The Heritage of Hub City: The Struggle for Opportunity in the New South, 1865-1964

Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By: William Mychael Sturkey, M.A.

Department of History

The Ohio State University

2012

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Hasan Kwame Jeffries, Advisor

Dr. Kevin Boyle

Dr. Kenneth Goings
Abstract:

“The Heritage of Hub City: The Struggle for Opportunity in the New South, 1865-1964” documents the deep-rooted origins of the Civil Rights Movement in the American South through the lens of a long local social history of Hattiesburg, Mississippi. This dissertation opens with a description of the first day of the 1964 Hattiesburg Freedom Schools and the retraces their development within the context of the changing status of race in modern America and the South to uncover the most important local, regional, and national factors that led to the explosion in local black activism symbolized by the openings of the Hattiesburg Freedom Schools on July 2, 1964.
Dedication:

This dissertation is dedicated to the black men and women who spent parts of their lives in Hattiesburg, Mississippi during parts of what was an incredibly tumultuous but ultimately triumphant century of American history.
Acknowledgements

First, I would like to thank the dedicated library staffs at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Emory University, Kent State University, the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, The King Center, The Amistad Research Center, The Ohio State University, and the University of Southern Mississippi for your tremendous help in researching this dissertation.

I would also like to thank my colleagues at the University of Southern Mississippi, especially Jennifer Brannock, Louis Kyriakoudes, Max Grivno, Andrew Weist, Curtis Austin, and Andrew Haley, all of whom made this work immensely better. My gratitude further extends to the dozens of people who spent hours talking with me about their experiences and lives in Mississippi.

I would also like to greatly thank my dissertation committee Hasan Kwame Jeffries, Kevin Boyle, and Kenneth Goings, and others who have greatly helped with the conceptualization of this project, especially Paula Baker and Joseph Arena, for their continued advice and support. Your insights through the years have greatly guided and influenced this work.
Finally, thanks to my family, especially Mom, Dave, and Aisha for your continued support and enthusiasm.

Vita

June 2000 Harborcreek High School

March 2005 The Ohio State University

May 2007 University of Wisconsin-Madison

August 2012 The Ohio State University

Publications


Fields of Study

Major Field: History

 Minor Field: African American History

 Minor Field: Modern American History
Table of Contents

Abstract.........................................................................................................................ii

Dedication....................................................................................................................iii

Acknowledgements......................................................................................................iv

Vita...............................................................................................................................v

Introduction: The Heritage of Hub City.................................................................1

Chapter 1: A Requiem for a Dream Deferred.......................................................20

Chapter 2: The Hub City of the New South...........................................................54

Chapter 3: In the Shadows of Modern America.....................................................104

Chapter 4: The Dreamers.......................................................................................163

Chapter 5: Those Who Stayed.............................................................................198

Chapter 6: A Way of Life......................................................................................233

Chapter 7: A Generation of Champions.................................................................262

Chapter 8: Collisions..............................................................................................295

Conclusion: People of Spirit...................................................................................351
Introduction: A Local Movement

Black churches across Hattiesburg, Mississippi rocked on their foundations the morning of July 2, 1964, the day Jim Crow died. Hundreds of black youths packed into the brick cathedrals, their faces glowing with hope as they entered the sacred spaces built by the generations who came before. The young people sang and shouted. The sounds of music and laughter echoed off the vaulted church ceilings and drifted out through the hot summer air. Most of them were young, but elders were scattered throughout. An eighty-two year-old man explained that he had arrived at the churches that morning to “learn more in order to register to vote.” He was surrounded by children as young as eight. Those young people had yet to be scarred by the worst of the stinging and humiliating lessons of the racial hatred that clouded black Mississippi life. But many of them wouldn’t ever have those same experiences as the old man. They were going to have different lives than those who came before. That morning was the start of something new and transformative. And so they arrived by the hundreds, filling those hallowed spaces to the brim. They packed the narrow rows between the church pews and stood hand-in-hand, belting out freedom songs. Their voices poured through the brick-framed windows and out onto the city streets, infusing the surrounding community with energy and possibilities. Something in them was changing. Their lives were being altered. Freedom School was officially in session.¹

Those magical first moments were merely the beginning of the Hattiesburg Freedom Schools. By the end of the following week, nearly 600 ambitious students arrived to enroll in the voluntary summer classes, crowding into the Mt. Zion Baptist, True Light Baptist, and St. Paul Methodist churches to absorb the transformative opportunities of Freedom School. So many students enrolled that the Freedom Schools quickly ran out of space. Teachers moved their classrooms outside, gathering students in the shade of the church buildings or under a canopy of trees. But there were still just too many students. The original Freedom School planners had only expected between 50 and 100 throughout the entire summer, not 600 in the first week. The overwhelmed Freedom School coordinators were forced to cut off registration. No more students. They were simply out of teachers. But the black youths of Hattiesburg wouldn’t hear of it. They kept coming, climbing through windows and unlocking doors to sneak their friends into the bursting Freedom School classrooms. In the coming weeks, nearly one-thousand students arrived for Freedom School classes, forcing activists to call for teaching reinforcements. The students learned black history, debated Civil Rights Movement tactics, and published community newsletters. Soon they were leading voter registration campaigns, sitting-in at local lunch counters, canvassing potential voters, and marching in downtown protests.

Many of them would go on to remarkable lives and careers. Something came loose that summer in those Freedom Schools. Most of them would never turn back. As a fifteen year-old student named Albert Evans wrote in 1964, “Today I am the world’s footstool but tomorrow I hope to be one of its leaders. By attending Freedom School this summer I am preparing for that tomorrow.”

The Hattiesburg Freedom Schools that met in the summer of 1964 were part of an epic civil rights campaign named Freedom Summer. During Freedom Summer, or the

---

Summer Project, over one thousand idealistic and courageous college students and ministers from across America entered Mississippi to join the fight for black equality in the nation’s most racially oppressive state. The Freedom Summer workers who arrived in Hattiesburg were liberal dreamers who ventured to Mississippi to join the Civil Rights Movement that was sweeping through the South. They came from all over. Sandra Adickes and Stanley Zibulsky were from New York. Joe and Nancy Ellin were from Kalamazoo. Arthur and Carolyn Reese were veteran teachers from Detroit. Paula Pace came from Connecticut and Dick Kelley arrived from Chicago. Others hailed from places like San Francisco, Baltimore, and St. Paul, Minnesota. Many of them were young with little or no experience as activists. Most were teachers or privileged college students free from the obligations of summer jobs. A remarkable social movement of people called them to Mississippi. They came together that summer in Hattiesburg, infiltrating Mississippi during the heart of the Civil Rights Movement to live, laugh, and pray among thousands of black Hattiesburgers who for years had struggled to gain freedom. None of their lives would ever be the same.\footnote{“Freedom School Assignments,” Box 17, Folder 20, MFDP Papers; “Summer Project Workers-Hattiesburg,” Box 2, Folder 1, Ellin Papers; and Alex Poinsett, “Council of Federated Organizations Conducts Summer-long, Freedom Project,” \textit{Ebony}, September, 1964, 25-34. For more on the goals of the 1964 Freedom Summer Project, see Doug McAdam, \textit{Freedom Summer} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); John Dittmer, \textit{Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi} (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1995); and Charles Payne, \textit{I’ve Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle} (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995).}

Freedom Schools were the most electric part of Freedom Summer campaign. They empowered Mississippi youths by placing them at the forefront of a burgeoning statewide Civil Rights Movement and supplementing the inferior public educational opportunities available to most African Americans. Mississippi schools remained racially segregated a full decade after the Supreme Court’s 1954 \textit{Brown v. Board of Education} decision. Most of the black schools were astonishingly bad. On average, Mississippi spent about four times as much on white students as blacks. Expenditures for black schools briefly increased during the 1950s in an attempt to ward off the impending \textit{Brown v. Board} mandate, but vast inequalities remained. The disparities were devastating and endless. Teachers in black schools taught more students than their white counterparts and were paid far less. They also had less to work with. Everything in the black schools was
inferior, desks, chairs, windows, bathrooms, and even chalkboards, if they had them at all. Black students received hand-me-down textbooks from white schools that had discarded the old books for newer ones. African American students opened “new” books only to find the names of a half dozen white students listed on the inside flap, again rehashing the inequalities between the lives of those young black students and the whites who lived across town. The most disturbing tale of inequality came from Ruleville. Each November, teachers loaded Ruleville students as young as seven years-old onto busses and delivered them to plantations where students spent their school days picking cotton. “I have picked at several plantations over the past several years,” one young man testified. “I don’t get paid for this. I have seen the teacher get the money from the Boss Man. I think they usually get about $14 or $15 because the class usually picks 800 pounds. I was 7 in the 3rd grade when I first went to the fields to pick.” Any student who refused to pick was threatened with a $3.00 fine. The state was filled with countless examples of heartbreaking educational inequalities. Many black students simply didn’t have a chance. In observing the regular public schools, Freedom School proposer Charlie Cobb wrote that “Mississippi destroys [those considered to be] ‘smart niggers’ and its classrooms remain intellectual wastelands.” In his Freedom School prospectus, Cobb envisioned providing students with an unprecedented opportunity. He wanted to design spaces of freedom, or “Houses of Liberty,” as one student would later dub her Freedom School.4

Hattiesburg, also known as the Hub City, had the biggest Freedom School system in the state. It was, according to statewide Freedom School coordinator Staughton Lynd, the “Mecca of the Freedom School world.” The young students didn’t just attend the Hattiesburg Freedom Schools. They took them over. Classroom discussions and curriculum changed to fit their needs. They held debates, studied black history, read Ebony magazine, sent letters to the President, and learned French. The momentum from those schools penetrated back into the Hub City as a new generation of leaders emerged.

In some of the most audacious acts in Movement history, dozens of them spilled out into their communities to canvass potential voter registrants. They went house-to-house rapping their tiny fists on the wooden front doors of their elders, demanding that the older generation attempt to register to vote and come to political meetings. That fall, many of those young people became the first blacks to ever attend public schools with whites in the state of Mississippi. Ten year-old Glenda Funchess was among those to integrate. She later remembered, that Freedom Schools “really helped us to stand firm, and not crumble. Because we knew that we were very equal. No matter what they called us, no matter what they did.”

