backed military triumph in which so many of the moderates had just participated.

One doleful headline from the period seemed to sum up a myriad of problems: “Mississippi is Slipping Further Behind.”98 Meanwhile, the Delta Democrat-Times told its post-war readers that, “it is a fact that this state is at the bottom of the heap in almost all the bad statistics and at the top in practically no progressive record.”99 The state was the worst of all forty-eight states in everything “from preventive diseases per capita to lack of a workmen’s [sic] compensation law,” as one editorial put it.100

Political scientist V.O. Key noted, with no flattery intended, that Northerners and Southerners agreed that Mississippi was in a class by itself.\textsuperscript{101} As Ole Miss student editor Albin Krebs put it in 1950: “Lord knows Mississippi is not at the top of any lists, except that of illiteracy.”\textsuperscript{102}

Any number of examples and empirical studies would seem to underscore the pessimistic outlook and bottom-rung ranking. Mississippi was for a long time the South’s – and the nation’s – poorest state in per capita income.\textsuperscript{103} “When President Franklin D. Roosevelt declared the South the nation’s number one economic problem, he could have gone further and pointed to Mississippi as the most intractable southern economic dilemma,” Connie L. Lester writes.\textsuperscript{104} In the 1940s, for example, the state’s per-capita income was only 36\% of the national average.\textsuperscript{105} According to 1947 data, only 27 percent of the state’s families had an annual income of over $600.\textsuperscript{106} That fundamental disadvantage – per capita income – underlay or contributed to all other social and economic difficulties. For example, “with the lowest per capita income in the country in Mississippi we must also consider its

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{101} Key, p. 229.
\item \textsuperscript{102} “About the Witch Hunt,” \textit{The Mississippian}, February 10, 1950.
\item \textsuperscript{103} If ranked by per capita income, Mississippi remains (according to 2004 U.S. Census data), the nation’s poorest state. In an editorial in the New York Times on Sept. 27, 2007, Mississippi was described as “the poorest state in the country. See “More Housing Woes in Mississippi,” \textit{New York Times}, September 27, 2007. Census figures from 1950 indicate the median annual family income in 1949 was $1198.
\item \textsuperscript{104} Roosevelt made that statement in 1938. Connie L. Lester, “Balancing Agriculture With Industry: Capital, Labor, and the Public Good in Mississippi’s Home-Grown New Deal,” \textit{Journal of Mississippi History}, Vol. LXX, No. 3 (Fall 2008) In 1968, when the Southern Christian Leadership Council wanted to pick an appropriate site to launch its Poor People’s Campaign, it chose Marks, Mississippi, a small town in the Northern Delta.
\item \textsuperscript{106} Alexander Heard summary of interview with Morton B. King, June 16, 1947. Southern Politics Collection.
\end{itemize}
correlated position as also having the greatest percentage of illiterates,” Sydney E. Stoliar wrote, in 1954. “The two are steadfast companions.”

Mississippi also was the most rural of the Southern states: “the population of only 12 towns exceeded 10,000 in 1940; the largest of these, Jackson, the capital, had a population of only 62,000,” one source states. In Mississippi at that time, and even to some extent today, most towns were small enough that people identified their roots by referring to the county they lived in and not the town. In the mid-1940s, much of the state was still mired in a rigidly segregated plantation economic system.

Meanwhile, and related to issues of income as well as a long tradition of anti-intellectualism, Mississippi’s per-capita spending on public education consistently was dead last of all the states. The state had by far the lowest teacher salaries in the nation. No doubt partly as a consequence, the state was suffering from a drastic shortage of teachers in 1945. It had the lowest rate of school attendance per pupil, a statistic tied to two factors: the threadbare public schools and the dominance of agriculture and thus the imperative for so many Mississippi children (particularly African-Americans) to do seasonal work in the fields. For years Mississippi was the only state without a kindergarten system and it did not rectify that shortfall until the 1980s.

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108 Key, p. 230.
109 As late as 1947, the average annual expense per pupil in Mississippi public schools was $58.52, the lowest rate in the country. See Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1950, 71st Edition, U.S. Department of Commerce.
110 According to the Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1950, 71st Edition, U.S. Department of Commerce, the statewide annual average teacher salaries for 1946 and 1947 were $856 and $984 respectively. According to a survey by the Bolivar County Schools in 1950-1951, the average annual salary for a white teacher in Mississippi was $1570 and the average for a black teacher was $773.
111 The fact that many Mississippians who would otherwise have been teachers were away serving in the Armed Forces in 1945 was also a contributing factor.
According to Caryl A. Cooper, “a survey taken in 1940 revealed that 25 of the state’s 82 counties had no secondary school for African-Americans. Consistent with those findings, a 1950 survey of black schools in Sunflower County revealed that no black high schools existed.” According to a 1937 survey, “the colored schools of Sunflower County are in deplorable condition.” Clarksdale, a major population center in the northern section of the Delta, did not build a black high school until the 1950s. In 1944-1945, some 44 percent of Mississippi’s educable black children were not enrolled in school at all. Within Mississippi’s public schools, as pitiful as they were overall, things were especially bad for blacks. According to Nicholas Lemann, “in 1938, the average American teacher’s salary was $1374, and the average value of a school district’s buildings and equipment per student was $274. For blacks in Mississippi, the figures were $144 and $11.” As late as 1961 in the Delta’s Bolivar County District Four, $101.55 was spent annually per each white child compared with a mere $23.83 for each black child, a ratio of greater than four-to-one. Meanwhile, the ready availability of such statistics, which so clearly and self-evidently made the case for school integration, prompted the Mississippi legislature to pass a law to minimize publicity and documentation about school spending.

In the immediate post-war, the state’s colleges, inseparably tied to the surrounding economic conditions, were suffering, too. “Our institutions of higher learning cannot compete in salaries, in curriculum, in physical plants with any other

113 Asch, p. 56.
115 Lemann, p. 18.
state,” one commentary concluded.\textsuperscript{116} The money problems persisted. In the mid-1950s, faculty salaries at Ole Miss were, on average, $1200 a year below the national average for state universities.\textsuperscript{117} Morton B. King, an Ole Miss sociologist, stated in 1947: “There is no good Negro college in Mississippi. Perhaps there is no good college in Mississippi.”\textsuperscript{118} As late as 1946, no Mississippi institution of higher learning granted Ph.D. degrees.\textsuperscript{119} There was no four-year medical school in the state.

In yet another startling statistic pointing to both poverty and racial inequality, in 1950, the entire state of Mississippi had a total of two black lawyers.\textsuperscript{120}

Also, Mississippi had the lowest state appropriation for public libraries, “another bottom place for our state,” in the words of one editorial.\textsuperscript{121} Mississippi had the fewest and the most under-funded public services generally as well as a deliberately inadequate and enfeebled state government.\textsuperscript{122} In 1945 for example, Mississippi had no department of labor nor a child labor law. In a matter directly related, as late as 1947 the ten-hour day and the 60-hour week were typical for women workers and child labor was ubiquitous in the fields. Meanwhile, Mississippi was the state with the least industry. Other than some scattered agriculture-related enterprises such as creameries or cotton gins, some extraction businesses such as

\textsuperscript{117} “Exodus from Ole Miss,” \textit{Time}, July 29, 1957.
\textsuperscript{118} Alexander Heard summary of Morton B. King interview, June 16, 1947. \textit{Southern Politics Collection}.
\textsuperscript{120} Charles W. Eagles, \textit{The Price of Defiance: James Meredith and the Integration of Ole Miss} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), p. 70.
\textsuperscript{122} The claim that the weakness of the state government was deliberate can be supported by analysis of the 1890 state constitutional convention which, among other things, took steps to disempower the governor’s office.
lumber mills, and some defense work spurred by the war, industry in Mississippi in
the 1940s was virtually nonexistent. As of 1947, industry was so sparse in
Mississippi that no organized association of manufacturers existed in the state.\textsuperscript{123}

In the area of health services, the record was similarly anemic. Mississippi
had the lowest rate of hospital beds per capita of any state, less than one-half the
number of hospital beds as were needed.\textsuperscript{124} The state offered 1.5 beds per 1000
population. Health experts stated that a rate of 4 beds per 1000 population was a
minimally adequate number. Specifically for black Mississippians, the figure was 0.7
beds per 1000 population. “Mississippi is at the bottom of the national list in hospital
facilities” generally, one 1945 editorial stated. “For its million Negroes there are
practically no hospital facilities. For its million whites, there is only inadequate
hospitalization.”\textsuperscript{125} Meanwhile, Mississippi had the nation’s second highest birth rate
– a classic indicator of underdevelopment, often conjoined with rates of rural poverty.
Likewise, and somewhat paradoxically, the state had the nation’s highest rates of
infant and maternal mortality. In 1946, the state’s maternal mortality rate, based on
maternal deaths per 1000 live births, was twice the national average.\textsuperscript{126} As late as
1948, fewer than 43 percent of Mississippi babies were born in hospitals.\textsuperscript{127}

\textsuperscript{123} Alexander Heard summary of interview with Cecil Travis, June 28, 1947. Southern Politics
Collection. By the mid-1950s, the Mississippi Manufacturers Association had been formed. In the
meantime, there was an organization called the Associated Industries of Mississippi, a Jackson-based
trade group that included lumber companies, bottling plants, utilities and banks.
\textsuperscript{124} Delta Democrat-Times, October 26, 1945 and July 11, 1945
\textsuperscript{125} “100 Cases and Six Beds,” Delta Democrat-Times, November 14, 1945.
\textsuperscript{127} The figure was 42.8 percent. Mississippi State Board of Health, Public Health Statistical Service
In yet another bleak health-related ranking: “our state leads all others in congenital syphilis,” one Mississippi source noted, in 1946. One public health survey in 1950 stated that “one of five Negroes in Mississippi probably has syphilis.” Also, the Mississippi Delta, with its flat land and standing water offering ideal breeding ground for mosquitoes, had as a result among the nation’s highest malaria death rate. In Mississippi as a whole in 1945, there was one doctor for every 2343 residents, as detailed in a survey that found “a definite shortage of hospital and medical facilities in the state.” As of 1945, the state ranked 48th out of 48 in the ratio of doctors to population. According to the Mississippi State Medical Education Board, as of January 1951, there were 51 black physicians practicing in the whole state, only 9 of whom were working in Mississippi’s rural areas.

The state’s benighted overall record also was reflected in rates of crime and violence, including racial violence. Mississippi was the state with the highest rates of lynching, both total and per-capita, though by World War II the practice of lynching, at least as public spectacle, had tapered off sharply. Still, according to John Dittmer, between 1880 and 1940, nearly 600 Mississippi blacks were lynched, as counted in official statistics, a figure that most scholars agree severely understates the true number of victims. The state also led the nation in beatings and mysterious

130 Mortality statistics from the U.S. Bureau of the Census and the Mississippi State Board of Health. By the late 1940s, in part because of the widespread use of the new chemical DDT, which killed off mosquitoes, the rate of malaria deaths in Mississippi had dropped precipitously.
132 Mississippi State Board of Health, 1945.
The state had an intractable “juvenile delinquency” problem, a
dilemma apparently linked to the sorry state of the economy and the paucity of decent
available jobs and educational opportunity for young people. “Mississippi’s
homicide rate is inordinately high; its per capita income disproportionately low; its
educational standards below those of most of the other states; it lacks a workmen’s
compensation law,” Hodding Carter wrote in 1939. “The indictments can be carried
out to very painful lengths.”

A few years later, he repeated the theme: “It is not a
good thing for a state to be at the bottom or near the bottom in all or most of the
things by which progress and civilization and the well-being of the individual citizen
are measured. Mississippi is at the bottom or near the bottom in almost all of these
things.”

Given all these problems, it is perhaps not surprising that Mississippi had
declining population at the same time – the post-war – that the overall U.S.
population was rising. The early post-war years, of course, coincided with the
height of the Great Migration. Overall, the state’s chief export seemingly was young
people of promise seeking opportunities and a quality of life that did not exist at
home.

In 1945, it had been only seven years since, as Connie L. Lester pointed out,
Franklin Roosevelt had declared: “the South presents right now the nation’s number
one economic problem.”

Juan Williams, *Eyes on the Prize: America’s Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965* (New York: Viking,

―Shall Mississippi Lag Behind?‖, *Delta Democrat-Times*, July 20, 1939.

―Surpluses Aren’t Everything,‖ *Delta Democrat-Times*, January 17, 1946.


Letter from Franklin D. Roosevelt to Members of the Conference on Economic Conditions in the
South, July 5, 1938, quoted in David L. Carlton and Peter A. Coclanis (eds.), *Confronting Southern
Poverty in the Great Depression: The Report on Economic Conditions of the South* (Boston:
the quintessential Southern state and where its Delta section was labeled by one author as “the most Southern place on Earth” and by others as “Mississippi’s Mississippi” and the “South’s South,” the moderates and the returning veterans among them faced a daunting set of challenges – quantified and defined in these various categories and others – in their desire to bring modernization and improvement or even the rudiments of civilization to their state. The apparent intractability and vast extent of the problems needs to be appreciated, as does the complicating fact that the moderates – elites, veterans, and others – were connected by background, upbringing, family ties and tradition with such an evidently bleak and troubled society and its historically regressive political culture. Their work in “opening” Mississippi’s closed society by urging the raising of the then-highly informal professional standards, by pushing their concept of modernization, and the like, must be understood not only as an enormous undertaking in light of the extensive problems but also as taking place at the same time they (the moderates) were part of – and even part of the leadership of – the very same backward and change-averse state. As was suggested in the introduction and elsewhere, theirs was a mixed and conflicted position.

Moreover, it should be underscored that the challenges as they were defined by the moderates were primarily economic and, to some degree, social. That was a limited view, however. The rates of poverty and income and literacy and education and hospital resources, etc., were itemized and prioritized as they were in various white-controlled Mississippi publications, by exclusively white state government agencies, and in all-white elite studies because that was the way the moderates and

139 Cobb.
other whites saw and defined the post-war Mississippi landscape. The problems as articulated, most notably, were not particularly racialized. “The fact that the condition of a million voteless Negroes, engaged in marginal or submarginal agricultural or domestic work, accounts for most of these booby prizes isn’t usually cited,” Hodding Carter wrote, in 1945.140

By and large, and with a few exceptions, there were not editorials in 1945 in white-owned newspapers about African-American access to the ballot or about job opportunities for blacks or the condition of black schools, and so forth. The society’s problems, as the white moderates saw them, were about improving the state’s economy, first and foremost, and, secondarily, they concerned other areas of Mississippi life that were effected by the woeful economy. It was white privileged definition of what the state needed. The perspective and the constructed idea of progress was therefore a narrow and exclusionary one defined by the “white gaze,” as Ruth Frankenberg calls it.

One final point regarding the woeful conditions in Mississippi in the early post-war is that the state in the 21st century is still at or near the bottom in many of the categories cited, including public education, with an economy highly dependent on transfer payments like welfare and food stamps. So, for all the change cited in this study, facilitated in part by the elite white moderates, one overriding continuity is that the intractability of the state’s economic problems remains, at least in important ways.

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140 Hodding Carter, “State’s Social Statistics Help to Explain Bilbo,” PM, August 8, 1945.
“No more room” at the state’s colleges

The end of the Second World War in the late summer of 1945 and the resulting return of thousands of service members to their homes in Mississippi led to a number of changes within the state right away. With military-age young people as their constituency, the state’s colleges and universities were one among the first places to feel the impact. Ole Miss, anticipating the coming matriculation influx of returning service members, had set up a post-war planning committee in early 1945 under the chairmanship of Billy Wynn, a Greenville lawyer. At Mississippi State College (later renamed Mississippi State University), President Clarence Dorman “predicted that the GI Bill would make it possible for ‘thousands’ of students to go to school who ‘would not have attended college under ordinary circumstances’.” \(^{141}\)

State, as that school was and still is known, bolstered its program in modern farming techniques in preparation for the onslaught of returning veterans eager to prepare for agribusiness careers. \(^{142}\) In the last year of the war, State’s enrollment was 761; by the first full academic year after the war it had soared to 3,391. \(^{143}\) By the summer of 1946, State was “crowded to the limit,” one source noted. \(^{144}\) Even with veterans “demanding” to be admitted, University President Fred Tom Mitchell declared “there is no more room at State.” \(^{145}\)

\(^{141}\) Sansing, p. 126.
\(^{142}\) Behel, p. 164.
\(^{143}\) Sansing, p. 129.
Similarly, at Delta State Teachers College in Cleveland, total enrollment figures went from 185 in 1945, to 483 in 1946, to 596 in 1947. In two years, therefore, the size of the student body had tripled. At Ole Miss, registration totaled more than 1,250 undergraduates for the academic year 1945-1946, far surpassing the previous year’s student body of 774. The new figure was “the largest enrollment since the beginning of the war in 1941,” one newspaper declared. Quonset huts and other temporary barracks, newly acquired from the demobilizing military, sprouted on the Oxford campus to address the sudden and acute need for housing. By the summer of 1946, both Ole Miss and Mississippi State had stopped considering applications for any prospective student wishing to matriculate prior to fall semester 1947. Enrollment at virtually all Mississippi colleges and universities multiplied in the post-war years, as it did in most parts of the nation thanks in part to the GI Bill of Rights.

Anecdotal evidence suggests much of the new student crop had a different and more focused attitude, partly due to the more mature outlook of the veterans among them. Given the period of war service that had interrupted their education, the veterans by 1945 and 1946 in many cases were a few years older than the typical age for college students. “The University of Mississippi was full and overflowing with

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146 The school is now known as Delta State University. Figures come from the Timeline section of the University’s website, www.deltastate.edu.
147 “Enrollment Goes Above 1250, Several Students Yet to Register,” Mississippian, September 1945. David G. Sansing has slightly different figures. He writes, “At Ole Miss during the spring semester of 1945 enrollment was 657; in the fall semester, 1271; a year later, 3213.” Making Haste Slowly: The Troubled History of Higher Education in Mississippi (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1990), p. 129.
148 For example, in the summer of 1946, former (and future) Gov. Hugh White wrote of his travels to Atlanta: “Emory University, that normally has 1500 students in all departments, is trying to prepare for 3500 for the coming year. I believe if you will investigate you will find all states are confronted with the same problem.” Letter, Hugh White to Walter Sillers Jr., July 17, 1946. Walter Sillers Jr. Papers.
veterans taking advantage of the GI Bill of Rights,” remembered Charles C. Jacobs Jr., an Ole Miss law student at the time. “All these veterans were serious-minded, studious, and at the university for the purpose of getting an education.”149 Newly matriculating veterans brought a similar gravitas to campuses across the country. The ex-service members “were men,” a Yale student of the time recalls. “They were serious. They had a purpose.”150 So, along with extra-regional exposure, as was previously discussed, it can be safely assumed that at least some college-enrolled Mississippi war veterans in the mid- to late-1940s tended to have an extra degree of direction and maturity in their approach to their education.

With the burgeoning numbers and the more focused students came signs of a marginally more democratic atmosphere at Mississippi colleges, again within the unshakable confines of racial segregation. James W. Silver, recently returned from service overseas in the Red Cross to the Ole Miss history department, recalled that with the idealistic spirit brought about by the war and its successful conclusion, 1945 marked a hopeful time on campus in spite of the many challenges. In his view, the relatively progressive mood even touched on the seemingly intractable subject of race. “Most pleasing of all,” Silver wrote, “a good many of us believed the state would continue to expand in wealth and wisdom and would be able to reform itself to the point of making all of its citizens first-class.”151 That wish, of course, would prove to be complicated in its realization, to say the least.

151 James W. Silver, Running Scared: Silver in Mississippi, page 47. Meanwhile, also in Oxford, returning veteran Phillip E. Mullen, who recently had rejoined the editorial staff of his father’s newspaper, the Oxford Eagle, began to organize a local chapter of the American Veterans Committee,
Meanwhile, H.V. Howerton, chairman of the Ole Miss department of political science, agreed that the returning veterans brought new thinking to campus, even regarding the issue of race. “Five or 15 years ago there was considerable difficulty in discussing on the campus of Ole Miss such matters as repeal of the poll tax and the right of Negroes to vote,” Howerton told an interviewer in 1947. “Those were delicate subjects to examine even in the classroom of political science. In the present day, however, attitudes have shifted so much that there is now considerable ‘liberal spirit’ on the campus which looks favorably upon suggestions to increase the number of persons voting.” He added, “the cause for this change is principally the attitude of veterans who are returning to school. Perhaps … because of ideas which they acquired while off to the wars, these veterans are exhibiting an awareness to [sic] suffrage problems.”

In addition to the college-bound cohort, a number of other slightly older war veterans among the white Mississippi moderates of the post-war were still relatively young upon their return in 1945. Some of this group had been educated in the 1920s and 1930s, embarked on their careers in the 1930s, and had then gone into the service. Hodding Carter and James W. Silver each turned 38 the year the war ended, for instance. The political clout of this generation as a force of moderation had already been felt by the early 1940s. For example, Congressman Thomas G. Abernathy, a which, one source notes, consisted of “usually young veterans just back from the war, white and black, who thought there was or ought to be a new day on this race stuff.” See Jason Sokol, There Goes My Everything: White Southerners in the Age of Civil Rights, 1945-1975 (New York: Albert A. Knopf, 2006).

conservative moderate by Mississippi standards was first elected in 1942 by “the younger bunch,” a friend wrote him.\(^{153}\)

The close of the war and the gradual reassembling back home of all these itinerant service members prompted the widespread conversation among whites in Mississippi and across the South about the need to achieve certain goals domestically in the name of the war’s triumph. For example, Clarence Poe wrote a piece in 1945 for the \textit{Progressive Farmer} titled “What Victory Should Mean for the South” in which he proceeded to enumerate necessary changes.\(^{154}\) Hodding Carter moved back to Greenville and resumed control of the \textit{Delta Democrat-Times} in the spring of 1945. In this position, he was among the first and the most prominent of the white Mississippi moderates to at least approach the issue of race, however gingerly and, in his case, from a position of largely unassailable white privilege.

In a front-page editorial in June of 1945, shortly after his return, titled “A Personal Statement,” Carter wrote that his war experience had brought the “tempering of old beliefs with newer convictions.” And he offered his reasons for having fought in the war and the lessons he had brought home. “As for myself, the right to speak one’s mind, to protest outrage, to debate openly, is paramount,” he stated. “I think I have earned that right; and it is my intention to exercise it in the interest of my town and state and country as assiduously in the future as I ever did in the past.” His particular target, he suggested, was intolerance and bigotry. “It seems that the hates and prejudices and superstitions which assured the success in Germany of Hitler’s

\(^{153}\) Letter, J.P. Coleman to Thomas G. Abernathy, November 24, 1943. J.P. Coleman Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

In a letter a few weeks later, Carter mused on his return home and on getting reacquainted with Mississippi’s political and racial environment. Bringing to bear his experience overseas, and employing the widely popular war rhetoric to make his point, Carter wrote of his homeland: “This place is really a battleground between democracy and fascism, and the horrible part is that almost all of the Fascists honestly believe they are democratic – excusing a little colored blindness.”

In the summer and fall of 1945, Carter’s editorials, for which he would be awarded a Pulitzer Prize the following May, in many ways stressed ideological themes of the war that Eric Foner and others describe – freedom, justice, equality, fairness, the struggle between democracy and fascism, and the like. And many of the pieces touched on, if not race directly, at least racial tolerance. Carter saluted “A Kid Named Bobby Henry” – a piece about a Greenville (white) youth killed in action in Germany in 1944 honored posthumously with the Congressional Medal of Honor, and in the tribute the editor stressed the overarching humanitarian lessons of the war as he saw them. Meanwhile, Carter attacked Senator James O. Eastland’s comment that African-American soldiers serving in the war were an “utter and abysmal failure.” The editor hailed Japanese-American soldiers – comprising Company D of the 442nd Infantry Army Regiment – who had achieved a stellar combat record in Italy and Germany and whose slogan, “Go for Broke,” Carter said, could be “adopted by all

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Americans of good will in the days ahead. We’ve got to shoot the works in the fight for tolerance. Those boys of Company D point the way.”\footnote{Waldron, p. 153.}

Meanwhile, in a clear example of a post-war agenda outlining a vision of social and economic progress, Carter in 1945 pushed the idea of building a much-needed hospital as a memorial to the war dead of Washington County. “We believe the boys who gave their lives would have liked it that way,” his editorial in the \textit{Democrat-Times} stated.\footnote{“The Hospital as a War Memorial” \textit{Delta Democrat-Times}, October 15, 1945.} In late 1946, the Greenville paper carried another editorial, titled “A Man is a Man,” which drew again on the writer’s war experience. “The hard fact, whether anyone likes to admit it, is that every race has some fine representatives and some completely worthless members,” the piece stated, with patronizing tone firmly in place. “It seems to us after seeing men under the horrible pressure of facing death, that our own opinions should be based on the concrete fact of each individual person’s character and worth.”\footnote{“A Man is a Man,” \textit{Delta Democrat-Times}, December 17, 1946.}

Carter also assertively waded into a local controversy over the Lions Club honor roll. A proposal, first made in late 1945, for a monument containing the names of the Greenville men, black and white, who had served in the war was abandoned because of some whites’ objections to having the two races honored together on the same board, even though the names of blacks and whites would be listed on opposite facings. “We fail to see any threat to ‘white supremacy’ or to segregation or to any of the other issues so useful to rabble rousers, in placing the names of the Negro service men on the Roll,” Carter wrote, in an editorial titled “The Honor (?) Roll.” “In not
doing so, we see only a threat to democracy itself.”\textsuperscript{162} The whole episode created “a stench in the nostrils of the fair-minded,” he added. With his familiar paternalism mixed in this case with outrage, Carter also asked, “How in God’s name can the Negroes be encouraged to be good citizens, to feel that they can get a fair break, to believe that here in the South they will some day win those things which are rightfully theirs – decent housing, better educational facilities, equal pay for equal work, a lifting of health standards, and all of the other milestones along an obstacle-filled road – if we deny them so small a thing as joint service recognition?”\textsuperscript{163}

\textbf{Specifics of the white moderates’ post-war agenda}

The elite white Mississippi moderates’ post-war agenda, however, was in general terms not consciously directly about race, Carter’s emphasis on tolerance and related matters notwithstanding. The agenda items, particularly regarding the economy, definitely impacted race, and they arguably were among many factors helping set the stage for the eventual civil rights struggle. But in the mid-1940s the “job ahead,” as one editorial termed it, mainly was comprised of elements that could fall under the rubric of professionalism and modernization – i.e., economic change. That is hardly to say, however, that the predicate of 150 years or so of racial history in Mississippi was not relevant or that the concepts of professionalism and modernization, in particular, did not have a racialized past, as in the issue of slave

labor versus industrial labor, for example. That context is a larger framework for this dissertation. That said, in looking, again, at one particular piece – among many – of the opening of Mississippi’s closed society, namely the role of the white moderates in the immediate post-war, it is clear that their agenda, as they articulated it, was deliberately mainly focused on issues other than race.164

The white moderates’ post-war agenda was also bounded by class considerations. Because of the poll tax and other restrictions, most whites did not vote in Mississippi in the 1940s, so the political and other leaders looking out for their futures but also helping to frame the debate and implement it had the concerns of a relatively narrow audience most immediately in mind. The very small electorate had a big impact on the definition, on the part of elites, of the “public” and what it supposedly required. Journalists, for example, perceived and addressed issues with a tightly defined sense of what interests were important and had influence. Because of low literacy rates, most white Mississippians were not buying newspapers or reading editorials. Thus the process of entry into the political debate – over the post-war agenda – was highly exclusive as a practical matter. Such class-based and race-based restrictions on participation naturally limited what the agenda would include.

In the Delta, Hodding Carter was one of the chief voices putting forth the new moderate agenda and, as his support for the Washington County hospital proposal

164 By way of context, it should be remembered that for many white Americans the issue of race was not a top priority in the mid-1940s. That would change in subsequent years. By 1947-1948, President Truman would make civil rights a national priority. The issue would split the Democratic Party in 1948 and in later years. But that was all in the future in 1945. The race issue did not seriously divide the Democratic Party in the 1944 elections, for example. Throughout his presidency, Franklin D. Roosevelt, amazingly, in retrospect, was able to hold together a winning political coalition that simultaneously included white segregationists from the Deep South and blacks from the northern cities.
makes clear, he was often doing so in the name of the war’s purpose, as he saw it. In the period immediately following the war, Carter’s correspondence and his Democrat-Times editorials were full of arguments for change and action on other needed modern amenities in Greenville and Mississippi, such as: highway improvement, anti-venereal disease funding, a “Negro Park,” school safety, more direct service from the Illinois Central Railroad’ main north-south line, new swimming pools for both races, a new county jail, a new junior college for black students, more modern and humane conditions at the nearby Parchman state penal farm, a political system comprised of two viable parties, federal housing funds, more funding for state universities, a state medical school, more library funding, a trans-Mississippi River bridge, and planning for new industry. Many of these priorities, such as the “negro” park, swimming pools for both races, and a new junior college for African-American students, all indicate that “moderate” or not, Carter remained a committed segregationist, as did virtually all other white Mississippi moderates of the period. His editorials were addressing – often in the name of the war and its supposed ideals – various aspects of the long record of social and economic problems as described by the white elites in Mississippi, outlined earlier.

“There are many aspects of growth, many that we sometimes overlook,” Carter editorialized in the Democrat-Times in the summer of 1945. “Growth means civic planning, proper zoning, (and) an expanded and modern business section. It means expansion of such things as fire and police departments; port, air, rail and trucking facilities; new schools; more residences. It means more industries and
community beautification, more recreational facilities, utility expansion.”  

By the fall of 1946, Carter was focused on “the Job Ahead” in an editorial about Greenville’s economic development in which he spelled out four priorities: increased diversification of agriculture, expanding existing industrial plants in Greenville and attracting new plants to the general area, freeing the nearby Mississippi River bridge from tolls, and converting the Greenville Army Air Base to civilian use.

A newfound sense of confidence and a call for ambitious growth in the name of the war’s ideals were also reflected in the words of other moderate newspaper editors elsewhere in Mississippi. Beginning in August, 1945 and continuing though the following February, Phillip E. Mullen at the Oxford Eagle wrote repeated editorials advocating a welter of economic and social improvements that he tied to the legacy of the war. On Aug. 9, he was pushing for funding veterans’ education and for education as a whole. Two weeks later, just as the Pacific war was concluding, Mullen again was writing about community responsibility to help returning veterans. “Communities able to attract factories, distributing firms and various enterprises to expand present industries and business and to provide modern housing at reasonable rental will have a great advantage over the do-nothing communities that hope for the best but never get beyond that stage,” he wrote. In subsequent editorials, Mullen focused on economic development, on wages, and on “President Truman’s

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liberal, progressive and well-outlined program for reconversion.” Other Mullen editorials around this time centered on housing and teacher shortages and on job training benefits.

In McComb, in the southwestern section of the state near Louisiana, J. Oliver Emmerich, publisher of the Enterprise-Journal, boiled down the post-war agenda, a topic he returned to repeatedly in the mid-1940s, in a single editorial on June 25, 1945. Titled, “A Civic Program for Our Community,” the preamble announced, “The Enterprise-Journal submits this twenty point program for community development and post-war prosperity.” These two terms, of course, and indeed the moderates’ entire post-war agenda, could be seen as synonymous with a broad definition of professionalism and modernization. As in Greenville and Oxford, the McComb priorities, as spelled out by Emmerich, included: industrial expansion, programs and facilities for veterans, education, job training, housing, and the like.170 In a similar vein, later that year Emmerich pushed for more state funding for higher education, an upgraded airport, parking meters for the business district in McComb, a four-year medical college in the state, and improved schools for African-Americans.171 Like Carter and Mullen, the McComb publisher in the immediate post-war period wanted his community and state to industrialize, modernize, and be more equitable, albeit as he saw it always within an ongoing segregationist context.172

172 By 1951, Emmerich was touting something called the “Pike County 16-point Farm Program.” Charles Nutter, “A Crusading Editor Gets Results,” Reader’s Digest (January 1951), pp. 134-137.
Meanwhile, in the state’s northeastern region, at the Tupelo Daily Journal, in the space under a masthead motto reading “Be Just and Fear Not,” publisher and executive editor George A. McLean and his editorial page editor Harry Rutherford were advocating a similar raft of improvements in editorials in 1945 and subsequent years. McLean’s and Rutherford’s writings on Tupelo’s need for a modern recreation program and for the region’s agricultural diversification away from the heavy reliance on cotton were examples of their forward thinking, at least as measured within the context of much of the rest of Mississippi. Notably, the northeastern part of the state surrounding Tupelo was, unlike most other areas of the state, not heavily populated by African-Americans and thus racial pressures on civic leaders there were comparatively benign. Sitting at the foot of the Appalachian chain, that part of Mississippi had much in common demographically and culturally with mountainous areas of states to the northeast.

In 1945, McLean’s newspaper commissioned a company from Missouri “to develop a survey of the basic economic facts of the (Tupelo) area and to set down a plan for economic development,” he recalled. The crux of what became Tupelo’s post-war agenda for economic growth was focused on agriculture and had five main components, as based on the survey and as McLean articulated it for his readers. The points were: encouragement of the dairy industry, obtaining higher productivity of cotton and corn, increasing the poultry industry by establishing facilities for freezing poultry, a forestry program, and an increase of truck farming especially regarding boysenberries and strawberries.\(^{173}\)

Meanwhile, economic issues topped the agenda for Hazel Brannon (later Hazel Brannon Smith), moderate publisher of two weeklies, the *Lexington Advertiser* and the *Durant News*, both located on the eastern edge of the Delta in Holmes County. Her editorials supported plans for an “adequate” recreation program for Lexington and for industry and efficient agriculture for the Delta. She also focused her editorial fire on the need for more even-handed and modern law enforcement. It should be noted, somewhat parenthetically, that these newspaper editors and publishers, such as Carter, Mullen, Emmerich, McLean, Rutherford and Brannon, were also at the same time civic leaders and community boosters. They practiced, in the words of Hodding Carter III, the Greenville publisher’s son, “community journalism.” Their editorials reflected their interests in developing and modernizing their home towns.

And again, consistently during these early post-war months, there was the linkage between social and economic improvements on the one hand and the higher purpose and ideals of the war, at least as they were interpreted by certain elite white moderates, on the other. On Labor Day in September, 1945, Emmerich’s *Enterprise-Journal* declared: “Now there is a peace to be won. And labor has probably as big a job in winning that peace as have the admirals and generals and statesmen at the conference table. … This is labor’s day, and if the great army of working men and

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174 It was not only newspaper writers that in the aftermath of the war were calling for Mississippi to embrace change, much of it either directly or indirectly relating to race. Leaders and groups in civil society, such as churches, labor unions, business organizations and others, also realized Mississippi needed to move forward. In August of 1945, the Delta Council, a group of leaders in the Delta forming a kind-of chamber of commerce for cotton and related enterprises, came forward with a six-point program for improving “Negro schools.” “Negro Schools,” *McComb Enterprise-Journal*, August 16, 1945.


176 Interview with Hodding Carter III, October 31, 2009.
women pitch into their new problems with as much practical sense and enthusiasm as they pitched into the war problems, and if they exhibit the same spirit of co-operation and teamwork that they have exhibited during the war, labor can look forward to a new day, brighter than any yet seen.”

The articulation and leadership of a post-war agenda was not relegated to editorialists exclusively, nor just to the moderates. Other centers of white community leadership also contributed their ideas. Business leaders in particular were active. In Jackson, the chamber of commerce proposed “a conversion plan that incorporated new industries and the returning veterans.” The city of Jackson was also planning a major public works program as soon as construction materials again became available after a long period of wartime shortages. To the northwest, the Delta Council, a group from Mississippi’s main cotton-growing area highly influential with the state legislature and comprised of leading bankers, businessmen, planters, and civic and political leaders, announced in July of 1945 its plans for tuberculosis hospitalization and education. The proposals were drafted for presentation to the legislature for its upcoming session beginning the following January. The hospitalization plan called for “500 tuberculosis beds for Negroes and 300 [for] whites, construction of county isolation hospitals, registration of tuberculars and inauguration of chest clinics.”

The Delta Council was also pushing the cause of rural hospitalization “which means better medical care for our people and increased

178 Behel.
179 “Forward Thinking By the Delta Council,” Delta Democrat-Times, July 16, 1945
facilities for practicing physicians,” the organization’s manager, Dorothy Lee Black, stated.\textsuperscript{180}

Meanwhile, the Delta group’s six-point education plan was structured with African-American residents in mind, albeit always within the confines of ongoing segregation.\textsuperscript{181} The Council directors recommended “better school buildings and equipment, increased salaries for better trained school teachers, and the establishment of a Negro junior college in the Delta for teacher training.”\textsuperscript{182} The education plan was endorsed by \textit{Jackson Daily News} editor Fred Sullens, among other influential figures.\textsuperscript{183}

Other business organizations likewise joined the public debate in its various aspects. For example, the Mississippi Economic Council (MEC), a statewide business group, attacked the highly parochial and balkanized “beat” system for building and maintaining county roads and urged the substitution of a countywide “unit” system. “The beat system is largely one of lack of coordination in a governmental area small enough for effective and democratic centralization,” one MEC memorandum stated.\textsuperscript{184} As time went on, the MEC also got active in a campaign to abolish local Justice of the Peace courts – a longtime miasma of cronyism, corruption and ineptitude, according to critics – and replace them with a

\textsuperscript{181} Delta Council member Alexander Fitz Hugh of Vicksburg wrote in 1945 that the issue of black education “is one that calls forth the statesmanship of the Delta of Mississippi and of the South.” Letter, Alexander Fitz Hugh to Walter Sillers Jr., June 6, 1945. Walter Sillers Jr. Papers.
\textsuperscript{182} “Forward Thinking By the Delta Council,” Delta Democrat-Times, July 16, 1945.
\textsuperscript{183} “Negro Schools,” McComb Enterprise-Journal, August 16, 1945.
\textsuperscript{184} Mississippi Economic Council, How the Present ‘Beat’ System Developed and How it Works, Owen Cooper Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
professional system of magistrate courts. As with other groups and other issues elsewhere in the state, the economic council’s aim in the judicial realm was modernization and professionalization.

As has been suggested, Mississippi’s attempt to define social and economic progress in the period following World War II covered topics such as education, crime, housing, industrial development and employment. These issues were featured repeatedly in the public “conversation,” the one dominated by whites, about improving the state. White moderates were conspicuous in leading this particular discussion, which encompassed modernizing the state and upgrading its professional standards, as they defined those concepts. The white moderates meanwhile were active in the various sub-aspects of each of these issues in the post-war agenda. For example, the topic of health care included debates over the lack of doctors, construction of veterans’ hospitals, hospitalization costs, tuberculosis treatment policy, the proposal to build a state medical college, prevention of syphilis and other diseases, and related challenges. And, again and again in this period, the war was a familiar framing device, particularly in informing the language as moderates struggled to articulate the importance of making certain changes. For instance, in the fall of 1945, one commentator wrote: “We must now carry on a great campaign for hospital and medical care,” in order to fight “the same grim battle against ever-

185 Memorandum, Owen Cooper to Garner Lester et. al., June 8, 1956. Owen Cooper Papers. For a further discussion of the “JP courts,” see Chapter Four.
menacing Death which we all must make or see our loved ones make sooner or later.”

Missing, almost always, from the debate in the white-owned papers and in the correspondence of leading elites was the perspective of Mississippi’s blacks, as well as that of the state’s lower-class whites. The moderates’ post-war agenda, therefore, was a notion of progress and not the notion of progress.

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The early post-war years saw a transformation on the political stage in Mississippi combining aspects of change and continuity. The political events of 1946 and 1947, taken together, arguably resulted in some improvement in the state’s image, but also, somewhat paradoxically, represented mostly stasis for the time being regarding the underlying fundamentals of the race question and specifically the ongoing maintenance of white privilege. The public evolution, such as it was, featuring the demise of U.S. Sen. Theodore G. “Theo” Bilbo’s career (and then, shortly thereafter, his death) and the emergence of John C. Stennis as a statewide figure, was an example within the realm of electoral politics of the gradual, complex, and in some ways contradictory, “opening” of Mississippi’s closed society, as Ole Miss historian James W. Silver labeled it. The political transition was also emblematic of the important and self-interested role played by the state’s white moderates, and particularly the elites among them. Though this chapter concerns the two politicians and the transition in leadership from one to the other, the moderates
are the real focus because they were at the center of historical action. They helped facilitate the change as well as guard the continuity, particularly as it concerned race.

Specifically, these elite white non-reactionary Mississippians, now more conscious in the post-war of what they saw as the reality of the state’s extra-regional exposure, were eager to put forward a public version of their homeland and of themselves that they considered more flattering and advantageous, particularly for reasons of inducing economic growth and fostering their emerging vision of modernization and professionalization. The moderates were becoming convinced that Mississippi as a whole needed to further develop more productive connections – much as they themselves had increasingly been doing in their own individual lives – in the extra-regional context. Namely, they favored for Mississippi enhanced contact and exchange with academic, political, literary, social, cultural, financial, industrial, governmental and other entities situated elsewhere, particularly in the Northeast. They were nudging the state to move beyond its historic defensiveness and fabled isolation to be more in harmony with some notable national norms. ¹ For example, in reflecting upon the South, Hodding Carter wrote some years later: “In time this section, like all parts of America, will grow in its understanding of democracy.”² Moderates were encouraging the overall trend.

A realignment along those lines would reinforce the moderates’ developing world view and serve their purposes, some of which were quite self-interested. They

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¹ The word “fabled” is used to describe the state’s isolation because there has been an ongoing debate over to what extent Mississippi indeed was isolated. Certainly since the antebellum period, the cotton industry in Mississippi was extensively interconnected with other parts of the world. Meanwhile, the Mississippi River has for centuries been a source of other kinds of globalized commerce in the state. At the same time, there have been many areas of the state comparatively bypassed by broader forces.

wanted a power shift in Mississippi away from inward-looking traditionalism – a sphere occupied and controlled by others – and toward their own more expansive notion of extra-regionalism. In terms of self-interest intertwined with altruism, this desired shift was similar to the moderates’ ongoing, and related, push for professionalization, a development which amid the upgrade would presumably leave educated and trained people such as themselves most in charge in Mississippi. They wanted both what they saw as best for Mississippi as it coincided with what was best for them.

In the 1946-1947 period, the presentation and tone of the state’s political leadership, especially as it was portrayed in the burgeoning and increasingly reform-minded national news media, were crucial in the eyes of these moderates. They wanted Mississippi viewed more approvingly, or at least less scathingly, in terms of its politics regardless of the complex and in many ways unsightly reality of which they were well aware and had themselves long been beneficiaries. They wanted Mississippi seen as (and, to an extent, to be) a more mainstream, progressive and open society as reflected in its politics. A vital and necessary step, the moderates felt, was to replace the state’s most visible officeholder with a more modern and suitable figure, as they judged it.

This chapter examines the last years of Senator Bilbo after a decades-long career of power and success at the ballot box. In his unique style, Bilbo, a flamboyant racist and political icon, seldom, in the words of C. Vann Woodward, “rose above the level of an obscene clown.”

Yet the story is far more complex than

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that. For example, Bilbo may have indulged in carnival-style antics but in many ways he represented white Mississippi as it really was in all its fears and anxieties. And Stennis may have been cast as the state’s future, but in some ways he was also its mask, pushed forward in a vain attempt to obscure the bitter political scene behind his reassuring boardroom-smooth veneer. The moderates abandoned Bilbo for reasons far beyond his tiresome boorish methods and the fact that observers were increasingly convinced that the old race-baiting tactics, which he had by then long since honed to a grotesque art form, were counterproductive in maintaining the essence of white privilege. And their choice of a figure like Stennis was more than strictly self-interest on their part arrayed behind a presentable front-man.

In any event, the chapter looks at how Bilbo’s final exit and the installment of the more temperate – by Deep South standards – John C. Stennis as his successor served both Mississippi and especially the ambitions and aims of the state’s white moderates. In doing so, the chapter also explores the key question of class. And it also raises the matter of whether a more “moderate” and “practical” segregationist like Stennis, for all his relative sophistication, refinement and soothing aura, was ironically in fact a far more effective racial traditionalist than a “pert little monster” like Bilbo, as one adversary famously labeled him.4

The relevant political events themselves were dramatic and rich in symbolism. In the state’s Democratic primary in July of 1946, “The Man” Bilbo (whose other self-chosen sobriquet, “The Stormy Petrel,” was equally boastful and, in many

quarters, the subject of a like amount of mockery and ridicule), was effectively re-elected to a third term in the U.S. Senate. Bilbo was the inflammatory longtime tribune of Mississippi’s white poor and working-class racial grievance, and perhaps the most notorious practitioner of extreme racist rhetoric of his era to reach the national political stage. But while narrowly besting a crowded field of opponents – “four peckerwoods,” as he called them – Bilbo’s 1946 campaign was marred by allegations of racial intimidation and vote fraud. With the quiet urgings of many white moderates, blacks stepped forward to present evidence against Bilbo in the ensuing election investigations. Compounding his troubles, Bilbo also, in the fall of that year, came under a separate investigation regarding alleged bribes, kickbacks and other questionable dealings with wartime contractors who had worked on his “Dream House” mansion in Poplarville.

By January 1947, the Senate had refused to re-seat Bilbo based on the mounting evidence, a predicament complicated even further by his famously acrimonious relations with fellow senators and other powerful Washington figures. “He has become so vile that the men who would sit with him in Congress can bear him no longer,” the Amsterdam News, a black New York City-based newspaper,

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5 Perhaps less flattering, Bilbo was also called the “Prince of the Peckerwoods.” Kari A. Frederickson, The Dixiecrat Revolt and the End of the Solid South, 1932-1968 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, p. 33.

6 T.B. Wilson, president of the Mississippi Progressive Voters League said that some whites “encouraged the Negro leaders to give full testimony and to be thorough in gathering their evidence. One white man sent an anonymous message … via a second Negro to the effect that he could not come out openly and encourage him but that he hoped he would do all he could to present evidence against Bilbo.” Alexander Heard summary of Wilson interview, June 21, 1947. Southern Politics Collection.

7 In 1940, for example, the Washington press corps voted Bilbo “the second most useless senator.” Delta Democrat-Times, Aug. 23, 1940. Also, Senator Robert A. Taft, the prominent Republican of Ohio who in the mid-1940s was preparing a run for the presidency, was a particularly bitter foe of Bilbo’s. Of Bilbo, Taft said: “There is no excuse for him, and he is a disgrace to the Senate.” Transcript of “Meet the Press,” broadcast of Aug. 9, 1946.
concluded. Finally, after months with his political and legal status left unresolved and with the senator in seclusion, and with Mississippi newspapers full of rumors about his future and even his true whereabouts, Bilbo died in August 1947 at a New Orleans hospital at age 69 after a lengthy battle with cancer of the throat, jaw and – his many detractors snickered at the irony – the mouth.

Bilbo’s eventual replacement in the Senate, chosen in a special election in November of 1947, was John C. Stennis, a 46-year-old, seemingly mild-mannered state circuit court judge known in white moderate circles mostly for his polite and serious mien, his untheatrical presentations – itself a sharp break from the old showman style of political ballyhoo practiced by Bilbo, and others – and his detailed focus on agricultural and economic issues and on international relations. One prominent moderate, Frank E. Smith, recalled, “Judge Stennis was a courtly, attractive man in the style of the Southern lawyer-scholar.” Notably, Stennis was seen by moderates as having better professional credentials and to be far more articulate and credible spoken than his predecessor. And importantly, in stark contrast with Bilbo, Stennis had studiously downplayed the question of race in his campaign. In fact, as with many of the elite moderates in those years, particularly

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8 Amsterdam News, November 30, 1946. As quoted in Feegler.
9 On Sept. 1, 1946, an article appeared on Page 1 of the Delta Democrat-Times headlined: “Bilbo Suffers from ‘Inflammation of the Mouth’ … And That’s No Joke, Son.” The subhead atop the article added: “Pity ‘The Man’: He Won’t Be Able to Talk.” Three days later the Democrat-Times ran as an editorial, a reprint of a column titled “Operating on Theodore” from the Jackson Daily News which read, in part: “‘The Man’ has been afflicted with a fiery tongue and inflammatory mouth since the very beginning of his political career, most prominent symptoms being chronic running off at the face. While surgeons have Theodore under control they ought to do some probing about with their instruments and see if they can cut out his general cussedness.”
10 Frank E. Smith, p. 69.
those in politics, Stennis, to the extent he realistically could, practiced silence on the race issue. And given the comparison in that respect with the virulent racists of the Bilbo stripe, and given people’s hyper-vigilance on the slightest gradation regarding the topic of race, Mississippians had little trouble interpreting the coded meaning of that conspicuous lack of racist commentary – Stennis’s fealty to racial traditionalism might be less-than reliable.

In the 1947 campaign, Stennis also benefitted from a collective post-Bilbo hangover among the electorate, so to speak. Many voters desired to return to some sense of normalcy and rationality in public affairs after the senator’s death, or at least to comparative quiet. To the white moderates, the two political figures, a generation apart in age, looked to be markedly different in both substance and style, and the moderates welcomed and encouraged the emergence of the younger more temperate man. This chapter, in part, examines the veracity and the worldview behind that impression amid clear evidence that Stennis, too, was an arch segregationist and racist, though certainly in a more genteel, cordial and soft-spoken package. Stennis, for example, occasionally made strategic accommodation with the forces of civil rights, but always with the long-term aim of preserving white racial privilege.

The two-year pivot from Bilbo to Stennis was abetted by the white Mississippi moderates, and especially by elites, in the form of newspaper editorials, radio broadcasts, campaign circulars, letters, fundraising, political advice, legal challenges and other venues. In the rather self-serving words of Pascagoula (Miss.) Chronicle-Star editor Easton King, writing in 1945, moderates, such as himself, were “leading … the South to a new day of progress and straight-thinking, following the long dry
season of demagogues.” Their position—criticizing “demagogues” like Bilbo and then promoting Stennis (as openly as smart political calculation allowed)—was underpinned by two basic and interrelated assumptions the moderates shared. Taken together, they are in line with the overall thesis of this dissertation.

First, as was discussed in a different context in the last chapter, the white Mississippi moderates believed—and it was in their own economic interest to thus advocate—that the ideals and larger meaning of World War II needed to be expressed in a post-war state agenda, articulated and led by themselves, of modernization and professionalization. As business owners, publishers, academics, ministers, politicians, and leading figures in other fields, with a widening range of experience and contacts, they perceived the state’s need to shed the worst of its old suspicions and stereotypes—especially the ones played out so relentlessly in electoral politics—and move forward. Or at least they were aware of the value of appearing to do so.

And second, the moderates increasingly saw themselves and Mississippi as part of extra-regional networks, the successful engagement with which they considered essential to the state’s future, as well as their own. For example, the hostility and badgering aimed at the national press, on the part of Bilbo and other hard-line figures, and the media’s apparent attitude of contempt delivered in return, often broadened or misdirected to target the state itself, was harmful, perpetuated the unfortunate—from the moderates’ standpoint—“redneck” and “peckerwood”

13 Many moderates and black leaders strongly backed Stennis in the 1947 campaign but kept their support muted for fear that open advocacy would backfire, in allowing the judge’s opponents to tar him as a tool of the liberals and their fellow-travelers.
stereotype of Mississippians, and had to end, they believed.14 Simply put, Bilbo and the politics he practiced were viewed as embarrassing and outmoded impediments to the fruition of the new post-war realities, as the moderates saw them, and Stennis was selected as a hopeful vehicle for pursuing a change – or perhaps mostly a positioning – they very much favored.

Stoking the old fears

The 1946 and 1947 senatorial campaigns demonstrated the important and ultimately self-interested role of the moderates in challenging the inward-looking, defensive stance personified by Bilbo and in supporting the more extra-regional and even international vision the moderates perceived in Stennis.

In 1946, in what was to be his final run for office, Bilbo shrewdly managed to avoid an open discussion of what impartial observers, overlooking race for the moment, might have cited as among the most pressing public issues of the early post-war period of likely concern to a U.S. senator and the electorate. All of such items would be extra-regional in nature. Those issues could well have included: the country’s (and the industrial world’s) conversion to a peacetime economy, the reconstruction of Europe and Japan, the nationwide rail strike then taking place,

14 The moderates’ concern about Mississippi’s image and the harmful effect that demagogues, harsh racism and other offensive conduct was having in the extra-regional context persisted well after the events of 1946-1947. For example, in late 1955, Arvel C. Smith, a Presbyterian minister from Louisville, Miss., wrote: I am a life-long Southerner, a lover of Mississippi, and I think it is to be sadly regretted that there are influences in our state … that are all but making us look ridiculous in the eyes of the nation.” Letter, Arvel C. Smith to J.P. Coleman, December 15, 1955. J.P. Coleman Papers.
widespread shortages of consumer goods, and the alarmingly deteriorating state of U.S. relations with the Soviet Union, among other matters.

Instead of seriously addressing these or other weighty concerns, the veteran Mississippi campaigner chose mainly to once more stoke old paranoia and bitterness and to practice his particular specialty, the politics of personality. This strategy was vividly familiar to generations of white Southerners dating back at least to Reconstruction and the Populist era, and was linked to the deeply rooted nativist strain in American history, namely the sense of ambient danger and malice projected onto a seemingly hostile outside world.\(^{15}\) “Whether or not you believe it,” Hodding Carter wrote in 1945, white Mississippians “preserve a white-hot resentment for both the real and imagined ills of a reconstruction [sic] which ended more than 60 years ago.”\(^{16}\) Bilbo’s political cunning was his ability to successfully channel and exploit inchoate anxiety among poor whites by giving those Mississippians visible, if largely manufactured, scapegoats.

It was a parochial framework Bilbo understood, from decades of experience in politics, would especially have visceral resonance with many poor, rural white voters who not only had spent a lifetime confronting the state’s harsh social and economic realities, outlined in the previous chapter, but as a consequence, and as they were led to believe by waves of unscrupulous office-seekers, felt themselves long victimized by certain large and often amorphous forces, real and imagined intermixed.

Historically, paranoia and fear have intensified with economic bewilderment, a

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\(^{16}\) “A Mississippi Editor Explores the Bilbo Mystery,” *PM*, August 6, 1945.
generalized condition in Mississippi in the mid-1940s accentuated specifically at that moment by the dislocation caused by the needed conversion to a peacetime economy. Of course, it should be emphasized that the poll tax, one of several methods used to suppress the black vote in the late 1940s and 1950s, also at the same time had the effect of severely limiting the poor-white vote as well. That meant for example that in Washington County, in the center of the Delta, which had by the mid-1950s a population of about 70,000 people, a high voter turnout in a well-publicized tightly contested election would be around 6700, or less than ten percent of the total residents.17 “One person is the boss so to speak of what sort of government ten should have,” wrote Hodding Carter, who was opposed to the poll tax, in 1955.18

Elite control and white solidarity worked in tandem as poorer whites in effect, in their effective complacency or despair, were willing to sacrifice full access to democracy in exchange for assured maintenance on the part of the dominating whites of the racial status quo, something the lower-class whites were repeatedly told was crucial. Poor whites had to be continuously fed the message that even given their own desperate economic situation, the price of staying one rung above blacks on society’s ladder was worth forsaking any suggestion of fundamental change. To those who wished to remain in political power under such a skewed and unstable arrangement, it meant constantly stoking fears among white Mississippians about change, to reinforce inertia by keeping them from examining the issue rationally and realizing where their true (especially economic) interests lay. For Bilbo and others who depended politically upon the sufferance of such disenfranchised whites, the

17 In the 1950 Census, Washington County had a total population of 70,257.
challenge always was to keep them from fully asserting those true interests and reverting against their own exclusion.

To that end, in a tactic that dates at least to the turn-of-the-century attacks on Populism, Bilbo used racial fear as his main device in quieting the poor whites’ legitimate if under-expressed demands and keeping their support behind the poll tax, favoring a supposedly limited federal role in the state, and opposed to change generally. Once during his last campaign, Bilbo was warned that he was spending too much time in Washington and that he had better quickly get back to Mississippi where rival candidates challenging him for re-election were already busy on the stump. “Hell,” the senator reportedly replied, “there’s no need to hurry. All I got to do is go down there and holler ‘nigger’ once or twice and all those peckerwoods will fall in line.” That monumental cynicism of preying upon racial fear aside, the repeated success of this strategy fits a long-established pattern dating from the 19th century and carrying over to the present day of poorer whites often disregarding their own economic interests in their political behavior.

The argument for the poll tax, specifically, rested rather blatantly on fear. In the 1940s context, this would include worries about Communism, Socialism and, most importantly, the specter of a black takeover. Mississippi state Rep. Walter Sillers Jr. of Rosedale explained that “one of the prime methods of the Communist and Socialist parties to gain their objectives in this country is to remove all qualification to vote, for they can appeal more successfully to that element who take no interest in government. … Furthermore, [repeal of the poll tax] throws open the

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bars and permits all of the ignorant irresponsible Negroes in this country to participate in elections.”

By the time Bilbo stood for re-election, the ever-combustible element of race had been stirred anew by the advances African-Americans had achieved during World War II, by a related growing and ambient sense of race consciousness among Mississippi blacks, and by an unprecedented assertiveness on the part of many blacks to participate in the 1946 primary, encouraged by the Smith vs. Allwright Supreme Court ruling two years before that outlawed the all-white primary. This overall shift gave political counter-appeals in the “paranoid style,” as historian Richard Hofstadter coined the term, an added pungency and efficacy in 1945-1946. “From news items it looks as if we are in for a fight with the Negroes during this primary,” Walter Sillers Jr., by then Speaker of the House, wrote in the spring of 1946. “I was afraid of this and it is what prompted me to introduce the bills in the House repealing the primary election laws.” Given the rising tension, Bilbo in that campaign had a fresh opening to make the highly charged argument that the dreaded “outside” forces were encouraging disruption of Mississippi’s racial mores. The vast majority of the Mississippi electorate at this time was still white, of course.

Skillfully mining that habitually scarred vein of grievance and fear, and giving it a blatantly racialized cast, Bilbo’s re-election campaign in 1945-1946 featured two distinct and intertwined aspects: gut-level bonding with voters and railing against the

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21 However, racial appeals and the anti-“outsider” gambit had been staples of Mississippi politics since antebellum days. See Richard Hofstadter, The Paranoid Style in American History (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966). Hofstadter referred to “movements of suspicious discontent” recurring in American history.
all-corrupting “outsiders.” In the first instance, he selected as his tools for re-election a handful of comparatively marginal (given the many far more important national and global crises of the moment) issues to emphasize – such as: opposition to efforts to end the poll tax, opposition to a permanent Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC), and opposition to proposed federal anti-lynching legislation – in which he well knew the overwhelming majority of white voting Mississippians agreed or at least would go along with him.23 “An old man, too well versed in the evil ways of mass prejudices, has come forth with a platform which some, perhaps many among us, may find appealing,” Hodding Carter wrote, upon Bilbo’s announcement for re-election.24 Later, the editor added: “He is against the FEPC. So is every other Southerner in Washington. … The difference is that Bilbo will use the FEPC as an excuse to wage the kind of campaign on which he thrives – the shameful attacks upon minorities, both racial and religious, against whom he arrays himself as a defender of the South.”25

To accord Bilbo his due as a master political strategist and practitioner, the veteran campaigner instinctively understood the power of the racial, anti-Semitic and nativist appeal, and he knew if concocted with enough campaign frenzy and skilled misdirection – to “holler ‘nigger’” at the propitious moment – it would trump not only

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23 This is not to suggest that issues of access to voting, job discrimination, or lynching are in any way trivial, only that they were small in comparison to many of the national and international issues the U.S. Senate was considering in the early post-war years.
25 “Bilbo’s Platform,” Delta Democrat-Times, January 4, 1946. A case in point is illustrated in Alexander Heard’s summary of his 1947 interview with H.V. Howerton, the chairman of the political science department at Ole Miss. Heard’s notes read: “I asked the source of Bilbo’s strength. Dr. Howerton replied with deliberation and assurance that it is his ability to fabricate false issues which permits him to appear as champion and protector. This is also the ability to hide a real issue. The introduction of the race issue and foreign domination set the pace. Once those matters had been raised from then on everything else is obscured.” Interview dated June 17, 1947. Southern Politics Collection.
the true interests of white non-voters but also overwhelm the more reasoned or broader matters of apparent concern to the elites and others. One commentator called it “a typical Bilbo tactic: to set up a villain and then go after it, posing as the hero.”

Indeed, once Bilbo’s bond with his selected group of the electorate was reinforced by targeting the straw men of his chosen “issues,” he then swiveled to activate the second part of his strategy, namely attacking not only minorities but, practically interchangeably and inextricably, a range of “outside” enemies. In 1946 this comprised an ever-shifting menagerie of northern-based threats he would, at various times, specify as Communists, or labor unions like the CIO, or Jews, or the northern press, or the NAACP, or the U.S. Justice Department. Such groups, he claimed, were against him and his positions on the “issues” in a nefarious attempt to subvert southern (i.e., racial) tradition. Sometimes the adversaries were cross-blended in his anti-intellectual vernacular in uniquely creative combinations, such as “communistic, radical, negro-philistic forces.” When Bilbo’s adversary Hodding Carter won the Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing in the spring of 1946, the senator’s response was in keeping with the notion of projecting what Richard Hofstadter called a multifaceted “vast and sinister conspiracy.” It was also classic anti-intellectualism. Bilbo stated: “No red-blooded southerner worthy of the name would accept a Poolitzer-blitzer prize given by a bunch of nigger-loving Yankeeified communists for editorials advocating the mongrelization of the races.”

baiting jargon of the era, “red-blooded” was frequently used as a synonym or as code language for white.

The histrionics were part of a calculated pose, in part employing the charged suggestion of sexual defilement that were often a subtext in rhetoric pitting the purity of the south, and the need to defend her, against the despoiling, infiltrating, penetrating influences of the corrupt north. Extra-regionalism was thus associated through various rhetorical combinations and inferences with nothing less than sexual assault. It was “the artificial anger of the southern politician,” as Hodding Carter put it\(^\text{30}\) – namely, to seem a heroic shield protecting white Mississippi against forcible and dangerous calls for change from without – “the shining defender of southern attitudes.”\(^\text{31}\) Bilbo was not alone in employing charged rhetoric conjuring devilish outside agents supposedly trying to pillage and ruin a pure Mississippi. In 1945, House Speaker Walter Sillers Jr. wrote he was “shocked almost beyond expression at the complacent attitude the people of the South have taken towards the sinister influences driving with all the power at their command, aided and abetted by powerful political influences in the country, to trample under foot and destroy the sacred traditions of the South to the jeopardy of white supremacy – political and social.”\(^\text{32}\) With these kinds of statements from the state’s most powerful politicians, it is no surprise that Mississippi became gripped by anti-communist fears beginning in earnest only a few years later. The xenophobia and hyper-defensiveness in the


“paranoid style” directed against both the “outsider” and the supposed communist were closely related.

Of course, one irony is that, if one accepts the historiography highlighting the role of systemic or structural change regarding America and race, outside forces indeed were a threat, but most notably to Bilbo himself and his harshly white-supremacist power base. He was correct in perceiving that such forces along with indigenous groups and many other factors earlier specified eventually would help overwhelm and forever change his increasingly antiquarian and besieged concept of Mississippi.

For the time being, however, when Bilbo was criticized by reformist voices in the primary campaign, it provided him yet another handy foil for his immediate political advantage of stirring xenophobic passions. For example, in the March 11, 1946 issue of LIFE magazine, Bilbo was named the “worst” U.S. senator. The otherwise dubious honor merely allowed Bilbo to once again strike his martyr’s pose. “The more he is lampooned, the more tenderly is he taken to the bosom of his people,” Hodding Carter wrote. “He makes it plain he is persecuted by these forces. The South is persecuted likewise by these forces. He and the South are thus indivisible.”

33 In 1939, an association of Washington-based correspondents voted Bilbo the “second least useful senator.” The Delta Democrat-Times took umbrage, tongue in cheek: “We resent this,” an editorial stated after Bilbo was selected runner-up. “And we suggest Senator Bilbo rise on a point of personal privilege and demand to know why he is an also-ran.” February 21, 1939.

34 Hodding Carter, “Chip on Our Shoulder Down South,” Saturday Evening Post, November 2, 1946, p. 19. Many Mississippians, Bilbo’s supporters and foes alike, questioned the decency of running photographs of the senator with food spots on his suit. To some readers elsewhere such images might have confirmed the stereotype of the rube rural politician, but Mississippians who knew Bilbo and knew of his deteriorating health in the last year of his life interpreted the spotted suit as “resulting from his inability to eat skillfully because of the cancerous condition of his jaw,” said Clayton Rand, editor of the Mississippi Guide. As such, the pillorying of Bilbo in the national press was often bitterly
As in the past, Bilbo’s two-part strategy was a winning one in the primary contest, held in early July, 1946. “A good many, perhaps a majority, of Southerners are … angry at the intensity of non-Southern criticism of the South,” Carter stated in 1946. “And just as many Southerners are afraid of the implications of sudden change, imposed from outside.”  

A year later, reflecting on Bilbo’s victory, Carter told an interviewer he “could name at least 10 or 12 specific individuals in Greenville who had never voted for Bilbo in their lives prior to 1946, but who were deeply disturbed by the comments of the outside press on their internal affairs and because of this reaction voted for Bilbo.”  

In the voters’ mind, according to the Bilbo campaign plan, Mississippi and the outside world were to be kept apart and at odds, and in 1946, as he had many times before, Bilbo executed his strategy with great acumen and cleverness. For the moment he managed to outmaneuver the trend toward extra-regionalism that the elite white moderates came to represent in the post-war. The subtlety and high-mindedness of that trend was no match for Bilbo’s deftly employed bombast, at least in the short term.

In Bilbo’s calculatedly emotional campaign rantings, one prominent personification of all the demonic outside forces became, of all people, Walter Winchell, the radio commentator and columnist (and not incidentally, a Jew from New York), then at his peak of influence, who regularly issued invective aimed at Bilbo from his broadcast studio in Manhattan. When Bilbo did finally win the

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primary, one prominent Mississippi daily ran a classic banner headline: “Bilbo Licks Winchell Et Al.” The subhead writer likewise indulged in a flight of home-fires creativity: “Buttinsky Damyankees of North, East, Plus C.I.O. Fail to Stop Stormy Petrel.” The newspaper editor in this case had wholly accepted Bilbo’s version of the real dreaded sinister forces he was truly fighting against.

As long as the state and the outside world were seen as separate and extra-regionalism was successfully caricatured and harangued with wild misrepresentations, Bilbo’s self-selected role as interpreter for white Mississippians of the “true” nature of the external threats maintained viability and kept him in power. A problem for Bilbo developed when white Mississippians, with the moderates in the vanguard, began in larger numbers during the war and in the immediate post-war to experience extra-regional connections and influences for themselves. This trend never coalesced sufficiently to defeat Bilbo at the polls, but by his last years it was emerging and was proving an ever more challenging adversary. Through travel and other experience more and more Mississippians began to understand and perhaps appreciate for the first time the positives that could result from those broader interactions, such as the diverse (and, for Mississippi, modernizing) benefits of cultural borrowing, or the prospect of economic development using outside investment and thus bringing about a higher standard of living. The stance of suspicion and hostility, personified by Bilbo, was grudgingly giving way to an attitude of welcoming and even pursuing, to a degree, extra-regional cooperation. The “spokesman for the downtrodden whites,” as one author termed the veteran senator, was at risk of losing favor to the extent more and more whites – at least those

with access to the vote – were gradually coming to see themselves as no longer quite so downtrodden, isolated and powerless. The elite white moderates were helping drive this change and they would continue to be highly engaged in it for decades as the state was to take part in a lengthy fight over accommodating “outside” influence, such as the federal government.

The non-reactionary Mississippi whites, and especially the elites, saw the historically reflexive almost ritualized defensiveness, particularly the highly theatrical and crudely racialized form in which Bilbo framed it and personified it, as ultimately self-defeating for the state, evident by the scathing way it was being viewed elsewhere, a reaction about which the moderates were increasingly aware and alarmed. Reporters from national publications, for example, “linked Bilbo’s bombastic manner with his state’s incredible poverty,” one source notes. So the moderates in their prominent and widely visible association with the state chafed at themselves and their interests being ongoing collateral casualties of Bilbo’s attention-getting antics. In the way that it was coming across to a national audience, the old racial politics in Mississippi was a developing problem for the moderates and their allies in their effort to showcase the state more positively and push it to modernize and industrialize.

So the moderates’ objections were not primarily that Bilbo’s methods were counterproductive for the maintenance of the essence of white privilege, though they may ultimately have been, but rather that he and his ilk stood in the way of the moderates’ concept of progress. The availability of outside monies, as the moderates

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38 Frederickson, p. 71.
39 Boulard, p. 206.
were well aware, often hinged on a perception in Mississippi of racial harmony which would in turn suggest that investments were well-husbanded and secure in the long term. Bilbo’s continued presence on the political stage made a garish mockery of such pretentions. Political scientist and scholar G. Alexander Heard commented on the “indignities for which Bilbo is famous and which raised Mississippi to ridicule before the country.”

In a sense, the moderates of the post-war wanted politics itself in the Deep South to appear more civilized and mainstream and for the race issue to be effectively downplayed. “At present the most bigoted views are presented as the official views of Mississippi,” lamented moderate McComb publisher J. Oliver Emmerich a few years after Bilbo’s death. “Mississippi can gain much through an official stand contrary to the usual bigoted view and including the positive things for which we stand.”

To the moderates, to the extent Mississippi continued its political isolation, including Bilbo-style racist, nativist, anti-intellectual and Populist extremism and his campaigns that raised fears of “outsiders,” it meant forgoing opportunity and progress. Productive extra-regional relations were essential to economically developing the state, in the moderates’ view. Blatant harping on race in particular posed a threat to the state’s efforts to industrialize by encouraging the building of “branch plants” of out-of-state firms. The actual ongoing troublesome reality of race relations in the state thus mattered to the white moderates in this regard mostly indirectly. Namely they were concerned to the degree it led to a problematic result –

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for them – of the impression of backwardness and rhetorical toxicity of Mississippi that Bilbo and the ostentatiously defensive pugnacious campaign he was waging were perpetuating to an ever-broadening, more sophisticated, more literate, and increasingly reform-conscious post-war national audience. This group included the extra-regional forces who were seen by the moderates as having the power and offering the hope, particularly through business investment, to at last upgrade Mississippi.

The moderates were hardly dispassionate impartial observers amid Bilbo’s anti-“outsider” and anti-intellectual rants. As with Hodding Carter and his Pulitzer Prize, and as with the moderates’ commitment to industrialization by luring companies to Mississippi, they themselves were in fact increasingly part of, connected with and sympathetic to many of the broader forces and trends Bilbo so regularly savaged that were reflected more and more in the post-war national press.

For example, the elite moderates – a number of them – had been educated at universities outside Mississippi and had spent their summers during childhood in other regions as well, for example. The north, for them, was not the dreadful immoral cesspool conjured up in full invective at a Mississippi crossroads political rally. It was a region where the moderates had developing friendships and significant ties. Many of them had expanding business and social contacts in places like New York, Washington, D.C. and Chicago, for instance. Moreover, the moderates were reading publications such as *Time* and *LIFE* and were attuned to other outlets of the national media. They also had traveled to different parts of the world, particularly during the
war. In the spring of 1947, they took note of the Journey of Reconciliation, a CORE-sponsored early iteration of the Freedom Rides, in this case taking place in four states of the upper South.\(^42\)

Moreover, the moderates saw American internationalism, as expressed in such venues as the fledgling United Nations, as necessary (whereas Bilbo derisively crowned Eleanor Roosevelt, a guiding figure at the UN, “the queen of Greater Liberia”).\(^43\) Also, the moderates were coming to perceive the implications of Mississippi’s and America’s racial problem in a Cold War context, and thus understood its potential to deeply embarrass the country, particularly in a global struggle of propaganda targeting Third World countries. They saw the involvement within Mississippi of Northern-based philanthropic groups like the Ford Foundation, the Rosenwald Fund, the Jeanes Fund, the Phelps-Stokes Fund, the Field Foundation and the Guggenheim Foundation as generally positive. And they were personally participating in programs funded by those northern-based philanthropies.

Moreover, as will be discussed in detail in Chapter Five, the moderates wanted the University of Mississippi and other schools in the state to be nationally recognized for academic excellence and they encouraged a robust exchange of ideas – even potentially unpopular ideas – on campus. They were proud that Mississippi

\(^42\) The states were Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee and Kentucky.

\(^43\) Bilbo’s “Liberia” quotation comes from Curtis Wilkie, Dixie: A Personal Odyssey Through Events That Shaped the Modern South (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), p. 129. The “Greater Liberia” idea, as will be discussed later in the chapter, was Bilbo’s controversial scheme to “resettle” all African-Americans in Africa. He was pushing this idea in the United States Senate well into the 1940s.

Other white traditionalists in Mississippi also took aim at the United Nations on racial grounds. House Speaker Walter Sillers Jr., for example, wrote that “in my opinion we would not have the 17 African Negro half savage, illiterate, tribal governments as members of the United Nations, each of which has the same power as the United States in that body, which is one vote each, if it were not for the Negro vote in the United States.” Walter Sillers Jr. Papers.
journalist Hodding Carter won a Pulitzer Prize in 1946 and that Mississippi writers like William Faulkner and Eudora Welty were gaining national and worldwide renown. They had read *Black Boy*, published in 1945, an autobiographical novel written by Mississippi native Richard Wright (Bilbo’s comment on the book was: “I would hate to have a son or daughter of mine permitted to read it; it is so filthy and so dirty”), and were aware that the book was a national sensation that deeply impacted the state’s wider reputation, along with that of the entire Jim Crow South. They saw the importance for Mississippi of improved extra-regional transportation networks, cultural exchanges and financial ties. (“Give Us Not the Poverty of the ‘Southern Way of Life’ But Prosperity of ‘American Way’” pleaded one headline, from moderate George A. McLean’s *Tupelo Daily Journal*, from 1947.)

Also, the moderates were keenly aware of the mass migration now under way of African-Americans from Mississippi’s rural areas to Southern cities and then cities in the North and they were writing and thinking about the consequences locally and broadly of the exodus. And they were mindful that the state was suffering a general drain of talented young people of both races seeking jobs, schooling and other opportunities outside Mississippi that were unavailable within the state. “For decades men here in the South has [sic] seen many of the most promising young people migrating to other sections because greater opportunities exist,” wrote Phillip E.

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44 Hodding Carter of the Delta Democrat-Times won that year’s Pulitzer prize for editorial writing.
45 According to one source, Bilbo denounced *Black Boy* as “a damnable lie from beginning to end” and the “dirtiest, filthiest, lousiest, most obscene piece of writing that I have ever seen in print,” pointing out that “it comes from a Negro and you cannot expect any better from a person of this type.” James C. Cobb, *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) p. 192. The full quotation is available in the U.S. *Congressional Record*, 79th Cong., 1st Sess., 128 (June 27, 1945): 91.
Mullen in the *Oxford Eagle*, in 1945.\(^{47}\) Within the limits of the racial segregation with which they lived and which they helped maintain, the elite white moderates were committed to extra-regionalism and believed in its inevitability, in spite of the seemingly dominant political ethos reflected in the 1946 campaign and in Bilbo’s screechy rhetoric railing against the specter of outsiders and change. Whereas the moderates saw the confluence of new forces as generally positive and the way of the future, Bilbo sneeringly summed it all up as sexual debasement – i.e., “miscegenation” and “mongrelization.”

In short, the moderates of 1946-1947 had a relatively broad perspective and were growing more sensitive to extra-regional opinion and values. In his reactionary litany crafted to incite and motivate primary voters and his suggestions of anti-Mississippi and anti-South conspiracies lurking in the “outside” world, Bilbo was representing the state and its posture vis-à-vis other places in a way that was directly contrary both to the moderates’ experience and to their vision of a more widely interconnected modern future. Thus the aging senator was an anachronistic embarrassment and threat to the moderates’ plan for their state and their own futures. “With the strategy of divide-and-conquer,” Hodding Carter ruefully wrote in late 1945, “Bilbo seems destined to give Mississippi a national black eye for another four [sic] years.”\(^{48}\)

\(^{47}\) *Oxford Eagle*, August 30, 1945.
‘Demagoguery is out’

By contrast, in 1947, following Bilbo’s death, John C. Stennis, of a generation younger than Bilbo and with a more educated and cosmopolitan background, and compared by his admirers to his worldly and sophisticated contemporary J. William Fulbright of neighboring Arkansas, appeared to embrace a number of national and international forces the white elites were coming to espouse and welcome. In fact, for example, Stennis made a number of speeches in his 1947 campaign in support of the United Nations. “Judge Stennis’ statesmanlike and exceptionally informed talk on the critical issues of the world stability was not the kind of comments we have unhappily come to expect from seekers of high office,” Hodding Carter wrote after a Stennis appearance in Greenville in September, 1947. “He spoke as a citizen who realized the gravity of the national and international scene, and who considered the post of a United States Senator as transcending the petty, vicious and artificial issues which other aspirants have so often created to further their candidacies.”

Particularly in light of the Bilbo era, then just recently closed, moderates saw in the Stennis campaign an appropriate representative for a state wishing to emphasize its embrace of modernism and its extra-regional dimensions. For example, Stennis was the only candidate in the 1947 race who even partly avoided the old cry against outside criticism and interference in response to the work of the President’s Commission on Civil Rights, recently appointed by Harry Truman. Other candidates based their entire campaigns on this issue, assuming the by-now very familiar anti-

“outsider” muscularly segregationist platform.\textsuperscript{50} Wrote one moderate Stennis supporter, in a campaign circular to colleagues on the eve of the November vote: “this is Mississippi’s golden opportunity to present pridefully to the nation.”\textsuperscript{51} Other moderates agreed that Stennis ideally represented the state in the extra-regional context. When Stennis was elected, J. Oliver Emmerich at the \textit{McComb Enterprise-Journal} wrote an editorial with the trumpeting title “Demagoguery is Out.” In part the piece stated: “The people of the nation have their eyes upon Mississippi. The election of Judge John Stennis has had helpful effect upon the position of our state as viewed from these outsiders. As Mississippians, we will do our own thinking and vote accordingly. But if we have a choice of people thinking well of us or not, we prefer that our state’s name be held in good repute.”\textsuperscript{52}

Notably, in the 1947 campaign, in backing Stennis the moderates were also simultaneously rejecting one of his opponents, Congressman John E. Rankin of the First District, who was the field’s closest incarnation, in manner and political outlook, to the recently deceased Senator Bilbo. In the election, Rankin ran fifth in a six-candidate race, garnering just 13 percent of the vote, a clear suggestion of a changing political scene. Rankin “was the man most nearly like Bilbo,” writer David L. Cohn recalled, with a touch of literary hyperbole and the license of ample and wicked elitist snobbery. “He, too, was Negro-baiting, Jew-hating, demagogic, violent, emotional. But the aftermath was quite different. … Nowhere in the state could he get more than

\textsuperscript{50} Alexander Heard’s summary of interview with Hodding Carter, Nov. 4, 1947. Southern Politics Collection.
\textsuperscript{52} “Demagoguery is out,” \textit{McComb Enterprise-Journal}, November 4, 1947.
a handful of people to listen to his ravings: a cacophony heard above the frightened steer-bellowings of an oratorical slaughter house.”

The white moderates’ challenge to Bilbo and embrace of Stennis were related to the issue of race in significant ways, of course, some direct and others more subtle. The moderates’ stance showed they wanted a certain kind of change regarding racial politics such as moving beyond what they saw as the corrosive, race-baiting style of Bilbo, particularly to the degree such change might sufficiently improve Mississippi’s extra-regional relations to their advantage. But they labored to make certain that any reforms that did get accomplished under Stennis or others posed no real immediate challenge to the maintenance of white privilege. The moderates agreed on the need for some degree of change, mostly for the moment in the realm of appearances and tone, but they also wanted to keep power, which meant maintaining essential inequities.