The Hattiesburg Freedom Schools were phenomenal. But they were also just one part of the remarkable 1964 Freedom Summer, one of the most audacious campaigns of the American Civil Rights Movement. During that summer, over one hundred civil rights volunteers and scores of ministers descended on the Hub City that summer for short but eventful stays. The black downtown on Mobile Street buzzed with activity as their society seemingly burst open hope. Not everyone was involved. It would be a mistake to say that. But thousands were. They organized, protested, and fought. There were countless extraordinary moments in the coming weeks as local blacks slowly but surely began ejecting Jim Crow from their lives. People who had never dreamed of voting marched to the courthouse to register. Grade school dropouts helped plan an overthrow of the state Democratic Party. Normal everyday people virtuously demanded access to the promises of American democracy. They cracked open a system. And they did it together.

Hattiesburg busses remained segregated nearly a decade after the famous Montgomery Bus Boycott, but local blacks resolved to end the practice that summer. When thirty-five year-old Dorothea Jackson was removed from a bus for refusing to give up her seat on a sweltering August day, the remaining twenty black passengers stood up and also walked off that bus, spurring a boycott that would end segregated seating on city busses. Two days later, a half dozen kids from the Freedom School dragged their teacher

---

5 Adickes, interview; Zibulsky, interview; Randall, interview; Schwartzbaum, interview; Pace, interview; Adickes, The Legacy of a Freedom School, 81-100; and Funchess, interview with author, recording, Hattiesburg, Mississippi, December 16, 2009.
6 Randall, interview; Adickes, interview; and Sheila Michaels, interview by author, recording, Columbus, OH, June 18, 2010.
through town on an integration tour, stopping at the local Kress’s and Woolworths for equal opportunity sodas before arriving at the local library for a sit-in. Their teacher was arrested, but the protest spurred a larger response and the library was eventually desegregated. All across Hattiesburg, the Movement was in vogue.7

Over the following months and years, well after the Freedom Summer volunteers went back to their colleges and the Freedom Schools closed, black Hattiesburgers launched a prolonged attack against systematic racial discrimination, eradicating the worst aspects of Jim Crow from their society. It was an epic but triumphant struggle, full of meetings, demonstrations, boycotts, marches, arguments, songs, tears, tragedies, integrations, and victories. The Movement had caught hold of a community and it would never be the same. In a state full of remarkable social change, Hattiesburg stood out. The first white person to be convicted of killing a black civil rights activist in Mississippi occurred here. The first white man to be convicted and equally sentenced for raping a black woman in Mississippi was in Hattiesburg. The continuous attempts of black Hattiesburgers to register to vote led to a Justice Department case against a local white supremacist registrar named Theron Lynd and helped form much of the legislative backbone of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Dozens of famous civil rights activists originated from and travelled through Hattiesburg, including Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. just days before he died. Today, Hattiesburg looks remarkably different than it did in 1964. African Americans can walk, sit, stand, eat, and sleep just about anywhere they like. Hattiesburg has black police officers and public officials. Local schools are integrated. The city even has a black mayor, an absolutely unthinkable achievement just forty years before when African Americans were killed just for merely attempting to register to vote.8

8 See Danielle L. McGuire, At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance--A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power (New York: Knopf, 2010), 191-211; Taylor Branch, Pillar of Fire : America in the King Years 1963-65, especially 50-74 and 214-224; Dittmer, Local People; and Gordon A. Martin, Count Them One By One: Black Mississippians Fighting for the Rights to Vote (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2010).
Blossoming during the greatest social upheaval in American history, the Hattiesburg Freedom Schools were a beacon of vast and rapid changes that would occur in the coming. But Freedom Schools and their students were also part of a deep and extraordinary history with roots that extended well beyond those amazing Hattiesburg Freedom School classrooms. Those churches rocked on foundations laid nearly eighty years before. There were profound histories behind the origins of those spaces and the reasons why the Movement happened to grab such a hold of Hattiesburg. As Hattiesburg blacks accomplished all of those transformative changes in the 1960s, they stood on the shoulders of people who lived and fought and struggled to carve out meaningful lives in the midst of the most racially oppressive society America has known since the end of the Civil War. In nowhere else was the racism greater or the eventual changes more profound. Yet, the blacks who lived there found ways to survive and even at times thrive. Those hopeful students who burst into Hattiesburg’s black churches on the morning of July 2, 1964 were the result part of a deep and extended legacy, the apex of an intergenerational struggle fought by African Americans who gathered within the confines of Jim Crow Mississippi to produce vestiges of freedom and manufacture dreams. They were the heritage of the Hub City.

What unfolds in the following pages is a history of race and opportunity during a century of life in the American South. This story is told through the lens of a town and its people, both black and white, to examine how a century of American modernization affected race in Southern communities between the end of slavery and the death of Jim Crow. Originally founded in 1880, Hattiesburg was a place where both whites and blacks saw opportunity and arrived to pursue better lives. A classic town of the New South, Hattiesburg was founded during the height of the Second Industrial Revolution as wealthy innovators laid railroads across the Southern landscape, modernizing the region and opening new avenues of industrial and economic development. In much of the South, but especially in southern Mississippi, the most important function of the new railroads was the opening of the timber trade. These developments are what made Hattiesburg boom. As the century turned, thousands of Southerners abandoned agricultural lives to
take jobs with the new sawmill and railroad companies as the South embraced the opportunities of modernity.

As new economic prospects crept across the region, white Southerners consolidated power to control opportunity. They refurbished antebellum racial mores to reclaim power and status over African Americans, hoarding the promises of their changing society, by stripping away the black rights gained after the Civil War and permanently relegating African Americans to an inferior social and political status. Yet, this ambitious new economic and racial system known as the New South was inherently flawed. As the white architects of the New South welcomed industrialization, they also inadvertently opened opportunities for African Americans. Black communities would also benefit from the promises of the New South, finding opportunities through economic mobility and racial cohesiveness enforced by Jim Crow. Pockets of strong black people resiliently waded through the depths of racial oppression together, all the while gaining strength in and out of the South. Similar dynamics repeated throughout the Great Depression and World War II as Southerners increasingly reached out to the federal government and outside world. This process capitulated in the 1960s in places like Hattiesburg where a national Movement landed in a deep-rooted African American community to spark a complete and utter local rejection of Jim Crow.

By writing this history of Hattiesburg, I hope to illuminate inherent truths about the histories of other similar places in the American South. As with most cities, there are several factors that make the Hub City unique. Hattiesburg is certainly not every town. But the town itself is highly symbolic of hundreds of mid-sized towns created by a system, the way of life that emerged within the context of post Reconstruction Southern history. This way of life was dominated by a social racial caste system that controlled the opportunities found within the new economic structure of the urban South. By exploring how national and regional trends affected the racialized struggle for opportunity in Hattiesburg, I hope to offer implications for people in other Southern cities who similarly responded to and were affected by nearly a century of American life.
I also go to great pains to contextualize Hattiesburg within the realm of a constantly changing America, especially when discussing events, people, and developments that impacted local African Americans. Major events, people, and historical trends and developments are unfolded here; synthesized in part from other histories and applied to a Hattiesburg narrative in order to help show how the outside world constantly affected African Americans across the South, even if local everyday people were seemingly disconnected from important events and famous leaders. I hope this historical context will allow for inferences for other black Southern communities. Of course, not every moment in American history is or should be included. Nor do I document every significant event in the history of Hattiesburg. Some omissions will appear obvious to local historians, but my goal is not to detail the entire history of Hattiesburg. I’ve merely included the factors that I believe have led to the most dramatic and transformative changes to racial relations and access to opportunity throughout the modern history of the American South.

In order to more fully contextualize the black experience in Hattiesburg, this narrative also includes the perspective of Mound Bayou, a small town in the Mississippi Delta located about 200 miles away from Hattiesburg. Mound Bayou is included in this history for several reasons. The first is to help illuminate the importance of education to newly emancipated freedpeople during and after the Civil War. I use the story of the Montgomery family, whose son Isaiah founded Mound Bayou, as a narrative function to both introduce Mound Bayou and to help demonstrate the importance of education to newly emancipated African Americans. Throughout the early twentieth century, African American communities trumpeted education as the primary means for achieving success within the constraints of Jim Crow Mississippi. The blacks who arrived in Hattiesburg throughout the late 19th and early 20th century arrived with similar values and goals.

Mound Bayou also functions in this narrative as a municipal icon for much of the rest of black America. From its foundation, Mound Bayou functioned as a crucial example of the possibilities for the advancement of African Americans through the self-help tactics advocated by Isaiah Montgomery and his close friend and ally Booker T. Washington. The town consistently attracted scores of African American leaders and members of the black media who saw extraordinary promise in the all-black settlement.
and espoused its virtues to audiences across the nation. The town offered something for American blacks that Harlem, Chicago, and even Atlanta never could: it was completely controlled and inhabited by African Americans. The all-black settlement was widely recognized as a place of peace and prosperity where scores of African American farmers and entrepreneurs flourished. Mound Bayou was a model for black communities across America. At the very least, it remained an important beacon of racial pride.

Because it served as such a powerful example of black self-help, Mound Bayou emerged in the black public eye as early as the 1890s and attracted dramatic media coverage throughout much of the early twentieth century, consistently remaining one of the most discussed black communities in America. It hosted scores of celebrities, celebrations, and dozens of members of the black media themselves, steadily attracting more attention per capita than any black enclave in the country. It also served as a headquarters for several statewide black organizations, which connected African Americans from numerous communities, including Hattiesburg. This attention continued throughout the twentieth century and culminated in 1955 with the massive media coverage of the Emmett Till case. I seek to illuminate Mound Bayou’s historical importance to black America in order to show how that longstanding tradition ultimately created the century’s largest Mississippi race story that would create dramatic openings for black leaders to attract increased outside influence and assistance from outside the state. Mound Bayou played a massive role in helping to eventually bring widespread Movement activities to Mississippi in the 1950s and 1960s and I seek to document its importance to the local events in Hattiesburg while offering analogous implications for other Southern communities.

Lastly, I need to note that this study appears in the form of a highly crafted narrative. I embrace the scholarly mission of historical study, but also pay close attention to style and narrative structure in order to offer what I hope is an engaging and enjoyable account without compromising the standards of historical scholarship. Professional historians have for decades wrestled with strategies for writing serious academic works that tell better stories and are accessible for public consumption. The most popular historian of the twentieth century Barbara Tuchman routinely criticized academics for dry narratives and inaccessible prose while challenging them to think more like artists. Her
contemporary Samuel Elliot Morrison similarly argued that academic historians “have forgotten that there is an art of writing history.”

Academic historians today encounter similar challenges and shortcomings. Historian Gordon Wood defends academic history writing, noting that modern academic historical monographs “grew out of the 19th-century noble dream that history might become an objective science” and have built upon decades of historiographical advancements to “allow us to know more, and more accurately, about more aspects of past human behavior than ever before.” Yet, it is this very limited and refined scope of specialization that inherently limits historical readership and results in what current American Historical Association President William Cronon calls “professional boredom.” Recent editorials published in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and the American Historical Association’s *Perspectives Magazine* urge historians to produce a new generation of scholarship that foregoes highly specialized jargon in favor of language accessible to broad audiences. The art of writing and narration within the expected parameters of professional historical scholarship is one of the hottest discussions and debates in the historical profession.

This dissertation seriously considers these decades-long conversations between public and academic historians to seek a working marriage between scholarship and storytelling. It is narrative-driven, but historiographically and analytically grounded. The arguments should be clear but not dry. Numerous major historiographical trends have been incredibly important to the conceptualization of this work and are thoroughly engaged in the footnotes. But this work is also driven by the desire to tell a story accessible to non-academics and fully embrace the remarkable possibilities of narrative historical writing within the parameters of professional historical scholarship. I weave the story of race and opportunity in Hattiesburg, Mississippi through a century of American

---


and Southern history to ultimately return readers to the opening moment of the Hattiesburg Freedom Schools with a far better appreciation of what those Freedom Schools meant and a complex understanding of how they came to be.

* * *

Today, scores of elderly black Hattiesburgers remember a time “when the Movement came.” That massive social Movement captured an entire community and transformed a society as the most public forms of Jim Crow disappeared from their Hattiesburg life. Most who remember that arrival are referring to either the appearance of small groups of college-aged activists in 1961 or 1962 or the massive influx of dozens of white Northern ministers in January of 1964, who arrived in the Hub City that winter and spring to participate in mass protests and help register voters. The people who most vividly remember “when the Movement came” were also those who facilitated its arrival. They hosted the activists, helped them organize marches, and offered their churches and schools for rallies and meetings, embracing the opportunities offered by the ambitious Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. This sort of collective communal action was nothing new for many local blacks. For decades, they had been collectively organizing through community-supported black churches, schools, and businesses to improve their own lives and those of the black people who lived among them. Yet, local people tend not to include those traditions as part of the same “Movement.” The black Hattiesburg children who poured into those wonderful Freedom Schools on July 2, 1964 were part of not only a national Movement, but also a remarkable local community organizing tradition.11

Recent historical scholarship has attempted to extend the periodization of the Civil Rights Movement beyond the 1950s and 1960s by calling for the conceptualization of a “long Civil Rights Movement.” The most popular vision for such an extension is to consider the role of Great Depression-era labor activists in laying the groundwork for the Movement’s classical era that began in the mid-1950s. By grounding the Movement in the labor-based organizing of the 1930s, several historians have concluded that the Cold

11 Daisy Harris Wade, interview by William Sturkey, recording, Hattiesburg, MS, October 6, 2011, recording in author’s possession.
War stripped the Movement’s radical economic potential and left a stripped-down agenda that ended public racial segregation, but ultimately failed to remedy deep-rooted racial economic inequalities. This contemporary historiographical top-down labor-based “long Civil Rights Movement” paradigm, however, underappreciates the transformative nature of the 1960s-era assaults on Jim Crow as well as the deep historical foundations of local community organizing traditions. Any periodization that begins in the 1930s overlooks the importance of early African American communal foundations and also of the uniqueness of the 1960s, in which millions of black Southerners unprecedentedly expelled racial segregation from their society.12

This dissertation seeks to add another layer to the historiography of the Civil Rights Movement by exploring Movement origins at the local level. Historians have tended to focus on national origins or trends while largely overlooking the systematic foundations of localized communal institutions and traditions that facilitated Movement activities during the 1950s and 1960s. From a local view, it becomes very clear that the foundations for local community organizing efforts were laid far before the 1930s. The very spaces in which the Movement was organized are symbolic of those deep roots. Almost without fail, every single one of the iconic Southern black churches made famous during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s was organized during the 1880s or 1890s as African American migrants created black enclaves in the cities of a rapidly urbanizing New South. Yet, this does not mean scholars should include all forms of black communal organizing should fall under the banner of a Movement. The activism of later decades built on these foundations, but was fundamentally different in scope and nature.

The Civil Rights Movement affected every location differently, but had its greatest impact in Southern urban spaces during the 1960s as the racialized system of Jim Crow was systematically removed from Southern public life. This broad social transformation was characterized by the destruction of public racial segregation, criminalization of white-on-black assaults, rapes and murders, removal of civically mandated racial economic and educational barriers, and legislation that offered for African Americans the right to participate in the political process. The 1960s era widespread rejection of Jim Crow was completely different than anything that came before and also had far deeper roots than most historians have realized.

This dissertation measures social change within the Jim Crow era by tracing the history of a community through several eras to demonstrate how local populations were affected by and responded to numerous national and regional developments across a century of American life. Throughout the twentieth century, black families and communities consolidated their resources to champion education, mobility, economic independence, and varying forms of collective welfare organizing to manufacture opportunities within the constraints of Jim Crow and lay deep institutional foundations and pioneer communal values that would later facilitate the rise of a massive social movement. Blacks had always sought to achieve greater levels of freedom. Their actions, responses, and successes constantly shifted based on varying historical opportunities and contexts. The overtly aggressive black activism seen in the 1960s was the result of a long organic developmental process rather than a radical thread of activism fashioned during a particular era. This dissertation builds on existing local studies, especially John Dittmer’s *Local People* and Charles Payne’s *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom*, to illuminate the history of the remarkable black communities that grew and developed between Emancipation and the Civil Rights era.¹³

Furthermore, this dissertation explores the impact of American modernization on race in the small cities of the New South by examining and fully incorporating the changing perspectives of white Southerners. As I seek to demonstrate the origins of the remarkable Movement that grabbed Hattiesburg’s black community, it is also necessary to explore the perceptions of the white architects of the very system to which blacks were responding. By considering New South economic trends and white perspectives within the context of a long local social history, I seek to show how Southern dependence on Northern and government assistance through much of the twentieth century created openings for African American advancement even as Southerners institutionalized and maintained the Jim Crow system. Although local whites were fairly successful in hoarding the most promising opportunities, they consistently had to reconsider and renegotiate their own racial mores and practices to capitalize on the opportunities offered by modern America. Every aspect of their society was so racialized that any changes to their economic or political system also inherently impacted the racial order, which remained in constant flux through the twentieth century. Because of these realities, I argue, many of the opportunities in black Southern life were inadvertently created by local white powerbrokers. The most important of these was the economic mobility provided by wage labor, communal cohesion created by rigid racial residential segregation, and the decline of lynching as a terrorist tactic. Many Southerners, at every turn, compromised local racial control for increased opportunities from outsiders without ever realizing the effects the assistance would have on local black populations.¹⁴

This dissertation also contributes to the prevailing literature of black life in the American South by seeking to slightly alter an often whiggish view of African American life after Reconstruction, an era commonly referred to as the “nadir” of the black

experience. Much of the historical literature of the Jim Crow South focuses on the atrocities, of which there are many. Mississippi is often seen as a sort of wilderness where blacks were haplessly lynched and abused for decades. In a growing field of historical scholarship that documents African American resistance in slavery and during the postwar era, it is almost as if for several decades blacks forgot how to cope with Southern racial oppression besides simply leaving the region. African Americans certainly encountered incredible challenges and severe racial discrimination and violence. But they also built communities and institutions that insulated them, in part, from the consequences of white supremacy. This work attempts to offer a much more nuanced view by uncovering what historian Robin Kelley refers to as the “hidden transcripts” of African American life in the Jim Crow South. Whereas Kelley focuses specifically on workplace resistance, I apply his “hidden transcript” concept more broadly to illuminate the daily intricacies of the African American experience through the lens of a Southern community and its people. To put it plainly, I seek to show what African Americans did rather than merely detailing what was done to them.15

I do not necessarily seek to classify every single action under the banner of resistance or tradition. Rather, I am merely attempting to more fully capture the ways that everyday working-class African Americans strove to find peace and prosperity within the rigid racial confines of the Jim Crow system. This dissertation captures subtle pleasures and points out the various forms of happiness available to Mississippi blacks as it

documents a rich, vibrant community that grows and changes through the early twentieth century, facing down lynching, disfranchisement, discrimination, and a horde of other disadvantages to pursue and create opportunities during the century after Emancipation. Hattiesburg blacks encountered the worst kinds of racism. But they also found opportunity in the openings of the New South. This dissertation embraces a “bottom-up” analysis of change in black lives within the historical context of Modern United States and Southern History. I use innovative sources to overcome the challenges of researching black life in the Jim Crow era and produce a deft marriage between New South economic history and African American social history, allowing this work to contribute to a recent renaissance in African American historiography that more fully illuminates the intricacies of Southern black life during Jim Crow.