For example, the moderates’ disapproval and disdain for Bilbo’s vocal opposition to a permanent Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) had little to do with their in fact wanting a robust labor commission to conduct its work, which entailed federal enforcement preventing job discrimination in defense plants. On the contrary; they basically agreed with Bilbo that a permanent FEPC was a bad idea. In defending their position, they fell back on legalisms, claiming the law was unworkable. “Wherever legislation is opposed by a majority of the population affected by that legislation, it cannot be carried out with the resort to force in the

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54 The FEPC ended its operations in June, 1946, when Southerners in Congress succeeded in terminating it.
beginning and without an extremely long period of education,” Hodding Carter wrote in 1950.55

Where the moderates saw themselves as separate from Bilbo, rather, was in what they considered the crassly bigoted and needlessly provocative way the senator went about expressing his position (and the openly racist rationale involving sexual fears that lay behind it – that his opposition was intended to shield white women from having to work alongside black men). The moderates cringed as he whipped up base passions on the matter, but yet they simultaneously tended to agree with his underlying view on the overall merits. To the moderates, Bilbo’s abrasive methods on the issue were seen as off-putting and counter-productive in the wider political context, and as such, for their own broader reasons, they did not wish to be associated with them, their basic agreement with Bilbo on the core issue notwithstanding.

The moderates differentiated themselves from the likes of Bilbo by ostensibly in their own minds placing the FEPC issue above questions of race, however believable that argument (or self-delusion) might or might not appear. But that was the line of reasoning with which they were high-mindedly reassuring themselves around this time. It was an echo of a larger emerging states’ rights framework that attempted to move the racial struggle away from raw invective and fear and into a discussion, seen as more rational, about Constitutional powers and prerogatives. “I am opposed to the idea of a federal compulsory FEPC law primarily because such a law would be another extension of federal government action in [a] province that has

been reserved to the states and to local action,” Hodding Carter wrote in 1953.\footnote{Letter, Hodding Carter to Don S. Levi. March 6, 1953. Hodding II and Betty Werlein Carter Papers.} Also, at least as a public rationale for their opposition to FEPC, the moderates emphasized the concept of individual freedom and the primacy of private property – i.e., protecting the right of business owners to hire whomever they pleased. Hodding Carter, for example, felt “job discrimination [was] none of the federal government’s business.”\footnote{Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff. The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation (New York: Random House, 2006), p. 39.} The moderates were therefore looking to decouple the FEPC matter from Bilbo-style racial animosity and sexual anxiety and move it into more benign and legalistic territory where, presumably, their opposition might garner for themselves broader, including extra-regional, support.

Another example of the moderates’ focus on maintaining their power, while distancing themselves in their own minds from the likes of Bilbo, is illustrative. In the 1940s, the moderates generally did not favor immediate access to voting by all eligible black Mississippians. The electorate at that time was virtually all white, so the notion of including the disenfranchised half of the state’s population represented a potential upheaval in political power, something they strenuously resisted. So again, the moderates essentially agreed with Bilbo, his unvarnished methods of presentation aside. Access to the ballot, of course, had long been restricted along lines of color (and class) through the use of poll taxes, subjective literacy tests administered by biased local white officials, “grandfather” clauses, and other devious means. The all-white primary, outlawed in 1944, had been the ultimate excluder of Southern blacks from the political process; in the post-war other more conniving (or threatening)
means of limiting access would now be needed. In 1948, for example, a moral
classification qualification for voting was added, obviously an extra loophole to be
available along with all the other devices thwarting black participation at
Mississippi’s polls. John Dittmer’s book *Local People* opens with a sequence about
returning African-American veterans, with the support of a number of activist groups
like the Mississippi Progressive Voters League, attempting to register to vote in the
1946 primary. Their effort was part of a broader agitation for voting, as was
expressed in the blacks’ own post-war agenda discussed in the previous chapter.

The white moderates were unreceptive to such entreaties or at best were
dragging their feet. “We can see no good in mass voting by Negroes in Mississippi,”
Hodding Carter wrote in 1947. Carter did “not believe in mass voting of Negroes in
Mississippi at this time,” he reiterated later that year. Some of the moderates,
such as J. Oliver Emmerich at the *McComb Enterprise-Journal*, in 1946, were even –
in stark apocalyptic language evocative of Bilbo, no less – voicing support for state
legislative plans to block, for the time being, “the danger of Negro votes in
Mississippi [which] lies in the vast hordes of illiterates in the Negro ranks of the
state.” Interestingly, in writing of “mass voting” and “vast hordes,” both Carter and

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61 “Raising the standard of voting in Mississippi,” *McComb Enterprise-Journal*, April 9, 1946. The go-
slow approach favored by Carter and Emmerich would seem to be in line with certain paternalistically
racist views of many white Mississippians. Alexander Heard’s summary of his interview with
Washington County Democratic chairman Sam V. Anderson in 1947, replete with unusual slurs, shows
how certain whites justified the foot-dragging. The notes read: “Cuffy is going to be all right. We are
going to take care of him and he is going to continue to make progress.” Mr. Anderson said that he
favors an increase in Negro participation by gradual ‘infiltration’ and not, repeat, not, by a sudden
mass registration and qualification. Mr. Anderson says that we will let them vote but that we want to
do it in our own way and we don’t want to talk about it when we do it and we don’t want to be told
how to do it – but we’ll do it. He says he doesn’t want the thing dramatized and he implied that he
Emmerich employed the scary rhetoric of superior black numbers, which harkened back to historic white fears of being racially overwhelmed and surrounded, particularly in the rural areas with disproportionately large populations of black agricultural laborers. So, in some ways the elite moderates and Bilbo both stooped to some of the same shopworn canards in their arguments.

But, some overlap notwithstanding, the moderates also did not support all efforts to prevent black voting, such as, in the extreme, Bilbo’s loaded suggestion, made in a speech to a (white) crowd the week prior to the 1946 primary vote, “that the best way to keep the Negro from voting is to see him the night before.” In the same speech, Bilbo reportedly called on “all red-blooded Anglo-Saxons” to “go to any extremes that are justified” to keep African-Americans from the polls.62 Nor were the moderates as obtuse and arrogant, not to mention paternalistic, as figures like W.H. Anderson, of Ripley, who in 1947 held the powerful position of head of the Democratic State Executive Committee in Mississippi. “Our Negroes are not interested in voting,” Anderson told an interviewer, seemingly, for his own purposes, disposing of the topic with that statement.63

Instead of backing either opposing position of the polarization of the issue, which pitted calls for immediate access to voting versus politicians threatening violent “extremes” to prevent it, the moderates saw themselves as wise, level-headed, realistic gradualists, assuming for themselves the “white man’s burden” of

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responsibility and calmly residing once again in something resembling the center. They chose what they defined as a middle way, what they considered a careful, rational view which accepted in the abstract the inevitability of eventual black voting, and held that the state meanwhile needed to prepare for when Mississippi blacks, on a timetable and under conditions wholly determined by whites themselves, would have the unfettered voting rights.

For example: “the franchise cannot be permanently withheld from this group,” Hodding Carter wrote in 1947, “and I believe that it is up to the white men of the South to put his house in order against that day.”64 Later that year, Carter said he favored extending full voting rights to African-Americans “whenever the education standard of the Negro approaches [that] of the white people.”65 By favoring delays or in setting conditions for black voting such as the raising of education levels, the white moderates were able to keep their position of power in society unchanged while separating, in their own minds, from the unseemly realities of Bilbo-style racial extremism and blunt recalcitrance that in fact, paradoxically, very much lay at the dark core of such white privilege.66

In the 1940s view of the white moderates, holding fast to such paternalistic notions as “the education standard,” a full resolution of the voting matter would ideally be deferred for the moment, but enough had to be done by the state in the near term, at least in terms of appearances, to address the increasing demands of

64 Letter, Hodding Carter to Mr. Bullis, July 3, 1947. Hodding II and Betty Werlein Carter Papers. It is noteworthy and ironic that in discussing the eventuality of African-American access to the polls, Carter speaks of white “men” preparing for it. So, as revealed in the language employed, the exclusion from power not only relates to race, it pertains to sex as well. 65 Roberts and Klibanoff, 39. 66 The argument that blacks were not properly prepared to take part in elections had been used by Mississippi whites dating back to the time of Reconstruction. Asch, 14.
Mississippi blacks and the federal government for full African-American access to voting. Some lukewarm gestures were needed to maintain stability, peace and control. Hodding Carter wrote in 1948: “It seems to me that the job ahead for the white people of the South is to help ease more and more Negroes into full citizenship as fast as possible so that the impact of a mass of citizens voting for the first time won’t upset all political calculations.” The “political calculations” Carter did not want disturbed, of course, were those that kept the whites in control. And, 78 years after the passage of the 15th amendment to the Constitution granting suffrage to black males, he was content to talk without any trace of irony about “easing” lifelong American citizens into some future state of “full citizenship” according to his own arbitrary timetable.

Political realities indeed obviously lay at the issue’s core. “The Negro is a minor figure as yet in state politics,” Carter wrote in 1953, again betraying a stupefying degree of paternalism in his wording, though here he was looking narrowly at registration figures. “There are not enough of them voting to make a great deal of difference although this will rapidly change.” And always of highest priority for the moderates was the economic development of the state and its

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67 A more extreme example of paternalistic – or, in this case, maternalistic – notions held by some white Mississippians related to African-Americans voting is discussed by Alexander Heard in a summary of his interview in 1947 with Lucy Fisher, the circuit clerk and registrar in Yazoo County. “When a Negro comes into her office applying to register (Mrs. Fisher) takes him into the vault,” Heard writes. “She then gives him a quiet and maternal talk. She says that she will register him if he insists but that she feels the time has not yet come for Negroes to register in Yazoo County. She tells them she thinks the time is coming but at present the people (white and black by implication) are not yet ready for it and it would be a mistake and only produce trouble for the Negro to register. She tells them that things move slowly and that their day will come and should come when they can register just as white people do but she doesn’t think it is here yet. She says that almost always the Negro then agrees with her and departs in peace.” Southern Politics Collection.


modernization and professionalization as they defined those concepts. They calibrated the voting issue in relation to the supposed economic impact. As J. Oliver Emmerich wrote in 1946, “If Negroes are going to vote eventually in Mississippi and we ignore a sound and sensible approach to the situation and create a Negro bloc, it will be one of the hardest possible deterrents to Mississippi’s growth.”

Emmerich’s statement represents curious reasoning, however. The whites’ suppression of the “Negro” vote and the fear of bloc voting on the part of blacks, of course, was long the key factor in stymieing the development of two political parties in the South (in favor of virtually total Democratic Party dominance), a situation in which a newly enfranchised group – the blacks – might have held decisive leverage. The stalling of universal suffrage therefore foreclosed what presumably might have been healthy two-party public debate, an unpredictable and uncontrollable aspect of “Mississippi’s growth” the elites strenuously wanted to avoid. By abetting the continued thwarting of blacks’ right to vote, the moderates in fact helped foreclose the possibility of a more relevant and robust political debate about the state’s true future needs; the moderates were unwittingly hurting their own long-term interests. “Mass” black voting in fact would not upset economic development, as moderates like Emmerich were framing the issue, so much as it would threaten the whites’ ongoing control. The moderates’ stance, in this respect, was not that dissimilar from Senator Bilbo’s. They were both primarily interested in their own power and repeatedly acted to reinforce and expand it.

In April, 1946, Emmerich’s *McComb Enterprise-Journal* again indicated its concern over the prospect of wholesale black voting in the primary: “The question

has been raised as to whether Mississippi’s white supremacy safeguard, which authorizes the circuit clerk to challenge any person presenting himself for registration to interpret any section of the constitution to the county official’s satisfaction, will be sufficient to prevent the registration of negro veterans,” the paper stated. In the same editorial, Emmerich also raised alarms about “the recent ruling in Washington by the Justice Department that any person or party refusing a qualified voter the right to take part in ‘any’ primary or election will be prosecuted.” The Smith vs. Allwright U.S. Supreme Court ruling, issued two years before, outlawed the all-white Democratic primary in the South, and this effectively encouraged efforts among blacks in Mississippi, conspicuously including veterans, to vote in the 1946 primary. Another source notes that “black activists, many of whom were veterans, orchestrated voter registration drives in an effort to unseat Senator Bilbo in 1946.” The issue of African-American voting was coming to a boil in Mississippi in the 1940s and the white moderates were squarely in the middle of it, as skewed to one side as that “middle” proved to be.

72 The Smith vs. Allwright case was only the most recent of a number of federal court rulings in the late 1930s and early 1940s giving hope to the cause of African-Americans’ rights. The Supreme Court decision in the case of Gaines in 1938; a circuit court ruling regarding Anne Arundel County, Maryland, in 1939; and the Court of Appeals decision in the Alston case in 1940 – all three cases having to do with blacks and education – would be prominent examples. The full citations of the three cases are as follows: Missouri ex rel. Gaines v. Canada, 305 U.S. 337 (1938); Mills v. Board of Education of Anne Arundel County, 30 F. Supp 245 (1939); and Alston et al. v. School Board of City of Norfolk (Virginia) et al., 112 F.2d 992 (1940).
73 Frederickson, p. 42.
A quieter form of segregation

Looking at these two examples, the FEPC and the voting franchise, it is clear the white moderates thus wanted their privileges maintained, as in being free to practice discrimination – or, as they might have phrased it, to exercise their freedom of choice – in the workplace and to completely dominate the ballot for the immediate future and then to share access to it exclusively on their terms and according to their timetable. But, primarily for reasons rooted in extra-regional concerns and influences, by 1946 the white moderates were turning away from the ugliest methods which were being and which historically had been conducted in support of that very white supremacy – unsightly realities personified by people like Bilbo. By challenging Bilbo and touting Stennis, the moderates ultimately helped shape a political environment effectively making it easier for African-Americans in later years to oppose discrimination and exclusion from the ballot. Within clearly selfish limits, they were fostering some forms of glacial progress. Their position was therefore complex and self-contradictory but ultimately, barely, progressive.

The shift from Bilbo to Stennis was, for the white Mississippi moderates, in keeping with a complex adjustment involving race. They wanted the tone and the external appearance of the state modulated, but, for now, not much of the racial substance. They signaled moderation, but for the time being kept the essence of the status quo. An underlying issue was a contest for political power in the state, between reactionary and moderate white factions. Bilbo used race unabashedly, bluntly and crudely as a divisive tactic in his campaign, and Stennis, when he ran a
year later, offered general soothing statements about “respect” and “tolerance” but otherwise basically avoided the race topic as best he could. Stennis “secured what in any other state would have been called the liberal vote by campaigning without mentioning the race issue and by pledging to ‘plow a straight furrow down to the end of my row’,” one source writes.74

By opposing Bilbo and then supporting Stennis, the white Mississippi moderates in their politics in a sense were rejecting the deliberate exacerbation of racial tensions in favor of a quieter form of “practical segregation,” what some wishfully (or cynically) called “true separate but equal,” subordinated publicly to other, primarily economic, concerns.75 They were stepping away from the long-developing doctrine, honed by Bilbo and a number of other white Mississippi politicians of lesser skill who preceded him, that political power in the state had to be based on understanding and exploiting prejudice in all its irrationality and fear. The post-war Mississippi moderates, by contrast, were coming to see power more in terms of economic development, predicated on carefully tended racial truce, or at least its outward appearance, that might require some ongoing negotiation and, as necessary, marginal concession. Their opposition to Bilbo and support of Stennis, therefore, can

74 Frank E. Smith, p. 70.
75 The idea of “true separate but equal” animated much of the debate in post-war Mississippi. Moderates put forward the idea that if segregation were to remain, it nonetheless had to adhere to the principle of equality. “To make Plessy v. Ferguson a reality,” is how William F. Winter, a future governor, put it. So, say, white institutions and black institutions had to have equal funding, and the races had to be treated equally before the law. The more discerning of the moderates, of course, realized that to maintain two separate societies was untenable, particularly from a financing standpoint. So, it is possible they were putting forward a “true separate but equal” doctrine knowing it would not work, but also realizing that the only other alternative was an open and equal – non-segregated – society. But in the 1940s, the moderates were sticking to, and perhaps politically hiding behind, the unworkable notion of equality and segregation coexisting.
be viewed in terms of raw power and in the context of a struggle over which (in part, class-based) white element in Mississippi was going to control the state’s future.

In their maneuverings in 1946 and 1947, the moderates thus wanted a lid kept on racial strife so as to allow for progress as they defined it and envisioned it. Bilbo was (in most part, deliberately) fomenting black-white tensions while Stennis implicitly, in his understated posture, offered to the moderates the promise or the illusion of quelling them. “Nothing could be worse than a flareup of racial hatred,” the *Delta Democrat-Times* stated in the midst of the 1946 campaign, alluding to what it saw as Bilbo’s repugnant methods. “There is everything to lose and nothing to gain.”76

An underlying – and related – issue was one of social control and the best way, according to the moderates, to maintain it. The moderates had at least two opposing elemental forces, one on each metaphorical flank, to contend with in this regard. The hard-line racist reactionaries like Bilbo were on the one side and black activists and an increasingly attentive federal government ever more aware of blacks’ rights were on the other. Moderates in those early post-war years were becoming concerned that Bilbo had so alienated and infuriated black Mississippians, particularly young people and returning veterans, with his sharply barbed racialized appeals to certain whites, even to the point of implicitly encouraging racial violence as with his “night before” and “any extremes that are justified” comments. The moderates fretted that the resulting invigorated political activism on the part of African-Americans – such as widespread attempts to register to vote and calls to the U.S. Justice Department to investigate voter intimidation and other brutal expressions

of Jim Crow – as well as, in turn, Bilbo’s redoubled and even more incendiary efforts in an attempt to meet this new force, would cause a threat to long-term social stability and thus to the moderates’ control.

Ultimately, this upheaval, largely unnecessary and avoidable in the moderates’ view, was a potential challenge to their own white privilege. Bilbo-style tactics seemed to be stirring a backlash and garnering the attention of powerful and, from the moderates’ point of view, potentially overbearing, uncontrollable and disruptive forces, like the federal Justice Department, which for instance announced prior to the 1946 primary that it would move to enforce the blacks’ right to vote.

In a twist on the extra-regional theme, the moderates mostly wanted the state to be left alone to deal itself with the issue of race, and at the same time they wanted determination of the outcome wrested away from the erratic, needlessly antagonistic and therefore undependable Bilbo types. The ultimate result the moderates sought therefore was power and control for themselves, arrayed behind an upright, bland and reassuring figure like Stennis, over Mississippi’s racial future. “Mississippi has her full share of critical problems, such as the race problem,” noted the lead editorial in the Tupelo Daily Journal the week before the 1947 vote, which Stennis won. “Wouldn’t it be really worthwhile to have a man in the Senate that we knew would deal fairly and firmly with this and other critical problems without fanning the flames of prejudice and hate and endangering the very existence of our society?”

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Tupelo paper was edited and published by a noted moderate and civic leader, George A. McLean.

A more subtle and less confrontational but ultimately more effective segregation, with the promise of gradual change, including as necessary some pretense of negotiation and a modicum of mutual bi-racial respect, presented in a more publicly presentable package, was clearly needed, in the eyes of future-minded white moderates. The moderates “favored good and peaceful relations between the races,” Joseph Crespino writes, “yet they also realized the enormous social transformation that segregation entailed and wanted desperately for that transformation to happen in an ordered, rational and thus gradual way.” John C. Stennis, with his soothing tactful approach and his implied promise that the racial situation was manageable, was more what the situation called for, in the moderates’ view.

The issue of race, never far from all historical matters regarding Mississippi, was, for the white moderates, in this post-war phase very much bound up with questions of the state’s image and how that might affect economic development, modernization and related concerns. “There are few things more destructive than prejudices,” wrote J. Oliver Emmerich, of the McComb Enterprise-Journal, in the spring of 1946. “Prejudices block the avenues of progress.” They “dwarf the possibilities of men.” In pushing the political transformation of 1945-1947, the moderates in many cases did not directly take a stand for racial tolerance per se, but they did see the switch from Bilbo to Stennis as changing the political environment

80 Crespino, 35.
81 “‘We Must Learn to Live Again’,” McComb Enterprise-Journal, May 1, 1946.
pertaining to race in a way they considered positive and more humane, within the near-term framework of maintaining white privilege. Also, part of what Stennis did by mostly sidestepping the race issue in his campaign, for example, was offer the white moderates the semblance or perhaps the illusion of a brief reprieve from racial pressures in the public sphere. Silence on the race issue in this context signaled some openness to progress on race, or at least an unwillingness to go to every extreme to defend segregation. But it also allowed rhetorical space – welcome, in the moderates’ minds – to hopefully focus on other topics.

In a welcome development for the white moderates and their aim of subduing the race issue, if only temporarily, African-American leaders in Mississippi also expressed relief and approval at Stennis’ election. The *Jackson Advocate*, the leading black newspaper in the state, wrote in 1947 that Stennis was “a big improvement over Bilbo or Rankin to represent Mississippi in the United States Senate. ... While Rankin capitalized upon the economic and mental condition of the poor white folks of Mississippi, Stennis respected their humanity and citizenship, and instead of talking to them about the race issue, devoted his campaign to discussing before them things near to their hearts and stomach [such as] housing, farming, high prices, schools, roads, taxes.”82 Stennis was a departure from the past merely in the fact that he was willing to talk about relevant issues and to listen.

By way of summarizing this section of the chapter, the two-pronged thesis of this dissertation, involving both the moderates’ role in modernization and

professionalization and the extra-regional dimension, is operative in these political circumstances.

First of all, the white moderates of the mid-1940s were concerned that coarse public displays of racism (and anti-Semitism and bigotry generally), which Bilbo, Rankin and also a handful of other white Mississippi politicians practiced and personified, were not only no longer most effective in helping the moderates and other whites maintain their positions of racial privilege and control and in ushering in needed changes, but rather they were being seen, particularly by important extra-regional constituencies, as an increasingly tasteless and disreputable throwback, especially now in light of the fight against fascism during the Second World War. “How quickly have we forgotten what the war was fought for,” wrote one New York City correspondent to Hodding Carter after Bilbo’s victory in the primary. Later, Stennis shrewdly campaigned on the notion, favored by the new generation of white Mississippi moderates, that the war had changed the state and that the legacy of the global conflict required new, more enlightened policies and leadership. “The fine young boys and girls back from the war … and thousands of others,” he stated, were calling for a change. “The people seem to sense the idea that those who were leaders before the war cannot get results after the war.”

If the old demagogue political style was left unchecked, the post-war moderates and especially the elites believed, it would continue to sully and constrict opportunities for their state and thus inhibit their own fledgling – and central – vision of a more professional and modern society in the post-war, with themselves

84 Weeks, p. 34.
remaining in the controlling position, of course. Attaining their ideal of a new Mississippi meant outside investment and interest, which in turn depended, at least in part, on developing positive public relations based on effective, modern political leadership that made sense to a broad audience.

And secondly, regarding the thesis of the dissertation, a key consideration for the moderates in taking this position, again, was extra-regionalism, particularly the state’s reputation as reflected in the post-war media and the wider liberal academic and political community. More and more, Bilbo and his style of open unapologetic racism practiced to such successful short-term effect upon the electorate in Mississippi came to be seen as undermining the broader image the state’s moderates wished to project. The steady drumbeat of stories throughout 1945 and 1946 in LIFE, LOOK, the Saturday Evening Post, Time, The New York Times, PM, and other important national and international publications, generally depicting Bilbo as a tacky racist buffoon in Deep South, red-galluses stereotype and Mississippi as hopelessly mossback and desperate for electing him repeatedly to high office, caused a significant defensive response locally against “outside criticism” that, in bolstering his crafted campaign strategy, redounded to Bilbo’s short-term political benefit.85 The attacks allowed him to cast himself as the protector of white Southern attitudes and traditions.86

85 To give one small example, in 1945, PM published a series of articles by Hodding Carter intended, according to the headlines, to explore “the Bilbo Mystery,” suggesting that his continued popularity and political longevity were, to a national readership, truly inexplicable.
86 Regarding Bilbo, Hodding Carter writes: “The more he is lampooned the more tenderly is he taken to the bosom of his people. He makes it plain he is persecuted by these [outside] forces. The South is persecuted likewise by these forces. He and the South are thus indivisible.” “Chip on our Shoulder Down South,” Saturday Evening Post, November 2, 1946.
But the longer-term reaction among the state’s elite and their allies was quite different and it combined elements of race, class and generational considerations. Through their travels and other extra-regional contacts and associations, leaders among the Mississippi white moderates were coming to consider Bilbo and his boldly racist ilk as a profound embarrassment (in his reflection upon them) whose continuing presence as a symbol of the state on the national level threatened to thwart their post-war aspirations. They did not care for the state being the recipient of “outside” criticism, but rationally they recognized the problem Bilbo represented in the broader context. By the 1940s, whites in Mississippi and elsewhere in the South “increasingly spoke what one historian has called ‘a new language of Americanism,’ a rhetoric that allowed them to begin to transcend both the region and history,” Kari A. Frederickson writes. “Many returning white veterans, desiring not to preserve but to oust the failed and corrupt regimes of the past, likewise conceived of politics and the state in ways that conflicted with the notions of Black Belt conservatives.”

After Bilbo’s death, Stennis, with his personal conservatism and reserve, his courtly and dignified image, his sterling elite extra-regional credentials (such as being elected to Phi Beta Kappa at the University of Virginia law school, having a son at Princeton, and Stennis’s close lifelong friendship with Turner Catledge, the managing editor of the New York Times), his relative youth and his dry emphasis on economic issues, was seen by moderates and others as a badly needed future-oriented corrective. For example, Mississippi governor Fielding L. Wright viewed Stennis as the leading candidate because “people would look for a clean middle-age man

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87 Frederickson, p. 104.
88 Catledge and Stennis were friends dating to their years together as students at Mississippi A&M College, now Mississippi State University.
whom they thought could restore prestige to the state.” 89 So Stennis was valuable to the moderates both in an internal and an external sense, as far as Mississippi was concerned. Specifically, aside from his seeming to offer a respite from the tense racial situation that Bilbo’s frontal methods were seen as having complicated, Stennis appeared, in the moderates’ view, to be a reassuring symbol to outsiders of a more progressive state, at least marginally.

The moderates helped encourage and engineer this political transition, to the extent it was made in the early post-war period in Mississippi – from Bilbo to Stennis, and, more broadly, from a public dialogue of raw forms of racism to one of more centrist economic-based priorities wherein the issue of race, at least in the attempt, was intentionally moved to the margins. White moderate Mississippi leaders in politics, journalism, religion, business and other fields saw that evolution in emphasis as welcome partly because in their minds it served to obscure from public view and therefore palliate from their perspective, for the moment, the issue of race. This development appealed to their interests, which increasingly were predicated on the promise of racial harmony, at least according to their (perhaps unrealistic) ideal vision, and onto – in their view – separate questions of how to build up post-war Mississippi, primarily in economic terms. For their own reasons, they wanted the race issue safely defused and contained, and certainly not cynically agitated for short-term political gain.

89 John C. Stennis Collection, Congressional and Political Research Center, Mississippi State University Libraries, Pre-Senate Series, January 9, 1947, CF 31.
“Bigotry, anger and fear”

The moderates’ calculations regarding Bilbo and Stennis, based on economic self-interest and power, were related to issues of class, region (within Mississippi) and ideology, and were compounded by a legacy of growing antipathy and resentment on their part as they noted Bilbo’s maddening history of victory at the polls.90 A key matter for consideration in this chapter is what exactly had changed in the early post-war years that differed from earlier periods that caused white moderates in Mississippi to be more eager for Bilbo to be defeated in 1946 and then replaced in 1947 by what they considered a more temperate alternative whereas they had been more resigned to his presence – or at least less effective in their opposition – in earlier election cycles. Beyond elements of profound generational change in the state’s leadership, discussed earlier, which by the mid-1940s posed an emerging complication for the aging Bilbo, there were other essential differences taking shape in the state’s political environment, particularly regarding the moderates, in the period moving from the pre-war through the war years to the post-war.

And by around the mid-1940s there were signs the white Mississippi moderates themselves had begun to change. They had gained extra-regional experience and contacts, much of it related to their service related to the war, and they had developed a new perspective and vision for their state of modernization and professionalization to which Bilbo was, by 1946-1947, coming to be considered a

90 In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Mississippi was riven by a geographical divide in its politics, what V.O. Key has called the “Hills vs. the Delta” and what others have more bluntly called the “rednecks vs. the planters.” See V.O. Key, Southern Politics in State and Nation, previously cited.
highly visible antithesis and for which Stennis was a suitable future representative. A related conclusion is that Stennis was seen by the white moderates as a more skilled, subtle and therefore effective protector of components of what they saw as certain aspects of needed racial stasis, compared with Bilbo’s openly hostile methods which by the early post-war years were showing signs of backfiring and making things less controllable from their perspective. The veteran senator’s pugnacious and confrontational brand of white supremacy had proved increasingly provocative, controversial and therefore, in lieu of the broader post-war context, problematic. Also, there is evidence Bilbo himself had changed by 1946. Once a staunch New Dealer and economic populist somewhat in the Huey Long mold, Bilbo in the late 1930s and 1940s had increasingly and cynically narrowed his focus almost exclusively to the race issue.⁹¹

In the altered political climate following World War II, the moderates, and in particular the elite group that is the focus of this dissertation, had become more and more uneasy about the coarse racist antics and the tiresome cult of personality of “The Man” Bilbo, primarily because he no longer served or represented their evolving, broadening interests. C. Vann Woodward’s “obscene clown” reference notwithstanding, most observers would grant that Bilbo had exceptionally keen insight into the prejudices of his constituents and possessed the ferocious political

⁹¹ Alexander Heard’s summary of his 1947 interview with Tupelo publisher George A. McLean in part read as follows: “McLean says that between 1940 and 1946 Bilbo changed his line and started berating the Negro, and his essential core of liberalism, his concern for the common man, became so covered with a crust of bigotry and demagoguery that he opposed him in 1946. … (McLean) lamented that the political expression of liberalism in the state, at least a concern for the poor fellow, was miscarried and corroded with the other stuff.” Heard’s interview with McLean was conducted July 10, 1947. Southern Politics Collection.
survival instincts to exploit them. His ambition had hardened to the point where he had the stomach and the lack of scruples to play unabashedly on the base feelings of the electorate.

To the Mississippi moderates of the mid-1940s, however, Bilbo increasingly was seen as an anachronism, or perhaps as a part of themselves – crudely expedient and bluntly racist – dating to an earlier era that, given the changed landscape of the post-war which they themselves perceived and had experienced, they now no longer wished to advertise or had convinced themselves they had surmounted and moved past. Bilbo was just so nakedly unapologetic about who he was and what he stood for, including the “approval of white supremacy,” that he was making image-conscious moderates, who now had a more complex agenda and a conflicted position, especially on the race issue, increasingly uncomfortable. The fact that Bilbo was a sitting U.S. senator, Hodding Carter wrote in 1946, is “a horrifying if important reminder of what the combined forces of bigotry, anger and fear can produce in a democracy.”

Bilbo also was a living emblem of the extremes of Mississippi’s white rural poverty and depravation. He understood that way of life instinctively and for decades he represented it in all its fears and bitterness, exaggerated or otherwise. “White leaders often preyed upon white fears and gained political advantage from cultivating

a sense of white power in peril,” Chris Myers Asch writes.95 In his long career, Theodore G. Bilbo was the quintessential example of that breed, what Hodding Carter called “the South’s braying demagogues.”96 Richard Hofstadter reminds us that “sociological studies have shown there is a close relation between social mobility and ethnic prejudice.”97 And, as was explained in the previous chapter, Mississippi was mired in extreme poverty and lack of opportunity. This was true of its rural areas in particular.

Sociologists and students of group psychology have long concluded that those seeing themselves as stuck in an inferior position characteristically become anxious and frustrated and seek handy targets for their misery. The white moderates who comprise the focus of this dissertation, a wealthier and more privileged group, desperately wanted to get away from the widely held notion of a deeply impoverished Mississippi, particularly as defined, personified and exploited by the likes of Bilbo. They saw that portrait as dated and limiting, or at least they thought it was high time to be seen as transcending it, the economic and social realities in the state notwithstanding. They wanted the issues of the state’s economic deprivation addressed and not left to fester indefinitely. Their life experience, based far apart from the worst of the state’s condition, was notably different than the old hardscrabble stereotype and they wanted Mississippi to move on. The moderates’ post-war agenda, outlined in the previous chapter, specifically took aim at poverty-based issues, which led to priorities such as new hospitals, new roads, economic development, better schools and colleges, and the like. As such, the moderates

95 Asch, 22.
97 Hofstadter, The Paranoid Style in American Politics, p. 60.
wanted political leadership that, in their view, reflected their aspirations along these lines, and not representatives who seemed content to practice the continued exploitation of the existing problems.

Based on image alone, Theodore Gilmore Bilbo came across to many in the 1940s as a character—or perhaps a caricature—from some tinctured yesteryear. “The Man” stood a mere five-foot-two, with a bald pate, scarlet suspenders, a showy diamond stickpin and ubiquitous cigar. In his letters, the “Theo G. Bilbo” signature rivaled John Hancock’s in its exaggerated size and decorative ostentation, and the name itself—Bilbo—seemed drawn from a Faulkner backwoods miasma. To his admirers, the gnome-like Bilbo was a “slick little bastard.” His vaunted speaking tours, for years a popular attraction in rural Mississippi, featured hours-long public harangues freely employing words like “nigger” and “kike,” not to mention “damn” and “hell.” Playing to the rough (and quite often inebriated) elements in the crowd, typically comprised of poor farmers, Bilbo favored bawdy bragging references from the political platform about his virility and manhood, often delivered while clutching his crotch. Bilbo’s rallies became “profane camp meetings,” one author writes. These public spectacles, however much they amused and titillated Mississippi’s rural

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98 Holmes County editor Hazel Brannon wrote, “After hearing Bilbo’s speech at Durant we’d say the man just naturally uses damn and hell so often in his public and private speech that it was just a slip of the tongue … a slip that he himself didn’t notice until it was reported in the press.” “Through Hazel Eyes,” Lexington Advertiser, May 16, 1946.

99 Kari A. Frederickson writes that one factor contributing to the popularity of certain Southern demagogues of the 1940s, including Bilbo, Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, and others, was a reputation for philandering and sexual power. She writes: “as someone who combined a political outsider’s fighting rhetoric with personal sexual potency, Thurmond appealed to conservative white men suffering from a self-diagnosed case of political impotency.” Frederickson, p. 102.

groundlings, convinced other, more discerning observers he was a “dirty-minded little office-seeker,” in Hodding Carter’s words. 101

Many of Bilbo’s oratorical flourishes were memorable if appalling in their descriptive preposterousness, and deliberately so. Early in his career, for example, he called one adversary “a cross between a mongrel and a cur, conceived in a nigger graveyard at midnight, suckled by a sow, and educated by a fool.” 102 The target of these remarks took offense, tracked Bilbo down while he was riding on a train and beat him with the butt of a pistol, causing the trademark “battle scar” on his scalp that “The Man” carried with pride ever after.

However colorful and legendary, as a master of the old courthouse-square showmanship, the aging senator encountered an element of ambient if tepid reformism by 1945-1946 that tended to view him and his rabid fulminations with bafflement and disgust. 103 He was especially considered out of step with the veterans and the post-war agenda they were beginning to help implement in the state. There “are changes at work in Mississippi and the rest of the South,” Hodding Carter wrote in the summer of 1945. “Bilbo knows this. He knows also that the great political imponderable is the returning Southern soldier.” 104 Editor Phillip E. Mullen at the Oxford (Miss.) Eagle made a similar point about the impact on Mississippi politics of the returning servicemen. Mullen directed his editorial to the state’s “thinking people,” thus implicitly rejecting Bilbo-style emotional appeals: “Perhaps this is

102 Wilkie, p. 58.
103 An often-told joke circulating in Mississippi in those early post-war years went as follows: “I am not particularly opposed to the federal anti-lynch law. But I hope they do wait until we can get rid of Bilbo.” Letter, Albert W. Haffner to Mr. and Mrs. J. Oliver Emmerich, August 16, 1973. John Oliver Emmerich Sr. Papers, Special Collections Department, Mitchell Memorial Library, Mississippi State University.
104 Hodding Carter, “State’s Social Statistics Help to Explain Bilbo,” PM, August 8, 1945.
strong talk in an off-campaign year,” he wrote (in 1945), “but the agitation against Bilbo is not arising mainly from his old political foes, but by men who have taken no great amount of interest in politics in the past and by an ever-increasing number of veterans, young men who think there should be an end to racial and religious hate, old prejudices and narrow outlook that keep fomenting ill will and hatred among people banded together as citizens of these United States.”

Frank E. Smith, a future congressman from the Delta, adds that war-related experience helped some Mississippians in the service get an added perspective on Bilbo and their native state’s racial issue, particularly in seeing how others considered them. “The racial invective poured forth by Bilbo in the early forties became the state’s best known trade-mark to Mississippians in service over the world,” Smith writes. “But even the Mississippi servicemen who felt constrained to defend Bilbo against some of this reaction to his extremism were having second thoughts about the patterns back home.”

For decades, Mississippi’s elite white moderates had distrusted and even in some cases despised Bilbo along with the poor rural white voting bloc he epitomized which, even with poll taxes and other restrictions on voting hampering participation by the lower classes, had long been a power in state politics. Enmity among the privileged had grown and hardened proportionately over the years as “The Man” successfully climbed the political ladder from state senator to lieutenant governor to

106 Frank E. Smith, p. 95.
two non-consecutive terms as governor and, finally, in 1935, to the U.S. Senate. With “sickening impact,” Hodding Carter wrote, Bilbo “has succeeded in attaining the positions he sought.”

So the moderates’ opposition to him in 1946, partly for reasons of power and expediency, was grounded in years of class-based disapproval of, even abhorrence at, his methods, as well as a dollop of envy and frustration at his undeniable success at the polls. For instance, in his memoir, William Alexander Percy, the aristocratic Delta planter and poet of the pre-World War II era, described Bilbo, without deigning to call him by name, as “glib and shameless, with that sort of cunning common to criminals which passes for intelligence.” Bilbo’s followers, Percy added, “were the sort of people that lynch Negroes, that mistake hoodlumism for wit, …that attend revivals and fight and fornicate in the bushes afterwards. They were undiluted Anglo-Saxons. They were the sovereign voter.” For all of Percy’s evident revulsion, there was appended that grudging backhanded acknowledgement of Bilbo’s keen political acumen.

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107 Bilbo was adept not only at speechmaking, but at retail politics as well. William Carraway, mayor of Leland, told interviewer Alexander Heard the story of sitting in a barber chair in Jackson right after Bilbo had had his haircut. Heard’s notes summarize the scene. “The barber was all a flutter and excited and asked Mr. Carraway if he knew who that was. Mr. Carraway said yes, he knew it was Senator Bilbo. The barber said that Bilbo had invited him to visit him in Washington. (Mr. Carraway said that the barber had probably never been out of Mississippi and the chances were 1000 to 1 that he would never leave the state). You know, he said he had a cute “widder woman” he would turn over to me if I would come to see him in Washington. The barber was greatly excited about this prospect. Mr. Carraway said that Bilbo probably went all over the state with that story and that if all the people he invited to come to Washington really went, the ‘widder woman’ would really be a busy little gal.”


109 Percy, pp. 148-149.

110 In Percy’s famous phrase, Bilbo was “a slick little bastard,” an opinion which, again, acknowledges Bilbo’s highly effective political skills if not his character.
By the time Bilbo geared up for re-election to a third term in late 1945 and early 1946, the core of that long-simmering hostility had only intensified and the leading moderates in the state were ever more vocal in opposition to his role as the face of Mississippi politics. A handful of Magnolia State newspaper editors, including Hodding Carter and Philip E. Mullen, for example, were among the most fervent post-war critics seeking conclusive antidotes to the “Bilbonic Plague” and to “Bilbousness.” When Bilbo stepped forward once again to face the voters, Carter’s editorial in the *Delta Democrat-Times* was typically derisive and scathing: “For about forty years now, Theodore G. Bilbo has announced for public office with sickening regularity,” he wrote. And when Bilbo eventually won the 1946 primary, Carter’s unabated nausea and disdain were palpable: “It is impossible to believe that any other senatorial election in our history ever dealt democracy a lower blow or ever sent a less worthy man to Washington to represent a supposedly intelligent and free people.”

The moderates’ opposition to Bilbo, therefore, which was driven in large part by practical extra-regional considerations and concerns about the impact on economic development of the symbolism of his political leadership, was also grounded in ideology and class. In not moving more forcefully against Bilbo in previous elections, enough of the moderates in their ineffectiveness or inertia had tacitly gone along with his continued reign or were less aware and thus less bothered than they would become in the post-war of how much a blot he really was on their aspirations.

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for the state and how that might impact them personally. In the retrenchment of the 1920s, when he served as governor, and then the Depression period of the 1930s, Bilbo’s racist and nativist appeals were often more subtle or downplayed, had had at least some resonance with enough of the group which would become post-war moderates, or were offset in their view by a somewhat encouraging strain of pro-New Deal economic populism and progressivism in his gubernatorial platform and Senate voting record. By 1945-1946, however, the moderates had evolved experientially and historical circumstances had sufficiently shifted, particularly given the war, to the point where a critical mass of moderate opinion had formed against Bilbo, his style and the increasingly undiluted racist politics he espoused.

**Elitist scorn**

Born in 1877 in Poplarville in southern Mississippi, Theodore G. Bilbo’s roots in politics lay primarily in the Populist era and Mississippi’s so-called “revolt of the rednecks” of the late 19th and early 20th centuries in which the poorer Hill section, his stronghold, supplanted the wealthier Bourbons from the Delta area as the preeminent force in state politics. The generational factor is notable here. As was stated earlier, the elite white moderates under discussion in this dissertation had an average

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114 In 1931, toward the end of his second term as governor, Bilbo’s populist platform was very much modeled on that of Huey Long, governor of adjacent Louisiana. According to Chris Myers Asch, the platform included plans to build paved roads, set up a public printing plant for schoolbooks, and make the public university system more accessible to poor students. Asch, page 41.
115 See Albert D. Kirwan, Revolt of the Rednecks: Mississippi Politics, 1876-1925 (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1951).
birth year of about 1910, and therefore they were typically 33 years younger than Bilbo. The cohort of veterans of World War II, specifically, was even more chronologically removed, with a few, born in the 1920s, young enough to be Bilbo’s grandchildren. Their outlook was inevitably different simply given that generational separation alone. And for a group ever more concerned in the post-war with modernity, Bilbo with his tiresome “bloody-shirt” harangues about the Civil War and the evils of Reconstruction, hardly seemed the ideal contemporary leader attuned with their own ever-broadening and forward-thinking – at least in their own minds – outlook.

Regarding class and regional issues and the “rednecks’ revolt” of the earlier period, the Hill country political ascendance meant the dreaded “bottom rail on top,” in William Alexander Percy’s rueful phrase.116 The class-based contempt evident with Percy could be seen in other venues by other observers as well. In 1947, Hodding Carter wrote a novel titled Flood Crest in which he seemed to amply belittle Bilbo – or his fictional counterpart – and “The Man’s” unrefined country-dwelling Mississippi supporters. For instance, the book has the Bilbo character, named Cleve Pikestaff, introduced to the reader as his hand is vigorously itching and probing his backside while gazing into a bedroom mirror. Pikestaff “scratched himself whenever and wherever he pleased,” Carter’s account reads. “He had discovered long ago that scratching his bottom, if done with detachment and at respectable intervals, was a political high card among the people he courted, as was picking his nose.”117 The passage, perhaps conjuring up the spectacle of Bilbo’s habit of proudly clutching his

116 Percy, p. 140.
genitals on the public stage, was part of a tendency and concerted effort by the elites to ridicule Bilbo. In one newspaper column, for example, Carter spoke about entering the word “bilbo” in the dictionary, both as a noun, “a bilbo – a reckless, intolerant vilifier,” and as a verb, “to bilbo – to seek to destroy the character of another; to arouse racial animosity; to make a political nuisance of oneself.”

Returning such elitist scorn in equal measure, Bilbo established a long-held pattern of cynical projection and venomous “chip on our shoulder” politics in the early decades of the 20th century, as he ascended the political ranks. Throughout his career, Bilbo saw – or, in many cases, embellished or created – a sinister-sounding assemblage of perceived high-placed bogeymen against whom he railed while building his career, a raft of “outsiders” to pillory. His targeting was sometimes intermixed with an extra portion of leftover Reconstruction-era bitterness and xenophobia. “The carpetbaggers invaded the South in Reconstruction days, and we are just coming out from the effect of their rule and dictation,” Bilbo declared, in the mid-1940s. “If I stay in Congress – change that – as long as I remain in Congress, I’ll be damned if they’re going to invade again.” His list of external threats, which likely would sound familiar in somewhat updated form to voters in 1946, over the years included: railroads, banks, Jews, Wall Street, trade unions, big cities, immigration, large newspapers, the federal government and, always, the North. This fits a pattern in American history that Richard Hofstadter described wherein “the

119 Hodding Carter, “Chip on Our Shoulder Down South,” Saturday Evening Post, November 2, 1946.
120 “‘The Man’ Bilbo Suggests Savage Be Told To ‘Go Wash His Mouth’,” Delta Democrat-Times, January 6, 1946.
spokesman of the paranoid style finds [the hostile and conspiratorial world] directed against a nation, a culture, a way of life.”

Importantly, unlike some other demagogues who were roughly Bilbo’s contemporaries in public prominence, such as Huey Long or Charles Coughlin, the Mississippi senator of course regularly incited among his white followers a racial hatred of blacks. Often Bilbo’s racism was expressed interchangeably or in conjunction with statements lacerating the “outside” forces. In the words of Hodding Carter, Bilbo and other like-minded Mississippi politicians “successfully used the black menace, the bloody shirt, the big interests and class prejudice as … weapons.” An early instance of Bilbo’s national exposure came in 1928 when he accused the Republican presidential nominee, U.S. Commerce Secretary Herbert Hoover, of having danced with a black woman while inspecting flood damage in Mississippi the year before. Hoover dismissed the charge as an “indecent and unworthy statement.”

Bilbo’s evolving platform through the years in many ways mirrored and was associated with the most reactionary components of the white Protestant world view from which groups like the Ku Klux Klan drew resurgent energy in the early decades of the 20th century. “In many rural areas declining agricultural prices caused widespread hardship among farmers and agricultural laborers, making them susceptible to Klan propaganda about ‘Jewish bankers’ and ‘foreign interests’ in the

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121 Richard Hofstadter, The Paranoid Style in American Politics, p. 4
122 Coughlin targeted Jews and “international bankers” – a veiled reference to Jews – in his broadcasts.
123 Hodding Carter, “A Mississippi Editor Explores the Bilbo Mystery,” PM, August 6, 1945.
125 Bilbo was a member of a Klan grouping in Mississippi called Bilbo Klan No. 40. An offshoot of the Klan, the Americans for the Preservation of the White Race, also was active in Mississippi in the 1940s and 1950s.
U.S. economy,” Kathleen M. Blee writes, about the early-1920s period. “Rapid technological and social changes, high rates of immigration and internal migration, post-war nationalism, rapid urbanization, and the migration of large numbers of Southern blacks to the North also heightened the appeal of the Klan’s open racism and nativism.”

Robert H. Wiebe’s *The Search for Order: 1877-1920* chronicles aspects of the same rural-urban clash occurring during the Populist and Progressive eras.

The historical underpinnings of appeals based on such tensions remained intact and active well into the 1940s and then even later, through the civil rights years. “The South has some good reasons to cherish a grudge even now,” Hodding Carter wrote in 1946. “The grudge is, basically, that which any colonial, exploited people hold for the financial and political heart of empire. Self-pitying, self-stultifying, backward-glancing, it is expressed by suspicion of anything that comes from the North.” While moderates like Carter understood the historical reasons behind such suspicion, by the post-war these non-reactionary whites were basically pushing their state to move beyond that old “grudge” and instead embrace certain aspects of extra-regionalism, modernization and professionalization.

Ironically, given his anti-“outsider” rhetoric and posture during the 1946 campaign and before, Bilbo did have a record in the U.S. Senate indicating staunch support for some federal programs, especially during the New Deal, that entailed

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extensive “outside” involvement in Mississippi. He also advocated at least one notable international commitment – a proposed “solution” to America’s race problem.

Initially elected to the U.S. Senate in 1934 on a Huey Long-style platform of redistribution of wealth and unemployment insurance, Bilbo backed big-government measures in the 1930s such as the National Relief Act, rural electrification, the National School Lunch Act, the National Labor Relations Act (the Wagner Act), wage and hours laws, money for public housing and increased funds for those on Social Security. Bilbo essentially came to control the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in Mississippi and used its patronage, resources and personnel as a political organization, rewarding friends and supporters with government jobs and contracts. Moreover, Bilbo was a strong believer in federal agricultural support payments for his state’s farmers and in federal money for levee construction and repair along the Mississippi River. Thus, given this federal largess he championed and of which he took great advantage, he undoubtedly did favor particular kinds of “outside” involvement in Mississippi.

One biographer even went so far as to title his study of Bilbo in the 1934-1940 period, Redneck Liberal, highlighting the senator’s supposedly progressive and activist-government side. Again, a certain form of New Deal liberalism and support for racial segregation were still very much fused during this period for Deep South Democrats. As James T. Patterson writes, “States’ Rights in 1935 was a vital ideology, not just a functional cover for racism” as it unmistakably would become

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some 10-plus years later. Bilbo and others incongruously (in retrospect) but successfully straddled the ideologies of states’ rights and the New Deal. They encouraged federal involvement and the flow of federal money in Mississippi at the same time they derided on racial grounds the “New Deal Black and Tan National Party” – the Democratic Party – that essentially fed them. Primarily thanks to generous cotton subsidies, among other federal programs like the WPA, in the 1930s President Franklin Roosevelt kept intact a functioning alliance with the most racially extreme Black-Belt lawmakers, such as Bilbo.

Also, Bilbo’s support for vast federal spending in Mississippi would seem to suggest not only an obvious element of extra-regionalism in his voting record but also that he had a view of economic development in the state that was based on monies channeled to pre-existing white sources of power. These would include owners of big cotton operations, for example, or, at the individual level, recipients of Social Security, who, when agricultural and domestic workers were kept from coverage in the program, were, in Mississippi at least, virtually all white. This economic vision of Bilbo’s, purportedly to improve standards of living in Mississippi, at least for some whites, conflicts with the post-war notions of Mississippi’s white moderates, who, while not opposing New Deal programs (to the extent the post-war moderates were politically conscious and active in the 1930s), by the mid-1940s were placing their emphasis instead on individual-based capitalism, economic development and investment as opposed to federal handouts mostly to a small cluster of large white landowners.

In the case of Mississippi, this new understanding of needed growth called for a vastly upgraded public and private infrastructure – involving education, health care, transportation, industrial development, etc., all of which, in turn, required a huge paradigm shift in the state’s posture toward unfettered extra-regionalism (which also, the moderates well knew, would eventually lead to a changed racial situation in the state) – to successfully support it. So though Bilbo and the white moderates may have indeed shared some inclinations in support of 1930s-style progressivism, there was a substantial difference – and an important struggle over power which developed in the post-war – in their competing economic notions and priorities.

As for internationalism, Bilbo went before the Senate repeatedly in the late 1930s and early 1940s pushing a fringe scheme to send American blacks “back” to Africa – a mass deportation and repatriation proposal the likes of which had been abandoned, at least in mainstream political thinking, some 100 years before during the days of Daniel Webster as a possible answer to the slavery crisis. Yet from 1938-1944, Bilbo kept flailing the “Greater Liberia” idea, the planned “deportation of the entire Negro race to its native heath, Africa,” on the Senate floor.131 “I am urging the voluntary resettlement of America’s 12,800,000 Negroes in their fatherland, West Africa,” Bilbo stated a speech in 1944.132 The lawmaker therefore, in his unusual way, was hardly a purist in the anti-internationalism, or anti-“outsider,” stance he assumed for Mississippi voters in 1946 any more than he was in his professed disdain


As always, Bilbo’s *modus operandi* in the immediate post-war period, and especially as his last campaign was taking shape, was to represent and exploit the suspicions and antagonism on the part of certain white Mississippians towards external forces of change. Bilbo “knows that the appeal to their hates rather than to their hopes works well with a farming people conditioned for so long to having little, to expecting less and to resenting those who have more,” Hodding Carter wrote in 1945.\(^{133}\) The Greenville editor also wrote, “the South is at a distinct tonal disadvantage for the principal reason that the centers of publication of all major organs of fact, opinion and fiction are located outside of the South. But this very handicap is a great boon to Southern demagogues; they can scream of lopsided persecution.”\(^{134}\)

And it was in practicing this anti-“outsider” politics of anger and envy that Bilbo by around 1946 particularly ran afoul of the state’s elite white moderates, themselves both tied to extra-regional institutions and influences and also now imbued with a somewhat broader perspective, ambitions and optimism in the war’s aftermath. Hodding Carter, for example: had been mentored early in his career by William Alexander Percy and David Cohn, two worldly Greenville writers; had been educated at Bowdoin, Columbia, Tulane and Harvard (where he had attended on a Nieman journalism fellowship); had served in North Africa and the Middle East

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\(^{133}\) Hodding Carter, “A Mississippi Editor Explores the Bilbo Mystery,” *PM*, August 6, 1945.

\(^{134}\) Hodding Carter, “Chip on Our Shoulder Down South,” *Saturday Evening Post*, November 2, 1945, p. 19.
during the war; had had by 1946 several books published by New York-based publishers; had written articles for national publications such as the *New York Times*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Reader’s Digest*, and *PM*; held a writing fellowship from the New York-based Guggenheim Foundation in 1946; and had given lectures and made frequent public appearances around the country.

“I feel that I should do as much as I can to explain one section [of the country] to another,” Carter later wrote, “and I intend to devote most of my time to that from now on.” As one article noted, “by 1946, Carter was one of Mississippi’s best-known political journalists and editors, a controversial figure in his own right who had won a national following, largely through the Northern press, for his moderate civil rights positions.” The piece continued: “National journalists arriving in Mississippi in the spring of 1946 to cover the primary campaign invariably called upon Carter, who, in turn, provided well-reasoned succinct statements as to why Bilbo should be defeated in the July election. … Invariably, the Northern press portrayed Carter as an angry, brave, reform-oriented, small town editor who stood up to tyranny and risked a certain amount of physical danger in doing so.”

In short, Carter was an extra-regionalist. His perspective was at least partly national in scope. As he said many times, he saw his role as explaining Mississippi to the outside world and interpreting the outside world for Mississippi readers. Other elite white Mississippi moderates similarly had a broad range of experiences and connections, and as a consequence were developing different sensibilities.

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136 Boulard, pages 202 and 204.
Bilbo had been perceptive all along about the danger of outside influences, but the main threat, as it turned out, was to his own political career and to Mississippi’s white supremacist power base upon which his position was constructed. The moderates were an agent, albeit a complicated and only a gradual one, of that attempt to bring change.

“Antithetical to American traditions”

Certain evolving attitudes coalescing in the post-war nationally were in many respects proving inhospitable to the politics that Bilbo had long practiced. For example, in June of 1945, Bilbo gave a speech in the Senate denouncing attempts to create a permanent Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC), the agency formed by executive order by Franklin Roosevelt in 1941 to fight job discrimination in wartime industries in cases where companies held government contracts. Bilbo’s speech in part focused on the ethnic makeup of FEPC employees. He pointed out, at length and with dark implications, that many of them supposedly were Jewish or of Japanese ancestry. The performance drew appalled attention from some in the national press, and their comments typically were couched in light of the war and the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps a few months earlier. Those global events, in the minds of many prominent journalists and other thinkers, were serving to create a new public extra-regional narrative.
The liberal magazine *The Nation*, for example, wrote that, “Senator Bilbo’s exhibition last Thursday made it appear that at the cost of hundreds of thousands of lives we had destroyed Hitler’s racial obscenity in Europe only to have it parade in all its shameless arrogance at the very center of our democracy.”

For observers in Washington, as it was becoming for the growing cadre of moderates in Mississippi, the true meaning of the war was at odds with Bilbo-style rhetoric. The current secondary literature confirms that clash by the mid-1940s of old and new thinking. “By war’s end,” Eric Foner writes, “racism and nativism had been stripped of intellectual respectability and equated with pathology and irrationality.”

Criticism of Bilbo’s anti-FEPC speech, ignited by national publications, was soon picked up by individual citizens, especially in the North, many of whom wrote directly to Bilbo to complain. His vituperative and in some cases tasteless and insulting replies, which were characteristic of his long-practiced combative style, and which had typically been overlooked in earlier times of less powerful, pervasive and judgmental news outlets and a different national mood, now themselves found their way into nationally circulated magazines. The fallout from the publication of these letters, therefore, can be ascribed at least in part to the growing reach of the post-war media. *Time*, for example, published a sampling of Bilbo’s correspondence, written in the original on U.S. Senate stationery, in the summer of 1945.

To Helen Feldman, of Chicago, Bilbo reportedly wrote: “I wired a bunch of these fanatics in New York and told them if these Communists and fanatical groups did not quit trying to pass such damphool legislation … that eventually the great mass...

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137 *The Nation*, July 7, 1945, p. 2, as quoted in Fleegler.
138 Foner, p. 239
of American people would revolt and figuratively liquidate every member of their
groups.”

To Leonard Golditch, of New York, the secretary of the National Committee
to Combat Anti-Semitism: “If Jews of your type don’t quit sponsoring and
fraternizing with the Negro race you are going to arouse so much opposition to all of
you that they will get a very strong invitation to pack up and resettle in Palestine. …
There are just a few of you New York Jew ‘kikes’ … socializing with the Negroes for
selfish and political reasons. … You had better stop and think.”

And to Josephine Piccolo, of Brooklyn: “My dear Dago (if I am mistaken in
this, please correct me) … Will you please keep your dirty proboscis out of the other
47 states, especially the dear old state of Mississippi?”

The national media, which (aside from some dogged progressive publications
such as the New Republic) had long ignored Bilbo’s antics, his controversial
statements including praise in the 1930s for Nazi racial ideology, and his crackpot
schemes such as the “Greater Liberia” repatriation of more than 12 million African-
Americans, began in the post-war to weigh in with more serious scrutiny and
criticism of the Mississippi senator and of his home state generally and by
implication. “As World War II ended in 1945 and the movement for democratic
reform returned to this country, dozens of journalists and their publications found the
brutal segregation and pervasive, stifling poverty of states like Mississippi irresistible

139 Time, Aug. 6, 1945. Bilbo’s suggestion to Feldman that members of opposing groups would be
“liquidated” if they persisted in their efforts employed phraseology that recurred in various exchanges
the senator had at the time of his re-election campaign. When director of the federal Office of
Economic Stabilization, Chester Bowles, made a ruling on cotton clothing prices he did not like, Bilbo
was quoted: “It’s a damnable outrage. Bowles is economic problem No. 1 of the South. The best thing
to do is to liquidate him.” “‘Outrage’ Screams ‘The Man’ As Anderson Signs at Bowles’ Order,” Delta
Democrat-Times, April 4, 1946.
subjects for closer examination,” Garry Boulard writes. “On almost a monthly basis such publications as the *New York Times*, the *New York Herald-Tribune*, the *New Republic*, the *Nation*, *U.S. News & World Report*, *Time* and *Collier’s*, among others, provided lengthy studies of the high unemployment, poverty, and illiteracy rates of Mississippi, coupled with harshly condemnatory coverage of the state’s sometimes violently-enforced segregation tradition. Inevitably, Bilbo came up short in most profiles.”

This scrutiny was one aspect of a reformist and extra-regional trend among national publications in the period accelerating just after the war, a development which, regarding Mississippi, Hodding Carter sarcastically referred to as “hunting of the Southerner in his native habitat.” Carter’s *Delta Democrat-Times*, for example, ran a story in 1945 titled “‘LIFE’ Visits a Delta Plantation,” in reference to a planned *LIFE* magazine essay about a nearby cotton operation featuring the work of noted photographer Eliot Elisofon. As part of the intensifying glare, regional newspapers in the South also were noting the disconnect between Bilbo’s rancid statements and an emerging post-war notion that, as Eric Foner writes, “ethnic and racial prejudices were not only detrimental to the war effort but antithetical to American traditions.” The *New Orleans Item*, for example, reacted to Bilbo’s letter to Josephine Piccolo by saying, “truly there is no worse influence in high life than Senator Bilbo. … He is a disgrace to Mississippi … and to the nation.”

140 Boulard.  
143 Foner, p. 237.  
144 *Time*, Aug. 6, 1945.
As long as the sources of such criticism were originating from outside Mississippi, Bilbo was able to easily place them dismissively within his pre-set rubric that external forces were out to destroy him along with Southern tradition, including racial norms, and that construction worked to his short-term political advantage. “In transforming such negative coverage to an overall anti-Mississippi bias in the national press, Bilbo was hoping to prompt home state voters to support him as a symbol of Mississippi greatly maligned in the dreaded Yankee liberal press,” one source notes. But in 1945 and 1946, increasingly stringent and credible anti-Bilbo statements began to appear within Mississippi itself, particularly in publications controlled by the elite moderates. After two memorable campaign appearances in Holmes County in the spring of 1946, the normally restrained local editor, Hazel Brannon, wrote: “Perhaps the fact that Holmes County has traditionally voted against Mr. Bilbo accounts for the viciousness of his Lexington speech … and at that it was not as bad as his Durant speech.”

Other elite white moderates in the state like editors Easton King and Hodding Carter, themselves ever more attuned to extra-regional views, also took the lead in challenging Bilbo. The “dear Dago” letter to Josephine Piccolo, in particular, touched off a scathing round of local publicity. For example, in the Pascagoula Chronicle-Star, King wrote: Bilbo’s “‘dago’ and ‘kike’ letters are a disgrace and an outrage. He is going to find out that this kind of business actually turns the stomach of many a young Mississippi service man now returning to the farms and counties.”

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145 Boulard.
The *Delta Democrat-Times*, in late July of that year, was prompted by the “dear Dago” contretemps to examine other similar examples of Bilbo correspondence that used ethnic and anti-Semitic insults. On July 25, for instance, the newspaper reported that Bilbo had written a prominent rabbi, Stanley R. Brav of Vicksburg, stating that given the clergymen’s views, expressed in a letter to the editor of a New York newspaper, that he should “move to New York” where “you can live in an atmosphere better suited to your type.”

At the *Democrat-Times*, Carter’s response to the exchange with Rabbi Brav, the “dear Dago” letter and the prospect of Bilbo’s re-election generally was emblematic of many of the complexities of the white moderate stance of the mid-1940s. For example, Carter at that point was not in favor of expanded rights for African-Americans much beyond “respect,” “tolerance” and equal treatment under the law, but he recoiled at Bilbo’s combative and overtly racist approach and cringed at its reflection upon Mississippi. Carter also employed an argument of extra-regionalism – namely, the nationalizing effect of the war – to challenge Bilbo.

In an editorial titled “My Dear Dago,” published on July 26, 1945, Carter began: “We refuse to believe that the average Mississippi voter is so bigoted that he must constantly be entertained with such performances as have so recently been given in the halls of Congress.” Moreover, “we are appalled at the way [Bilbo] uses his opposition and his position to drive a rampant chariot of prejudice across the nation.” Thus Carter was attempting to wrest the true definition of white Mississippi – and thereby the essential source of political power (“the average Mississippi voter”) –

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from Bilbo’s domain. The editor also was distancing his expressed understanding of
the nature of Mississippians from the likes of Bilbo, and thereby trying to isolate the
senator and marginalize the viewpoint he represented. In a separate context, Carter
said: “everybody in the South is not Bilbo and does not think like Bilbo.”149 But
Carter also went on to promptly, if indirectly, assert white privilege, from an
impregnable position of racial advantage, in discussing the idea of a permanent
Federal Employment Practices Commission. “We do not believe that the FEPC is a
workable or proper approach to solving the shameful problem of giving the Negro …
a fair break,” he wrote, not bothering to add what he would consider an alternatively
workable or proper approach.

However, the crux of the July 26 editorial was about Bilbo’s disharmony with
national norms emerging from the war, the “vast melting pot” that was created in the
early 1940s, in the words of Eric Foner.150 Carter clearly was on the side of the extra-
regional forces – a vision of true Americanism (coupled, in this column, with true
Mississippianism) – whereas, his argument held, Bilbo was not. “In full proportion to
their numbers,” he wrote, “Senator Bilbo’s Dagoes have gone from Greenville and
from Mississippi and from the rest of the nation to fight for their country. We wonder
if Senator Bilbo ever heard of a Jersey Dago named John Basilone, whom the
Marines called Manila John, and who at Guadalcanal, in the bloody turning point of
the Pacific war, won the Congressional Medal of Honor and the unofficial title of the
bravest Marine. John Basilone might make a personal answer to Senator Bilbo if he

150 Foner, p. 237.
were still around. But he died at Iwo Jima.” Carter’s retort to Bilbo regarding Italian-Americans supports Eric Foner’s idea that World War II expanded the definition of the ideal of American freedom to include many white ethnics. “The war made millions of ethnic Americans, especially the Jewish and Catholic children of new immigrants, feel fully American for the first time,” Foner writes.  

A couple of weeks later, in mid-August of 1945, Carter wrote an editorial tweaking Bilbo in the context of another extra-regional, national issue – the building of the atomic bomb, just recently dropped on two Japanese cities. “We’re afraid that Senator Bilbo is pretty upset over the story of the development of the atomic bomb,” Carter wrote, in tones of pointed mockery. “It seems that a Jewish woman scientist and an Italian scientist, both devoting their efforts in behalf of the United States, were chiefly responsible. Imagine being indebted to a Jew and an Italian, senator! And if it should come to light that a Negro chemist had something to do with it too, we really believe that Senator Bilbo couldn’t survive the triple shock. Which would certainly be too bad.”  

It should be noted that one aspect of the moderates successfully using the extra-regional argument, such as the charge that Bilbo was out of touch with post-war national norms, was that the accusers themselves had to be sufficiently grounded in Mississippi traditions in order to withstand the inevitable counterattack. The moderates trying to nudge the state forward had to simultaneously have a protective

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152 Foner, 239.
base of local credibility whereby they could associate themselves with the South and
the mystique of Southern nationalism.

Therefore, Carter, for example, spent a good deal of space and energy telling
readers, in personal terms, of his multi-generational roots in the South, the fact that
both grandfathers fought for the South in the Civil War and a great-grandfather was
killed at Shiloh.\textsuperscript{154} “Although Carter spoke of progressive reform and greater
tolerance in racial relations,” one source said, “he largely symbolized the better-
educated, conservative, entrepreneurial profile of the Delta planter. … His
philosophy was clearly to the left of the Delta planters, but his style, demeanor, and
values reflected mainstream America.”\textsuperscript{155} So Carter and other white moderates were
most effective as agents of marginal change when they had a strong presence both
locally (as in the “entrepreneurial profile of the Delta planter”) and extra-regionally
(with values reflecting “mainstream America”).

The war-related themes and the influence of an expanding reformist media, as
expressions of a post-war extra-regional trend running contrary to Bilbo’s defensive
posture of racial and ethnic antagonism and fears of “outside” forces, were reflected
not only in the public writings of the elite white Mississippi moderates, among others,
but also in their private correspondence with readers across the country. As Bilbo
became more of a national story beginning in 1945, residents of other states vented

\textsuperscript{154} For example, in a letter to J.E. Boggess, Carter explained: “All of my forebears for as far back as
we can determine and that is a good many generations have been Southerners, mostly Louisianans and
Virginians. My great-grandfather was killed at Shiloh, a grandfather was wounded there and another
grandfather was captured at Vicksburg. I was born and raised on a farm in Louisiana.” Letter,
\textsuperscript{155} Boulard, pp. 207-208.
their opinions by contacting Hodding Carter and other prominent white Mississippi moderates. “I have just read in PM your courageous and inspiring editorial in criticism of Senator Bilbo’s infamous ‘Dear Dago’ letter,” wrote H.J. Clonick, of Chicago, to the Democrat-Times editor. “You have earned the deepest gratitude of men of good will everywhere.”156 And Wallace Herbert, of Ruston, La., wrote Carter: “May I … offer you my congratulations for defending democracy in your state. I refer, of course, to your courageous stand against Bilbo and his rabble-rousing antics.”157 Added R.B. Haydock, of Oxnard, Calif., in a letter in late August, alluding to Bilbo: “I shall note with much interest anything that comes out of Mississippi indicating a change for the better.”158

Yet another sign of the disconnect between evolving national values and norms emanating from the war, the Holocaust, and post-war global issues on the one hand and Bilbo’s politics on the other was the resolution passed in November 1945 by the Jewish War Veterans of the USA calling for the Mississippi senator’s impeachment. The other two resolutions adopted at the veterans group’s annual encampment concerned a Jewish state in Palestine and relief for international refugees.159 About this same time, Bilbo went on record in opposition to the appointment of former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt as a delegate to the United Nations. Bilbo was increasingly out of step with an emerging post-war national

“consensus,” of which authors such as Godfrey Hodgson and others write, brought about by 1946 in part in response to the Cold War.\textsuperscript{160}

In August of 1945, Bilbo formally announced that he was running for re-election to the Senate and Hodding Carter used the occasion to reassert the extra-regional argument against Bilbo. As Carter’s piece illustrates, the moderates believed that Mississippi should end its isolation and more fully interact with other regions and that Bilbo-style insularity and small-mindedness stood athwart that needed progression. In “the time of Armageddon,” Carter pointed out in an editorial, exaggerating a bit for affect, Bilbo’s campaign platform contained but three modest planks: abolishment of the five dollar use tax for automobiles; opposition to repeal of the poll tax; and opposition to the FEPC.\textsuperscript{161} Deriding these flimsy ideas by pointing to the big picture, Carter wrote: “We have spent three hundred billion dollars on a war, mortgaging ourselves and our children and their children for generations, in order that we might survive as a self-governed nation. We must pay for their war, now and in time to come, with far more taxation than we have ever levied upon ourselves. But Theodore G. Bilbo’s only tax proposal is that an automobile use tax be repealed.”\textsuperscript{162}

The subsequent campaign of 1945-1946 was in many ways an ongoing clash between strengthening extra-regional forces, allied with the elite white moderates,


\textsuperscript{161} By year’s end, Bilbo’s campaign platform had expanded to include opposition to anti-lynching legislation, to loans to Great Britain and to universal military training. “Bilbo Announces Opening of His Campaign Office.” \textit{Delta Democrat-Times}, December 31, 1945.

and the entrenched reactionary elements of Mississippi as personified by Bilbo. The Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing, awarded to Hodding Carter in May of 1946, is a vivid example of how national organizations were encouraging and supporting change in the state. The Pulitzer committee, led by columnist Arthur Krock of the New York Times, in particular singled out for praise 11 of Carter’s editorials, nearly all of them having to do with nationalizing themes emerging from the war. The most memorable of the columns was titled “Go for Broke” and it concerned the heroism, in the Italy campaign of the war, of Company D of the 442nd Infantry Regiment, made up entirely of Japanese-Americans. In that column Carter wrote: “It is so easy for a dominant race to explain good and evil, patriotism or treachery, courage or cowardice in terms of skin color. So easy and so tragically wrong. Too many have committed that wrong against the loyal Nisei, who by the thousands have proved themselves good Americans, even while others of us, by our actions against them, have shown ourselves to be bad Americans.”

In another of the cited editorials, titled “Utter and Abysmal Failure,” about Mississippi U.S. Senator James O. Eastland’s criticism of black troops in World War II, Carter stressed extra-regional themes, but also showed clear indications of the moderates’ enduring mindset of white privilege, in this case in the form of paternalism. “Certainly we should not agree with Senator Eastland’s ill-timed and ill-advised denunciation,” Carter wrote. “It is not a way of helping the Negro along the road we are all walking, the road of good citizenship and Americanism.”

By contrast, when finally relieved of Bilbo, who died in the late summer of 1947, the elite white Mississippi moderates, in pondering the upcoming special election, welcomed the campaign of John Stennis with scarcely contained glee. The low-key jurist was seen by them as the embodiment of needed change, their ideal of a sophisticated modern leader. The moderates favored not only the candidacy of Stennis but also the new politics – or at least the more presentable statesmanlike persona – he seemed to them to represent. “With Stennis in the Senate we can always be sure that we will not be ashamed of his action and that he will bring honor to us rather than opprobrium,” noted one 1947 editorial, written by Tupelo publisher and moderate George A. McLean, endorsing the judge’s candidacy. The moderates in particular approved of the de-emphasis on race of the Stennis campaign in favor of other issues.

Moreover, the Stennis campaign turned out to be a breeding ground for a new generation of politically active and (by Mississippi standards) progressive figures, including William F. Winter, Frank E. Smith, J.P. Coleman, Zelma Price and William Keady. These and other young moderates gathering around Stennis called themselves “thinking Mississippians,” in an unsubtle and plainly self-serving contrast to the fervid emotionalism that invariably had attended the Bilbo brand of politics. “The respectively, the prize for editorial writing would go to Mississippi editors – and moderates – Ira Harkey and Hazel Brannon Smith for their work on race-related issues.


166 State Rep. Zelma W. Price circular, October 29, 1947. Mississippi media sources covering the 1947 campaign also welcomed the contrast between the formal Stennis and the theatrics of the late Bilbo. “There’s no occasion whatever for arm-waving, eye-rolling or tearing a passion to tatters,” Frederick Sullens of the Jackson Daily News was quoted. “There’s no need for vain posturing, hysterical ranting, or any mumbo jumbo stuff.” Weeks, p. 38, citing the Jackson Daily News, September 21, 1947.
Stennis victory was a real pleasure to all the good people here,” Johnny Popham, a South-based reporter for the *New York Times*, assured his editor, Turner Catledge – a white elite moderate from Mississippi himself – after the votes had been tallied.167 The Atlanta bureau chief for *Time* magazine about this same period referred to “the so-called better people, or perhaps better-called good folks of the South.”168 The white moderates, though plainly committed to maintaining their racial prerogatives, continued to see themselves as “the good people” and “the good folks.”

**Perspectives on Bilbo and Stennis**

Employing the yardstick of presentism, we tend to look today at Theodore G. Bilbo and John C. Stennis as quite similar, because the scholarly lens of race and civil rights, especially where Mississippi is concerned, is so ubiquitous and powerful. A persuasive argument along those lines can be made, namely that the two politicians were essentially bad cop and good cop, rabid segregationist and practical segregationist – interchangeable parts of a single white political structure that put highest priority on maintaining its racial privileges and that as a consequence (and aided by mortality) discarded one politician for another when it served their selfish interests to do so. While Stennis was subdued and unassuming in manner, and eschewed offensive rhetoric and practiced a certain respectful treatment toward both whites and blacks in inter-personal relations, it is debatable that, in matters aside from

style and presentation, he was all that much different than Bilbo was or would have been had he lived past 1947 and continued in the Senate, particularly regarding issues of race and civil rights.

After all, Stennis was still, like his predecessor, an avowed segregationist. Stennis had built his legal career on a case wherein he sought conviction and execution of three black men whose murder confession he was fully aware had been induced by flogging.\textsuperscript{169} Once elected, he became a pillar of the rearguard Southern bloc of obstructionist U.S. senators operating in the civil rights era. He was an active – yet, to some degree, reluctant – part of the so-called Dixiecrat revolt of 1948, splitting off Southerners from the Democratic Party over the issue of civil rights. He later signed the Southern Manifesto drawn up in Congress in defiance of the \textit{Brown} ruling. He had virtually an identical voting record to that of his longtime Mississippi colleague James O. Eastland – himself, in his time, the Senate’s most avid defender of white supremacy and a chief spokesman for the White Citizens’ Council. Along with Eastland, Stennis used his influence in late 1955 to persuade the U.S. Defense Department to release damaging information about Emmett Till’s father, Louis Till, who while a soldier in 1945 had been executed in Italy on allegations of rape of two women and murder of a third; the intent of the disclosure was to smear the son’s memory and to engender support for his killers. V.O. Key described Stennis as “a dignified, conservative candidate, not given to ranting about the race question,

\textsuperscript{169} The convictions eventually were overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court in the case of \textit{Brown v. Mississippi} (1936) that outlawed the use of evidence obtained by torture. The transcript of the trial suggests Stennis was aware of the methods of interrogation used. Richard C. Cortner, \textit{A “Scottsboro” Case in Mississippi: the Supreme Court and Brown v. Mississippi} (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1986).
although in fundamental agreement with the Bilbo viewpoint."\textsuperscript{170} Stennis was part of a political strain in post-war Mississippi politics, Alexander Heard stated, which believed that “a Mississippian could accomplish Sen. Bilbo’s ends without disgracing and making a fool of the state in the process.”\textsuperscript{171}

So it can be argued the Bilbo-to-Stennis transition was in many respects a superficial one that mostly served the “progress” aims of its main sponsors – the elite white moderates – and did little to fundamentally alter a strictly hierarchical political and economic system involving white privilege that continued to benefit those very moderates, along with, to some extent, many other whites. “Bilbo’s death did not herald a new day in race relations for Mississippi,” John Dittmer writes. “His successor, Judge John Stennis, though no race baiter, was also dedicated to preserving white supremacy in the Magnolia State.”\textsuperscript{172} The life of average Mississippians, and most notably the blacks, was not changed between 1945 and 1947 in any measurable way as the U.S. Senate seat became occupied by a more presentable racist.

To some degree, in fact, it could be maintained that the comparative respectability Stennis personified in the long run made it more difficult to make progress on race. For the devotees of progress on civil rights, opponents like Stennis who had respectability were potentially more dangerous than the fulminating types. Unlike the unabashed Bilbo, Stennis was a smooth and deceptively subtle politician. The progression from Bilbo to Stennis, this view continues, served to help modify the state’s political tone and its image, and that was an important first step toward more

\textsuperscript{170} V.O. Key, p. 253.
\textsuperscript{171} Alexander Heard summary of interview with Erskine Wells, June 30, 1947. Southern Politics Collection.
\textsuperscript{172} Dittmer, p. 9.
substantive change, but it did little in the short term to alter Mississippi’s existing racial and class-based realities. In fact, in lending those realities his credibility and the gracious political skills he possessed and the pugnacious Bilbo so conspicuously lacked, it is plausible Stennis, dignifying them and even obscuring them by association, did much to perpetuate and reinforce core aspects of the status quo, just as many moderates had been confident he would. The picture may have changed with Stennis’ ascension, but there was little tangible action in the way people led their lives that could be quantified as resulting change – in gaining access to voting, for example.\textsuperscript{173}

In offering an alternative view, that the Bilbo-to-Stennis transition in fact had import, beyond superficiality and presentation, as far as the white moderates were concerned, there is no intention here to be complicit in excusing any aspect of Mississippi’s racial hierarchy of which both men were key leaders. For, as \textit{Pascagoula Chronicle-Star} editor Easton King pointed out, the true problem was not with the political leadership but with the underlying realities. “You really don’t gain very much by chopping off the top of the structure,” King told an interviewer in 1947. “The inequity in Mississippi politics is in the giant base, the giant pyramid of political life which expresses itself at the summit in such characters as Bilbo. When you knock them off you really haven’t done very much. Another fellow of similar characteristics would be pushed to the top by the corrupt and benighted process.”\textsuperscript{174}

\textsuperscript{173} There is also the lingering impression that both men, when reduced to archetype, represented warring aspects of the composite white Mississippi moderate outlook such as it was in the mid-1940s: racism and progress, call it; the yearning to maintain prerogatives of white privilege while seeking change; the adherence to the race issue and the desire to transcend it; backward and forward; the closed society and something more open; etc. The moderates embodied both these poles.

\textsuperscript{174} Alexander Heard summary of interview with Easton King, August 11, 1947. Southern Politics Collection.
But in considering the white moderates of Mississippi and their viewpoint in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the transition, which may look barely marginal today, was framed by many at the time as being from a fulminating old unreconstructed racist – Bilbo – to a reasonable serious young intellectual – Stennis. To the moderates, the switch was thus enormously meaningful. For them, the overriding priority was to modernize and professionalize the state and a key aspect of that “progress” was the state’s reputation as reflected in the new extra-regional media. Therefore, for the white moderates, considerations like image and projection as conduits to economic development were essentially everything and their ideal front man was someone who could best represent the state to an extra-regional audience.