In many ways, these perspectives and goals ultimately allow this social history to offer a more complicated or alternative vision of the structural changes inherent in American modernization. Historians often think of blacks as being excluded from the vast promises of American modernity. Be it through the loss of production, rise of sharecropping, failure of Populism, or development of Jim Crow, African Americans were seemingly excluded from modernity, getting trampled by the railroads and becoming some of the worst victims of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. But modernity also resulted in the rise of black urban enclaves that would offer for greater opportunities for millions of black Southerners. As Leon Litwack explained, “The popular idea that ‘freedom was free-er’ in the towns and cities stimulated an ongoing movement.” Most Southern blacks remained in rural areas during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but those who migrated to the cities began to realize a freedom not possible before modernization. They too had visions of opportunity in the New South and crafted parallel communities that provided for many greater opportunities in and out of Dixie. This dissertation seeks to complicate our historical understanding of the processes of modernization by detailing how African American individuals and communities used wage labor to leave plantations, build important communal institutions, migrate North,
change jobs, and eventually lay remarkable foundations that would facilitate the most transformative changes in African American life.\(^{16}\)

Moreover, this dissertation seeks to contribute to the literature on black Southern life by showing how local black Hattiesburg leaders were connected across the state and even the country. African Americans in the pre-World War II era were never as stagnant or isolated as previously thought. Rather, they constantly sought to organize leaders from different communities in attempts to create a statewide dialogue that would allow an exchange of ideas and strategies. Many also embraced an important and powerful relationship with African Americans outside Mississippi, especially with former Mississippians who had migrated to Chicago. Through publications like the *Chicago Defender*, Hattiesburg blacks were in touch with national racial conversations and developments and vice versa. This study helps further illuminate the important roles in Southern black life played by Northern media outlets in the decades before World War II. Furthermore, by including Mound Bayou’s role in the black national consciousness, I help illuminate the long development of the processes and relationships that existed between Mound Bayou and the black Chicago media and which ultimately created the explosive social power of the 1955 Emmett Till lynching case. The media explosion of the Emmett Till case has a far deeper history than most scholars have previously recognized. The impact of the lynching was not merely the result of the boy’s age. Longstanding relationships and personal initiatives produced that case which profoundly impacted race in America.\(^{17}\)


Finally, this dissertation offers additional significance to recent American and Southern history by documenting the rich history of an often overlooked region. The Mississippi Piney Woods’ importance to the growth of the “New South” economy and American modernization has been vastly understudied. As historian Noel Polk has argued, “It is as if Hattiesburg, one of the largest cities in the state, simply did not exist” because of the region’s location between extraordinary places, such as New Orleans and the Mississippi Delta. Despite being often overlooked, Hattiesburg and the Piney Woods region were crucial to the growth of modern America and the New South in numerous ways, particularly through the region’s contribution to the American timber industry. The Mississippi Piney Woods was the site of one of the largest lumber booms in American history. It dominated the national timber industry from the turn of the century to the Great Depression. In 1910, Southern Longleaf Yellow Pine comprised 36.6% of all the lumber cut in the United States, making it by far the leading lumber species produced in America. The Longleaf Yellow Pine that grows across the Mississippi Piney Woods was shipped across the globe as the world modernized. Used in utility poles, railroad ties, naval stores, and residential flooring, it was perfect for the infrastructure of a modernizing world. This dissertation will illuminate the essential role of places like Hattiesburg in contributing to the modernization of America and rise of the New South. Research conducted for this dissertation will not only show the ways that the development and growth of Hattiesburg impacted African American history, but also the history of Mississippi, the modern American South, and the contemporary United States.\[18\]

Chapter 1: A Requiem for a Dream Deferred

Ben and Mary Montgomery knew the value of an education. Reading was a dream. It offered hope. But as black slaves in antebellum Mississippi, it was illegal for them to learn to read and write. The Montgomerys, however, had a unique owner named Joseph R. Davis, the brother of future Confederate President Jefferson Davis. Joseph Davis was curious about the minds of the enslaved blacks who worked on his Davis Bend plantation. Located just twenty miles south of Vicksburg in a two mile-wide bend of the Mississippi River, Davis Bend was one of the largest cotton plantations in the state. Only nine Mississippians owned more than 300 slaves, and Joseph Davis was one of them. For years, he had wondered just what those black bondspeople could achieve if given a genuine opportunity. Influenced by contemporary reformist arguments, his curiosity got the best of him. Davis violated the law by allowing many of his slaves to learn to read. He even helped them by providing access to newspapers and books. Ben and Mary Montgomery jumped at the opportunity. Their literacy paid off.¹⁹

Ben Montgomery began to foster his remarkable intelligence and natural curiosity. He absorbed books on engineering and architecture, developing an outstanding gift for mechanics and agricultural management. The literacy created opportunities for both the slave and the slaveowner. Davis capitalized on Ben’s talents, moving him out of the field and into roles more suited for his ever-expanding expertise. Rather than toiling in the scorching Mississippi sun, Ben worked as a mechanic, machinist, civil engineer, and purchasing agent. Through several wise transactions, he even made a small side profit, and used the earnings to rent Mary’s labor so she could stay at home caring for their five small children, teaching each how to read. The couple’s youngest son, Isaiah

Thornton Montgomery, remembered his mother reading to him from an old fashioned Webster’s spelling book during the day and his father drilling him on the alphabet at night.  

Isaiah learned quickly. By age seven, the young boy read so well that his parents had to hire a private tutor to teach him more than they ever could. The lessons paid off. Literacy was potent. As they had for his father, words opened doors for Isaiah. When a contraband copy of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* appeared in the slave quarters, Isaiah covertly read the book to his appreciative fellow bondsmen, enhancing his status in the Davis Bend slave community. At age ten, he was transferred to the plantation mansion to serve as Joseph’s personal secretary. He spent the rest of his enslavement copying and filing personal letters and papers, often spending his free time enjoying Davis’s extensive library, rumored to be the finest literary collection in the entire South. His life was infinitely better than it would have been as a field hand. The Montgomery’s avoided the daily pitfalls of field labor, the aching backs and scarred, cracking hands that characterized plantation slavery. Years later, Isaiah remembered his privileged status as a well-educated slave, “We just barely had an idea of what slave life was.”

Isaiah was a young teenager in the spring of 1862 when Union forces took New Orleans, forcing Joseph Davis to flee his Mississippi River home. Following a series of Union Army raids, the white overseers at David Bend also fled. The chaos of the Civil War left a vacuum. The only people left on the plantation were its black workers. Naturally, the former slaves who stayed at Davis Bend looked to the Montgomerys. The literate black family stepped in to lead. They managed the plantation through the end of the War and beyond, supervising agricultural production and sales, and even maintaining correspondence with Davis, who promised to eventually sell to them portions of the estate. Their business savvy, facilitated by literacy, kept the farm afloat. But the Montgomerys were not blindly loyal to their former owner and his brother’s cause. Davis

---


Bend was surrounded by action. The plantation sat in the heart of the Civil War’s Western Theatre. And the Montgomeries assisted the Union Army. Ben used his mechanical skills to help repair Yankee ships and Isaiah became cabin boy and personal attendant to Admiral David Porter as the Union’s river fleet took control of the mighty Mississippi during the Siege of Vicksburg.  

The Montgomeries also offered Davis Bend as a refuge to hundreds of escaped slaves. Bondspeople poured onto the plantation, arriving with a common ambition. They desired what they had been denied. Almost every single one of them wanted to learn to read. So the Montgomeries helped establish schools for these freedpeople. Those who could read taught the ones who couldn’t. Throughout the war, the black population at Davis Bend sought literacy with remarkable vigor. According to Davis Bend historian Janet Herman, the new migrants were “universally eager to read and write.” Schoolhouses popped up along the plantation’s empty river channels. Permanent settlement followed. Many blacks were there to stay, building a community on that plantation. Learning was all around them. Within fifteen months of the Confederate surrender at Appomattox, the freedpeople at Davis Bend had organized an educational system, complete with a school board and five black teachers. The Montgomeries would stay more than a decade after the end of the War. Ben Montgomery ran Davis Bend until he passed away in 1877, the year Reconstruction officially ended. The black population at Davis Bend reached as high as 2,000, and news of African Americans “advancing rapidly in letters” continuously flowed from the reports of observers.

The Montgomery’s literacy offered them greater levels of freedom within slavery and positioned them for leadership roles following Emancipation. They passed this rich

---

22 Joseph Davis often mentioned the Montgomery’s valuable service in postwar letters to his brother. See, Lynda Lasswell Crist, et. al., eds., The Papers of Jefferson Davis (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), Vol. 12 June 1865-December 1870. The fall of Vicksburg on July 4, 1863 essentially sealed the fate of the Confederated Army, which had suffered a major military defeat at Gettysburg the previous day. While Gettysburg turned the tide of war by ending the Confederate’s Pennsylvania invasion, the Union victory at Vicksburg gave the North complete control over the Mississippi River, effectively cutting the Confederacy in half and crippling its logistical capabilities. For more, see Michael B. Ballard, Vicksburg: The Campaign That Opened the Mississippi (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003); and Edwin C. Bearss with J. Parker Hillis, Receding Tide: Vicksburg and Gettysburg-The Campaigns That Changed the Civil War (Washington D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2010).