From this perspective, it did not really matter that both men had segregationist records. What the men actually did in the functioning of their office was largely beside the point. In fact, neither man particularly distinguished themselves as a legislator, despite their long years in Washington; the careers of both were forever defined and overshadowed by race.175 Moreover, as William F. Winter said, for white Mississippians of the 1940s and 1950s, “we were all segregationists.” For the elite white moderates and their ambitions, the question of Mississippi’s political leadership was not about lawmaking skill but rather all about optimally representing the state in the wider media and economic development context.

175 And, in Stennis’s case, by Vietnam and Watergate. Stennis was chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee from 1969-1981, a period covering the later years of the Vietnam War. Notably, he was an early opponent of America’s involvement in Vietnam, dating back to when John F. Kennedy was president. Stennis also was close to President Richard Nixon, and, at a crucial juncture of the Watergate crisis in the fall of 1973, Stennis’s name was proposed by Nixon, in his showdown with special prosecutor Archibald Cox, as someone who might be tasked to listen to the White House tapes and render an impartial opinion. The “Stennis compromise” idea failed and the dispute between Nixon and Cox subsequently led to the famous “Saturday Night Massacre” of October 1973.
What mattered for the white moderates, for their purposes in this regard, was above all the question of tone and symbolism. And the progression to Stennis was seen as a symbolic, and to that degree a substantive, step forward. It mattered to them, for instance, that certain politicians, like Stennis, based their segregationist positions on their concept of States’ Rights and the Constitution, in contrast to others, like Bilbo, who had a reputation as the quintessential devout gut-level racist preying on emotionalism and fear. Mississippi’s bigotry did not diminish appreciably in the transfer of power from Bilbo to Stennis, but the switch did definitely represent a change in its form, and that was seen as important in a gradual sense. Jim Crow was humanized by figures like Stennis and to the moderates that was a step forward, not merely an act of putting a genteel mask on a corrupt system. In the words of Malcolm Gladwell, the young senator brought a more humanitarian attitude than his predecessor.176 The fact that the letters Stennis sent to constituents invariably maintained an antiseptic veneer of politeness, undoubtedly sincere, featuring soft, non-committal language, even when the tone of the incoming letter had been blatantly racist and vile, was seen by the white moderates as a welcome enhancement of civility and maturity, particularly in light of the surreal recent context of crotch-grabbing public stagecraft and “My Dear Dago” salutations from a veteran of supposedly the world’s greatest deliberative body. Even down to his reassuring one-on-one contacts, Stennis put balm on a harsh and toxic debate and, for the moment, implicitly directed belligerent parties to reflect. Stennis was seen as a needed agent of calm.

Moreover, Stennis’s “silence was a signal,” Hodding Carter III observed, “and everyone knew what that meant. He declined to take part in the worst of it. If a politician repeatedly passed up the chance to make vile, racist, nasty comments about black people when he could have done so and in the process pleased his white constituency, then everyone gets the message. For the moderates, it wasn’t always so much what they did affirmatively when they believed something was right. It’s what they declined to do when they thought something was wrong. And that was Stennis.”  

Other, semantic adjustments may appear small today but also represented meaningful progress, particularly to observers at the time. Bilbo, for example, had habitually directed his formal campaign announcements and appeals to “white Democratic voters.” For Stennis, by contrast, the preferred term was simply “Democratic voters” or “Mississippi voters.” The language was moving into more benign, less racially freighted territory where appeals could conceivably include reaching out to black voters. Similarly, Stennis would talk of “school desegregation” rather than use more toxic terms like “Negro-infested schools,” as some whites preferred. In Washington, Stennis mostly was known for his lawyerly dissent from the growth of federal power at the expense of the states and also for his long tenure, not for racial bombast like his predecessor. Thus, while both Bilbo and Stennis were segregationists, the presentations each made were starkly different, and that contrast mattered a tremendous amount to the image-conscious, “forward”-thinking moderates. And therefore it is a distinction that is noteworthy historically.

177 Interview with Hodding Carter III. October 31, 2009.
179 Stennis served in the Senate for over 41 years, from November 1947 to January 1989.
Justifiably, many historians today are looking at broader questions in lieu of sixty-plus years of post-war history on the matter of race. Namely, to them the main question to be explored concerns the extent to which the Bilbo-to-Stennis transition, while in many ways serving the political agenda of white moderates, had meaning beyond the transformation it represented in personality, style and symbolism, however important those factors surely were and are. To what degree did it matter if Mississippi, with the prodding of moderate elements, was essentially opting in the 1940s for a quiet intellectual segregationist over an obnoxious rabblerousing one? Did what Robert L. Fleegler calls “the decline of public racism,” which he sees as the larger message of Bilbo’s demise, indicate progress if those underlying racist values simply migrated to a more private sphere to be reconstituted in different garb? ¹⁸⁰

Charles M. Payne writes about a roughly analogous and concomitant development regarding lynching. By the early post-World War II years, Payne contends, the practice of vigilante race killings in the South upholding white supremacy with terror was no longer done as a public spectacle with visible and wholesale white community approval as it often had been earlier in the century. Rather now it tended to be carried out by smaller extremist groups in cloaked circumstances – late at night, in remote places in the back woods, in prisons away from public view, and in other secret venues. ¹⁸¹ “Howling mobs were becoming passé,” Payne writes. “Small groups of men were doing quietly what large crowds

¹⁸⁰ Fleegler.
¹⁸¹ The Department of Records and Research at the Tuskegee Institute compiled annual figures on lynching in the South and released the data at the close of each year. In the year 1946, for example, there were six lynchings in the region, according to the Institute. In 1947, there was one. “Only One Lynching,” McComb Enterprise-Journal, January 5, 1948.
used to do publicly.”¹⁸² By the 1940s, the lynchings or race killings were less-often officially sanctioned or condoned, but they were still “allowed” by means of a willing aversion of just enough of society’s and law enforcement’s collective gaze. Willful ignorance and other forms of passive aggression had replaced direct and above-board mainstream sanction.

Meanwhile, about the same time, the Ku Klux Klan had long since lost public favor in “polite” Mississippi society and the group found it necessary to hold meetings under wraps, with memberships kept a lifelong secret and protected by sworn oaths. But the White Citizens’ Council (which while nominally eschewing Klan-style physical violence got similar results – i.e., continued white dominance – with tactics of economic violence and reprisal, such as job termination and housing eviction) operated openly and attracted many of the state’s “leading” white residents, particularly small-town lawyers, judges and businessmen. The Council was “pursuing the agenda of the Klan with the demeanor of the Rotary,” Charles M. Payne writes. He added, the Council’s “disclaimers show that by the 1950s white leadership thought it necessary to seek ‘respectable’ methods of defending white supremacy.”¹⁸³

These examples suggest that in the early post-war years some of racism’s most odious and attention-getting elements were no longer acceptable in baldest form in polite or official white circles in Mississippi. But they continued to be at least tacitly tolerated if they could envelop their operation with a screen of discretion and if


¹⁸³ Payne, pp. 34-35.
the elites could thereby maintain deniability or could convince themselves of their own ongoing decency and fair-mindedness by comparison. These once-overt forms of blatant racism and racialized violence thus became diffused and were carried out by proxy or through indirection or under the guise of some dubious law lending a sheen of “legality” if not justice.

The Bilbo-to-Stennis change, occurring about the same time, has some of these same qualities of transmutation. The uncouth offensive demagogue and the quiet respectable obstructionist, though of much different styles, generations and backgrounds, in fact had some fundamental values in common on the race question. In the switch of political personalities, the package and the presentation regarding racial issues changed, but not much of the essence as it was experienced by average people in Mississippi. So, again, as in the full arc of Mississippi history, there was on the political front in 1946-1947 both change and continuity, and the elite white moderates were in the midst of it in all of its self-contradiction.

Scholars today thus are justified in being skeptical. What is being argued here is not that it indeed mattered much substantively in a way most historians might recognize, or even in the immediate sense, that Stennis replaced Bilbo. As Martin Luther King Jr. wrote in the Letter From Birmingham City Jail in describing Eugene “Bull” Connor’s defeat in the mayoral election of 1963 to Albert Boutwell: “We will be sadly mistaken if we feel that the election of Mr. Boutwell will bring the millennium to Birmingham. While Mr. Boutwell is much more articulate and gentle than Mr. Conner, they are both segregationists, dedicated to the task of maintaining
the status quo.”184 The situation in 1940s Mississippi is comparable. The point is that the white Mississippi moderates at the time saw the change in the state’s political leaders as crucial to their ambitions. For those white moderates, and especially the elites who were increasingly part of extra-regional networks, the presentation of the state for a wide audience was vitally important.

But while, thanks in part to the moderates, the face of Mississippi politics did shift in the early post-war years from the corrosive cigar-chomping bigot to the colorless lawyerly gentleman whose bigotry was far more camouflaged and leavened, it is less clear that the policies changed that much. After 1947, the state was able to project a somewhat more respectable image with Bilbo gone and Stennis in office, and that no doubt was helpful to the moderate Mississippians in innumerable ways, even beyond public relations, as they pushed the state to move forward economically and socially. And Stennis did have a history of civility and accessibility toward African-Americans that would have been unthinkable in the Bilbo era, earning him the “nigger lover” label from his rivals. According to Johnny Popham of the New York Times, Mississippi black leaders knew Stennis “for a fine gentleman and know that over the years they can make some real progress with a man like that around, not just quick-talking politicians’ liberal promises, but good, solid, unrestrained advances.”185 The Stennis campaign slogans – “a new day” or “a better day” in Mississippi politics – seemed apt, most especially to the white moderates who so assiduously helped the judge win. Those mottos also conveyed code carrying

meaning unmistakable to Mississippi voters: we need to move beyond the obsession with race.

Three historians – Robert L. Fleegler, John Dittmer and Steven F. Lawson – have written extensively about Bilbo’s last campaign, the subsequent attempt to oust him from the Senate, his final months of exile wasting away in a New Orleans hospital issuing increasingly tinny and pathetic statements of defiance, about his deathbed statement of “love and admiration for the Negro people” (in which he claimed he had, at long last, used them only as a matter of political expediency), and, to some degree, about the campaign to succeed him.186

The scholars differ whether external or internal forces, regarding Mississippi, were – besides the factors of advancing age and cancer – primarily responsible for Bilbo’s fall. Fleegler suggests that those most intent on ending Bilbo’s career were elites outside the South, such as writers for national publications and Washington-based politicians, who understood World War II as primarily a struggle against fascism whose legacy truly de-legitimized the old bigotry and ranting prejudices which had been for so long Bilbo’s stock-and-trade. Dittmer and Lawson, on the other hand, stress the role of African-Americans in the anti-Bilbo effort, particularly those Mississippians who, at considerable physical risk, testified before an investigating panel in Jackson in December, 1946 about their voting problems in the primary the previous summer.187

Given these two divergent viewpoints, there is ample space in the historiography for the interpretation of this dissertation that looks at the role in the political transition in Mississippi of certain white moderates. This privileged group had their own newfound understanding of the war’s meaning and had connections externally with elites elsewhere along the lines that Fleegler describes. But these moderates also through their emphasis on professionalization and modernization and other aspects of economic and social change in the state contributed to a post-war climate that indirectly helped encourage and embolden indigenous challenges to Bilbo.

The white Mississippi moderates, in this rendering, were a local reflection of the larger extra-regional trends and they were tentatively allied with internal forces of change. Furthermore, on this last point, Mississippi’s elite white moderates were in close touch with African-American leaders in the state who themselves saw Stennis as the candidate offering them the most hope. In the wholly patronizing tone quite typical of the white newspaper coverage of the time, the New York Times wrote, of Stennis: “Negro leaders rely upon him as a friend in the traditional sense of a kindly disposed white leader who brings wise understanding and tenderness to racial problems.”\textsuperscript{188} Once again, the elite white moderates of Mississippi were in a brokerage role, however paternalistic.

And they even, in this case, seemed to have the last word. Nearly a decade later, looking back on the events of 1946 and 1947, Hodding Carter wrote a friend: “Years ago, Theodore Bilbo called me a nigger lover when he was running for re-election to the Senate. I wrote an editorial admitting that I was a nigger lover and

\textsuperscript{188} New York Times. September 15, 1947.
pointing out that I tried to love all my fellow men, black, brown, red or white or
green, down to but not including Theodore Bilbo. And I doubt that even God
Almighty could do that. He shut up for awhile.”189

But well before Carter wrote that letter, the focus of political activity for the
elite white Mississippi moderates had shifted from the realm of U.S. Senate
campaigns to the state legislature in Jackson. And in 1948, at the start of the so-
called “progressive” legislature, there was a move to pay public tribute to the late
Senator Bilbo. Apparently, however, by this time enough lawmakers felt the memory
of the “Stormy Petrel” was best left unstirred. As the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*
reported, a “bill to designate the square on which the proposed 15-story state office
building will be located as ‘Theodore G. Bilbo Square’ today was killed in the House
buildings and grounds committee.”190

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Carter Papers.
190 *New Orleans Times-Picayune*. Wilson F. “Bill” Minor Papers, Special Collections Department,
Mitchell Memorial Library, Mississippi State University.

By coincidence, the appointment had been set for Election Day. A high ceiling of afternoon clouds outside broad windows overlooking downtown Jackson reflected a bright silver light within the corner office. The room was otherwise filled with framed photographs of well-known faces and an assortment of other mementos from a long political and legal career. An honorary degree from Tugaloo College, an historically black school in Jackson, and something called the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Award were prominently displayed, among other honors. Judging by these laurels, the old man was obviously proud of his recognition by the African-American community. He squinted hard and swiveled slowly in his well-worn leather desk chair, which still had visible the official seal stenciled at antimacassar height, making it a keepsake from his years as Mississippi governor.

But the conversation went to a much earlier period, back to 1946-1947 when he was a first-year law student in his twenties fresh from service in the Philippines at the end of World War II, back to when he had first cast an eye on a seat in the state legislature. Given his halting voice and the long pauses as he tried to answer the
questions posed, this apparently was a difficult time to explain in a contemporary context. Perhaps it all seemed so incongruous, particularly to him now. For white Mississippians of his generation, the consensus on race has shifted to a great degree in the course of a long lifetime. Or maybe the variables active at that long-ago time were so at odds with one another they still, now years later, could not easily be sorted out. How, for instance, could one have defended racial segregation and at the same time considered oneself a moderate or a progressive even by Mississippi standards? How could those views possibly be reconciled? At one point during the discussion, describing the state’s white privileged elite that he personified in those days, William F. Winter simply and quietly said, with evident strain and regret, “we were all segregationists.”

Winter wanted to convey those events, some six decades in the past, with absolute precision, so he searched around in his files for several minutes and eventually retrieved a copy of a speech he was preparing to deliver the following week at a legislative conference in North Carolina. In his slow raspy drawl, he began to read.

“At the risk of sounding like an ancient mariner, let me tell you about an experience I had exactly sixty years ago this November, when several of us law students at Ole Miss were sitting around one night indulging in our favorite pastime of shooting the bull. One of our number who was still recovering from ghastly burns suffered when his plane had been shot down in flames in the South Pacific allowed as how he was going to run for the legislature from his home county down in the Piney Woods. Another fellow who had won the Silver Star as an infantry officer in Europe thought that he would do the same thing, and before the night was over there were
four others who announced similar intentions. Before the semester was out, there were twelve of us who were thinking about running.

“Twelve of us did run, and in the ensuing races eleven of us were elected. Eleven of us. Just exactly enough to make up a football team. And don’t think that one day that fall we didn’t borrow some uniforms and a football from the Ole Miss team and stick cigars in our mouths to pose for the cameras. Eleven students, still enrolled in law school but now moving on to change the world, or at least a small corner of it. All of us had come out of World War II with a newly found sense of who we were and with bright expectations for the future. There was a remarkable idealism that we shared and we went to Jackson intending to move our state out of its old stuck-in-the-mud ways.

“What we immediately ran into though was an implacable opposition to change that was built around an almost fanatical commitment to maintaining racial segregation. That issue colored every other issue. Every proposal was viewed through the prism of race. Within weeks of our convening for the 1948 session, the governor of South Carolina, Strom Thurmond, came to Jackson and in an address reminiscent of the secession rhetoric of 1861 told us that there was no power on the face of the earth that could bring about the end of segregation if the South just stuck together. The tragedy was not that he said it, but that so many people believed it. The real tragedy was that instead of being able to focus on the issues that were in need of action, like better schools and better roads and better jobs, we spent so much of our energy fighting a bitter-end battle on the wrong side of a cause that we were bound to lose, just as we had lost the fight over slavery almost a century before. The idealism that had marked our entry into politics became a struggle against elusive old myths.”

In his pained, forthright and clearly self-serving recollections, Gov. Winter was essentially sketching a version of the dilemma of the white Mississippi moderates of the early post-war years, and particularly of the elites among them such as those

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1 Interview with William F. Winter, November 7, 2006.
enrolled at Ole Miss law school and/or newly serving in the state legislature. In the late 1940s these prominent non-reactionary whites – along with the broad constituencies they represented through Ole Miss, the legal community, their own legislative districts, veterans’ groups, and many other venues and contacts – appeared caught between two imperatives, basically one rooted in the past and one seeming to point to a somewhat different future. Specifically, they faced, and had been raised as an inescapable part of, the white Southern obsession with maintaining racial segregation, distilled and starkly epitomized in 1948 by the J. Strom Thurmond-led Dixiecrat “revolt” within the Democratic Party over civil rights.² By his own account, Winter and his Ole Miss cohort joined in spending “so much time” fighting the “bitter-end battle on the wrong side of a cause.” Winter correctly does not exempt himself and his allies from the “so many people” who willingly or mutedly bowed to the most extreme segregationists or who even flirted with joining that group themselves. But at the same time, the young elites also were pushing a raft of so-called “good government” measures for their state. The moderates wanted Mississippi to modernize, professionalize and industrialize, even, according to Winter, in ways they understood would eventually undermine the very segregationist status quo that for so long had so conspicuously benefited them, their race and their class.³

They realized, for example, that the post-agricultural, more economically developed and externally connected Mississippi society they envisioned would inevitably be accompanied by inexorable pressure to expand the voting franchise and

² The Dixiecrat revolt also was led by Mississippi Gov. Fielding L. Wright, who in 1948 was the vice-presidential candidate on the ticket of the breakaway Southern-based party.
then, inevitably, by the sharing of political power, which was seen by everyone as the ultimate key to fundamental change on race. One of the moderate lawmakers’ allies, Hodding Carter, wrote in 1950 that, “with the right to vote the Negro will eventually achieve for himself those things which have been denied.” In a backhanded way, the state’s racial obstructionists seemed to agree. In supporting a “good moral character” amendment to state voting law, a move which had the clear and cynical intent of stemming African-American participation at the polls, one hard-line Mississippi legislator in 1948 warned, “if we don’t get practical about this thing, and arm ourselves, my county, for one, is going solidly black in 10 years.” The moderates did not advocate for reforms like “mass voting,” as they called it, by all eligible blacks. But the more discerning among them knew that transformative changes, which unobstructed access to the ballot would portend, were surely coming and there was considerable discussion and correspondence among them about preparing “against the day” the new era would arrive.

But they clung to their rarified status, which included such an exclusive hold on political power, in the meanwhile. The elite white moderates of the late 1940s saw at least some of the “modernizing” goals they favored in the legislature, such as equalizing pay for teachers in both white and black schools or establishing supposedly comparable state parks for blacks who were barred from the whites-only parks or requiring railroads to provide “equal but separate accommodations for the races,” as all helping forestall racial integration in the near term and thus preserving,

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for the moment, the full accumulation of their own privileges, rooted as they were in racial segregation. These last-ditch attempts at “equal” facilities, after so many decades of the obvious inequities of Jim Crow, helped keep in place the moderates’ and the broader white society’s own delusions that such separation with some belated paltry funding might possibly be commensurate with equality.\(^6\) The railroad measure, incidentally, included an enforcement provision which “would permit the railroad company to refuse to carry a passenger if he would object to the car or section designated for him to occupy.” The rule would seem to reify the established racial hierarchy dating at least to the late-19\(^{th}\) century era of *Plessy vs. Ferguson.*\(^7\)

For the moderates, along with such evidence of their reinforcement of racial caste, or at least working within the encrusted ubiquitous reality of segregation, there also were clear efforts to upgrade the state as they interpreted that concept. In the prepared remarks from his 2006 files, Winter summarized the first-term lawmakers’ modernizing and professionalizing agenda as improvements in schools, roads and jobs. And in fact in 1948 the legislature did designate a Legislative Highway Planning Committee as the agency to study the state’s highways, roads and bridges, and moderates like businessman Owen Cooper did serve on that powerful panel. Other moderates pushed the related notion of rural electrification.\(^8\)

But the moderates’ vision and ambition actually comprised much more than planning job-generating infrastructure projects and extended far beyond education

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\(^7\) New Orleans Times-Picayune. Wilson F. “Bill” Minor Papers. The Supreme Court’s *Plessy* ruling, upholding the constitutionality of the doctrine of separate but equal, was issued in 1896.

\(^8\) Rural electrification was a particular interest of moderate Ned Lee, the longtime editor and publisher of the *Webster (Miss.) Progress*. It was “related” to schools, roads and jobs in that rural electrification was, like the other factors, essential to economic development.
improvements. This is where, for all their enabling and accommodations with the old
system, the moderates do deserve some modest historical credit for fostering a kind of
progress. As expressed in accomplishments in the 1948-1950 sessions of the
legislature, their priorities included: a long-sought workers’ compensation measure;
tax-exempt bond authority to encourage economic development; an attempted
reapportionment to remove “gerrymandered” legislative districts originally designed
to minimize the political power of the Delta and other “black” parts of the state;\(^9\)
authorizing the building of a four-year state medical teaching college; getting rid of
“blue laws” forbidding certain leisure activities on Sunday; pushing a state child-
labor law; backing a bill allowing women to serve on juries (“the lady-juror
proposal”); toughening standards for the state’s legal and engineering professions;
reforming dreadful practices at Parchman state penitentiary such as gun-toting trustee
guards and prisoner whippings; blocking attempts to impose loyalty oaths on
university professors in the state; abolishing the Mississippi Bureau of Investigation
(MBI) – a “Gestapo” organization, in the words of critics; and other relatively
progressive ideas articulated in the moderates’ overall post-war agenda.\(^10\)

The moderate legislators also pushed to fundamentally reorganize state
government. The newcomers to the legislature in 1948 tried to consolidate various
state agencies and get beyond the remaining legal remnants of Mississippi’s historic
intramural sectionalism. The whole government had been structured under the 1890
constitution to keep power divided and local and to give the counties with a

\(^{9}\) Wilson F. “Bill” Minor points to the “white supremacy features written into the apportionment of the

\(^{10}\) The “Gestapo” quotation comes from Wilson F. “Bill” Minor, “New State ‘Spy’ Unit is Created,”
preponderance of white population the greatest voice in Jackson. That old system
was inefficient and was hamstringing growth, in the moderates’ view.

So, given this litany of evidence supporting the conclusion that moderates in
the Mississippi legislature embodied both an orientation toward a economically
developed future and an allegiance to the most troubling aspects of Mississippi’s
racial past, the main question explored in this chapter is this: Did the elite white
moderates of post-war Mississippi represent some modernization and progress, as
Winter and others contend, or were they primarily out to maintain in the guise of
progress the established racial and class systems by adapting them to a changing
national and international political and economic situation, as his actions and
recollections suggest they did as well. The short answer is they were in the murky,
blended center involving both. The moderates arriving in Jackson in 1948 and their
like-minded allies across the state sought a framework for some changes but also
were committed to the existing order, a cross-pressured position of power familiar in
bipolar structure to students of social change at every stage of American history. In
this case, in William F. Winter’s words, the Mississippi moderates of 1948-1950
straddled a “political schizophrenia that would envelop the Deep South for the next
two decades: the commitment of progressive young Southerners intent on carrying
out their war-born mission of improving the quality of life in their communities and
the almost paranoid resistance to any change that had its focus on race.”

The state legislature, which convened for regular sessions in early 1948 and
early 1950 and a special session in late 1949, was the site of a microcosm of the

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11 Mullins, p. xxi.
struggle between these two poles: the forces of reaction on the one hand and some attempts to move the state forward on the other. The white moderates of post-war Mississippi, such as the earnest freshmen newly arriving in Jackson, had commitments and ties to both; the two forces were not mutually exclusive, most particularly so in their own minds. As Winter indicated, the white moderates regarded themselves as both segregationists and modernists, a “Jim Crow liberal” combination that dated in its two-part contradictory composition at least to the white New Dealers of the 1930s in the Deep South and to the original Progressives of the pre-World War I era.

Today, the conjoining of the concepts of segregation and white supremacy together with modernity constitutes a clear oxymoron, a development reflected in the painful, conflicted way that Winter today conjures up the deep past. In the pre-civil rights movement years of the early post-war, however, there existed for certain whites an uneasy equipoise between the two sides, not in the least in the minds of these elites with their own limited and tradition-laden idea of modernity. Like their predecessors in earlier historical epochs, the mid-20th century Mississippi moderates simultaneously favored both essential aspects of the racial status quo and also steps to modernize the state with the help of government involvement and activism as well as with private investment.

Again, to the 1940s and 1950s moderates, the term “modernize” had what we today would consider a relative and limited application – to roads, schools and jobs, as Winter described it, for example, along with other measures – but certainly stopped well short of embracing aspects of racial fairness and equal rights that are inarguably
part of the modern American ideal. If the post-war moderates were modern, as they claimed to be, it was to be a stunted modernism that by their choice was constrained by centuries-old white social norms on racial segregation. Generally, their mindset emphasized the desirability of updated social structures and institutions – new roads and hospitals, improved education, new industry, a bigger role in some areas for the federal government, enhanced connection with extra-regional entities, a more professional corrections program, a streamlined justice system, and so on – without publicly accounting for or accepting the fundamental racial transformation, including desegregation, that a range of such social, economic and legal changes would surely eventuate. The moderates knew that broad changes were inevitable, but when it came to race they hesitated to take any meaningful political risks to recognize, verbalize or enhance that reality they were convinced was coming. As was true with Sen. Stennis, they preferred not to discuss race when they could avoid doing so and as long as possible they kept their public focus elsewhere. Moreover, they surely did not directly challenge the old order on the subject of race. That aversion was and remains their main shortfall, historically speaking.

To offer examples of their split position, for all the white moderates’ “progressive” accomplishments in the legislature highlighted above, at least eleven of them were simultaneously attending law school at Ole Miss, as Winter mentioned, an institution famously segregated at the time along racial lines, and they ran successful campaigns in the fall of 1947 in which the electorate was virtually all-white. (The voting privilege also was essentially relegated to the higher economic classes among the whites, for that matter, given the realities of poll taxes, subjective literacy tests
and other impediments to voting among the poor and working class.) In effect, these moderates were privileged beneficiaries of Mississippi’s historic racial repression and they took no discernible steps, at least in the late 1940s and early 1950s, to disturb the foundations of those privileges. They advocated change from the state’s “stuck-in-the-mud ways,” as Winter referred to them, from a lofty and comfortable platform of having long reaped the rewards of Mississippi’s “ways,” including unfair racial and socio-economic caste. They walked a fine line between a freighted past and a halting modernity. They were Mississippi’s traditionalism, as well as, among the whites, its promise and nascent change.

**Modernizing segregationists**

The newspapers covering the legislature in the late 1940s took note of both the traditionalism and the new generation embodied in the recent arrivals. “It was like a University of Mississippi Homecoming for at least six new members of the Senate, all of whom were classmates at Ole Miss before they entered service,” the New Orleans Times-Picayune declared at the beginning of the 1948 legislative session. The elite white moderates, bound by such collegial and other ties, had been brought up in, participated in and succeeded in the very established system they were now gingerly and indirectly beginning to call into question. As white Mississippians, they too were raised to see every issue “through the prism of race,” as Winter described it. For them as for every other white Mississippian, race “colored every other issue.”

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Their budding political careers were an extension of their privileged lives, as well as of their war experience and other presumably broadening factors. They personified and represented the tension inherent in the state’s racial and social history as well as in its present racial politics.

In light of their agenda for reform, therefore, the moderates’ position was complex and even hypocritical. But at the same time their ideology, for all its inherent cross-currents, was consistent overall. Akin to what historian Anthony Lake Newberry calls the South’s “fair-play segregationists,” a group who favored an ideal of truly separate but equal, these Mississippi moderates, at least as they were expressed in those post-war legislative sessions, were “modernizing segregationists.”

They certainly regarded themselves as such, as Winter’s recollections serve to attest, and to a large degree the blended label is valid. For the Mississippi moderates, each side of that binary at various times reinforced the other. Partly, they were loyal to segregation in order to help accomplish what they saw as a modern agenda. And conversely, to some extent they pushed their version of modernization effectively to retain, however temporarily, segregation and their own privileges that were connected with it. As consummate politicians, the freshmen lawmakers of 1948-1950 were flexible and opportunistic in expressing their priorities. Like all able practitioners of their craft, the Mississippi moderates heading to Jackson in early 1948 thrived at the intersection of selfish interests and noble ideals.

An example of such vacillation is illustrative. As moderates like William F. Winter and journalist Hodding Carter envisioned it, and so reconciled in their own

minds, there was a sensible compromise to be made amid what they considered the hardening extremes of the race argument in Mississippi in the late 1940s. They believed there was middle ground between what they saw as the drastic step of abolishing patterns of racial segregation, as President Truman and the national Democratic Party were beginning to advocate by 1947-1948, and, on the other hand, the outdated impracticality of rigidly maintaining the tradition in the South of blatant racial injustice wherein, as Carter wrote, “the Negro does not get equal protection before the law, … his separate schools are not equal and … he suffers from discrimination in respect to the facilities and the opportunities offered him.” 14 There was perceived to be a large ideological space between civil rights activism and the recalcitrance of “NEVER,” and, with some reluctance, the moderates trod that uncertain shifting ground.

In addition to whatever faint stirrings of conscience such bleak conditions as Carter mentioned were slowly registering in a post-war context marginally more attuned than before to issues of racial democracy, the white moderates knew the harshest realities of racial caste were increasingly unacceptable to powers they felt bound to respect and which could make all kinds of trouble for them in their privileges, such as (at least in the pre-Black years) federal courts. 15 Likewise, they were influenced by various extra-regional forces, like the national media and large economic and non-profit entities, with which they were connected from their own direct experience. Mississippi needed to adapt, in their view, or at least needed to be

15 However, the Mississippi whites’ “respect for the Supreme Court and its decisions is not extended to the President or the Congress,” Hodding Carter wrote, in 1948. Hodding Carter, “The Civil Rights Issue as Seen in the South,” New York Times Magazine, March 21, 1948.
seen as doing so. So, along with the demonstrable obeisance to segregation, the
moderates did favor the notion that the state had to grow and improve and externally
assimilate if not change fundamentally.

There existed two untenable extremes – prompt and fundamental change
versus the continuance of the starkest expressions of injustice – according to the view
of the white Mississippi moderates. The moderates considered themselves agents of
realism, as guardians of a genuine but gradual transformation and middle position in
the face of this potentially dangerous polarization, including what they termed unwise
and disruptive calls such as President Truman’s for sweeping racial adjustments in the
near-term. Along with other factors which from their perspective favored caution and
even stasis, such as their own desire to preserve privileges, the hypersensitivity to
perceived “outside” pressure was, as always, an essential aspect to the white
moderates’ flexibly constructed centrism. They were attuned to extra-regional
concerns, particularly about Mississippi, and they felt some compunction to respond
affirmatively. But at the same time they deeply resented being pushed. And this
contradiction helped make for a complex extra-regionalism on their part.

The process of change “must be done by the Southerners themselves in their
own way and not dictated from afar,” Hodding Carter wrote in 1949. By
“Southerners” he of course was assuming that white Southerners would be in the
dominate if not exclusive position. If left alone to work at what the white moderates
chose to define as natural progression, an evolutionary improvement in the racial
situation under the elite whites’ control was being “accomplished in the only way

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possible in the South, and that is within the bounds of racial segregation,” they insisted. But, the elite moderates underscored, “it is the discrimination within this pattern that must be ended.”

Along those lines, H. Brent Schaeffer, who was a white Lutheran minister, an activist in black education and a Mississippi representative of the Southern Regional Council, a progressive group in the context of the Magnolia State, stated in 1948 that, “we are confident that no outside power can upset segregation standards of the state as long as those are part of the state’s legal foundation and accepted by general custom and practice, provided there is aggressive and harmonious effort to adjust and eliminate inequities and discriminations.” Of course, in retrospect, the moderates’ stated ideal, at least in the short term, was in practical terms unattainable: racial segregation without discrimination. The U.S. Supreme Court was to make that very point in the Brown ruling in 1954. But for the time being in the late 1940s, the white Mississippi moderates, along with “liberal” groups in the South such as the Southern Conference for Human Welfare and the Southern Regional Council, continued to try to realize an elusive balance between segregation and change that might somehow allow enough adjustment while keeping them in control.

This view involved a clear example of the certitude and self-interest of the white moderates’ position, one that they themselves were convinced at the time was enlightened and sensible. They designated themselves as arbiters of what constituted “the only way possible” and they blithely assumed that the “segregation standards” and “general custom and practice” they alone, along with the white powers they

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embodied, had crafted and enforced, was normative and dare not be “upset.” They saw fit, exclusively amongst themselves, to define the proper timetable determining at what pace it was feasible for “the gulf between fairness and unfairness” characterizing Mississippi’s race problem, as Hodding Carter put it, to be phased out.

“My thesis is that the change has been so marked in the last 10 years and by projecting the continuation of that change for another 10 years, you will have the kind of democracy which we are all working for,” Carter wrote, in 1953.¹⁹ And that attitude, namely that true full democracy for (black) American citizens could be accorded only gradually over a period of years, even decades, was controversial in the state at the time, understandably. Given the increasingly insistent activities in those years on the part of groups like the Mississippi Progressive Voters’ League, the Mississippi chapter of the NAACP, and the Regional Council of Negro Leadership (founded in 1951), it is safe to conclude that black Mississippians, and others, had a far more urgent schedule in mind than that induced by what Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was to later call the “tranquilizing drug” of elite white gradualism.²⁰ As the *Chicago Defender*, the black newspaper so influential among African-Americans in Mississippi, declared in a 1950 editorial, “How can [Hodding Carter] expect Negroes who have abundantly demonstrated their rights to full citizenship be satisfied with the progress taking place in Mississippi? If left to their own devices, just when does Mr. Carter expect his fellow Mississippians to come around to recognizing Negroes as

²⁰ That is a quote from Martin Luther King Jr., “I Have a Dream” speech, Washington, D.C., August 28, 1963.
first-class citizens entitled to every privilege accorded white people?” The editorial concluded, “Mr. Carter’s case is really pitiful.”

As a rule, the white press in Mississippi and elsewhere was not seriously covering issues of racial discrimination in the late 1940s and early 1950s whereas the black press was. Mississippi whites generally did not read, nor were even particularly aware of, the black press, except to resent it, on the rare occasions when they read about it in an often hostile white press, as an instigator of a stirring African-American empowerment. Therefore, lacking such a self-examination in their own periodicals and paying little heed or open-mindedness to those publications that did explore such questions, the whites themselves were not particularly conscious, reflective or even honest about the (perhaps, to them, well-intended) bigotry so deeply imbedded in their own “moderation.” Ruth Frankenberg’s idea of the blinding aspects of the “white gaze” of history is clearly applicable in this context.

As Winter emphasized, his cohort of well-educated young Mississippi state legislators of the late 1940s was animated in its “idealism” and its ambition by extra-regional experiences, notably those garnered through service in World War II and then in returning to their home state to assert leadership roles. Furthermore, the moderates were influenced by extra-regionalism as it was coming to shape institutions such as the University of Mississippi and amid intensifying international concerns wrought by the onset of the Cold War, an expanding global agenda discussed in the more enlightened corners of the state’s media in the late 1940s.

“Today the American creed, the democratic ideal of the rights and dignity of the

individual is at war with the Communist concept of mass direction from above,” Hodding Carter stated, in 1948.\textsuperscript{22} There were notable outside pressures to get in sync with what was increasingly seen as a larger national consensus, and Mississippi’s most adept young lawmakers, even while chafing at the external prodding and acting within the limits imposed by state political realities as they saw them, felt the imperative to respond to larger forces and as necessary make grudging modifications.

Thus, the Mississippi legislature of 1948-1950 provides context for another example featuring the two main components of the thesis of this dissertation, coupling as the legislature did elements of both the modernization and professionalization impulse in all its complexity and contradiction – including, anachronistically in this case, fealty to racial segregation – and the impact of extra-regionalism on inducing change. As this chapter’s analysis of the legislature’s activities in that three-year span is designed to illustrate, the newly elected lawmakers’ broadening perspective to the extent they had acquired it, and their promotion of a vision of modernity, were tempered by and in conflict with their lifelong immersion in the assumptions of racial and economic caste and in the legalistic notion of States’ Rights. The latter was a Civil War-era holdover concept bound up with the question of race and reinvigorated to the level of near-hysteria in Mississippi in the early post-World War II years. This was particularly so in the presidential election year of 1948.

\textsuperscript{22} Hodding Carter, “The Hidden South,” Tulane University Fall Convocation speech, 1948. Hodding II and Betty Werlein Carter Papers.
The term “hysteria” is chosen quite deliberately here and it offers some indication of the depth of intense emotionalism and sectional panic on the race question at that time. Elisabeth Young-Bruehl reminds us that racism, which was such a major feature of the J. Strom Thurmond-led States’ Rights Jeffersonian Democratic Party (the Dixiecrats), is at its core grounded in hysterical characterology related to sexual fears, particularly on the part of white males.23 “The prevention of sexual relations between black men and white women was the absolute, all-consuming obsession of white males,” wrote James C. Cobb in his study of the Mississippi Delta.24 (The Emmett Till murder and trial of 1955, for example, was to bring these elements once again into particularly stark and brutal focus.)

The visceral reaction to the notion of black men having sex with white women goes some distance in explaining the late-1940s segregationists’ belligerent and anxious mongering featuring highly sexualized and largely invented language such as “miscegenation,” “harlemization,” “mixicrats,” “race mixing,” “mongrelization,”25 and, more euphemistically, “social equality” and “social co-mingling.”26 It also helps one understand Gov. Thurmond’s unsubtle allusion to rape – or at least penetration – for the benefit of his 1948 Jackson audience, declaring that, if white Southerners could stick together, “all the bayonets of the Army cannot force the Negro into [our]

26 “The radical Negro leadership is now concentrating all of its interest and attention on social equality,” Hodding Carter wrote in 1950. “Let us hope there is still a saner minority of that leadership which works for goals that can be reached in the ascertainable future such as equal justice, equal opportunity, equal education, etc.” Letter, Hodding Carter to Frank J. Wideman, January 16, 1950. Hodding II and Betty Werlein Carter Papers. Carter also wrote, “I would certainly draw the line at social co-mingling.” Letter, Hodding Carter to Donald B. Leverett, March 20, 1950. Hodding II and Betty Werlein Carter Papers.
homes."\textsuperscript{27} Arkansas Gov. Benjamin T. Laney meanwhile called President Truman’s civil rights program a “direct thrust” at the South.\textsuperscript{28} Mississippi House Speaker Walter Sillers later said the northern-dominated Democratic Party “plunged the dagger of integration and mongrelization” into the white people of the South.\textsuperscript{29} By representing and favoring some degree of extra-regionalism involving the north and other areas, the elite white Mississippi moderates were therefore, if only by implication and association, risking activating the white Southern male’s most combustible anxiety.

Of course, there was a less hyperbolic component to the Dixiecrat movement. Political scientists, for example, spoke of a political realignment in the making, as Southern Democrats since around the time of the 1928 Al Smith presidential campaign and then Franklin D. Roosevelt’s ascendance four years later began to become alienated from the mainstream of their party. And then there was the legalistic constitutional argument about federal vs. state power, or “States’ Rights,” in the shorthand, an echo of the old antebellum attempt to wrap slavery and sectional economic tension in the guise of lofty justifications. Truman’s civil rights program was “anti-Southern” in the words of Lexington, Miss., editor Hazel Brannon, a relative moderate, apparently assuming, without a trace of irony, that the views and prerogatives of Southern whites and the region itself were virtually synonymous.\textsuperscript{30}

And this more sober, cerebral, federalist approach had some appeal to moderates, particularly in its contrast with the ongoing shrill rhetoric from hard-

\textsuperscript{27} Hodding Carter, \textit{Southern Legacy}, p. 144.
\textsuperscript{28} Tupelo Daily Journal, January 4, 1948.
liners. “The States’ Rights splinter party is self-avowedly anchored to the general and
defensible theory that there should be as little Federal participation as possible in the
internal affairs of the several states,” Hodding Carter wrote, after Southern Democrats
had fled their party in the summer of 1948. “As such it represents simply another
projection of the traditional American debate over centralization of political power.”\(^{31}\)

But, constitutional and intellectual reasoning aside, it clearly was the
emotional and overtly racial aspect that had the greatest and most immediate impact
politically in 1948, especially in Mississippi, the locus nationally of the most fervent
support for the Dixiecrats. For, as V.O. Key pointed out, the Dixiecrat movement
“spoke fundamentally for the whites of the black belt and little more, at least if one
disregards their entourage of professional Ku Kluxers, antediluvian reactionaries, and
malodorous opportunists.”\(^{32}\) An underlying psychological factor to this allure to
extreme elements would be what Martha Hodes, in essentially agreeing with Young-
Bruehl, describes as white Southern male’s irrational terror that “their” white women
would, if free to do so, choose to be with African-American men.\(^{33}\)

Though Hodes looks at an earlier period of history when such anxieties were
most visibly reflected in publicly sanctioned violence, including the spectacle of
lynching, a lot of the masculinity and whiteness issues raised in this dissertation – the
unique power of the returning Mississippi veteran, the diminutive Sen. Bilbo’s

\(^{31}\) Hodding Carter, “A Southern Liberal Looks at Civil Rights,” \textit{New York Times Magazine}, August 8,
1948.

\(^{32}\) Wilkie, 151. The “black belt” technically refers to the content and color of the soil, though the
double-meaning regarding America’s Southern agricultural areas is obvious.

\(^{33}\) Martha Hodes, \textit{White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth Century South} (New Haven:
Yale University Press, 1997). In the 1940s, in researching his landmark study \textit{An American Dilemma:}
The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy, Gunnar Myrdal asked white Southerners what they
believed blacks most wanted from integration. The number one answer was: “intermarriage and sexual
intercourse with whites.”
graphic and incessant public bragging about his manhood and potency, the sexualized outcry directed at the FEPC over the prospect of white and black co-workers at defense plants,\(^3^4\) the image of young lawmakers posing as cigar-chomping football players or gathering as ex-GIs hatching their political careers in a late-night bull session, and so forth – were expressions of this same cultural and sexual insecurity, in somewhat updated and modulated form. In headline vernacular in certain Mississippi papers in the early post-war period, anyone seen as sympathetic to the black civil rights cause was dubbed a “mixer,” a term with evident sexual connotations. The Dixiecrat harangues raising the specter of blacks and northerners piercing and despoiling private and supposedly pure white southern realms can be seen in this context. And the World War II veterans joining the legislature can be viewed through the analytical lens of white male bonding with all of its accompanying tensions – sexual, competitive and otherwise.

There also were other, related explanations for the visceral reaction against race change in Mississippi in 1948, among them frustration and antagonism, particularly against “outside” involvement in what many whites saw as a state prerogative. “The average white Southerner believes that the President’s civil rights program represents a politically motivated and all-out offensive against … the doctrine of white supremacy,” Hodding Carter wrote. “The Southerner has modified its application from time to time, but he has a psychopathic fear of having it modified for him.” Again, according to the rhetoric of moderates like Carter, from their

\(^{34}\) Hodding Carter wrote, white Southern employers “do not interpret the FEPC as an effort at economic justice, but as an attempt to put the two races in undesirable contact whose symbolism is social rather than economic.” “A Southern Liberal Looks at the South,” New York Times Magazine, August 8, 1948.
perspective of race privilege, a Southerner and a white person were one and the same. In any case, the self-styled efforts of the elite white moderates joining the Mississippi legislature in the late 1940s to bring a new energy, rationalism and sophistication to the state’s welter of economic and social problems, as outlined for example in Chapter One, encountered a highly powerful and partly irrational race-based phenomenon with which they themselves were historically associated. In a sense, the newcomers had to contend with a disturbing and confounding part of themselves.

Veterans and Other Moderates

Estimates vary as to how many of the 122 House members and 52 senators convening in Jackson in 1948-1950 were World War II veterans. According to Andrew P. Mullins, editor of a recent book of William F. Winter’s speeches and writings, who relied on Winter’s unpublished memoirs in composing the introduction, “the 1948 legislature in which [Winter] and his law classmates were seated was over 50 percent World War II veterans.”35 Journalist Wilson F. “Bill” Minor puts the figure as high as 60 percent.36 “Of that group,” Minor wrote, “Senators [Carl] Johnstone and [Decatur] Butler are wounded veterans. Johnstone miraculously survived an abdominal wound received in the Normandy invasion. Butler was twice wounded, once at the Anzio beachhead and in the invasion of Southern France.”37 In his memoir, Frank Smith, in 1948 a state senator and later a congressman, writes that

35 Mullins, p. xxi.
“there were thirty or forty young veterans in the legislature.” Whatever the exact number, Smith, in an echo of Winter’s 2006 recollections, was clear that “I knew, either directly or indirectly, that most of [the young veterans] were idealists who hoped to have a part in making a better day. We had no illusions about completely remaking Mississippi, but we did believe we could contribute to its improvement.”

These white moderates, of course, had a complex and racially limited definition of the notion of improvement. For, in the words of Malcolm Gladwell, they bore the ideological marks of their time and place. And race and class, one could safely add.

An essential point is that not only were young World War II veterans heavily represented in the 1948-1950 Mississippi legislature, but also the Jackson-based media, and those newspapers publishing elsewhere in Mississippi, in covering the legislators consistently emphasized their war service. Relatedly, the journalists subjectively interpreted the young lawmakers’ camaraderie, their eagerness, their impatience with long-established custom, their newly acquired – and supposedly impressive – educational credentials, and their relative youth as important factors in weighing the merits of the legislative agenda they were espousing. In a way that comports with William F. Winter’s recollections, the young moderates, and particularly the veterans, were portrayed in the press as standing for something new and modern, priorities that were assumed to be especially legitimate, righteous and even heroic because they came to be linked with the legacy of the war itself.

This was a distinct replay of aspects of the Deep South politics of the post-Civil War period, involving the preeminence of the battle-scarred Confederate

38 Frank E. Smith, p. 72.
veteran and the potent political symbolism of the “empty sleeve” and the “bloody
shirt.” In Mississippi newspapers of the late 1940s, references to war wounds, to
battlefield decorations such as the Silver Star, and to hallowed events and places, like
“Normandy” and the “Anzio beachhead,” were directly intermixed with coverage of
comparatively mundane matters such as workers’ compensation legislation or
whether to eliminate Sunday “blue laws.” The clear implication of these articles was
there was only one noble and patriotic side to these historically rather complex state
political issues. The war as a memory and a public experience thus was being
leveraged, especially by the moderates and their allies in the press, to further specific,
and basically unrelated, legislative goals. That media portrait, however compelling
and understandable in the years immediately following the end of the Second World
War, which continued to reverberate in the late 1940s as such a huge and defining
event, is rather simplistic when viewed today in historical terms.

Also largely missing in the coverage was the issue of the stifling influence of
peer pressure, a factor that might have been particularly relevant regarding young
lawmakers newly struggling to make their name in Jackson. Given the uncertainties
that inevitably attend any budding career, particularly one involving such ambition
and calculation, it is plausible that these freshmen legislators, many of them still in
law school, were unlikely to take a meaningful stand on race given the intense
pressure to conform emanating particularly from more established colleagues.
Instead of picking up on such careerist tensions, or other compromises or failings, the
press cast the newly elected lawmakers mainly as a refreshing band of young
reformers.
Veterans and non-veterans comprised the incoming moderate legislative cohort. In addition to Smith, of Greenwood; Winter, of Grenada; and Winter’s law school classmates like C. Brinkley Morton of Senatobia, among some of the other prominent young moderates who served in the legislature in the 1948-1950 period were Phillip E. Mullen, of Oxford; and Zelma W. Price, of Greenville. These and other like-minded legislators, not surprisingly, were closely connected with other white elite moderates throughout the state in the fields of politics, journalism, academia, religion, business and law. Winter, for example, was a protégé both of James W. Silver, the Ole Miss historian under whom he studied in the early 1940s, and U.S. Senator John C. Stennis, for whom Winter had worked in the 1947 campaign. Smith, meanwhile, had run a Greenwood newspaper in partnership with Hodding Carter. Carter, in turn, served with Price in the clubby world of Delta power circles of business, banking and law. They were both active members of the Delta Council, the cotton-growing region’s version of a chamber of commerce, for example, and were both especially interested in the issue of juvenile delinquency.

Meanwhile, Morton, not only training as a lawyer but also, later in his career, serving as Episcopal bishop of San Diego, was in close contact in the 1940s and 1950s with figures in Mississippi’s Episcopal Church hierarchy, such as Hal Crisler, Duncan M. Gray Jr., Duncan Hobart, A. Emile Joffrion, and Hewitt Vinnedge. Mullen, who in addition to his legislative duties was also an editor at the weekly Oxford Eagle, received encouraging letters and supporting editorials from other moderate journalists in the state, like Carter, George A. McLean, and J. Oliver Emmerich, as well as from his Oxford neighbor and fellow political moderate.
William Faulkner. Mullen “was a close friend of William Faulkner long before the Mississippi author became world renowned,” Wilson F. “Bill” Minor wrote.\textsuperscript{40} Faulkner, in turn, was close to both Carter and Silver. The social network “snowball” of accumulating ties among the moderates was quite extensive and relevant in this context.

A discussion of this litany of contacts binding the moderates, however, is not meant to suggest there were no internal conflicts among them. Observing the Mississippi lawmakers of 1948, Minor, for one, came to see a distinct division within the emerging “young guard,” as he called it. “In a separate category from the insurgent group was a faction of young members, largely made up of university students or recent graduates of the University of Mississippi. This faction sometimes went along with the insurgents to block the planning of the ‘old guard,’ but in most cases this group maintained an even tenor to place its strength behind several key measures.”\textsuperscript{41} Thus it is a misreading to see the young lawmakers and their allies as a consistent and seamless bloc. In the very same way, it would be overly generalized to regard the group of 127 moderates at the center of this dissertation as parading in ideological lockstep. There were schisms and ongoing tensions among the moderates on various issues. For example, they often broke into sub-groups that, for observers like Minor, could be labeled “centrist” and “liberal,” in a very general sense.

Other examples of divisions among moderates more generally would include the comparison of J. Oliver Emmerich, who moonlighted as a speechwriter for the Dixiecrats during the 1948 presidential campaign, with Phillip E. Mullen, who while

\textsuperscript{40} Wilson F. Minor, “Mavericks see full cycle of Mississippi in three decades,” \textit{New Orleans Times-Picayune}, February 17, 1983.

“serving in the Mississippi House in 1948 stood alone in the defense of President Harry Truman,” the Dixiecrats’ main target, Minor recalled. Meanwhile, Hodding Carter and Senator Stennis, who generally were ideologically compatible, had a long-running dispute over the question of statehood for Alaska and Hawaii, a matter that, like so many things in the early post-war years, was seen by white Southerners and others in the context of race. Congressional representation for two new states might result in diluted Southern obstructionist power in Washington over civil rights legislation, so it was feared. As a group the Mississippi moderates were simpatico on a broad range of issues, but there were notable areas of disagreement among individual members and between various factions it should be stressed.

With that qualifier in mind, given the extensive degree of connections amongst political centrists in the state, the moderates in the state legislature of 1948-1950 can be seen as representing in general terms a broader network of elite whites. This larger array of Mississippi moderates would include not only figures like Silver, Faulkner, Carter, Emmerich, McLean, Gray, Hobart, Stennis, and the others just mentioned, but also a number of other leaders in academia, journalism, politics, the clergy, and business. And each one of the larger group of moderates had their own constituencies – congregations, readerships, etc. – to consider and accommodate. While clearly committed to the segregationist system, they all in various ways and to differing degrees were pushing the state to modernize and professionalize, particularly as they defined those concepts. For today’s scholars, it is the support

43 One of the ten points President Truman emphasized in his message to Congress on civil rights, dated February 2, 1948, was “providing statehood for Hawaii and Alaska.”
function of this wider group that gives the forward-thinking actions of the 1948-1950 Mississippi legislature, such as there were, compounded historical significance.

The moderate legislators and their political activities were conspicuous expressions of a deeper and more profound, if sometimes erratic, shift involving many other Mississippians. In time, the entire state would evolve as well, from “closed” to more open, all while clinging to essential aspects of the closure, especially regarding race. The legislature of the 1948-1950 period exemplified a much broader process of complex change as well as continuity.

As was earlier suggested, a narrative of generational change in leadership featuring an impatient cohort of idealistic young veterans not only serves as an enduring heroic memory for self-described “ancient mariners” of politics like William F. Winter, it also was an irresistible contemporaneous story line for some of the Mississippi media covering the legislature in this period. However true the impression, accentuated by the press, that an age-related (and experience-related) struggle for primacy was a core component of the 1948-1950 sessions, scholars naturally are inclined to want to plumb deeper than the shallows of journalistic mythology. For one thing, the young moderates’ position was actually more historically and politically complicated than the crusader caricature that was continually featured in the rhetoric of many Mississippi journalists of that time.

A review of newspaper columns of the period covering the legislature demonstrates that often dry and intricate policy proposals or arcane parliamentary maneuvers involving many players having a range of subtle differences were boiled
down in daily print to comparatively simplistic personality melodramas marked with bright lines and clear labels. Such literary staging was full of sports-contest clichés, and even allusions to the generational tensions of royal succession, featuring renegade “new blood” “young guard” “insurgent” first-termers, and particularly World War II veterans, riding an inspired tide of “reform” as it smashed against the rock-hard stilted ways of a wily and hidebound “old guard.” For instance, the Webster Progress, a weekly newspaper published in Eupora in Webster County, Miss., referred to freshman lawmakers pushing change as the “young rebels” and the “young crowd.” The issue of masculinity, sports and competition that is explored in the work of Martha Hodes, among others, is again germane in this context.

To give another example, Wilson F. “Bill” Minor, Jackson bureau chief for the New Orleans Times-Picayune where he wrote the widely-read “Eyes on Mississippi” political feature, offered his readers the riveting action of easy-to-follow team-like young-vs.-old groupings, in spite of the divisions discussed earlier within the new-member contingent that he himself was beginning to detect. “The Mississippi House last week was upset by a rip-roaring band of freshman members, largely drawn from the ‘cut-over timber counties’ of South Mississippi,” Minor wrote on March 21, 1948. “So disquieting was the influence wrought by these insurgents in these late days of the 1948 session that the normally unbending ‘old guard’ of the House at week’s end was vigorously working for peace to prevent an impasse on appropriations which are still hanging fire.” And in the spring of 1949, Minor continued to choreograph the legislature in terms of generational conflict. “An

44 “Personally about the Legislature,” Webster Progress, February 12, 1948.
insurgent group of the young guard, smarting from the policy making in the House, rose and tied legislation into knots for nearly a month,” he wrote.\textsuperscript{46}

Even given the familiar journalism adage that the primary job of a newspaper story is a commercial one – namely, to be read, preferably by paying customers – such animated reports are, historically speaking, one-dimensional – a rough draft of history, so to speak.\textsuperscript{47} Or at least they reflect the human tendency common in journalism, and elsewhere, to condense ideas into symbols and to present a subjective version of the truth limited to how one constructs reality. Like so many other scribes of his day, Minor had “his heroes and villains,” a longtime friend observed.\textsuperscript{48} For all that the freshmen moderate lawmakers of 1948 were associated in the media with youth, new energy, forward thinking, the patriotic righteousness and legitimacy of the war experience, etc., their position in fact was quite nuanced, blending definite elements of the past along with a concept of the future, for example.

In some ways, however, such punchy newspaper prose indeed did point to some of the complexities of the young moderates’ position. For instance, the fact that a whole region of Mississippi would be broad-brushed as “cut-over timber counties” shows that, for all the progressive and modernist fervor behind Minor’s promotion of the new member “heroes,” an anti-Yankee economic victimhood rooted in the colony complex of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century was still presumed marketable shorthand for \textit{Times-Picayune} readers of 1948. In other pieces, Minor regularly referred to Mississippi’s

\textsuperscript{47} The quotation that the mission of a newspaper is to be “the first rough draft of history,” is attributed to Washington Post publisher Philip Graham (1915-1963). See David Halberstam, \textit{The Powers that Be}, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979).
“hill” counties, as if the elevated terrain still carried a meaningful political distinction as late as 1948. But in fact, the “Delta vs. the Hills” or, alternatively, the “the planters vs. the rednecks” labels were (again, team-like) designations largely dating to the pre-automobile days when regionalism and factionalism within the state were far more pronounced but which by the post-war had been deemed by most observers as increasingly obsolete, as in V.O. Key’s landmark 1949 study of Southern politics.49 However, to give Minor his due, his articles were intimating, correctly, that for Mississippi there existed a complicated and fractured history beneath the surface action.

While writings such as Minor’s and that of the Webster Progress might have at times over-hyped the political divisions along lines of age and legislative seniority (as well as region), it is undeniable that the 1948-1950 legislature had a significant reformist (as well as accommodationist) character driven by the younger World War II veterans and their ideology of some change. Given that Minor was a moderate and a war veteran himself then still in his twenties may help put into context some of the David-vs.-Goliath, heroes-vs.-villains, or generational constructs and perspectives to which readers of the Times-Picayune (and other publications that syndicated his work) were regularly treated concerning the young ex-warrior Mississippi lawmakers of 1948-1950 and the entrenched systemic resistance the newcomers sometimes encountered. But, again, the moderates actually were in a much more complicated, and compromised, position than might have been regularly discerned by some observers at the time in Jackson keenly interested in crafting a clear dramatic sequence featuring heroic casting.

Overall, the contribution of these lawmakers – and that of their far-flung network of supporters throughout the state – was evolutionary, even glacially so, and not revolutionary, or rebellious. As members themselves of Mississippi’s small and interconnected ruling class, the elite white moderates were hardly looking to overturn the existing hierarchy of state power. As gradualists and accommodationists, the group members had an agenda involving a number of contradictions that, had they been highlighted more at the time, might have further cluttered a straightforward daily story line with confusing, paradoxical, and ironic aspects of a messy reality, one simultaneously involving both racial segregation and aspects of a kind of modernization, for example.

**A revision in the historiography**

The handy simplification of complex legislative events and the (often misleading) off-hand ideological groupings for the benefit of newspaper readers reflected a wider and more powerfully polarized situation that, as William F. Winter indicated in 2006, provided the ultimate context for all political developments in Mississippi in this period. Any meaningful progress of the 1948, 1949 and 1950 legislative sessions in Jackson in beginning to implement aspects of the moderates’ post-war agenda understandably has been distorted or mostly forgotten. It has been largely obliterated historically by a dramatic if figurative earthquake, namely the Dixiecrat “revolt” targeting President Truman and his civil rights initiatives which at
the time had gained favor in much of the national Democratic Party. Many white Mississippians and other Southerners caught up in the drama derided “Truman’s so-called civil rights program.” In discussing the latter, Mississippi House Speaker Walter Sillers Jr. referred to “President Truman and his FEPC, anti-poll tax, anti-segregation, social equality, federal anti-lynching law, and other so-called ‘civil rights’ and radical socialist anti-South measures now before the Congress.”

Among other things, the “bolting” of the party, as it is often referred to, is seen as a pivotal moment in a decades-long process of ending the “solid” South for the Democrats. The Dixiecrat phenomenon is remembered as having virtually eclipsed all other political activity in Mississippi at that time. “The legislature became a daily forum for States’ Righters declaring war on the national Democratic Party and Truman’s leadership,” Wilson F. “Bill” Minor recalled, decades later. So in this convoluted sense, among others, extra-regional priorities had a big impact within Mississippi, in that a form of outside pressure, from the White House and the national Democratic Party, helped set off an enormous backlash locally among whites.

In any event, there was so much political antagonism and hyperventilated anxiety over race among Mississippi whites at that historical moment that anyone vaguely in the “middle” offering gradual steps forward or concentrating on comparatively intricate and dispassionate “good government” matters, such as

50 The modifier “so-called” was used regularly by Mississippians looking to rhetorically diminish and delegitimize something with which they disagreed. In this period, for example, there often were references to “the so-called New Deal,” “the so-called racial problem of the South,” “the so-called Democratic Party,” and “the so-called Supreme Court.”

workers’ compensation or medical education or reform of state government or upgrading the professions, has thus far been largely overlooked by scholars. But in fact there was, “a great body of Southerners who are not content with an angry and negative approach to civil or other rights in the South” and who were in fact trying to focus on other things, wrote one North Carolina correspondent to Hodding Carter in 1948.52 Such relative and evolving moderation, legislative and otherwise, has been mostly neglected to date. One factor is that historical hindsight has been impacted by the glare of the intervening highly contentious “heroic” civil rights period of 1954-1965.

For example, with the historiography of the civil rights years still churning with agitation in the years immediately following the traumatic events of the 1950s and 1960s, it was and to an extent still is a challenge to bring attention to incremental progress taking place in Mississippi on relatively detailed issues in a parliamentary setting at roughly the same time that, say, the state’s senior U.S. senator, James O. Eastland, was issuing defiant clarion calls to racial battle such as: “organized mongrel minorities control the government. I am going to fight to the last ditch. They are not going to Harlemize the country.”53 Inflammatory statements from such highly placed sources and galvanizing events have diverted attention from the merits of lower-key plodding measured “progress” as reflected in this case in the accomplishments of the legislature. The mass media must be cited as crucial in dramatizing statements such as Eastland’s and in choosing to highlight the extreme polarities of the struggle, as it continued to do during the “heroic” civil rights period of 1954-1965.

53 Roberts and Klibanoff, 40.
But as such contemporaneous media coverage has gradually morphed over the decades into relatively dispassionate historical analyses, a more nuanced perspective is becoming possible. The events of 1948-1950 are therefore illustrative of the overall thesis of this dissertation: the elite white moderate has been a complex if overlooked actor in Mississippi’s historic process of change and continuity.

Beyond the Dixiecrat convulsion, enormous as it was, other related factors concerning undue emphasis on the extremes also have served thus far to complicate the effort at broader and more textured historical awareness about gradual “progress” and change through indirect and complicated processes. The issue of the white Southern monolith, a supposedly undiluted mass of racial radicalism, earlier explored in the historiography chapter, is applicable here.

For example, the Mississippi state legislature of the post-war and civil rights era, in conjunction with other hard-line elements of that time such as the Jackson-based Hederman newspapers, has acquired, thanks to the writings of Hodding Carter, James W. Silver, James C. Cobb, Frank E. Smith, Curtis Wilkie, the wider national news media, and other sources, a durable reputation in the scholarship and in historical memory comprising elements of extremism, farce, and harsh disturbing almost fanatical racism.\textsuperscript{54} In that sense the image and notoriety of the 1940s and 1950s legislature reflects a perception and a misperception of white leadership of the state as a whole in this period involving heightened attention on polarizing figures such as Senators Bilbo and Eastland. To be clear, there is no argument here that

\textsuperscript{54} The Hederman family owned and managed the Clarion-Ledger and the Jackson Daily News, among other media properties.
Mississippi’s post-war white extremists in positions of power were not really as “bad” or reactionary on the race question as they, to all evidence, certainly were. That record is unmistakable. But what is being postulated is that, especially regarding the legislature, the story is more layered and contradictory than the fairly one-sided version that has been told to date.

The state legislative body in particular, which thanks to antiquated apportionment rules favoring the hinterlands at the expense of population centers was dominated mostly by rural lawmakers encased in seniority catering to the state’s most conservative and race-fearful constituencies, has been largely dismissed or pigeon-holed by many contemporaneous observers and by historians. Scholars have interpreted the post-war state House and Senate as chambers of almost-comic extremity, gratuitous speechmaking, desperate efforts to stop the inevitable, outdated thinking, tangential and petty debate, nostalgic and sentimental paeans to the “Lost Cause” of the Confederacy, reprisal and “shakedown” legislation, hard drinking and endemic corruption. Tales of excessive partying and the entire range of social interaction were legion as the state’s politicians, extroverted as a breed and away from their wives, flocked to the big city of Jackson for lively biannual or annual sessions.55

Mississippi’s legislature, it should be added, was hardly unique among state assemblies in this particular respect. But as a group, the politicians convening in Jackson were “legislative jackasses,” in Hodding Carter’s tart phrase.56

seriously, in 1956, another observer, J.R. Grisham, wrote of “the fear that is dominating many of the decisions and votes in our legislature.”57 The fear and the seemingly extreme behavior were interconnected.

The apparently unrestrained excess was most notable, and is of most interest to historians, as it was expressed in the legislative process. The main aspects of the legislature, and of Mississippi’s wider power structure, in those years were hair-trigger defensiveness and ideological rigidity. Recalled an Ole Miss graduate recently returned to the state in 1956 from a military assignment: “On occasion I went into the Capitol building to observe our Senate in action. That exalted body seemed to be a veritable hornets’ nest of hyper-sensitive individuals – toward anything or anyone who did not conform to accepted ideas.”58

As with many parliamentary bodies giving the widest latitude to allow open debate, the Mississippi legislature was structured in a sense to protect the expression of extreme rhetoric and (in retrospect) unusual maneuverings. Because any statement made on the floor of the legislature carried with it an absolute privilege, and no suit for libel or slander based on such a statement could be successfully prosecuted, the lawmakers often used – or misused – the House and Senate chambers as platforms to strike at adversaries, in shrill and highly personal terms, with complete immunity from action for defamation.59 This legal cover had the effect of removing inhibitions regarding bold emotional comments and actions. This was particularly the case

59 This privilege of immunity and the practice of its misuse was not limited to the Mississippi legislature, of course.
regarding the resolution process. And the targets of these resolutions, when they could, responded with similar invective, creating a highly toxic post-war political environment. The legislature was dominated by “political loons” and “character jobbers” who should “go to hell,” according to one of Hodding Carter’s front-page editorials, in 1955, after the editor was stung by a legislative resolution calling his writing “untrue” and “not warranted by the facts.”

Whether Carter’s belittling portrait of Mississippi solons is fully valid or not, it is clear, as Winter suggested in later years, the overriding force determining virtually everything the legislature did was race – at least until sufficient numbers of moderates arrived in the post-war to begin, however tentatively, to shift the emphasis away from that obsession and onto economic development and other “progressive” matters.

Notably, and hardly surprisingly, Mississippi’s legislature had been characterized by racial fear and white supremacist action long before the 1940s. But for example in the context of the changes beginning to occur in the post-World War II

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60 Hodding Carter, “Liar by Legislation,” Delta Democrat-Times, April 3, 1955. Carter was responding to House Concurrent Resolution No. 31 which declared, among other things, that his article “A Wave of Terror Threatens the South,” Look 19, March 19, 1955, did “violence to the principles of justice, truth and fair play.”

61 Of course, it is overly simplistic to argue that race exclusively was the determining factor rendering the political climate so fearful in the late 1940s. There were many other, related elements at play, particularly regarding the economy. For example, part of the hostility directed at President Truman’s civil rights proposals in 1947-1948 and in subsequent years in Mississippi was undoubtedly related to depressed cotton prices caused in part by federal trade policies imposing a limit on U.S. cotton exports. This led to a large surplus of cotton in the U.S. and resulted in steeply depressed prices. House Speaker Walter Sillers Jr. railed against “the stupid and indefensible action of the Secretary of Agriculture in limiting exports of cotton [in] our foreign trade.” Letter, Walter Sillers Jr. to Frank R. Ahlgren, October 18, 1950. Walter Sillers Jr. Papers. Therefore, there was already deep resentment and ambient anger toward Truman and the federal government over other “anti-South” policies which were only compounded and exacerbated by the civil rights proposals. Concerns about race and economic insecurity were intertwined.
years, repeated evidence of the continuance of the old patterns was especially striking. In particular, the strenuous efforts of many in the late 1940s and 1950s legislature to stifle any change even remotely touching on race were works of contorted legalisms patently thwarting democracy in the broader sense, and that has seemed to be the institution’s primary historical legacy to date.

Some of these endeavors were laughed off as buffoonish theatricality or ridiculous stretches of logic by critics like Carter, both at the time and since, but because in many cases they became state law and were thus enforceable upon two million Mississippians, and in particular upon the nearly one million black Mississippians, the parliamentary efforts were hardly harmless amusements. A review of the record reveals to what impressive lengths an elected body could go in its reactivity.

The constitutional “theory” of nullification, for example, which presumably had been settled in the 1830s when President Andrew Jackson threatened to have John C. Calhoun hung for his obstinacy on the tariff matter, was pushed by many prominent Mississippi lawmakers well into the 1960s! “Foolish” and “legal poppycock,” was the response in 1955 of Gov.-elect J.P. Coleman, one of many

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62 The 1950 U.S. Census showed that Mississippi’s total population was 2,178,914 people; including 1,188,429 whites and 986,707 blacks. In a category labeled “other” there were a total of 3,778 people.
incredulous observers.\(^{63}\) Coleman’s appalled reaction was backed by other moderates across the state.\(^{64}\)

In February 1956, both houses of the legislature unanimously adopted a similarly antiquarian “Resolution of Interposition,” in which Mississippi claimed the right to decide where power resided in any contest between federal and state prerogatives and reserved the right to “interpose” its sovereignty between a federal ruling and the state’s people when it determined that states’ rights were abridged by federal action.\(^{65}\) As the resolution was coming to a final vote in the House, a spontaneous group of House members began singing “Dixie.”\(^{66}\) In the resolution, the state announced that it “considers” the U.S. Supreme Court’s *Brown* ruling “unconstitutional, invalid and of no lawful effect within the confines of the state of Mississippi.”

Around that time, there even was much loose talk in Jackson about secession itself. “It isn’t a laughing matter, but we do have to snicker at the spectacle of some of our local registrars defending the Mississippi River bridge against a platoon of

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\(^{63}\) “Coleman Blasts Nullifying Plan,” *Jackson State Times*, December 14, 1955. In December 1955, Coleman, scheduled to take office the following month, was planning “to deliver a special message to the Legislature on the subject of nullification.” He wrote Professor James W. Silver at Ole Miss for research assistance “to help me again lay this ghost, now almost a hundred years after its final death.” Letter, J.P. Coleman to James W. Silver, December 19, 1955. J.P. Coleman Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

\(^{64}\) For example, Arvel C. Smith, a Presbyterian minister in Louisville, Mississippi took note of the talk of nullifying a decision of the U.S. Supreme Court. He wrote Coleman: “I am proud of your courageous stand on this matter.” Letter, Arvel C. Smith to J.P. Coleman, December 15, 1955. J.P. Coleman Papers.

\(^{65}\) Some sources argue that the Interposition doctrine was not antiquarian at all, but rather was a shrewd way for Southern political leaders to take a stand against the federal government they fully realized was only symbolic while gaining time for Southern emotions to be quieted. See letter, Hodding Carter to L.A. Chase, February 13, 1956 and letter, Hodding Carter to Franklin Jones, March 19, 1956. Hodding II and Betty Werlein Carter Papers. To Jones, Carter wrote that interposition “takes the play away from the local and regional groups, such as the (Citizens’) Councils, and to that extent reduces the danger of civil strife. It is of course a delaying tactic and nothing more, but as such it may give us what we need in the Deep South, namely time.”

Marines or even a lone FBI agent,” Hodding Carter mused. Also, 1956 was the same year the legislature created the 12-member Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, a state agency charged with the responsibility “to do and perform all acts and things deemed necessary and proper to protect the sovereignty of Mississippi … from encroachment thereon by the federal government … and to resist the usurpation of the rights and powers reserved to this state.” As it turned out, for its first few years, under the administration of relative centrist Gov. J.P. Coleman, the commission was a rather small, staid and inactive outfit focusing mostly on public relations and Mississippi’s image. The agency’s true invigoration as an investigative force came during the subsequent and more racially strident governorships of Ross R. Barnett and Paul Johnson Jr., stretching from 1960-1968.

Meanwhile, in the early post-war years there were other repeated parliamentary expressions of extremism, to the point, in retrospect, of outright foolishness. In the 1948 legislative session, for example, hours of debate were expended over a proposal to force Mississippi radio stations to play “Dixie” at the beginning and end of each broadcast day and to have all newspapers in the state print a chorus of the song’s lyrics under the masthead every edition. An amendment to that bill, apparently intended to insult President Truman, of Independence, Mo., or more likely to expose the whole exercise as ridiculous, would have outlawed the broadcast in Mississippi of the “Missouri Waltz,” with such an act constituting a felony.


357
Also, in the early and mid-1950s, there were a number of serious proposals in the legislature to in effect outlaw or at least neutralize the NAACP.\textsuperscript{70} For instance, a bill was passed (but was vetoed by Gov. Coleman) requiring the NAACP to publicly disclose its members. In 1956 the state passed a measure requiring public school teachers to submit affidavits listing all organizations they had been associated with for the previous five years; the unspecified but clear intent was to ferret out black schoolteachers who might be members of the NAACP. The hounding of the NAACP was in fact part of a multiyear strategy in Mississippi. In 1946 lawmakers had started a General Legislative Investigating Committee mainly to develop laws to rid the state of the organization.

No breach of the color line was too trivial to attract lawmakers’ wrath. For example, there were efforts in the legislature to eliminate all state funds for Jones County Junior College, located in Ellisville, because its unbeaten 1955 football team opted to play “against Negroes” in the 1955 Junior Rose Bowl in Pasadena, Calif.\textsuperscript{71} The Jones opponent, Compton (Calif.) Junior College, had eight black players on its roster.

Meanwhile, the legislature in February 1948 debated a “slander bill,” calling for the criminalization of the act of criticizing the state. That same month, the legislature passed a resolution calling for a federal law to deal with anyone citing

\textsuperscript{70} The push to outlaw the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in Mississippi was opposed by many moderates and was considered dubious by legal experts. “I agree with you that the NAACP should be stopped from operating in Mississippi,” Gov-elect J.P. Coleman assured state Rep.-elect Herschel L. Cameron in late 1955. “I greatly fear, however, that we shall have to use other means, as to outlaw them would be unconstitutional for several reasons and would not stand the test in the federal courts.” Letter, J.P. Coleman to Herschel L. Cameron, November 19, 1955. J.P. Coleman Papers.

\textsuperscript{71} “Jones College to Bowl Over Newspaper Threat,” Delta Democrat-Times, December 6, 1955. Mississippi’s junior colleges were chiefly funded by the counties, but the state made an appropriation for their support every two years.
discrimination by setting up a new agency empowered to expel from the state “such persons, their household goods, including their dogs, their chickens, and all personal belongings.”\textsuperscript{72} In 1956, a similar if more mildly worded measure was being considered “which will make it a crime for a teacher of government or anyone else to criticize any official or policy of the state government.”\textsuperscript{73}  House Bill No.119, introduced in January 1956, proposed essentially a state sedition law, making it a crime to urge or encourage “nonconformance with the established traditions, customs and usages of the State of Mississippi.”

Also, the legislature in the post-war years on a number of occasions seriously considered shutting down the state universities over issues of academic freedom and “un-American” activities on campus, both matters intimately connected with race. This topic is discussed further in Chapter Five. Meanwhile, some legislators demanded that every book referencing African-Americans be banned from the University of Mississippi library.\textsuperscript{74}

The legislature evidently was not against books altogether, however. In 1954, it passed a law appropriating the impressive sum of $5,000 for the Mississippi Library Commission “for the purchase of books dealing with the subject of ethnology,” which, given the list of texts subsequently acquired, was apparently interpreted as meaning pro-segregation literature and propaganda.\textsuperscript{75} Meanwhile, in 1950, with the


\textsuperscript{74} “Exodus from Ole Miss,” \textit{Time}, July 29, 1957.

\textsuperscript{75} On February 1, 1956, for example, the Mississippi Library Commission reported that it had purchased 47 copies of “White America” by Ernest Cox, 25 copies of “Black Monday” by Tom P. Brady, and 20 copies of “You and Segregation” by U.S. Sen. Herman E. Talmadge, Democrat of Georgia. \textit{Report to the Mississippi House Appropriations Committee and the Senate Finance Committee}. Wilson F. “Bill” Minor Papers.
anti-communist witch-hunting period nearing its peak, one state lawmaker charged that members of the Ole Miss faculty “were receiving pay from foreign sources,” Hodding Carter reported. The Greenville editor added: “I think such attitudes are particularly witless and dangerous to the preservation of the thing that we want to preserve most of all – a democracy of give and take in which opinions are respected.”

The extremes of anti-communism and segregation became fused in Mississippi politics of the post-war. The legislature debated something called the “Subversive Act of 1950” that targeted five professors at Ole Miss for their supposed liberalism. The law which resulted required all state employees to sign loyalty oaths. It also stipulated that state college appropriations would be withheld until school presidents filed written reports that there were no subversive influences at their institutions. The legislature in this period also created a committee to monitor supposedly subversive organizations. While surely many state legislatures and other lawmaking bodies around the country went to (later regrettable) extremes under the banner of anti-communism in the early post-war years, so the anti-subversive trend needs to be understood in some context. But in this situation, the legislature-generated harassment and intimidation of faculty and school administrators, the intense atmosphere of anti-liberal paranoia, the potent and toxic alchemy of the fear

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of communism and the fear of race change, and the resulting seriousness of the threat of university closure combined to make Mississippi a special case.\(^78\) Related to the issue of shutting down universities, there was a serious proposal, in the wake of the Brown decision in the mid-1950s, to allow the legislature, if necessary to preserve segregation, to close all the state’s public schools.\(^79\) This effort had the support of Mississippi’s Speaker of the House, among other leading figures, and in a special session of the legislature in September 1954, constitutional amendments were approved to allow, if not actually to effect, the schools’ closure.\(^80\) Also after Brown, compulsory school-attendance laws were eliminated. It “seems certain that in states where there are compulsory school attendance laws, that it would be a violation of the civil rights of white children under the Federal Fourteenth Amendment to force these white children to go to school with Negro children,” House Speaker Walter Sillers Jr. wrote in 1955.\(^81\) In the same session, the state’s conspiracy statute was revised to include attempts “to overthrow or violate segregation laws of the state.”\(^82\) Meanwhile, the state made it illegal for outside lawyers to represent clients and racial cases which had been proscribed by state action. As had long been the case in some form, state law in the 1940s and 1950s was mainly being crafted as a direct instrument of white supremacy.

\(^78\) A fuller discussion of the issue of academic freedom on Mississippi campuses is included in Chapter Five.
\(^80\) The 1954 provision allowing the closure of the public schools was never actually utilized.
On more narrow issues, sometimes the legislature was highly creative in coupling the historically bizarre with the mean-spirited. Reacting to complaints that “smart aleck” African-American teenagers were telephoning “white ladies” and the problem had reached “epidemic proportions,” the Mississippi House voted a $10,000 fine and five years imprisonment for cursing into the telephone, according to James W. Silver.83 This last example clearly touches again on the Martha Hodes argument about gender, masculinity and ideal femininity, namely, in this case, that white Southern men were fearful to the point of hysteria and irrationality about the idea that white women might be communicating with black males let alone desiring them sexually.

The legislature’s practice of issuing resolutions, many of them impulsive and personal in nature, was particularly notable. “When Mississippi legislators get together their herd instinct drives them to resolving the fate of the world,” James W. Silver snickered in The Closed Society. “If they hate Hodding Carter or the President of the United States, or love Elvis Presley, Dizzy Dean, the Mississippi State basketball team,…or feel that a former Miss America is an accomplished actress, they are not inhibited from saying so.” He added, more seriously: “Legislators spend much of their time devising legal subterfuges to keep the Negro in his place.”84

Again, overall the extremity, ballyhoo and vindictiveness, particularly regarding race, have mostly comprised the post-war legislature’s reputation to date.

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84 Silver, pp. 10-11.
The legislative rhetoric and maneuvers were highly visible symptoms of a feverish attitude on the part of much of the state’s white leadership that drove Mississippi into foredoomed confrontation with the national government during the years of the civil rights movement. That overwrought, angry and panicky stance, recorded by witnesses and cameras in its many permutations, is what is most remembered. The negative cast was greatly enhanced and solidified for example in the period leading up to the Ole Miss integration crisis of September 1962 when a barrage of defiant neo-Confederate speechmaking in the State Capitol exacerbated the already hair-trigger tension by egging on the extremes and thereby arguably legitimating the ensuing acts of violence.

According to author James C. Cobb in *The Most Southern Place on Earth*, the angry, emotional and nostalgic behavior on the floor of the legislature regarding integration at Ole Miss was part of a reactionary pattern lawmakers had set throughout the administration of Ross R. Barnett, which began in 1960. Cobb writes: “In addition to approving the right-to-work amendment in 1960, the legislature also lowered the income tax while raising its own salaries, provided public funding for the Citizens’ Council, enacted a host of anti-sit-in and anti-voter registration measures, and capped these accomplishments by commending South Africa for ‘the determined stand of the government …in maintaining its firm segregation policy’.”

Meanwhile, state legislators in the early 1960s served in high positions in political organizations that regularly referred to the president of the United States as

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85 Cobb, p. 228.
“Blackjack Kennedy.”86 The legislature set up a group to coordinate the commemoration of the Civil War centennial in 1961-1965 called the Mississippi Commission on the War Between the States. Mississippi legislators were devoted supporters of an active State Sovereignty Commission and its mission to keep black Mississippians from gaining their rights. And so on.

Therefore, given this overall record stretching from the late 1940s through the 1950s and into the 1960s, certainly there is ample fodder for the damning – and prevalent – view of the Mississippi legislature of the post-war years as either intensely reactive, marginally relevant, hopelessly racist, or all three. But the argument raised here is that the great struggle over race, particularly the phase beginning in the early post-war period, exploding over the Truman civil rights program and flaring up again in the mid-1950s, and then reaching a new height of panic over the matriculation at Ole Miss of James Meredith in 1962, has served to hinder clear perceptions of the notable forward progress that, despite all the undeniable distractions and contradictions, also was being made in Jackson, particularly in 1948-1950. Many of the white moderates discussed in this dissertation were participants or important facilitators of a discernable series of legislative accomplishments, achieved in the name of bolstering the state as a more “modern” entity. But until now their achievements, such as they were, have been obscured.

86 An example of such an organization would be one calling itself Unpledged Mississippi Democratic Electors. In the 1960 campaign, Vice President Richard Nixon did not fair much better than Senator Kennedy in the eyes of Mississippi conservatives. He was known as “NAACP Nixon.”
Gubernatorial grandstanding

In addition to the question of the legislature’s dubious reputation historically, obvious evidence that moderate Mississippi lawmakers and their associates elsewhere in the state were segregationists, humanitarian or not, and thus in a general sense connected to the Dixiecrats and other attention-grabbing white supremacist factions, has tended to historically mar all positive developments that the moderates may have helped facilitate, however gingerly. Moderates have been called, with some justification, “practical segregationists” who shared many of the aims, if not the tactics, of the hard-liners. While not excusing the segregation, racism and related injustice in which the moderates were culpable in so many ways, the historical distortions and the progressive achievements are placed in some context in these pages. A modicum of credit, or at least a fuller explanation, is offered where it is overdue.

Again, the media-generated focus on race as a Deep South “crisis” in the post-war, as the civil rights movement of that time helped to frame it and as subsequent history has often interpreted it, also has had the effect of diminishing, relatively speaking, the importance of the comparatively quotidian accomplishments of the legislature in favor of dramatic defiant executive action on the part of polarizing individuals. This is particularly true of state governors, such as Mississippi’s Fielding Wright in the case of 1948, or Ross R. Barnett in the early 1960s. Numan V. Bartley
and Hugh D. Graham called Barnett “the ultimate caricature of racist demagogues of the massive resistance period.”

Elsewhere in the region, Govs. J. Strom Thurmond in South Carolina, Orval Faubus in Arkansas, George C. Wallace in Alabama and Eugene Talmadge and Lester Maddox in Georgia are examples of the same post-war Southern breed. Storming out of national political conventions, making fiery speeches full of secessionist rhetoric, grandstanding on university campuses in the face of federal power, and other well-documented gubernatorial posturing always garnered much more attention (and, not incidentally, won votes), particularly in the television era and when contrasted with civil rights martyrs or faceless federal officials, than the bland and often confusing machinations of incremental legislative progress. Historians too have been overly concerned with these individuals at the expense of other factors. As Rembert W. Patrick writes, unfortunately the national spotlight in the civil rights years focused “on the dramatic acts of governors, who were no more successful in preventing token integration in educational institutions than a ruler of ancient times was in commanding tidal waters to be still.”

In reality, drama aside, the real political clout in Mississippi state government, since the 1890 state convention, has by far been in the legislature, not the governor’s office, a fact mostly overlooked in serious post-war press coverage and in scholarship. In keeping with Mississippi’s long tradition of deep suspicion of centralized political power, the office of governor was effectively neutered in the 19th century.

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century with the imposition of a paltry annual salary, threadbare staffing and office
budgets, and the ban on serving successive terms, among other constitutional
limitations. In succeeding decades, other prerogatives, such as much of the
effective’s appointment power, were gradually stripped away. For example, in 1922,
the legislature took control of the powerful Delta levee boards away from the
governor. And the authority to appoint trustees to the Board of the Institutions of
Higher Learning was changed to a staggered process in the 1930s so that no one
governor could fill more than one-third of the seats. Moreover, as a practical reality,
“the governor has considerable power during the first year of his four-year term,”
Frank E. Smith observed, “but the power tends to pass to a legislative oligarchy
during the following three years.”

But, for all that, the biggest factor emasculating the governor’s power vis-à-
vis the legislature was one-party rule. In the realities of governing, much of an
executive’s power is typically derived from competition within factions of the
legislature where the executive’s veto, powers of appointment, unique public
platform, and other persuasive tools can swing the balance on key issues in making
laws. In a legislative body that was entirely comprised of Democrats, as was the
Mississippi legislature of the late 1940s and up until quite recently, that executive
clout simply did not exist. The true action and power resided within the Democratic
legislative caucus and the governor, institutionally, was basically a bystander when it
came to making law. So, with an executive power vacuum, the legislative leadership

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89 In 1987, a gubernatorial succession amendment to the state constitution was ratified, making
governors eligible to serve two successive terms.
80 Frank E. Smith, p. 280.
91 Ibid., p. 279.
reigned well above the governor as the most important force in state government. In the case of Mississippi in the early post-war years, the Democratic lawmakers were occasionally divided, to be sure, but a strong House Speaker’s office dominating a compliant rules committee, forced a large degree of unanimity.  

Therefore, as judged by the impact upon actual year-by-year governmental process, as opposed to quixotic actions in the public glare under the pressure of the civil rights issue, the most influential political leader in Mississippi state government was, and has long been, the speaker of the state House of Representatives. From 1944-1966, that individual’s name was Walter Sillers Jr., of the Mississippi River town of Rosedale, in Bolivar County.

“Lawmakers overwhelmingly fell into step with then House Speaker Walter Sillers, perhaps the most powerful state political figure of the last half-century,” Wilson F. “Bill” Minor, recalling the late-1940s, wrote in 1983. Added Karl Wiesenburg, a state representative from Pascagoula in the late 1950s and early 1960s, speaking in 1965: “Mr. Sillers has been for some thirty years the most important man in the state of Mississippi. Governors may come and go, but Mr. Sillers goes on forever. He has more power than the governor; he has more power than the legislature collectively, even though he is nominally only the Speaker of the

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92 The House Speaker, for example, had the power to select all members and chairmen of all standing committees and all recess committees. The Speaker also had the power to send all bills to the committee of his choice.
93 The governor’s power to succeed himself/herself has been restored since the 1950s. Other powers also have been extended to the chief executive. For believers in a strong executive, the model for rewriting the Mississippi Constitution in the post-war was Huey P. Long, whose meteoric reign with nearly dictatorial executive powers in nearby Louisiana had a profound effect on Mississippi thinking. The changes to the Mississippi governor’s office were not effectuated until years after Long’s death in 1935.
94 After the death of his father in 1931, Sillers dropped the “Jr.” from his name and was known simply as Walter Sillers.
House.‖\(^96\) Newspapers at the time, again favoring the handy caricature, called Sillers the “Bolivar Baron” and “the Grand Old Gibraltar of the state’s legislative old guard.”\(^97\) That Sillers’ name is all but forgotten historically and that of a more transitory, shallow and far less accomplished figure like Ross R. Barnett lives on as the great martyr-pugilist for the white South squaring off against the Kennedys and their minions at Ole Miss speaks volumes about the skewed emphasis of race-related political studies of Mississippi.\(^98\) An inquiry into the workings of the legislature – one that goes beyond the widely derided attention-getting extremist and foolish actions – and into the importance of the gradual change of the framework, as opposed to incidents of stark “crisis” or examples of demagogic figures fed by the power of television, is a needed corrective.

On the topic of crises, and tied to the phenomenon of the Dixiecrats, the clustered timing of dramatic events from late 1947 through 1948 may be yet another critical reason for any lingering historical distortion, obscuring the reality of some forward movement legislatively, in terms of modernization and professionalization, concerning that period. For starters, the opening of the 1948 legislative session in early January fell directly in the midst of several extremely charged developments related to civil rights. Just three months before, in October of 1947, the President’s

\(^96\) Interview with Karl Wiesenburg, Civil Rights Documentation Project, Mississippi Humanities Council, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Millsaps College Archives, June 11, 1965.  
\(^97\) “Steinfort tags Walter Sillers ‘Real Dictator of Mississippi,’,” Jackson State Times, August 30, 1959.  
\(^98\) A piece in the Jackson State Times included the following: “The governor of Mississippi, whoever he might be, hasn’t much power in comparison with Sillers. Sure, the governor can campaign and advocate this and that. But it’s the legislature that will either approve or disprove his program. It will be Walter who will either approve or disprove. As dictators go, Walter is a remarkable strategist. He has been eminently successful at his trade. Governors come and governors go – but it’s old Walter who runs the show.” “Steinfort tags Walter Sillers ‘Real Dictator of Mississippi’,” Jackson State Times, August 30, 1959.
Committee on Civil Rights issued its report, *To Secure These Rights*, which took direct aim at the Southern segregationist cause in urging action by the federal government. For example, the report called for an aggressive federal effort to effect “the elimination of segregation, based on race, color, creed, or national origin, from American life.” 99 Then the second week of January, the much-anticipated, nationally touring Freedom Train, carrying 133 original historical documents, including the Mayflower Compact, the Declaration of Independence and the Gettysburg Address, stopped in Jackson and, in a highly controversial and unprecedented breach of racial norms, was opened to visitors on a non-segregated basis. 100 The irony of this stopover, conjoining as it did both tangible hallowed symbols of the bedrock notion of democracy and human freedom and also arguments for race-based anti-democratic restrictions on freedom, was lost on no one, even with the momentary reprieve from segregationist practice.

Adding still more to the emotional conflagration of that immediate period, just a few days later, on January 20, Mississippi Gov. Fielding L. Wright’s inaugural address contained the loaded threat that unless national Democratic leaders ceased promoting “anti-segregation legislation,” Southern Democrats would break from the party in national politics. In press coverage of the speech, forms of the word “secede” and defiant references to the Confederacy were blared in headlines throughout the state. 101 In Jackson, House Speaker Sillers stated that Wright had made “the most courageous and statesmanlike appeal made in defense of state’s rights

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99 Dittmer, 27.
100 Foner, 250.
101 For example, “Cease Anti-Southern Legislation or State Democrats will Secede Says Mississippi Governor in Inaugural Address,” *Delta Democrat-Times*, January 22, 1948.
and local self-government since those memorable debates in Congress in 1860-1861 when another Mississippian, Jefferson Davis, rose to the height of the situation and proved himself to be the great leader and statesman of his day.”

Continuing the stunning series of dramatic developments, two weeks later, on February 2, 1948, President Truman sent a special message to Congress urging it to implement his civil rights committee’s recommendations, which covered such controversial (at least in the minds of many white Mississippians) topics as federal anti-lynching legislation, protection of voting rights, ending discrimination in interstate transportation, repeal of the poll tax, a permanent Federal Employment Practices Commission and an anti-segregation law.¹⁰² In response, Mississippi’s House Speaker Sillers and a group of other state lawmakers sent a telegram to Mississippi’s U.S. House of Representatives delegation in Washington. “We join with all the white Democrats in Mississippi who appreciate your forthright, outspoken denunciation of the president’s message and the damnable, communistic, unconstitutional, anti-American, anti-Southern legislation recommended to Congress,” the telegram stated. “We commend you for your courageous defense of the South.”¹⁰³ By the end of that month, a meeting of 200 Mississippi Democrats had been convened in Jackson, with supporters from nine other Southern states in attendance, to develop “top-secret plans” to thwart Truman.¹⁰⁴

And then in May came the fiery Jackson speech of Strom Thurmond full not only of 1861 rhetoric, which Winter recalled most clearly, but also the ancient and

¹⁰² Message from the President of the United States transmitting his Recommendations for Civil Rights program, February 2, 1948.
¹⁰⁴ Frederickson, p. 84.
suggestive canard of “social intermingling” of the races. “Our people draw the line,” the South Carolina governor declared. “All the laws in Washington, and all the bayonets of the Army, cannot force the Negro into their homes, their schools, their churches, and their places of recreation and amusement.”

Mississippi Dixiecrats rallied under the name “True White Jeffersonian Democrats” and punctuated their political meetings with Rebel yells.

As a result of the concussion of all these highly volatile events, which continued through the summer walkout at the 1948 Democratic National Convention after Minneapolis Mayor Hubert H. Humphrey’s dramatic appeal for civil rights to the convention delegates and then the fall campaign featuring a breakaway Dixiecrat presidential ticket, the fervor was so intense that Frank Smith’s recollection – one that is now being called into question in this chapter, given the countervailing evidence – was that the 1948 legislative session became little more than a cheering section for the Dixiecrat cause. Considering the current historiography, including Smith’s memoirs and books like that of Kari A. Frederickson that draw heavily upon such accounts of the participants, it would be difficult to exaggerate the heightened emotion in Mississippi’s public dialogue in the late 1940s and would be easy to parrot the consensus conclusion shared by Smith, Frederickson and others that little else of consequence was taking place in the state on the public stage.  

However, the perception of – and historical emphasis on – an apparently monolithic and shrill white Southern reaction to national civil rights proposals and a public focus resting virtually exclusively on that issue, needs to be adjusted – the

105 Hodding Carter, Southern Legacy, p. 144.
primary purpose of this chapter. In spite of all the fear, anger and hysteria surrounding the Dixiecrats and civil rights swirling around Jackson, and with particular intensity in 1948, the legislature seated that year was quite productive and forward-thinking on a number of issues impacting Mississippi’s growth and development.

The contrast between the Dixiecrats and the legislature’s moderates, therefore, had some of the same elements as the comparison discussed in the previous chapter between the demagogic Theodore G. Bilbo and the more practical (or seemingly so) and humanitarian John C. Stennis, again both falling under the rubric of conformity to racial segregation. At least for a brief period the legislature was in fact “progressive,” in several important understandings of that word. Amid Mississippi’s wider hullabaloo over race, there was a heretofore overlooked or at least misconstrued forum – the state legislature in 1948-1950 – where some lasting progress toward the moderates’ interpretation of modernization and professionalization actually occurred.

“Progressivism – For Whites Only,” 1940s version

Upon the adjournment in April 1948 of the Mississippi legislative session, Gov. Fielding L. Wright declared “that the legislation enacted will assure and enhance Mississippi’s continued march of progress.” The lead paragraph of a New Orleans Times-Picayune story at that time emphasized the same point using a form of the same word, declaring, “the 114th Mississippi Legislature went home today amid a

107 New Orleans Times-Picayune, April 14, 1948.
flurry of last-minute lawmaking, but left behind what veteran members considered some of the most progressive legislation passed in a single session.” The article goes on to highlight the workers’ compensation bill, passed during the session, as “‘the most important piece of social legislation’ enacted in Mississippi” history.\(^\text{108}\)

But, notable as that specific achievement and the enactment of other new laws were, the question remains were the “veteran members” and other observers at the time justified in commending themselves as progressives and for continuing a putative “march of progress” for helping realize supposedly groundbreaking “social legislation” such as that regarding workplace injury, while at the same time they virtually ignored or sidestepped the fundamental issue of racial injustice. How valid – or invalid – is that interpretation of progress? Today, how readily should we accept the flattering ways in which the white moderates of 1948 chose to characterize their own accomplishments?

Though strictly speaking, the workers’ compensation measure involved a form of taxation on employers to cover expenses for their injured employees, the legislature of 1948-1950 which claimed the new law as its central attainment represented a progressivism derivative, ironically, of the ideology of Mississippi’s “business progressives” of the 20\(^\text{th}\) century’s first two decades.\(^\text{109}\) An example of the earlier breed would be Ellen S. Woodward (1887-1971) of Louisville, Miss., a state legislator and economic development official and later the second-highest ranking

\(^{108}\) New Orleans Times-Picayune, April 10, 1948.

\(^{109}\) Workers’ compensation is a form of insurance that allows employers adequately to meet their moral obligation to employees. It also acts to assure employers who are willing to do that, that their less scrupulous competitors are also providing such insurance.
woman official in the Franklin Roosevelt administration, and Clarksdale lawyer, state legislator, planter and businessman Oscar Johnston (1880-1955), also a top figure in the Roosevelt government, in the Agriculture Department.\textsuperscript{110} The business progressives, among other things, favored encouraging the development of light agriculture-related industry in Mississippi, such as creameries and pulp mills.

Somewhat like his mid-20\textsuperscript{th} century successors, who kept their vision of change “within the bounds of racial segregation,” as Hodding Carter put it, Oscar Johnston was a “progressive” to the extent he sought some incremental government-sponsored change, as in agricultural assistance, but it was change to be maintained solidly under a white-dominated structure.\textsuperscript{111} Biographer Lawrence J. Nelson writes that Johnston represented “an advocacy of efficiency and public services, if not necessarily increased democracy and social justice.”\textsuperscript{112} Richard Hofstadter sees the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century Progressive-era leadership in the South as being “a rising social elite of aggressive new businessmen,” a description suitably fitting Johnston.\textsuperscript{113} In a characterization that overlooked some advances on the race front through the Social Gospel movement and other gradual reforms, historian C. Vann Woodward labeled this earlier period “progressivism – for whites only.”\textsuperscript{114}

It is evident that something of the same racially compromised attitude, evident not only in the Progressive Era but also during the New Deal, prevailed in the more

\textsuperscript{110} See Lawrence J. Nelson, King Cotton’s Advocate: Oscar G. Johnston and the New Deal (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999). During the New Deal, Woodward, a former Mississippi state legislator, held high positions in the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, the Works Progress Administration and the Social Security Board. Her particular area of expertise was in the area of women’s employment. The highest-ranking woman in the Roosevelt administration would be Frances Perkins, the labor secretary.


\textsuperscript{112} Nelson, p. 7.

\textsuperscript{113} Hofstadter, The Age of Reform, p. 145, note.

\textsuperscript{114} Woodward, Origins of the New South, 1877-1913.
recent incarnation of “progressivism” in Mississippi. The much-touted 1948 workers’ compensation law, for example, excluded from coverage farm workers and domestic servants. A majority of African-Americans in Mississippi who were employed in 1948 worked in one of those two areas. This clause in the law mirrored racial restrictions inserted into the federal Social Security law in the 1930s, in the guise of disregarding certain work categories in the South, namely agricultural and domestic workers. The old-age pension plan, James T. Patterson writes, “exempted large categories of the poorest workers, notably domestics and agricultural laborers.”

These 1930s restrictions were put in place at the behest of Southern Democrats in Congress, insistent on the maintenance of local controls on federal programs, as the price of their support for passage. They and their like-minded allies in business in states like Mississippi wanted to maintain economic and racial dominance and the prerogatives of states’ rights in the face of a robust expansion of the federal government, and Social Security benefits aiding certain workers, namely blacks, might have posed a threat to that power and order. The same was true with the federal minimum wage law, which also did not apply to agricultural workers. So, in a similar way, in its crowning achievement of enacting workers’ compensation

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116 It should be added, by way of context, that the 1930s also saw definite if incremental progress on race in Mississippi in part instigated by the federal government. Hodding Carter noted that “since 1932 … a growing federal concern and a growing federal entry into the field of minority group discrimination in each of these areas: job opportunities, sufferage, and education. You have wage and hour legislation that immeasurably benefited the low incomes, low pay, particularly of the Negro worker in the South. You have had fair employment practices put into practice in a number of the states and continuing attempts to do so at the federal level.” Hodding Carter, convocation address, Southern Illinois University, 1955. Hodding II and Betty Werlein Carter Papers.
legislation, the “progressive” legislative session of 1948 offered little tangible progress, in any immediate sense, for most black Mississippians of that time.

There is some cause to assert that the new law so heralded by the moderates and others was a worthy first step, subject to improvement and expansion down the road, and that all Mississippi workers black and white would eventually benefit from the precedent, however flawed and politically watered-down in the inception. But in this major instance, African-Americans were, in the thin guise of their job status, deliberately excluded from the 1948 bill. Post-war Mississippi moderates thus focused on modernization and professionalization, particularly as they defined those concepts, while sometimes deliberately helping block progress on race, or at best, when it came to that topic, moving haltingly and from a position of narrow self-interest. Moreover, they were working within a highly restrictive political context and their attainments were limited by what was doable.

That said, looking more broadly the elite Mississippi moderates of the post-war did contribute to significant accomplishments in matters seemingly – in some areas intentionally – quite removed from race. In the case of 1948-1950, amid all the attention-grabbing Dixiecrat posturing on the race issue, the legislature, in addition to passing workers’ compensation legislation: got rid of the widely flouted Sunday “blue laws”; took major steps to reorganize an antiquated state government still clinging to the 1890 constitution, such as a move for proportional representation in state legislative districts; authorized the building of a four-year state medical college in Jackson; toughened standards for law school admittance and for practicing lawyers; debated the “youth court bill,” a measure to try youths in courts separate from adults;
moved to equalize teacher salaries between white schools and black schools; passed bills to replace the notoriously violent and corrupt prison trustees with professional guards at Parchman state penitentiary; and abolished the MBI – the Mississippi Bureau of Investigation – the state’s secret spy agency.\footnote{Some could argue that the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, created in 1956, essentially was the reconstitution of the MBI. But even if that were the case, for eight years, from 1948-1956, the state did not have a so-called spy agency. Meanwhile, the subject of youth courts was hotly debated in legal circles in the 1940s. In 1944, there was a legislative proposal to move the functions of the Oakley Delinquent Farm, a program for young black male offenders, to Parchman State Penitentiary. Generally speaking, the moderates strenuously objected to the idea of mixing young offenders with adult inmates at a state prison.}

An argument can be made that some of these measures, like the youth court bill, the raising of salaries at black schools to bring them in line with those at white schools, the move to professionalize the guards at overwhelmingly black Parchman, and the doing away with an intelligence-gathering organization clearly designed to target civil rights as well as labor unions, directly benefited Mississippi’s African-Americans. But if so, the issues’ moderate advocates in the legislature debating the legislation did not necessarily cite racial fairness as a selling point. And besides, in some of these instances there was scant measurable improvement for African-Americans as measured by their day-to-day experience.

In the case of a “professional” prison guard, for example, it is possible that racism was so ingrained that the “upgrade,” from trustee to trained guard, was negligible from the viewpoint of the black consumer, namely the prisoners. They were abused and deprived of basic human rights under both arrangements, “modern” and pre-modern, “professional” and unprofessional. Thus any progress concerning race via these legislative measures that did occur was indirect and, for the moderates, largely unacknowledged. No white Mississippi politicians in this era were in any way
taking an overt stand to help black people, even if that was in some cases the effective or eventual result of their actions. The legislators were helping bring about “progress” in terms of their concept of modernization and professionalization, but not necessarily on race. They seemingly were content to work within a highly compromised and racialized system.

However historically conscious or intentional sources may be in the application of the term “progressive” in describing the 1948-1950 Mississippi state legislature, in fact the descriptor is particularly apt from the standpoint of scholarship and comparative history. The label draws an obvious parallel with the Progressive Era of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, an epoch which again included Mississippi’s “business progressives.” There are similarities between the two time periods in the state and national contexts respectively in terms of the involvement of the elites, the kinds of advances made in law, and regarding the unmistakable paradox in the case of race. The term “progressive” of course has come to have an expanded meaning as a near-synonym for liberal. But, as a matter separate from that blurring over time, the comparison between the Mississippi legislature of 1948-1950 and the pre-World War I era nationally is well-taken and worth exploring. In a way, it seemed as if the national Progressive movement of the early 20th century took 40 years to finally reach the hinterlands of Mississippi, at least as it was expressed in the legislature.

One way of understanding the Progressive period in U.S. history is that it was an attempt to make the laws, particularly those governing life in American cities,
catch up with the rapidly changing social and economic realities – those aside from race, that is – of the Industrial period. It was, in Robert H. Wiebe’s terminology, a “search for order” or in Richard Hofstadter’s words, an “age of reform.” In broad areas such as democracy (within racial limits), regulation, efficiency, prohibition and social justice, these earlier Progressives advocated and accomplished a number of measures. So, too, by comparison, did the legislators in Jackson in 1948-1950 on the state level.

In the area of democracy, for instance, the original Progressives nationally fought successfully for the direct election of U.S. senators and for the adoption of the ballot initiative and the referendum.\(^{118}\) The Mississippi legislature of the later period pushed for equalizing voting districts by population.\(^{119}\) Moderate state Senator (and future U.S. congressman) Frank Smith, for one, proposed a resolution in 1948 calling for a constitutional amendment which would apportion seats in the legislature according to population. In 1950, Smith proposed the creation of a “little Hoover” commission to reorganize state government.\(^{120}\) In another example of the comparison across time periods regarding democracy: the pre-World War I Progressives fought

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\(^{118}\) The Seventeenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, providing for the direct election of U.S. senators, was ratified in 1913.  
\(^{119}\) One bill, the New Orleans Times-Picayune reported, “provided that representatives would be apportioned among the counties on a basis of one to each 15,000 residents.” Wilson F. “Bill” Minor Papers. 
\(^{120}\) The Hoover Commission, officially named the Commission on Organization of the Executive Branch of Government, was appointed by President Harry Truman in 1947 to recommend administrative changes in the U.S. federal government. It took its nickname from its chairman, former President Herbert Hoover. One of the commission’s recommendations, for example, was a term limit for the presidency. This resulted in the 22nd Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, ratified in 1951, that set the limit at two terms. There also was a Second Hoover Commission in 1953-1955 during the Eisenhower Administration.
for women’s right to vote. The Mississippi “progressives” in the 1948, 1949, and 1950 legislative sessions favored a bill to allow women to serve on state juries.\footnote{New Orleans Times-Picayune, February 20, 1950.}

On the topic of regulation, the earlier Progressives urged checks on big business, including in the area of child labor. Mississippi lawmakers in 1948 pushed a state labor law to “regulate the employment of children as to ages, hours, condition and occupations,” requiring “a certificate from the state to employ a minor.”\footnote{New Orleans Times-Picayune, February 2, 1948.} Similarly, in the area of efficiency, the first Progressives advocated greater professionalism in a range of fields, including business management, public administration, public services generally, policing, and the press. They called for non-partisan “experts” to replace political spoilsmen and bureaucrats. In the mid-20th century, the Mississippi legislature likewise debated more stringent regulations on the legal and engineering professions, as well as in the area of prison management and control, previously mentioned.\footnote{According to the New Orleans Times-Picayune, March 2, 1948, regarding the legal profession, “under provisions of the measure … the state supreme court will select 15 legal figures from the three supreme court districts of the state from whom the governor will name a five-member board of bar admissions. … Other requirements under the bill are that to be admitted to the bar, a candidate must have completed a course of study in a law school over a period of two-years’ duration or have completed two years legal study in the office of a practicing attorney.” Concerning the engineering profession, the Senate considered a bill which “raised from one year of college or recognized school training to four years of such training in order to be licensed.”}

Within some racial limits, the Mississippi Progressives wanted greater professional expertise applied in areas like local courts. Meanwhile, the campaign for the prohibition of alcohol in the earlier period is similar to the 1948-1950 Mississippi reformers’ moral objections to “quickie” marriages prevalent along the state’s border. Generally speaking, the parallels, across different time periods and involving distinct contexts, are quite striking.
This similarity would extend to common social structures and organization, as in the case of women’s clubs, providing an outlet for the intellectual energies of middle-class and upper-class women and offering a way for them to be involved in political matters. The clubs in both the Progressive period in the cities and in post-World War II Mississippi played a significant, if often behind-the-scenes, role in ventilating important issues and advocating reforms. In particular Mississippi was the site of women’s book and study clubs, sometimes set up through churches but often organized independently. “The multitude of women’s study and literary clubs in the South provide almost our only link with the great outside world of arts and letters,” Hodding Carter wrote. In both the Progressive and Mississippi cases, the clubs allowed educated women to move beyond a focus on cultural and social activities, though they were still active in those areas too, and, without openly questioning prevailing assumptions about women’s proper role, to define a space for themselves to explore public issues while not directly challenging the existing male-dominated structure. And in both eras, the clubs’ non-partisan image, and their connections through marriage and family with highly placed men, made it difficult for political leaders to disregard them.

There are significant differences overall between the two historic situations, of course. The original Progressive template focused mainly on the cities, especially in the North; Mississippi’s case was far more rural. The earlier Progressives wanted above all to place limits on the growth, concentration and power of industry; the

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124 Hodding Carter, Southern Legacy, p. 77.
125 The reference here concerns white clubs, primarily. Although, of course, there were clubs formed by black women as well. See Alan Brinkley, American History: A Survey, Vol. II (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2009), p. 574.
Mississippi legislature’s “progressives,” despite favoring some regulations on business like the responsibility for workers’ compensation, put a priority on economic development, as in supporting local bond authority to attract new industry. The quest in Mississippi in the 1940s to relax Sunday “blue laws” against showing movies and playing ball games and to institute the local option for the sale of alcohol certainly contradicts the tenor of the temperance component if not the consumptive overall reality of the original Progressivism.

Nevertheless, the similarities are stark and notable. One fundamental parallel between the two epochs is in the clear irony over race. It is arguably a misnomer to call any time period, such as the pre-World War I years, “progressive” in the broad sense of the word when one of its main champions, Woodrow Wilson, was a virulent racist and when the era’s litany of “progress” was accompanied by sustained outbreaks of lynching, the ascendance of the Ku Klux Klan and widespread disenfranchisement of African-Americans – such as that enshrined in the 1890 Mississippi state constitution (“the Mississippi Plan”) – in the Southern states. The xenophobic reaction to the “new” immigrants of that time period accentuated a harshly anti-democratic mood. It is likewise problematic to call the late 1940s “progressive” in general in Mississippi, in spite of the way the moderates at the time themselves described the period and their specific accomplishments, when the signature event of that time was the massive and regressive spasm of the highly racist Dixiecrat phenomenon in the face of which most centrist Mississippians either took part or fell silent. As Dewey W. Grantham notes in the subtitle of his book,
progressivism in places like Mississippi involved the “reconciliation of progress and tradition.”

Progressivism also is a troubling and empty descriptor for a political climate wherein blacks were effectively excluded from what was supposedly the prime legislative example of such progress – the workers’ compensation law. In a general sense, the “progressive” label alone also is not necessarily a credible fit when racial segregation was still considered by virtually all Mississippi whites to be inviolate. As judged by action, this view was shared by moderate lawmakers. Even within the white mindset of the pre-civil rights era in the Deep South, as in the case of New Deal Southern Democrats, that maintained that both a certain form of liberalism (or progressivism) and ongoing support for segregation were somehow compatible in practical political terms in a situation where the electorate was virtually all white, the linkage of those two now-disparate ideas looks curious in historical retrospect. Like their turn-of-the-century forebears, the white Mississippi moderates of 1948-1950 were compromised on race. In many ways, rather than strictly “progressive,” a more apt if somewhat euphemistic and overly broad term for the elites would be “conservative.”

It should be noted, parenthetically, that for the conservative progressive Mississippi legislature of 1948, parallels can also be drawn not just to Progressivism but to other periods of reform in American and Southern history. The similarity between the worker’s compensation debate at the state level and the Social Security enactment during the New Deal, particularly regarding racial restrictions, has been

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mentioned. And certainly the cross-pressured Mississippi legislators of the post-war had elements in common with Southern Populists of the late 19th century like Tom Watson, at least in the bifurcated way in which C. Vann Woodward has depicted him on the question of race.127 Both have stood before history primarily for their failure on race, for example.

On the segregation question, the hopeful modernist notion of an ever-expanding democracy such as Eric Foner described it in *The Story of American Freedom*, in spite of some legislative moves that could be interpreted in that regard, encountered not only inertia but also a frenzy of frontal and ambient hostility in Jackson in 1948. Even some slightly less-heated debates confronting the state lawmakers, like proposals to equalize pay for the state’s teachers at black and white schools, had a racist or race-related undertone; the teacher-pay effort was clearly meant to forestall widely expected court-mandated desegregation. In supporting such measures, the moderates clearly were strategically accommodating Jim Crow. Like all historic political movements, the Progressives, both in their original iteration and in their spin-offs in places like Mississippi decades later, contained elements of obvious contradiction. The elite white moderates of post-war Mississippi, including those active in the 1948-1950 legislature, were exponents of an enduring “modernizing segregationist” conundrum, for example. They were, to attempt a label, conservative progressives.

No doubt, the moderate Mississippi lawmakers of 1948-1950 and their supporters largely stayed allied with the surging hard-line segregationist orthodoxy, a

stance which, viewed in light of other more forward-thinking contributions, makes
their overall position complex if not outright hypocritical. On the whole the
moderates yielded – some quite willingly and actively – in the face of overwhelming
States’ Rights political power which in turn adamantly rejected, in House Speaker
Walter Sillers Jr.’s words, “the strong-arm tactics to browbeat, insult, humiliate the
South, trample under foot her cherished traditions, mongrelize and subjugate her
people, and destroy her institutions.”\textsuperscript{128}

One of the moderate legislators’ key allies in the press, for instance, \textit{McComb
Enterprise-Journal} publisher J. Oliver Emmerich, went so far as to be a leader in the
Dixiecrat movement, albeit one who eschewed the more extreme racist or secessionist
rhetoric against “Truman and his harlemites” and hewed to the narrow constitutional
and legalistic argument concerning federal-vs.-state power. In the parlance of 1946-
1947, such “moderates” were in the mold of John C. Stennis as opposed to that of
Theodore G. Bilbo. Namely, they were “polite,” “practical,” and “intellectual”
segregationists and status quo defenders promulgating theories of “states’ rights” in
lieu of Bilbo-esque demagogic rabble-rousing raising the alarming specter of
miscegenation and other supposed horrors, sexualized and otherwise. But, as
Emmerich said years later: “In the light of history, the states’ rights campaign of 1948
can be seen as an outgrowth of the thinking of the rednecks, the coonasses and the
hillbillies. But it was acceptable to the political elite as well.”\textsuperscript{129}

The latter, of course, offered presentable cover to the former groupings in the
way of reasoned and rational argument – and sanction by the most powerful classes –

\textsuperscript{129} Frederickson, p. 1.
and historians need to hold the elite white moderates to account for what was, in
essence, a protective enabling role, and which in this respect had the effect of
prolonging racial injustice. Emmerich in his position as cerebral Dixiecrat advocate
was quite typical, if more articulate than most. “The concept of a federal government
and separate sovereign states, each with separate and distinct powers, is a concept
which should be preserved,” he wrote in his memoirs, decades after the passions of
1948 presumably had subsided some. “The powers granted to the federal government
and to the separate states are accompanied by distinct responsibilities which must be
upheld in order to preserve both the states and the federal government.”

Here Emmerich apparently was comforting himself retrospectively that the Dixiecrat
upsurge of which he had been a part was also something other than an unseemly
outgrowth of “redneck” thinking.

Other moderates of the late 1940s, facing the Dixiecrat juggernaut, were more
circumspect than the movement’s leaders like Emmerich. In such cases, they
contributed the minimum support necessary to the States’ Rights cause in order to
cling to power while hoping the phenomenon was mostly spasmodic and expecting it
to blow over. Stennis, for example, “was not among those who [were] enthusiastic
about that (States’ Rights) effort,” William F. Winter recalled. Though, after some
initial hesitation about joining the movement, the newly elected U.S. senator did give
a speech at the States’ Rights party convention in Birmingham, Ala., in the summer
of 1948. Others did their best to keep mum or dared to maintain tacit loyalty with the
national Democratic Party. They carefully ventured to point out that the States’

130 Emmerich, Two Faces of Janus: The Saga of Deep South Change, p. 91.
131 William F. Winter, Oral History Interview, Mississippi State University, p. 6.
Rights movement neglected the obvious fact that federal money made up a huge percentage of the South’s economy, and therefore it was either myopic, hypocritical or self-defeating to strike at the hand from Washington that nourished them. “There were a number of us who were newly elected who had no enthusiasm for the States’ Rights, Dixiecrat effort who thought it was a foolish thing to do,” Winter remembered. Meanwhile, Phillip E. Mullen, the first-term representative from Oxford, bolstered in his views not only by a relatively tolerant and open-minded college-town voting constituency but also by his secure role as a top editor and columnist at the Oxford newspaper owned by his father, felt the lonely freedom to be an outspoken loyalist to President Truman.

“Support for the States’ Rights zealots in Jackson was not unanimous,” Kari A. Frederickson writes. Referring to the 1947 primary electorate, Frederickson adds, “voters in the traditional populist strongholds, young Democrats, and legislative hopefuls such as young Frank Smith, one of several veterans running in the Mississippi Democratic primary, looked askance at the States’ Rights takeover. Rumblings regarding the doings at Jackson resonated throughout the state. Editorials by state representative Philip E. Mullen in the Oxford Eagle early in the campaign expressed mixed feelings over the wisdom of [Gov.] Wright’s [secessionist] threat and questioned the ability of the South to assert itself as an independent political entity.” Hodding Carter, believing Mississippi needed two viable political parties in order to enter the national mainstream, endorsed Republican presidential candidate

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132 Ibid., p. 8
133 Frederickson, p. 83.
Thomas Dewey in the fall of 1948 and also kept up his assaults, in narrowly legalistic terms, on the Truman civil rights proposals.

Meanwhile, “opposition to the States’ Rights movement in Mississippi resurfaced despite [Gov.] Wright and [Speaker] Sillers’s control of the party,” Frederickson writes. “Not all Mississippi Democrats went along with the pledge to withdraw from their party. Philip Mullen, of Oxford, editor of the Oxford Eagle, member of the state legislature, delegate to the state convention, and a voice of moderation in the state, acknowledged that he and others were against Truman and the civil rights program, but that he did not believe the precinct conventions reflected the true will of the people. Ned Lee, Europa newspaperman and delegate to the state convention, likewise opposed the party bolt and claimed, ‘I don’t see any good in forming a third political party.’”

Thus, as a group, the moderates including the legislators were somewhat torn and compromised regarding the events as they, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, encountered the Dixiecrat phenomenon.

With all the emotion surrounding the segregation issue, with Mississippi’s own Gov. Fielding Wright running as the vice presidential candidate with South Carolina Gov. Thurmond on the States’ Rights ticket in the 1948 general election, and with Thurmond and Wright garnering a whopping 87 percent of the vote in the state that November, it is perhaps understandable if historically questionable that most Mississippi politicians with future career aspirations – even those with otherwise more “moderate” inclinations – made accommodations with the hurricane-force

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134 Frederickson, p. 108.
prevailing political winds. As Frederickson writes, “Frank Smith later acknowledged that while he and other moderates disagreed with the states’ rights revolt, they were a distinct minority. Smith soon made up his mind that he could do more good within the system than outside it so said nothing. In Mississippi the spectrum of opinion had narrowed to the point where the best moderates could do was keep quiet.” As in the case of Senator Stennis and his U.S. Senate campaign the previous year, the elite moderates often chose meaningful silence to send a message or signal their position on issues touching race.

As always, politicians yielded to self-interest and the requirements of self-preservation, especially given the extreme environment. This was especially true of the young moderates who as newcomers to Jackson were at a particularly vulnerable and fledgling stage of their careers. Political pressures to conform, and in particular peer-pressure, were difficult to resist. These observations are not intended as an apology or excuse, but merely as an attempt to understand a historic predicament and to include the positives that might be there along with all the clearly discernable reaction, moral indifference, cowardice, and pandering that also was involved.

Whatever the degree of compromise or capitulation the moderates felt compelled to make, a real contribution in particular of these legislators, and the networks of Mississippians who supported them, was that in the midst of a severe racist maelstrom which they accommodated they did have some success in bringing a bit of the modern world, as they saw it, to their state. They helped bring evolutionary change to the context of Mississippi. Like the Progressive movement nationally of

135 The States’ Rights presidential ticket received 167,538 votes in Mississippi that year to the Democrats’ 19,384 and the Republicans’ 5,043.
136 Frederickson, p. 83.
the turn of the 20th century, the Mississippi moderates of 1948-1950 blended an alliance with more overt expressions of racism together with a push for modernization and professionalization that would go some distance to update – to “open” – their homeland in a rapidly changing world. They had a historically meaningful role in changing the state’s framework.

The 1948, 1949 and 1950 sessions

Many of the so-called progressive ideas that culminated in state legislation in the late 1940s had been discussed among Mississippi moderates for years, and with increasing frequency since the end of World War II. To take the most prominent example, the proposal for a workers’ compensation law – workmen’s or workman’s compensation, in the argot of the times – to protect employees injured at the workplace, had been formally debated in the legislature since 1922 and was the focus of a special legislative study committee by the mid-1940s. But by 1947, no workers’ compensation law had been successfully passed in Mississippi.

Similar labor laws had long since been enacted in all other 47 states as industrialization grew more mechanized and complex and it spread nationwide along with the attendant stresses and hazards complicating the nature of work and workplace safety. New Jersey, for instance, had passed a workers’ compensation measure in 1911 as part of the Progressive agenda of its new governor, Woodrow Wilson. One factor thwarting enactment of the law in Mississippi was the

137 New Orleans Times-Picayune, April 10, 1948.
requirements of the Balance Agriculture With Industry (BAWI) program, a plan to entice industry to the state begun in the 1930s. So eager – or desperate, one might say – was Mississippi for industry in the Depression years that one means of luring the out-of-state factories was the dubious promise of local suppression of the needs and demands of labor, such as workers’ compensation. For example, in his successful campaign for governor in 1935, Hugh L. White, the man credited with creating BAWI, ran on a platform opposed to workers’ compensation.\textsuperscript{138}

Prior to Mississippi finally adopting the law in the post-war, injured workers seeking redress in the Magnolia State had to sue employers and prove negligence in court, a circumstance that helped give rise to Jackson-based cottage industry of “damage-suit lawyers” profiting from the existing system. “It is an unfortunate fact that most labor groups in this state have been educated into believing that the system of common law liability is more beneficial to labor than any workman’s compensation act,” Mississippi state Sen. William C. Keady of Greenville wrote, in 1944.\textsuperscript{139} In a society strictly stratified by class and steeped in paternalism, such legal challenges to authority, as in one’s employer, could be physically dangerous and were not frequent, despite the presence of the damage-suit lawyers coterie poised to egg them on. The whole arrangement, and the persistent lack of a sensible law, struck many observers as unwieldy and absurd. “So reasonable has enactment of such a law

\textsuperscript{139} Letter, William C. Keady to Dave Peel, March 13, 1944. William C. Keady Papers, Special Collections Department, Mitchell Memorial Library, Mississippi State University.
seemed that we sometimes wonder what jokers, aside from the opposition damage suits profiteers, could be in the deck,” the Delta Democrat-Times declared in 1939.\textsuperscript{140}

In other ways, the lack of a workers’ compensation law in the case of Mississippi was, of course, more closely related to race. White control of black labor, particularly in the state’s rural areas, had been a bedrock reality dating to the slavery period, and a law granting new rights to workers potentially at the expense of employers thus had direct racial connotations. Workers’ compensation was seen as a threat to the system. “When this legislation is passed, the master no longer concerns himself with the welfare of the servant,” explained Marion W. Reily, a lawyer in Meridian, in a 1942 letter. “Some shyster lawyer could stir up Negroes and give farmers a world of trouble. … When you have compensation acts, fictitious claims are made constantly. The darkie who says he fell from a mule, stumbled over a clod, strained his back, or what-not, in the hands of a crooked lawyer and a crooked doctor, could make it very unpleasant for the farmers of the country.”\textsuperscript{141} The white power structure was bitterly opposed to giving black workers a legal tool to be used against it and fought for the exclusion from the law of agricultural and domestic workers.

By backing the workers’ compensation effort, even one with these exclusions, the moderates were, in theory at least, rejecting this kind of entrenched racial traditionalism and thus were, by logical extension, contributing to some measurable progress on the race question. They were setting up a law that would eventually give workers of all races some basic rights, at the expense of employers. They were changing the framework which would have racial repercussions in the future. The

\textsuperscript{140} “Workmen’s Compensation – Perhaps This Time,” Delta Democrat-Times, October 31, 1939
\textsuperscript{141} Letter, Marion W. Reily to Walter Sillers Jr., February 9, 1942. Walter Sillers Jr. Papers.
moderates of course were not taking an overt stand on race in this regard, however. In backing workers’ compensation they did not talk in terms of facilitating any overthrow of ancient racial norms. In fact, by their legislative compromises, they were accommodating those very norms, at least in the short term. Rather they emphasized, once again, issues of modernization and how a workers’ compensation law would help move Mississippi forward.

Their stance contradicts Gov. White’s view from the 1930s that the absence of a worker’s compensation law actually served as a lure for certain out-of-state employers. For all their eagerness for industrialization, the most discerning moderates were most interested in attracting outside companies that were minimally humane and caring in their treatment of employees, primarily because those tended to be stable long-term businesses. “I am convinced that the absence of such [workers’ compensation] legislation has kept and will continue to keep many desirable industries out of our state,” Col. Alexander Fitz Hugh, a Vicksburg businessman, member of the Delta Council, and a moderate, said in 1945. “I wish to earnestly urge that a fair and adequate act be formulated and introduced in the next session of the legislature.”

Senator Keady, a onetime law partner in Greenville of William Alexander Percy, said, “our biggest fight in the Mississippi legislature is to sell to the membership the soundness of the principles of workmen’s compensation.” In the Senate of 1944, a workers’ compensation bill was reported favorably out of the special committee created to “make a comprehensive study of the workmen’s

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compensation laws of other states; ascertain which of said laws have worked satisfactorily to both labor and industry; study and investigate procedure and operation of such laws; the cost of operation thereof and any and all facts in connection therewith.”\(^\text{144}\) The special committee also drafted the proposed law.\(^\text{145}\)

But the measure was defeated once again when taken up by the whole Senate that year. “My position all along has been that our state should enact a statute which has been tried and worked successfully in a state similar to ours in point of population, wage rates and industrial development,” Keady wrote in 1945.\(^\text{146}\) In another letter, Keady explained that the Mississippi bill “closely [followed] the Arkansas statute,” so it can be safely surmised that in looking for “a state similar to ours in point of population” he was alluding, at least in part, to demographic racial composition. In 1946, a workers’ compensation bill managed to get as far as passage by the state House of Representatives, but it subsequently died in the Senate.

But 1948 was the year the long push in Mississippi for workers’ compensation was finally enacted into law. It was introduced at the start of the session in January, passed the House on March 30 by a vote of 69-54, and then, after a series of proposed amendments threatened to doom its passage, the measure was adopted by the Senate the first week of April. On April 13, Gov. Fielding L. Wright signed the bill into law, scheduled to go into effect the following January. According to press reports, the decisive legislative actors in maneuvering the bill to passage were a small group of World War II veterans, particularly in the House. “Those boys” they were called by one Capitol observer, J.K. Morrison. “The ‘boys’ of which [Morrison] speaks are

four World War II veterans in the House who took up the fight for the bill, steered it through tough opposition in the House and then campaigned vigorously to gain needed support in the Senate,” Wilson F. “Bill” Minor of the Times-Picayune reported. The article named these central figures as H.M. Ray, N.S. Sweat, Sam Allred and William F. Winter. At the time, three of the men were under 26 years of age and the fourth was in his mid-30s.

The point of reviewing the workers’ compensation example is that the new State Capitol cohort of war veterans, Ole Miss law students and other younger – and more moderate – representatives was crucial in bringing change to law in post-war Mississippi. The resistance to them was fierce and the law itself was fairly tepid, especially regarding race, in retrospect, so it is important not to overstate the shift this new measure symbolized. But when this “progressive” success is placed in the context of the inertia of the previous 26 years when all efforts at passing a workers’ compensation law had failed, and when it is added to other steps toward modernization and professionalization the 1948 legislature undertook, its significance can be more fully understood and appreciated.

The younger group of moderate legislators also took a leading role in effecting other changes in the state. For example, as with the issue of enacting a workers’ compensation measure, there had been attempts in the legislature for years to relax Sunday “blue laws.” By the early post-war period, these statutes, grounded in religious fundamentalism and dating in Mississippi in some form as far back as the

first decade of the 19th century, officially prohibited movies and sports activities on
the Sabbath. The rules, as with those prohibiting alcohol sale and consumption, were
widely ignored, particularly in Mississippi’s cities and larger towns where doctrinaire
Protestantism was presumably counteracted by cosmopolitan and secular influences.
“Professional baseball and golf games now flourish in the state on Sunday with no
apparent effort made to curb them,” the Tupelo Daily Journal noted in early 1948,
before the official ban was lifted. “Numerous movie houses also operate on Sunday,
during the evening as well as the afternoon. Some openly charge admission while
others accept donations.” 148 But in spite of the flagrant breaches, the laws remained
on the books and they evidently were a deterrent to some recreational activities,
especially in the rural counties. Elsewhere they were seen as a silly relic of a bygone
Mississippi best updated. One concern was that the continued existence of a law that
was so widely disregarded bred a generalized disrespect for the law that was itself
corrosive and socially disruptive.

The attempt to change the “blue laws” and end what William F. Winter called
“a farce which has existed in Mississippi for a long time” was accelerated in the
legislature in the first post-war years. In early 1946, for example, state Rep. Zelma
W. Price of Greenville proposed allowing a local option for the showing of Sunday
movies. 149 With his familiar dollop of sarcastic contempt for the legislature, Hodding
Carter called Price’s proposal “so sound that it is practically foredoomed to
failure.” 150 And in fact the measure did fail to pass that year.

At the outset of the 1948 session, the “blue laws” bill again was defeated in the state House of Representatives, but by only a narrow margin, and with 19 members not voting. Noting the absences, the *Tupelo Daily Journal* stated the proposal, which would have allowed Sunday movies between the hours of 1-6 p.m. and legalized baseball, football, basketball, tennis and golf during the same Sunday hours, “is still given a fair chance of passing when it comes up again.”\(^{151}\) House members William F. Winter, C. Brinkley Morton and Phillip E. Mullen, all World War II veterans and moderate newcomers to the legislature, were among four lawmakers authoring the bill. The other member of the group, Rep. Jesse Holleman of Stone County stated, “I’m sick and tired of being a citizen of a state where good people must violate the law in order to enjoy some of the simple and harmless pleasures of life.”\(^{152}\) Added Hodding Carter, “Mississippians are long on legislating other folks’ morals.”\(^{153}\)

But in the end the mood of the 1948 legislature once again turned out to be different than that of its predecessors. That initial defeat in the House, on January 3, was followed the next day by a new vote and a reversal. The Sunday movie bill was approved by a tally of 72-58, with a slight amendment allowing municipalities to call special elections to determine whether they wanted the bill implemented in their jurisdictions. A publication covering the movie industry ran a story the following month which carried the headline, “War Veteran Solons Back Move to Break Ancient

\(^{152}\) Ibid.
State Blue Laws.”154 And again, the legislature’s younger members – its “war veteran solons” – led the effort to overturn one of Mississippi’s “ancient” rules in favor of one that more accurately accounted for modern lifestyles.

Moderate elements of the Mississippi-based press, like the coverage of Wilson F. “Bill” Minor in the Times-Picayune or the pieces in dailies like the Tupelo Daily Journal, the Delta Democrat-Times and the McComb Enterprise-Journal, seemed in tone to reflect the view the blue laws were a doddering anachronism. In the leads of certain news articles regarding the 1948 debate, the strictures about recreation on the Sabbath were invariably labeled “140-year-old ‘blue laws’” and there would often be included an explainer paragraph prominently placed in the story emphasizing again that the laws dated to the state’s frontier era. Meanwhile, those legislators calling to overturn them were typically characterized as young World War II veterans with the courage and sense to recognize an obvious reality – namely, that the ban had long been ignored wholesale – who were thus seeking to end an hypocrisy. “It was a fight replete with oratory, as the ‘young crowd’ carried their points,” the Webster Progress reported, in a dispatch typical of the general drift of the coverage.155

The “blue laws” fight was emblematic of a growing feeling in the 1948 legislature, and in the sessions held the next two years, that many of Mississippi’s morals-based codes were antiquated and out-of-step with new post-war realities. The Senate, for example, passed a measure in 1948 repealing a statute that banned bowling alleys and pool tables within five miles of the University of Mississippi and Mississippi State College. The reform bill had been introduced by freshman Sen.

155 “Personally About the Legislature,” Webster Progress, February 12, 1948.
Thomas Etheridge who came from the university town of Oxford and who was a graduate of Ole Miss himself. It was co-authored by five other new legislators. Etheridge, meanwhile, presented the Senate a “24-foot long” petition signed by 733 Ole Miss students calling alcohol-prohibition laws “unenforceable” and urging their repeal. The petition was referred to the temperance committee, a quaintly named standing body in the legislature.\textsuperscript{156} The “blue laws” controversy was in a sense re-enacted in these other issues confronting the legislature touching on morals, according to participants. For instance, “about the same arguments [as those used in the ‘blue laws’ debate] will be heard when the prohibition repeal is considered,” state Rep. Phillip E. Mullen, of Oxford, predicted early in the 1948 session.

The other morals issues that were debated in the legislature would include not only prohibition but also the matter of the existing “black market tax” for illegal sale of alcohol and the idea of clamping down on “quickie marriages” by randy and intoxicated teenagers driving into Mississippi’s border areas from neighboring states for a fast weekend of legal “marriage” – a situation encouraged by local Mississippi governments, so eager for fees they had set up all-night licensing offices, in league with a pliant motel and liquor trade likewise happy to have more business, illicit or otherwise. There were powerful “selfish interests which fatten on these hasty ventures into matrimony,” the \textit{Jackson State Times} charged.\textsuperscript{157}

By the post-war years, a whopping 60 percent of Mississippi’s marriage licenses were going to residents of other states, and of that figure 48 percent were

\begin{footnotes}
\item[156] “Ole Miss Petition,” \textit{New Orleans Times Picayune}.
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teenagers without parental consent.\textsuperscript{158} “There are no waiting period or blood test requirements in Mississippi, and more often than not, minor couples can find officials willing to accept any statement as to ages,” the \textit{Jackson State Times} observed.\textsuperscript{159} Wilson F. “Bill” Minor at the \textit{New Orleans Times-Picayune}, in a wry understatement, noted that Mississippi had “flexible marriage statutes.”\textsuperscript{160} By way of tightening the rules, there were proposals in the 1948 and 1950 sessions to increase the price of marriage licenses from $3 to $5, to institute a mandatory three-day waiting period between the time of application and approval of license, and to forbid circuit clerks from issuing such licenses between the hours of 6 p.m. and 8 a.m.

Incidentally, not only the moderates, but also various community groups, including conservatives and evangelicals, were active on the marriage-law issue. For instance, the Honey Bayou Home Demonstration Club, a women’s organization in Shelby, focused on upholding women’s traditional societal roles, sent legislative leaders petitions and letters urging support for bills requiring a waiting period and a blood test before a license would be issued.

As in the earlier examples, the young moderates, in the black market tax and marriage cases, generally wanted to change what they saw as outmoded situations and governmental incoherence. “It is the height of hypocrisy for a state to say whiskey is illegal yet collect a tax on its sale,” Lexington editor Hazel Brannon, a relative moderate, wrote in 1947.\textsuperscript{161} In its contortion, the state of Mississippi sold liquor

\textsuperscript{159} “Marriage Laws Need Tightening,” \textit{Jackson State Times}. November 27, 1955.
\textsuperscript{160} \textit{New Orleans Times-Picayune}, Feb. 20, 1950.
licenses at the same time it outlawed liquor. A prohibition law was still on the books until 1966, when it was finally repealed, but meanwhile the state took in millions annually in taxes from illegal liquor traffic. This “legal pretense” and “cozy bit of corruption,” as Wilson F. “Bill” Minor called it, speaks to the reputation for moral creativity of the Mississippi legislature, discussed earlier. “Mississippians are tired of the sham maintained so long,” he added. The days of the precarious and baffling situation wherein simultaneously Mississippi’s “drys have their law, the wets have their whiskey, and the state has its taxes,” as the oft-repeated line had it, eventually came to an end. But, speaking generally, on some morals questions, such as the “blue laws,” the moderates wanted things relaxed; on other moral-related matters, like the “quickie marriages” matter, they wanted the laws toughened. The unifying element in their platform that makes these individual actions add up to a consistent whole, was modernization.

In the 1948 session and in the ensuing two years, the moderates also led the successful fight to establish a four-year state medical teaching college in Jackson. Like many of their other efforts, such as the abolition of the MBI spy agency, the push to dismantle the local justice of the peace court system, the consolidation of state agencies into a more streamlined arrangement, setting up a new highway program to be financed with an increase in the gasoline tax, the raising of standards for admission to the Mississippi state bar, etc., in creating a modern medical teaching college, the white moderates were looking to upgrade and professionalize their state. In so doing, the moderates who were driving much of this legislative activity did

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almost nothing to disturb racial norms in Mississippi. But they did slowly and haltingly push a version of change.
The bifurcated stance maintained in the post-war by elite white Mississippi moderates, whereby they tended to straddle the fault line in the state separating traditionalism and change, between a “closed society” and a somewhat more open one, can be seen specifically in a welter of important issues they confronted in the early 1950s. These issues included: equalization of funding for black and white schools, a renewed effort at industrialization, agricultural diversification, the abhorrent conditions at Parchman state penitentiary, the future of local justice of the peace courts, the revitalization of the Mississippi Historical Society, integration of minor league baseball and of higher education at private universities, the viability of two political parties in Mississippi, expansion of the voting franchise, and even statehood for the territories of Alaska and Hawaii, among other concerns.

As in debates in earlier post-war years, in weighing the forces of traditionalism versus change, the white moderates of the early 1950s put a priority on modernization and professionalization, especially in the terms in which they understood those concepts. This was their notion of reasonable doable progress. And they acted on it with the benefit of their growing extra-regional sensitivity, awareness
and experience. They also endeavored in all cases to maintain social control and their own prerogatives, including those related to race, with varying degrees of success.

Regarding the traditionalism impulse, there is ample evidence in 1951-1953 that the moderates continued to favor stasis or only marginal adjustment on the general question of racial segregation and white supremacy. In the words of Malcolm Gladwell, they were not challenging the foundations of their privilege.\(^1\) In particular, they advocated a plan passed in 1953 by a special session in the state legislature to supposedly equalize funding and teacher salaries for black and white public schools, ironically a clear and ultimately vain attempt to forestall integration by preempting the expected Supreme Court ruling on desegregation. “The Mississippi Legislature, in an attempt to influence the Supreme Court’s decision, had enacted a public school equalization program in 1953,” Caryl A. Cooper writes.\(^2\) The pending Court decision was something most white Mississippians in the early 1950s anticipated with dread, for they all but knew which way the court was going to rule.\(^3\)

The equalization proposal, while on the surface offering the allure of racial fairness, was really therefore about whites maintaining privileges and control. Reinforcing that overall point was the fact that while an equalization program was

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3 The Court’s decision in the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* case was announced on May 17, 1954. In the months prior to the Court’s announcement, some white Mississippi moderates were resigned to the inevitability of the ruling, the evidence shows.
passed by the legislature the money that would have begun to make equalization a reality was never appropriated in the months leading up to the Brown ruling.

On another issue, one that offers more ambiguity on the question of traditionalism and change, the moderates pushed to draw new industry to the state, such as a “branch plant” of the Alexander Smith & Sons Carpet Co., based in Yonkers, New York, which was built in Greenville in the early 1950s under the name Greenville Mills. The moderates thus favored a kind of modernization, but with a number of caveats and complicating factors which will be discussed. In a related matter, they also advocated agricultural diversification, to move beyond the state’s historic commitment to cotton and the vagaries of its price cycles, into areas like corn, cattle, and what Lexington Advertiser editor Hazel Brannon Smith called “12-months-a-year farming” as opposed to relying on a single crop with only one growing season.

“We are going through an unbelievable agricultural revolution down here,” Hodding Carter wrote, in 1951. In a separate letter that year he stated, “three years ago there were no stockyards here. Now we are clearing $5 million worth of livestock” annually. A few years earlier, J.C. Holton, Mississippi’s agricultural commissioner observed: “the once cotton-enslaved Delta is now getting cattle conscious.”

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4 A bond issue for the plant, Greenville Mills, was approved by Greenville voters in January 1951 and the company began operations there in 1953.
Preserving tradition, moving forward

Industrialization was long regarded with some suspicion in Mississippi, particularly by the ruling oligarchy of landowners and their political allies who perceived the new force as economically disruptive and unpredictable, including in terms of race. “There is no need to demand for changes in our (state) constitution to meet racial issues, or to induce industry to locate within our borders,” House Speaker Walter Sillers Jr. stated as late as 1957.10 Such resistance was viewed as intransigence by some observers. “Corporation baiting has been a pastime of certain types of politicians and shortsighted citizens not in public life,” wrote R.L. Ingalls, chairman of the Ingalls Companies, a major shipbuilder, in 1944. “With the advent of peace, some industries will relocate themselves, but this will be done with great care. Mississippi, in many particulars, has not been progressive. In my opinion, the trouble lies with the state’s best citizens who have left the job to others rather than trying to bring Mississippi up to the standards of the more progressive communities.”11 By the post-war period, what Ingalls called the state’s “best citizens,” namely its younger moderates, were being more assertive and influential in pushing their concept of a statewide industrialization policy.

Industrialization by luring businesses had the potential to be transformative in a number of ways. Specifically, the practice of drawing off industry to Mississippi from other states was pushed in the first post-World War II years by the moderates primarily as a way to satisfy the need locally for work of returning veterans and to thus keep them from moving elsewhere and thereby draining the state of a potential source of productivity, social cohesion and stability. The white moderates were therefore concerned primarily about the viability of their own communities which had themselves in the top positions. They saw their domains as threatened by the prospect of out-migration or mass unemployment and possible unrest as a result. But industrialization quickly transcended the issue of the employment needs of ex-veterans, if it ever was relegated to just that, and assumed a powerful and far more complex racial and class component. At least since the World War I era, of course, industrialization had been causing some dislocation and social mobility in Mississippi, among other places in America, though in Mississippi industrialism was still basically in its infancy by the mid-1940s.

“The industrialist,” Ole Miss historian James W. Silver wrote, in 1963, was the “kingpin of the power structure in Mississippi and the man most likely to crack open the closed society.”12 While the elite white moderates of the late 1940s and early 1950s encouraged industrialization and some aspects of the change it portended, they did so with study and care, not wishing the society to be “cracked open” to the point where their dominance and authority would be challenged. They thus approached industrialization with a complex agenda, both wanting the essence of

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Mississippi’s existing racial hierarchy to be kept intact throughout and also, paradoxically, knowing full well that the spread of industry they favored was setting in motion profound long-term social change, including on matters of race.

This was a clear example of the moderates’ straddle. One version of this paradox, encapsulated by Gov. Hugh L. White in his inaugural address to the state legislature in January, 1952, was to both “continue to go forward” on Mississippi’s economy, “and at the same time do our part in the struggle to preserve and maintain the cherished tradition of this beloved Southland” – which was code language for white supremacy and segregation. The whites wanted to go forward and at the same time stay put.

Gov. White was a conservative on race, but also was a business progressive when it came to industrialization. The “cherished tradition,” as he put it, of existing race relations was, ironically, under indirect assault by the very effort to “go forward” on the economy. As it took hold, the transformation fostered by the new factories, for example, involved the gradual infusion of cash wages and thus a measure of economic freedom into a black community in Mississippi still otherwise heavily dependent on white-controlled credit, as at plantation stores. The white leaders were taking careful notice, and cited the uneven spread and effect of industrialization. “Especially has Washington County been denuded of its (farm) labor for industry,” businessman Jere B. Nash wrote Hodding Carter, in 1951, of the uneven pattern of new opportunities in the Delta area for blacks. “In areas such as Greenwood, Yazoo

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13 Gov. Hugh L. White speech to the legislature, January 22, 1952.
City and Clarksdale, more negroes are on the plantations because they do not have industries.”\textsuperscript{14}

Largely thanks to an industrialization program pushed by the moderates, therefore, African-Americans in some parts of Mississippi were beginning to participate in the modern consumer economy, a growing clout which was to prove decisive in the racial struggles of the years to come, particularly as the white business community detected self-interest in catering to a black consumer who now had acquired purchasing and therefore boycott power. In the coming years, this empowering trend fueled by industrialization was to be confirmed, perversely, by the backlash it engendered. Starting in the mid-1950s, the White Citizens’ Council, founded in the Mississippi Delta town of Indianola, used pressure tactics on white-owned businesses, and others, specifically to target credit, employment, lease arrangements, and other measures of a growing African-American economic independence.\textsuperscript{15}

Despite the massive effort to preserve the racial status quo, it was unrealistic to believe that Gov. White’s “cherished tradition” could continue unaltered given the changing circumstances. For the South to accept “progress,” Wilbur J. Cash wrote, “was manifestly to abandon the purely agricultural basis from which the Southern world, and ultimately the Southern mind, had been reared.”\textsuperscript{16} Others, speaking specifically of Mississippi, agreed. “Mississippi’s old way of life and industrialization are mutually exclusive,” James W. Silver wrote. Nobody “is

\textsuperscript{14} Letter, to Hodding Carter from Jere B. Nash, November 21, 1951. Hodding II and Betty Werlein Carter Papers.
\textsuperscript{15} The first chapter of the White Citizens’ Council was founded in July, 1954 in Indianola, Miss.
magician enough to freeze the social status quo while revolutionizing the economic
order.”17 The legerdemain for the white moderates operating gingerly in the center
was to allow and even foster as necessary the inevitable change while maintaining
both social control and the essence of their privileges. They struggled to do so while
negotiating both the new economic demands of African-Americans and the pushback
from some increasingly alarmed elements of the white community.

The moderates endeavored to keep the changes inherent in industrialization,
which in part had the effect of benefiting blacks, under white auspices. Their
challenge was to keep adjusting and accounting for the fluid dynamics of pressures
both from blacks and from poor and working-class whites, which were often at cross-
purposes. For example, Mississippi’s lower-class whites got most of the choice non-
management jobs in the new factories, and in the beginning of industrialization, until
an exodus of black farm labor around the Second World War began to sufficiently
rouse community elites to address the increasingly acute employment needs of
African-Americans, the whites got nearly all the newly created unskilled factory jobs.
The elite whites were helping make the decisions as to who got these jobs.18

So the moderates’ position was quite mixed and politically sensitive, requiring
skills, as Silver suggested, surpassing those of a sorcerer. “Our chief concern around
here … is the continued displacement of the agricultural workers through
mechanization and adaptation to other crops,” Hodding Carter wrote, in 1955. “I

17 Silver, p. 77.
18 An example would be Hodding Carter’s letter in June 1954 to the manager of Greenville Mills
seeking a summer job for George Albert, an African-American from Greenville home for vacation
from college in Ohio. Carter wrote: “Would there be any possibility of putting him on in any capacity
at Greenville Mills this summer? I can vouch for his integrity and ability and moreover he is a
deserving young fellow.” Letter, Hodding Carter to Jack Potts, June 21, 1954. Hodding II and Betty
Werlein Carter Papers.
don’t know what we are going to do about population unless we can get some more industries in the Delta.”19 Industrialization, of course, has to be seen in the context of the Great Migration of blacks leaving the Deep South and heading to the Northern cities around this time. An intermediate step in the movement from, say, the fields of the Delta to the south side of Chicago, was the newly – slowly – industrializing Mississippi town and small city, which would become the stopping points for many blacks absorbed into the fledgling local factory economy.

As Connie L. Lester writes of industrialization, “in the minds of the state’s leaders, the measured steps to greater prosperity would raise family incomes, increase consumer purchasing, and improve tax revenues, but would leave in place white supremacy, male domination, and the power structure that favored existing political and economic elites.”20 Hodding Carter, writing in 1953, without much apparent recognition of his evident paternalism, touted Greenville’s “recognition of the need for labor opportunities for our Negro population that led to the establishment by bond issue of the Alexander Smith plant.”21 White moderates like Carter thought they could design, manage and contain a system that featured home-grown assistance for “our Negro population” as well as for lower-class whites, while leaving the society’s overall structure basically undisturbed. Palliation under these circumstances was a difficult assignment, for, as Nan Elizabeth Woodruff points out, “displaced from the

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20 Lester, p. 238.
land and with no place to go in a depressed economy, sharecroppers and tenants fought back.”

For Carter and the other elite white moderates, industrialization of the late 1940s and early 1950s served the ultimate goal of keeping them in control during a process of gradual change regarding race. It did so in at least two related and oppositional ways which, when combined, bolstered the position of relative centrist figures like themselves. First, the Citizens’ Council backlash from 1954 on notwithstanding, industrialization otherwise for a number of years had the effect of subduing somewhat the more extreme radical elements of the white community, who despite their racial ideology and fear of blacks’ gains could still recognize and appreciate the job opportunities and related financial benefits accruing to themselves from the influx of new factories. Whites therefore understood the need to encourage the industrializing trend by maintaining at least the appearance of centrism and presentability for their out-of-state onlookers contemplating moving plants to Mississippi. This suppressive effect lasted until about the time the *Brown* decision in 1954 galvanized much of the latent unease and paranoia among certain Mississippi whites concerning change. But for a time, the white extremists knew the stakes could now be higher for themselves if they flouted national norms on race too openly and blatantly. “Knowledge of the effect on industrialization will hold up some of the hotheads down here,” Carter wrote, perhaps wishfully.

And secondly, as was suggested, industrialization potentially supplied a living for African-American farmers and agricultural workers newly displaced in the post-

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23 Letter, Hodding Carter to F.L. James, April 6, 1956. Hodding II and Betty Werlein Carter Papers.
war by increased mechanization in the fields, the curtailment of the sharecropping system and plummeting cotton prices, but who for whatever reasons were hesitating to migrate North. Related to that point was the concomitant mechanization of domestic service. Washing machines and dishwashers were revolutionizing work inside the homes just as the mechanical cotton pickers (along with chainsaws replacing axes and handsaws, gasoline tractors, the spraying of the herbicide Diuron, and other revolutionary agricultural innovations) were upending work arrangements in the fields. The need for much of the manual labor in these areas was swiftly dropping off.

For black men and women, the new local job possibilities – in factories – offered an incentive to stay in Mississippi. In the elite moderates’ view, these blacks could be a disruptive and unpredictable force if they remained in Mississippi and were not otherwise placated with gainful or at least subsistence employment. “Our principle hope of course is to secure enough industry to absorb the surplus farm labor if they are to remain in the South,” Carter wrote.24 Thereby, he said elsewhere, with some detectable racism: “the town [of Greenville] itself becomes more stable, even though the steady job at the new plant may be disillusioning to the new, fumbling employee from the farm.”25

Therefore, at least until the mid-1950s and the incendiary and polarizing impact of Brown, the Emmett Till case, and the full onset of the civil rights movement, the two ends of Mississippi’s racial spectrum among the lower class, white and black, could be somewhat mollified and thus socially controlled via

industrialization, at least according to the ideal scenario of the elite moderates’ evolving plan. The moderates maintained a position at the fulcrum during this process whereby they built some credibility with both sides and, importantly, they struggled to keep hold of the full range of their power and privileges.

In the process of encouraging some industrialization, the elite white moderates were in league with others who were concerned with social stability and profits, namely the richest Mississippi landowners who saw troubling results from their black employees increasingly being displaced from the land with few viable alternatives.

“If all or many of the Negros remain in the Delta and cannot work they will be a burden on public relief appropriations,” Dorothy Lee Black, an official at the Delta Council, told researcher Alexander Heard in 1947. “The big Delta people are eyeing that tax problem since they would bear most of the burden and for the first time the active prejudice against industrialization is being broken down and the Delta planters are beginning to think that if they are going to have to feed the Negroes anyway they might as well work for it. The interest in the Balance Agriculture with Industry program is therefore increasing enormously among Delta folk.”26

Adding to the divided and complex nature of this issue was the contorted posture necessary to develop and maintain the convincing façade the white moderates themselves tried to present for the Northern industrialists who, with their own agendas, were considering moving businesses to Mississippi towns. As Hodding Carter described one encounter in the wooing process with Alexander Smith officials,

26 Alexander Heard summary of interview with Dorothy Lee Black, July 7, 1947. Southern Politics Collection. The Balance Agriculture with Industry (BAWI) program is discussed later in this chapter.
somewhat tongue-in-cheek, “we were armed with refreshments and a portfolio of statistical data which proved that Greenville’s climate was most salubrious, that the Mississippi was the world’s most tamed river, that our people were most eager to work, that our health and happiness and patriotism were most unblemished, and that if any envious critics in Jackson or Vicksburg or Meridian denied these truths, they were just a bunch of damnable liars.”

The elite moderates understood that the flow of extra-regional investment likely depended upon their own ability to create two diametrically opposed impressions. First, they had to defy stereotypes by demonstrating to Northern capitalists and other prominent outside investors and business people the appearance of bi-racial harmony and political reasonableness in the Magnolia State. And second, they had to extend the somewhat contradictory guarantee that they and their Mississippi communities were sufficiently and capably opposed to, in their carefully marketed words, organized labor “agitation,” union “syndicates,” workplace “racketeering” – terms which to their appreciative Northern audience, in the 1940s and 1950s, carried the trace connotation of ethnic-based organized crime – and the troublesome notion of employee rights, which at times was suggestively associated with socialism and communism.

Regarding the surrounding political and racial climate, the Mississippi moderates offered their outside evaluators a utopian portrait of the state, featuring an equal, just and fully functioning bi-racial democracy, all securely placed under elite

28 The aggressive language toward labor unions was quite common in those years in Mississippi. For example: “these labor-leader racketeers make Benedict Arnold look like a piker,” state Rep. Walter Sillers, of Rosedale, wrote to a Tennessee newspaper editor. Letter, Walter Sillers Jr. to Frank Ahlgren, October 15, 1941. Walter Sillers Jr. Papers.
white control. They especially emphasized for skeptical and hard-nosed extra-regional moneymen how peaceful race relations were in their communities, belying any external impression that may otherwise have been conveyed about the South’s social tension and imminent upheaval. The message was unmistakable: Your investment will be safe here, and, secondarily, your conscience about any supposed racial unfairness here need not be troubled. This economic-based drive to create a blissful image about Southern race relations is the exact reason, of course, that Sen. Bilbo, the Dixiecrats, the White Citizens’ Councils and other hard-line groups and demagogues with their loud and naked appeals to prejudice, even to the point of implying the condoning of violence, represented such a disruptive and troubling complication for development-minded moderates, as was discussed in Chapter Two, Chapter Three, and elsewhere. “I have reason to believe that a good many [Mississippians] are becoming concerned over the effect of the tensions upon our industrial program,” Hodding Carter wrote, in early 1956. “It is certainly apparent that industrialists have become more reluctant to consider our state as the location site.”

Moderate Mississippians like Carter labored to concoct a completely different reality for presentation to his northern audience. It was an elysian vision in part enabled, to the extent the moderates actually believed it themselves, by their insulation and obliviousness to African-American concerns, and was generated both by a kind of sincerity and by rank and cynical economic motivation. In promoting Greenville to the California-based actor and comedian Danny Thomas, who in the

early 1950s was searching for a site for a new hospital he planned to build in the South, Carter wrote: “Because of a knowledge of what we have accomplished in inter-racial relationships in our community of Greenville, I would like very much to bespeak it as the location for the hospital.” He went on to describe “the good will which exists between the two races here,” that there has been “no effort to interfere with suffrage” and that not “a single incident of racial violence” in “the last twenty years or more” had taken place in the city.

In addition to indulging in a highly developed form of community salesmanship, Carter in this instance clearly was giving Thomas the sublime and even self-deluding elite white perspective from which no glaring racial problems were visible. 30 It was surely a “white gaze,” in Ruth Frankenberg’s phrase. Moreover, in his emphasis on Greenville’s supposed harmony and lack of tension and violence, Carter was privileging social control and the established order, with the implication that the elites themselves would justly continue to remain at the very top.

The issue of worker controllability was parallel and connected to the matter of race harmony. In addition to presenting their version of the racial ideal – which, again, was about white dominance – the moderates also went to lengths to reassure outside investors about worker contentment and staunch anti-unionism in Mississippi – a portrait which, as with supposedly harmonious race conditions, also contained elements of exaggeration and even deceit. “The main selling point” of moving industry South, Gunnar Myrdal wrote in the 1940s, “has always been the cheap labor supply – incidentally, with particular emphasis on the fact that white workers are

30 Letter, Hodding Carter to Danny Thomas, November 5, 1951. Hodding II and Betty Werlein Carter Papers. Thomas’s project, the St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital, was eventually built in Memphis, where it opened in 1962.
available – and the relative absence of trade union interference.”31 Or, to put it in the more advantageous terms the moderates preferred, they curried favor with out-of-state employers by espousing the “right to work.” A few years after the Alexander Smith factory began operating in Greenville, Hodding Carter warily wrote, “I hope that management of the mill will be such that the racketeer will find little as a basis for the discontent they would like to foment.”32

For their own reasons, the Mississippi moderates therefore catered to and enabled the anti-union strategies of Northern industry that had become persuaded that the South was an eager and steadfast accomplice in escaping the North’s own post-war labor troubles. “As Alexander Smith fled its union antagonists” in the North, James C. Cobb writes, “Carter praised ‘the truly splendid one-hundred-year human and industrial record’ of the firm” in order to build public support and smooth its relocation to Greenville.33

There is evidence, however, that the elite white Mississippi moderates were not entirely anti-union and hostile to worker rights, their staunchly pro-employer presentation as suitors to Northern businessmen notwithstanding. Their advocacy for workers’ compensation, culminating in the 1948 state law discussed in the previous chapter, lends credence to this view. Their stance in favor of state child labor legislation in the legislative sessions of 1948-1950 likewise shows their sensitivity to

workers’ rights. Also, Hodding Carter, for one, revealed in private correspondence that he was not against labor unions, in fact had been a member of the Newspaper Guild early in his career, and had enjoyed positive relations with the union at his own newspaper. “I try to be detached about such matters and, as a matter of fact, am more frequently criticized in my own neighborhood for pro-union bias than for almost anything else,” Carter wrote, in 1954.34 He frequently cited unions as a force for good at local “branch” operations of the Chicago Mill and Lumber Co. and the U.S. Gypsum Co. “At both of these plants, working primarily with wood, Negroes are employed in considerable number,” Carter wrote in 1953. “While the jobs that they hold are not supervisory, the pay scale is good and the men, represented by their union, have achieved, through the cooperation of the companies, good working conditions.”35

And also, Carter and other moderates clearly understood that the Northern industrial strategy they themselves cynically encouraged of fleeing to the South to escape unionism, while clearly benefiting Mississippi towns at the expense of the North, was doomed to failure eventually. Their presentation to the North thus was less than fully sincere. The same forces demanding rights for workers in the North surely would migrate South as that region developed, they fully realized. “The intensity of the labor-management struggle elsewhere in industrial America must make the South seem like heaven to a strike-harassed manufacturer, even though that

heaven is temporary,” Carter wrote in 1949. So the Greenville editor was both luring Northern firms with his “emphasis of the willingness, the abundance, and the good behavior – the 100 percent Americanism – of Southern workers” while knowing full well that the implied anti-union promise was illusory, at least beyond the short-term.