23 Hermann, The Pursuit of a Dream, especially 37-60, 61-106, and 109-216. Quotes on quote on 54 and 183, respectively.
familial heritage onto their children and to the freedpeople who migrated to Davis Bend during and after the War. Because teaching slaves to read was illegal, their ability to achieve literacy in antebellum Mississippi was fairly unique. Their desire to do so, however, was not. After Emancipation, newly freed slaves across Mississippi pursued this educational dream. Freedpeople understood the value of literacy, and wanted it badly. It offered liberation, enabling control over contracts, facilitating communication, and allowing for audacious dreams about the possibilities that awaited their children. Those who could master the letters would become leaders. They could achieve the things so readily denied to their enslaved ancestors: safety, peace, respectability, and even mobility. It also gave them the ability to cast ballots and read the Bible. Most importantly, it allowed them to read contracts, sign agreements, and take better jobs to improve their families’ future. But perhaps the desire was even simpler. As the renowned black scholar W.E.B. DuBois suggested, “The very feeling of inferiority which slavery forced upon them fathered an intense desire to rise out of their condition by means of education.” Regardless of their motive, reading was the pathway to liberty and across Mississippi. Newly freed blacks scrambled to learn, pouring off the plantations in search of knowledge as if the letters were in their minds before they ever read a page.²⁴

* * *

The Civil War unlocked opportunities. During the War Between the States, over 17,000 black Mississippians (approximately 20 percent of black men between 18 and 45 years of age) fought for the Union Army. For many black soldiers, fighting their former masters was only the first step in a long march toward freedom. Full liberation required education. Black soldiers learned a great deal in those Union Army camps, employing a variety of tactics to gain literacy. They paid instructors to follow the army, quizzed their white Union officers, collected newspapers, and shared knowledge among themselves when they could. Thousands of black Union soldiers pursued physical and intellectual

liberation in tandem, fighting Confederates during the day and learning to read at night by the glow of their camp fires.  

Soldiers weren’t alone in their quest for education. Freedpeople who couldn’t fight tagged behind Union battalions, constructing nomadic schools behind the safety of the front line. Other blacks carved out educational spaces in the disordered, hallowed out Civil War South. Plantations became campuses, with dining rooms used as lecture halls and foyers turning into classrooms. Ideas were disseminated under the shade of trees, in church basements, and old municipal buildings. George Washington Albright, a former slave whose mother had taught him to read and write, took it upon himself to establish a school after Civil War. “He taught his classes wherever he could,” according to historian Christopher Span, “under a shade tree during the war, then in an abandoned building, and then in a church shortly after the war.”

After the Civil War, northerners were shocked by the way freedpeople pursued education. The Freedmen’s Bureau, a federally funded organization in charge of transitioning African Americans from slavery to freedom, organized a series of Freedmen’s Schools throughout the South. Freedmen’s Bureau teacher Josephine Nicks reported that “There is manifested quite an eager desire to gain knowledge by the pupils, the rapidity in their studies is astonishing.” Adult students came even after long days in the fields. The lure of literacy brought spirited minds into the schoolhouses. Hundreds of black cotton pickers rested their aching backs on creaking wooden benches or dust covered floors while hunched over cracked pages held by wind-chapped and cotton-bitten hands. A Jackson teacher reported that their Freedmen’s School was “composed exclusively of work hands,” and met four days per week in the evenings.


See Christopher Span, From Cotton Field to Schoolhouse: African American Education in Mississippi, 1862-1875 (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 31-38, quote on 33.

Josephine L. Nicks, “Teacher’s Monthly School Report, For the Month of October 1866,” Teachers’ Monthly School Reports, October 1865-November 1868, roll 1, M 1907, FBR.

“Monthly Report of Freedmen’s School at Jackson, County of Hinds, State of Mississippi, for the month of December 1865, Teachers’ Monthly School Reports, October 1865-November 1868, roll 1, M 1907, Records of the Field Offices for the State of Mississippi, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned
Mississippi slaves flocked to these schools in remarkable numbers, greatly exceeding Freedmen’s Bureau expectations. The Natchez Freedmen’s Bureau schools opened in October of 1866 with 102 pupils. Blacks in the surrounding area caught wind of the educational opportunity and ventured to the Mississippi River town. Within nine months of the school’s opening, attendance had increased sevenfold. By July of the following year, 726 students were enrolled in the Natchez Freedmen’s Bureau schools.29

Blacks also didn’t wait for white teachers, but instead launched ambitious educational initiatives. Early Freedmen’s Bureau reports indicate that freedpeople themselves organized and taught the first Freedmen’s Schools in Aberdeen and Columbus. The original Aberdeen school was run by a sole freedman, who by December 1865 was teaching a class of three hundred pupils. His legacy is immeasurable. We’ll never know what happened to his students, just that he was patient and generous enough to accept three hundred of them. He and his pupils stand as just one more example of black minds wrapped in a postwar literary wonderworld. 30

African American communities filled gaps in the frequently underfunded Freedmen’s Schools. State Superintendent of Education Joseph Warren told a colleague that one community “had become obsessed at the prospect of losing their teachers and had raised some 25 dollars to give them.”31 Bureau officials showed no qualms about placing the onus of educational achievement on black communities. Astonishingly, freedpeople, just months out of slavery, were often required to build, maintain, protect,
and even fund their own schools. Freedmen’s School directors and teachers threatened to
suspend classroom activities if various requirements were not met. Superintendent
Warren recommended to one teacher that, “if the colored people do not do what they can
to aid your work, and to make your session endurable, tell them so; and that you must
leave them.”

On December 15, 1865, just eight months after the Confederate surrender, Warren
accused Vicksburg blacks of a lack of financial support and actually began charging
tuition, requiring every pupil to bring one dollar on the first day of every month to pay for
their education. An Aberdeen Freedmen’s School teacher named Sarah H. was
dissatisfied with her school’s facilities and threatened to close the school unless the black
community improved the building. African Americans renovated the structure to keep the
school open. Sarah H. found the upgraded accommodations acceptable, writing that “they
have made the room much more comfortable.” The following month, Sarah H. received
additional support when one of the older girls in her class began to assist her with
teaching duties.

Collective communal action to support the Freedmen’s Schools was common.
Black Mississippian organized to meet the challenges placed on them by the Freedmen’s
Bureau, often subsidizing underfunded schools. A teacher in Macon reported that he
received “no other pay than that I obtained from the Freedmen.” As in Vicksburg, many
schools were funded with student tuition. Black families who owned virtually nothing
managed to pay their own way. A month after the Natchez Freedmen’s school opened, it
counted an average attendance of 138 pupils, with 122 regularly paying tuition. A group

(49), July-December, 1865, roll 1, M 1907, FBR.
Superintendent, Volume 1 (49), July-December, 1865, roll 1, M 1907, FBR.
34 “Monthly Report of Freedmen’s School at Aberdeen, County of Monroe, State of Mississippi for the
month ending June 30th, 1866,” Teachers’ Monthly School Reports, October 1865 - November 1868, roll 1,
M 1907, FBR; and “Monthly Report of Freedmen’s School at Aberdeen, County of Monroe, State of
Mississippi for the month ending July 31st, 1866,” Teachers’ Monthly School Reports, October 1865-
November 1868, roll 1, M 1907, FBR.
35 “Monthly Report of Freedmen’s School at Macon, County of Noxubee, State of Mississippi for the
Month ending July 31st, 1866,” Teachers’ Monthly School Reports, October 1865 - November 1868, roll 1,
M 1907, FBR.
36 “Report of Schools,” Mississippi Natchez District, November 1866, Miscellaneous Reports Sent to the
Assistant Commissioner, March, 1866-October, 1868, roll 37, M 1907, FBR.
of Quaker missionaries in Columbus encountered an African American community that raised $658 (the modern equivalent is approximately $9,500) during their first school organizational meeting. They must have given nearly all they had. It was a remarkable gamble and testament to the faith they placed in education. Local black men also guarded the schoolhouse and the homes of its Quaker teachers from nearby white vigilantes. Black Southerners went to great lengths to support the Freedmen’s Bureau schools. Typically, the bureau covered only half of school expenses. Black communities made up the rest.\textsuperscript{37}

The Freedmen who learned the most turned into teachers and found jobs in educationally eager black communities. Considering that African Americans regularly funded Freedmen’s Bureau schools anyway, it is no wonder that many black communities simply began establishing their own schools. These institutions were widespread, popping up “like mushrooms after a storm” according to historian Ira Berlin.\textsuperscript{38} In Mississippi, many of these schools operated independently from the Freedmen’s Bureau, much to the chagrin of Superintendent Warren who often expressed frustration over schools not reporting their activities. On January 2, 1866, Warren lamented the existence of “many private schools” taught by former Freedmen’s School students that were not reporting their daily activities. In Vicksburg, Superintendent Warren had heard of “quite a number of girls well advanced, who have disappeared altogether. I am told,” he reported to a supervisor, “that many of them have gone here and there to teach on their own account; and some are becoming governesses in private colored families.” On April 11, 1866, Warren again expressed frustration over rumors of attempts to open schools without his approval, and of others who did not submit reports to the Freedmen’s Bureau. In and out of Freedmen’s Bureau schools, postwar black Mississippians fiercely pursued literacy, carrying upon their backs the shattered lives of their ancestors and dreams of future generations. Learning was a foundation of freedom. Like the Montgomerys, they knew the value of an education.\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{37} Williams, \textit{Self-Taught}, 93; and DuBois, \textit{Black Reconstruction in America}, 648.
\textsuperscript{39} Joseph Warren, “Report of the Colored Schools in Mississippi during the Month of December 1865,” to Lt. Stuart, Letters Sent from Superintendent, Volume 2 (50), January-June, 1866, roll 1, M 1907, FBR; and
In 1870, the schools went public. Mississippi’s legislature ratified the Fifteenth Amendment, completing the requirements for readmission to the United States. The Amendment enfranchised black Mississippians by deeming it illegal to deny any citizen the right to vote based on race. Since Emancipation, African Americans had embraced the ballot, electing dozens of black legislators to national and state offices. In 1870, Hiram Revels was appointed to the United States Senate, becoming America’s first black Senator. Five years later, Blanche K. Bruce became the first elected black United States Senator. Black Mississippi communities also enjoyed scores of local victories. In 1870, the 117-member state legislature included 30 black elected officials. Three years later, black electoral power sent 55 blacks to the Mississippi House of Representatives and 9 to the Senate.40