Carter and the other Mississippi moderates also knew that they were dealing with firms that, generally speaking, were quite notorious for having troubled labor relations and who saw the South as a “right to work” refuge, and they played to that desperation. In so doing they knew that they would be getting a certain kind of corporate actor – importantly, one which would help perpetuate their own privileged position. “For the most part, the factories established under BAWI represented firms with long histories of bad labor relations – the result of low wages and speedup,” Connie L. Lester writes. “Seeing high-wage firms as a threat to agriculture and the racial hierarchy established through sharecropping and tenancy, the industrial program settled for what was at most a modest improvement in the overall economy.” The fact that BAWI (the state’s Balance Agriculture with Industry program) initially – in the 1930s and early 1940s – marketed the lack of workers’ compensation as a come-on to the northern industrialists underscores the notion the state, in its hunger to develop, was willing to welcome even the least-scrupulous of firms.

Meanwhile, other elite white Mississippi moderates actually played a role in protecting some union activists. For example, historian James W. Silver was a

37 Ibid.
38 Lester, p. 262.
correspondent and friend of Ed Blair, the state organizer for the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, which, Silver writes, “had some five thousand members in Mississippi” by the end of the 1940s.\(^{39}\) So overall, the elite moderates’ position on unionization contained an internal tension, or at least appeared so depending in part upon how attentive they were being to the open-shop demands of out-of-state industrialists.

However, the moderates’ bifurcated position was very consistent with a history of labor that long had separated unions of skilled workers, like Carter’s Newspaper Guild, from those of unskilled workers, such as one that might potentially be expected to represent ex-farm hands working in a Mississippi carpet mill. That history, lasting up until the merger of the AFL and CIO in 1955 ended years of estrangement, often saw skilled labor unions preventing unskilled workers from joining the movement. In their straddled posture, mixing for example an anti-unionist argument for the benefit of a Northern carpet company along with some pro-worker sympathy and a history of alliance with certain skilled unions, the elite white Mississippi moderates were replicating the divisions in some of that contentious class-based and race-based early history of unionization.

These contrasting pressures and allegiances to both conservatism and progressivism, to both status quo and change, bound up in the industrialization process thus necessitated some delicate acts of balancing for the white moderates. The politically fraught process of satisfying simultaneously the demands of poor

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whites and blacks within Mississippi is an example, just discussed. Meanwhile, by way of earning the approval of outside industry, certain leading journalists and other Mississippi elites generally worked to showcase how current and centrist they were, the anti-union rhetoric notwithstanding, and to thus publicly situate themselves and their communities in the mode of the emerging post-war national political consensus. So not only were the Mississippi locales racially safe and full of eager would-be workers, the moderates’ line of presentation went, they were also familiar in a wholesome all-American sense.

The cleverness of this approach is another instance of the elites’ extra-regional sensibility. “Newspaper editors across the state, anticipating inquiries from interested firms, touted the advantages of their towns and counties,” Connie L. Lester writes. “The message was clear: Mississippi voters wanted to present their towns as modern, progressive, and prepared to offer the quality of life found elsewhere.” But it is not clear in the case of this ardent “smokestack chasing,” as some cynics called Southern industrialization, that the elite white Mississippi moderates and the networks of influence they led deserve those temperate labels.

As was stated, the moderates harbored suspicions of certain types of unions, for example, or at least they emphasized that supposed inclination for their Northern evaluators. So, as was discussed in the previous chapter, the “progressive” tag in particular is dubious. Meanwhile, their racial mindset, still associated with white supremacy and fully vested in white privilege, raises questions about how truly

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40 Lester, p. 253.
“modern” the moderates were, at least in an evolving national context circa 1950. In many cases, with the competitive imperatives of economic development on the line, the elite Mississippi moderates resorted to open promotion of racial segregation, well into the post-war years. In the summer of 1949 in Holmes County in the Delta, for example, the “moderate” editor of the Lexington Advertiser, Hazel Brannon, in a lead editorial on the front page implored readers to cooperate in a labor survey “to determine the number of white men and women between the ages of 21 to 40 in this vicinity who are available for employment in a shoe manufacturing industry which is considering Lexington as a possible site for the location of a factory.”42 The situation was much the same four years later when the Advertiser carried a large front-page labor survey in bold typeface stating, “Wanted: White women, ages 18-40, within a 20-mile radius to work full time in a proposed factory at Lexington, Mississippi.”43 Such surveys typically were conducted on behalf of potential incoming businesses to predetermine the extent of the available (white, in this case) labor pool.

By this old racial model, thus trumpeted by a supposed political moderate like Brannon, the state’s African-Americans presumably would continue to provide cheap agricultural labor and domestic service in a system built on white supremacy or, at best, they would settle for the lowest-ranking jobs in the new factories. In 1944, economist Gunnar Myrdal expressed the concern that “the pattern of giving all new industrial jobs to whites only is so firmly established that it does not seem likely that the industrial development will, directly or indirectly, give Negroes anything like the

number of jobs required.” By the early 1950s, blacks did end up working in Mississippi factories such as Greenville Mills in large numbers, a transformation fostered in part by the moderates. Notably in this period, the jobs the blacks got with the urgings of moderates were non-supervisory, so their gains in joining the industrial realm stayed within the familiar racial pattern of the plantation and the labor camp.

The industrialization picture was thus quite mixed. The moderates do deserve some slight credit for the eventual change in getting African-Americans employed in these new factories, regardless of the degree to which they were acting out of their own self-interest in encouraging African-American employment and regardless of the reality that the jobs, given the range of options in the mills, were for a long time restricted to the unskilled level. The “improvement” for African-Americans the moderates arranged in this period was from no industrial jobs to mostly menial industrial jobs. The racial component of Mississippi industrialization in the post-war changed only gradually, very much under the politically attuned control of the white moderates.

BAWI

For decades prior to the early 1950s, there had been “New South” efforts in places like Mississippi to attract outside industrial investment. This strain can be

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44 Myrdal, p. 199.
traced back at least to the South’s pro-industrial, pro-Northern capital “New Departure Democrats” of the Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction periods, discussed by C. Vann Woodward, Eric Foner and other scholars. The attempt to revive the region’s economy after the devastation of four years of Civil War involved Bourbon outreach and alliances with Northern capitalists. This involved Mississippians as it did other Southerners.

But, for all that nascent industrial activity in the late 1800s, the region, and Mississippi in particular, of course remained overwhelmingly agricultural. It long was, as V.O. Key pointed out, the most rural and agricultural Southern state. Well into the 20th century, Mississippi, to the extent it did have any enterprise more sophisticated than farming or farming services and supplies, was mostly comprised of extractive industry as a tributary to Northern capital, as Woodward put it. As many Mississippians of the time understood it, with great umbrage and resentment, the state thus was a kind of economic colony, which in Mississippi was based on cotton, as well as timber and a few other resources.

Harboring this colony complex, many state leaders bemoaned their supposed dependence, the use of their state for widespread extraction, and their subordination to Northern capitalist interests. Southern newspapers well into the post-war years, for example, were full of angry denunciation of, as they indignantly saw it, freight rate differentials that Northern railroads had long established to the South’s competitive disadvantage, protective manufacturing tariffs, and the centralization of capital in Northern money markets. “It is not Southern decision which preserves the old

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Within that larger economic framework of the South chafing to compete with the North (or East, by Carter’s compass), there emerged some other specific demographic, social and political reasons why Southerners, and notably Mississippians, looked to establish an industrial base, even if it meant co-opting and luring restless Northern firms. With the introduction of mechanization in the cotton fields and in domestic service around the end of the Second World War, employment in the state’s agriculture and in private homes began to decline. This drop-off coincided, of course, with the return of many veterans to the state looking for work. Many displaced African-American field workers then moved to Southern towns and cities seeking jobs or went north, while others contemplated doing so. Community leaders, such as the elite white Mississippi moderates of the 1940s and 1950s, considered industry a needed solution to meet the need locally for work, and importantly, to maintain social stability with themselves remaining on top. “Faced with the prospect of mass unemployment leading to mass exodus, Southern rural elites – many of them small-town merchants and landowners – became desperate for means of propping up their economies and keeping their customers at home,” David L. Carlton writes.

Thus Mississippi’s ardent push in the mid-20th century for industrialization was driven by blacks (and poor whites) and their evolving imperatives but also was very much about elite white control in responding to those needs. “With declining

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48 Carlton, p. 118.
farm prices and everything else going up, things in rural areas are in a very unbalanced situation,” Ripley businessman Asa G. Dickerson wrote in 1955. “We must work out something to give our people more employment, and as I see it, this will be our only hope of prosperity in the foreseen [sic] future.”

Mississippi, in the heart of the rich-topsoil black belt with the nation’s largest percentage of African-Americans, even considering the demographic effects of north-bound migration, can be seen as taking the lead among the Southern states in aggressively pushing industrialization. The state in particular pioneered the concept of enticing Northern industry to relocate through subsidization. In 1944, Gunnar Myrdal wrote of the movement “of industries to the South, which certain Southern states, particularly Mississippi, have encouraged by offering manufacturers special tax exemptions, free or low-priced factory lots, or even ready-built plants, as well as other advantages.” In 1946, Ned Lee, the editor of the *Webster Progress*, touted the state’s unique incentive program for luring business. “Mississippi cities have a corner on this idea now,” he boasted. “Surely some other state or states will copy our plan. Before they do, we must take advantage of our present opportunity.” The industrialization push involving highly developed targeting and wooing strategies was especially active in Mississippi because elites in the state were forced to respond creatively to the degree of threat existing there to social control, in terms of the growing numbers of displaced field workers, and thus to their own claims on power and privilege. The potential for disruption was greater there in direct proportion to

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49 Letter, Asa G. Dickerson letter to J.P. Coleman, December 20, 1955. J.P. Coleman Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
50 Myrdal, p. 398.
51 “Agriculture and Industry,” *Webster Progress*, April 4, 1946.
the larger percentage of blacks and was exacerbated in particular by the mechanical revolution taking place in the 1940s in growing cotton, Mississippi’s staple, as well as in domestic service.

Self-interest therefore was an obvious motivation for the white moderates’ belief in industrialization and effort in attracting Northern transplants. “We hope down here that the gradual industrialization of Mississippi and the agricultural changes will make it more possible and more attractive for Mississippians to stay at home,” Hodding Carter wrote, in 1951.52 By the post-World War II period, transportation networks and national financing systems had been developed to the point, at least according to self-interested “smokestack-chasing” adherents, where industry based in the North could more easily and cost-effectively be decentralized nationally. As the Delta Democrat-Times put it in 1945, “the principle of the assembly line can be extended so that instead of the various parts of the machine being made in different units of a Detroit factory, they can be made in various parts of the country and assembled.”53

The development model the post-war Mississippians looked to was called Balance Agriculture with Industry, a relatively enlightened program begun in the mid-1930s associated with New Deal national economic planning, which traced its origins to a local initiative in the town of Columbia. That South Mississippi community had sought to find something to replace its dying timber industry.54 Once a new BAWI law was passed in 1944, the program was reinvigorated in the late

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52 Letter, Hodding Carter to W.D. Comstock, October 26, 1951. Hodding II and Betty Werlein Carter Papers.
54 Lester.
1940s and early 1950s after a wartime hiatus. In Gov. Hugh L. White’s inaugural address to the state legislature in 1952, he led with a “solemn promise to the people of Mississippi to do everything in my power to advance the industrial development of our state.”55 The elite white moderates had come to feel the same way. One of the most notable facets of BAWI was it involved the state in economic planning, which, for a society long wary of government involvement in private affairs, was a huge step toward a version of modernization.

The enlightenment and advancement, such as they were, however, were limited, in part by the strictures regarding the program of Mississippi’s racial segregation and white supremacy, and also of its class hierarchy, as were virtually all “progressive” ideas emanating from the South in the New Deal years. James C. Cobb, for example, explains how, at the insistence of Deep South members of Congress, support payments under the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933 in the Mississippi Delta primarily were of benefit to white planters.56 Industrialization promised workers a reprieve from the usurious store credit of the cotton economy in favor of the independence of cash consumerism, and therefore it posed a threat to the old plantation paternalism that still held so many Mississippi blacks (and poor whites) in economic bondage. And it even offered an entry point into the lower middle class for many unskilled Mississippi workers. Nonetheless, however realistically, the quest to draw in outside industry was organized by the elites in such a way as to leave the

55 Gov. Hugh L. White address to the Mississippi legislature, January 22, 1952.
state’s traditional racial and economic hierarchies and arrangements as undisturbed as possible given the level of uncertainty.\textsuperscript{57}

The front-page labor surveys in 1949 and 1953 seeking exclusively white workers featured in the \textit{Lexington Advertiser}, mentioned earlier, were cases in point. And certain factual assertions, as Mississippi industrialization unfolded, seemed to bear out the racially inequitable scenario. In a 1954 letter, Hodding Carter wrote: “New industrial jobs are not being distributed equally on a ratio basis and although many former Negro farm workers are being taken in, they are not being absorbed nearly as rapidly as the white workers.”\textsuperscript{58} The elite white moderates helped put in place a complicated process that kept them in control. It combined an old-fashioned open racism, as reflected in the Lexington labor surveys and in concurrence with the views of a significant portion of their white neighbors, along with a self-interested concern in trying to satisfy enough of the requirements of newly idle black farm workers to keep them quiescent with sufficient sustenance to stay put.

Aside from the years-long work of locating and then persuading specific industries to move to Mississippi, in every step of which the elite white moderates took the lead, the essence of the BAWI plan was community participation and support in helping the out-of-town businesses get started locally. The \textit{McComb Enterprise-Journal} explained in plain language the pitch to Northern firms: “if you come here, we will build a factory for you by floating a bond issue. Then [you] retire the bonds – out of your Mississippi earnings – and when the issue is retired the factory becomes

\textsuperscript{57} This is the thesis of Connie L. Lester’s article, cited previously.
\textsuperscript{58} Letter, Hodding Carter to T.M. Campbell, May 17, 1954. Hodding II and Betty Werlein Carter Papers.
your property.” The McComb newspaper added, “BAWI is, in effect, an industry subsidy.”59 The bond issues, which often ran into the millions of dollars, would be put to a local vote, and thus forces of community persuasion were critical to what, at this crucial stage, was basically a political process.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, for example, the bond issues would invariably be backed by heavy support from certain Mississippi newspapers, controlled by moderates, and other sources of local leadership, such as politicians, school officials and ministers. When coupled with the long and expensive process of courting out-of-state business to begin with, for the moderates these local drives for bond support, requiring highly targeted and assiduous public relations effort lasting in some cases for months and even years, were a big part of what made Mississippi’s industrialization in the post-war primarily their creation.

Subtlety was often set aside. “Do Yourself A Favor – Vote For the BAWI Issue,” Easton King’s Pascagoula Chronicle-Star readers were told in a typically blunt and heavily slanted editorial.60 Community leadership comprising a certain degree of enlightenment, extra-regional experience in making the contacts in Northern states, local credibility and political savvy was essential. By the outbreak of World War II, twelve plants employing a total of over four thousand people had been established in Mississippi under the aegis of BAWI – hardly a seismic economic shift amid a state population in 1940 of almost 2.2 million. But it was a start and it proved

60 This article was published on November 2, 1956.
to be a template for a more extensive program after the war under the prodding of the newly repatriated moderates who had assumed controlling positions in the state.61

Indeed, in 1945-1946, with the return of the veterans and the formulation of the white moderates’ post-war agenda for Mississippi, a revived plan of industrialization, involving the targeting of specific Northern companies, was atop the list of priorities. In June of 1945, for example, Hodding Carter had been back less than a week at the helm of the *Delta Democrat-Times*, after an absence of five years in the Army, when he wrote an editorial titled “The Search for Industries” in which he observed, “all over the United States, cities and towns the size of Greenville and cities and towns smaller than Greenville, are engaged in an all-out competitive battle against the metropolitan industrial cities and each other. Primarily, the fight is for the location or relocation of businesses and industries in these cities and towns after the war.”62 Editors at the *Webster Progress*, writing later that year, agreed. “Practically every community in Mississippi is now interested in securing one or more industries,” they wrote.63

The moderates took the lead, in both private and public forums, in promoting the state’s post-war industrialization. They did so in the first place via correspondence, particularly with extra-regional contacts in industry, the media, foundations, academia, professional organizations, and other networks. But they also made their case in print. The pages of a number of Mississippi newspapers – the *Delta Democrat-Times*, the *Durant News*, the *Lexington Advertiser*, the *McComb*

61 “Progress Report of BAWI Plants in Operation,” April 1, 1952. Owen Cooper Papers. The population of Mississippi in 1940, according to U.S. Census Bureau statistics, was 2,183,796.
63 “Ahead of Schedule,” *Webster Progress*, December 6, 1945.
Enterprise-Journal, the Oxford Eagle, the Pascagoula Chronicle-Star, the Tupelo Daily Journal, and the Webster Progress, among others – all of which were edited and published by moderate figures in the early post-war years, were full in this period of unabashed corporate sycophancy, laudatory stories about the chamber of commerce and other business interests, and a cheerleading tone about any whiff of industrial activity in their circulation area.

For example: “Industries of Great Aid to Greenville,” was a headline above a not-atypical news story in the Delta Democrat-Times in 1946 which began, “Greenville’s industries aid greatly in the welfare of this Delta metropolis.”64 In the Oxford Eagle in October of 1945, a lead story on the front page hailed the arrival of honored visitors: “Glove Factory Men in Oxford Today.”65 The Hanson Glove Co. of Milwaukee, Eagle readers were assured, “is one of the most successful makers of quality handwear [sic] in the country.”66 Meanwhile, the decision by the Mississippi Agricultural and Industrial Board in 1946 to open an office in New York City to encourage business relocation drew a wondrous editorial in the McComb Enterprise Journal trumpeting the state’s ascendance to the big-time: “Mississippi Goes to New York.”67 And the Delta Democrat-Times led its editorial page in March 1946 with fervid speculation about “the future of Greenville” tied to a possible deal locally with an out-of-state clothing manufacturer. In fact, the only hard news reflected in the piece was that company representatives had contacted the head of the Greenville

65 Oxford Eagle, October 18, 1945.
chamber of commerce and an exploratory meeting was planned, but that was enough apparently to justify excited pronouncements about the community’s future. 68

The pro-business tone among these moderate news outlets could at times be quite hectoring and condescending, full of lectures to readers about the need to change with the new industrial times. When the Illinois Central Railroad was considering locating a plant in McComb to make aluminum refrigerator cars, J. Oliver Emmerich of the Enterprise-Journal wrote that townspeople wary of the new development risked being considered “an old fogy” and being called “moss backs.” “Progress goes where progress is invited,” Emmerich reminded his audience. “Communities move ahead when they are friendly to growth.” The stakes regarding the aluminum refrigerator cars could not be higher, and in fact were of national importance, the publisher pressured his readers. “Today the eyes of the nation are being centered upon McComb.” 69

The case of the Illinois Central plant also points to the multi-part role that the moderate Mississippi editors and publishers played in industrialization. As officials with chambers of commerce and other community business groups, the moderate journalists “for occupational reasons,” as Carter said, joined with the bankers as the key local leaders participating in the plants’ establishment from the start. And then, all while maintaining such a central inside role, they assumed the stance of editorial observer, which one might have mistakenly believed involved a degree of impartiality and professional skepticism. 70 J. Oliver Emmerich was both a member of the special chamber of commerce committee evaluating the Illinois Railroad’s initial plan while

also penning a series of subsequent editorials in favor of that very plan, including the one calling detractors “moss backs.”\textsuperscript{71} Hodding Carter was intimately involved in the Alexander Smith case from the company’s first expression of interest, through the wooing process, securing the land, the bond issue vote, constructing the building, the hiring, to the company’s operational start in 1953. And throughout, he kept up a series of highly supportive editorials and glorifying feature stories touting the world’s most admirable rug manufacturer. Hazel Brannon had a similarly fawning experience in Lexington with a shoe factory, as did Philip Mullen in Oxford with the Hanson Glove Co. “Community journalism,” as the soft euphemism might have it, was being practiced with ardor.

Certainly, such pro-business coziness, even that which in present-day terms may look to border on journalistic malpractice, and the habit of small-town newspapers acting as boosters for local employers or prospective investors was hardly invented in Mississippi in the post-war and nor did it end there. “More than most business or mercantile activities, newspapers reflect change and growth of communities and states,” Hodding Carter wrote, in 1954.\textsuperscript{72} Subtle or not, newspapers then and now are an extension of perceived community need and, less scrupulously, of the requirements of advertisers and the business community more generally. Also, journalistic ethics, particularly in small towns, were more relaxed then than they in many cases would later become when considering editors’ and publishers’ outside interests, board commitments, community involvement, and the like. Carter wrote in

\textbf{\textsuperscript{71}} “New Industry to Employ 250 Skilled Men Workers to be Located in McComb,” \textit{McComb Enterprise-Journal}, March 25, 1946.

1955 that an editor “must be a liaison man with the public and naturally engage in as many community affairs as possible, lest it be said that he is simply a loose critic who stands apart from the people and community about whom he comments.” 73 A professional stance of detachment and dispassion thus would be denigrated as “loose” criticism. In this regard, the Mississippi journalists’ own professionalism, in terms of the degree of healthy detachment, looks from a presentist viewpoint today to be somewhat compromised, but assiduous “community journalism” was not out of the norm for the times. This is particularly true with small newspapers wherein the positions of publisher and editor, jobs theoretically often seeming at cross-purposes, would be combined in one individual who was thereby tasked simultaneously to protect the paper’s business position and its editorial integrity.

In the early 1950s, Mississippi newspaper editors, including the moderates, were unabashed in their alliance with business, even to the point of using their influence directly to help specific companies troubleshoot individual problems. “You are probably going to think I’m in the cinder business,” Hodding Carter wrote the head of the Illinois Central Railroad, based in Chicago, in 1951. “However, we have a new industry ready to open here, a broiler plant, and it is in desperate need of cinders for the grounds surrounding it. Would it be possible for this industry to get five carloads of cinders? … I hate to bother you about this but the plant will mean a good deal to us here and we are anxious to get them off to a good start.” 74


Moreover, the industrialization of Mississippi and the relentless courtship of business there was in keeping with profound extra-regional trends. The local developments need to be seen in the context of what Lizbeth Cohen describes as a wider pendulum swing toward mass consumerism, consumption and capitalist heroism that was, from the mid-1940s to the 1960s, part of the nation’s conformist response to the Cold War and recovery from World War II. But, that all said, in the case of Mississippi and the moderates, the degree of obsequiousness and the intensity of the search for business are striking, both as expressed in print and in private correspondence. “I never got really enthusiastic about bringing an outside industry to Greenville until I met the representatives of Alexander Smith,” Hodding Carter wrote the company president in 1950, in a highly flattering even disingenuous letter characteristic of their exchanges at times. “It was an eye opener to see how peoples, so short a time before strangers, got on together.”

The chumminess got to the point where the Mississippi moderates and the Northern capitalists were essentially working together, as both groups admitted in the candid privacy of their correspondence. “I have just read your banner headline story,” an Alexander Smith executive wrote Carter in the midst of Greenville’s bond-issue campaign for the carpet mill, “and have the happy feeling that the public relations aspects of this rather ticklish situation are being beautifully handled by most capable hands at both ends.” Or, as Carter later explained, in more politic language,}

77 Letter to Hodding Carter from Murray D. Ewing, December 26, 1950. Hodding II and Betty Werlein Carter Papers. In the case of the campaign to lure the Alexander Smith mill, Carter’s personal efforts extended to writing Greenville residents spending the winter in Florida and others in service in the military to send them applications for absentee ballots and to urge them to support the bond. See
the Democrat-Times’ role: “In order to assure that the bond issue would pass in the election, this newspaper carried extensive feature material on all aspects of Alexander Smith and carpet making and what the coming of such an industry would mean to the town.”

The impression of aggressive wooing and flattering of business is reinforced and particularly notable when the vehement local effort is seen in combination with the pieces that Mississippi moderates in the press managed to place in the national media that all but served as advertisements for Mississippi communities pitched to a much wider readership. This effort, of course, was part of the moderates’ extra-regional sensitivity and experience and was facilitated by their contacts with New York-based literary agents and with editors at national publications. In 1949, Hodding Carter wrote an article for the Atlantic Monthly titled “Southern Towns and Northern Industry,” in which the second paragraph reads: “there is one sacrosanct topic which, even were I so minded – and I hastily add that I am not – I would not dare to discuss save in the most favorable terms. That topic is the advantages which Greenville, Mississippi, offers the prospective industrialist.”

Similarly, in 1951, Carter contributed a piece to Ford Times, a publication circulating among executives in the automobile and automotive trade in states like Michigan, Ohio, Illinois and Wisconsin, an obvious target audience for a Deep South
community eager to attract the notice of antsy manufacturing businesses. The article was titled, “My Favorite Town – Greenville, Mississippi.” In this period, Carter also wrote profiles, articles and books featuring such local and regional subjects as: Greenville’s Main Street, Biloxi; the Gulf Coast, Tupelo, and the Lower Mississippi River Valley. Following the publication of the Tupelo piece, in the *Saturday Evening Post*, Carter assured a local official, “I think the overall impression of the article was helpful to Tupelo and Mississippi, to judge by the letters.”

Meanwhile, in the publication *The Lamp* in November 1951, Carter’s wrote a piece titled “The South Is on Its Way,” with the subtitle, “The region today pulses with the life of mechanized agriculture and new industries.” Carter was quite candid, in a self-mocking way, that he in effect was playing a Barnum-style huckster in promoting Greenville to attract business. “Step right this way, folks,” he wrote a friend, “to the best little industry-wanting town in the South.” And Carter was exaggerating only somewhat when in a letter to a Rhode Island friend he spoofed in Southern vernacular his own aggressive and regionally slanted pitch to Northern manufacturers. “What you all doing about labor trouble, crowded slum conditions for workers, terrible climate, labor unrest, racketeering in high and low places – see Jersey waterfront – water pollution?” Neither his humor nor his felicity with puns deserted Carter once Greenville voters overwhelmingly approved the bond issue for

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81 *Ford Times*, Vol. 43, No. 11 (November 1951).
82 Letter, Hodding Carter to Julius G. Berry, February 27, 1951. *Hodding II and Betty Werlein Carter Papers.*
the Alexander Smith rug mill. “Carpet baggers of Mississippi,” he crowed to a
friend.85

The moderates’ heavy-handed promotion to outsiders and relentless
campaigning to local readers soliciting bond-issue support continued throughout the
early post-war years. “Lexington and Holmes County need a good factory with a
substantial payroll,” Hazel Brannon wrote in the Lexington Advertiser in 1949, in an
editorial very typical of the pro-business tone. “Now is our chance to get it.”86 And
these Mississippi towns, with the boosterish leadership of the moderates using the
BAWI program, did indeed get many of the factories they were after. In 1946, the
first full year of the program’s operation after the war’s end, there were three new
factories begun in the state under BAWI, with a total payroll of 700 workers. By
1951, that annual figure had jumped to 21 businesses started with a total payroll of
3175, along with another nine factories with construction planned or under way that
year with an expected total payroll of 2830 employees. Therefore, in combining
factories started with those in some stage of planning or construction, in numbers of
businesses and total payroll, the BAWI program essentially had expanded about nine
fold in five years.87 “This industrial program is really snowballing,” Hodding Carter
remarked, in 1953.88

85 Letter, Hodding Carter to Carroll Kirkpatrick, January 22, 1951. Hodding II and Betty Werlein
Carter Papers.
87 “Progress Report of BAWI Plants in Operation,” April 1, 1952. Owen Cooper Papers, Mississippi
Department of Archives and History.
A “dark legend”

Aside from the subject of industrialization, in other topic areas that proved contentious around the early 1950s, the cohort of moderate Mississippians at the center of this dissertation proved to be more active in pushing professionalization, at times in realms with clear racial dimensions. In doing so, however, they still clung to central aspects of Mississippi’s traditionalism, such as racial segregation. Again, they unsteadily straddled those two widening polarities.

For example, the moderates were particularly adamant in the post-war about making certain changes at the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman, the notorious 18,000-acre cotton-growing prison farm with a largely black inmate population located in Sunflower County, a remote area of the Mississippi Delta. As with industrialization, the issue of Parchman and prison reform generally raises interesting questions about social control – specifically, race control, and also class control – in the context of the elite white Mississippi moderates of the post-war. Their notion of progress included wanting such control maintained, with themselves in the paramount position, but they also simultaneously were advocating modernization and professionalization, as in making the prison marginally more humane and rational and less violent.

As with earlier generations of reformers opposing such practices as the slave trade, slavery, and convict leasing, once the post-World War II moderates became

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89 Sources vary about the size of the farm. Estimates in print have ranged from 16,000 acres to 28,000 acres. So, the figure here is likely an estimation, slightly on the conservative side. The Mississippi State Penitentiary website, [www.mdoc.state.ms.us](http://www.mdoc.state.ms.us) puts the current total at “approximately 18,000 acres.”
more conscious of the horrors of Parchman, they called for an end to many of the
cruellest and most corrupt aspects of what they realized was an unfair penal system.
This was ironic, of course, because, as with slavery and other brutal practices faced
by prior generations in different circumstances, the prison was but a very grim
expression of a larger social and political apparatus that had long placed them and
people like them on top. To its growing legion of detractors, Parchman was
effectively a dungeon, but it had long been operated in the name and in support of
white supremacy.

The elite white Mississippi moderates of the post-war thus once again wanted
change but also the maintenance of the essence of the status quo. Their version of
modernization and professionalization included favoring an end to prisoner
whippings and to the violent, corrupt system permitting armed trustee guards with
latitude, in the service of discipline, to shoot inmates, for example. But in the early
1950s, the moderates’ reformism did not extend to altering Parchman’s rigid system
of racial segregation which kept Mississippi’s black prisoners in a compounded state
of bondage.

Ironically, the moderates’ continuing devotion to segregation along racial
lines served to obscure for a time their understanding that the penitentiary, if properly
managed, really needed to be segregated in another far more professional way – by
classification of criminal. They did not clearly see and act upon the profound
differences that existed among Parchman’s large group of African-American
prisoners. So their professionalization and specifically their belief in best
professional practices in this instance were limited by their racism. By around 1953,
that blind spot had begun to heal, however. The moderates finally did begin to write supportively about the construction of a “Little Alcatraz” building at Parchman to separate out and house the most dangerous inmates and about “arrangements for the first-timers” so that “they will have no contact with frequent offenders and hardened criminals,” as Hodding Carter wrote in 1953. At present, he noted ominously, “homosexual old-timers are not separated from the youngsters.”

The “dark legend of Parchman Farm,” as John Lewis has called it, had been depicted in stories by William Faulkner and Eudora Welty and had been lamented in several blues songs. The prison’s medieval reputation proved more than justified. The *Delta Democrat-Times* sarcastically referred to Parchman as “that enlightened establishment dedicated to degenerating men to the status of animals.”

The conditions at the farm, which was essentially a state-owned cotton plantation set up as a profit-making enterprise, worked by convict labor and enforced even in the 1940s and 1950s with antebellum-style whippings, were “worse than slavery,” in the words of one author. And in fact the struggle over reforming Parchman is very much about the extent to which Mississippi was ready to fully move beyond its slavery past, by now supposedly nearly a century removed in time. Other 20th century critics even implied that Parchman was so barbaric its methods essentially predated American

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91 For example, there is a song titled “Parchman Farm Blues,” by Washington “Bukka” White. One Parchman reference in Welty’s work appears in *Delta Wedding*. Speaking of the novel’s protagonist, Laura McRaven, Welty writes: “She remembered the baying of the dogs at night; and how Roy believed when you heard dogs bay, a convict had got out of Parchman and they were after him in the swamp; every night of the world the dogs would bay, and Roy would lie in the house shaking in his bed.” Eudora Welty, *Delta Wedding* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1946), p. 10.
slavery, which was enlightened by comparison. “Parchman was akin to a product of the dark ages,” editor and publisher J. Oliver Emmerich wrote.  

In the first post-World War II years, one observer recalled, “the prison had bad food, bad living conditions, [and only] one physically disabled doctor” for 2300 inmates, who regularly were worked from 4 a.m. to 7 p.m., with three hours’ break during the hottest part of the day. Lewis writes: “In a South filled with nightmarishly inhuman prisons and work farms, Parchman Penitentiary was infamous for being the worst.” Adds David Oshinsky: the farm’s “story covers the bleak panorama of race and punishment in the darkest corner of the South.” Parchman easily falls into the sociological category of what David J. Rothman called the “asylum,” meaning institutions that imprisoned people as a means of social control.

In the case of Parchman, of course, the social control was highly racialized as it was class-based. The elite white moderates’ stated opinion was based on their notion of professionalism, namely that Mississippi needed a 20th century corrections system as opposed to a pseudo-plantation and forced-labor camp in the guise of a prison. It was somewhat ironic that Parchman itself was initially a symbol of reform, as a substitute for Mississippi’s scandalous practice in the post-Reconstruction years of convict leasing. By the 1940s, the penitentiary was among the world’s largest

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97 Oshinsky, 2.
commercial cotton operations, essentially staffed with slave – or, rather, incarcerated, and, as need be, chained and whipped – predominantly black labor.

“While prisons and prison methods have changed vastly over the years, Parchman, since it was founded in 1902, has gone along virtually about the same,” journalist Wilson F. “Bill” Minor observed, in 1953.99 Resistance to change and the extent of the corruption and brutality at Parchman had long been formidable. For example, in 1940, state Senator Howard McDonnell of Biloxi, a criminologist and prison reformer, recalled, “I could not get another member of the Legislature to vote with me in trying to correct the conditions” at Parchman.100 For much of its history, Mississippi had had, the words of one national expert, “a primitive penal system that is close to the bottom of the list.”101 What was called for, Hodding Carter wrote, was “a modern penal system … the kind of system Mississippi doesn’t have but should.”102 Of course, the moderates’ concept of modernization and professionalization did not include racial integration in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The moderates’ push for reform at Parchman was animated by their awareness of extra-regional trends and national standards, as expressed through professional bodies like the American Prison Association. The moderates also brought to their campaign for change their complex sense of morality. But these motivations were bound by their entrenched and – for the time being – largely immovable racial assumptions.

101 “Outstanding Penologist Says Mississippi Penal System is Improved but Primitive,” Delta Democrat-Times, July 1, 1953.
Within those limits, gradually in the early post-war years, the attitudes of leading white Mississippians started to evolve. A series of anecdotal and piecemeal reports in the 1940s and early 1950s alleging especially brutal practices at the isolated prison finally prompted some efforts at investigation and then calls for change. And because the prison was essentially a black institution, demands for reform had widespread racial implications for all Mississippians. “A long range program of prison reform should be applied in Mississippi,” wrote publisher J. Oliver Emmerich in 1946.\footnote{“At Our State Penitentiary,” \textit{McComb Enterprise-Journal}, October 11, 1946.} That year, after several unexplained shooting incidents at the farm, a number of the elite white Mississippi moderates began advocating the overhaul of Parchman’s system of armed trustee guards, who by established practice were selected from among the prisoners and given the discretion to discipline and even fire upon fellow inmates with buckshot. The elite white moderates wanted things done more professionally. They called for replacing the trustees with full-time trained professional guards.

With thousands of prisoners scattered among 17 separate “work camps” – segregated into “white camps” and “Negro camps” – throughout the large property, and with few paid staff members to manage them, with no effective system of centralized control, and with no perimeter fencing at the penitentiary, discipline had long been overly punitive. Wide discretion for discipline was pushed to the lowest bureaucratic level. Order was, in fact, maintained by means of arming fellow prisoners who became, in their highly remote patch of Delta farmland, in effect, the law unto themselves. As late as June 1953, the Parchman superintendent, Marvin Wiggins, termed the shooting of prisoners “routine” after an incident where six
inmates were wounded by a shotgun blast when they disobeyed an order against “bunching together.” Wiggins’ comment and the shooting itself, the latest among a number of problems involving the trustee system, only served to bolster the case for reform, in the moderates’ view. “Thorough study should be made of the inmate guard system to determine the advisability of abolishing it and providing competent state guards,” a report, by Ole Miss sociologist and penal expert Alfred C. Schnur stated. “I feel that it should be abolished at once and civilian guards should be employed throughout.”

In 1948, with the arrival of the conservative “progressive” state legislature, a bill authorizing the hiring of 50 full-time paid guards “to be employed at the state penitentiary with a view to replacing the present trusty guard system at the prison” was passed by both the House and Senate. But even so, some five years later, there were still ongoing efforts in the legislature to abolish whatever substantial portion remained of the trustee system. According to Wilson F. “Bill” Minor at the New Orleans Times-Picayune, of the approximately 240 guards serving at Parchman in 1953, all but 40 were prisoner trustees. The “prisoner-guard is still the backbone of the security system at the Mississippi state penitentiary,” he wrote. That year Mississippi was, along with Louisiana and Arkansas, among only three states still

clinging to the trustee-guard practice the American Prison Association had long branded “highly undesirable.”108

Also in 1948, the legislature, imbued with at least some demonstrable regard for enhanced professionalization, set up a full-time parole board with the authority to investigate practices at Parchman. The part-time parole board it replaced, one critic charged, was “trafficking in human slavery,” referring to the outgoing panel’s regular practice of releasing prisoners to go work at the homes of politically connected people, particularly in Jackson, at pittance wages and under completely servile conditions.109 By stopping this modern-day “slavery” scandal, the moderates, risking the ire of the political network that had condoned and benefitted from the established parolee-servant practice, were making at least some small steps away from allowing or overlooking the worst and most exploitative (and patently racist) practices. The headline in the Tupelo Daily Journal, published by moderate George A. McLean, hailed the new legislative measures – the hiring of professional guards and the creation of a full-time parole board – as launching a “Program of Reform In Penitentiary.”110 The moves certainly rendered the system somewhat – if even marginally – more professional.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, elite white moderates in Mississippi also pushed for an end to sanctioned beatings at the penitentiary administered with the

109 “Pen Whippings Denounced by Senator Jones,” Tupelo Daily Journal, March 24, 1948. In this article, Senator Fred Jones of Inverness charged that the part-time board was so corrupt it paroled inmates to work “as hand-servants to wealthy Jacksonians at wages as low as 50 cents a day.”
feared “Black Annie” leather strap, or what one inmate called “the bull hide.”\textsuperscript{111} “This relic of barbarism ought to go,” H.H. Crisler Jr. of the \textit{Jasper County News} in Bay Springs wrote, in 1952. “It has no just place in our society today. There are other forms of punishment which can be substituted, and yet not be as degrading and brutal as the strap.”\textsuperscript{112} Defenders referred to the practice with the gentle euphemism of “corporal punishment.” State law in effect in the 1940s and 1950s allowed for beatings of up to 20 lashes with “Annie,” an instrument five feet long and six inches wide. The floggings involved spreading “the offender face downward, with other prisoners holding his arms, legs and head, while a prison employee applies the lash,” a 1946 newspaper account stated.\textsuperscript{113} Until the law was somewhat modified in 1950, these beatings could take place on the sole authority of camp “sergeants,” staff members in charge of various work sites on the property. Obviously this practice, used to discipline a prisoner population which was mostly African-American, conjured up and was derivative of slavery’s most inhumane aspects.

In his report on Parchman, Ole Miss Prof. Alfred C. Schnur, a University of Wisconsin Ph.D. and former associate warden at a prison facility in Minnesota, favored development of “a disciplinary program less repressive and less conducive to resentment and ill will.”\textsuperscript{114} Other elite moderates had long agreed. In 1946, when a grand jury in Sunflower County, home of Parchman, issued a statement in favor of retaining the practice of whipping prisoners, Hodding Carter offered a highly critical editorial. “It seems to us that one of the gauges of civilization’s progress has been

\textsuperscript{111} Letter, to Hodding Carter from E.D. Davis. Hodding II and Betty Werlein Carter Papers.
\textsuperscript{112} “Abolish the Strap,” \textit{Jasper County News}, April 3, 1952.
\textsuperscript{113} “Seek to Outlaw ‘Black Annie,’ Lash Used on Convicts at State Pen,” \textit{Delta Democrat-Times}, March 4, 1946.
\textsuperscript{114} “Ignorance Should be Retired,” Schnur report. \textit{Ibid.}
our movement away from physical violence as a means of punishment or of settling differences. The whipping post, like the torture rack, is a relic of the barbarism against which mankind continually fights. To say there are no other means of controlling convicts is to deny the findings, implemented almost everywhere, of intelligent, trained penologists.”\textsuperscript{115} Here again, Carter’s argument regarding Parchman rests on his view of modernization and professionalization, as well as awareness and interpretation of extra-regional values such as “civilization’s progress.”

J. Oliver Emmerich, publisher of the \textit{McComb Enterprise-Journal}, used a similar argument. “The modern conception of the operation of a penitentiary does not include the lash,” one of his 1946 editorials stated.\textsuperscript{116} That same year, to dramatize the case for outlawing the whippings, state Sen. Howard McDonnell of Biloxi brought “Annie” to Jackson to display it for his fellow lawmakers. “Its use is contrary to every principle of science, philosophy, humanity and Christianity,” he stated. “I hope this creature of ignorance will be relegated among other barbarian measures of the past.”\textsuperscript{117} In spite of the dramatic appeal, the Senate “indefinitely postponed” McDonnell’s proposed ban.

But in 1950, the conservative “progressive” legislature did pass a law restricting the use of the whip somewhat. Under this new measure, prison staff members had to submit a request to Parchman’s superintendent stating the reason for the proposed whipping, and then the superintendent had the discretion to approve,

\textsuperscript{117} “State Senate Refuses to Ban Use of Lash on Prisoners at Parchman; Strap is Displayed,” \textit{McComb Enterprise-Journal}, March 14, 1946.
reduce or reject the recommended punishment.\textsuperscript{118} But even with the new limits, the whippings continued into the next two decades, even as most other states had dropped the practice. By 1953, only South Carolina, Tennessee and Mississippi still sanctioned prisoner whippings.

Twice, in the 1953 session of the legislature, amendments to Parchman appropriations bills were offered to outlaw the use of the lash altogether. The bills passed in the Senate but narrowly missed passage in the House. State Rep. Joseph E. Wroten of Greenville, was one of the moderates pushing the ban. But in fact the practice persisted for years afterward. Civil rights leader John Lewis wrote of witnessing “hundreds of stripe-suited black convicts who were goaded by bullwhips and cursing, kicking guards to turn out a daily quota of cotton or other crops” when he was briefly a Parchman inmate in June, 1961.\textsuperscript{119} In keeping with David J. Rothman’s thesis of the asylum as state instrument of social control, a whole range of public institutions, including schools, local jails and mental hospitals, gradually moved away from the doctrine of corporal punishment in post-war decades. Meanwhile, in the early 1950s, moderates such as J. Oliver Emmerich in McComb raised questions about the practice of racial beatings in local jails, administered by police, of a kind disturbingly similar to those at Parchman regarding state criminals. Emmerich’s editorial stance was by no means popular with many white readers. “I


soon recognized that my expose of the jailhouse whipping would cause possible repercussions,” Emmerich wrote in his memoir.120

Moderates studying Parchman called for a range of other modern, professional practices at the penitentiary, in areas besides the trustee and the whipping issues. They favored rehabilitation programs, a psychiatrist on staff, vocational training, adequate library facilities, a prison chaplain and a chapel, a recreational center, and educational programs, all which the prison completely lacked in the late 1940s and early 1950s. They advocated termination of the profit-making “working plantation” model in favor of a non-profit modern corrections institution, or, if the profit system was to be retained in the near-term, then at least “the inmates should be paid for their work in the penitentiary,” Schnur’s report stated.121 “Today, as in 1902, the primary concern of Parchman penitentiary is the planting, cultivation and harvesting of the cotton crop,” Wilson F. “Bill” Minor observed in 1953.122

The profit-making set-up was considered by reformers a corruption of the legal system, Gunnar Myrdal points out, in part because in sentencing, judges “may decide the punishment on the basis of a consideration as to the state’s profit. Mississippi, for example, had a net profit of half a million dollars in 1939 from its penitentiaries, and judges were inclined to send criminals to the penitentiary rather than fine them.”123 In effect, as its defenders in Jackson were quick to point out, Parchman, remaining just as it always had been, was an extremely profitable business

121 “Ignorance Should be Retired,” Schnur report. Ibid.
123 Myrdal, p. 548.
for a state otherwise strapped for money. As with reforming the old corrupt parole practices, in challenging the profit-making model, the moderates were facing strong and influential opposition, including from business and other sectors which presumably would, in the event of reform, have to make up any resulting shortfall in state revenue.

The state’s overall poverty thus was an underlying factor in sustaining support for Parchman remaining as it was. The financial benefits of the prison staying tethered to the plantation model, not surprisingly, had highly placed constituencies. And because Parchman was (largely correctly) seen as a black institution, calls for reforming the penitentiary in the early post-war years did not have many supporters among white racial traditionalists who were already caught up in battling the notion of civil rights on other fronts. Reform of Parchman was, at its core, about race. As Charles W. Eagles writes, “any calls for change (at Parchman) elicited charges of undermining the traditional racial patterns because the overwhelming majority of the inmates were Negro. Prison reform smacked of racial reform.”

Also on the topic of professionalization, the moderates wanted Parchman opened up for citizen inspections and for media coverage. They wanted an end to what Hodding Carter described as “a high-handed policy of secrecy” at Parchman, which, he added, “prevails whenever it suits the purpose of the authorities there.”

Added Easton King at the *Pascagoula Chronicle-Star*: “the public does have the right to know what goes on at all of its institutions, penal and otherwise.” Along those

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125 “It’s Up to the Legislature,” *Delta Democrat-Times*, July 7, 1953.
126 “We See It This Way,” *Pascagoula Chronicle-Star and Moss Point Advertiser*, July 10, 1953.
lines, the moderates suggested that standard professional practice for institutions be applied, namely that national penal experts regularly visit, study and make assessments of Parchman.

This concern was part of the elite white moderates’ extra-regional awareness and sensibility. They urged that recommendations of the American Prison Association, as in such areas as classification of inmates, be carried out. They cited studies by the Federal Bureau of Prisons, part of the U.S. Justice Department, and by the New York-based Osborne Association for prison reform, a private foundation associated in its inception with the social welfare movement of the 1930s. In 1952 and 1953, the moderates editorialized that the superintendent, Marvin Wiggins, whose background was in farming and plantation management, should be replaced, preferably by an expert in penology and criminology – or failing that someone with at least a high school diploma. As late as 1951, there remained a provision in Mississippi law that stated Parchman’s superintendent had to be an experienced farmer. The moderates pushed to “make it mandatory that the penitentiary head be a penologist,” again, a reform in the direction of professionalization. Of course, as the work of sociologist Magali Sarfatti Larson points out, professionalization served the purpose of bolstering the authority of the very people – those with education and

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128 Howard McDonnell, a state senator from Biloxi, and also a lawyer and a criminologist, introduced a bill in the legislature requiring the superintendent of the legislature have at least two years of college education. The bill failed. Then he proposed requiring the superintendent to have a high school education. That bill also was defeated. McDonnell served on the legislative standing committee on penitentiaries in 1952.

specialized knowledge – who, for example in this case in Mississippi, were calling for its application.\textsuperscript{130} So, for the moderates, there was a strong element of self-interest in the promotion and creation of a system that people like themselves were, in Mississippi, exclusively trained to carry out and control.

Meanwhile, the moderates repeatedly called for state investigations as various unsolved killings and other problems and scandals in the prison leaked out. Hailing the principle of academic freedom, they defended critics of the penitentiary such as Alfred C. Schnur, an authority on prison reform who, in moment of candor that stirred the wrath of the farm’s defenders in Jackson, called Parchman a “wonderful training school for criminals.”\textsuperscript{131} The elite moderates lent editorial support and other aid to politicians who advocated reforms at the penitentiary. “May I take this occasion to compliment you on your courageous fight to abolish the lash and to affect other long-needed reforms at Parchman?” Hodding Carter wrote state Senator Howard McDonnell in 1953.\textsuperscript{132}

By 1953, the forces backing the moderates’ general efforts at reform included: the Mississippi Bar Association, as well as, Carter reported, “a majority of the Mississippi Senate, a sizeable minority of the Mississippi House, almost the entire state press, every trained penologist in America, and the Mississippi Crime and Delinquency Commission.”\textsuperscript{133} The moderates’ view advocating some reforms was becoming increasingly mainstream. The state penitentiary, one Mississippi moderate

\textsuperscript{131} “Ole Miss Prof Sticks to Parchman Opinion,” Delta Democrat-Times, March 7, 1954. A fuller discussion of Schnur, Parchman and the concept of academic freedom is included in the next chapter.
\textsuperscript{132} Letter, Hodding Carter to Howard McDonnell, July 1, 1953. Hodding II and Betty Werlein Carter Papers.
\textsuperscript{133} “Parchman’s Basic Issues,” Delta Democrat-Times, June 30, 1953.
stated years later, remained an affront to “modern standards of decency,” self-evidently an extra-regional notion.\footnote{\textit{Quote of federal Judge William C. Keady, taken from Oshinsky, p. 246.}}

The moderates’ push for professionalization, at least in the case of Parchman, had a clear racial component. They favored some changes, but simultaneously wanted the overall rigors of segregation, and thus white racial privilege, to be kept in place at the prison. This can be seen in the specifics of what the elite moderates were proposing, as in a push to hire “colored assistant chaplains” at the penitentiary, though that also could be interpreted a forward-thinking act of affirmative action.\footnote{“State Senator Charges Parchman Superintendent Balks at the Law,” \textit{Delta Democrat-Times}, June 10, 1953.}

More broadly, and to their credit, the white moderates were looking to reform and render more humane a harshly racist and largely black institution. In ways somewhat analogous to the examples of misgivings about Theodore G. Bilbo and then the Dixiecrats, and in a case that reveals the essence of the moderates’ enduring conundrum, in the Parchman situation the elite white moderates of the post-war were becoming increasingly uncomfortable with the perpetration of some of the worst and most horrendous excesses of the Jim Crow South. But they were arriving at that conclusion even as those excesses had been created and long condoned as a distasteful but harshly necessary part of the defense of their own privileged racial and class position. “I have been told that Parchman is the kind of place it is because that is the way you and I and the rest of the people of Mississippi want it,” Alfred C. Schnur routinely told white Mississippi audiences in 1952.\footnote{Alfred C. Schnur, “Crime in Mississippi,” speech, prepared in February, 1952.} Schnur, like other
Mississippi moderates of the 1940s and 1950s, used the phrase “the people of Mississippi” to refer to the white people of Mississippi.

Michel Foucault articulates the dichotomy inherent in the need for control by the most powerful groups in society. He points to a tense coexistence pitting the ruling hierarchy against certain groups which are targeted for repression. This tension was particularly unstable in the case of Mississippi, given its unique racial makeup and its restrictions on African-American participation in the political system. “The process by which the bourgeois became in the course of the 18th century the dominant political class was masked by the establishment of an explicit, coded, and formally egalitarian judicial framework, made possible by the organization of a parliamentary, representative regime,” Foucault writes. “But the generalization of disciplinary mechanisms constituted the other, dark side of these processes.”

In a racist culture like 1940s and 1950s Mississippi, of course, the “parliamentary, representative regime” was dominated almost entirely by upper-class whites, so the “other, dark side of these processes,” for example a brutal prison system populated mainly by blacks, was for a time largely removed from the visible areas of concern of the state’s most powerful people. Parchman was set in the most remote part of the state and was inaccessible to the media and to most external observers—including, notably, out-of-state professionals – for very specific reasons. The “secrecy” about which Hodding Carter complained was both institutionally deliberate and was part of the prison’s wider mystique. Parchman’s “dark legend” grew, in part, in the absence of reliable information regularly getting out to the public.

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The penitentiary committee in the Mississippi legislature ruled that institution and its funding, and tenaciously protected its prerogatives in doing so. Even today, drivers on the Delta roadways nearing the entrance to the Parchman property are warned with a series of large road signs that they are forbidden by law from even slowing down and that their movements are subject to being filmed. It was only through the strenuous effort in the post-war of certain moderate elements of Mississippi’s media, bolstered by an extra-regional consciousness and belief in modernization and professionalization, that hard questions about Parchman started to be asked by larger numbers of the state’s whites, in spite of their overall racist inclinations. They were becoming concerned about the inhumanity they were part of promulgating by sustaining the “dark side of these processes.”

Amid the push for reform, the moderates’ concern about the state penitentiary often showed their enduring racial bias. “The white population at Parchman, so much in need of … a rehabilitation program, is showing a marked increase,” was a main worry of state Senator Fred Jones of Inverness, who otherwise, judging by his early opposition to the lash, had at least some “moderate” leanings.\(^{138}\) That said, as the post-war years proceeded, the elite white Mississippi moderates in some of these extreme cases such as Parchman, and from a position of great strength, carefully calibrated caution, and limited risk, were beginning to act more forcefully upon their doubts concerning an overall unfair system that bequeathed such privilege to themselves. But they remained in that familiar bifurcated position involving the tense interplay of traditionalism and reform, continuity and change, embodying what

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William A. Link called the *Paradox of Southern Progressivism*, what David G. Sansing referred to as *Making Haste Slowly*, what Dewey Grantham called *A Region at Odds* and what J. Oliver Emmerich termed the *Two Faces of Janus*.

“Cracker barrel” courts

On a number of other issues percolating in the early 1950s, the moderates were equally committed to upgraded professionalization, within racial limits. For example, they pushed for an end to the justice of the peace local court system – or “JP courts,” in common parlance – which seemed to them an outmoded relic of a pre-automobile rural Mississippi that basically no longer existed. According to a growing chorus of reformers, the courts were part of an anachronistic and expensive local government structure that dated to horse-drawn wagons, family farms and small-town convenience. They were pushing to reform that bloated (in their view) local system generally, but specifically they focused mainly on the JP courts.

The state had enacted the justice of the peace court system in 1848, so, like the ancient “blue laws,” the courts were increasingly seen as being well past their usefulness. The dichotomy featuring these entrenched local courts versus the post-war attempt at reform comports with the theories of political scientist Stephen Skowronek, who, in the context of issues like federal civil service reform, noted for

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139 Another source traces the founding of the JP courts to an even earlier period. The courts “date back without substantial modification to 1817,” the year Mississippi achieved statehood, Wilson F. Minor writes. “Move to Revise Justice of Peace Court System,” *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, November 1956.
example the historic tension between autonomous operations of political patronage on the one hand and new and expanding bureaucratic structures on the other.\textsuperscript{140}

By the 1940s and early 1950s the local courts had long since become degraded and overwhelmed by incompetence, inefficiency, nepotism, corruption, and other complications, in the moderates’ view. There were numerous studies and repeated anecdotal evidence backing up that opinion. “The chief advantages of the justice of the peace courts have now largely vanished,” stated a mid-1950s report from the Mississippi Economic Council (MEC), a statewide business group, with some moderate elements, that helped lead the judicial reforms.\textsuperscript{141} In a more general comment, an MEC report stated, “through archaic laws, public lassitude and political selfishness, Mississippi allows its legal framework to become a screen behind which hides all manner of political corruptionists and law violators.”\textsuperscript{142}

Developed in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century as a kind of small-claims court to resolve disputes among neighbors in isolated farming communities of the state, the JP courts by the mid-20\textsuperscript{th} century had a jurisdiction that now included major criminal matters.\textsuperscript{143} Increasingly in the 1940s and 1950s, the local JPs, often uneducated people with little more legal training than notary publics, seemed to the elite


\textsuperscript{141}Charles S. Tindall, Why the Justice of the Peace System Should Be Abolished and How to Do It. A Report to the Mississippi Economic Council, April 10, 1956. An example of moderate elements within the Mississippi Economic Council would be Owen Cooper, the head of the Mississippi Chemical Corporation.

\textsuperscript{142}“Poor Law Enforcement In Mississippi Studied in Economic Council Report – System Described as ‘Old, Outmoded’,” McComb Enterprise-Journal, July 2, 1953.

\textsuperscript{143}Charles S. Tindall’s report for the Mississippi Economic Council in April 1956, previously cited, stated, in part: “The office of justice of the peace had thorough justification in the early development of the social and legal aspects of our nation and our state. In a state rural in character, whose population is not great and was widely scattered, whose transportation system was largely confined to the horse and buggy, it was highly important that disputes between neighbors involving small matters of property, and misdemeanors and crime not of a serious nature, could be dealt with without delay and without undue inconvenience.”

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moderates to be woefully ill-equipped and lacking in experience to handle their burgeoning responsibilities in a changing and increasingly complex world. As the *Pascagoula Chronicle-Star* noted at the time, “Mississippi’s system of law enforcement was developed to fit a pattern of life and government which was fast disappearing even while the Constitution of 1890 was being written.” 144 Obviously, there were clear class-based elements in the case of the JP Courts, with the elite whites who pushed for abolition wishing to wrest aspects of control away from more parochial elements in the society.

The proposed elimination of the JP courts – and, for that matter, the calls for more humane treatment and professional conduct at Parchman and at local jails – corresponded with a wider effort in the post-war among Mississippi’s legal community, and favored by the elite moderates, to improve various aspects of the state’s criminal justice system. Examples of these reforms would include: tightening law school entrance requirements at Ole Miss, raising the credentials necessary for bar admission, increasing salaries of court reporters and other officials, professionalizing community policing, equalizing sentencing of black and white criminals, and modernizing other related standards of practice. 145

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145 In February 1955, there was a gathering in Louisville, Kentucky called the Southern Police Institute. The Institute had held a number of similar conferences in earlier years. The 1955 Institute included a panel consisting of Thurgood Marshall, Louisville editor Mark Ethridge and Greenville, Miss. editor Hodding Carter. The Institute was financed by grants from the Carnegie Corporation, the General Education Fund, the Rockefeller Foundation and the Doris Duke Foundation. The meeting brought together selected Southern police officers to talk about racial conflict and other problems. So, this is an example of Northern money funding a meeting facilitated by Mississippi moderates like Carter to try to upgrade an area of the state’s criminal justice system. See letter, Hodding Carter to Cart Brandt, December 10, 1954. Hodding II and Betty Werlein Carter Papers.
The outmoded nature of the JP court system specifically was, as far as the elite moderates were concerned, part of a county-based mindset and excessive localism of bygone days still afflicting too much of Mississippi. Such inefficiency and backward thinking was no longer appropriate in a systems-oriented modern world where geographic distances could be far more easily bridged than in earlier times, according to the moderates’ view.

For example, many Mississippi counties still in the 1940s had two county courthouses, dating to a time when a range of modest hills (or a river) bisecting a county would necessitate, by the insistence of a divided and fiercely localized populace, having a courthouse on either side of the barrier. Morton B. King, the Ole Miss sociologist, described the “intense local feeling in some areas of the state.”\textsuperscript{146} In Bolivar County (1950 population: 63,004) in the Delta, for example, government had become so balkanized that there was an East Bolivar County Department of Public Welfare and a West Bolivar County Department of Public Welfare.\textsuperscript{147} The towns of Cleveland and Rosedale each served as county seats of Bolivar County. Correspondingly, the county had a First Judicial District and a Second Judicial District. Such a particularized system was not unusual for Mississippi counties, even well into the post-war period. The problem persists to the present day: as of 2010, with a significant reduced population since the mid-20\textsuperscript{th} century, Bolivar County has \textit{six} separate school districts.\textsuperscript{148} Repeated attempts at consolidation have failed.

\textsuperscript{146} Alexander Heard summary of interview with Morton B. King, June 16, 1947. Southern Politics Collection.
\textsuperscript{147} Bolivar County population figures are drawn from the 1950 federal census.
Along those lines, many counties of Mississippi, such as Yazoo, had in the 1940s as many as five independent road departments, or “beats” as they were known, each of which handled road work in its own sub-jurisdiction with separate equipment and separate management. With increasingly better road conditions and with greater use of the automobile, this system seemed to many people to be woefully informal and inefficient by the post-war. But pressure to consolidate into one county highway department where there could be central purchasing, pooling of equipment and other economies of scale was resisted intensely by defenders – politically important constituencies – of the old highly politicized system. Many of the moderates, among others, felt this parochial arrangement was absurdly unworkable and needlessly expensive and needed to be reorganized under one county board. In short, the old model went sharply against their notion of modernization and professionalization.

But specifically on the matter of the legal system, there also was ample evidence the justice of the peace courts were overly harsh and blatantly racially biased against African-Americans, a stance which was making the moderates, despite their own clear racism, increasingly and uncomfortably self-conscious. So the clear evidence of the court’s racial bias was a factor in their pushing for reform. In 1955, for example, a 19-year-old black male named Curtis Freeman was sentenced by the Tchula JP court, in Holmes County, to six months at a county prison farm for “unlawful use of vulgar and obscene language” in the presence of a white high school girl.149

Moreover, justice of the peace court officials, known in common parlance as constables, were also known to travel state roads and make arrests, for minor

149 “Asked to Leave the County,” The Presbyterian Outlook, October 17, 1955.
infractions such as missing tail lights, and hold offenders in local jails – overnight if necessary – until cash fines, which were essentially bribes, were paid. Reacting to such obvious scams, reformers wanted restrictions placed on the constables to “stop them from going out on the highways and such unorthodox procedures as practiced in some instances,” as Gov. J.P. Coleman put it.\textsuperscript{150}

Flaws in the local court system, and the moderates’ and the media’s growing exasperation with it, became starkly and tragically apparent in April 1953. That month, a justice of the peace and storekeeper in the Delta town of Benoit, a white man named John Thomas, was exonerated by a fellow justice of the peace after he had shot and killed an African-American plantation worker named Claude Otis Johnson over a $37.50 grocery bill. The killing was “justified,” stated Thomas’ fellow justice, Elbert V. Reams, who had failed to call to his hastily arranged hearing in nearby Rosedale (“The Delta City of Brotherly Love”) any of the incident’s several eyewitnesses and then declined to refer the matter to a grand jury. Reams, incidentally, had been elevated to the justice of the peace office, where he now handled the disposition of such serious criminal cases, from his previous position as trustee of tiny Rosedale Cemetery.

Adding to the aroma of small-town back-scratching if not outright corruption surrounding this case was the fact that Mississippi House Speaker Walter Sillers Jr. and his Rosedale law partner W.C. “Bill Clay” Roberts were part of Thomas’s defense team. The fact that Sillers, who was in fact originally responsible for the JP

\textsuperscript{150} Statement by Governor J.P. Coleman, 1956. J.P. Coleman Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
appointment of “my close personal and political friend” Reams and who, as House Speaker, obviously held considerable ongoing power directly and indirectly over Reams’s office, did not recuse himself from the case struck some observers as unusual if not troubling.\textsuperscript{151}

A “bloodstained whitewash,” was how the \textit{Delta Democrat-Times} described Reams’s ruling, in a front-page editorial.\textsuperscript{152} The \textit{New Orleans Times-Picayune}, the \textit{Pascagoula Chronicle-Star} and other of the more moderate outlets of the state’s press also reacted with harsh condemnation and scorn. For example, Wilson F. “Bill” Minor of the \textit{Times-Picayune} condescendingly observed after Reams’s decision that “there are hundreds of other matters of a serious legal nature which are settled in a ‘court’ which the JP holds around a cracker barrel in a crossroads grocery or the back room of some building.”\textsuperscript{153} In many counties, the Mississippi Economic Council concluded, “law enforcement is for all practical purposes ‘non-existent.’”\textsuperscript{154}

After the killing and what the \textit{Democrat-Times} called the “wicked farce” of the Reams hearing, centrist elements of the Mississippi Bar Association, the Mississippi Economic Council, the state legislature, and Mississippi’s political leadership more generally prompted in part by the media outcry, began making serious and concerted proposals to eliminate the justice of the peace courts. They

\textsuperscript{151} Or, alternatively, perhaps Reams instead might have recused himself, given his connection with Sillers. On December 27, 1944, upon the death of Robert Arnold, the Bolivar County District No. 2 justice of the peace, Walter Sillers Jr. wrote a letter to Gov. Thomas L. Bailey. In part, it stated: “Mr. E.V. Reams, who has always been my close personal and political friend, is an applicant for the place and will be a candidate in the election which will be called to fill the vacancy. In the meantime, I shall appreciate it if you will appoint him to fill the vacancy and serve until an election is called. Reams is your friend as well as mine.” Walter Sillers Jr. Papers.


\textsuperscript{154} “Poor Law Enforcement in Mississippi Studied in Economic Council Report – System Described as ‘Old, Outmoded’,” \textit{McComb Enterprise-Journal}, July 2, 1953.
looked to replace them with a system of magistrate courts that would, as they envisioned, be more rational, systematic and fitting for a modern society – involving bureaucratic structures, to use Stephen Skowronek’s concept, and greater legal and administrative acumen. “Since the early beginnings of this nation and the admission of our state to the Union, society has grown much more complex,” the MEC report noted. “The civil and criminal jurisdiction of the justice of the peace has so expanded and the nature of the controversies so varied as to demand increased ability on the part of the justices.” In urging the abolishment of the office of justice of the peace, the MEC stated: “This recommendation is based on intensive studies by the Council and other organizations, such as the Mississippi Bar Association, showing the office to be an outmoded one resulting in inefficiency and oftentimes miscarriages of justice.”

In late 1956, Gov. J.P. Coleman stated that if the justices of the peace resisted efforts at modernizing and improving their offices, it would result in abolition. He urged a state constitutional convention to bring outmoded laws up to date. Coleman called the justice of the peace laws “as far behind the times” as the 1848 date of their enactment.

The elite white moderates again framed the JP court issue mostly in terms of professional improvement, as in the MEC report, but they also clearly were motivated by class and racial considerations. They wanted control of a major aspect of

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155 Charles S. Tindall report to the Mississippi Economic Council, Ibid.
Mississippi’s judicial system, and criminal matters up to and including questions of life and death, taken away from lower-class, uneducated, locally focused and unsophisticated rural whites sitting around a “cracker barrel at a crossroads grocery” and instead put into the hands of skilled, trained, experienced, modern professionals much like themselves who possessed “increased abilities.” And the impetus for reform in their view was partly the unmistakable evidence, as in the Thomas exoneration, of obvious racial injustice of the kind they were less and less able to abide, in spite of their ongoing fealty to racial segregation and even white supremacy.

Reforms both at Parchman and in the justice of the peace courts had racial implications, in spite of the segregationist roots and inclinations on the part of the “reformers.” Parchman’s inmate population was overwhelmingly African-American – David Oshinsky’s analogy to slavery and the related controversy over “Black Annie” whippings could not be more explicit in that regard – and the JP courts, given the example of the Benoit killing and Rosedale hearing, were subject to blatant abuse along racial lines.\(^1\)\(^5\)\(^9\) In calling for systemic changes given these two cases, the moderates indirectly were targeting areas of racial injustice, however forthcoming or conscious they were, in their stated attention to questions of modernization and professionalization, of this ultimate result, particularly given their leadership and promotion of racial segregation.

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\(^{159}\) “Parchman would remain a predominantly black institution,” with a prison population before World War II fluctuating between 70 and 90 percent African-Americans. Oshinsky, p. 164. Parchman was “a farm with slaves,” in the words of one attorney. Oshinsky, p. 248. A 1953 article stated that “Parchman ordinarily has about 2,300 inmates, of whom about 75 to 80 percent are Negroes.” “State Senator Charges Parchman Superintendent Balks at the Law,” Delta Democrat-Times, June 10, 1953.
A struggle over Mississippi’s historical memory

Meanwhile, regarding an issue around this time more narrowly focused on upgrading of professions, the elite white moderates helped reconstitute and reorganize the Mississippi Historical Society, in 1952-1953. Several prominent moderates, including: Chalmers Whitfield Alexander, a Jackson lawyer; John K. Bettersworth, a professor at Mississippi State; Hodding Carter; Rt. Rev. Duncan Gray, the Episcopal bishop of Mississippi; Sanford W. Higginbotham, a historian at Ole Miss and the editor of the *Journal of Mississippi History*; Ned Lee, editor of the *Webster Progress*; George A. McLean, publisher of the *Tupelo Daily Journal*; historian James W. Silver at Ole Miss; Congressman Frank Smith; Robert H. Spiro, a professor of history at Mississippi College; John D. Williams, the chancellor at Ole Miss; and state Rep. William F. Winter of Grenada all were active in reviving this organization that had long been moribund.

The move to revive the organization was seen as part of developing and enhancing the credentials of Mississippi’s academic and literary community and making the state more in keeping with post-war national norms and practices. Thus, extra-regional exposure and awareness on the part of the moderates was one aspect of the movement to professionalize the state’s previously loose collection of historically interested parties.

The revitalization of the Mississippi Historical Society also was about the composition of the state’s intellectual authority and leadership, which was in part class-based. The move was one aspect of a broader attempt, for professional
historians and a larger educated public, to seize control of Mississippi’s historical memory away from politically powerful and racially reactionary heritage groups associated with efforts to glorify the Confederacy, along with plantation life, ancient stereotypes about the races, Southern womanhood and the “Old South” more generally.

Examples of Mississippi’s existing heritage hierarchy would be the state chapters of the Sons of Confederate Veterans (the “dead Confederates,” to its detractors,) Daughters of the American Revolution and the United Daughters of the Confederacy, which had long been staunch allies of Senator Bilbo, for example. “The DAR – UDC element,” as James W. Silver later recalled, “tried to horn in on things” as the Society was getting reestablished.160 The work of the Mississippi Historical Commission about this time, discussed in the Overview and Thesis chapter, in drafting and placing historical markers statewide with reference to the “Civil War” and not the “War Between the States,” can be seen in this context.

As in the cases of industrialization and the JP courts, the reforms in this instance were driven partially by the elite moderates’ self-interest, namely their desire for control of the apparatus and institutions – and even official memory – of Mississippi’s society, and their wish for the state to be remade in their image and according to their values, defined as modernization and professionalization. In the process, they wanted to supplant the power and control of other groups of whites. As James W. Silver wrote Hodding Carter, upon the latter’s election as Historical Society president in 1955, “I think it is rather important that you take over this job if only to

prove that the present wave of reaction can’t control every damned thing in the state.”

Along with issues of modernization, such as the complicated process of attracting industry to the state, and professionalization, as in reforming the state penitentiary, the local court system and the leadership and direction of the state’s history profession, there were some developments in Mississippi in the early 1950s that revealed more plainly that the elite moderates’ views on matters more directly related to race, specifically, were beginning to soften some. For instance, in 1951 many of the moderates supported a commission under the auspices of the Southern Regional Council to study sentencing for black and white offenders in the South, amid voluminous evidence that African-Americans were given far longer prison terms than were whites when convicted of the same crimes. Several of the moderates wrote letters to the Ford Foundation, then based in Detroit, in support of the Council’s application for funding the study. This would be another instance of the moderates’ extra-regional connections.

In another example of their activities in this period bearing on race, the Mississippi moderates generally opposed an amendment to the state constitution introduced in the 1952 session of the state legislature to be placed on the November ballot, to “elevate the educational qualifications for voting,” as one of the proponents

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161 Ibid.
163 See, for example, letter, Hodding Carter to Chester C. Davis, July 2, 1951. Hodding II and Betty Werlein Carter Papers. The Ford Foundation headquarters is currently in New York City.
delicately put it.\textsuperscript{164} Despite the polite and misdirected language, the amendment was a clear attempt to further restrict the voting franchise in the state, and especially to discourage African-American – but also poor white – participation at the polls. In opposing the amendment, the elite whites thus in effect were taking (an indirect) stand for greater access to the polls by members of both races.

Meanwhile, also in the 1952 election cycle, a number of the moderates pushed for having two viable political parties in Mississippi, and many broke with the long if weakening Democratic Party tradition and backed the Republican presidential candidate, Dwight D. Eisenhower. “First Two-Party Campaign Taking Shape,” blared a headline atop a piece written by Wilson F. “Bill” Minor for the \textit{New Orleans Times-Picayune} in the late summer of 1952.\textsuperscript{165} Added Hodding Carter, “I have read and published a number of stories about the proposed coalition between Southern Democrats and Republicans. … I do think the time has come for a realignment.”\textsuperscript{166}

The one-party Democratic South of course had been entrenched since Reconstruction as a means of maintaining white racial control. The two-party movement advocated by the moderates had the potential to undermine that rigid hierarchy and thereby accelerate racial change.

On another issue demonstrating a slowly evolving position on race, in 1952 and 1953 the Mississippi moderates declined to oppose the integration of the semi-pro baseball Cotton States League, whose Mississippi teams in those years included the

\textsuperscript{164} Letter, to Hodding Carter from Hillery Edwin White, October 22, 1952. Hodding II and Betty Werlein Carter Papers.
\textsuperscript{166} Letter, Hodding Carter to Frank A. Carter, June 26, 1951. Hodding II and Betty Werlein Carter Papers.
Clarksdale Planters, the Greenville Bucks, the Meridian Millers and the Natchez Indians. Hodding Carter dismissed those hyping the integration issue’s significance by alluding to the Cold War. “Why can’t we realize we’re living in a world which is a lot more concerned with saving mankind’s undeserving skin than in the skin color of baseball players,” stated his editorial in the *Delta Democrat-Times*, in the spring of 1953. “We don’t think that many GI’s from Mississippi are objecting in Korea if some dark-skinned fellow-soldier is the boy who makes the strike-out or the homerun.” \(^{167}\) According to Susan M. Weill, Mississippi elites like Carter, with their extra-regional experience, “displayed a global consciousness unusual for the times.” \(^{168}\) Maybe so, but as of 1953, they were still referring to black athletes as “boys.” Even with an extra-regional and Cold War perspective, the maintenance of the moderates’ privileged position and their condescension still endured at least in certain verbal constructions.

The following year, Carter’s *Delta Democrat-Times* criticized a group of white citizens whose threat of a sit-down strike prevented the playing of an exhibition baseball game in Greenville between a white team and a squad of African-Americans. The editorial cited extra-regional and modern forces as making racially integrated contests inevitable in the future, and the paper urged readers to accept that reality. “You can hardly turn on a television set to a sports event anywhere, or read of one or more or listen to one on the radio without discovering that one or more of the

participants are Negro,” the piece stated. In an editorial earlier that year, the paper had declared: “We repeat our own belief that there is no strong reason for opposing the presence of Negro players in organized baseball.”

Thus the rigidity of the moderates’ segregationist views, more evident in the late 1940s, looked to be easing somewhat by the early and mid-1950s. As members of boards of trustees, several of the moderates agreed to the integration of various private educational institutions they controlled. These included graduate programs at the University of the South, a school in Sewanee, Tenn., and the George Peabody College for Teachers in Nashville, part of Vanderbilt University. Both schools, while situated outside Mississippi, did draw large numbers of students from the state and thus had large alumni and parent networks there. When such desegregation policy changes were proposed, the elite moderates made no effective effort to thwart them, especially in their tokenist origins. “I am completely in accord with the proposal to admit some carefully selected Negroes on the upper graduate level as voted unanimously by the rest of the board,” Hodding Carter wrote the Peabody president, after the editor had been absent for a crucial trustees’ decision on integration in 1953. That same year, when the University of the South voted to integrate its school of theology, Carter’s Delta Democrat-Times editorialized, “we applaud the action of the board; it is in keeping with the teachings of Christ.” Moral absolutes were therefore part of the moderates’ thinking in this case, but so was control and

political calibration and prudence, as in the admonition to only admit “some carefully selected” African-Americans restricted to the “upper graduate level.” Regarding the University of the South integration, Carter predicted whites’ concerns about the situation would quickly die down. “My own feeling is that after one or two trial enrollments, not much will be done about it anyhow,” he wrote.173

Also regarding matters of race, and more broadly, several of the more discerning post-war Mississippi moderates came to endorse statehood for the territories of Alaska and Hawaii, which they knew would presumably result in four more non-segregationist members of the U.S. Senate, through which crucial federal civil rights bills would have to pass. The statehood drive supported by the moderates thus represented a long-term challenge to the parliamentary obstructionist bloc in Washington on civil rights.174 Notably, the push for statehood, particularly the admittance of Hawaii, was seen by these moderates very much in the context not only of race but also of the Cold War, which was reaching a climax in the early 1950s, at least in its Joseph McCarthy phase. “I’m very upset about the approach of some of our demagogues, North and South, regarding statehood for Hawaii, and the attitude towards Asiatic peoples in general,” Hodding Carter wrote in 1953.175

With the Hawaiian islands populated by many people of Asian and Pacific island descent, the embrace of Hawaii statehood would, according to supporters, constitute a kind of retort, not only to Southern segregationists and Northern “demagogues” like McCarthy but also to global critics, especially those from

174 Alaska and Hawaii finally were admitted to the Union as states in 1959.  
communist countries who at the time propagandized in places like Asia and Africa that America was hostile to the Third World and to people of color abroad and at home. “The admission of Hawaii to the union would effectively answer Red propaganda in Asia to the effect that the United States believes only white people are deserving of full, democratic government,” Hodding Carter wrote. The awareness and sensitivity on the part of the moderates to concerns about America’s worldwide reputation in this case, and the negative impact upon it of Southern racial problems, is yet another example of their extra-regional perspective. “We seem to be very busy in Mississippi giving everybody in Asia and Africa all the material they want to make the United States look bad and the Commies look good,” Carter wrote, in 1955.

So overall the period of 1951-1953 and thereabouts, much like the earlier post-war years immediately preceding it, represented a mixed picture on the question of the moderates’ leanings. It remained an open question whether the moderates were truly politically astute reformists looking to bring their state into the national mainstream or whether they should be seen predominantly as racists in polite accommodationist veneer, enabling the continuance of a segregationist and white supremacist regime by helping it adroitly negotiate and palliate a raft of outside pressures, such as federal court rulings and the expectations of Northern industrialists, all while maintaining social control and the essentials of privilege and status quo. Amid questions of equalizing funding of the public schools, industrialization, agricultural diversification, prison reform, the justice of the peace courts, the

upgrading of professional norms in various realms, restrictions on the voting
franchise, the initial integration of sports and private educational institutions, changes
in the relative strength of political parties, the composition of the U.S. Senate, and the
other matters just mentioned, there is evidence lending credence to both viewpoints.

But one factor supporting the historical interpretation of the moderates as
accepting the practicality if not leading Mississippi’s change, and one which was
more apparent as the 1950s wore on, was the growing conviction among them that a
major transformation on the race front, including desegregation and the enforcement
of universal suffrage, was both imminent and inevitable, and that the state had best
prepare for the peaceful implementation of those realities. As always, in advocating
that the state make ready for such change, the elite moderates attempted to continue
to situate themselves in a position of dominance and were willing to bear the costs of
maintaining the often contradictory but necessary centrist posture while doing so.
5.) The “Magnolia Curtain,” and Tchula (1954-1956)

This chapter primarily explores two areas from the mid-1950s wherein Mississippi’s elite white moderates facilitated gradual social change within an overall framework of ongoing, but slowly loosening, fealty to racial segregation. In both situations they seemingly stood against the state’s majority white opinion in many ways. Both instances were highly political. And both matters were tied up with the two stark and interconnected passions of the moment – fears about communism and race.

The first case was the promotion of some degree of academic freedom (and free speech generally, along with freedom of religion) at Mississippi colleges and universities, most notably the University of Mississippi, Ole Miss. The moderates wanted thereby to breach what was commonly known as the “Magnolia Curtain” of rigidly enforced orthodoxy that had descended in particular on the state’s campuses, among other venues in the state.

And the second instance was the moderates’ defense of the two (white) leaders of the biracial Providence cooperative farm in the fall of 1955 amid the threat of a community-sanctioned lynching, or at least a popular demand that they leave town immediately or else. Again in this case, the moderates were defending the right
to depart from prevailing opinion, even opinion about race. The two Providence
leaders, targets of random charges about communism and sympathy for integration,
had been brought before a mass meeting of several hundred white residents in the
adjacent Delta town of Tchula and were told, virtually by unanimous vote, that they
had better permanently leave the area or, in the words of one attendee, face “a rope.”
The fact that a state representative-elect was presiding officer at the meeting and at
least one state representative along with virtually all local law enforcement were in
attendance helped give the gathering the imprimatur of a quasi-legal hearing. By
their presence, H.L. Mitchell wrote, the assembled leaders “gave official blessing” to
the proceedings.¹

One lonely dissenter in the audience who did dare publically speak up for the
two men and who questioned the legitimacy of the meeting, a Presbyterian minister
from the nearby community of Durant, was then dismissed by his church board of
elders several weeks later, a decision seconded by all but two of his 45 parish
members. In newspaper editorials, advertisements and columns in several
publications across the state, moderates took up the minister’s cause. The elite white
Mississippi moderates generally deplored the intimidation and violence that,
ironically, had long existed as the crudest instruments to preserve the very system
from which they themselves had so handsomely benefitted for so long.²

¹ H.L. Mitchell, Report from Mississippi, October 4, 1955. Allen Eugene Cox Papers, Special
Collections Department, Mitchell Memorial Library, Mississippi State University.
² Another example of official intimidation, related to the race question, occurring during this period
was the firing in January 1956 of Walter D. Smith as administrator of the Holmes County Community
Hospital. Smith’s wife, Hazel Brannon Smith, moderate editor of the Durant News and Lexington
Advertiser, both in Holmes County, had just previously won in the case of a damage suit filed against
her by the Holmes County sheriff for her articles protesting of the mistreatment of a black prisoner. In
explaining Walter Smith’s termination, hospital board chairman David Miles said Smith was
The Tchula case represents in vivid form where, yielding to racial fears, many Mississippi whites had generally abandoned in the late 1940s and 1950s a certain affinity for (racially limited) economic populism or “redneck liberalism” they had demonstrated dating at least to the New Deal period. “Liberalism” in that Huey Long mold, championed in Mississippi by figures in the 1930s like Theodore G. Bilbo, in his unique way, featured on the state level such programs as paved roads, establishing a public printing plant for school textbooks, and making the public universities more accessible to poor students, albeit (of course) on a continuing segregated basis.\(^3\) On the national level, the ideology extended to support for Franklin Roosevelt’s agricultural and flood control programs, if not his efforts to end racial discrimination at defense plants. Such “liberalism” in Mississippi had also been exemplified by whites’ previous grudging— but increasingly strained— tolerance of cooperative farms on the Socialist and Social Gospel model in their midst such as Providence.

But now in the post-war, liberalism, along with most everything else in Mississippi, was becoming more and more overwhelmed and defined by the race issue as it had not been in earlier periods.\(^4\) This was particularly true in the wake of the *Brown* decision of May 1954. “After the Supreme Court’s anti-segregation decision, the climate changed,” Hodding Carter wrote. “A white man was either with you or against you.”\(^5\) Mississippi whites, now focusing narrowly and with great

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\(^3\) Asch, p. 41.
\(^4\) This metamorphosis was very much reflected in the evolving career of Theodore G. Bilbo and his hardening obsession with race in the 1940s, as discussed in Chapter Two.
alarm on conditions like the bi-racial aspect of the cooperative farms, and on disturbing allegations such as that both races there were permitted to swim at the same sites, were abandoning wholesale the waning vestiges of any holdover “liberalism,” to the extreme point of demanding under threat of violence the dismantlement of Providence, the banishment of its leaders and the ideological purification of entire communities. While by no means “liberals” regarding race, the elite white post-war moderates, as demonstrated regarding their reaction to Tchula, declined in all cases to go along with the mass trend, particularly as it veered toward threats of violence. In fact, in a number of cases, they stood against conventional white opinion on matters related to race.

The topics of academic freedom and Tchula (pronounced Choo-luh) amplify the thesis of this dissertation in part because the themes of modernization and professionalization are again germane regarding these and other events of 1954-1956, as is the role of extra-regional influences. For example, the moderates saw greater academic freedom as ideally helping enhance the modernity and professionalism – and thus, in their view, the wider stature – of the state’s leading universities. Extra-regional factors in the case of academic freedom would include not only the schools’ broader reputations but also, more specifically, the accreditation process through

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6 In the matter of ideological purification, the Tchula incident is a direct reflection of the academic freedom argument on Mississippi campuses. Both had to do with the rising concern about “liberal” ideas that were perceived as being connected to race. The issue of bi-racial swimming has a long and fraught history in the South, particularly as it theoretically offers the chance of proximity of barely clothed black males and white females. At Providence, in spite of the heated allegations, the evidence was simply that black babysitters and white children often swam together. For more on pools and their history regarding race, see Jeff Wilse, *Contested Waters: A Social History of Swimming Pools in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).
national and regional higher-education associations. Political interference on campus, including the limitation of academic freedom, historically had had a detrimental impact on accreditation, though not in all situations.\(^7\) “The University knows that if it hews to the Citizens’ Council it is damned by the academic world and may lose the accreditation it has,” Ole Miss chaplain and noted campus moderate Will D. Campbell wrote in 1955.\(^8\)

Another example of extra-regionalism in this context would be the New York-based Fund for the Republic, a civil liberties think tank backed by the Ford Foundation, which was set up in 1953, according to its statement of purpose, to “support activities directed toward the elimination of restrictions on freedom of thought, inquiry and expression in the United States.” Among other things, the Fund underwrote programs of the Mississippi Council on Human Relations, the state branch of the Southern Regional Council, expanding rights to black citizens.\(^9\) The Mississippi Council on Human Relations was also to have an important role in supporting the targets of the Tchula mass meeting. Meanwhile, also on the topic of

\(^7\) As will be discussed in succeeding pages, in the 1940s the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools allegedly was aware of politically motivated firings at Mississippi universities, a situation that would normally jeopardize accreditation. But perhaps because of ethically questionable political dynamics on its own board, the association decided not to tamper with the universities’ accreditations. \(^8\) Letter, Will D. Campbell to Alvin J. Kershaw, November 10, 1955. Will D. Campbell Papers, Civil Rights Collections, Special Collections, University of Southern Mississippi. \(^9\) Cora Ratliff, a prominent Methodist laywoman and president of the Mississippi Council on Human Relations, wrote: “We are getting some money from the Fund for the Republic, and I think we have a great responsibility and great opportunities.” Letter, Mrs. W.H. Ratliff to Morton B. King, February 8, 1956. Morton B. King papers, University of Mississippi. In describing the Southern Regional Council in 1954, Hattiesburg Rabbi Charles Mantinband wrote, “SRC beats no tom-toms, but carries on its work quietly, without fanfare. Some who oppose it call it ‘pink’ or ‘subversive.’ The fact remains that the movement has received two tremendous votes of confidence. The Fund for the Republic (Ford Foundation) voted it $240,000 for intensive field study and research activity. And Uncle Sam, through the Department of State, now officially turns to the headquarters office in Atlanta to enlighten foreign visitors on the true story of the South and race relations.” Letter “To Our Friends,” Charles and Anna Mantinband, December 1954. Rabbi Charles Mantinband Papers, Civil Rights Collections, Special Collections, University of Southern Mississippi.
extra-regionalism, in 1951, Ole Miss history professor James W. Silver planned a seminar at Ole Miss gathering “a hundred or so of the prominent formers of public opinion in this part of the country.” The sponsoring organizations he planned to approach were, among others, the Washington, D.C.-based Brookings Institution and the Ford Foundation. Thus extra-regional entities, such as Washington-based and New York-based nonprofit organizations, were active in post-war Mississippi on questions of public opinion, “freedom of thought” and African-Americans’ rights. And the elite white moderates at the center of this dissertation were tied to those groups and were facilitating those cross-border connections.

And yet another example of extra-regionalism as it applies to Mississippi in these years would be the work of Allan Knight Chambers, a professor of theology at Boston University, aiming “to help the situation in Mississippi.” Chambers, a former chairman of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund and a civil rights activist dating back to the Scottsboro case in 1931, traveled frequently to Mississippi, was a conduit for funding programs there and had contacts with many of the elite white moderates highlighted in this dissertation. When sociologist Morton B. King left Ole Miss in 1956 over questions of academic freedom, for example, Chambers expressed concern. “He was a key man in our strategy, both in the state at large and for his particular area,” Chambers wrote.

On the topic of extra-regionalism even more generally, by the mid-1950s the elite white moderates through various (and strengthening) networks of connections

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10 Letter, James W. Silver to Leo Pasvolsky, September 14, 1951. James W. Silver Papers, University of Mississippi
continued to be acutely and increasingly aware of Mississippi’s dubious reputation externally. For example: “The politicians and extremists have caused our state to appear to the rest of the nation as a region of shameful intolerance,” worried Robert L. Hardee of Sandersville writing in 1956. The image problem was due to race-related turmoil in their view. As they had been during the final years of Senator Bilbo’s boisterous reign, the moderates were uneasy in the 1950s about the ongoing harm the hardening negative impression was causing the state. “I can not overestimate the damage that has been done to Mississippi by the series of violent incidents in the Delta and elsewhere,” Hodding Carter wrote a Chamber of Commerce official in the coastal city of Biloxi in the wake of the Emmett Till murder case and the Gus Courts shooting in late 1955.

Carter spent a great deal of his time traveling around the country giving speeches and attending conferences. “Everywhere I go I meet with the most serious criticism. I am sure unless the madness ends our state will be badly injured, not only in its resort business but its industrial efforts.” Interestingly, at least in the correspondence, the moderates in their elite and protected position seemed most concerned with how the “madness” of violence against African-Americans and others was, via impressions created in the extra-regional context, in effect hurting their own priorities, namely business and investment. At least by this evidence, they seemed comparatively less concerned about physical harm inflicted on the more immediate victims such as Till and Courts themselves.

The important lessons of these two mid-1950s cases – academic freedom and Tchula – reinforce the arguments in earlier chapters on modernization, professionalization and extra-regional influences concerning, for example, a post-war agenda, Senators Bilbo and Stennis, the conservative “progressive” legislature of 1948-1950, industrialization, reform at Parchman penitentiary, phasing out of the Justice of the Peace courts, as well as other major matters discussed. And as with these earlier examples, the moderates involved in the issues of academic freedom and the fallout from the Tchula incident, along with various other 1954-1956 situations, were flexibly ambivalent and often apparently quite muddled and contradictory on the question of continuity and change.

For instance, generally speaking the moderates still in that later period carried on an abiding commitment to the state’s racial traditions, as in, in their case, acquiescing or even initiating the creation in 1956 of a Sovereignty Commission, a state agency with investigative powers aimed essentially at protecting states’ rights and prerogatives. They were still capable of warning, as Hodding Carter did in 1956, that: “the rest of the country had to know that the Supreme Court edict was not of itself going to change the entire basic thinking of a large part of the United States.”

Conversely, and simultaneously, they also showed an inclination toward some important adjustments, as in opposing the screening of speakers to state university campuses based on their political (including racial) views. Once again, the moderates’ overall stance amounted to a blend of stasis and some change, a fluid combination in all cases animated by their sense of self-interest.

The fact that the elite white Mississippi moderates maintained this bifurcated position even when tested by the fervid spasm of the post-Brown white race anxiety of 1954-1956 makes the examples from these three years especially stark, meaningful, and supportive of the dissertation’s overall message of the moderates’ gradualist and flawed conservative progressivism. 

"I would like to make every effort towards working out a logical solution of the (race) problem,” Hodding Carter wrote in 1956. “To do this in the face of the emotionalism of both sides seems almost impossible. But the future of Mississippi requires it.”

The race issue, by proxy

Mississippi’s fight over academic freedom on its college and university campuses that flared in the late 1940s and early 1950s during the McCarthy anticommunist and anti-labor union era, greatly intensified in the period following the Brown decision in 1954, and continued in various iterations well into the 1970s, was primarily a thinly veiled proxy struggle over race. “Segregation cannot be maintained by ‘book burning’,” Hodding Carter wrote in 1956, bluntly conjoining the two ideas.

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15 Examples of that anxiety would include: the hostile reaction to Brown, the formation of the White Citizens’ Council beginning in the Delta in the summer of 1954, the defensive response to the Till case in the late summer and fall of 1955, the harsh opposition to the petition campaign launched by the NAACP in Mississippi to force local school boards to effect desegregation plans in the wake of the “Brown II” Supreme Court ruling, and several high-profile shooting incidents in the towns of Brookhaven and Belzoni in 1955 involving victims who were prominent black activists.


Other elite white moderates such as the Rev. A. Emile Joffrion also noted the direct connection between enforced conformity (on campuses and elsewhere) and the race obsession. “We have two forms of violence in Mississippi,” Joffrion, an Episcopal rector in Oxford, wrote in 1955. “One form is the outright brazen murdering of Negroes. … The other form of violence is in the form of various pressures, social, political, and economic, brought against Negroes and ‘liberal’ whites. The state colleges and universities have been intimidated before, whenever they have ventured beyond the routine exercise of classroom teaching.”

Therefore, taking into account Joffrion’s and Carter’s observations, in supporting the principle of academic freedom and freedom of speech on Mississippi’s campuses, the moderates were effectively advocating for settings wherein the race issue potentially could be ventilated in honest and open discussion, which they considered a first step on the only non-violent route to change.

Academic freedom was thus a way of counteracting the official intimidation that was a mechanism to maintain racial caste. It constituted a somewhat indirect challenge to the racial status quo. The moderates were looking to breach ever carefully what was known as Mississippi’s silence-enforcing “Magnolia Curtain,” otherwise known as the “Cotton Curtain” – obviously allusions to the stultifying “Iron Curtain” of the then-burgeoning Cold War – by standing up to the atmosphere of official force that Joffrion describes.

If race change in Mississippi was indeed

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19 In a letter to Morton B. King, the Rev. Duncan M. Gray Jr. referred to “a series of events designed to isolate Mississippians behind a ‘Magnolia Screen’ which has so much in common with the Iron Curtain of Russia.” Morton B. King papers, University of Mississippi. February 10, 1956. In another letter, Gordon Smythe wrote Morton B. King: “Freedom – internal, personal, intellectual freedom –
systematic and a gradually assembled structure, certainly academic freedom was a piece of the much larger mosaic.

Again, as with Hodding Carter’s concerns in 1955 about the impact of Delta murders on industrialization and business, at least in this case, in speaking of “two forms of violence,” Joffrion indicated as if both the killing of black people and the “various pressures” stifling free speech on campus were somehow equivalent atrocities. Even if such an interpretation involves a distortion of Joffrion’s actual view and is therefore somewhat unfair, his statement was nonetheless a very elite, privileged – even spoiled – position to assume, and it was evidently quite typical of his peer group. That group – including many of the elite white moderates at the center of this dissertation – apparently saw the vicious crimes being committed as a grim method of upholding a system they essentially enabled as less troubling (or perhaps less visible, given the skewed and biased practices of the white-owned media at that time) than collateral issues that more directly impacted their own interests. If they understood the connection between the violence and their privilege, they did not choose or dare to directly confront the underlying problem too boldly, and thus maintained a position of some timidity, hypocrisy and rather narrow self-interest.

But by acting on these (surely important) collateral issues – academic freedom, industrialization, Parchman, and others – the moderates were gradually changing the context in which the worst racist atrocities, like the Till murder and the...
Courts shooting, were taking place. In that sense they helped to gradually marginalize and delegitimize the most extreme impulses and thereby effected some social progress. In so doing they were often far from the front lines in trying to correct Mississippi’s most blatant wrongs and injustices and seemed often blithely disengaged from the true and immediate horror in their midst. The moderates’ role in change was typically indirect, and, for all its contribution, in retrospect, sometimes maddeningly so.

A number of cases, to be discussed in detail in succeeding pages, illustrate the point of academic freedom as proxy for the race issue. Thus they show that the struggle at the universities led to some degree of meaningful change regarding the context if not the immediate reality of race in Mississippi. Also, as Charles W. Eagles has written about the James Meredith case of 1961-1962, the struggle over academic freedom in the mid-1950s in Mississippi helped set in motion more dramatic changes regarding race to come.20

Concerning the matter of proxy, in 1954, for example, when forces in the state legislature – along with the governor – tried via a threatening letter to the Ole Miss chancellor to silence and even terminate sociology and criminology professor Alfred C. Schnur over his criticisms of Parchman penitentiary, the lawmakers were most aggravated by Schnur’s call for more humane, modern and professional treatment at

an institution that happened to house thousands of African-American inmates. At its core, this argument ostensibly about freedom of speech and the degree of public restraint appropriate for “state employees” was therefore really about race and the blatant attempt on the part of officialdom to forestall an open and professional discussion about it.

To cite a similar instance, when conservative forces in Jackson and elsewhere objected to a planned appearance at Ole Miss by the Rev. Alvin L. Kershaw, an Episcopal minister from Oxford, Ohio, during the school’s annual Religious Emphasis Week in early 1956, they seized on an earlier statement he had made after a successful appearance on The $64,000 Question, a national television quiz show. Kershaw had said he would donate some of his prize money from the show to the NAACP. He subsequently wrote, in an open letter to Ole Miss students, that, if he were to be questioned about race while visiting the campus, he would feel compelled to frankly express his views. “If I am asked, or engaged in discussion, I must in the candor that any honest question deserves speak from my convictions on segregation or any other subject,” he wrote.

As if more were needed, an added incendiary was the fact that Kershaw had appeared on the television program as an expert in jazz music, an interest with obvious Afro-centric associations which further raised suspicions and hackles in white power circles in Jackson about the “Ohio preacher.” In the case of the Rev. Kershaw, the matter of academic freedom was also bound up with questions of

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21 There were many white inmates at Parchman as well. See previous chapter for a more in-depth discussion of this topic.
23 Kershaw was white.
freedom of religion. After weeks of controversy, attempts at stalling, internal
wrangling and profound embarrassment, university authorities finally rescinded
Kershaw’s invitation. Local Oxford ministers who were asked at the last minute to
substitute for Kershaw at the event refused under the circumstances to participate.
Veteran faculty members both at Ole Miss and at Mississippi State resigned in protest
over the state’s pressure on Ole Miss and the university’s capitulation.

Thus, thanks to moral stands to varying degrees taken by a number of
Mississippi moderates, the “Kershaw affair” became an even bigger controversy. Of
course it is ironic that the incident and the way it was handled ended up inciting the
very animated debate over issues of race, academic freedom and religion the state
authorities had so badly wanted to suppress all along. Judging by coverage in Time
magazine, perhaps America’s leading news source at the time, and the voice of the
country’s middlebrow, middle-class respectability, the matter in fact became a
national story.24

But again, the issue, on the surface being the expression of support for the
NAACP and the prospect of that predilection being aired on a Mississippi campus,
was fundamentally about race. “The ‘speaker ban’ controversy in Mississippi had its
roots in the entrenched segregation and racism of the 1950s and 1960s,” Gregory J.
Griffin writes.25

Likewise, when Prof. James W. Silver, the Ole Miss historian, was criticized
in the lead editorial of a statewide newspaper as a “crackpot” for saying in an October

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24 Time ran a story on the Kershaw incident in its February 27, 1956 issue.
Speech at Mississippi State University,” Journal of Mississippi History, Volume LXVII, No. 3 (Fall
2005), p. 188.
1956 speech that “Mississippi will probably join the United States in a few years,” the scholar’s statement was interpreted – correctly – as a comment about integration and the likelihood of the state eventually coming more into accord with national laws and norms regarding race relations.\textsuperscript{26} At the time Silver “was considered the most liberal man on campus” at Ole Miss, one of his colleagues remembered.\textsuperscript{27} Not only the media but also lawmakers, university officials and even Gov. J.P. Coleman weighed in – as they similarly had done in the Schnur case – on Silver’s legal right and privilege as a “state employee” to make statements deemed critical of Mississippi, an offence which by then had been made a violation of state law. Arguments in mid-1950s Mississippi about responsibility to the state versus the supposed dangers of enforced orthodox thinking – i.e., arguments over freedom of speech – were, as with most every other public matter of concern in the state at that moment, directly related to the issue of race.

Yet another example from a few years earlier of the tie between academic freedom and race would be the unsuccessful effort, again originating in the legislature, to censor or even de-fund the Mississippian, the Ole Miss weekly student newspaper, after favorable editorial comments were made about the prospect of blacks entering the university’s graduate schools.\textsuperscript{28} Later, some legislators, apparently quite desperate to suppress free debate and forestall civil rights efforts, called for banning every book in the Ole Miss library that referenced African-

\textsuperscript{26} “A Professor’s Crackpot Talk,” Jackson Daily News, November 1, 1956.
\textsuperscript{27} Will D. Campbell, Brother to a Dragonfly (New York: Seabury Press, 1977), p. 169.
\textsuperscript{28} “Stand for the Negroes,” The Mississippian, October 27, 1950.
Americans. The public argument over academic freedom as it related to race extended to extreme, even bizarre, lengths.

The serial controversy over academic freedom should at its base be viewed as a fight over race because the critical issue was whether the race question could be explored, even obliquely or by implication, in open forum on a Mississippi campus and also elsewhere by university professors, and particularly whether the screening – i.e., banning – of speakers by university authorities based on political (including racial) views was appropriate. It follows then that those advocating for academic freedom, such as Schnur, the sponsors of Kershaw’s visit, Silver, campus journalists at the Mississippian, and other elite white moderates who voiced support, were part of a movement to create a space for constructive dialogue, which was an initial step toward peaceful change on race.

“Everyone at the University understood that race was not to be discussed,” Ole Miss chaplain Will D. Campbell remembered. “There were a few who refused to teach mythology and call it sociology or history. But most simply avoided it altogether.”30 Kershaw would seem to speak for the elite white Mississippi moderates, and others, when he lamented that the state’s “distressing climate has smothered the freedom necessary to all democratic thought: The freedom in candor, trust, and in the respect for the integrity of the individual to think responsibly his own thoughts; the freedom, as Americans, as human beings, as people with religious faith,

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30 Campbell, p. 157
to consider, discuss, ponder together issues such as [race and segregation] which have powerful impact upon our national and individual destiny.”

The elite moderates were pushing for an environment in Mississippi of freer thinking, freer expression and the right to openly disagree. “Thoughtful men and women would oppose any tendency in this country to create limitations upon the individual’s right to think and express his thoughts, regardless of the topic considered,” wrote H.H. Crisler Jr., editor of the *Jasper County News* in Bay Springs, in 1949. The moderates were generally appalled by the atmosphere of repression – the “Magnolia Curtain” – seemingly descending upon their state, with particular effect in the period immediately post-*Brown*. “I have, in the past few months, returned from a military mission assignment in Iran…, and since returning spent thirty-five days’ leave in Jackson,” wrote Army 1st Lt. Albert C. Butler in early 1956. “Immediately upon return to Mississippi, I sensed a drastic change in the attitude of the average Mississippian toward freedom of the press and freedom of expression. It seemed suddenly that all thought and action must be channeled and categorized, with absolutely no room for deviation from the local norm. This I found abhorrent and revolting.” Butler’s case, involving international exposure through experience in the military, is yet another small example of extra-regionalism and its role in social change in Mississippi.

Even some of the ostensible guardians of the status quo realized, in moments of candor, that suppression of free speech was untenable in a supposedly democratic

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society. “We admit to the weakness of our position if we hold it to immune to
discussion and even opposition,” Gov. J.P. Coleman wrote in 1956. The natural
byproduct of freer expression and discussion everyone on all sides knew would
inevitably be a more open examination of the race question. That is what gave the
free speech question such outsized power and energy at that moment in Mississippi
history. Regarding the moderates, a more cynical view would hold that because the
advantages of class, privilege, education and the like had rendered them presumably
relatively secure and protected from any immediate personal cost of the social
convulsions that might result from an open exploration of race and related inequities,
the elites could afford to be more receptive than their white neighbors to the risk of
entertaining ideas like academic freedom. In any event, the issue of race and a
cauldron of fear lurked just barely beneath the surface of the academic freedom
debate.

Mississippi’s debate over academic freedom on campus should also be seen as
another example of the contested nature of public space in the post-war Deep South.

Notably, the more formal struggle over questions of academic freedom and
freedom of thought conducted mainly through official channels on university and
college campuses was closely connected to a more general and insidious condition
reflected widely in everyday personal relationships in Mississippi. Such routine
interactions featured subtle repression, severe social codes, peer pressure, self-
censorship and unstated covert agreements that the issue of race was somehow off-

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34 Letter, J.P. Coleman to E.R. Jobe, November 5, 1956. J.P. Coleman Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
limits. To air the topic of race and civil rights even obliquely in conversation was considered rude, impertinent and unwelcome.

The crux of the matter was that Mississippi’s entire system, segregation included, rested upon the doctrine of social control, most especially of black labor and black sexuality. To merely broach the issue of the racial status quo, even in casual settings among friends, was to touch on and by implication disturb that potentially volcanic and inherently insecure underlying reality. The volatility and seriousness of this situation, from the white point of view, was compounded many-fold by the recent Brown decision and the unsettling onset of what would come to be known as the civil rights movement. Typically, given the white community’s ongoing enabling of the status quo, the response to even implied questions about race was defensiveness and the disapproval of peers.

The “Magnolia Curtain” in various forms was thus ubiquitous in Mississippi and its defenders were ever more determined to maintain the cloak of resistance. Among plantation owner Betty Pearson’s circle of white friends in the Delta community of Sumner, for example, the subject of race was all but taboo, she recalled.35 “People just didn’t bring it up,” she said. “You couldn’t have a conversation about it. People refused to talk about it. There was this understanding that you just didn’t talk about it. At a cocktail party, people just changed the subject. It was impolite to press the point. And in fact it was useless.”36

Pearson perceived an underlying reason for the informal conspiracy of studied – and culturally enforced – avoidance. “When you live in a small town, many

35 Betty Pearson and her husband William W. Pearson were owners of Rainbow Plantation outside the Delta towns of Sumner and Webb.
36 Interview with Betty Pearson, September 12, 2006.
people’s self-worth comes from their standing in the community,” she said. “So, their views on race were subordinated in this funny way to their need for community standing. A good many people felt that community standing was paramount and that the only way that they could live in that society was to keep quiet.”

Along those lines, Norman Bradley, editor-in-chief of the *Jackson State Times* in 1955-1956, said regarding the topic of race and integration, “I found it difficult even to talk to people – I mean that quite literally, to talk to people – whom I had known all my life. … In their minds discussion of the problem had some connotation of acceptance of solutions with which they did not agree. That is if there was any question of integration, even as of a discussion – merely to discuss it meant to accept the principles of integration and to advocate it. Well, that isn’t true at all, and so we found it very difficult to communicate with lifelong friends when we reached any such topic as this.”

Thus the most dominant aspects of Mississippi’s white culture along with the state’s political system, which by definition in those years were acting in mutual proximity, reinforcement and influence, were both holding fast to an ethic of unspoken and impacted resistance regarding race change. And the more tense the situation became, as in the mid-1950s after *Brown*, the more wary and defensive people were about even raising the issue of race. “The sad thing to my mind is that we haven’t got people [in Mississippi] who yet feel courageous enough to express themselves on the segregation issue or to address themselves openly to some rational

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37 Ibid. Regarding Betty Pearson’s “small town” observation, as was discussed in Chapter One, Mississippi was and is overwhelmingly rural.
38 Norman Bradley interview, conducted by Dr. Caudill, pp. 33-34. Norman and Frances Weems Bradley Papers, Special Collections Department, Mitchell Memorial Library, Mississippi State University.
and practical way of handling this troublesome question,” wrote New York Times managing editor Turner Catledge, a native Mississippian, in 1955.\(^{39}\) The argument in this chapter is that some of the elite white moderates, at least in the realm of academic freedom and in the case of the Tchula incident and its aftermath, were beginning to express themselves and display a degree of courage along the lines that Catledge wished for.

These moderates encountered, and eventually haltingly tried to open, this expansive and seemingly sound-proof “Magnolia Curtain” both in daily life and in official policies such as those governing campus activity.\(^{40}\) In that sense, in retrospect the “Magnolia Curtain” is effectively synonymous with the “closed society.” The moderates at the center of this dissertation, being elites, presumably were somewhat less vulnerable than were others to the kinds of rigid and punitive social pressures Pearson describes, by dint of their education levels, economic resources, membership in well-healed and community rooted families, connections with other powerful individuals, and the fact that their “community standing” thus was comparatively well-established and secure. These resources allowed them, at least in theory, a somewhat wider range of social options and even some small degree of eccentricity on the race question.

Added to that was the longstanding – and somewhat paradoxical – genteel tradition in the South allowing white intellectuals, writers, artists, the independently wealthy, the discreetly homosexual, the alcoholic, the family black sheep, and other

\(^{40}\) The “Magnolia Curtain” was also known as the “Cotton Curtain” and the “Magnolia Screen.” The terms were often used interchangeably. James W. Silver’s label, the “Closed Society,” was coined in the 1960s with the publication of his book, previously cited, titled Mississippi: The Closed Society.
iconoclastic or privileged individuals to be eccentric and to be somewhat distanced from what were taken to be the difficult realities or practicalities (including those pertaining to race) of daily life. This cultural forbearance protecting certain people, obviously, was called to account to some extent as the race question permeated everything by the mid-1950s.

But as a general point, both in their community circles and in their stance toward questions like freedom on Mississippi campuses, the elite white moderates at the center of this dissertation were most securely positioned to question and then begin to counteract repressive norms that they, particularly through their more ready access to extra-regional influences, apparently were increasingly finding to be arbitrary, stifling and even, amid the wider hysteria over communism, un-American. The “campaign to try to curb what people think and say smacks more of the Russian method than the American way,” Robert L. Hardee, of the South Mississippi town of Sandersville, wrote in 1956.41 Added Hodding Carter: “To intimidate or punish anyone, whatever his opinions, his religion, his color or his lawful politics, is as un-American as any bestial idea that ever came out from behind the Iron Curtain.”42

Allowing some expression, but maintaining control

In their special legislative session in early 1955, the Mississippi House of Representatives, in an official resolution, urged higher-education authorities to adopt

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a rigorous campus screening process. The resolution, one reporter noted, told “state-supported schools to steer clear of speakers who had ideas that conflicted with Mississippi’s laws and customs.” This, of course, was code language for race and segregation. The universities’ Board of Trustees, taking the hint from its bosses in Jackson, responded by imposing a policy requiring approval before a speaker could appear at a Mississippi university or college. Using the familiar drapery image, Hodding Carter wrote, “such a criteria for any university where the inquisitive mind is expected to develop [is] as a blight, a curtain dropped to cut off a portion of the world.”

It should be added by way of context that on the question of academic freedom, no doubt, Mississippi’s elite white moderates, as always, had mixed motives, included among them the desire above all to maintain power and control in their centrist position of calculation. This required dexterity and some degree of cynicism with the aim of keeping whatever change was deemed needed at a gradual and manageable pace. For example, for all its value as a potential vehicle for change on campus, academic freedom was also, conversely, a way of coralling and then defusing the most robust forms of progressive agitation – which at least theoretically

\[\text{\textsuperscript{43} “Ole Miss Has a Problem; To Cancel Kershaw Speech or Let Students Hear Him,” Delta Democrat-Times, November 13, 1955.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{44} The term “bosses” is used because in practical terms, the Board of Trustees was controlled by the legislature and the governor. In fact, after the debacle of the “Bilbo Purge” of 1930, a huge scandal regarding political interference on campus, a state constitutional amendment was passed “establishing a Board with terms so staggered that no one governor could obtain control,” Morton B. King writes. But in reality, the Board never recognized or asserted its own authority and remained well into the 1950s a creature of politics, highly subject to outside influence, particularly from Jackson. See Morton B. King statement regarding the Kershaw matter. Morton B. King Papers, University of Mississippi.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{45} “Age of Enlightenment,” Delta Democrat-Times, November 15, 1955.}\]
could include forces openly in favor of integration, say – that otherwise would inevitably have sought other, perhaps coarser, means of expression.

Looking at the issue from the reverse direction, the moderates by favoring academic freedom and opposing screening were effectively providing a way for race questions and grievances to be aired, if selectively, indirectly and cautiously, which ironically would leave intact sufficient institutional resistance against the more insistent voices calling for more extensive change regarding race. This is what Joseph Crespino calls “practical segregation,” as opposed to moderation. Academic freedom, if implemented, thus served as a vehicle for controlled evolution and as a release valve, which, the moderates hoped, would continue to enable the broader purpose of maximum social tranquility and the essence of stasis, a state of affairs which continually most benefited elites like themselves. In this sense, the moderates were very much within Mississippi’s longstanding historical pattern, rooted in the demands for vast amounts of agricultural labor, of whites fiercely maintaining social control.

As they regularly were in the post-war, the moderates in the mid-1950s were buffeted from the varying sides. They favored allowing for a degree of transformation, which they believed they could control, but effectively they were acting to prevent even greater change. They took that “middle” position, of course, while at the same time remaining segregationists. The moderates therefore were certainly not what could be regarded today as race heroes in standing up for the principle of academic freedom on campuses. Far from it. But amid a very repressive atmosphere in 1950s Mississippi, by advocating creation of a channel for ideas to be
more freely expressed, the moderates were part of fostering incremental, structural change. And, for better or worse, they helped keep some degree of race peace intact in an atmosphere that, had the extremes had the field to themselves with no mitigating structural referees along the lines of the moderates, might very well have become even more chaotic and deadly. Granted there have been voices, then and since, who have argued that risking just such a revolution was exactly what was needed and that evolutionary progress, on the other hand, was essentially cynical, undemocratic and amounted to a dream deferred.

The question of maintaining order by straddling the “middle” on this issue is tied up with the matter of control in a broader sense. As with industrialization, prison reform and a number of other issues regarding which they sought change in the 1945-1956 period, the elite white moderates’ motives in advocating what they saw as a form of modernization and professionalization in higher education – i.e., academic freedom – were not without self-interest. They not only saw problems for themselves in having the state harshly criticized externally, as Hodding Carter’s letter to the Biloxi official expressed the fear that it in fact was, they were concerned the calcified atmosphere on state campuses was helping foster that negative image. But the question went beyond just appearances. They desired for their homeland what they defined as a more advanced culture, to the extent they could control it, wherein the colleges and universities which many of them once attended, where they might in turn choose to send their own children, and, in the case of Ole Miss, the school which most visibly represented the state – and thus themselves – to the outside world would
be more sophisticated and advanced institutions that best prepared the next generation for leadership and would be seen as such.

In other words, the elite moderates wanted their state’s flagship university in particular to evolve in their own image, a vision shaped in many ways by their own experience having in some cases attended leading colleges and graduate programs in the extra-regional context. They wanted their state’s most prominent school to be known for something besides football, national prowess in which served for many Mississippians as a kind of needed compensatory alleviative, substituting at least a transitory form of ego-building sophomoric bragging rights for genuine academic and cultural standing.\(^{46}\) It is no coincidence that Ole Miss had the greatest football teams in its history in the 1950s (and early 1960s), ranked among the top programs in the country.\(^{47}\) The gridiron is where so much of the university’s (and the state’s) energy seemed to be directed.

So once again, as with other issues of the period, the academic freedom battle among Mississippi whites was really one about control over the state’s broader image, mission and direction and about which vision and which group would shape Ole Miss’s policies and development, as well as that of the other state campuses.

That struggle was class-based – and, particularly in earlier times, region-based – in a sense because Ole Miss had long been associated with the planter elite of the

\(^{46}\) One of many ironies here is that the prowess and popularity of the football team in the 1950s helped maintain public support for the university even as it underwent changes regarding academic freedom and then, in the 1960s, as it began to integrate. State legislators and other politicians were wary of carrying through with threats to shut down the university or even challenge it openly because the football team gave the school such a broad base of popular and political support. Success in sports therefore acted as effective cover for some degree of progressive expression on campus.

\(^{47}\) In 1959, for example, the Ole Miss Rebels had a 10-1 record and outscored their opponents by a total of 350-21 points. That team was ranked second in the country. The Ole Miss team won the Cotton Bowl following the 1955 season.
Delta, a group whose wealth and paternalistic relations with blacks historically had been considered suspect in the resentful view of the white small farmers, working people and “rednecks,” as sources such as author Albert D. Kirwan called them generically.48 “Ole Miss had the aura of an exclusive club for the planter class,” Curtis Wilkie recalled. “Wealthy Delta families sent their sons and daughters to Ole Miss as surely as they harvested cotton each fall.”49 However, representatives of white working-class people from other more hardscrabble parts of the state, less historically tied and enamored with Ole Miss, populated much of the legislature and were thus influential over the Board of Trustees of the Institutions of Higher Learning, nominally the controlling state agency.

Other than fervently rooting on the Ole Miss football team, these broad constituencies in the state, having comparatively scant formal education themselves, had little personal investment or identification with the state’s leading school. The allegiance of this part of the population might more naturally trend toward Mississippi State, which, a 1931 article stated, “is primarily designed to fill the needs of the inhabitants of the hill country” whereas Ole Miss “has always maintained a reputation for catering mainly to the delta people.”50 This split amounted to a huge political problem for Ole Miss, particularly as controversy developed there over “liberalism” and related matters. For the school, political support, particularly that which was seated in Jackson, was always conditional. So a class-based conflict was

49 Wilkie, 82.
very much bound up with the academic freedom debate taking place among the
state’s leading politicians and other officials.

Partly for reasons of class envy, Ole Miss, for all its prominence and value as
a proud symbol of the state, was a tempting target, supposedly full of suspicious new
thinking, dating to the antebellum days when the university was denounced as “a
nursery of Yankeedom” and a “hotbed of abolitionism.” In the case of the 1950s,
some non-elite and more racially conservative whites in many parts of the state saw
the promotion of academic freedom – and freedom of thought and expression more
generally – in its various forms as amounting to an attack on their “way of life” (a
phrase that always implied racial segregation) and their values. They responded with
a two-pronged assault on what they interpreted as a drift toward communism and
racial integration, simultaneously, on campus. In 1955, a spokesman for the White
Citizens’ Council, for example, called Ole Miss and Millsaps College in Jackson
“examples of the modern trend toward liberal thinking.” Integration, the spokesman
added, was “one of the hallmarks” of liberal thinking. (The Ole Miss student body,
incidentally, would remain virtually 100 percent white for the next seven years.
Millsaps did not admit black students until 1965.)

To the elite white Mississippi moderates of the mid-1950s, the question was
whether the university would remain, in the words of one of them, John O.

51 David G. Sansing, Making Haste Slowly: The Troubled History of Higher Education in Mississippi
52 Millsaps was and is a private college affiliated with the Methodist church.
53 “Chancellor Williams Rebukes Simmons on ‘Liberal Thinking’,” Delta Democrat-Times, June 12,
1955. The White Citizens’ Council (WCC) would not necessarily be described as “non-elite.” In fact,
the WCC was comprised largely of leaders of the white community in Mississippi. But the group and
its members can be accurately termed racially conservative, to say the least.
54 Maria R. Lowe and J. Clint Morris, “Civil Rights Advocates in the Academy: White Pro-
Emmerich, Jr., “a glorified grammar school who [sic] can produce good football teams” or whether it would strive to be a first-class academic power with respected extra-regional standing based on the idea that, as another moderate, James W. Silver, said, “progress comes only when there is freedom of discussion and freedom of expression, even from college professors.” As believers in their version of modernization who were well aware of the low esteem in which the state’s schools generally (aside from athletics) were held elsewhere, and who saw that woeful academic ranking and the policies that perpetuated it as problematic for recruitment and retention of quality professionals in the state, as well as for the effort to keep talented young people from looking elsewhere for opportunities, the moderates saw the academic freedom struggle as essential to their own values. “Were [Ole Miss] to give in to obvious censorship of ideas, it would begin to lose its intellectual freedom, its ability to teach objectively, and its attraction to students who want to learn,” Hodding Carter fretted in a 1955 editorial.56

As has been discussed in earlier sections of this dissertation, such as Chapter One regarding a post-war agenda, the moderates of the late 1940s and early 1950s wanted the state upgraded wholesale, particularly regarding the economy. Such improvement, they well knew, required a modern and more vibrant state university system as an essential underpinning. The 1955 House resolution screening speakers to state campuses ran counter to the moderates’ ideal. That measure contributed “to the lowering of faculty morale and to the decision of able college graduates to seek

careers outside Mississippi,” Ole Miss historian James W. Silver ruefully stated.  Thus within the academic freedom debate, there lay a basic struggle over values between the elite moderates and the white racial conservatives, intermixed with a contest over control.

The ironies here, of course, abound. Ole Miss was in many ways the archetype of a segregationist institution and it was to many, including some black Mississippians long deliberately excluded from the student body, a grand symbol of the Old South in all its injustices. In 1962, the campus was to be the site of “the last battle of the Civil War” when it finally integrated, thus enshrining and casting Ole Miss as a backward foil of racist recalcitrance in civil rights movement accounts. The school was “a lonely outpost amid the quiet splendors of the old regime,” in the words of James Meredith.

And yet, at the same time, to many hard-line segregationists and white supremacists, the university represented dangerous forces of independent thinking, modernism and change that, left unchallenged in the 1950s even in the relatively incubated iteration of academic freedom, would – they feared – inevitably mean the unthinkable, eventual racial integration. This would be the ultimate catastrophe as far as they were concerned.

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57 “Ole Miss Students Protest Program to Screen Speakers,” Delta Democrat-Times, April 24, 1955.
58 Sansing, 157.
“A Red behind every black”

Any discussion of Ole Miss as the locus of a structure for change in the state has to underscore the fact that the Oxford campus has long been Mississippi’s most important and most symbolic institution, for many reasons. Its central place in the state’s lore is intertwined for example with the Civil War, which, along with slavery and the civil rights struggle, remains by far the most potent subject in Mississippi’s historical memory. “The grounds of the school are drenched with the legacy of war,” Curtis Wilkie writes.59 The doomed bravery of the University Greys, the unit of Ole Miss students marching off to war in the spring of 1861 only to suffer 100 percent casualties during Pickett’s Charge at Gettysburg, is a stock part of the state’s mythology, for example.60

In the 1950s, and to an extent since, that mythology still permeated Ole Miss. In that sense, James Meredith’s observation about the Old South comports with those of others. The term “Ole Miss” itself harkens to slave dialect in reference to the mistress of the plantation, for example. The antebellum-style white-columned Lyceum building at the heart of the campus, the fraternity and sorority culture derived from the plantation model, the droopy-mustached Colonel Rebel mascot, the ubiquity of the Confederate “Stars and Bars” battle flag until moves in recent decades to curtail its appearance, annual campus “Dixie Week” heritage celebrations with beard-growing contests and period costumes at an “Old South ball” worthy of Scarlett O’Hara and Rhett Butler and wherein students would find fun in “enslaving” one

59 Wilkie, 80.
60 There were two units of Ole Miss students who went off to join the Confederate Army – the University Greys and the Lamar Rifles.
another for the day, and most fundamentally the absolute and complete racial segregation of the institution, all combined to give Ole Miss a deeply white Southern feel connected with a greater regional mythology and heritage.61 It was and still is arguably the most “Southern” of the Southern universities in that respect.

But along with that hidebound Dixie traditionalism, there was a counter-trend at Ole Miss and other Mississippi campuses – one applicable to most colleges and universities. Such schools are, almost by definition, sites for new ideas, intellectual curiosity and an ongoing impetus for academic freedom. They had and have an environment permitting students “frequent interactions with non-Mississippians, easier access to information and social networks outside the state, and an annual extended break during which they leave the state,” one source says.62 Extra-regionalism thus was an important factor in making Mississippi colleges comparatively progressive, at least in theory. Plus college and university faculty typically enjoyed relative job security, which added to a certain liberal atmosphere on campus.

At least since the infamous “Bilbo Purge” of 1930, in which dozens of professors and administrators at Ole Miss and other state colleges were dismissed by then-Gov. Theodore G. Bilbo for political reasons, causing the schools’ accreditations to be temporarily withdrawn and their reputations to suffer badly, political interference and questions of academic freedom had been a persistent issue at

Mississippi campuses. The schools historically seemed to be almost an extension of the state’s political apparatus. This was most conspicuously evident at Oxford, but was true at other schools as well. For example, when state legislative candidates without previous legislative experience won Democratic primary elections, and were thus virtually assured of winning the office, they took a training course at Ole Miss in legislative procedure. The bonds between the campus and the Jackson hierarchy were thus cemented from the outset. Moreover, it was not unusual in the 1940s for university administrators to use school cars and resources to travel the state to campaign on behalf of gubernatorial candidates; the school served, in effect, as a campaign organization.

In a related development, college alumni associations often functioned as shadow political organizations in a state that featured few other established statewide networks. “Mississippi presents in a highly magnified form the political jeopardy of

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63 According to a 1931 article in the Virginia Quarterly Review, “last summer, two years after his return to the governor’s chair, Mr. Bilbo had gained sufficient control over the school board of trustees to enable him to dismiss and replace one-hundred and seventy-nine officials and faculty members from the four state colleges. He is quoted as having said to newspaper reporters, ‘Boys, we have just hung up a new record.’ The reverberations of horror and official denunciation over the country are well known. The American Medical Association, the Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools of the Southern States, and the American Association of University Professors are among the organizations which have disqualified the Mississippi colleges.” “The Mississippi Imbroglio,” Virginia Quarterly Review, Volume II, No. 2 (April 1931).

64 For example, as was stated earlier, in the investigations by accrediting agencies which followed the “Bilbo Purge,” Ole Miss law school was expelled from the American Association of Law Schools, the medical school was placed on probation by the two medical accrediting agencies, and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, the Society of Civil Engineers, the American Association of University Professors, the American Association of University Women, and the Association for American Universities either dismissed, expelled, or placed the university on probation, according to David G. Sansing. See Sansing, p. 108. The “Purge” took place about the same time similar political pressure was exerted at Louisiana State University by the administration of Gov. Huey P. Long.


66 To give a more recent example of the phenomenon, Trent Lott, a member of Congress from 1973 to 1989 and a U.S. senator from 1989 to 2007, worked as a fund-raiser for the Ole Miss alumni association while he attended Ole Miss law school in the mid-1960s. The position allowed Lott to make important political connections in the state which paid off for him in later endeavors.
all state educational institutions,” a review article from the 1930s stated. “State and other public school systems offer one of the most obvious and potentially powerful sources of political organization. That Mississippi happens to have embraced this particular form of political alignment is patently unfortunate for the general cause of education.”

The senatorial campaign of John C. Stennis in 1947, for example, was greatly aided by activating the alumni community of Mississippi State College, from which Stennis had graduated in 1923. In short, there was a vast overlap between state-funded schools and state politics.

While accreditation was crucial to maintain standing in the extra-regional context, as in, say, national law-school rankings, the related – and often counter-veiling – matter of intramural state politics often was a more immediate concern for Mississippi schools. Politics, literally the schools’ financial lifeblood, trumped the imperatives of academics or wider reputation. According to some sources, in the first

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68 In the era Stennis attended, the school was known as Mississippi A&M College.
69 In one of many small examples of the interplay between the state schools and state politicians, and of the heavy dependence of the schools upon the good graces of the powers in Jackson, Mississippi State College President Benjamin Franklin Hilbun – “Mr. Ben,” as he was known – would routinely send letters of congratulation to state legislators upon their election to office, upon re-election, or upon their winning positions of leadership. Hilbun was a former state legislator himself and therefore had longstanding ties to many of his correspondents. These letters were typically fawning and flattering, assuring the recipients that college administrators were at their beck and call. “There is very little that a man in my position can do for a person in your position,” Hilbun wrote to Earl Evans upon the latter’s election as President Pro Tem of the Senate in 1956. “But if there should come a time when I can run an errand or do some minor chore, please do not hesitate to call on me.” Letter, Benjamin F. Hilbun to Earl Evans, January 9, 1956. Benjamin Franklin Hilbun Jr. Papers, Special Collections Department, Mitchell Memorial Library, Mississippi State University. If “at any time [I can] lighten your load, I am as close by as your telephone,” Hilbun told House Speaker Walter Sillers Jr. Letter, Benjamin F. Hilbun to Walter Sillers Jr., January 4, 1956. Walter Sillers Jr. Papers.

In order to fully understand the politicization of Ole Miss and the other campuses in the state, it is important to bear in mind that virtually all Mississippi governmental institutions and agencies were heavily tainted by politics. Parchman Penitentiary previously was discussed in this regard. The state Probation and Parole Board chairman, Martin Fraley, reported directly to House Speaker Walter Sillers Jr. about political activities in the state. See Letter, Martin Fraley to Walter Sillers Jr., September 13, 1960. Walter Sillers Jr. Papers. The state hospitals were directly connected and beholden to state political leaders. And so on.
post-World War II years the state schools had become even more inextricably bound up with Mississippi politics than they had been before, with the heads of Ole Miss, Mississippi State College and Acorn A&M all being replaced for political reasons. The Bilbo purges of 1930 were “nothing compared to the number of changes which have occurred recently,” Kenneth Toler, Jackson-based columnist for the Memphis Commercial-Appeal, said in 1947.\textsuperscript{70} Added Ole Miss sociologist Morton B. King, writing in 1955, “many citizens and many members of the legislature believe that the legislature can, if it chooses, determine the policies of a school and hire or fire individual faculty members.”\textsuperscript{71}

The political corruption became so Machiavellian and bureaucratically incestuous, Toler alleged, that a member of the Board of Trustees of Mississippi higher education was also simultaneously a member of the accreditation board of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Incredibly, while so ensconced, the official chose not to recuse himself from association policy regarding Mississippi. What would seem on its face a blatant conflict of interest had the effect of ensuring that the moves of Mississippi’s political leaders to hire and fire college personnel based on their political views would not effect the schools’ accreditation, at least with the Southern Association, according to Toler. “The association will not take up the complaints of those who have been fired under the new regime,” Toler stated.\textsuperscript{72} The accreditation process itself thus was completely tainted by politics.

\textsuperscript{70} Alexander Heard summary of interview with Kenneth Toler, July 1, 1947. Southern Politics Collection.
\textsuperscript{71} Morton B. King statement, 1956. Morton B. King Papers, University of Mississippi.
\textsuperscript{72} Alexander Heard summary of interview with Kenneth Toler, July 1, 1947. Southern Politics Collection.
As a state school, Ole Miss of course was critically dependent on public support. Its relations with the legislature and specifically with the appropriations committees bearing on education funding were effectively its sustenance. The same was true for all the Mississippi state colleges and the record is replete with university administrators directing flattering letters, free football tickets, luncheon and parade invitations, the assistance of campus security, and a stream of other offerings to legislative leaders.

No Ole Miss official was too busy to be at the service of Jackson officials. When House Speaker Walter Sillers Jr. wanted tickets to Ole Miss football games, he would write to none other than Chancellor John D. Williams, who would quickly oblige.73 The president of Mississippi State, Benjamin Franklin Hilbun, himself a former state legislator, was equally willing to do the bidding of his former Jackson colleagues. Adding to the particularly acute political pressures and scrutiny in Oxford was the fact that so many of Mississippi’s leaders were Ole Miss alumni and/or parents, so events and changes at the school often quickly had reverberations in the highest councils of the state. The atmosphere surrounding Ole Miss football games typically resembled a gathering of the state’s political, media and economic elite and the pre-game cocktail parties became famous for networking mixed with bonhomie. The university was the “cradle of the state’s power structure,” Curtis Wilkie writes.74 Along the same lines, Time magazine called the Ole Miss law school “the prep school for political power in the state.”75 The smallness, intimacy and lack

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74 Wilkie, p. 96.
75 “New Mood at Ole Miss,” Time, September 23, 1966.
of diversity among that ruling clique were contributing factors in holding back any challenge to the orthodoxy.

But in part because the university was so closely interlinked with Mississippi politics, which itself was so internally compromised and immobilized in being so tethered to a racist status quo, and in a related sense because it drew upon a state which was so impoverished financially, Ole Miss was widely considered to be an academic mediocrity at best in the 1940s and 1950s. In a related sense, it was also known in those years for its lack of liberal thinking, particularly compared with flagship schools elsewhere in the country. The returning veterans with their broadening experiences and burgeoning numbers went some distance to mitigate that stifling climate, as was discussed in Chapter One, but only to a degree and by the 1950s even that marginal progress was under challenge.

There were, granted, as James W. Silver stated, a few “wide-awake” members of the faculty in the post-war years. But those somewhat encouraging factors notwithstanding, the woeful quality overall of the university chagrined and frustrated the elite white moderates who wanted the school, particularly as it reflected themselves in the extra-regional realm, to stand for excellence, or at least to approach that ideal. Many of the moderates pointed to the hostile and repressive atmosphere in the state as a contributing element. There is, Ole Miss sociologist Morton B. King stated in 1956, “an intellectual climate in the state which is inimical to higher education.”

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76 Letter, Morton B. King to Harris Warren, August 1, 1956. Morton B. King Papers, University of Mississippi.
As an inevitable extension of the state’s raft of chronic economic and race-related problems, the state’s leading universities were clearly struggling academically.77 “Ole Miss and State College are both dead from the shoulders up,” Tupelo publisher George A. McLean candidly lamented to an interviewer in 1947. “The (Ole Miss) law school has been in the past a place to retire lawyers who couldn’t make a living in the state. The dean of the law school was a broken-down lawyer from some small town in Mississippi.” However, McLean did see a speck of hope in extra-regionalism, namely in trying to open up the school to “outside” thinking. “Some new members of the faculty have been brought in from outside the state in recent years and … perhaps they can do some good, but generally speaking, the institutions of higher learning in the state have not been a source of ideas or even an atmosphere which would cultivate or encourage tolerance and receptivity to new ideas.”78 Self-evidently, this would be an instance of some extra-regional influence as a potential source for change, encouraged by elite white moderates like McLean.

Never especially welcome in the first place, “new ideas” and outside thinking were by the late 1940s and early 1950s increasingly suspect, however, and this tended to stunt the campus atmosphere even further in Mississippi. By that time, the issue of academic freedom at the state’s colleges and universities had become bound up with generalized concerns and cynical charges about the dangers of liberalism and even communism. In the overwrought atmosphere of the day, being seen as pushing for certain kinds of change could be considered subversive, at least thus was the smear.

77 For a more complete discussion of these various problems in the state, see Chapter One.
“The Mississippian who prides himself on his individuality in reality lives in a climate where non-conformity is forbidden,” James W. Silver wrote.\footnote{“Dr. Silver’s Speech and Reactions to It,” McComb Enterprise-Journal, November 22, 1963.}

The communism tag, of course, was hurled about in academic (and other) settings nationally in those years, and state governments and agencies were prompted by the imperatives of representative democracy and the requirements of self-preservation to respond and, as necessary, kowtow. In 1950, for example, the California Board of Regents instituted a loyalty oath policy, calling on all University of California employees to either sign a statement they were not communists or leave their jobs.\footnote{“A Victory for Academic Freedom,” The Mississippian, April 13, 1951. A state appellate court later ruled the oaths invalid.} In the early 1950s, the board of education in New York City conducted now-infamous purges of hundreds of schoolteachers suspected of communist ties. In Mississippi, in a policy similar to that in California, before being paid by a state agency, employees had to sign a non-communist affidavit, or “loyalty oath.” This was required under Mississippi’s Subversive Act of 1950.\footnote{This law was passed, ironically, by the conservative “progressive” legislature of 1950.}

The communist issue was particularly – but not uniquely – acute in Deep South states like Mississippi because conformity and uniformity, on matters related to race especially, was so demanded by extremist whites and by much of the population generally. In 1954, James W. Silver, the history professor at Ole Miss, developed a standard speech that he delivered when invited to talk at civic clubs in Mississippi. It was titled: “The Tragedy of the South’s Passion for Unanimity” The talk offered the historical parallel between the South of the 1950s and the region during the secession crisis of 1860-1861 which featured intense pressures on antebellum whites with
mixed feelings to bend with prevailing political winds and follow the “fire-eaters” out of the Union. A later iteration of the same speech was titled: “The Lunatic Fringes and the Moderates – A Hundred Years Ago and Now.” The same line of argument appeared in Silver’s “Closed Society” address of 1963 in which he “characterized Mississippi as a totalitarian society in which officials enforce a brand of orthodoxy ‘almost identical to the pro-slavery philosophy’ of 100 years ago.”

As Drew Gilpin Faust suggests, “such a society was at best infertile ground for the growth and nurture of an intellectual class.” While a historian of the antebellum period, Faust could easily have been talking of Mississippi in the post-World War II period and the growing hostility and suspicion there directed at college campuses. In particular, for example, the state legislature debated the Subversive Act of 1950 which in addition to mandating the loyalty oaths also targeted five professors at Ole Miss for their supposed liberalism. The legislature in this period also created a committee to monitor what it considered subversive organizations, many of which were associated with race and civil rights and many of which had academic ties. The State Sovereignty Commission, established in 1956, employed secret investigators to ferret out “subversive activities.”

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82 Letter, James W. Silver to W.J. Cunningham, October 23, 1954. James W. Silver Papers. The point about conformity and uniformity is related to the issue of the white monolith, previously discussed, and the extent to which Southern whites have constituted a single bloc. Regarding the parallel between the 1950s and the antebellum period, Mississippi Gov. J.P. Coleman wrote: “The great problem confronting Mississippi right now is to keep the hotheads from repeating the terrific mistakes of the 1850s and 1860s. We have been destroyed once on the Negro question and I do not want to see us destroyed again.” Letter, J.P. Coleman to E.R. Jobe, November 5, 1956. J. P. Coleman Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

83 “Professor Silver’s Vehement View of Mississippi,” National Observer.

Indeed, often the question of communism and support for desegregation were conjoined rhetorically, as if the two issues were somehow connected in reality. In the fall of 1954, for example, amid the widespread post-\textit{Brown} hysteria, a Tchula resident named A.D. Stewart felt moved to take out a large advertisement in the \textit{Lexington Advertiser}, consisting of “A Personal Statment [sic] to the People of Tchula and Holmes County,” in which he attempted to refute “slander” and “absurd reports, rumors and falsehoods” concerning his beliefs and his community reputation. He was particularly incensed, he stated, because “I understand that a few people are maliciously accusing me … of possessing Communist leanings and favoring the breaking down of the established order of racial segregation.” Nothing could be further from the truth, Stewart hastened to assure his neighbors in a lengthy rebuttal.

The conflation of the issues of communism and race had been forming for some time in post-war Mississippi. “Segregationists benefited from a cold war political climate in which almost any manner of social nonconformity could be construed as a threat to fundamental American values,” Joseph Crespino writes.

Walter R. Bridgforth, a lawyer and state representative from Yazoo City, according to an interviewer’s notes in 1947, for example, said that he “feels that the directed efforts to dissatisfy the Negroes is a product of a program originating in the Soviet Union and using many well-intentioned persons in the U.S. to implement it. … He sees this agitation of the race issue as a deliberate effort to weaken the U.S. internally.

\textsuperscript{85} A backhanded way of supporting this point is to cite the fact that “nigger-lover” and “commie,” or variants on those slurs, were often blended together into a single invective – “nigger-lovin’ communist,” for example – when the target was perceived to have unorthodox views.

\textsuperscript{86} \textit{Lexington Advertiser}, September 30, 1954.

\textsuperscript{87} Crespino, 52.
He commented sadly that many Protestant preachers and members of college faculties have been taken in.”^88

That view, perhaps quaint in light of a present perspective, was apparently widespread and had even intensified by the mid-1950s. For example, Bridger B. Allen, a prominent lawyer in Indianola, warned incoming governor J.P. Coleman in 1955 that “the Communists are at the bottom of our racial troubles. If we will keep them and their left-wing attorneys out of our courts, we will put a stop to most of our troubles.”^89 Coleman’s reply, while somewhat vague and noncommittal, indicated he was in accord with Allen’s views. “I personally have all the confidence in the world that we shall be able to achieve the desired objectives,” the governor-elect assured Allen. ^90 Meanwhile, a leading Mississippi businessman, Charles Wilkinson Jr. of the Columbia-based Wilkinson Battery Company – makers of “Rebel Batteries” – referred to the Supreme Court’s Brown decision as “the gross usurpation of power by nine politically appointed left-wing tools of the Communist Party.”^91

And the Jackson Daily News and The Clarion-Ledger, the state’s two largest newspapers and the primary organs of its white reactionary establishment, ran an editorial in the papers’ joint Sunday edition in early 1956, stating its views on communism and race. In part, the piece stated: “Our way of life in Mississippi is unalterably opposed to integration for we know it is but a step from mixed schools to mixed marriages, miscegenation, social equality and mongrelization. We know that behind it all is the sinister program the Communists to divide and conquer our people.

[^88]: Alexander Heard summary of interview with Walter R. Bridgforth, June 18-19, 1947. Southern Politics Collection. Bridgforth was a member of the law firm of Bridgforth and Love in Yazoo City.
Any white man who wants to preach integration in the South, or elsewhere in the nation, is an enemy of his own people and his voice should be silenced. To talk about segregation being ‘un-Christan,’ or that the refusal to permit its advocates to pour their poisons into the minds of our young people ‘violates the freedom of speech’ is the shabbiest of tommyrot. …Communists are enemies of our Southern way of life and traditions so precious to our people.”

The passage about poisoning the minds of young people referred to the academic freedom debate and the line about segregation being “un-Christian” was a reference to the Tchula controversy of the fall of 1955. A few years later, the Jackson Daily News explained to its readers that for a long time “intelligent Southern people have been aware of the sharp alliance between Communists and agitators in the civil rights cause.”

Thus much of the state’s media, business and political leadership, including its representatives in Washington, in virtually all cases heavily invested in segregation and white supremacy, were in part responsible for the relentless conflating of the ideas of communism and opposition to segregation. “Mississippi’s own senior United States senator played a key role locally and nationally in connecting the two concepts,” Charles W. Eagles writes. “According to one scholar, James O. Eastland was both ‘consumed with the threat of communist conspiracy’ and the South’s ‘most

93 Another example of the attempt to link communism and change on the race issue in the South was the case of the Highlander Folk School in Monteagle, Tennessee. A training center for liberal leadership with links to the labor movement and the cause of economic justice, Highlander was involved in civil rights and desegregation in the 1950s as it had been in previous decades. As such, it was attacked as a “communist training school.” In 1961, the State of Tennessee revoked the school’s charter.
garrulous champion of calloused white supremacy.’ Supporting both McCarthyism and the Citizens’ Councils, Eastland used his position on the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee of the Judiciary Committee to exacerbate the fears of white southerners by investigating alleged subversives. ... A year after the Brown verdict, Eastland called for an investigation of the influence of the communist conspiracy on the Supreme Court’s decision. One observer later concluded that ‘Eastland saw a Red behind every black.’ In Mississippi, as in other parts of the South, anti-communism merged with and reinforced opposition to integration because whites often assumed that any advocate of racial change also held radical political ideas – that is, that an integrationist was necessarily a communist.”

That view evidently had highly placed support throughout the state. As early as 1947, for example, the powerful Delta Council passed a resolution requesting the Board of Trustees of the State Institutions of Higher Learning to investigate communism on the faculties of all state universities and colleges.

With such a defensive attitude pervading Mississippi’s most powerful political offices, it was an extremely difficult – even hostile – environment in which to operate, particularly for individuals and institutions that were seen as failing to strictly adhere to orthodox thinking. The tiny size of the universe of positions of power in the state also contributed to the lack of a range of opinion and thus potential support for change. Occupants of high-profile jobs at Mississippi universities, which again were very closely connected to the state political structure, lived in a fishbowl,

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so to speak, and felt enormous pressure and did yield to the increasingly shrill and powerful anti-communist forces.

Prior to 1953, for instance, Ole Miss Chancellor John D. Williams served on a “regional loyalty board” of the federal Civil Service Commission where he worked on adjudicating federal employee loyalty cases.\(^97\) Also, at the behest of the state Board of Trustees of the State Institutions of Higher Learning, which acted as usual at the insistence of conservatives in the legislature, Williams in early 1954 hired Hugh H. Clegg, then an assistant director of the FBI, as his assistant and the University’s director of development.\(^98\) The FBI at this time obviously was deeply involved in investigating alleged communist activity in the U.S. Clegg’s job at Ole Miss included being the University’s spokesman before audiences around the state grown skeptical and alienated from the “liberal” Oxford campus.

“I appeared before scores and scores of civic clubs and youth groups, and so on all over the state,” said Clegg, recalling his nomadic travels.\(^99\) He also had another role, centered on the campus per se, and one requiring greater discretion and befitting his prior work for J. Edgar Hoover. Clegg “had been employed to keep Ole Miss ‘clean’,” sociology professor Morton B. King recalled, meaning “clean” of unwelcome ideas and disruptive influences.\(^100\) “Clegg’s job was to keep an eye on people like me,” recalled Will D. Campbell, the Ole Miss chaplain in the mid-1950s.

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\(^{97}\) Letter, Philip Young to John D. Williams, July 13, 1953. John Davis Williams papers, University of Mississippi.

\(^{98}\) “Some members of the Board of Trustees encouraged” Williams to hire Clegg, the former FBI official recalled. University of Southern Mississippi, Civil Rights in Mississippi Digital Archive. Interview with Hugh H. Clegg.

\(^{99}\) University of Southern Mississippi, Civil Rights in Mississippi Digital Archive. Interview with Hugh H. Clegg.

and noted campus progressive. “He had spies everywhere (on campus) reporting back to him whom I’d met with and whom I lunched with.”

Or, as Clegg himself elliptically described his work responsibilities, he was to monitor “certain forces often defeated or completely frustrated or with a deep-seated inferiority complex who seem to be dedicated to hurt or even destroy our University.”

Reported *Time* in 1957: “the anti-integration hysteria has become so pervasive that many (Ole Miss) students become spies and informers for segregationists in the state, each keeping his own blacklist of suspects.”

In any event, in 1950s Mississippi idiosyncratic views, such as those bearing on the question of academic freedom and open debate, were not just quirky and benign, as they might have been in another time and context. They potentially were a threat to the established order upon which segregation rested, and thus they were bitterly controversial and even seen as dangerous and unpatriotic. Opponents thus resorted to the charge of communism, a slander which was routinely launched on the flimsiest of pretexts. “Anyone who disagrees with you is a communist,” H.V. Howerton, chairman of the Ole Miss political science department, commented ruefully, in 1947.

Added the Rev. Duncan M. Gray Jr., writing to an Ole Miss sociology professor in 1956, “we might just as well face it: Christianity and sociology have both become ‘subversive’ in Mississippi today.” Writing in 1956, Gordon

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101 Interview with Will D. Campbell, July 1, 2006.
105 Gray’s letter was written to sociologist Morton B. King, February 10, 1956. Morton B. King papers, University of Mississippi.
Smythe at Mississippi State College lamented “the current practice of confusing intelligent disagreement with subversion.”

The elite white Mississippi moderates were therefore in the position of not only defending academic freedom but also fighting off growing (ultimately, largely unsubstantiated) and heated talk about disloyalty, subversives and “Reds” – the term headline writers seemingly preferred – that attended non-conformity and supposed “liberalism” on campuses, which included the notion of open debate of ideas. Rev. A. Emile Joffrion, an Episcopal minister in Oxford and a moderate leader in the community, observed in late 1955 in the midst of the Rev. Kershaw controversy that “academic freedom and now religious freedom are slowly being tied up in the familiar web of fear and fascist tactics imposed on the few attempts on our campuses to keep the prophetic voice alive. I have seen enough in my four years of college work to be terrified by the control which the state legislature has over our colleges and universities. Now that most of these honorable gentlemen are leading members of the Citizens’ Council, it really looks to me as though we will all soon be living ‘behind the Magnolia Curtain’.”

Given the loaded “Magnolia Curtain” language, both sides in the academic freedom debate thus were attempting to appropriate the rhetoric and the imagery of communism and the Cold War for their own divergent purposes. For example:

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106 Letter, Gordon Smythe to Morton B. King, February 9, 1956. Morton B. King Papers, University of Mississippi. Echoing Smythe’s view, editor H.H. Crisler Jr. wrote, in 1953: “Anything one is against these days need only carry the cognomen of “Communist” and that gets by without explaining further.” Jasper County News, April 16, 1953.

“whenever anyone adds fuel to the flames of intolerance, he is in fact helping to bring Communism a step nearer,” Hodding Carter warned his readers in 1949.\textsuperscript{108}

In February 1950, the very same month that U.S. Senator Joseph R. McCarthy suddenly rose to national fame with an anti-communist speech in Wheeling, West Virginia, a state representative from Benton County named Lee Hamer McKenzie prompted the Mississippi House to hold a rare executive session after he claimed Ole Miss harbored “communists, socialists, and fellow travelers” on its faculty. McKenzie went on to say that “he wanted to clamp down on teachers who were ‘liberals’,” one newspaper reported.\textsuperscript{109} As part of the ensuing House debate, state Rep. N.S. Sweat of Acorn County introduced a bill calling for Mississippi’s institutions of higher learning “to report to the legislature as to whether or not any subversive persons are employed.”\textsuperscript{110} Sweat reportedly characterized the bill – part of what became the Subversive Act of 1950 – as a reasonable compromise between the House faction demanding a “witch hunt” at state colleges and those who would leave the schools alone to manage their own affairs regardless of political developments.

\textsuperscript{108} \textit{Delta Democrat Times}, July 15, 1949, as quoted in John T. Kneebone, “Liberal on the Levee: Hodding Carter, 1944-1954,” \textit{The Journal of Mississippi History}, 49 (1987), 157. Of course, as Carter and others were well aware, the Cold War helped frame the academic freedom debate in many ways. Not only was each side in the academic freedom controversy using the rhetoric of the Cold War but also the issue of race itself had Cold War dimensions. The inhabitants of India, Burma, Malaya and other Asian and Third World countries, Carter said “are weighing in their minds the relative merits of Communism and Democracy. We know what the relative merits are, but it is hard to prove those merits to people who have endured colonialism at the hands of white Europe for so long. And they ask you, ‘what does Democracy mean to yellow men and brown men and black men,’ ‘what about their attitudes and treatments in the United States.’” Hodding Carter, convocation address, Southern Illinois University, 1955. Hodding II and Betty Werlein Carter papers.


In response the following week, Albin Krebs, a member of the editorial board that year of the *Mississippian* and a relatively progressive voice in campus matters, penned an editorial titled “About the Witch Hunt.” He wrote: “The issue at stake is not ‘ARE there liberals?’ but instead ‘WHY NOT liberals?’ We are in college to learn, to get a broad education.” He added: “The issue of academic freedom is involved here. So is the basic American constitutional right of freedom of thought.” Elite white moderates like Krebs and Hodding Carter, who gave a speech on academic freedom at Ole Miss a few weeks after the editorial was published, were rejecting conformity of thought on campus. “The number of teachers who have unconventional or unpopular opinions are many,” Carter said in his talk. “They must be protected from discrimination.”

In yet another sign of the paranoid and repressive atmosphere in the mid-1950s at Ole Miss, professors there were required to sign affidavits listing all organizations they had ever joined or contributed to. Meanwhile, the state legislature in early 1956 considered a bill “which will make it a crime for a teacher of government or anyone else to criticize any official or policy of the state government.”

It should be underscored here that the context for the events at Ole Miss and other Mississippi colleges in the mid-1950s was not only the anti-communist purges

111 Capitalization in the original.
and the Cold War, but also, interrelatedly, the beginning of the civil rights movement per se and the intense racist backlash that accompanied it. Those few years therefore marked a historical confluence regarding both anticommunism and race. Regarding the latter: the *Brown* decision, the Till murder, the Gus Courts shooting and the George Lee killing in Belzoni, the Lamar Smith killing in Brookhaven, the Montgomery bus boycott, the Arthurine Lucy case (notably, involving integration at the nearby University of Alabama), etc. all occurred during the period 1954-1956, as did the founding of the White Citizens’ Council, in the Mississippi Delta. These were huge events and for many white Mississippians they portended the dreaded possibility of greater social upheaval to come. So any race-related issue in those years, no matter how trivial it may appear in retrospect, sparked ready tinder of heightened emotions and typically caused what today may seem a heated and overblown response.

For example, the fact that the University of Pittsburgh football team had an African-American fullback named Bobby Grier scheduled to play in the 1956 Sugar Bowl game in New Orleans against Georgia Tech was front-page news for days in Mississippi. The “Brown Sugar Bowl,” as Hodding Carter called it, in a wisecrack of racist indulgence, involved threats from Georgia Gov. Marvin Griffin that his state’s team would boycott the game rather than play an integrated team. The Sugar Bowl

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116 The first chapter of the White Citizens’ Council was begun in July 1954 in the Delta town of Indianola.

117 The governor eventually allowed Georgia Tech to play, and Tech won the game 7-0. But in the midst of the controversy, the Georgia Board of Regents, looking to the future and acting at Griffin’s urging, “banned non-segregated college athletic contests anywhere in Georgia and ruled out appearances of Georgia teams in other states where local laws and customs would make an integrated event ‘repugnant.’” “Georgians Say New Segregation Policy Hits Future Bowls,” *Delta Democrat-Times*, December 6, 1955.
typically was a major social event attended by many Mississippians and the Grier case thus drew a lot of attention in the state.

In any case, this overall context of heightened fear and hysteria needs to be kept uppermost in mind when examining the issue of academic freedom in Mississippi in the mid-1950s.

“Ideas cannot be kept out of a state”

In February 1954, Alfred C. Schnur, the professor of sociology at Ole Miss specializing in criminology who had long conducted academic studies of conditions at the notorious state penitentiary at Parchman, told an Oxford civic club in a moment of candor that the prison farm was “a wonderful training ground for criminals,” according to news accounts. He reportedly added that Parchman administrators were “embryonic” in their understanding and ability. Finally, Schnur labeled penitentiary Superintendent Marvin Wiggins, whose previous background had been in agriculture, “a good farmer.” Schnur’s expressed views, no doubt, represented those of a significant portion of informed Mississippians.

The remarks, as reported, however, infuriated Parchman’s many staunch defenders in the state legislature, particularly the members of the House Penitentiary Committee, who were loyal supporters of Wiggins and who comprised the principle authority over the sprawling Delta penitentiary.118 The committee was already

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118 There is strong evidence that Parchman was very much an extension of the political powers in Jackson and in some ways was a political organization. As a state institution, this might seem an
primed to be prickly about criticisms directed at Parchman and Wiggins given the repeated need to respond to negative commentary in recent years about the use of the “Black Annie” lash and about the employment of trustee guards at the prison, among other alleged irregularities and controversial activities. This might help explain any forthcoming overreaction.

Sure enough, in short order, the penitentiary panel’s objections to the Schnur speech were spelled out in an indignant three-page letter to Schnur’s boss, Chancellor John D. Williams of Ole Miss, incidentally where students in the civil rights years adopted the campus motto “Where Everybody Speaks.” Writing on March 2, the members stated that Schnur’s reported comments first of all were untrue, were in violation of a “trust” that Wiggins supposedly had extended in allowing Schnur access to prison files for his studies, and should rightly be embarrassing to Ole Miss because the remarks put the school in the position of “publicly attacking another state-owned institution.” The letter closed with the implied and rather chilling suggestion that the question of the University’s funding lay in the balance until the issue of Schnur’s statements was addressed satisfactorily. “We trust that his unethical conduct will have no repercussions upon the consideration of the needs of the University by members of the Legislature,” the lawmakers asserted, adding ominously, “yet we know that sometimes in the heat of discussion, main issues are

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119 For a more detailed discussion of these issues related to Parchman, see previous chapter. 
120 In this sense, the moderates, particularly in the media, who had long been Parchman’s most persistent critics, were indirectly responsible for provoking the controversy over the February 1954 Schnur speech. 
121 Wilkie,110.
lost sight of while others are magnified.”\textsuperscript{122} To put even greater political muscle behind the show of force, the letter was distributed to the press.

The missive and the whole way the situation was treated was a heavy-handed display of power and a clear attempt to muzzle Schnur and to warn Williams to clamp down on dissident voices on campus, or else. It amounted to an unambiguous threat that a professor’s freely expressed – and highly informed – opinion that had so irritated the state prison’s defenders in Jackson would result in financial problems for the University. As one newspaper reported, “a legislative committee threatened to cut off university funds unless a criminologist at the university stopped publically criticizing the way Parchman State Penitentiary was run.”\textsuperscript{123} And the calculated distribution to the press predictably engendered a loud and angry response, though that criticism, particularly emanating from the moderates, was cast in a direction other than perhaps the legislators had intended and hoped. “House Group Warns of ‘Repercussions’,” read a front-page headline of the March 5 \textit{Delta Democrat-Times}, the first of many articles and editorials to come, most of them attacking the committee’s move.\textsuperscript{124} The flap also resulted in more immediate headaches for Schnur. No less a figure than Gov. Hugh L. White called for the professor to be fired for his reported criticisms of Parchman.

In his reply to the chairman of the Penitentiary Committee a week later, Chancellor Williams, cautiously mindful of his wide range of disparate constituencies

\textsuperscript{122} Letter, Charlie Beauchamp et. al. to John D. Williams, March 2, 1954. John Oliver Emmerich Sr. Papers, Special Collections Department, Mitchell Memorial Library, Mississippi State University.

\textsuperscript{123} “Ole Miss Has Problem; To Cancel Kershaw Speech Or Let Students Hear Him,” \textit{Delta Democrat-Times}, November 13, 1955.

\textsuperscript{124} “Governor, Solons Threaten Ole Miss Prof and University for Talks on Parchman,” \textit{Delta Democrat-Times}, March 5, 1954.
from Oxford to Jackson, declined to take the bait. In particular he did not appear defensive in the face of the panel’s stated threat to Ole Miss’ funding. In an obsequious and apologetic tone, Williams’ letter thanked the legislators for showing “kindness in conveying to me the thinking of your Committee on this important question of crime prevention and penal organization in Mississippi.” By way of responding specifically to the committee’s concerns, the chancellor sought refuge in misdirection, citing Schnur’s many professional accomplishments, for example, which in fact were not at all at issue. Williams also ventured gingerly into didacticism, pointing out that Webster’s Dictionary said nothing about the word “embryonic” being derogatory (thus sidestepping the fact that otherwise neutral words can always be employed in critical or insulting contexts). In addition, he assured the committee the Ole Miss sociologist surely had no intention “to criticize adversely anyone connected with the penal system.”

Otherwise, the chancellor blamed the whole misunderstanding on the media and the dreaded scarcity of newsprint column inches available to convey their reports of Schnur’s civic-club remarks. “It is difficult to present questions of this kind accurately and fully in the press,” Williams explained to the committee chairman. “The press cannot give at all times an adequate amount of space.”

Once the legislators’ original letter had been made public, however, moderate voices in the Mississippi press gave more than enough coverage to the controversy. Generally they were appalled and outraged at, as Hodding Carter called it, the “arrogant and contemptible assault upon academic and individual freedom” in the way the Penitentiary Committee and the governor had responded to Schnur’s

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criticism of Parchman. “In warning of possible retaliation against the university and in recommending Dr. Schnur’s dismissal, the committee and the governor show themselves to be as ignorant of [the] Constitution as they are of modern penology, which is saying a lot,” Carter added, in a scathing editorial in the *Delta Democrat-Times*.  

In the city of McComb near the Louisiana border, J. Oliver Emmerich, editor and publisher of the *Enterprise-Journal*, expressed similar views, if somewhat more restrained in the phrasing. “As we see it, Dr. Schnur’s recommendations have been academic,” Emmerich wrote. “It would be a serious mistake for our legislature, our board of trustees or our governor to attempt to curb academic freedom in the University of Mississippi or any other of our state educational institutions.” Other moderate newspapermen in Mississippi also took issue with the legislative committee’s actions and even suggested that the panel’s views lay outside mainstream (white) thinking in Jackson, which in 1954 surely was itself quite reactionary. “The Penitentiary Committee’s statement will not meet approval of all legislators,” John Herbers of the United Press bureau in the state capitol pointed out. The committee “has always painted a rosy picture of Parchman and is sold on Marvin Wiggins as superintendent.”

Regarding the Schnur controversy and the academic freedom debate more generally, Chancellor Williams hewed a careful line between protecting the rights of

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127 Interestingly, Emmerich also was a member of the Board of Trustees of the State Institutions of Higher Learning from 1944-1956. He also was editor of the Jackson State Times, a statewide newspaper. So he had a stake in both sides of the academic freedom debate.
128 Emmerich’s editorial was reprinted in the *Delta Democrat-Times* on March 17, 1954 under the headline, “McComb Editor Defends Right of Ole Miss Professor To Say Whatever Is On His Mind.”
faculty to speak their mind but at the same time, with an eye toward Jackson, cautioning them that any advocacy they espoused, or were seen as espousing, could cause political problems. “Williams said the university could not exercise ‘thought control’ but was careful in the selection of its faculty,” a 1955 newspaper article reported. Regarding Ole Miss professors, “‘we anticipate they’ll not be propagandists for they have no right to be’,” the article quotes the chancellor as saying. “‘But we want them to be men of honesty and to express themselves as they see it in their own areas of competence’.”