African American voters wanted schools, and the legislature responded. In 1870, Mississippi’s elected black officials established the South’s first public school system for African American children. The state system would institutionalize learning, offering education to all Mississippians. Blacks had unprecedented access. The schools were not racially integrated. Blacks and whites would learn separately. But the institutions were designed to offer analogous learning experiences. Black Republican legislators carefully included protective clauses against discriminatory funding. The first public school statute required “separate free public schools for whites and colored pupils,” with “the same and equal advantages and immunities under the provision of this act.” Racially integrated schools didn’t matter. Equally funded schools did. And black representatives passed legislation that if enforced would ensure equitable educational opportunities for children of both races. Diverting school funds was considered a fairly serious crime. The act included a provision that mandated a minimum punishment of 3 months in prison and a $200 fine “whenever any county, municipal, corporation, or school district shall fail to provide separate schools for white and colored pupils, with the same and equal


40 Hiram Revels was appointed to the US Senate by the Mississippi State Senate, and served just over one year. See Vernon Lane Wharton, The Negro in Mississippi, 1865-1890 (New York: Harper & Row, 1947), 138-180, particularly 172-180 for a discussion of African Americans in state politics between 1869 and 1875. For more on the 1873 election, also see Nicholas Lemann, Redemption: The Last Battle of the Civil War (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2006), especially 31-62.
advantages.” It also stated that “such persons so offending shall also be liable to an action for damages by the parent or guardian of the pupil so refused.” A parent could actually sue a school district for racial discrimination. This was 1870. The new black schools institutionalized the educational dream, offering immense possibilities for young African Americans.41

Predictably, black Mississippians flocked to the new public schools. Attendance skyrocketed. For example, in Panola County 55 blacks were attending school at the beginning of 1870. During the first year of the new school system, attendance rose to 750. By 1872, enrollment in Panola County schools reached 1,884. This was typical. Across Mississippi, nearly 50,000 African American children attended black public schools. According to Span, the average daily attendance figures for enrolled black children exceeded whites, despite the fact that black youths faced more difficulty in attending schools due to factors such as distance, poverty, and violence.42

Education held so many promises for Mississippi blacks in the early 1870s. The newly freed people saw liberty in the letters. They dreamed for their children, sending them off to schools that offered the promises of a better life. One can only imagine what grand ambitions floated through their minds as they contemplated the possibilities of the next generation, the first one born out of slavery. Their eyes must have welled with hope as they watched their children venture toward those schoolhouse doors and return with ideas in their heads and words on their tongues. Only the possibilities were new; fore this was an old dream. Education was an obligation to those who had come before them. One such young Mississippi student named Ida B. Wells remembered school as a generational endeavor. “Our job,” she later explained, “was to go to school and learn all we could.”

After long days in the schoolhouse, young Ida would sit reading the newspaper to her father and an “admiring group of his friends.”43

41 “Mississippi School Law,” Hinds County Gazette, April 20, 1870, 1.
42 John W. Kyle, “Reconstruction in Panola, County,” in Franklin L. Riley, ed., Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society: Volume XIII (University, MS: Mississippi Historical Society, 1913), 89-90; Span, From Cotton Field to Schoolhouse, 153-176. It is impossible to know the attendance at every school, but the available figures reflect the importance of education to black Mississippians, and further demonstrate the vigor by which they pursued those early opportunities.
Born into slavery, Ida’s father James Wells never had the chance to obtain a formal education. But like the Montgomerys he recognized its value. After Emancipation, he enthusiastically supported the local black teachers college, even serving on its board of trustees despite not having a college education himself. Founded in 1867, Shaw University was one of two black Mississippi teacher’s colleges founded during Reconstruction by the Methodist Freedman’s Aid Society. It was later renamed Rust College to avoid confusion with a North Carolina school of the same name. Shaw was one of the dozens of Southern schools built during Reconstruction to train a cadre of black educators. These universities were designed to train the first generation out of slavery. From their doors emerged waves of black teachers who scattered across the South. The schools had a broad impact, offering for blacks the ability to earn a professional living while helping to fulfill the educational dreams of a generation. A Nashville, Tennessee school even offered a medical branch named the Meharry Medical College, after its white benefactor who had once been fed and sheltered by a generous freedman. Young Ida B. Wells joined the ranks of these young black professionals, somewhat reluctantly succumbing to her father’s ambitions by attending Shaw University and becoming a teacher.44

Education offered remarkable opportunities for black Mississippians. But they didn’t live in a vacuum. White supremacy loomed large. As African Americans pursued their educational dream, oppositional forces were mobilizing. Their vision of a postwar world was far different than the one anticipated by blacks. It more closely resembled the society that had crumbled rather than the one freedpeople hoped for. Redemption was on its way, and many of these educational advances would be retracted. Between 1875 and 1890, in what historians have labeled “counter Reconstruction” and “the great detour,”

44 The Haven Institute in Meridian was the other college founded by the Methodist Freedman’s Aid Society. McMurray, To Keep the Waters Troubled, especially 16-77; Jay Samuel Stowell, Methodist Adventures in Negro Education (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1922), especially 122-133 for information on Rust College and the Haven Institute; and Alex Poinsett, “Meharry Medical College Celebrates Its 100th Anniversary,” Ebony, October, 1976, 31-40. For more on Meharry Medical College, see Charles Johnson, The Spirit of a Place Called Meharry: The Strength of Its Past to Shape the Future (Franklin, TN: Hillsboro Press, 2000).
the great promises of black education disappeared. A window of opportunity was slammed shut.\textsuperscript{45}

\* \* \*

Legendary Confederate cavalryman Nathaniel Bedford Forrest hated black liberty as much as anyone. Emancipation threatened not only the Southern social order, but his very livelihood. Forrest was a slave trader. He made his living selling liberty downstream. Hailing from a modest background, he had found a calling in the Mississippi River slave markets. Forrest bought and sold slaves for a commission, haggling with both seller and buyer while profiting from both. When he earned enough of a profit, he began buying and selling slaves himself. Forrest also dealt in real estate and livestock, but it was trading human beings that made him one of the richest merchants in Memphis. By 1860, the self-made businessman was worth approximately $260,000 (over $6,000,000 today), nearly all of it profit from the slave trade. Forrest despised the notion of black freedom and channeled it into rage. When the Civil War began, Forrest was ready to defend his right to earn a living by selling humans. Nicknamed the “Wizard of the Saddle,” or “that devil Forrest” to General William Tecumseh Sherman, the self-trained cavalryman became one of the Confederacy’s most feared combatants due to his aggressive bravado and sheer intensity. He had an unmatched passion for battle and personally killed dozens of Union soldiers. His military prowess resulted in a remarkable rise within the Confederate ranks. Within a year, he ascended from private to brigadier general, a feat unmatched by any other soldier on either side of the war.\textsuperscript{46}

The rush of emotional adrenaline that made Forrest such an imposing warrior also limited his leadership. He made scores of brash, irresponsible decisions. His passion and boldness did not always translate well to tactical maneuvers and the leadership of men. His inexperience and lack of understanding of the role that cavalry should play within the strategic movements of an army would cost the Confederates dearly at the Battle of Chickamauga. He also made a major mistake in April of 1864 when he ordered the

\textsuperscript{45} Span, \textit{From Cotton Field to Schoolhouse}, 172; and Henry Bullock, \textit{A History of Negro Education in the South: From 1619 to the Present} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), quote on 60.
\textsuperscript{46} See Jack Hurst, \textit{Nathan Bedford Forrest: A Biography} (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), financial statistic on 64.
murder of 292 surrendered black soldiers at Fort Pillow, Tennessee. “The slaughter was awful,” a Confederate sergeant reported to his sister. “Words cannot describe the scene. The poor deluded Negroses would run up to our men, fall upon their knees, and with uplifted hands scream for mercy, but they were ordered to their feet and then shot down…General Forrest ordered them shot down like dogs.” The murder may have brought Forrest some personal satisfaction as he exercised his rage against those defenseless black souls. But the massacre also served as a rallying cry for both African American and white Union troops, a galvanizing reminder of Confederate evils. For the rest of the war, black Union troops would cry out “Remember Fort Pillow” before making a charge.47

After the war, Forrest continued targeting blacks. He never lost his passion for the Confederate cause, and even considered riding to Mexico to orchestrate guerilla attacks against the United States. He never enacted the plan to continue the war, but like many Confederate veterans, the Wizard of the Saddle simply refused to accept any level of black citizenship or equality. He helped organize and lead the nation’s original Ku Klux Klan, a paramilitary Confederate offshoot filled with other Southern veterans who rejected the Civil War’s outcome and sought to restore complete racial subordination throughout the South. Forrest was the organization’s first Grand Wizard. His defiance and resolve was legendary. So was his reputation for violence. And he became an idol to many disgruntled Southern rebels who advocated violence as a means to restore the lost racial order. As his biographer writes, “As the Klan’s first national leader, [Forrest] became the Lost Cause’s avenging angel, galvanizing a loose collection of boyish secret social clubs into a reactionary instrument of terror.” Although Forrest only led the Klan

for a short period of time, he remained an iconic figure for future generations of white supremacists.48

The Klan provided a major obstacle to African American liberty in Mississippi. Black schools were primary targets. “In no other state than Mississippi,” writes Klan historian Stanley Horn, “did the matter of negro schools seem to occupy the Klan’s attention to such a degree.” Its recurring attacks on black educational facilities were a constant threat for both students and teachers. Klansmen and other secret societies attacked schoolhouses, whipped white and black teachers, and murdered those who fought to educate African Americans. They too understood the value and potency of black education. According to Eric Foner, “churches and schools, embodiments of black autonomy,” were particularly targeted because of their severe threats to white supremacy. Those waves of eager black learners who flocked to the schoolhouses were often greeted by Klansmen.49

The attacks started immediately after the War. Mississippi Freedmen’s Bureau Superintendent Warren reported numerous violent acts against black educators and schools. In late 1865, he described one incident where a “dozen or more white citizens proceeded to a house, occupied as a school house, broke it open and gave the teacher until the next morning to quit the place.”50 Four months later, Warren pleaded with a Mississippi Brigadier General to protect Freedmen’s Schools, noting their difficulties in rural areas. He wrote, “In all larger towns where they were secure, fully adequate schools have been opened. It will be remembered that Mississippi has very few large towns. Schools in unprotected places were inforseeable [sic] until lately.”51

48 Other paramilitary groups included the Confederate Officer Guard, the Red Shirts, and the White League. Hurst, Nathan Bedford Forrest, 6.
50 Joseph Warren, “Report of the Colored Schools in Mississippi during the Month of December 1865,” to Lt. Stuart, Letters Sent from Superintendent, Volume 2 (50), January-June, 1866, roll 1, M 1907, FBR.
51 Joseph Warren, Letter to Bt. Brigadier General F.D. Gevall, April 3, 1866, Volume 2 (50), January-June, 1866, roll 1, M 1907, FBR.
An 1871 congressional committee investigating Southern racial violence concluded that Klan activity in Mississippi was “marked by the development of most decided hostility to all free schools, and especially to free schools for colored children.”