The message from the top was one of support, but only to a degree, and with considerable ambiguity. So long as Ole Miss faculty stayed within their “own areas of competence” and refrained from what he considered propaganda, the chancellor presumably would act to defend them. His acquiescence in the hiring of Hugh Clegg, his tolerance of an on-campus culture of spying, and his implementation of the policy requiring disclosure of all faculty organizational ties and contributions, however, all show that Williams agreed with those in Jackson that believed liberal voices on campus at least needed close internal monitoring. Ole Miss sociologist Morton B. King, one of Williams’ critics, wrote later that “the University administration was firmly habituated to a policy of expediency and caution, at the expense of essential academic goals and of intellectual and institutional integrity.”

The main argument here is that Mississippi’s elite white moderates – Carter, Emmerich, Herbers, and even Williams, to some extent – were by 1954 defending the

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131 Letter, Morton B. King letter to Harris Warren, August 1, 1956. Morton B. King Papers, University of Mississippi.
rights of academic critics of one of Mississippi’s most blatantly and abusively racist institutions, i.e. its prison farm, to express themselves freely and without fear of reprisal. They were protecting an academic forum and the privilege to dissent from a more powerful orthodoxy on an issue in this case clearly related to race. The point is that this development was a relatively mild but important step toward more profound social and political change. If social critics were indeed at liberty to comment candidly on the ravages of Parchman, perhaps they and others would look at and feel compelled to speak out about other glaring inequities in the society.

Such a trend in the mid-1950s, if taken to its logical conclusion, would as everyone realized inevitably lead to a wider debate on race, which lay beneath virtually all of the state’s fundamental problems. Parchman was but an extreme expression of a larger pervasive system that exploited, oppressed and, when necessary, brutalized people of color.\(^\text{132}\) The nature and extent of that system were in danger of being exposed, subjected to open examination and perhaps even eventually reformed should questions about issues like Parchman become too pointed and lead to an analysis and re-assessment of underlying causes.

The modernization and professionalization aspects of this episode would include the fact that Schnur aimed by his research, publications in scientific journals and commentary to bring updated and professionally accepted methods to what he considered an antiquated and barbaric prison farm long guided by incompetent parochial practices, as was discussed in the previous chapter. As Chancellor Williams explained in his reply to the Penitentiary Committee, “Dr. Schnur’s experience as a criminologist leads him to believe that the State of Mississippi can

\(^{132}\) Along with some white inmates as well, of course, in the case of Parchman.
profit, as surrounding states like Tennessee, Louisiana, and Alabama have profited, from a thorough study of its entire penal system by the Federal Bureau of Prisons.” So Schnur represented a wider professional perspective on a local institution. In a related sense, evidently Ole Miss administrators such as Williams, scholars including Schnur and King, and their fellow elite moderates like Hodding Carter, J. Oliver Emmerich and John Herbers sought a more advanced and enlightened university where varied opinions from a broad array of sources were welcomed. “If our university is to be curbed in its academic expression and denied the right to suggest provisions of improving our society then none other but Mississippi will be the loser as a result of such restrictions,” Emmerich wrote.133

The extra-regional components of this controversy range from the fact that Schnur was educated at the University of Pittsburgh and the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and previously had served as an associate warden in a state prison in Stillwater, Minnesota, to the increasing calls among Schur and other reformers for Parchman to adhere to guidelines set forth by such national entities as the American Prison Association, the New York-based Osborne Association for prison reform, and the Federal Bureau of Prisons. The support Schnur received in his showdown with the legislature from the American Association of University Professors, a nationwide group, is also indicative of the extra-regional dimension. As a background article in the *Delta Democrat-Times* pointed out, Schnur had been published in such national scholarly journals as the *American Journal of Sociology*, the *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, and the *Journal of Correctional Education*, so he brought to the

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133 “McComb Editor Defends Right of Ole Miss Professor to Say Whatever is on his Mind,” *Delta Democrat-Times*, March 17, 1954.
Parchman case a breadth of expertise in the wider norms of his profession, as acknowledged in articles reviewed by his academic peers.  

Similarly, Hodding Carter’s editorial calls for the House Penitentiary Committee and the governor to align themselves with the U.S. Constitution also is, in a sense, a way of summoning an extra-regional argument to counter local prerogatives, parochial thinking and narrow legislative fiefdoms. In short, the case of academic freedom at Ole Miss, and in particular the situation pertaining to Dr. Schnur, had all of the key aspects of the dissertation’s thesis, involving modernization, professionalization and extra-regional influences.

As was indicated, in early 1955, the Mississippi House of Representatives passed a resolution in support of screening – i.e., investigating, and then possibly rejecting – proposed campus speakers. By the policy which resulted, investigations were to be conducted prior to prospective visitors being invited to the campuses of state universities. The resolution urged institutions to bar speakers who endorsed the theories of organizations “dedicated to the overthrow of our way of life and the spirit and intent of the law of Mississippi.” The phrasing “our way of life” had long been code language for racial segregation and white supremacy, though in the context of the mid-1950s it conceivably could also be interpreted as anti-communist boilerplate. Again, the two causes – race and communism – in some sense overlapped and reinforced one another in those years. Moreover, the assertion of state sovereignty and states’ rights, evident in the resolution’s phrasing, was a common refrain of those

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standing guard over Mississippi’s racial status quo. The “law of Mississippi” also, of course, upheld racial segregation at that time. The intent of the resolution clearly was aimed at keeping “liberal” speakers off campuses, thus disallowing events where certain ideas, including those pertaining to change on the race issue, presumably might possibly otherwise be discussed or debated.136

Receiving this unmistakable signal from the state capitol, the Board of Trustees of the Institutions of Higher Learning, the agency nominally controlling the universities, essentially put the legislators’ wishes into immediate practical effect. The board promptly and unanimously passed its own resolution, dated February 17, 1955, which read: “All speakers invited to the campus of any of the State Institutions of Higher Learning must first be investigated and approved by the head of the institution involved and when invited the names of such speakers must be filed with the Executive Secretary of the Board of Trustees.”137 The Institutions of Higher Learning included all of Mississippi’s public universities and colleges.138 At Ole Miss, the task of investigating reportedly was carried out by Assistant to the

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136 Much of the academic freedom debate in Mississippi foreshadows various aspects of the Free Speech Movement at the University of California, Berkeley, which began in 1964. The University of California administration was aiming to block the intrusion of what it called “off-campus issues,” many of them related to civil rights. That attempt at censorship backfired badly in that it helped ignite the Berkeley uprising and thus the whole student movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

137 John D. Williams, memorandum “To all the Faculty and Staff” of the University of Mississippi, March 2, 1955. John Davis Williams papers.

138 A list of such schools today would include: Alcorn State University, Delta State University, Jackson State University, Mississippi State University, Mississippi University for Women, Mississippi Valley State University, the University of Mississippi and the University of Southern Mississippi. Several of the universities here mentioned had slightly different names in the mid-1950s. For example, until 1974, Alcorn State was known as Alcorn Agricultural and Mechanical College, or Alcorn A&M. In 1924, Delta State was founded as Delta State Teachers College. In 1955 its name was changed to Delta State College. In the mid-1950s Mississippi State University was known as Mississippi State College.
Chancellor Hugh Clegg, who was fed potentially damaging, and often unsubstantiated, information by the American Legion and other right-wing groups.\textsuperscript{139} The elite moderates’ reaction to the new screening policy was overwhelmingly negative. The trustees’ move exemplified a dangerous “pattern of restriction of thought in the whole country,” James W. Silver noted a month after the decree was announced. “I believe that faculty people should speak out against it,” Silver wrote.\textsuperscript{140} Along the Mississippi Gulf Coast, at the Pascagoula Chronicle-Star and Moss Point Advertiser, moderate editor Easton King reprinted an editorial from the Mississippian at Ole Miss, which he headlined “A Backward Step for Higher Learning.” In part, the students’ editorial described the board’s resolution as “a grave intrusion on the fundamental constitutional guarantees of free speech and free inquiry, upon which the foundation for higher learning must rest.” It went on to say, “this could be only an entering wedge, the beginning of thought control which may well lead to censorship of textbooks and eventually of what is taught in the classroom.”\textsuperscript{141}

Meanwhile, at the Jasper County News in Bay Springs, editor H.H. Crisler Jr. wrote, “Such action as screening speakers by college leaders seems to us as indicating Mississippians can’t take it and are becoming intellectual cowards, fearing that thinking is a dangerous business.”\textsuperscript{142} Added William D. Buchanan, a professor of government at Mississippi State College who in 1956 resigned in protest over issues of academic freedom: “when ministers are prevented from speaking to students, and

\textsuperscript{139} Morton B. King wrote: “It is unofficially known on the campus that the actual checking is done by the Assistant to the Chancellor and Director of Development who is a former Assistant Director of the F.B.I.” Morton B. King statement, 1956. Morton B. King papers, University of Mississippi.
\textsuperscript{141} Pascagoula Chronicle-Star and Moss Point Advertiser, March 25, 1955.
\textsuperscript{142} “Screening Speakers,” Jasper County News, March 24, 1955.
editors from speaking to faculty members, and when trustees feel they must screen not only our speakers but our thoughts, it appears to me that a college cannot perform its function as an institution of higher learning.”

In spite of the outcry from moderate quarters, evidence suggests the speaker ban quickly came to have its intended chilling effect on the vitality and diversity of views on Mississippi campuses. When Hodding Carter was invited by the historically black Alcorn A&M College to participate in a “convocation series” of speakers during the 1955-1956 academic year, he had to decline. “I doubt very seriously that the Board of Trustees would approve my speaking at Alcorn or any other Mississippi institution at this time,” he wrote, by way of sending his regrets. Also subsequent to the Trustees’ screening order, Carter was prevented by the president of Mississippi State from addressing that college’s chapter of the American Association of University Professors. The ban on speakers was of course part of a wider pattern of suppression of academic freedom in Mississippi. Wrote one Yazoo City schoolteacher after the 1955 trial of Emmett Till’s murderers: “what an opportunity I have to teach true democracy and am not allowed to open my mouth.”

And, reacting to restrictions on academic freedom generally, James W. Silver, the host of Columbia University international law professor Philip C. Jessup’s April 1955 talk at Ole Miss, felt moved to circulate a (somewhat) tongue-in-cheek

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143 Letter, William Buchanan to Benjamin Franklin Hilbun, February 8, 1956. Benjamin Franklin Hilbun Papers, Special Collections Department, Mitchell Memorial Library, Mississippi State University.
144 The school is now Alcorn State University.
146 Letter, William Buchanan to Benjamin Franklin Hilbun, February 8, 1956. Benjamin Franklin Hilbun papers.
147 Letter, Lucy W. Morris to Morton B. King, February 8, 1956. Morton King papers, University of Mississippi.
“memorandum” for History Department faculty and staff by way of publicizing the Jessup visit. It read, in part, “in spite of what you may have heard, it is going to be all right for you to come and bring your friends … to hear Philip C. Jessup. … In all fairness, we should warn you that Mr. Jessup has degrees from Hamilton College, Columbia, and Yale.” He added, to any potential lecture-goers feeling skittish of being seen in such a gathering, “we can assure you that neither a roll nor photographs will be taken.” While Silver clearly was mocking the repressive atmosphere and paranoia on the Ole Miss campus, he did assume a serious tone and acted to protect himself from possible fallout by writing boldly, in longhand, atop the memo, “Don’t print anything about this.”148

The allusion to Jessup’s academic credentials from schools in the Northeast and the presence on the Ole Miss campus of someone of Jessup’s internationalist bent shows again that the academic freedom debate had clear extra-regional dimensions.149 It was as if in frantically trying in the immediate post-\textit{Brown} years to cope with its precariously eroding position on race, Mississippi’s power structure wanted to shut a door against the potentially discomfiting ideas that might be percolating dangerously in the rest of the world.

Initially, the opposition to the Trustees-imposed speaker ban through the spring and summer of 1955 was fairly muted, if negative, perhaps in part because universities were less active in the summer months, and also because as always the moderate contingent was only loosely organized, at best, and was slow to react.

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149 Jessup was an authority in international law.
However, some academics, particularly those protected to a degree by tenure, such as historian Silver, felt compelled to speak out almost immediately against the new policy. “Ideas cannot be kept out of a state,” the Ole Miss historian told a Greenville audience that April.\footnote{Ole Miss History Prof Blasts ‘Screening’ Speakers; Tells Rotary Ideas Can’t be Legislated Out of State,” Delta Democrat-Times, April 22, 1955.}

Some students also chafed at the ban. That same month, for example, the university senate at Ole Miss passed its own resolution in protest of the ban. That year’s editor of The Mississippian, Jimmy Autry, claimed “90 percent of the student body is sincerely upset” about the screening policy.\footnote{Ole Miss Students Protest Program To Screen Speakers,” Delta Democrat-Times, April 24, 1955.} Editors of the student papers at Mississippi State and the University of Southern Mississippi added their voices against the restriction. And an editorial in May 1955 by John O. Emmerich Jr., son of the McComb publisher, declared that the screening plan “errs in assuming we must protect from controversial ideas ‘impressionable youngsters’ at our educational institutions. Colleges and universities were created to provide students with a wide variety of ideas – ideas which one normally does not learn outside higher education.”\footnote{More on Screening,” Delta Democrat-Times, May 9, 1955.}

But, this notable adverse reaction among some moderates notwithstanding, a larger, more organized and arguably more effective protest would come starting in the fall of the following academic year.
Rev. Kershaw and Religious Emphasis Week

Rev. Alvin L. Kershaw might seem an unlikely and remote figure to be the central actor in a major firestorm in Mississippi over questions of academic freedom that would ultimately result in faculty resignations, intense bitterness at the state’s most prominent universities, and consternation in the highest political circles in Jackson. Presiding rector since 1947 at a small Midwestern church, the Holy Trinity Episcopal Church in Oxford, Ohio, the 36-year-old Kershaw became something of a celebrity in 1955 based on a highly successful appearance on *The $64,000 Question* television quiz show.

The minister’s connection to Mississippi, surely an example of extra-regionalism, seemed on the face of it to come about largely serendipitously. But there is also evidence that Kershaw’s physical distance from Mississippi had ensured that his civil rights activities, such as they were in Ohio, were largely unknown in the Magnolia State, a fact which for moderate organizers of events at Ole Miss made him the perfect choice as a stealth candidate to slip through the mesh of official screening and then hopefully stir the campus with his progressive racial views. Kershaw had once been a theological student at the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee, and that credential, to the extent it was known, was reassuring and impressive to many people in Mississippi. In any event, Kershaw was carefully selected and was being used – by several of the elite white Mississippi moderates – as a potential vehicle to crack open the “Magnolia Curtain” on campus.
Will D. Campbell, the Ole Miss chaplain, had met with Kershaw in the summer of 1955, a few months prior to his quiz show appearance, and was impressed enough by his fellow clergyman to informally invite him to speak during the Ole Miss Religious Emphasis Week (REW), scheduled the following February. Part of Campbell’s duties as Director of Religious Life on campus was to organize the annual event, which the university’s fraternity members jokingly called “Be Good to God Week.” In discussions with Campbell, Kershaw agreed to come and he was then officially invited by the Committee of 100, the campus group nominally sponsoring REW. An official acceptance followed. Kershaw’s planned appearance, on the topic of “Religious Aspects of Contemporary Drama,” was scheduled and publicized. Meanwhile, all evidence suggests that Campbell was well aware of Kershaw’s views on race all along.

Subsequently, Kershaw appeared on the television show and won $32,000 thanks to his acumen on the subject of jazz music. After the show when pressed by reporters for a statement, he indicated he would give much of his winnings to charity. Among the beneficiaries he mentioned was the NAACP.

The media in Mississippi and other states and certain ambitious politicians quickly focused on both the NAACP pledge and the fact that Kershaw was now confirmed and scheduled as a speaker at Ole Miss. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, which in the context of today might seem fairly

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153 Religious Emphasis Week was scheduled February 19-22, 1956.
154 It should be added by way of context, that the Ole Miss Campus Y, which was affiliated with the national YMCA and YWCA and was therefore tied at least in spirit to the missionary traditions and Social Gospel history of those larger organizations, covered the honoraria, travel costs and other expenses associated with REW
155 The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.
benign, mainstream and widely respected, was considered radical and dangerous among many white Mississippians in the intense climate of the mid-1950s. Serious efforts to effectively ban the group from the state had been going on since the 1940s. The NAACP’s role in engendering national media coverage of the recent Emmett Till murder case (or the Till “kidnap” case, as it was becoming known in the increasingly defensive and apologetic white Mississippi media) only added to the controversy and resentment. Even “moderate” white newspapers in the state, like the Delta Democrat-Times, decried the organization. “We would not give the NAACP a nickel to spread more propaganda, put more dead bodies on display and milk more dollars from hate-stirred groups,” one editorial snarled.¹⁵⁶ In the Mississippi legislature, there were ongoing efforts to defund, harass and even outlaw the NAACP.

Kershaw’s imminent appearance, of course, was set within the context of the “abominable” campus screening policy, as Rev. A. Emile Joffrion called it, instituted the previous February. At the time of his statement regarding the NAACP, Kershaw had not yet passed the screening process. “Ole Miss Has Red Face,” the Birmingham (Ala.) News declared in a headline, alluding, only in part, to the University’s sudden embarrassment and predicament.¹⁵⁷ Here again is an example in the mid-1950s of the conjunction, in this instance embedded in the snide lingo of a headline writer, of questions of race, academic freedom and supposed communism. And with the media spotlight on Kershaw and the NAACP came predictable public attention and then,

¹⁵⁶ “Age of Enlightenment,” Delta Democrat-Times, November 15, 1955. The “put more dead bodies on display” reference pertains to Emmett Till’s funeral in September 1955 which featured an open casket revealing Till’s mutilated and partly decomposed body. The decision to open the casket was in fact made by the victim’s mother, Mamie Till Bradley, and not the NAACP. Jet magazine, the Chicago Defender, and other media outlets published photographs of Till’s dead body, images that horrified readers and helped draw worldwide attention to the case.
shortly following, the University felt direct pressure from Jackson, and particularly from certain ambitious lawmakers quick to exploit a budding controversy with clear racial overtones. As the Canton County Herald reported, “immediately the ‘see it as we do or else’ group swung into action.”

State Rep. James A. Morrow, Jr., from the town of Brandon in Rankin County, for one, urged in a letter to Chancellor Williams that Kershaw be “publicly rebuked” for his implied criticism of “our way of life in the South by his intention to aid in the fight to desegregate the races.” Morrow said he expected “whoever is responsible will correct this situation and revoke the reverend’s invitation even to appear in Mississippi.” At this point, apparently, given the overly heated rhetoric, not only was Kershaw not welcome at Ole Miss, he was to be barred from the state of Mississippi altogether. For good measure, Morrow “didn’t like the fact that a preacher knew a lot about jazz music,” the chairman of the Ole Miss sociology department recalled. The evidence that Morrow was taking advantage of the situation for political gain can be deduced from the fact that he released his letter to Williams to the press immediately while knowing full well that the chancellor in fact was in Europe at that moment and therefore would be unable to respond personally in

158 “Tempest in a Tea Pot,” Canton County Herald.
159 “Seeks Rebuke of Minister Who Won $32,000 on TV,” Delta Democrat-Times, November 9, 1955. Two months later, Morrow withdrew his opposition to Kershaw’s appearance and apologized to the minister for “any embarrassment I may have caused him on this incident.” This change of heart came after the state Board of Trustees, under the campus screening policy, had checked Kershaw’s background and concluded that the charges he was an integrationist appeared “vague and apparently unfounded.” After the Board’s findings were announced, Morrow spoke with Kershaw by telephone and was assured that the minister had been “misquoted and misled into answering some leading questions” on his segregation views. “Way Clear for Kershaw to Talk At Ole Miss Religious Program,” Delta Democrat-Times, January 20, 1956.
160 Interview with Morton B. King, July 1, 2006. “Some Southerners thought jazz was ‘nigger music,’” King recalled. “Background Recollections: Religious Emphasis Week and the Kershaw Affair.” Morton King papers, University of Mississippi.
a timely fashion. Meanwhile, stepping into the growing controversy, state Senator-elect Lamar Ross of Raleigh proposed limiting “all speakers at the University to those who are ‘in sympathy with our problems and way of life’,” the *Delta Democrat-Times* reported. The University’s screening policy was now at the center of a political firestorm.

As one Oxford source noted, “it wasn’t long before the phone began jingling up here” and University officials were informed “that a number of legislators in Jackson were insisting that Kershaw not be allowed to come to Ole Miss.” The *Jackson State Times* noted the obvious: “The University of Mississippi … has found itself squarely in the middle of a touchy segregation issue.” As in the Schnur case, part of the legislators’ strong-armed approach involved the threat of retaliation by cutting off funding, or what Rev. A. Emile Joffrion called “the absurd and age-old trick of intimidating the Univ. by inferring that economic pressure would be brought to bear if [Kershaw] came.” As John Herbers wrote, “the men in caps and gowns are worried that academic freedom might again be threatened by legislators who happen to control the purse strings of the university but sometimes do not understand its functions.” Added Hodding Carter: Ole Miss “is torn between financial support on the one hand and intellectual honesty on the other.”

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161 One former Ole Miss student observed that “Mr. Morrow made a cheap, diabolical bid for political power in beginning the (Kershaw) furor.” Letter, Albert C. Butler to Morton B. King, February 11, 1956. Morton King papers, University of Mississippi.
163 “Ole Miss Finds Itself In Middle of Touchy Segregation Issue,” *Jackson State Times*, November 13, 1955.
165 “Ole Miss Has Problem; To Cancel Kershaw Speech Or Let Students Hear Him,” *Delta Democrat-Times*, November 13, 1955.
But with the attempted clampdown coming so swiftly from figures in the state capitol, an informal counter-coalition of white moderate academics, students, journalists and ministers (who themselves felt a particular compunction to defend the religious freedom imperatives involved) began to form in defense of the Kershaw invitation. And highlighting that reaction involving this group of moderates is a main point of this chapter. “So many things are at stake,” Will D. Campbell wrote. “Religious freedom, freedom of speech, the state screening rule.”167 Their organizational efforts, in this instance, were also notable, especially given that Mississippi’s moderates rarely had been able to coordinate their efforts as efficiently and effectively as the more reactionary forces habitually did. But in this case the moderates were primed and ready for a fight, a development which exemplified a trend as the period 1945-1956 wore on; the moderates were becoming more organized, more emboldened and were gathering more support, even in the midst of the wider post-*Brown* white backlash.

For example, A. Emile Joffrion and Will D. Campbell were in touch with fellow ministers Duncan M. Gray, the Episcopal bishop of Mississippi; Duncan Hobart; Duncan M. Gray, Jr.; and Joe Earl Elmore, the former head of the Wesley Foundation at Ole Miss and now a clergyman in New York City. Bishop Gray, Joffrion assured Kershaw, was “in complete sympathy and agreement with our stand.”168 Meanwhile, Joffrion and Campbell were keeping Kershaw informed and

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were strategizing with him via letters and telephone calls. Pondering the University’s predicament, and doing his best to keep the pressure on, Campbell posed the rhetorical question: “Are we free or do we take orders from the Citizens’ Council?”

Also, student journalists, particularly at the Mississippian, amplified the pro-academic freedom argument seen in the pages of the Delta Democrat-Times, the Jasper County News, the Pascagoula Chronicle-Star and Moss Point Advertiser, the Madison County Herald, the Jackson State Times, and other publications in the state. “Students attend a university to increase their knowledge, gather information through freedom of speech and inquiry and formulate their own opinions,” an editorial in the Ole Miss student weekly stated. “How is this possible when they are coddled like children?” Also at Ole Miss, the chairman of the history department, James W. Silver, and the chairman of the sociology and anthropology department, Morton B. King, Jr., were agitating strongly that the Kershaw invitation stand. The Ole Miss student Senate passed a resolution in support of Kershaw’s planned appearance. The Campus YMCA passed a similar resolution. As events were to subsequently reveal, the moderates in their stand for academic freedom in this case

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169 In the weekly “order of service” bulletin dated November 13, 1955 of Joffrion’s congregation, St. Peter’s Episcopal Church in Oxford, the minister wrote: “Your rector wants it understood, in terms that are unmistakably clear, that so far as the Church is concerned, Mr. Kershaw has done nothing with which the Church cannot agree in giving part of his money to support the cause of de-segregation of the races.” Rev. Alvin L. Kershaw papers.
170 Letter, Will D. Campbell to Alvin L. Kershaw, November 10, 1955. Will D. Campbell papers, University of Southern Mississippi.
171 For example, on November 14, 1955, the Jackson State Times published a poll showing that 39 of 50 students surveyed believed that the University should allow Kershaw to keep his scheduled visit. The story was titled, “Students: Kershaw Should Keep Date.”
173 The resolution was passed “almost unanimously” on November 15, 1955. Letter, John K. Miles to Rev. Alvin J. Kershaw, November 17, 1955. Will D. Campbell papers, University of Southern Mississippi.
had a wide, if too often otherwise dormant and untapped, network of support in Mississippi for their broadening views.

To maintain the pressure in pushing back against the legislators’ threats, Professor King sent the university a stark warning of his own: he was ready to resign his tenured position if the University backed down over the matter. Writing and then hand-delivering a letter to the Ole Miss academic provost, King said: “Should the chancellor ask that the invitation be withdrawn or that Mr. Kershaw ‘withdraw’ himself, I am prepared to resign from the university and release to the press of the state and nation a carefully worded statement giving my reasons why I could no longer work here and keep my self-respect or live with my conscience.”

With the elite white moderates now engaged to this great extent, the battle lines were clearly drawn. “In a very real sense, this is a test case for academic and religious freedom in our state schools,” A. Emile Joffrion wrote, in a December 1955 letter datelined, obviously for theatrical effect, “from behind the Magnolia Curtain.”

Responsibility for the decision was ultimately passed to Chancellor Williams who had hesitated in making up his mind for three months, from November 1955 to February 1956, while the political winds blew with great force all around him. (To be fair, for part of that time Williams was traveling in Germany and was detached from the daily developments in the case.) All during that three-month period, Williams stayed silent on the matter, doing nothing to revoke the invitation. The Board of Trustees investigated Kershaw and, the NAACP connection notwithstanding, apparently found no specific cause for barring him from campus.

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174 Letter, Morton B. King, to Alton Bryant, December 9, 1955. Morton King papers, University of Mississippi.
And so, the matter of whether Kershaw would indeed come to campus was up to Williams.

What gave Williams an excuse to finally officially withdraw the invitation was a long letter from Kershaw to the Ole Miss student body published in the *Mississippian* February 3. In that piece the minister stated, among other things, “as a Christian clergyman, as a [native] Southerner, and as an American, I have been, am and will continue to support legal and social action that labors to effect, protect and ensure the equal status and estimation of all peoples.”176 With Kershaw’s scheduled appearance now just days away, the published letter promptly reignited the whole flap. In response the following day, after unsuccessfully trying to get both Rev. Campbell and the Committee of 100 to do the unpleasant task of carrying the message that the invitation was being revoked, Williams personally sent a telegram to Kershaw officially disinviting him because, he wrote, it would be “unwise” for the reverend to speak with the students.177

What makes this whole controversy particularly noteworthy for a dissertation on white moderates and their contribution is not only the degree and quality of their resistance prior to Williams’ decision but also for what happened next. In short, moderate voices both from outside the state and within loudly rejected Williams’ reasoning, feeling it was the chancellor’s decision itself which was unwise if not

176 “Letter to the Editor,” *Mississippian*, February 3, 1956. By “as a Southerner,” Kershaw was referring to his being born and raised in Louisville, Kentucky.
177 “Ole Miss Withdraws Invitation To Minister Who Gave to NAACP,” *Delta Democrat-Times*, February 3, 1956. “I knew that finally Kershaw would not be allowed to come,” Will D. Campbell recalled. “But I was determined that it would not be I who would withdraw the invitation. I would force the powers to admit publically that they were the powers. And that we at the University were pawns.” Will D. Campbell, *Brother to a Dragonfly* (New York: Seabury Press, 1977), p. 161.
cowardly. “The cowardice belongs to the administrations of both the university and the state,” noted an editorial in *The Christian Century*, a leading mainline Protestant publication, based in Chicago, with longstanding links to the Social Gospel movement. Meanwhile, the five other clergy scheduled to participate along with Kershaw in REW, from as far away as New York and Virginia, all promptly withdrew from the program. This moral stand gives impetus once again to the argument that extra-regional factors and advocates, tied to the elite moderates in Mississippi, were pushing for and affecting some gradual change in the state.

And the reaction among the elite white moderates in Mississippi per se ranged from disappointment to disgust to courageous opposition. The action of the Rev. Campbell and the Committee of 100 refusing to be pressured by the chancellor into doing the deed themselves of notifying Kershaw of the withdrawal decision was a notable act of defiance, which itself was to have unpleasant consequences later. (“I  

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178 John D. Williams could be considered an ally of the elite white moderates discussed in this dissertation, but because of the highly political nature of his position as Ole Miss chancellor, he often vacillated on important issues. For example, in this case of the Rev. Kershaw, Williams ultimately decided to disinvite him, in spite of other moderates’ wishes that he uphold the principle of academic freedom clearly involved in the matter. One recent book that is highly critical of Williams’ role in the civil rights era and sees his actions as cowardly is Charles Eagles’s *The Price of Defiance: James Meredith and the Integration of Ole Miss* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).


180 They were: Rev. Joe Earl Elmore, minister of the Church of St. Paul and St. Andrew (Methodist), New York City; Rev. George Chauncey of First Presbyterian Church, Monticello, Arkansas; Rev. Joseph H. Fichter of Loyola University, New Orleans; Rabbi Milton Grafman of Temple Emanu-El, Birmingham, Alabama; and Col. Francis Pickens Miller of Charlottesville, Virginia. In his telegram cancelling his acceptance to appear at REW, Rev. Elmore wrote: “I am impelled to express my sense of shock that an academic institution dedicated to the search for truth would carefully screen all prospective speakers to its campus towards the end of recruiting [sic] anyone whose views might be controversial. The action of the University of Mississippi is an affront to the maturity and intelligence of its students, faculty and staff and it is a disservice to education, democracy and the Christian faith.”

181 Campbell’s refusal to grant Williams’ request likely contributed to the campus minister’s departure, for a job at the National Council of Churches, at the close of the spring semester of 1956. “It might be that I have revolted long enough,” Campbell said, shortly before his departure. Letter, Will D. Campbell to Alvin L. and Doris Kershaw. March 9, 1956. Will D. Campbell papers, University of Southern Mississippi.  

Merrill Hawkins Jr. writes that Campbell lost his Ole Miss job because “he
don’t know if I will be able to stay or not,” Campbell wrote during the Kershaw crisis, sensing his shaky job security amid his activism, “but that has long ceased to be important.”182 Then local Oxford ministers who were asked to fill in on the program at the last minute decided under the circumstances not to cooperate. That move clearly surprised many of the hardliners, like Jackson Daily News editor Fred Sullens, who had written: “We may feel reasonably sure that [local clergymen] will not be spewing poison into the minds of our young people.”183

The Oxford ministers’ statement declining to step in as substitutes was rather tepid, particularly as considered in a presentist context. “We feel the excitement engendered throughout this controversy will make it difficult to maintain an atmosphere in which real religious values could be given proper attention,” it read in part.184 Nevertheless, their action in refusing to participate, and thereby contradicting defenders of the old order like Sullens, was a small blow for academic and religious freedom. “That took a lot of guts,” recalled Joe Earl Elmore, former head of the Ole Miss Wesley Foundation. “It’s one thing for outsiders to protest, but these were local church folks.”185

Others at the time, within the security of private correspondence, were more forcefully candid and scathing. “With all the rationalization possible to the administration, I still feel that the Kershaw business is the saddest single thing to happen since I came here in 1936,” James W. Silver wrote to his friends Betty and

“was one of the first white Southerners to call for integration and support Brown v. Board of Education.” Merrill Hawkins Jr., Review of And Also With You: Duncan Gray and the American Dilemma, by Will D. Campbell, Christian Century, (June 17-24, 1998), 621.

182 Letter, Will D. Campbell to Alvin L. Kershaw, November 10, 1955. Will D. Campbell papers, University of Southern Mississippi.

183 “Then There Were None,” Time, February 27, 1956.


185 Interview with Joe Earl Elmore, July 1, 2006.
Hodding Carter. “We had a fine opportunity to stand up to the illiterates and Neanderthals and could have gotten away with it. But we muffed it once more.” 186

Ultimately, there was no Religious Emphasis Week event at Ole Miss in 1956.

But perhaps the bravest responses in Mississippi to the chancellor’s decision were the subsequent resignations by two faculty members, sociologist Morton B. King at Ole Miss and political scientist William D. Buchanan at Mississippi State. 187

The dual resignations by these elite white Mississippi moderates, which made front-page news in Mississippi for days, represented a dramatic statement in support of academic freedom. King had first been hired by Ole Miss in 1939 and he became chairman of the department of sociology and anthropology in 1946. In a letter to Chancellor Williams in the wake of the Kershaw decision, King wrote, “as a faculty member, I have slowly and reluctantly been convinced in recent years that the administration and the Board are no longer able to defend here and on the other campuses of the state, the freedoms of thought, inquiry, and speech which are essential for higher education to flourish.” 188

Besides the heroic, or martyrly, nature of the resignations the most notable element of the faculty departures was the amount of support shown King and Buchanan for their decisions from colleagues nationally and also from sources within

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186 Letter, James W. Silver letter to Betty and Hodding Carter, February 5, 1956. Hodding II and Betty Werlein Carter papers
187 As at many other schools, Mississippi State also planned a Religious Emphasis Week in 1956. In advance, college President Benjamin Franklin Hibun had stated that there was to be no discussion of desegregation or race in the course of the event. The invited speakers, however, stated that they could not avoid the issue. So, as at Ole Miss, there was no REW at Mississippi State that year. “Jewish Communities in the South and the Desegregation Issue,” Charles Mantinband, address at the Plenary Session, National Community Relations Advisory Council, June 1956, Atlantic City, N.J. Rabbi Charles Mantinband Papers, Special Collections Department, McCain Library, University of Southern Mississippi.
188 University of Mississippi, Department of Public Relations, Press Release, February 7 1956. Morton King papers, University of Mississippi.
Editorial writers and other journalists, fellow academics, former students, ministers, church groups, and also just average people in the state who were moved by their stand inundated the two professors with congratulatory letters and published tributes. By their actions, the two men seemed to be speaking on behalf of a significant population of the state that apparently had been chafing under “thought control” mandates and “Magnolia Curtain” restrictions on freedom. The show of support for the two men is therefore evidence of a much wider moderate constituency that was looking to move beyond the repressive status quo.

The numbers of letter-writers and the breadth of the professors’ support were and are impressive. King’s network of backers included: a former Ole Miss student living in Columbus, Georgia; the head of the Ole Miss chapter of the American Association of University Professors; a social science professor at Tougaloo Southern Christian College in Tougaloo, Miss. (“the courage of your decision I certainly admire”); an Episcopal minister from Cleveland, Miss. (“my wife … joins me in deep gratitude to you for your stand at this critical time”); the president of the Mississippi Council on Human Relations; the chairman of the sociology department at Mississippi State; an official with the YMCA in Jackson; a former student and now the editor of the Panolian, a publication based in Batesville (“except for your action, I would have had the feeling that Ole Miss had surrendered”); a correspondent from Sandersville (“it is heartening to see that a few – like you – refuse to be bullied into giving up your freedom of speech”); a former political scientist at Ole Miss; a teacher from Yazoo City (“I’m glad somebody in the state has ‘guts’ enough to speak his true opinion”); a YMCA official at Mississippi State (“I dare to hope … that your action
will cause some persons responsible for shaping educational policy in Mississippi to reassess the present state of affairs”); a professor at Rust College in Holly Springs (“your stand, I believe, will give encouragement and new heart to countless citizens who believe as you do”); an instructor at Gulf Park College in Long Beach, Miss.; a Methodist minister in Tupelo; and a woman from Jackson (“there are many Mississippians who deplore the conditions that made your action necessary”). The State Conference of the Methodist Student Movement of Mississippi passed a resolution of support at its meeting in Columbus. The Jasper County News in Bay Springs published an editorial February 9 titled “Is It A University?” which commended King’s decision. And so on.

Buchanan, too, tapped a reservoir of support. Hodding Carter, for one, told the government professor, “you are a courageous man” and he offered assistance in helping him find a new job. A. Emile Joffrion, the Episcopal rector from Oxford, wrote Buchanan he had “redeemed the concept of academic freedom for countless faculty members in Mississippi whose integrity now need no longer be intimidated.”

But in spite of the scholars’ stand on principle and despite clear evidence of widespread sympathy for the professors’ action, one also could argue that as of the spring of 1956, and thereafter, the “Magnolia Curtain” was still firmly draped across the state, apparently as suffocating, impermeable and light-resistant as ever. For example, both Morton and Buchanan had to leave the state to find employment.

189 Various letters cited are located in the Morton King papers, University of Mississippi.
Buchanan was ousted immediately from Mississippi State upon handing in his resignation. “Your attitude … has gravely impaired your usefulness here,” college President Benjamin Franklin Hilbun wrote by way of terminating him on the spot.192

Other powerful forces, in the political realm, also lined up against King and Buchanan. The state House of Representatives, in another official resolution, called the two scholars “misguided reformers” and urged university administrators once again to “use every effort to prevent subversive influences from infiltrating our institutions.” The resolution commended Ole Miss Chancellor Williams and Mississippi State President Hilbun “for their recent actions in safeguarding our culture and traditions from vicious attacks and influences contrary to the beliefs of the people of Mississippi and the South.”193 In the state Senate, a resolution was introduced calling for King’s pay to be terminated immediately even though, by a previous agreement between King and Chancellor Williams, his resignation was effective nearly four months hence, on May 31, 1956. Gov. J.P. Coleman offered his take on the two professors. “If a man feels a team is unworthy, he ought to get off the team.”194 He added that the University of Mississippi and Mississippi State College “belong to the state and are not private institutions. If the people don’t want the professors there to spread the NAACP propaganda, (the professors) can move to

193 House Concurrent Resolution No. 21, Regular Session 1956, adopted by the House. State of Mississippi Legislature papers, Special Collections Department, Mitchell Memorial Library, Mississippi State University.
194 “Then There Were None,” Time, February 27, 1956.
private schools to find unlimited freedom.” A legislator from Prentiss County called King “a moral derelict and a filthy character.”

And the frustrated and emotional tone of the letters of support for King and Buchanan, in some cases approaching desperation, underscored the ongoing scourge of what one correspondent, A. Emile Joffrion, called “the fascist tyranny currently developing in our state” and how truly rare it was that someone dared publically to defy it. By their plaintive writings, the moderates in various locales seemed to be conceding how few choices they felt they had. The principled actions by brave moderates like King and Buchanan were certainly notable for the controversy and embarrassment they caused powerful defenders of the orthodoxy and for the support they evidently engendered. But the fact that they only numbered two people willing to step forward to risk their jobs, the fact that many of their supporters still felt compelled to cloak their views in private correspondence as opposed to open public expressions, and the fact that the professors were quickly drummed out of the state with no real effective opposition to the banishment shows how widespread the effective complacency and how deep the intractability of Mississippi’s system still was as of 1956.

But in the Kershaw case the elite white Mississippi moderates, however briefly, did pierce the “Magnolia Curtain.” And, as Charles W. Eagles argues, they did thereby establish a kind of precedent for more direct change related to race on Mississippi campuses that culminated in James Meredith’s enrollment at Ole Miss.

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196 “Tempest in a Tea Pot,” Canton County Herald.
some six-plus years later. In the Kershaw controversy, the moderates did make an incremental step that helped set up one of the defining events of the civil rights movement. The progress gained by the moderates’ actions in 1955-1956 was evolutionary but it led, perhaps indirectly, to something more revolutionary.

“A rope would take care of the matter”

One of the points of the organization of this dissertation, spanning 1945-1956, is that by around 1956, Mississippi’s elite white moderates were forming positions and taking some risks on behalf of race-related change to an extent that they had not eleven years before or even a few years before. So even if the change did not seem immediately profound, a notable if incremental pattern was being established. In 1946 and 1947, for example, the differences between Theodore G. Bilbo and John C. Stennis, so important symbolically for the moderates at the time, largely centered on tone and image, as was discussed in Chapter Two. The moderates opted for a more palatable and presentable racist in Stennis, but he was a racist nonetheless who went on to uphold strongly if not so obnoxiously the segregationist line established by his U.S. Senate predecessor, among others. The moderates’ evolution, such as it was, generally had been comparatively subtle to that point. By 1955 and 1956, however, the circumstances of the race issue and its political and social context had evolved and the moderates themselves had grown and even become more radicalized, at least comparatively. The bold actions taken by Morton B. King and William D. Buchanan
are notable cases in point. And an incident in the Delta town of Tchula in Holmes County offers further supporting evidence.

The events surrounding the mass meeting on the night of September 27, 1955 in a school auditorium in Tchula are an example of moderates striving to break from what seemed to be the iron dominance of mass white opinion, just as many of them were then likewise doing in the case of academic freedom and the “Magnolia Curtain.” At that historical moment, such opinion was in a highly anxious, agitated and menacing state, regarding most anything touching on the issue of race. But despite the surrounding furor, many of the Mississippi moderates at the center of this dissertation generally rallied around the two persecuted targets of the Tchula meeting, the leaders of a nearby cooperative farm. In doing so, they revealed once again the extensive network of centrist non-reactionary views and sympathies existing in the state which reflected a clear broad-based – and growing – desire to see some degree of change. This demonstration echoes the support shown for King and Buchanan as they made their stand against “thought control” and screening on Mississippi campuses. The Tchula episode is also illustrative of the ways in which Mississippi’s elite white moderates sought to foster in the state a measure of bi-racial harmony and even, tentatively, desegregation, if not yet full integration.

As was suggested at the outset of this chapter, the Tchula incident as it pertains to the moderates involved elements of extra-regionalism, modernization and

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198 The meeting was held at the Tchula Consolidated School.
199 The meeting took place just four days after the murderers of Emmett Till were acquitted in a courtroom in Sumner in another section of the Delta. The Till case drew intense national and even international attention on Mississippi and the issue of race in the South.
professionalization and therefore further bolsters the thesis of this dissertation. For example, regarding extra-regional factors, Providence cooperative farm, the 2,700-acre cotton-growing venture at the center of the Tchula controversy, was an offshoot of among other things Social Gospel-related idealism, a truly global phenomenon in its missionary dimension, in this particular case aiding poor semi-literate sharecroppers in the Delta.\(^{200}\) As was stated in Chapter One, the farm had been founded and was owned by YMCA national secretary and Protestant missionary Sherwood Eddy, of Illinois, and it was backed by Northern philanthropy.\(^{201}\) The Tchula showdown itself and its fallout attracted national media coverage from the *New York Post, The Reporter, and the Presbyterian Outlook*, among other outlets, and it drew the attention of New York businessman and former Hollywood producer Francis S. Harmon, a YMCA official and trustee at Manhattan’s Riverside Church.\(^{202}\)

Meanwhile, liberal or progressive extra-regional groups like the National Sharecroppers Fund, the National Agricultural Workers Union, the National Council of Churches, and the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen, based in Tennessee, were active in the case and supportive of the two main protagonists. Moreover, the AFL-CIO asked the U.S. Justice Department to deploy the FBI to investigate. The federal government was thus being called into a local Mississippi matter pertaining, at least

\(^{200}\) A fuller discussion of the Social Gospel movement as it relates to Mississippi is included in Chapter One.

\(^{201}\) Sources vary on the farm’s exact name. One source calls it “New Providence Farm.” Another calls it “Providence Farms.” A third calls it “Providence Community.” It was incorporated under state corporation laws as “Co-operative Farms, Inc.”

\(^{202}\) When the Durant Presbyterian Church fired Rev. Marsh Calloway for publically defending A. Eugene Cox and David R. Minter from a raft of charges at the Tchula mass meeting, Harmon took out a full-page advertisement in the *Durant News* paying tribute to Calloway. Letter, Francis S. Harmon to Hazel Brannon Smith, January 5, 1956. Hazel Brannon Smith papers, Special Collections Department, Mitchell Memorial Library, Mississippi State University.
The varied educational and military background of Providence’s two leaders and of their wives, also discussed in Chapter One, is yet another extra-regional element.

Modernizing factors would include Providence’s longstanding efforts to offer an alternative to sharecropping and its feudal living and working conditions, to maintain a federally chartered credit union where African-American farmers could borrow money without having to deal with the usurious interest rates available from plantation stores, and to be a forward-thinking experiment in successful and peaceful bi-racial living. All three of these factors, of course, effectively meant that Providence stood diametrically counter to the surrounding plantation culture and economy of the Delta, a juxtaposition which was the essence of the simmering years-long tension between farm and nearby white community.

Mississippi’s cooperative farm model was “to be a demonstration that both white and colored labor could work together on the cooperative principle and obtain a higher plane of living than was possible under the old plantation system,” declared a promotional pamphlet for Delta Cooperative Farm, also started by Eddy, located near Providence. “We

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203 In the end, the FBI refused to do a full investigation. “Until definite proof is secured in the form of affidavits or statements showing that local and state law enforcement officers were directly involved, no investigation would be undertaken,” the AFL-CIO delegation was told. H.L. Mitchell, “Report from Mississippi,” October 4, 1955. The Bureau’s office in Jackson did, however, collect information from A. Eugene Cox and David R. Minter about their operation of Providence. Attorney Joseph E. Wroten legal bill, October 29, 1955. Allen Eugene Cox papers, Special Collections Department, Mitchell Memorial Library, Mississippi Statea University.

204 As one observer said, in a letter to one of Providence’s leaders: “The Delta planters don’t want their source of income tampered with.” Letter, Claude W. Johnson to David R. Minter, October 8, 1955. Allen Eugene Cox papers.

205 Sam H. Franklin, “The Delta Cooperative Farm, Hillhouse, Mississippi.” Allen Eugene Cox papers.
think segregation is un-Christian,” Providence farm’s director, A. Eugene Cox said, standing up to his accusers that night in Tchula.  

Cox and David R. “Doc” Minter, Providence’s “missionary doctor” and medical clinic director, were “probably the first men in Mississippi history who didn’t leave town when 500 of their fellow white citizens told them to,” in Hodding Carter’s description. As incredible or irrational as it may sound today in some quarters, and as appalling as it was to many of the elite white moderates at the time, in Mississippi as late as 1955 it was indeed possible for there to be a rump “community meeting” – not publicly announced, but clandestinely publicized by word of mouth – totaling perhaps as many as 1000 people, presided over by state lawmakers, the county attorney, other elected officials, and law enforcement officers, at which law-abiding American citizens would be publicly and (virtually) unanimously “invited” to move away from their rightful and longtime home. Cox and his family had lived at Providence since 1942 and the Minters had moved there in 1946. Given the impressive turnout of such local officialdom, the fact that a public school auditorium was the setting for the gathering, and the use at the meeting and in the media of such

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206 Hodding Carter, American Traditions Project submission, November 13, 1956. Hodding II and Betty Werlein Carter papers.  
207 Ibid. The exact number of people attending the mass meeting is not known, but reports put figure and everything from “several hundred” to “1000.”  
208 Various media accounts indicate they were “requested” or “invited” or “told” to leave town, or even to leave Mississippi altogether. A United Press report stated that the meeting passed a resolution “saying it would be ‘better’ should Dr. D. R. Minter and A.E. Cox ‘not remain’ in the area because of ‘certain practices’ on a 2,700-acre plantation near Tchula.” “Reveal Citizens Council Behind Attempt to Expel Pair From Providence,” Delta Democrat-Times, October 2, 1955. Holmes County Sheriff Richard Byrd later claimed he “only dropped in on the meeting” and County Attorney Pat Barrett implied that, contrary to reports, he was actually attending a football game in Tchula that night. “Accused Holmes Men Deny ‘Red’ Charges; Claim They Not Listed as Subversives,” Jackson Daily News. It turns out County Attorney Pat Barrett was head of the Lexington chapter of the White Citizens Council and state Rep.-elect J.P. Love was head of the Tchula chapter. Both men had prominent roles at the Tchula mass meeting.
terms as “evidence,” “testimony,” “rebuttal,” “charges,” “verdict,” “sentence,” “court of public opinion,” and so forth, the proceedings, though completely and secretly arranged by the local White Citizens’ Council, had the imprimatur and weight, if not any of the Constitutional due process, of a legitimate and authorized assembly.209

The “crime” being prosecuted, according to news reports, was “practicing rights for Negroes which clash violently with the social order of this Deep South community.”210 Added state lawmaker Edwin White of Lexington, referring to Cox and Minter at Providence: “they were practicing social equality out there, and we won’t have that.”211 As Hodding Carter wrote, white people in Holmes County “couldn’t understand why (Cox and Minter) wanted to bury themselves among a bunch of Negroes who weren’t making any money for them.”212

Wholesale community vigilantism in Mississippi at that time, which is what the Tchula event amounted to under the thin veneer of legality if not justice, needs to be understood in the longstanding context of lynching in the rural South, and elsewhere, involving as it did both the moral corruption of mob psychology and the use of the gruesome spectacle of public violence to uphold white authority and white supremacy. (The strenuous efforts the Holmes County locals made to guise the Tchula event in “legal” trappings and the fact that a lynching in this case was not actually physically carried out and was replaced in this instance by banishment does indicate some perverse degree of “progress” – or at least a pause in the worst

practices – since when the days the extra-legal use of the rope was swift and seemingly had full public assent.)

Also, in a more immediate sense, the Tchula incident, like the academic freedom debate, took place against a background of portentous upheaval, as many whites saw it, of the Brown ruling; the Emmett Till case, adjudicated only four days before the nighttime Holmes County gathering; other high-profile murders and acts of violence in the Delta; NAACP petitions aiming to desegregate local school districts; the formation of the White Citizens’ Council; and other signs of acute societal vexation in the weeks and months prior to Tchula. “These are sad and terrifying times when every man must stand up and be counted as being for or against segregation,” Clarksdale businessman P.F. Williams wrote in late 1955. The same concussion of events causing tensions to boil on Mississippi campuses was the framework for turmoil in rural towns in the Delta like Tchula as well.

According to one of the organizers of the mass meeting, J.P. “Jim” Love, a Holmes County plantation owner, newly elected state representative and head of the Tchula chapter of the White Citizens’ Council, seeking after the fact to explain the proceedings in a benign and harmless light, the September 27 event was to merely involve a “representative group” of local residents seeking to find whether race

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213 This degree of “progress” tracks the writings of Charles M. Payne who notes that by the 1940s lynching was no longer carried out as a public event, but rather took place privately, in cloaked circumstances. See Payne’s I’ve Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).


215 Letter, P.F. Williams to Owen Cooper, November 11, 1955. Owen Cooper papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
agitation in the area “might lead to another Till killing.” Or, as another prominent attendee, County Attorney Pat Barrett, said afterwards, the expulsion of Cox and Minter was a good thing because, he said, “we don’t want a lot of good niggers getting killed.”

And as in the case of academic freedom, adding to the excitability of the moment were fears and random allegations about communism, which, perhaps inevitably, became intertwined with the Providence controversy involving as it did a non-conforming experimental enclave with origins partly rooted in 1930s Socialism. “Providence Farm is regarded as a mysterious enterprise in Holmes County and the suspicion directed toward it for 17 years is thought to be now coming into the open,” the Presbyterian Outlook reported in 1955. At the mass meeting, for example, Minter and Cox were publically accused, by a state representative, of following “the communist line,” a charge they heatedly refuted.

In any event, for whites in Holmes County a “way of life” was under siege and the locals reacted viscerally and emotionally against a handy nearby target, real or imagined. As an account in The Reporter stated, “the meeting opened when chairman J.P. Love, a new member of the state legislature from Tchula, announced that they were met to defend the American Way of Life,” a freighted notion, to say the least, containing in this context both Cold War and racial meanings.

216 “Angry Citizens Ask White Men to Leave,” Associated Press, September 28, 1955. In 1967, Love was defeated for re-election by Robert Clark, who then became the first African-American legislator in Mississippi since Reconstruction. Love is referred to in some sources as James Love.
218 “Asked to Leave the County,” The Presbyterian Outlook, October 17, 1955.
219 “Accused Men Deny ‘Red’ Charges; Claim They Not Listed as Subversives,” Jackson Daily News.
Law enforcement in the area, and in particular Holmes County Sheriff Richard E. Byrd, also had a special animus against Minter, and this too was part of the backstory. The bad blood between the two men dated to July 3, 1954 when Byrd, who was white, allegedly shot a black man, Henry Randall, when Randall had failed to respond quickly enough to Byrd’s order to “get moving.” In a newspaper libel trial which followed, Minter, who treated Randall’s wounds, testified that indeed Randall had been shot. As Hodding Carter described it, “Doc Minter testified against a law officer who had sworn not only that he hadn’t shot a Negro but that the Negro hadn’t even been shot. Doc had treated the Negro for a gunshot wound and said so.”

A libel judgment, against *Lexington Advertiser* editor and publisher Hazel Brannon Smith, eventually was overturned and the sheriff was admonished by the Mississippi Supreme Court. But meanwhile, with every motivation to want to get even, Holmes County law officers, in conjunction with the White Citizens’ Council and others, had become deeply involved in monitoring the activities of Minter and Cox and in orchestrating the Tchula mass meeting.

As in the Emmett Till “wolf-whistle” case, as many in the Mississippi media were suggestively calling it, the immediate catalyst for the mass confrontation with Cox and Minter were allegations involving the most ancient and incendiary of taboos – interaction between black males and white females. Supposedly four African-American male teenagers from Providence had “whistled at” or used “obscene language” in the presence of a 19-year-old white female while she waited at a bus stop. The youths were arrested and later aggressively questioned by a high-level team.

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of interrogators, comprised of the sheriff, the county attorney, a state legislator and other officials, with a “representative” group of white Holmes County citizens – members of the White Citizens’ Council – looking on, the New Orleans Times-
Picayune reported.222 “The questions went far afield,” as Hodding Carter recounted.223 The terrified youths answered “yes, sir” to virtually every question posed. As it turned out, the arrest and subsequent questioning were most valuable, to the white officials, as a pretext. They provided the necessary means many in the community were seeking to expose the unsettling presence of this cooperative farm in their midst. “We have been trying to get in on the inside of it for a great long time, and this was the break,” Lexington state Rep. Edwin White said.224

That two-hour session of white authorities firing leading questions at the black youths was tape-recorded, and that tape, played aloud at the Tchula gathering on September 27, constituted the primary “evidence” against Cox and Minter, who though sensing trouble had agreed voluntarily to attend the mass meeting. Neither man had been offered any opportunity to discuss the matter with officials ahead of time, to hear the tape beforehand, to consult lawyers, or even to know specifically what the meeting was about. It was, in the words of one headline writer, a “trial by tape recorder.”225 The interrogation of the youths had resulted in “charges” against the Providence leaders spelled out at the meeting: that blacks and whites had sat together at Providence meetings, that at certain gatherings Minter had expressed

225 Ibid.
support for the Supreme Court ruling in the *Brown* case, and that there had been
“mixed swimming parties,” involving white and black children, taking place at the
farm pool. Moreover, there was the allegation that “a private school is operated (at
Providence) where white children visited colored children for certain programs,” as
state Rep.-elect J.P. Love reported it.\(^{226}\)

When the two-hour tape was replayed at the mass meeting, punctuated by
angry shouting and boos from the crowd, Minter and Cox denied these specific
charges.\(^{227}\) But when the public discussion moved to the topic of segregation and
race more generally, the two men acknowledged their unconventional views and
stood their ground. Cox, for example, told the throng, “eventually we would have to
abide by the Supreme Court decision” on *Brown*, he told a reporter afterwards.\(^{228}\) He
also stated at the meeting, “we think segregation is un-Christian.”

In the words of Hodding Carter, “That did it.”\(^{229}\)

The residents attending the meeting overwhelmingly passed a resolution,
again under the presumption that the gathering had some kind of legal standing,
inviting the two men and their families to leave Holmes County “for the good of the
community.” Only two men dared rise to defend Minter and Cox. One was a young
planter, a veteran, named S.J. “Bobo” Foose. The other was a 60-year-old
Presbyterian minister from the nearby town of Durant named Marsh M. Callaway
who told the group the meeting was “undemocratic” and who expressed personal

\(^{226}\) “Asked to Leave the County,” *The Presbyterian Outlook*, October 17, 1955.
\(^{227}\) The so-called “mixed swimming parties” actually involved the presence in the water of an African-
American babysitter while Minter’s young children swam at the pool, Minter said.
\(^{228}\) “Cox, Minter ‘ Bewildered’ at Requests by Citizens,” *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, October 1,
1955.
II and Betty Werlein Carter papers.
confidence in Minter. “Gentlemen, I am sorry you are taking this action,” Calloway said in his remarks. “I’ve known David Minter for 29 years and it’s not Christian, it’s not American.” As with the struggle over academic freedom, both sides in the Tchula controversy cited the surely extra-regional notion of Americanism, as they each claimed to understand it, in defending their positions. The Durant minister also questioned the “legal and moral right” of the accusers to use a tape recording as evidence against Minter and Cox. 230

As the meeting was breaking up and Minter and Cox were leaving, “a man called out that a rope would take care of the matter and others agreed,” Hodding Carter reported. 231 As Cox recalled, “after the adjournment of this meeting certain inflammatory remarks were made by a citizen of Holmes County to the effect that I be lynched. These remarks were made in the presence of four other Holmes County citizens.” 232

The harassment, stalking and threats against Cox and Minter continued for weeks and months afterward. The families were given a supposed “deadline” of November 15 by which they would have to leave. Anonymous letters, phone calls, phone taps, shouting nightriders in automobiles streaming past their houses all were routine. The sheriff set up roadblocks at the entrance to Providence and visitors’ license numbers were jotted down. In some cases, employers of the car-owners were then contacted by Holmes County elected officials. In a common method of

economic harassment instigated by the White Citizens’ Council, insurance policies covering Providence were abruptly canceled.\footnote{The agent for the company that insured the clinic and household goods at Providence was a member of the Council, and the Minters and the Coxes quickly learned that all of their policies had been canceled.” James C. Cobb, \textit{The Most Southern Place on Earth: The Mississippi Delta and the Roots of Regional Identity} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) p. 223.} Given the pressure tactics and surveillance, it was not until six days after the meeting that Cox felt he could speak freely on the telephone, from the home of a friend in nearby Greenwood.\footnote{H.L. Mitchell, “Report from Mississippi,” October 4, 1955. Allen Eugene Cox papers.}

Rev. Calloway, meanwhile, was promptly told to resign from the pulpit of Durant Presbyterian Church because “members of the church have lost confidence in him,” the \textit{Memphis Commercial-Appeal} stated. “His usefulness is at an end here,” a church spokesman said.\footnote{“Elders Ask Minister to Resign in Durant,” \textit{Memphis Commercial-Appeal}, October 6, 1955.} The decision was supported by all but two of the parish’s 45 members. At the Coxes’ and Minters’ own church, the minister noted their plight by avoiding the mass-meeting controversy altogether in his sermon the following Sunday.

Incredibly, Cox and Minter and their families did not move away immediately.\footnote{The Cox and Minter families each had three small children at the time.} They stuck it out in Holmes County for the better part of a year, “for a long enough time to make ashamed a great many of the five hundred who shouted them down and threatened them and told them to leave the state,” Hodding Carter wrote.\footnote{Hodding Carter, “Submission to the American Traditions Project,” November 13, 1956. Hodding II and Betty Werlein Carter papers.} Eventually, however, they did decamp, to Memphis and Tucson respectively. By early 1956, Calloway was leading a parish among oil workers and their families in Good Hope, Louisiana.
The main point of reviewing this sad and disturbing series of events in the context of this dissertation is not just to be reminded of the frightening “length to which good people will sometimes go when fearful of an assault on their way of life,” as the Jackson State Times put it in the days afterward, though that lesson and the issue of goodness in this context are always worth revisiting. What is perhaps equally notable, and what has gotten less attention in studies of white Mississippians of this period, is the extensive degree of support the Minters, the Coxes and Callaway evidently also received. The men were commended by the media, by church sources like Church Women United lay leader Helene Alford, by lawyers, by average people across Mississippi, and by politicians on up to and including Gov.-elect J.P. Coleman. Editor Philip E. Mullen, then at the Madison County Herald, on observing the Durant church’s treatment of Callaway, remarked, “ain’t it amazing how a bunch of people will find an educated man, and pay him a big salary to reveal unto them the Word of the Lord – and then get mad at him when he does.”

This impressive demonstration of support was in addition to the many connections Cox and Minter had had with elite white Mississippi moderates in the period leading up to the Tchula case. It also was in addition to extra-regional support the Providence leaders and Rev. Calloway received. This Providence farm episode therefore, for all its notoriety as an extremist blight, does in a wider sense reinforce the message conveyed in the case of academic freedom and Ole Miss, namely that

240 Callaway, for example, received financial support from the Hartford Seminary, a religious school in Connecticut. Letter, Marsh M. Callaway to David and Susan Minter, January 9, 1956. Allen Eugene Cox papers. Also, in December 1955, a New York businessman, Francis S. Harmon, took out an advertisement in the weekly Durant News in support of Callaway. Letter, Francis S. Harmon to Hazel Brannon Smith, January 5, 1956. Hazel Brannon Smith papers.
amid an overall repressive atmosphere and even given an extreme example of that repression, there were signs of a broad and growing desire for some change regarding race. Or at least there was a sharp reaction against what the moderates saw as un-American, or “un-Christian,” community behavior. The two situations, academic freedom and Tchula, thus ran parallel, and not just chronologically. Many of the same elite white moderates such as Hodding Carter, A. Emile Joffrion and Will D. Campbell figured prominently in both cases and many of the same arguments, about freedoms, were repeated.241

“This is just a reminder that Mississippi, including Holmes County, is still in the United States,” Hodding Carter wrote, in an editorial, three days after the mass meeting. Cox and Minter, he added, “are entitled to a basic American right. It is the right to disagree with any other American; openly and in security.”242 His editorial was in essence the very same brief Carter had been making on behalf of academic freedom for some time. Charles Mantinband, the rabbi at Temple B’Nai Israel in Hattiesburg who was active on the Mississippi Council of Human Relations sent a copy of Carter’s editorial in the form of a letter to the editor of the Hattiesburg American.243 Mantinband added a postscript. “May I add that I know Dr. Minter and Gene Cox, medical missionary and farmer, for some years, and count them as my friends,” he wrote. “No gentler and nobler souls exist in these parts. These are self-

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241 The recollections of Will D. Campbell, for one, indicate an interesting tie-in between the controversy over speakers at Ole Miss and the situation at Providence Farm. “The occasion of my first visit (to Providence) was prompted by a speaker we had on campus, Dr. G. MacLeod Bryan, then in the philosophy department at Mercer University in Macon, Georgia,” Campbell said. Campbell took Bryan to visit Providence. Letter, Will D. Campbell to A. Eugene Cox, December 21, 1972. Allen Eugene Cox papers.


243 A. Eugene Cox was a member of the executive board of the Mississippi Council on Human Relations.
sacrificing and dedicated men, performing a labor of love, literally ‘for Christ’s sake’.”

“Stay there”

Though the deliberately cloaked circumstances of the October 1955 meeting between Gov.-elect J.P. Coleman and A. Eugene Cox and David R. Minter suggest the Mississippi’s “Magnolia Curtain” of intimidation was still in effect and influenced even the schedule of the man about to become the state’s highest elected official, the message conveyed that evening to the leaders of Providence was one of hope and perseverance.

The meeting of the three men had been quietly arranged by a separate party, newspaper editor Hazel Brannon Smith. Cox and Minter went to the meeting only after safely checking their families into the Holiday Inn in nearby Greenwood. The session was scheduled on a weekend, after dinner late at night, in the rural Choctaw County town of Ackerman, far from Coleman’s Attorney General office in Jackson where he was conducting official business in preparation for taking over as governor in January.  

Coleman lived in Ackerman, but the meeting was not held in anyone’s home, but in the small law office he maintained in town. The conference lasted two hours.

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245 For example, Coleman’s letters written during the period just prior to his assuming the governorship were written on Attorney General stationery listing the official Jackson office.
According to Cox’s notes, the discussion ranged over a number of topics, including the *Brown* decision, the shooting of Henry Randall by Sheriff Richard Byrd, and especially Providence farm, its staff and its programs. Toward the end of their talk, Cox brought up the central question: What should he and Minter do in light of the threats that had been made and the September 27 ultimatum?

Coleman’s response was animated and direct, Cox remembered. “Pointing to a large window in the front of his office, (Coleman) stated that often times, when working alone late at night, he was reminded of the fact that as a judge and prosecuting attorney he had been responsible for sending many persons to the state penitentiary. Some of them had promised to ‘see him later’.” Now turning to Cox and Minter, the governor-elect drove his point home. “You can’t run from it.” He added: “Stay there.”

Cox went on to conclude, “It was our understanding that Mr. Coleman made some contacts later in an attempt to have some of the heat taken off our backs.”

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247 Ibid.
Conclusion: Atticus Finch and Us

In the mid-1940s, a group of young elite white Mississippians, many of them just back from the service, began coalescing around a new public agenda for their state. Over the next decade or so, their interlocking priorities came to include modernizing the state’s economy, developing a more robust professional class and professional structure, improving Mississippi’s external reputation, enhancing the state’s schools and leading universities, linking the state more closely with other regions, and tempering its politics by toning down the relentless obsession with race. In attempting to upgrade their state, as they saw it, these “moderates” encountered the intransigence of a then-prevailing white ideology derivative of the Old South that was deeply suspicious and antagonistic to change, especially as it pertained to race. This dissertation has really been about these two competing views among whites of Mississippi’s future. It has been about how the elite moderates implemented their particular vision from 1945-1956.

Notably, throughout the 12-year process the moderates remained racial segregationists, though with somewhat diminishing commitment and growing ambiguity as the years progressed. The extent to which they would go to preserve segregation was gradually reduced to the point where their defense of it sometimes took the form of half-
hearted ritual, pro forma, or it increasingly contained caveats and stipulations. Their effort to improve the state was done in their own image and, at least in the short term, for their own benefit. Paradoxically, they sought a more advanced, fairer and even marginally more democratic society, but they also wanted to keep control for themselves. Mississippi had for so long tied itself into a self-defeating, self-deluding knot of legalisms, false justifications, and flimsy rationales in desperate support of white supremacy and white control of the economy. The post-World War II moderates were, perhaps too slowly and too cautiously, part of the ongoing process of unbinding the state from its bitterly painful past.

So ultimately how should history assess figures operating in the “middle” in an overall polarized environment? When we look at figures in history who did, in their calculus, what could be done as opposed to what we today agree should have been done, how are we to evaluate them? Heroes and villains may seem comparatively easy to cast, understand, and categorize, even if such packaging invariably involves the distorting element of projection, but what about those plainly stumbling along, so to speak, on the continuum between moral absolutes? Is there historical value in being so compromised, or are “moderates” simply everyday cowards who in their tentativeness and pragmatism obstruct the way to progress and justice? Is there such thing as a dynamic middle, or is that interpretation just rhetorical camouflage for moral timidity, befuddlement and stalling? Can we identify with conflicted positions, and therefore is this dissertation really about us and about the cross-buffed greater human condition in the face of complex challenges? Moreover, did the small group of elite white Mississippi moderates
of 1945-1956 chronicled here serve any larger purpose than simply being caught amid a highly fluid period of social change? In a sense, the questions being posed by way of summation come down to this: So what? What final meaning are we meant to take from this project?

    The answers basically involve three interrelated themes.

    First of all, the Mississippi moderates’ most valuable contribution to history is that of brokers and as an effective mitigating force at a historical moment when such societal ballast was sorely needed. In their sometimes maddening – particularly from a presentist perspective – contortions, half-measures and contradictions, these individuals did help maintain a degree of peace and balance in a situation in the post-war American South that might very well have degenerated to a much greater degree, perhaps into full-blown race war, without their intercession. With a degree of credibility extending to two rival and increasingly mutually-alienated constituencies, they had a vital role in keeping the society from unraveling further into chaos. “Let’s keep our shirts on,” Hodding Carter cautioned his (mostly white) readers the day after the Brown ruling.¹

    Instead of Mississippi having a violent revolution and then a bloody crackdown in response, the state experienced a comparatively tranquil evolution, facilitated by the moderates in large part. In a sense, they stepped into the mediating and balancing role where government rightly should have been. With Mississippi’s state government both negligible in size and hopelessly corrupted by the imperatives of white supremacy in those early post-war years, there was a huge void to be filled. Of course there was extensive violence and death as it was, but without the moderates it very well could have been much worse. As such, the moderates were an important early part of a

¹ Delta Democrat Times, May 18, 1954.
reconciliation, healing and forgiveness process that has been and remains Mississippi’s and the nation’s great challenge with respect to race.

By encouraging compromise in an otherwise polarized setting, the moderates’ middle position worked as social shock absorber from the opposing directions – from more extremist whites and from blacks, to simplify the paradigm. “Both Races Must Reject Hot-Headed Leaders,” read the headline above a 1955 editorial in moderate George A. McLean’s *Tupelo Daily Journal.* McLean and others, of course, sidestepped the matter of whether some aggressive “hot-headed” calls for revolutionary change were justified under the obviously unfair and undemocratic circumstances then (and, to some degree, now still) in effect in Mississippi. The moderates generally put a far higher value on order and tranquility, with them remaining in a position of power, than they did on overarching justice and righteousness. At least that is how they acted in the short-term and that is how history should evaluate them. This, of course, was in direct contravention of the aims of the coming civil rights movement, which in a sense from the mid-1950s on was a response to the failure, moral and otherwise, of the moderates’ approach which preceded it and which, ironically, helped make it possible.

The moderates wanted to avoid risking the pain and convulsion to Mississippi – and the threat to their own power – that, in their view, full, direct and prompt implementation of a broad attempt at racial justice and equality would surely have brought in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The moderates’ priority and focus remained always on what was politically practical and realistic, from their perspective, and not – though they were well aware of it – on what was transcendently right. And though they were seen as and were indeed moderates in some amorphous “middle” position, they also

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simultaneously were the effective opposition to the white traditionalists given that virtually all Mississippi blacks in the late 1940s and 1950s were excluded from the vote. In practical politics, for the 12-year period under discussion here, the moderates thus drove the state’s transformation to a degree, and the traditionalists deeply despised them for it.

The moderates were not only an enabler of some change they also, on the other hand, served to prolong business as usual. The cooling-off chamber and force for restraint the moderates provided, populated by a strengthening network of elites residing in what passed for an awkward political “center,” allowed Mississippi to negotiate an extremely difficult period not only in relative peace but also with order, in the service of what the moderates – and they alone – deemed to be a manageable transition. Those priorities, of course, may have seemed expedient or discredited at the time – and have seemed since – especially when compared with the more heroic and overarching values, exalted by more ideologically pure voices, such as “freedom” and “justice,” or, from the reverse pole, “tradition” and the ever-sacrosanct “Southern way of life.”

But the moderates’ position, however surely relativist, should be seen as more than meliorative. Their work went beyond just avoiding greater social turmoil and violence and thus preserving with minimal disturbance the existing political and social hierarchy while allowing grudging change. They were more than merely practical segregationists strategically accommodating the forces of civil rights only when they absolutely had to. And this related point constitutes the moderates’ second major contribution. The moderates were truly transformative in that they established a durable structure for lasting fundamental change. This trend became more pronounced as the
period 1945-1956 wore on. The argument in this dissertation therefore modifies the more conventional understanding that social change only happens in society when marginal groups like the underclass, or in this case, blacks in post-war Mississippi, demand more than the minimal crumbs the powerful typically offer them as the bare cost necessary to calm potential social discord. Of course, black demands and activism were essential to post-war change, as authors like John Dittmer and Charles M. Payne suggest, but the point here is that moderate whites, too, played a crucial part, in their own way.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s Mississippi, the elite white moderates endeavored to set up a system – reflected in electoral politics, acts of the legislature, industrialization, prison policy, higher education, elevated standards of professional authority, and the other areas enumerated in these pages – that marginally facilitated peaceful constructive change while not yielding much essential power, at least in the near term. Some critics, including many historians today, would deride the moderates’ degree of commitment to change as far too little at far too slow a pace. And that critique is more than justified. But the white moderates’ efforts did accomplish what no one before them had ever really done, at least to such an extent, and that is to establish a workable structure for change, which in turn allowed a more extensive transformation coming in the future led primarily by others.

The moderates provided a means for evolutionary change, as morally dubious as that deliberate process was in the context of rampant systemic injustice. The gradual change for which they stood, however frustrating to those seeking immediate comprehensive remedies, could be seen over time. “As one who returns infrequently to the South, I am struck by the extent to which segregation has been modified each time I
go back,” wrote E. Clifton Daniel, an editor at the *New York Times*, in 1954.\(^3\) While not directly challenging segregation in any prompt and meaningful way, at least in the period 1945-1956, the elite white moderates were an important part of that long-term “modification” process, for example.

And the third takeaway message, one which was suggested in the Introduction, is that the elite white Mississippi moderates’ middle position in 1945-1956 certainly reflects aspects of the reality of our own daily lives of contradiction, tradeoffs, caution, self-interest, inattentiveness and trying to do our mortal best in the midst of the constant presence of large ambient moral questions. However harshly – with good reason – we are tempted to judge them today, the elite white Mississippi moderates of the early post-war did act at the time in a way we can now see as very human, predictable and understandable. It is helpful to remember that. But then again, evil and cruelty are also human, predictable and understandable, so one must stand well short of lauding or apologizing for the moderates. Nevertheless, learning about them is to know something perhaps unsettling about our flawed selves.

So in looking at the period 1945-1956, we are left once again with a tension-filled blend of transformation and resistance, or what J. Oliver Emmerich called the “two faces of Janus.”\(^4\) The elite white moderates that have been the focus of this project were allied with both. They embodied the region’s contradiction in facing the issue of race, at least as seen by Mississippi’s white moderates. They had one foot firmly in modernity and what they knew was not only right but inevitable, and the other in the old order of

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\(^3\) Memorandum, E. Clifton Daniel to Turner Catledge, May 13, 1954. Turner Catledge papers.

segregation and its racist, greed-centered dark underpinnings. It was an “eternal struggle,” Hodding Carter writes, “between our moral and material selves.”

The moderates’ conflicted position in later years

There is a touch of irony that this dissertation, devoted in part to an argument that a group of elite white Mississippi moderates served to help open the state’s “closed society” during the early post-war years, should end in a period, the mid-1950s, when the closure by many measures would seem to have reached its most compressed and impregnable. For example, as was discussed in the previous chapter, by 1956, Morton B. King, William D. Buchanan, A. Eugene Cox, David R. Minter and Marsh M. Callaway were all hounded out of the state by various education, church, law enforcement and government officials after making their stand for change. Even given the degree of progress explored in this project, by the immediate post-

Brown period the “Magnolia Curtain” still apparently cloaked nearly everything and would continue to do so for years to come.

So the mid-1950s needs to be understood as involving this well-known post-

Brown white reaction, clearly. But it also was a time featuring other, effectively oppositional or at least non-cooperative or complicating, forces, which undercut any conception, now outdated, of an unshakably defiant white monolithic response. In many ways, developments in Mississippi led by the moderates the mid-1950s, such as enhanced

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academic freedom, represented a continuation of substantial evidence of modernization and professionalization indirectly leading to some modest change – or to effective and growing resistance to the worst white extremism – traceable throughout the years since the end of World War II. The fledgling modern and professional infrastructure largely initiated and assembled by the elite white moderates since 1945 was a factor in helping the state redirect, to the modest extent it did, the mid-1950s backlash.6

The moderates, of course, remained active beyond the timeframe covered in this dissertation. During the “heroic period” of the civil rights movement which extended to the mid-1960s, and in the years afterward, they maintained their complex straddle position in a deeply divided Mississippi, nudging the state forward but maintaining an abiding if increasingly complicated commitment to the its traditions. In the late 1950s, for example, Gov. J.P. Coleman and sources like the Jackson State Times, for a time under the editorship of moderate Norman Bradley, called for a revision of the state constitution, which had been written in 1890 for the basic purpose of disenfranchising the state’s black residents and enshrining, through arcane legalistic maneuvers, white supremacy. As with an issue like the Justice of the Peace local courts, discussed in Chapter Four, the moderates wanted the “outmoded, inadequate” constitution revamped to meet current needs, according to the State Times. The constitution “was written to serve the state in an era entirely different from the present,” the paper noted.7 In their arguments, moderates like Bradley thus stressed modernity and professionalization, and

7 “Constitutional Revision is Real Need,” Jackson State Times, September 22, 1955.
not explicitly the underlying or collateral incendiary issues like racial justice. So the moderates once again were change agents, but only indirectly and to a limited point.

As the moderates well knew or suspected, modernizing the state constitution in areas like fairer apportionment of legislative seats, based on current population distribution, would eventually have the effect of wresting control of state government away from the most rural conservative white elements in the state, which would in turn gradually have relatively progressive consequences with respect to policy impacting race. For one thing, the debate over the merits of “one man, one vote” concerning the apportionment of legislative districts had obvious if unspoken parallels with the issue of black suffrage; the underlying principles of fairness and democracy were the same for both. The airing of the issue could not help but stir thinking if not debate about the racial context of the state constitution.

Meanwhile, the moderates, with Gov. J.P. Coleman in the lead, fought to locate a Veterans Administration hospital in Jackson in the late 1950s. It was opposed by many segregationists in Mississippi because the hospital would be operated on an integrated basis. In this way, a federal agency – namely, the VA – can be seen as being an extra-regional force for change. The moderates favored the proposal not because it meant integration but because the hospital services were needed. Thus, the moderates in this instance once again opted for modernization and professionalization (and not explicitly or intentionally racial fairness and integration). Then a degree of social change, including eventually on the race front, followed from those priorities. The hospital was built.

A couple of years later, the moderates had a role in trying to broker a solution to the James Meredith/Ole Miss integration crisis. Mississippi figures like Marks lawyer
Lomax Lamb Jr. were in contact with officials in the Kennedy White House and Justice Department in the days leading up to what became the Ole Miss “riot” of Sept. 30-Oct. 1, 1962. And Charles Tindall, an attorney from Greenville, was one of 200 “state leaders” who gathered at the Edward’s House Hotel in Jackson several days after the riot to consider a resolution calling for recognition by Mississippi and its citizens of the need to cooperate with federal authorities, to encourage Ole Miss faculty to remain and to call on all parties to keep the university open. One participant rose to his feet to challenge Tindall: “Aren’t you talking integration?” Tindall replied that “I didn’t care what it was called, the State of Mississippi could not afford to have the University of Mississippi closed.” The resolution passed. And thus, though the decision was arrived at indirectly and only under threat of crisis, by 1962 even the most establishmentarian elite white Mississippi moderates were willing to go on the public record in support of racial integration, at least in this instance. It was a small but yet another meaningful step forward.

Meanwhile, critics of the moderates’ mediating role in the broader, trans-regional context came to include the likes of Martin Luther King Jr., who in the Letter from Birmingham City Jail in 1963 basically argued that to value order over justice, however disruptive the effect of implementation may be on a community, was itself unjust. Writing while sitting behind bars, King saw the moderate structure as regressive, more frustrating than “absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will” and completely

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8 Tindall’s memoir references an Edward’s House Hotel. Other sources mention an Edwards Hotel, in Jackson. One of the large hotels in Jackson in those years where most legislators stayed and where large conferences were held was called the King Edward Hotel. All three names refer to the same institution, which officially has been called by different names at different times.

9 Tindall memoir, p. 78..
inflexible. “I had hoped that the white moderate would understand that law and order exist for the purpose of establishing justice,” he wrote, “and that when they fail to do this they become dangerously structured dams that block the flow of social progress.”

If order is in fact associated with corruption, he argued, then a form of disorder – what King called “constructive non-violent tension that is necessary for growth” – is preferable.

Therefore, in the climatic period of the civil rights movement, the white moderates’ middle position continued to be a deep disappointment to some and is similarly dismissed by many to this day.

The gradualist argument regarding the white moderates – one that privileges slow, deliberate change – that is at the heart of this dissertation has a number of parallels and applications, including the widely discussed notion that the plausibility of the Barack Obama presidency was facilitated by decades of black role models and a growing trend toward color-blindness in entertainment-industry casting which helped prepare enough of white America to comfortably imagine Obama’s ascension and to vote him in. For instance, Jackie Robinson, Sidney Poitier, Bill Cosby, Oprah Winfrey and other popular black figures in the post-World War II (white-dominated) mass media would fit into the category Shelby Steele calls “bargainers,” embodying, at least in their image, the values of family, hard work, success, integrity, and honesty in a non-threatening and admirable package millions of whites could and even wanted to accept.

The cumulative result by

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11 Ibid., 291.

2008 in that case was a transformed electoral atmosphere of which Obama could take advantage.

Of course, the story is not quite that simple. For example, the formation of a black middle class in America beginning in meaningful numbers around the 1940s, Franklin Roosevelt’s 1941 executive order outlawing discrimination at defense plants, the integration of the Armed Services starting under Harry Truman, and the key civil rights legislation of the 1960s, all also helped bring African-Americans more into the mainstream of American life. These major developments, among others, could be seen as also helping comprise a necessary predicate for the eventual possibility of a black national leader and even a U.S. president.

The point is that gradualism, however frustrating in the near-term, can deliver historical results and as scholars we need to recognize such incremental contributions.

The most famous fictional elite white Southern moderate of the 20th century was and is probably Atticus Finch of Mississippi’s adjacent state of Alabama. In a recent *New Yorker* article, Malcolm Gladwell takes the fatherly protagonist of *To Kill a Mockingbird* and his historical ilk to task for humanizing rather than effectively challenging the Jim Crow system. Finch, much like the post-war moderates of Mississippi, sought accommodation but not basic reform. The elite Mississippians worked within an existing system, nudging it forward positively in a series of indirect ways, but at least in 1945-1956 they never really recognized and took a stand against its fundamental evil and injustice. We can today hold them to account for that, and this dissertation has.

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But what about us? What evils existing today are we standing up to, risking everything? And what will historians someday say about the moral compromises and the moderate steps we feel compelled to take every day?
The following is an annotated list of the 127 individuals who comprise my case study for this dissertation. The list was compiled over a period of years as my research traced the “snowball” sampling of growing numbers of contacts among Mississippi’s elite white “moderates” of the 1945-1956 period. I started first with Hodding Carter and then with a handful of his prominent close associates with whom he had significant amounts of correspondence, such as James W. Silver, William F. Winter, Hazel Brannon Smith, J. Oliver Emmerich, George A. McLean, Will D. Campbell and Duncan M. Gray Jr. And then I looked at the individuals in Mississippi with whom this larger group was in contact and had close and mutually supportive association, and the web expanded further from there. The decision to include certain names on the list was purely subjective, based on the materials that were available, what I could ascertain about the person’s background, and the existing record of their views on politics and race. Written documentation – letters, articles, memos, speech texts, etc. – was thus essential. So if the list seems overweighed with people in areas like journalism, the ministry or politics – fields with a substantial paper trail – that is the simple explanation.
The inclusion on the list of some names may be controversial. In its defense, I can say I included the names here based on my own reading of the written record. Thus, if there were three letters written by a certain person and two of them indicate certain held views on race, I might or might not make the judgment that those letters are sufficiently representative. My use of the label “elite” might rest on the fact that an individual was a pastor in a church or an executive with a well-known corporation or had graduated from a prominent school or was a member of a landed family. The list is not meant to be comprehensive, but it is indicative of my research methods and it is therefore important, in my view, to share with the reader.

The brief biographical information, where included, is written in such a way so as not to repeat but rather to augment what has already appeared in the text.

1.) **Alexander, Chalmers Whitfield**

   Jackson

   Alexander was known as “Mr. Alex.” He was born in Jackson on September 29, 1908. Alexander’s father was a lawyer. He graduated from Princeton, Class of 1932. At Princeton he was in the Jamesburg Reform School Work and the Young Peoples Society. Jamesburg is a reference to the New Jersey Reform School in Jamesburg, N.J. He graduated from the Jackson School of Law. He was associated with the Internal Revenue Service as a tax lawyer and as a vice president and trust officer with the First National Bank of Jackson. He was an elder in the Presbyterian church where he taught a Bible class for men. He was a captain in the Air Corps in World War II. Chalmers Alexander worked in the Century Building in Jackson. He was on the membership roster of the Mississippi Historical Society in 1952. Alexander was a member of the state legislature as of 1959. He died June 29, 1996.

2.) **Alford, Helene**

   Jackson

   Alford was active in Church Women United. She was state chair of the Mississippi Council on Interracial Cooperation, which became the Mississippi Council on Human Relations. The Council on Human Relations is associated with the Southern Regional Council. Alford signed a pledge for “Assignment Race.” She was a good friend of the A. Eugene Cox and the David Minter families and she expressed her horror and shock in a letter to Mr. and Mrs. Cox regarding the Tchula mass meeting dated Oct. 8, 1955.
3.) Arline, N. Paul  Greenville
He was a minister at the First Christian Church in Greenville around 1945.

4.) Atkinson, Ralph  Clinton
Atkinson graduated from Mississippi College in 1956. He was the editor-in-chief of the Arrowhead, a college publication, in 1955. In that capacity, he ran a favorable article about Hodding Carter, a piece which upset the school authorities. He also holds degrees from the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and the University of Michigan.

5.) Bache, W.L. Jr.  Vicksburg

6.) Bazzel, W.T.  Kossuth
Bazzel was a retired Methodist minister, of the North Mississippi Conference.

7.) Berger, Fred C.  Natchez
Berger was a lawyer with a firm called Berger and Callon.

8.) Bettersworth, John Knox  Starkville
Bettersworth was born in 1909. He was affiliated the Department of History and Government, Mississippi State College, later Mississippi State University. By 1953, he was chairman of the department. He was something of a counterpart at State to James W. Silver at Ole Miss, meaning a longtime liberal or progressive presence on the faculty. Was vice-president for academic affairs at State from 1961-1977. A “leadership” lecture series was named in his honor at State. He was an original member of the Mississippi Humanities Council, which was begun in 1972. Bettersworth was a member of the Mississippi Historical Commission, along with James W. Silver and Frank Smith. Bettersworth wrote History of Mississippi, a widely used high school textbook. His other textbook titles include Mississippi: The Land and the People. He was one of the founders of educational television in Mississippi and he was head of Mississippians for Educational Television. Bettersworth was a historian of the Civil War, of the Confederacy, of Mississippi and of Mississippi State. Bettersworth came to State in 1937 after graduating from Millsaps College and getting his Ph.D. in history from Duke University. He was a member of the Mississippi Historic Preservation Professional Review Board, a group which reviewed preservation projects for the state. He was also a member of the Board of Trustees of the Department of Archives and History. He died Dec. 31, 1991. Bettersworth is mentioned in the first sentence of Silver’s “Mississippi: The Closed Society.”

9.) Blackmon, James M.  Greenville
Known as Jimmy, Blackmon was associated with Blackmon Cotton Co. in Greenville.

10.) Blair, Ed  Jackson
Blair was the Mississippi organizer for the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, a position which exposed him to considerable physical danger in the 1940s and 1950s. He was in correspondence with James W. Silver around 1953. Blair’s boss in the union was Jacob S. Potofsky. Here’s what Silver has to say in Running Scared, page 30: “In the
1940s, Ed Blair and I became friends. He was an organizer for the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, who, [sic] by the end of the decade, had some five thousand members in Mississippi.”

11.) **Blass, Joel**  

Wiggins  

Blass was born in 1917. He got his undergraduate and law degrees at Louisiana State University. Blass was a veteran. He won the Bronze Star in World War II and served as a major in the U.S. Army infantry. Blass served in the state House of Representatives from 1953 to 1960. Therefore Blass was a state legislator in 1955 during the controversy between Hudding Carter and the legislature over his Look magazine article. Blass was a lawyer from Wiggins, in Stone County, and in the legislature he headed the opposition to the amendment to abolish the public schools in Mississippi. That was in 1955.  

According to Wilson F. “Bill” Minor, Blass “in 1955 had opposed a constitutional amendment pushed through by powerful House Speaker Walter Sillers to give the legislature power to abolish the public school system in the event of integration.” According to an article by Minor in March, 1956, Blass was one of the legislators who drafted an interposition resolution. In January, 1954, Joel Blass introduced a bill in the legislature to make “commingling of the races” in Mississippi illegal. So, his track record was mixed, as with all of them. Blass also supported a losing battle in 1957 to rewrite the 1890 constitution. Also in 1957, Blass was a member of the Mississippi State Building Commission. After his legislative career, Blass was an instructor and then an assistant dean at the Ole Miss law school. Later in his career, in 1989, Blass was appointed to the state Supreme Court.

12.) **Bradley, Norman**  

Jackson  

For a little over one year in the mid-1950s, Bradley was the executive editor of the *State Times* in Jackson. He left that position because he had difficulties with his publisher over his moderate editorial policy on such issues as the Emmett Till case. Bradley became editor of the *State Times* in 1955 and left in 1956. He was born in 1913 in Flora, Miss. Bradley wrote a letter of support for P.D. East’s application for a Nieman fellowship in early 1957. Prior to joining the *State Times*, Bradley was an editorial writer for the *Chattanooga Times*. He returned to the Chattanooga paper after his stint in Jackson. Bradley graduated from Millsaps in 1934, in the same class with Garland (Bo) Holloman. Bradley was close to Episcopal Bishop Duncan M. Gray Sr. and Dr. William B. Selah, pastor of Galloway Church in Jackson, the Methodist congregation where Bradley worshipped.

13.) **Brunini, Joseph Bernard Aloysius**  

Natchez  

He was born in 1909 in Vicksburg. He was a priest. He was active in something called Catholic Action of the South. Brunini was the Catholic bishop of Mississippi from 1967 until the early 1980s. He was associated with the Southern Regional Council. In 1956, Brunini was the secretary-treasurer of the Mississippi Council on Human Relations. He received his B.A. from Georgetown in 1930. He got a law degree from Catholic University in 1934. He was ordained a priest in 1933. His religious training included a period of study in Rome.
14.) **Bryant, W. Alton**

Oxford

Bryant was the provost at Ole Miss and was “man of honor” according to Ole Miss chaplain Will D. Campbell. There is an interdepartmental communication from Bryant to James W. Silver on November 5, 1957, regarding Silver’s grant money. He caved in to political pressure during the Meredith trial, however, when he told the court he did not know if any black students were on campus. The statement was either delusional or a deliberate falsehood, a higher court subsequently concluded.

15.) **Buchanan, William**

Starkville

Buchanan’s nickname was “Buck.” He was born in 1918. A longtime academic, Buchanan was associated for years with Washington and Lee University. By 1956, he was a professor of government at Mississippi State. According to the Morton King papers at Ole Miss, Buchanan submitted his resignation over a matter of principle on race and he was immediately stripped of his assignments and barred from campus. “He was released immediately,” King recalled. Buchanan left State because of the Kershaw incident at Ole Miss and in protest of a bill before the state legislature “which will make it a crime for a teacher of government or anyone else to criticize any official or policy of state government.” Hodding Carter wrote him when he resigned and called him a “courageous man” and offered to help him find a new job. Earlier, in 1954, Buchanan, and two other authors, published a book titled, “An International Police Force and Public Opinion: Polled Opinion in the United States 1939-1953.” It was a publication of the Center for Research on World Political Institutions in the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton. Buchanan, a political scientist, was a staff member of the Social Science Research Center at Mississippi State. Among other things, he was co-author (with Hadley Cantril) of How Nations See Each Other, the UNESCO study of public opinion which was published by the University of Illinois Press in 1953. Buchanan was at one time an assistant professor of government and a political psychologist with the Social Science Research Center, which published one of his books. Buchanan received his B.A. and M.A. at Washington and Lee and was a newspaper reporter in Lynchburg, Va., and Mobile, Ala. He was in public relations work at Roanoke College before going to Princeton to study public opinion. He wrote a book titled The Mississippi Electorate in 1953.

16.) **Caffey, Shed Hill**

Philadelphia

Caffey was a physician. He was a medical resident intern at the University of Virginia Hospital in 1952. He was a student of James W. Silver in the 1940s.

17.) **Calloway, Marsh**

Durant

Calloway was a Presbyterian minister who stuck up for A. Eugene Cox and David Minter at the mass meeting in September 1955 held in Tchula, in Holmes County. His church, the Durant Presbyterian Church, fired him almost immediately. On Nov. 20, 1955, the church unanimously voted him out. Calloway’s offense consisted of describing a friend, Minter, as “a fine Christian man” and questioning the legitimacy of the Tchula proceedings. Francis Stuart Harmon, a native Mississippian and a New York City businessman, had a full-page tribute to Calloway printed in the Durant News.
18.) Calvin, J.B. Picayune
Calvin was associated with the Tate Insurance Agency.

19.) Campbell, Will Davis
Campbell was born in 1924. He wrote a number of books, the best known of which is probably *Brother to a Dragonfly*. Campbell also wrote a book about Episcopal Bishop Duncan M. Gray Jr. called *And Also With You*. Campbell came from the country outside McComb, near a town called Liberty in Amite County. Campbell studied at Louisiana College, Wake Forest, Tulane and Yale Divinity School, from which he was graduated in 1952. Because of his Mississippi roots, he apparently was considered safe by Ole Miss which hired him to be director of religious life – the chaplain – in 1954. Yet he came to the Mississippi campus trying to stir up trouble, by his own admission. Campbell was chaplain at Ole Miss only for two years, 1954-1956. At Ole Miss, Campbell was, according to Morton King, “a good guy trapped in a firm bind: between the rock of his religious convictions and the hard place of his employment by and agency of the state.” He attended a meeting by the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen, a liberal church group, in January, 1956, in Nashville. A mailing of Howard “Buck” Kester’s describes the meeting: “The purpose of this “off the record” conference is to consider how churches and individual Christians may be helped to face more forthrightly responsibilities now required by the Supreme Court decisions against segregation. Through sharing our concerns and discussing our needs we hope to reach definite, realistic proposals that will be useful to Southern church groups in these days of crisis.” Campbell went to the National Council of Churches after he left Ole Miss. After his work with the National Council of Churches, doing racial and cultural relations work, Campbell became head of the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen. There was a PBS documentary made about Campbell titled, “God’s Will.” In the 1960s, it was Will Campbell who recruited Jon Daniels to come down to Alabama, where, as it turns out, he (Daniels) was killed. That “hit Will pretty hard,” according to Joe Earl Elmore. Campbell is mentioned in John Egerton’s book *Speak Now Against the Day*. Campbell paid tribute to P.D. East in *Brother to a Dragonfly*. Campbell had an “uncomplicated Christian logic,” according to James W. Silver, in *Running Scared*. Campbell was close to P.D. East, Duncan Gray Jr., Easton King, Robert Walkup, A.Eugene Cox, and others. Campbell was unusual in that he was able to talk with both ends of the ideological spectrum in the South – the poor whites and the blacks. Campbell knew the Klan and knew people in the Klan. He was friendly with them. Campbell was present in Memphis the night Martin Luther King was killed – April 4, 1968 – and there are famous photographs of him grieving along with the rest of King’s party in the Lorraine Motel that night.

20.) Carmichael, Jeannette Bay St. Louis
Carmichael was the editor and publisher of the *Bay St. Louis Light*.

21.) Carr, Oscar Clark Jr. Clarksdale
Carr’s lifespan was 1923-1977. He was a businessman in Clarksdale. He was a partner in the Carr Gin Company of Clarksdale and was president of the Carr Planting Company of Clarksdale. He was later a backer of Robert Kennedy and George McGovern. He was a student at Cornell for a year and a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy in 1945. By
1956, Carr was vice-president of the Delta Council. Carr was an ally of Hodding Carter III’s and was a delegate to the 1968 Democratic National Convention. Eventually he moved to Manhattan, and later had a role in the Jimmy Carter campaign in 1976. He was the president of Episcopal Laymen of Mississippi, was a member of the board of All Saints Episcopal School, and was a member of the Joint Commission of the Church in Human Affairs of the Episcopal Church.

22.) **Carter, Hodding** Greenville
David Halberstam describes Carter as “combative, brave, and generous.” Carter’s newspaper, the *Delta Democrat Times*, Halberstam says, was an oasis. Carter took in whoever was in trouble. “You got a sense of his courage.” Carter got Halberstam the job at the *Nashville Tennessean* in the spring of 1956. “It’s the perfect stepping-stone paper,” Carter told him, which for Halberstam it turned out to be. Southern newspapers took in reporters from good schools in the North with the understanding that they would work for peanuts in exchange for a year or two of training. Carter was protected by the Delta gentry. Greenville was different, Halberstam says. Carter was protected and he himself was protective.

23.) **Chaney, Fred** Whitfield

24.) **Coleman, James Plemon** Ackerman
“J.P.” Coleman was governor of Mississippi from 1956-1960. He was born in 1914. Coleman was educated at Ole Miss and the George Washington University law school. Coleman was District Attorney of the Fifth District of Mississippi for seven years (elected 1939 and 1943), Circuit Judge for four years (elected 1946), and Commissioner of the Supreme Court of Mississippi – all before being appointed state attorney general in October 1950, at the age of 36. Coleman played a role in keeping the 1952 Mississippi delegation from bolting the Democratic National Convention. As governor, he had a very mixed record regarding race politics. Many considered him not so much a moderate as a “practical segregationist” whose relative silence on the race question was really intended to reinforce and prolong segregation. In terms of helping facilitate change on the race question, his best moment came in the Mack Charles Parker lynching case of 1959; conversely, on race he can be criticized for his creation of (or acquiesce to the creation of) the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission. Coleman also was part of the group that conspired to keep African-American Clyde Kennard out of University of Southern Mississippi (then called Mississippi Southern College). For all that, generally speaking, Coleman was one of the allies of the “progressive” element in the state in the mid-1950s. Joe Earl Elmore described him as “a colorful guy, not a liberal, but not a Bilbo either.” Coleman stated he was intent on “keeping the hotheads from repeating the terrific mistakes of the 1850s and 1860s.” Coleman was playing both sides. Early in his career, Coleman was a congressional aide in Washington, D.C. and the “Speaker of the Little Congress,” around the time Lyndon Johnson held that position. The two men were friends. Late in Coleman’s career, President Johnson made him a federal judge. As governor-elect in late 1955, Coleman counseled and aided A. Eugene Cox and David Minter after the Tchula incident. Coleman died on Sept. 28, 1991.
25.) **Cooper, Owen**

Yazoo City

Cooper lived from 1908-1986. He was president of the Mississippi Chemical Corporation, a large agribusiness based in Yazoo City that he was instrumental in building up. He was a Baptist lay leader. Cooper was the former president of the Southern Baptist Convention, one of the last moderates to hold that position. He earned both his bachelor’s and his master’s at Mississippi State College. His M.B.A. thesis, dated 1936, was titled, “Land Utilization in Mississippi.” Cooper represented the Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation on the Legislative Highway Planning Committee in 1949. He was later director of the Federation. He was president of the Mississippi Baptist Convention in the mid-1950s. In the 1960s, he was the chairman of the Mississippi Action for Progress, a liberal group wherein he worked with figures such as Hodding Carter III. He was active in the Mississippi Council on Human Welfare. Cooper was on the Mississippi Economic Council’s Committee on Public Administration and Taxation, which looked into the question of reapportionment in 1956. He was a vice chairman of the American Red Cross fund raising campaign in the late 1950s. He was head of a number of organizations that were forces for moderation, such as: the YMCA in Mississippi, Board of Mississippi Industrial and Special Services, the Mississippi Economic Council and the Boy Scouts. He was a community leader in Yazoo City. Cooper founded M.I.S.S., a non-profit corporation that built low-income housing units for Mississippi families. Cooper was director of research and organization of the Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation, as of March, 1945. His brother was named W.S. Cooper, and the two were in business together – Cooper Brothers – in Mississippi. At some point, Owen Cooper was a trustee of the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, which is where Ralph Atkinson attended. Cooper was chairman of the Delta Council Educational Policy Committee for 1953-54. He also was committee chairman in 1956. Through their joint activities in the Southern Baptist community, Owen Cooper and President Jimmy Carter were longtime friends. Late in life, Cooper expressed regret that he had never held the job he had always coveted: governor of Mississippi.

26.) **Cox, A. Eugene**  

Cruger

Cox was the administrator of cooperative farms in Mississippi. His concept of the Providence Farm, of which he was director, was basically to address the abuses experienced by members of the Southern Tenant Farmer’s Union members and the inequities of sharecropping. He was born August 13, 1905 in Grayson County, Texas. He studied at Texas Christian University. In 1936 he began work at the Delta Cooperative Farm. He became associate director of the farm in 1939 and director in 1943. He lived in Holmes County beginning in 1942. He served as director of the Providence Farm until 1956. The whole Cox-Minter story regarding the Tchula mass meeting was told in a Hodding Carter article, published in December 1955, titled “Racial Crisis in the Deep South.” Cox was a member of the executive board of the Mississippi Council on Human Relations, around 1955. Cox’s wife, Lindsey Hail Cox, was a registered nurse. Providence doctor David Minter’s wife, Sue, also was a nurse. Lindsey Cox went to Providence Farm in 1936 through the support of the Board of National Missions of the Presbyterian Church, USA. A. Eugene Cox, in addition to his other many duties, was (while the accountant for the Delta Cooperative farm operation) the Postmaster of Rosedale, Mississippi. Though not a minister, Cox attended a meeting
sponsored by the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen, a liberal church group, in January, 1956, in Nashville. From a mailing of Howard “Buck” Kester’s: “The purpose of this ‘off the record’ conference is to consider how churches and individual Christians may be helped to face more forthrightly responsibilities now required by the Supreme Court decisions against segregation. Through sharing our concerns and discussing our needs we hope to reach definite, realistic proposals that will be useful to Southern church groups in these days of crisis.” There was a friendship between Cox and Cora Ratliff. Cox also was a friend of P.D. East and of Will D. Campbell.

27.) Crisler, H.H. Jr. Bay Springs
Crisler was the editor of the Jasper County News in Bay Springs. He wrote a favorable editorial on Hodding Carter when Carter had his famous fight with the Mississippi legislature in 1955. He wrote a favorable editorial about the Kershaw incident over which Morton King resigned his professorship at the University of Mississippi.

28.) Crook, Robert L. Ruleville
Crook was born in 1930. He was a state senator from Sunflower County. In 1969, he was a member of something called the State of Mississippi General Legislative Investigating Committee. Crook took a particular interest in nearby Parchman State Penitentiary and in corrections issues in general.

29) Cunningham, W.J. Greenville
A Methodist minister, his full name was William Jefferson Cunningham. He was known as Jeff. He was born in Iuka, Miss. in 1905. Cunningham studied at Millsaps College. Early in his career he was a minister in Oxford. He delivered a sermon at Ole Miss titled “The Negro Question” in 1944. He then served as minister at First Methodist Church in Greenville, from 1946-1951. He went to First Methodist Church in Tupelo and served there 1951-1955. Cunningham was close to department store owner and civic leader Jack Reed when he (Cunningham) was in Tupelo. In 1963, Cunningham was in “the eighth year of a happy pastorate at St. John’s Methodist Church in Memphis” when he was called to Jackson. He was the minister at Galloway Memorial Methodist Church in Jackson from Sept. 1, 1963 to June 15, 1966. One source writes that Cunningham “preferred a … gradual pace for desegregation in church and society.” Cunningham himself wrote, “I could not concur in the racial policy in effect in our congregation, [but] I would try to look at it understandingly and work with our people lovingly and patiently toward the Methodist ideal of the church in the stress of these days of social change.” He wrote a book manuscript titled Agony at Galloway, about his experiences at the Galloway church in Jackson and his efforts to promote the “open door” – namely, racially integrated worship services – at Galloway.

30.) Daily, Mrs. M.H. Jackson

31.) Dale, James P.
Dale was known as Jack. He was a newspaperman and was the son of a newspaperman. He was a World War II veteran. He was executive director of the Veterans’ Farm and Home Board in the period 1948-1950.
32.) Dattel, Bertie  
Rosedale  
The Dattels were a prominent Jewish family in the Delta. The mayor of Rosedale in the post-war period was M.J. “Mickey” Dattel. Bertie was his mother.

33.) Davis, Eva W.  
Vicksburg  
Davis was born in 1893. She was a prominent woman in preserving Vicksburg’s Courthouse/Museum. Davis wrote a cultural cookbook called “Mississippi Mixin’s,” published by Southern Printing Co. She was the hostess of a radio show titled “Court Square.” She also had a column in the Vicksburg Evening Post.

34.) Deen, Mrs. E.E.  
Hattiesburg  
In 1956, Deen was a member of the board of directors of the Mississippi Council of Human Relations.

35.) Dishman, Mrs. C.E.  
Piney Woods  
In 1956, Dishman was a vice president of the board of directors of the Mississippi Council on Human Relations, an affiliate of the Southern Regional Council.

36.) Easom, P.H.  
Jackson  
Easom was also known as Percy. His lifespan was 1889-1957. Easom had a degree from Peabody teachers college in Nashville. He was a World War I veteran and as a social worker after the war he worked on what was then known as “shell-shock” cases. He also was a professor of history at Mississippi College in Clinton. He was the state supervisor the Department of Education around 1950. White boys who were convicted of a crime in Mississippi would go to Columbia Training Camp and black boys who got in trouble would go to jail. This disparity existed until Easom started something called the Oakley Training Camp for black youths. He hired blacks for his staff, equalized textbooks, and instituted other reforms. In 1947-1948, Easom was a member of the Delta Council, and sat on its education policy committee. Easom believed blacks were inferior to whites and regularly spoke to black educators in a patronizing manner, according to Kenneth H. Williams.

37.) East, P.D.  
Petal  
Percy Dale (P.D.) East was a newspaperman in Petal, a town near Hattiesburg, where he published the flamboyantly provocative Petal Paper. He was born in 1921. East entered the U.S. Army in December, 1942, but was discharged a year later on the grounds that he was “temperamentally unsuited for the rigid discipline of the Army.” He studied at Mississippi Southern College (now the University of Southern Mississippi) and worked for several railroads. He emerged from the union movement – he was editor of two Hattiesburg labor union newspapers – The Union Review and The Local Advocate. He based his paper, the Petal Paper, on the progressive Carolina Israelite. The Petal Paper was started in late 1953. East lost most of his advertising since coming out against the White Citizens’ Council, which began in the mid-1950s. Among other tactics, East mocked the Citizens’ Councils with a drawing of a jackass. Hodding Carter recommended him for a Neiman Fellowship in 1956. East was turned down for a
Nieman that year and again in 1957, despite Hodding Carter’s and Norman Bradley’s best attempts at intercession with Louis Lyons, the Neiman director. There was a group of donors called the Friends of P.D. East keeping his paper financially afloat from the late-1950s on. East had his paper printed by the Pascagoula Chronicle-Star, edited by Easton King. East left Mississippi in 1963, due to persistent threats and harassment relating to his civil rights activities and opinions. East ended up somewhat like Hazel Brannon Smith, hounded and broke. There is a biography of East titled Rebel With A Cause. He himself wrote a book published by Simon and Shuster. East died at Fair Hope, Alabama on Dec. 31, 1971. East was a friend of A. Eugene Cox. Will Campbell paid tribute to East in Brother to a Dragonfly.

38.) Eastburn, Charley Paul Jackson
Eastburn was an infantry colonel in the U.S. Army. Eastburn was born on July 19, 1908 and died on October 13, 1977. He was a member of the West Point Class of 1930. He was the lead officer at the Headquarters, Mississippi Military District, Jackson. He co-wrote a book on military operations in Europe during World War II, published by the U.S. Military Academy in 1956. He also co-wrote a book titled A Short Military History of World War I With Atlas.

39.) Elmore, Joe Earl Oxford
He was head of the Wesley Foundation at Ole Miss from 1952-54. He did a lot of work with Methodist youth. He went to Yale Divinity School with Will D. Campbell.

40.) Emmerich, J. Oliver McComb
Emmerich was the owner, publisher and editor of the Enterprise-Journal in McComb and at the same time he was involved in Democratic politics and state government. He was born in 1896. Emmerich was the head of the Mississippi Planning Commission in 1936 and thereabouts, so he had a lot to do with economic development of the state. Emmerich was close to the ruling group of the Democratic state convention in 1944, according to a letter to Thomas Abernethy from Clarence E. Morgan, dated June 19, 1944. The McComb Enterprise and the McComb Daily Journal merged into the McComb Enterprise-Journal in June, 1945. Emmerich’s post-war plan for McComb is similar to Hodding Carter’s for Greenville. In the 1940s and 1950s, Emmerich was chairman of the State Board of Trustees of the Institutions of Higher Learning. He walked out of the 1948 Democratic convention over the civil rights plank, so his race views are complex, to say the least. He was a delegate to the 1952 Democratic national convention in Chicago. In 1956, Emmerich was on the Fourth Congressional District committee “Mississippi Citizens for Eisenhower.” Emmerich was a go-between in the Kershaw incident at Ole Miss Religious Emphasis Week, 1955-1956. He phoned Kershaw and asked him if he planned to speak on integration, and he said he would if asked. Emmerich was editor of the Jackson State Times in 1959. The State Times was an alternative to the virulently racist Hederman papers and published from 1954-1962. Toward the end of his life, Emmerich wrote a memoir titled “Two Faces of Janus.”

41.) Farley, Robert J.
Farley was dean of the Ole Miss Law School from 1946-1963. He had a doctorate from Yale. He taught at Tulane for a time. Farley was a member of the Ole Miss law faculty beginning in 1926. A law school building at Ole Miss is named for him. He was eased out of the deanship in 1963 when he insisted that James Meredith had a legal right to attend the university. He left in 1963 and went to teach at the University of Florida. Farley, James W. Silver writes, defended Nathan Cohran, a black man associated with Ole Miss accused of raping a white woman in 1949. A black student named Charles Herbert Thomas Dubra applied to the law school in 1953 and Farley recommended he be admitted. He went to Chancellor John D. Williams about it but Williams felt he had to go to the board of trustees and, in keeping with their wishes, Williams directed Farley to turn Dubra down. Farley signed a document asking respect for the U.S. Supreme Court after its decision against segregation in the *Brown* case. According to Silver’s *Mississippi: The Closed Society*, Dean Farley “repeatedly warned in public that lawyers were acting irresponsibly in permitting by their silence the Citizens’ Council and irreconcilable politicians to interpret the law for them. The chief dereliction came in allowing the people of Mississippi to believe that they could get away with an outright defiance of the courts.” Farley was a member of the Mississippi Economic Council’s Board of Directors in 1956-1957. Farley was from a “distinguished old-line Mississippi family,” according to Silver. Here’s a quotation from Silver’s *Running Scared*, page 93: “When I felt isolated and somewhat fearful of antagonizing those who ran the state, Bob (Farley) convinced me that he knew people in every town who thought as I did.” And, on page 96: “As dean of the Ole Miss law school, he had been one of the two or three state lawyers who had constantly warned that sooner or later even Mississippians would have to obey the decisions of the Supreme Court.” And, page 96: “He was earnest on the race question, as his distinguished ancestors must have been, realizing that blacks had always gotten a raw deal in this country.”

42.) **Faulkner, William**
*Oxford*
Born in 1897, Faulkner won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1949. When his novel *Intruder in the Dust* was made into a film in 1949-1950, it was a major event in Mississippi. Faulkner was outspoken in his views on race and civil rights, as in his notable speech before the Southern Historical Association in 1955 in Memphis. Faulkner died in 1962.

43.) **Finger, Homer Ellis Jr.**
*Jackson*
Finger was president of Millsaps College from 1952-64. He was a Methodist bishop. He graduated from Millsaps with a divinity degree in 1937 and from there attended Yale Divinity School. Joe Earl Elmore at the Wesley Foundation at Ole Miss credits Finger with supporting him in his (Elmore’s) various political activities in Oxford. He was the son-in-law of Cora Lee Ratliff, the head of the Mississippi Council on Human Relations.

44.) **Fitz Hugh, Alexander**
*Vicksburg*
Fitz Hugh was a Vicksburg businessman with interests in the Delta and he helped Hodding Carter get financing for his first Greenville newspaper, the *Delta Star*, in 1936. In 1956, “Col.” Fitz-Hugh, as he was known, was on the board of directors of the Mississippi Council on Human Relations, which was affiliated with the Southern
Regional Council. In 1956, Fitz-Hugh was on the Fourth Congressional District committee, “Mississippi Citizens for Eisenhower.”

45.) **Gardner, William V.** Greenville
Gardner was a temporary (supply) pastor at the First Presbyterian Church in Greenville. The regular pastor at First Presbyterian, Russell Nunan, was called to active duty as a Navy chaplain for 17 months, in 1952-1953, and Gardner was brought in from Texas. William C. Keady was the chairman of the church’s committee on supply pastors. In the Keady correspondence, he is referred to as “Dr.” Gardner. Gardner was a native Mississippian.

46.) **Gibbons, Harriet** Laurel
Gibbons was the only woman editor of a Mississippi daily newspaper in the period 1945-1956. She was editor of the *Laurel Leader-Call*. Her husband was Thomas Gibbons, who was the paper’s publisher.

47.) **Graves, Ernest** Laurel
Graves was an attorney in Laurel and was in close communication with James W. Silver

48.) **Gray, Duncan M.** Jackson
Gray was the Episcopal bishop of Mississippi in the 1950s. He was very supportive of the group of ministers who were pushing to have the Rev. Alvin L. Kershaw speak at Ole Miss during Religious Emphasis Week in early 1956. Gray was a member of the Mississippi Historical Society in 1952.

49.) **Gray, Duncan M. Jr.** Cleveland, Rosedale
Duncan Gray was a student at St. Luke’s Seminary, University of the South at Sewanee, Tennessee in 1952 and led a student movement for the admission of a black theological student. Although his uncle was vice chancellor of the university, the effort failed. The entire faculty of the seminary resigned in protest but it would still be several years before the school was desegregated. Earlier, Gray had attended Tulane. Gray was a young minister in the early 1950s, serving at churches in two Delta towns – Cleveland and Rosedale, which lie 17 miles apart. He was minister at the Calvary Church in Cleveland and the Grace Church in Rosedale. He and Hodding Carter, a layperson in the Episcopal church in Greenville, drafted the pamphlet that the Diocese then published in support of the *Brown* decision in 1954. He and Carter had a “close relationship” in that they worked on Episcopal Church statements on race in the 1950s, Gray recalled. Will D. Campbell’s book *And Also with You*, is in part is about Gray. He stated before a student group in 1956 that “segregation is incompatible with the Christian faith.” Gray was president of the Mississippi Council on Human Relations in the mid-1950s. Later (by 1959 and through the time of the Meredith crisis of 1962), he was at St. Peter’s Episcopal Church in Oxford. During the Ole Miss riot the night of September 30, 1962, Gray implored the students to disperse and, as the riot swirled around him, risked considerable physical harm to himself in doing so. Later in life he was chancellor of the University of the South, where he had once been in the seminary. And then he was named Episcopal bishop of Mississippi, as his father had been before him.
50.) **Guess, R. Malcolm**  
Oxford  
Guess was the dean of students at Ole Miss until 1955. He had been the chaplain at Ole Miss just prior to Will D. Campbell taking over that job in 1954. At Ole Miss, he had been director of the YMCA, Dean of Men, and a professor of sociology, among other jobs.

51.) **Haddon, J.W.**  
Isola  

52.) **Hales, Graham Lee Jr.**  
Jackson  
He was a student at the University of Virginia in the 1950s.

53.) **Harkey, Ira**  
Pascagoula  
Harkey was the owner and editor of the *Pascagoula Chronicle*, a paper which also at various times carried the name the *Pascagoula Chronicle-Star* and the *Pascagoula Chronicle-Star and Moss Point Advertiser*. He was born in 1917. He got a journalism degree from Tulane in 1941. Early in his career he wrote for the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*. Harkey earned a doctorate in political science from Ohio State University. Harkey won a Pulitzer Prize in 1963 for his editorials about the Ole Miss-James Meredith crisis of 1962. Around September 20, 1962, he wrote, “In a madhouse’s din, Mississippi waits. God help Mississippi.” The Gulf Coast, according to Susan Weill’s book, “was settled by immigrants from many countries, including Lebanon, Yugoslavia and Italy, and because of the diversity of its population, has long held a reputation as the most politically tolerant area of the state. As early as 1950, convention centers on the coast were integrated, more than a decade before this would be the case in the rest of the state.” Harkey sold the *Chronicle* in the 1960s.

54.) **Harkins, Eleanor**  
Jackson  
Harkins was president of the Mississippi Library Association.

55.) **Haxton, Josephine**  
Greenville  
Haxton’s pen name is Ellen Douglas. Haxton took her pen name, according to Stephen Whitfield, author of *A Death in the Delta: The Story of Emmett Till*, because she didn’t want to scandalize her father and other relatives by writing sympathetically about blacks and race. She was born on July 12, 1921. She is a native of Natchez and that is where she grew up. She studied at Randolph Macon College and graduated with a B.A. from the University of Mississippi in 1942. At Ole Miss she was the executive editor of the *Mississippian*, the student newspaper. She has published a number of books in her lifetime. Some of her titles are: *The Rock Cried Out*; *Apostles of Light*; *Where the Dreams Cross*; *A Lifetime Burning*; *Can’t Quit You, Baby* and *The Magic Carpet*. At one point she was the writer-in-residence at the University of Mississippi. She was also a writer-in-residence at Delta State University, for one semester. In her adult life, she has lived in both Greenville and Jackson.

56.) **Henderson, J. L.**  
Gulfport  
He was known as Lewis.
57.) **Henley, Mr. A.** Aberdeen

58.) **Herbers, John** Jackson
He worked for the United Press in Jackson during the 1950s. He went on the *New York Times*. Herbers was one of many reporters covering the Emmett Till murder case and trial.

59.) **Hickman, Alma** Hattiesburg
In 1956, Hickman was a member of the board of directors of the Mississippi Council on Human Relations. Hickman lived from 1887-1971. She taught in rural schools in Mississippi before becoming a college professor. She was a longtime professor of English at what is now the University of Southern Mississippi, which was once called the Mississippi Normal College. She wrote something called *Mississippi*, a pageant of education in Mississippi. She wrote this in 1929. More than 500 people were included in the cast! She later wrote a book called *Southern As I Saw It*. At one point she was president of the Mississippi Education Association. Gov. J.P. Coleman once called her “The First Lady of Education in Mississippi.”

60.) **Higginbotham, Sanford W.** Oxford
“Hig” was a Civil War historian and professor of History at Ole Miss. He was in the Marines in the Pacific in 1951. He taught a course on the Old South at the University of Mississippi. Higginbotham in 1953 was the associate editor of the *Journal of Mississippi History* and was active in the Mississippi Historical Society. By 1957 he was associated with the Pennsylvania State Historical Society. “Hig” was the associate editor of *Pennsylvania History*, the “Quarterly Journal of the Pennsylvania Historical Association.”

61.) **Hirschberg, Harris** Greenville
Hirschberg was known as Harry. He was a rabbi in Greenville.

62.) **Hobart, Duncan M.** Meridian
In 1956, Hobart was a member of the board of the Mississippi Council on Human Relations. Hobart was an Episcopal priest in Meridian and a mentor to Duncan M. Gray Jr. Hobart was a member of the committee that helped draft the diocesan response to the *Brown* decision. Duncan M. Gray Jr. was the primary author, along with Hodding Carter.

63.) **Holloman, Garland Hamilton** Clarksdale
Known as Bo, Holloman was the minister at First Methodist Church in Clarksdale. He lived from 1912-1993. Holloman graduated from Millsaps in 1934, in the same class as Norman Bradley. Later, in the 1980s, Holloman was the associate minister of the First United Methodist Church of Tupelo. During his career he also served at churches in Greenwood and Jackson. In 1985, he was awarded a doctor of divinity degree from Millsaps. Holloman had a life-long interest in scouting and the Boy Scouts of America.
**64.) Joffrion, A. Emile**  
Oxford  
In and around 1955, Joffrion was minister at the St. Peter’s Episcopal Mission in Oxford. He attended a meeting sponsored by the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen, a liberal group, in January, 1956, in Nashville. From a mailing of Howard Kester’s: “The purpose of this ‘off the record’ conference is to consider how churches and individual Christians may be helped to face more forthrightly responsibilities now required by the Supreme Court decisions against segregation. Through sharing our concerns and discussing our needs we hope to reach definite, realistic proposals that will be useful to Southern church groups in these days of crisis.” Joffrion was close to Ole Miss chaplain Will D. Campbell and collaborated with him during the Kershaw-REW incident of 1955-1956.

**65.) Johnston, Oscar G.**  
Scott  
Johnston was a planter, lawyer, legislator, businessman, banker, and a federal government official during the New Deal. Johnston lived from 1880-1955. He was president of Delta Pine and Land Co., which ran what was at one time was the world’s largest cotton plantation, located in and around the Delta town of Scott. Given his business position, and his prominent role in Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Agriculture Department, Johnston was one of the leading figures in the nation’s cotton industry. He was a member of the Mississippi state legislature from 1908-1918, where he was what was known as a “business progressive.” Johnston was in the tank corps in World War I. He was president of the Planters National Bank in Clarksdale, 1926-1927. He then became president of the Delta Pine and Land. He also served as an assistant Secretary of the Treasury, president of the Commodity Credit Corp., and director of finance for the Department of Agriculture’s Adjustment Administration in the 1930s. Johnston founded the National Cotton Council in 1939. Johnston was also a board member of the Illinois Central Railroad, beginning in 1940. Johnston once ran for governor, unsuccessfully as it turns out. At one time he was a member of the Democratic National Committee.

**66.) Jones, Sam L.**  
Indianola  
Jones was superintendent of the Sunflower County schools.

**67.) Karsell, Tom**  
Greenville  
Karsell was the managing editor of the *Delta Democrat-Times* before leaving for a Neiman fellowship at Harvard in 1954. During World War II, Karsell went into the service at a very young age and saw combat in North Africa, Sicily, Italy and Germany. He was wounded five times. Sources, including his son, speak of how stresses from that war service contributed to a number of Karsell’s health problems, including alcoholism. After the war, Karsell studied sculpture at the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center. He initially contacted Hodding Carter at the *Democrat-Times* because he was attracted to Carter’s stance on race. He felt very strongly about race. He told Carter he was an editorial cartoonist. Carter said he did not want a cartoonist but he did want a city editor and if Karsell wanted that job he should come to Greenville, which he did. After he got back from the Neiman in the spring of 1955, Karsell went to work for the *Jackson Daily News* as assistant to Fred Sullens, with the promise of the editorship when “Fred quits or dies.” Karsell knew David Halberstam at Harvard and was the one who brought Halberstam to Mississippi initially. Halberstam said that Karsell “floated around afflicted
with alcohol problems.” After working in Jackson, Karsell worked at various times at the *Louisville Courier-Journal* and the *Indianapolis Star*. He ended up doing advertising work for a drug company and then worked for the Salvation Army. Karsell also served in Korea. At one point, he worked for *Asian Stars and Stripes*. He worked in Adlai Stevenson’s presidential campaigns. He had his first heart attack at 37 and died at age 55 in 1975.

68.) **Keady, William C.**

   Greenville
   
   Keady was a lawyer, a state lawmaker, community leader, bar association president and later a U.S. District judge who was instrumental in reforms at the state penitentiary at Parchman. He was from Greenville. Keady lived from 1913-1989. He had a law degree from Washington University in Saint Louis. He practiced law in Greenville with William Alexander Percy and Hazlewood Farish. Keady served in the state House of Representatives from 1940-1943 and then in the state Senate. In the Senate, Keady headed the Judiciary Committee and took a particular interest in prison affairs. He resigned from the Senate effective April 1, 1945. In Keady’s time in the state legislature, he did work on the workers’ compensation issue, which a subsequent legislature (1948) did get passed. As a lawyer in Greenville, he was known as “Cash” Keady for his work on behalf of wealthy corporate interests. President Lyndon Johnson appointed Keady a U.S. District Judge in 1968. Keady was close to Senator John Stennis, and this alliance no doubt helped him get the federal judgeship. He had supported Stennis in his initial Senate campaign in 1947. Keady had been his chief fundraiser in Washington County. While on the federal bench, Keady ordered the state of Mississippi to improve conditions at Parchman. He ruled in the case of *Gates v. Collier* that Parchman needed to be reformed. Keady was a delegate to the 1960 Democratic National Convention. He was very active in the community. He was head of the committee at Greenville’s First Presbyterian Church that brought in William V. Gardner as a supply pastor for 17 months in 1952-53. Keady was elected to the Greenville school board in January, 1947. He was a member of a Public Relations Committee of the Washington County Chamber of Commerce. That was in 1947. Keady also was chairman of the finance committee of the board of trustees of the Washington County Public Library. In the 1960s, Keady was president of the Mississippi State Bar Association. “I am not a crusader,” Keady once stated. “It was never my intention to strike dramatic reforms but to advocate gradualism.” Toward the end of his life, Keady wrote a book titled, *All Rise: Memoirs of a Mississippi Federal Judge*.

69.) **King, Easton**

   Pascagoula
   
   King was the editor of the *Pascagoula Chronicle*, working with Ira Harkey. According to a letter from Will D. Campbell to Mr. C.H. Yarrow in Philadelphia, dated June 2, 1958, King “is a fine liberal who has recently been denounced in a resolution by the Mississippi Legislature as a ‘liar and integrationist’. ” King was close to P.D. East and to Campbell.

70.) **King, Morton B. Jr.**

   Oxford
   
   King was chairman of the Ole Miss Department of Sociology and Anthropology in 1956 when he resigned in the wake of the Kershaw-REW affair. King was an undergraduate
student at Vanderbilt in the early 1930s where he got involved in the Christian student movement. He received his M.A. from Vanderbilt and his Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin. He did post-doctoral work at the University of North Carolina and the University of Michigan. King taught at Mississippi State from 1941-1943.

71.) **Kirschner, Barbara**  
Greenville  
Kirschner grew up in Greenville. After attending public schools in Greenville, she graduated from Dana Hall School in Massachusetts and then Vassar College. She did graduate work at Harvard in business management. Most of her adult life she lived in Cincinnati.

72.) **Krebs, Albin**  
Oxford  
Krebs was the editor of the Ole Miss student weekly newspaper, the *Mississippian* during the academic year 1950-1951. The previous year he served on the paper’s editorial board. Krebs was from Pascagoula. He graduated from Ole Miss in 1951. He befriended Hodding Carter, who was helpful in getting Krebs placed at Columbia University School of Journalism after Krebs got out of the service in the mid-1950s. Krebs spent part of his career at the *New York Times* writing obituaries. Krebs was gay. He was estranged both from Ole Miss and from Mississippi generally, and attempts by the University to entice him back to Oxford for reunions or visits were unsuccessful. He died in Key West, Fla.

73.) **Lamb, Lomax**  
Marks  
Lamb was a lifelong resident of the Delta town of Marks in Quitman County where he became a prominent attorney. He graduated from Yale College in 1938 and Yale Law School in 1942. During the Second World War, Lamb served in the Far East and in China specifically. He was an unsuccessful candidate for Congress in 1950. Through his Yale connections, Lamb was acquainted with a number of individuals who would go on to serve in the John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson administrations. During the Ole Miss crisis of the fall of 1962, Lamb was an intermediary between the Kennedy administration and leaders in Mississippi.

74.) **Lee, Ned**  
Europa  
Lee was the longtime editor and publisher of the *Webster Progress* in Europa. Also, Lee owned the *Choctaw Plaindealer* in Ackerman from 1941-1949, along with his partners Grady Cook and Seale Winston. During those years the paper focused on World War II news and on rural electrification, among other issues. In 1949, the paper was sold to a group that included J.P. Coleman, the future governor. He was a member of the Mississippi Historical Society, as of 1952. Lee was an alternate to the 1952 Democratic national convention in Chicago.

75.) **Lennon, Lester**  
Holly Springs  
Lennon was dean of Mississippi Industrial College in Holly Springs.

76.) **Lewis, Arthur B.**  
Oxford
Lewis was a physics professor at Ole Miss, from 1936-1969. He was chair of the department from 1953-1957. Later he was dean of students. He was born in 1901.

77.) Mantinband, Charles  Hattiesburg
Mantinband was a key figure in the civil rights struggle in Hattiesburg. He was rabbi at Congregation B’Nai Israel in Hattiesburg. His lifespan was 1895-1974. He was very active in the Mississippi division of the Southern Regional Council. In the 1950s, he was a director and then chairman of the Mississippi Council on Human Relations, which was affiliated with the Southern Regional Council. In the 1930s, Mantinband was a rabbi in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. After World War II, Mantinband requested a position with a small congregation in the South. He was sent to Alabama, where he served in the tri-cities area of Florence, Sheffield, and Tuscumbia from 1946 to 1952. It was during those years in Alabama, when he played an active role in the Alabama Council on Human Relations, that Mantinband first became involved in racial issues. After his stint in North Alabama he came to Mississippi. At some point later in his career Mantinband served in Shreveport, Louisiana. While in Hattiesburg, Mantinband became actively involved in civil rights activities. Mantinband was often under threat and he frequently had trouble with members of his own congregation. The pressure eventually became too great, and in 1963, Mantinband accepted a post in Longview Texas. The phrase you hear over and over about Mantinband is “social justice.” In 1958, Mantinband wrote a Ph.D. dissertation for a degree from Burton College and Seminary in Manitou Springs, Colorado.

78.) Mars, Florence Latimer  Philadelphia
Mars was a businesswoman and heiress who lived in the Neshoba County community of Philadelphia. She lived from 1923 to 2006. She was educated at Millsaps College and at Ole Miss, where she roomed with Betty Pearson, later of Sumner, who became a lifelong friend. Mars owned the Neshoba County Stockyards. In 1964, she was one of the few people in Philadelphia to speak out against the killings of the three civil rights workers in Neshoba. She was also one of the few Philadelphia residents to cooperate with the FBI. Given her work with the FBI, she earned the enmity of the local Ku Klux Klan, which was in fact deeply involved in the three murders. She also was targeted by the local police, which likewise was part of the murder conspiracy. She was the target of harassment and threats. At one point, she was arrested and spent a night in the local jail, a highly unusual occurrence for a white woman, particularly one from a prominent family. She wrote the book Witness in Philadelphia about her experience at the time of the Neshoba murders.

79.) McLean, George A.  Tupelo
McLean lived roughly 1903-1983 and owned and ran the Tupelo Daily Journal newspaper from 1934-1983. He was known as a champion of community development. He is a good example of a post-war Southern leader concerned about development and image. He took a particular interest in the welfare of farmers in Northeast Mississippi. McLean was the publisher of the Journal, and not the editorial page editor, and this gave him some degree of deniability and protection in dealing with racial issues, because he was not really on the record so much. Instead, Harry Rutherford wrote many of the
editorials in the Journal. McLean was a graduate of Boston University school of Theology, Stanford and the University of Chicago. McLean was detested by a lot of people in Tupelo in part because he could be abrasive and headstrong. Private schools (“academies”) never took hold in Tupelo, a development which had the effect of keeping the community together. He was a member of the Mississippi Historical Society, as of 1952. McLean hated local Congressman John Rankin and took him on regularly. McLean was adamant about race relations and often called racists into his office to “persuade” them to act otherwise. One key to Tupelo’s relatively peaceful race relations, compared with other areas of Mississippi, is that it had far fewer blacks proportionately than, say, the Delta.

80.) McDonnell, Howard
Biloxi
McDonnell was a lawyer, criminologist and state senator who took a special interest in improving conditions at the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman. For example, he once proposed a bill in the Senate requiring the superintendent of the penitentiary to have at least two years college education. The bill failed. Then he proposed requiring the superintendent to have a high school education. That bill also failed. He pushed to outlaw the use of the “Black Annie” lash, a notorious form of punishment at the prison. Meanwhile, in the 1952 session of the legislature, McDonnell introduced a state labor department bill which called for the appointment by the governor of a commissioner to administer all labor laws. McDonnell sat on the legislative standing committee on penitentiaries in 1952. McDonnell’s law firm in Biloxi was called McDonnell and Lopez.

81.) Menger, J.M.
Greenville
Menger was a loan broker.

82.) Milner, Jay
Greenville
Milner wrote for the Jackson Clarion-Ledger in the mid-1950s. Milner went to work for Hodding Carter as managing editor at the Delta Democrat-Times in 1955, taking Tom Karsell’s place. Milner was one of many reporters to cover the Emmett Till murder and trial. In 1961 he published a novel about race in the South titled, Incident at Ashton.

83.) Miller, S.W.
Jackson
In 1956, Miller was on the board of the Mississippi Council on Human Relations.

84.) Minor, Bill
Jackson
Minor was born in 1922. His full name is Wilson F. Minor and his byline for years was W.F. Minor. His first assignment as a reporter was covering the funeral of Theodore G. Bilbo in August, 1947. For decades, Minor was the Jackson bureau chief for the New Orleans Times-Picayune.

85.) Minter, David
Cruger
Minter graduated from the University of Texas in 1932 and got his medical degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 1936. He won the bronze star in World War II. Minter was a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army during the war. Minter was the longtime
doctor at Providence Farm in Holmes County. He attended a meeting sponsored by the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen, a liberal group, January 10-11, 1956, in Nashville. Howard “Buck” Kester, the meeting’s organizer, sent out a mailing about the meeting, which stated: “The purpose of this ‘off the record’ conference is to consider how churches and individual Christians may be helped to face more forthrightly responsibilities now required by the Supreme Court decisions against segregation. Through sharing our concerns and discussing our needs we hope to reach definite, realistic proposals that will be useful to Southern church groups in these days of crisis.” Sometime after the Tchula incident of 1955, David and Sue Minter and their three children moved to Tuscon.

86.) **Morgan, Charles T.**
Mathiston
In 1956, Morgan was a vice president of the Mississippi Council on Human Relations, an affiliate of the Southern Regional Council.

87.) **Mullen, Phillip Earle**
Oxford
Mullen was known as “Moon.” He was born in 1913. He was associated with the *Oxford Eagle* newspaper, owned by his father, Curtis Mullen, beginning in the early 1930s. Phillip Mullen was assistant editor or associate editor of the *Eagle* from 1933 to 1951. Phillip did the bulk of the writing for the paper while his father, nominally editor as well as publisher, ran the business side. The younger Mullen was very aggressive about community needs and building up the community. Curtis and Phillip worked as a team, buying and running newspapers together in several southern communities. After leaving Oxford in the 1950s, the Mullens went to the Canton paper, to a publication in Paris, Tennessee and finally to a newspaper in Osceola, Arkansas. Also, in 1955, Mullen was associated with a publication called the *Four-County News*, based in Pickens, Mississippi. Mullen served in the Armed Forces from early 1943 to late 1945. After discharge from the service, he was one of the organizers of the Oxford chapter of the American Veterans Committee, a somewhat liberal organization that had a short but spirited life. He was in the state House of Representatives as part of the conservative “progressive” legislature of the late 1940s and early 1950s. He was therefore part of the group of legislators that helped get workers’ compensation legislation passed and also helped overturn the antiquarian Sunday “blue laws.” With the rise of the Dixiecrat phenomenon in 1948, Mullin was practically the only outspoken “loyalist” – supporter of the national Democratic Party and President Truman – in the legislature. He was a personal friend of William Faulkner. Mullen wrote a defense of Dr. Morton B. King in 1956 over the Kershaw affair. Mullen is a member of the Mississippi Press Association Hall of Fame.

88.) **Munger, Bernard V.**
Corinth
Munger was a minister in Corinth. He attended a meeting sponsored by the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen, a liberal group, in January 1956, in Nashville. In a mailing, Howard “Buck” Kester described the intent of the meeting, as follows: “The purpose of this ‘off the record’ conference is to consider how churches and individual Christians may be helped to face more forthrightly responsibilities now required by the Supreme
Court decisions against segregation. Through sharing our concerns and discussing our needs we hope to reach definite, realistic proposals that will be useful to Southern church groups in these days of crisis.”

89.) **Murphy, William Patrick**
Oxford
Murphy was an Ole Miss law professor from 1953 to 1962. Murphy had a law degree from the University of Virginia and a doctorate from Yale. He taught constitutional law. He was the only constitutional law professor at Ole Miss, and therefore, because Ole Miss was the only accredited law school in the state, he was essentially the only constitutional law professor in the state. He wrote a memorandum about the *Brown* ruling that said essentially the dictates of the Court must be followed. That stance marked him for criticism for the rest of his tenure in Mississippi. Murphy also was under fire for being a member of the American Civil Liberties Union.

90.) **Oliver, Mose**
Laurel
He was involved in publishing the Watkins and Oliver “Guide to Current Reading,” in Laurel.

91.) **Parker, Mrs. F.A.**
Prentiss
She was associated with the *Prentiss Headlight* newspaper.

92.) **Payne, Joan Balfour**
Church Hill
Payne was an illustrator of children’s books and other materials. She was born in 1923 and died in 1973. Her mother’s name was Josephine Balfour Payne, who was born in 1899, and the mother and daughter often teamed together in publishing books. Joan was the illustrator and her mother was the writer.

93.) **Payne, Monty**
Winterville

94.) **Pearson, Betty**
Sumner
She and her husband, William W. Pearson, were cotton planters in Sumner and Webb, in TALLahatchie County. She was active in the Mississippi Council on Human Relations. She and her husband were well-regarded liberals in the Delta. Betty Pearson was a close friend of Florence Mars’s. The two of them roomed together at Millsaps College and Ole Miss. At Ole Miss, Pearson was a student of James W. Silver’s. During World War II, Pearson served in the Marine Corps and was stationed in California. During the Emmett Till murder trial in September of 1955, Pearson was in the courtroom every day. In the 1960s, she was on the Mississippi Advisory Committee to the U.S. Civil Rights Commission. William W. Pearson was a graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Harvard Business School. As of 2010, the Pearsons were living in California.

95.) **Pittman, Paul Howard**
Tylertown
Pittman was an editor at the Ole Miss weekly newspaper the *Mississippi* in the early 1950s and worked in that capacity with Albin Krebs, who was in the class one year ahead.
of him. Krebs was the top editor at the paper during the 1950-1951 school year and Pittman was the editor the following year, 1951-1952. James W. Silver was Pittman’s thesis advisor at Ole Miss. His thesis was titled, “The Mississippi Constitutional Convention of 1868.” He graduated from Ole Miss in 1952. Pittman then founded and owned a newspaper and radio station in Tylertown. The paper was called the Tylertown Times. The airport in Tylertown is called the Paul Pittman Memorial Airport. There’s a memorial scholarship in Paul Pittman’s name at Ole Miss in the Department of Journalism.

96.) **Price, Zelma Wells** Greenville
Price was a prominent Washington County lawyer, legislator and later a judge. She was a pioneer in terms of women’s leadership in the law and politics. As late as 1965, Price was the only woman attorney in Washington County, whose population around that time was about 70,000. She was born on Oct. 6, 1903 in Calhoun County, Miss. Price was a key supporter of John Stennis in his successful run for the U.S. Senate in 1947. She was part of a conservative “progressive” group of state legislators in the 1940s and 1950s, along with William F. Winter, Frank Smith, and others. Price was elected to the state House of Representatives in 1943, 1947 and 1951. In the 1948 session of the legislature, Price was chairman of the Temperance committee and the Juvenile Delinquency Committee and was author of a county option bill on alcohol that failed. One of Price’s major issues was the county option for alcohol. In the legislature she authored something called the “youth court bill,” which had to do with trying youths in courts separate from adults. She was an alternate to the 1952 Democratic national convention in Chicago. She also sat on the Delta Council, and was a member of its health committee, in 1947-1948. She was a county judge.

97.) **Quimby, Ted** Hattiesburg
Quimby was a student at Harvard Law School in the mid-1950s.

98.) **Ratliff, Cora R.** Sherard
In 1956, Ratliff was president of the board of the Mississippi Council on Human Relations, which was affiliated with the Southern Regional Council. Her full name was Cora Rodman Ratliff. She was the mother of Mamie Lee Ratliff Finger, who herself was the wife of Homer Ellis Finger, onetime president of Millsaps College. Cora Ratliff was influenced by the Delta Farm Cooperative. She was very active in the Methodist church and held a number of leadership positions in the church. Ratliff was a friend of A.Eugene Cox, the head of Providence Farm in Holmes County.

99.) **Reed, Jack** Tupelo
Reed was president of the R.W. Reed Company and was at one time president of the Mississippi Economic Council. He was also a mayor of Tupelo and a onetime Republican candidate for governor in 1987, a bid that was unsuccessful. Jack Reed was born in 1924. He served in World War II, after which he graduated from Vanderbilt, in 1947. He received a master’s in retailing from New York University. R.W. Reed, of Tupelo, Jack’s father, was on the Board of Trustees of the Institutions of Higher Learning in 1946. Jack Reed did not approach the whole race question from a moral perspective.
Rather, he was a moderate looking for a better business climate. In that regard, he fought hard to keep Tupelo’s public schools open in the wake of the *Brown* decision when there was widespread talk of closing the schools to prevent desegregation. Reed was close to Rev. William J. ("Jeff") Cunningham, when Cunningham was a minister in Tupelo in the mid-1950s. Reed was head of the Mississippi Economic Council in the period 1963-1964. Reed was chairman of the State Board of Education in 1986. In 1991 he was appointed head of the National Advisory Council on Educational Research and Improvement.

100.) **Rush, Leslie V.** Meridian  
Rush was a doctor and director of Rush Memorial Hospital, which his father had started. Rush lived from 1906-1987. He was a bone doctor. He developed the "Rush Pin Technique," which was used for setting broken bones.

101.) **Schaeffer, H. Brent** Jackson  
Schaeffer was a Lutheran Minister. He was active in the Mississippi division of the Southern Regional Council. Schaeffer was a member of an interracial committee of Jackson citizens who were concerned about the racial problem between white and black Mississippians.

102.) **Schnur, Alfred C.** Oxford  
Schnur was a criminologist and sociologist on the faculty at the University of Mississippi. One topic he researched and wrote about extensively was the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman. He held degrees from the University of Pittsburgh and the University of Wisconsin. Prior to coming to Mississippi, Schnur was an associate warden of a prison in Stillwater, Minnesota.

103.) **Schutt, Jane Menefee**  
Schutt’s life span was 1913-2006. An Episcopalian, she was active in Church Women, United. She was involved with the Mississippi Advisory Committee of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. Betty Pearson also was on that board.

104.) **Selah, William Bryan** Jackson  
Selah was a Methodist minister. For 18 years he was the pastor of Galloway Memorial Methodist Church, in Jackson, the largest Methodist congregation in Mississippi. Dr. Selah supported the "Born of Conviction" statement by 28 young Methodist ministers in January 1963 and declared that "there can be no color bar in a Christian church." He resigned from Galloway in protest in June, 1963 when five blacks were refused admission to his church. William J. Cunningham was his successor. Selah was born in 1897 in Missouri. He went to Central College in Fayette, Missouri and then to Yale Divinity School.

105.) **Sessions, Clifton** Hattiesburg  
Cliff Sessions was a journalist known for his aggressive coverage of civil rights issues. He graduated from the University of Southern Mississippi in 1955. He was the program
director of radio station WFOR in Hattiesburg. Then he became manager of the United Press bureau in Jackson from 1957 to 1964. There his work on the race issue put him at odds with the Citizens’ Council. He was very active covering the Mack Charles Parker lynching case in 1959 in the South Mississippi town of Poplarville. The FBI was not pleased about that, and J. Edgar Hoover or his minions later tried to have him blocked from getting a job in the Justice Department under Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach. In fact, he did get that job and did public relations work for the Justice Department in Washington. He later was co-founder of the National Journal.

106.) Shavin, Norman  
Shavin was a feature and Sunday editor at the Jackson State Times in the mid-1950s. One of his interests was Jewish participation in the White Citizens’ Council.

107.) Silver, James Wesley  
Silver was a history professor at the University of Mississippi for nearly 30 years and in that time became a leading moderate voice in the state on racial matters. His polemic, Mississippi: The Closed Society, which took the form of both a speech in 1963 and a book in 1964, helped lead to his departure from the state in 1964. After a sabbatical year at the University of Notre Dame, he left the Ole Miss faculty for good in 1965. Silver was born in 1907. He received his bachelor’s degree from the University of North Carolina in 1927 and his Ph.D. from Vanderbilt in 1935. After a year at Southwestern College in Kansas, he arrived at Ole Miss in the fall of 1936. He was chairman of the Ole Miss history department from 1946-1957. One of the reasons Silver lasted as long as he did, even while being a high-profile progressive voice, was that at Ole Miss he had taught so many men and women who went on to prominence in Mississippi legal and political circles. So he had a fairly secure statewide base of connections and support to counteract the vitriol that he increasingly attracted. Silver was a good friend of John Oliver Emmerich Jr., a prominent journalist, for example. According to Emmerich, “all over Mississippi, there are people who were deeply influenced by Jim at Ole Miss. The bond that connects us is our mutual admiration for him – and the influence he had on our thinking.” Silver frequently left Mississippi, and that too allowed him to endure the protracted fight with traditionalist forces. For example, Silver served with the Red Cross in the Pacific in World War II. He spent the year 1949-1950 at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland, teaching on a Fulbright scholarship. Silver went to Harvard for the academic year 1951-1952 on a grant from the Fund for the Advancement of Education, to do post-doctoral work. Silver tried to leave the state each June for the summer to get away from all the tension (as did Hodding Carter). Silver spent a good deal of time addressing service clubs around the state, and it was said if half the audience had not walked out by the end of the talk, he did not feel as if he had done a good job. But the speaking engagements also added to his popularity and his political base in the state. Silver also taught correspondence courses throughout Mississippi. He was active with the Mississippi Valley Historical Association. Silver was a historian of the Confederacy, among other things. He wrote a book about public opinion in the Confederacy, for example. Silver was a director of the Mississippi Historical Society and a member of the board of editors of the Journal of Mississippi History. Silver’s work on the Mississippi Historical Commission was notable because the commission, on its
markers, referred to “the Civil War,” and not “The War Between the States.” A lot of his hate mail hooked on the idea he was Jewish, which he was not. Silver’s enemies dubbed him “thirty pieces,” suggesting he was a traitor. Silver wrote a book titled, Confederate Morale and Church Propaganda, in 1957. Silver was a close friend of Frank Friedel, a professor at Harvard. Silver wrote a book on General Pendleton Gaines, who was an important figure between the time of the Revolution and the Civil War. Silver’s progressivism really blossomed in the 1960s, but it was brewing in the earlier period. In 1963, Silver was president of the Southern Historical Association. After teaching at Notre Dame from 1964-1969, Silver went to the University of South Florida, where he was on the faculty until 1979. Silver died in 1988. It was said during the most contentious period in Mississippi over civil rights, Silver slept with a gun at his bedside.

108.) Smith, Frank Ellis Greenwood
Smith was a congressman from 1951-1963 and later was an official with the Tennessee Valley Authority. He was born in Sidon, Miss., in 1918 and lived to 1997. After a stint at a junior college in the Delta, Smith graduated from Ole Miss, where he was a student of James W. Silver’s. He served in the Army in World War II, in the artillery corps in General Patton’s Third Army. He won the Bronze Star for service in Europe. After the war he was a journalist in Greenwood, for a newspaper owned by Hodding Carter. He supported John Stennis for the U.S. Senate in 1947 and then worked for Stennis in Washington. He was elected to the state Senate in the late 1940s and was chairman of the Senate’s military affairs committee. He was elected to the U.S. House in 1950. There is a biography of him titled Mississippi Liberal, by Dennis Mitchell. Mitchell claims Smith fudged his position on race in 1950 in order to get elected. In the House, he generally kept his views on race low-key, particularly when compared with other Mississippi politicians. He did sign the Southern Manifesto in the wake of the Brown decision. His views on race contributed to a rift with Walter Sillers Jr., the speaker of the state House of Representatives and a key figure in redistricting after the 1960 census. When Mississippi’s congressional delegation had to shrink from six members to five, Smith had to run against a fellow incumbent and lost his seat in 1962. Smith had a longstanding friendship with President Kennedy, dating from 1956 when he supported then-Senator Kennedy’s bid for the vice presidential nomination at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. When Smith was ousted from his congressional seat, Kennedy made him an administrator at the TVA. Smith was a member of the State Historical Commission in Mississippi. Also on that board were James W. Silver and John K. Bettersworth. Smith also was a member of the Mississippi Historical Society, as of 1952, when it was revived. He was a special advisor to Gov. William F. Winter in 1981. Smith was a member of the Civil War Centennial Commission. He wrote a book titled Look Away From Dixie. His memoir was titled Congressman from Mississippi. In his later years, Smith could be found sitting in a rocking chair at Choctaw Books in Jackson, reading and talking with customers. The store is owned by his son, Fred.

109.) Smith, Marjorie D. Jackson

110.) Smith, Hazel Brannon Lexington
Hazel Brannon Smith was a newspaper publisher and editor in Holmes County, Mississippi, which is on the eastern edge of the Delta. She owned and published the *Lexington Advertiser* and the *Durant News*, among other properties. She was born in 1914 and she attended the University of Alabama. In 1936, after graduation, her father helped her buy the *Durant News* and to get established in the news business. Smith became a crusader against bootlegging and vice crime beginning around the 1940s. Because of the local sheriff’s direct involvement and partnership with the criminal element, her editorial stance put her at odds with powerful individuals in the community. She reported what was going on and got in trouble with the sheriff and, in the 1950s, with local Citizens’ Council. Initially interested in joining, Smith was kept out of the Citizens’ Council because it was all-male, and that ostracism had an effect on her politics. She wrote her column titled “Through Hazel Eyes,” which was often quite personal in nature. Her husband, Walter “Smitty” Smith, was a hospital administrator in Holmes County and he lost his job in retaliation for his wife’s editorial stance. This treatment only had a radicalizing effect on her. According to one source, Hazel Brannon Smith also published the *Flora Banner* (also known as the *Banner County Outlook*), in Flora, which she bought in 1955; the *Northside Reporter* (later the *Capitol Reporter*) in Jackson, which she bought in 1956; and the *Negro Free Press*. Hodding Carter wrote about her at length in a letter to the American Traditions Project in 1956 seeking funding. He also wrote to Louisville editor and former Mississippian Mark Etheridge trying to get some financial help for her newspapers. The two of them, with help from New York businessman Francis Stuart Harmon, set up something called the Tri-Anniversary Committee to raise money to keep Smith’s newspapers financially viable. Black organizations such as the NAACP also got involved in helping her financially. The Citizens’ Council had organized an advertising boycott against her and she needed help. In 1964, Smith was awarded the Pulitzer Prize. She continued to publish her newspapers until the mid-1980s, when advancing age and financial problems finally forced her to stop. She ended up dying in a nursing home in Alabama, suffering from Alzheimer’s disease.

111.) **Spiro, Robert H., Jr.** Clinton

Spiro was a professor of history at Mississippi College in Clinton from 1950-1957. He was born in North Carolina in 1920. He took his doctorate at the University of Edinburgh. Around 1955, he bought a small-circulation newspaper in Mississippi called the *Clinton News*. Spiro had a top position at the Mississippi Historical Society, around 1957. He was president of the University of Jacksonville from 1964-1979. He was a member of the U.S. Advisory Committee on Intergovernmental Relations. He was nominated for a position in the Defense Department in 1980.

112.) **Stein, Jake** Greenville

Stein was a merchant in Greenville and a prominent member of that city’s Jewish community. His family owned the SteinMart department store. Stein was close to Hodding Carter and he was a very influential businessman in the Delta.

113.) **Tatum, Jetson P.** Meridian
Tatum was a doctor at the Rush Memorial Hospital in Meridian. Through that connection, he was affiliated with the Rush Brothers Clinic and the Rush Foundation.

114.) **Tindall, Charles S.** Greenville
He was a lawyer and partner of Billy Wynn, a major power broker in the Delta and in Mississippi generally. The firm originally was called Wynn, Hafter, and Lake. Tindall was born in 1912. He was a graduate of Ole Miss and of its law school. In 1956, Tindall was a member of the Mississippi Economic Council’s Committee on Public Administration and Taxation which was looking into the question of legislative reapportionment.

115.) **Vinnedge, Hewitt Breneman** McComb
Vinnedge was associated with McComb Episcopal Church. He had positions at a number of other Mississippi Episcopal churches over the years. Vinnedge was born in 1898 and died in 1957. He graduated from the University of Miami in 1921. He was the president-rector at Keble College, an institution of the Episcopal Church at Pass Christian (Miss.) Southern College. Earlier he was a professor of New Testament language and literature at Nashotah House Seminary. He has a master’s from the University of Chicago, a Ph.D. from Marquette University, and a B.D. and S.T.M. from Nashotah. He had a radio program and had a book review column. He was a writer, teacher and clergyman. Vinnedge was a professor of history and religious education at Mississippi Southern College in 1947.

116.) **Waldorf, Milton** Hattiesburg
Waldorf studied at the University of Alabama. He owned a department store in Hattiesburg.

117.) **Walkup, Robert** Starkville
Walkup was pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Starkville from 1953-1964. He became pastor in 1953 “after making clear to the officers of the church that he had ‘a very tender conscience’ on the race question.” Walkup was raised in Senatobia, Mississippi. He attended a meeting sponsored by the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen, a liberal group, in January, 1956, in Nashville. According to the meeting’s organizer, Howard “Buck” Kester: “The purpose of this ‘off the record’ conference is to consider how churches and individual Christians may be helped to face more forthrightly responsibilities now required by the Supreme Court decisions against segregation. Through sharing our concerns and discussing our needs we hope to reach definite, realistic proposals that will be useful to Southern church groups in these days of crisis.” Walkup left the Starkville church for reasons having to do with race relations. He wanted an open door for anyone to worship. The Session of the church agreed and the doors were open. And then, while Walkup was away in Scotland, the Session, under pressure from the local business community, rescinded the policy. When Walkup came back his “heart was broken” by what he considered a betrayal. He resigned. A good friend of Walkup’s was Ole Miss chaplain Will D. Campbell.

118.) **Wiesenburg, Karl** Pascagoula
Wiesenburg was a state legislator from Pascagoula in Jackson County, in the southeast corner of Mississippi. Wiesenburg was born in 1911. He was from New York City originally. He served in the China, Burma, India theater of World War II. He originally came to Pascagoula as a Coast Guard officer protecting the coast from rumrunners in the 1930s. He became interested in and then an expert in ports, particularly the port of Pascagoula. He was city attorney of Pascagoula after the war. He was elected to the legislature in 1955 and served in the legislature from 1956-1963. He backed William F. Winter over Walter Sillers Jr. in the 1955 House Speaker race. This earned him the enmity of Sillers, who beat Winter in the election, and thus he was in a sense free of Sillers in the legislature. He was a delegate to the 1960 Democratic National Convention. He wrote a series of articles appearing in the *Pascagoula Chronicle* in late 1962 titled “The Oxford Disaster …Price of Defiance.” He was one of the few to oppose a legislative resolution in support of Gov. Ross R. Barnett on September 18, 1962 during the James Meredith integration crisis. Wiesenburg took a keen interest in reapportionment issues. According to Jackson-based journalist Wilson F. “Bill” Minor, Wiesenburg was one of a tiny handful of legislators “who consistently opposed the strategy of massive resistance pushed by Barnett and the White Citizens’ Council.”

119.) **Wheatley, Elizabeth**

Greenwood

In 1956, Wheatley was a director of the Mississippi Council on Human Relations, which was affiliated with the Southern Regional Council. Wheatley was a friend of A. Eugene and Lindsey Cox and of Betty and Hodding Carter.

120.) **Wilkes, Eugene**

Gulfport

Wilkes was the editor of the *Gulfport Daily Herald*, his family’s newspaper, beginning in 1954.

121.) **Williams, John D.**

Oxford

Born in 1903 and educated at the University of Kentucky, “J.D.” Williams was chancellor at Ole Miss from 1946-1968. Previously he had been a school principal and school superintendent in Kentucky and then was the president of Marshall College in West Virginia. Because Williams saw his main mission as protecting and growing the University of Mississippi, he was understandably wary of antagonizing the state’s white traditionalist hierarchy that controlled state funding. He was a member of the Mississippi Historical Society, when it was reconstituted in 1952. Williams kept appealing for calm during the Meredith integration crisis of 1962. At a critical moment, Williams announced that Meredith would be treated like any other student and the students were not to conduct any kind of demonstrations.

122.) **Williams, Parham H.**

Holmes County

Williams graduated from Ole Miss law school in 1952.

123.) **Williamson, Kathryn G.**

Water Valley

124.) **Williamson, H.G.**

Grenada
Williamson was a physician and in the mid-1950s was a board member of the Mississippi Council on Human Relations.

125.) **Wilson, J.H.** Clarksdale
Wilson was interested in reforms at the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman.

126.) **Winter, William F.** Grenada
Winter is one of the most prominent post-war moderate political figures in Mississippi. He has been a lawyer, state legislator, state tax collector, lieutenant governor and governor. Winter was born on February 21, 1923, in Grenada, Miss., the grandson of a Confederate cavalryman who rode with Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest. Winter’s middle name, hence, is Forrest. He was educated at Ole Miss and Ole Miss law school. He served in the Philippines with the U.S. Army at the end of World War II. Winter worked on John Stennis’ U.S. Senate campaign in 1947 and then he went to Washington in 1950, filling Frank Smith’s old job, as a legislative assistant to Stennis. He was elected to the state legislature from Grenada in 1947. He served in the House from 1948 until 1956 when he was made tax collector. Winter was the primary sponsor of Mississippi’s Workman’s Compensation Law, passed in 1948. He was instrumental in passage (in the legislature) of the Minimum Foundation Program in 1954, the basic educational system under which the state still operates. He ran unsuccessfully for House Speaker in late 1955 against incumbent Walter Sillers Jr. Winter was active in the Mississippi Historical Society; he was on the organization’s rolls when it was revived in 1952. In fact, he was chairman of the constitutional committee that reorganized and revitalized the Society in 1952. He served as its president from 1954-1955. He is the inspiration behind the William Winter Institute of Racial Reconciliation at the University of Mississippi. In 1955, Winter was a member of the Commission on Interstate Cooperation of the Council of State Governments. In 1956, Winter favored toughening Mississippi’s marriage laws. Later in his career, Winter was president of the board of trustees of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History. Winter was governor of Mississippi in the early 1980s.

127.) **Wroten, Joseph E.** Greenville
Wroten was a lawyer, state representative and Methodist church leader from Washington County, the area around Greenville. He was born on February 28, 1925, in New Albany, Miss., the son of a Methodist minister in Mississippi with deep social concerns. Wroten received his bachelor’s degree from Millsaps College and a law degree from the University of Mississippi. In January, 1948, Wroten was a student at Ole Miss. He was mentioned in the *Tupelo Daily Journal* in early January of 1948, as the Ole Miss student co-chairman of Religious Emphasis Week. He later practiced law with the Greenville firm of Wroten, Orlansky & Miller. He served for 12 years in the state House of Representatives, 1952-1963. Wroten was one of the few state lawmakers in 1955 to refuse to support a resolution before the House calling Hodding Carter a liar. Wroten was the Minters’ and the Coxes’ lawyer after the Tchula mass meeting incident of September, 1955. Wroten supported toughening marriage laws in 1956. He, like Karl Wiesenburg of Pascagoula, opposed the legislative resolution endorsing Gov. Ross R. Barnett on September 18, 1962. He was, along with Wiesenburg, the only one “who
consistently opposed the strategy of massive resistance pushed by Barnett and the White Citizens’ Council,” according to Jackson journalist Wilson F. Minor. A prominent Methodist layman, Wroten was a member of the Board of Christian and Social Concerns of the United Methodist Church. By 1979, Wroten was a judge in Greenville. He died in 2005.
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