The following year, a Senatorial investigation noted that in Mississippi, “the education of the freedmen was forcibly resisted, even to burning school-houses and killing teachers.”

A Chickasaw County teacher reported “a raid made over several counties,” that resulted in “several school-houses burned.” The Winston County Klan burned down every single black schoolhouse in the district. A Union officer explained the resistance to black education. He testified that “The major part [of the white population] are indignant, indeed, that negroes should have learning. All sorts of evil is predicted as the consequence.”

When not attacking the schools themselves, white supremacists turned their attention toward the educators. Black teachers were particularly harassed because “they were not only the messenger,” according to Heather Williams, but “also the message.” Freedmen’s Bureau official Colonel A.P. Huggins, who served as Monroe County Superintendent of Schools, was threatened one night by approximately 120 individuals who, he testified, “showed me a rope with a noose,” and warned “that if I did not consent to leave I should die.” Monroe County Klansmen visited Huggins’s teachers one night, warning each to close their schools. Within days, twenty-six black schools closed.

In April and May of 1871, a number of Mississippi teachers were warned by the Klan that they were to be “dealt with.” One of the instructors was actually captured and publicly flogged by Klansmen for ignoring the warnings. A missionary named Sarah Allen was visited by approximately eighty Klansmen in the middle of the night. The Klansmen stormed into her room, and demanded that she close her school, warning her

---

52 Many Democrats protested the entire public education system for whites and blacks because of the large amount of taxes required to support it. Black schools, however, were especially prone to violent reprisals. United States Senate, Report of the Joint Select Committee to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States: Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy, Vol. 1, 42nd Congress, 2nd Session, 1872, Senate Report 41 (Washington D.C: Government Printing Office, 1872), (hereafter cited as KKK Conspiracy, Vol. 1), 73.
53 Ibid., 280.
54 Ibid., 78.
55 Span, From Cotton Field to Schoolhouse, 160.
56 Williams, Self-Taught, quoted on 125; and U.S. Senate, KKK Conspiracy, Vol. 1, 77.
not to make them return. Cornelius McBride, a young teacher in Chickasaw County, reported that “At Houston several teachers of colored schools were attacked; one of them told me that they ordered him to leave in three days or they would take his life.” McBride himself was also targeted. The Klan arrived at his cabin shortly after midnight one evening. Faced with “a matter of life and death,” McBride escaped by jumping out of his bedroom window. Klansmen pursued him through the Chickasaw County forest, shooting and yelling, “God damn you, stop, or we will blow your God damned brains out.” The Klansmen finally caught McBride and flogged him with switches from a black-gum tree. McBride testified that while being beaten, “They said I wanted to make these niggers equal to the white men; that this was a white man’s country.” McBride quit. The Klan raids were effective. Disgruntled whites religiously followed their Confederate hero Nathan Bedford Forrest back into battle, continuously attacking black schools and teachers, relentlessly trying to crush black education and all it stood for. Learning was limited when the Klan was on the move. But violence was not the only way to curb the African American educational dream. Whites resisted black education in other ways as well.

If Forrest was the Lost Cause’s “avenging angel,” then Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus Lamar was its guiding spirit. An Oxford, Mississippi native, Lamar was a dedicated Confederate and major figure in the secession movement. In 1860, the respected attorney resigned from the United States House of Representatives to join the Mississippi Secession Convention. He played a major role, personally drafting Mississippi’s Ordinance of Secession, using private funds to support an entire infantry

---

57 U.S. Senate, *KKK Conspiracy, Vol. 1*, 74-78, Sarah Allen quoted on 74 and McBride quoted on 78. Scholars may be tempted to point out that the federal government passed a Ku Klux Klan Act in April of 1871 that effectively ended the organization. This legislation made Klan-type violence a federal crime and enabled the government to prosecute Klansmen for acts that limited the rights of Southern citizens. See Foner, *Reconstruction*, 454-455. Indeed, the Klan Act hampered the organization and even destroyed it in several places, but did not have a full impact in many Southern locales, particularly rural areas. Furthermore, the Klan was merely one vehicle for the culture of violent resistance that Forrest helped construct, and other groups soon took their place. For more on the decline of the first Klan and the emergence of other terrorist organizations, see Horn, *Invisible Empire*. Since 1865, Forrest has been honored in numerous ways across the South and his image remains contested to this day. For more on the contested legacies of Nathan B. Forrest, see Court Carney, “The Contested Image of Nathan Bedford Forrest,” *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 67, No. 3 (August, 2001), 601-630; and Paul Ashdown and Edward Caudill, *The Myth of Nathan Bedford Forrest* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005).
regiment, and even serving as Confederate Minister to Russia. Lamar embodied a second
tradition of white resistance to black education. In contrast to the violent rage of Forrest
and his Klan, Lamar personified a more mature, or at least more orderly, response. And
his tactics would have a more profound impact.58

Lamar and Forrest had vastly different personalities. Neither man recovered
quickly from the scars of the Civil War. But unlike Forrest, Lamar was not brash and
emotional. Rather, he was more tactful, thoughtful, and careful. But the men did have a
common goal. Lamar also sought power and a restoration of white supremacy. He was
just far more diplomatic. After the war, he joined the legal faculty at the University of
Mississippi and waited out the worst years. Just three years after the state was readmitted
to the Union, he became the first Mississippi Democrat elected to Congress since the
Civil War. The American reunion was forgiving, and Lamar was allowed to return to the
nation’s legislature despite having just helped lead the mass-secession just over a decade
before. Later in life, he served in the U.S. Senate for eight years, and was eventually
appointed President Grover Cleveland’s Secretary of the Interior before becoming the
only Mississippian to ever be appointed to the United States Supreme Court.59

When Lamar returned to Washington, his first order of business was to deliver a
long, eloquent eulogy for Charles Sumner, the ardent abolitionist who in 1856 had been attacked in the Senate chamber by Preston Brooks. When President Abraham Lincoln
was killed, Sumner became the most important black ally in Washington D.C. In fact, he
may have been so even before that fateful evening in the Ford Theatre. Sumner led a
group of Radical Republican Reconstructionists in crafting a series of Constitutional
Amendments that would more fully allow for black freedom. Those Reconstruction
Amendments formerly abolished American slavery and protected the civil and political
rights of Southern blacks. They also forced all the former members of the Confederacy to
ratify the Reconstruction Amendments for readmission to the Union. By 1872, each state
had reentered the Union, and Sumner softened his view on the occupancy of the South,

58 For biographical information, see Edward Mayes, *Lucius Q.C. Lamar, His Life, Times and Speeches*
(Nashville, TN: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, 1896); and Wirt Armstrong
Cate, *Lucius Q.C. Lamar: Secession and Reunion* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press,
1935).
59 Ibid.
calling for the withdrawal of troops. The Republicans sought to enable African
Americans to fully enjoy their newfound freedom. Charles Sumner remained a staunch
advocate of black rights until his death. When he passed away of a heart attack on March
11, 1874, the Executive Committee of the National Civil Rights Council recommended
that blacks in “every city and town in the country drape their houses and churches in
mourning” to recognize his contributions of African American life. Needless to say,
Sumner was not very popular among Southern white supremacists. 60

Yet, just over a month after Sumner’s passing Lucius Q.C. Lamar stood in front
of his Congressional colleagues and made amends. He highlighted Sumner’s softening
stance on occupation. “Charles Sumner in life believed that all occasion for strife and
distrust between the North and South had passed away, and there no longer remained any
cause for continued estrangement between those two sections of our common country,”
he observed. “Shall we not, while honoring the memory of this great champion of liberty,
this feeling sympathizer with human sorrow, this earnest pleader for the exercise of
human tenderness and heavenly charity,” he continued, “lay aside the concealments
which serve only to perpetuate misunderstandings and distrust, and frankly confess that
on both sides we most earnestly desire to be one?” 61

Lamar’s speech drew a remarkable response. Just imagine. Here was the author of
the Mississippi Ordinance of Secession commemorating the life and career of one of the
South’s most powerful pre and postwar political opponents. The powerful oration
reportedly drew tears from the eyes of both Democratic and Republican Congressmen
and rapidly accelerated the full reunion between the North and South. “Few speeches in
American political history,” John F. Kennedy’s ghost writers observed more than eighty
years later, “have had such immediate impact.” 62

60 Executive Committee of the National Civil Rights Council quoted in “Death of Senator Sumner,” The
New York Times, March 12, 1874, 1. Numerous works document Sumner’s pre and postwar roles. The two
best are David H. Donald, Charles Sumner and the Coming of the Civil War (New York: Knopf, 1960); and
61 The text of Lamar’s eulogy is taken from Thomas Brackett Reed, Rossiter Johnson, Justin McCarthy, and
Albert Ellery Bergh, eds., Modern Eloquence, Volume VIII (Philadelphia, PA: John D. Morris and
Company, 1900), 767-773.
quoted on 174 and 173, respectively.
Realistically, however, the speech was a farce, an empty, tactical gesture designed to appease Republicans. Democrats like Lamar were still negotiating the terms of the Civil War. At home, the Congressman would soon call for unmitigated violence and direct violations of the Sumner Reconstruction Amendments that protected black civil rights. Sumner’s death was one of the greatest events in recent Southern white supremacist history. Gone was African American’s greatest political ally. Free was the South to remove those “radical” requirements for readmission to the United States of America: giving blacks the unalienable rights of freedom, citizenship, and the vote. With Sumner deceased, the Republicans largely lost their taste for enforcement. And Mississippians knew it. They were going to start retracting those black advances. And just a year later, those rights were gone.

As the 1875 election approached, the *Hinds County Gazette* scared white supremacists into aggressive action. It exacerbated fears of further black and Republican takeover, claiming that Republican Mississippi Governor Adelbert Ames had raised a “Raiding Army,” and quoted the Governor saying “hell must be inaugurated in Mississippi.” The paper warned that “Ames is organizing murder, civil war, respite and anarchy in Hinds County. Let every white man arm and equip and be ready for action at a minutes notice.” A week later, the *Gazette* referred to Election Day as “the grand battle.” “The imbeciles and thieves,” it proclaimed, “must be overthrown—good honest government must be restored.” It encouraged whites to take up arms, advocating that, “Every Democrat and Conservative in Hinds County should make his arrangements to devote to his country all the twelve working hours of the 2d [sic] day of November. Nothing should keep him from his voting place.” The capital city’s largest paper insisted, “We shall win a glorious victory,” the Jason-based paper insisted.

Lamar, the consummate Ivory Tower rebel, had convinced Mississippi whites that Republican rule could be overthrown without federal intervention. He was right. And the subsequent Mississippi Revolution of 1875 sought to remove Republican political power by any means necessary. Led by former Confederates, including “White Liners,” “White Men’s Clubs,” and the Ku Klux Klan, Mississippi Democrats sought to reclaim political

63 “Ames and His Raiding Army,” *Hinds County Gazette*, October 13, 1875, 1.
64 “The Meeting at Auburn,” *Hinds County Gazette*, October 20, 1875, 1.
power by conducting massive voter fraud backed by widespread violence. Newspapers such as the *Hinds County Gazette* were used to spread the word. They were going to stare down the federal government, daring Washington officials to stop them from overthrowing the Republican Party in Mississippi. As Nicholas Lemann has observed, the Democratic Party, “had become as much a military as a political organization.”

Reconstruction ended on Election Day, 1875. Violent threats kept most blacks away from the polls. The Gazette noted, “There was an immense deal of quiet intimidation. The blacks were given to understand that they must elect a better set of men to office.” Real violence ensued as well. A dispatch from Columbus reported, “Every negro found on the streets was arrested and tack[ed] up. Four negroes refusing to be arrested were shot and killed.” In several places, local whites seized the arms of the state militia. The sheriff of Yazoo County feared the power of these renegade white supremacist groups so much that he refused to use his trained, regular militia against them due to fear of open war. Henry Whitfield, District Attorney of the Seventh Judicial District, observed one particularly threatening Democratic rally in West Point where white supremacists paraded two Civil War cannons down the road, daring blacks to vote. Two days later, Lowndes County Democrats pulled a twenty-four pound cannon to the court house and fired it down the street in broad daylight, “breaking and shattering the glass in adjacent buildings.”

Unsurprisingly, the Democrats, armed to the teeth, swept the state in the 1875 election. Dubbed the “orator” of the 1875 Mississippi Revolution, Lamar “literally inspired, rushing from meeting to meeting to meeting, arousing the wildest enthusiasm,” noted historian Claude G. Bowers. The federal government, fatigued from fourteen years of war and occupation, stood idly by as white supremacists redeemed the racial calamities of the Civil War, repealing black rights and ushering in a remarkably long era of racial

---

67 “Our Late Election,” *Hinds County Gazette*, November 17, 1875, 1.
inequality that would deny basic Constitutional rights to blacks for almost a century. Black Mississippians wouldn’t regain the right to vote for ninety years.\textsuperscript{70}

By the end of 1875, Mississippi’s leading white supremacists had essentially conducted the final assault of the Civil War, ending Reconstruction and eliminating black political power. As Lamar’s biographer Edward Mayes wrote, “In the domestic history of Mississippi, the year 1875 is the supplement of 1861. It is the year of redemption, the year in which a great political revolution reclaimed the prize of state sovereignty.”\textsuperscript{71} Nicknamed the Redeemers, Mississippi Democrats set the stage for similar such uprisings in South Carolina, Louisiana, and Florida the following year. During the 1876 Presidential Election, black voters in each state were threatened with violence. Ballot boxes were stuffed, and electoral corruption ran rampant across the South. Returns in South Carolina, Louisiana, and Florida were widely contested because of the corruption, resulting in a nationwide controversy over the Presidency. Lamar led Southern Democratic congressmen in brokering a deal that decided the Presidential Election of 1876. Southern Democrats conceded the election to Republican Rutherford B. Hayes in exchange for the withdrawal of all remaining troops and the construction of a Southern transcontinental railroad. Reconstruction was over. Those black educational dreams of the postwar era lay shattered in its wake.\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{70} Soon-to-be ousted Republic Governor Adelbert Ames termed Lamar the “orator” of the Democrats. See Blanche Ames, \textit{Adelbert Ames, 1835-1933: General, Senator, Governor, the story of his life and times and his integrity as a soldier and statesman in the service of the United States of America throughout the Civil War and in Mississippi in the years of Reconstruction} (New York: Argosy-Antiquarian, LTD, 1964), 413; and Claude G. Bowers, \textit{The Tragic Era: The Revolution After Lincoln} (New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1940, orig., 1929), quote on 455. Ironically, the next President to order the use of federal troops to protect black rights in Mississippi was John F. Kennedy, eighty-eight years after Lamar’s Sumner eulogy. There are widespread arguments for the lack of government intervention. It is certain, however, that the federal government was well informed of the illegal elections. During the months before the election, Mississippi Republicans warned of impending violence. They also reported Election Day intimidation and voter fraud directly to US Attorney General Edward Pierrepont, but received no federal assistance. For more on the inaction controversy, see Lemann, \textit{Redemption}, especially 135-209; Wharton, \textit{The Negro in Mississippi}, 181-198; and Stephen Cresswell, \textit{Rednecks, Redeemers, and Race: Mississippi after Reconstruction, 1877-1917} (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2006).

\textsuperscript{71} Mayes, \textit{Lucius Q. C. Lamar}, 329.

\textsuperscript{72} A common misconception is that all U.S. Armed Forces left the South never to return. This was not the case. In fact, over the following eighty years, the military would at times maintain a much larger force in the South than it ever did during Reconstruction. What is significant, however, is that these troops would not be used to protect the Constitutional rights of African Americans until 1957 in Little Rock, AR. For more on the Compromise of 1877 and Lamar’s centrality to the agreement, see C. Vann Woodward, \textit{Origins of the New South, 1877-1913} (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1971 edition,
White supremacists had established a second front against black rights. Whereas Forrest pioneered violence, Lamar established political control. The Revolution of 1875, also known as the First Mississippi Plan, was resoundingly effective in changing the state’s political landscape. Democrats took offices throughout Mississippi in the election of 1875 and used their power to remove Republican state officials. The impeachments came fast. Mississippi Superintendent of Education Thomas Cardoza was among the first to go. Redeemers charged the black state official with ten counts of embezzlement totaling $18,050 (the historical equivalent of nearly $360,000). Cardoza was accused of ordering unneeded books, exaggerating student enrollments, and stealing directly from the all-black Tougaloo College. He quickly resigned and left the state before the legislature passed the impeachment. There was also a good chance he could have been killed. The Democrats followed by impeaching Governor Ames and African American Lieutenant Governor Alexander Davis. Both men fled the state. Ames moved to Minnesota where he helped thwart a bank robbery by outlaw Jessie James. By the late spring of 1876, conservative white Democrats controlled the entire executive branch.\(^73\)

The new Democrats immediately began retracting black educational opportunities. New Superintendent of Education T.S. Gathright simply diverted funds away from black institutions. Teacher salaries in African American schools are a good indicator of the dramatic cuts in education. In 1875, teachers in black schools were earning an average monthly salary of $53.45. Within a year, their average income dropped to $38.54. By 1890, teachers in black schools were paid only $23.20 per month.\(^74\) In 1889, the Mississippi Educational Association had expunged all black teachers from its ranks, leaving African American educators without a professional

---

\(^73\) Impeachment Trial of Thomas W. Cardoza, State Superintendent of Education (Jackson, MS: Power & Barksdale, State Printer, 1876), Mississippi Department of Archives and History; and “The Cardoza Articles,” Hinds County Gazette, March 15, 1876, 1. See “Resignation of Ames,” Hinds County Gazette, April 5, 1876, 1; Ames, Adelbert Ames, 1835-1933, 451-473; and Busbee, Mississippi: A History (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 2005), 162.

\(^74\) The salaries of teachers in white schools fell as well, but their pay became increasingly disproportionate to black school teachers. By 1910, white instructors were earning twice the salary of their African American counterparts. See Wharton, The Negro in Mississippi, 246 & 249; and Stuart Grayson Noble, Forty Years of the Public Schools in Mississippi, With Special Reference to the Education of the Negro (New York: AMS Press, 1918), 141-142.
Academic censorship was also used to curb the power of black education. Teachers discussing any sort of racial advancement were fired. That would last until at least 1964. Mississippi officials consciously sought to distort the historical training in the state’s public schools. Legislators formed a committee to ensure in history texts the fair treatment of the Confederacy during and after the Civil War. Meanwhile, African Americans, especially Reconstruction-era legislators, were purged from most textbooks, and the miseries of Antebellum slavery became more palatable in the literature as white administrators sought to construct a sympathetic view of their ancestors’ hideous actions.\textsuperscript{76}

In 1890, the newly empowered Mississippi Democrats constructed a new Constitution to legally disfranchise African Americans. Nearly all Mississippi politicians appreciated the results of the First Mississippi Plan. But some cautioned its long-term impact, citing illegality or even immorality. Judge J.B. Chrisman of Lincoln County argued that “no man can be in favor of perpetuating the election methods, which have prevailed in Mississippi since 1875, who is not a moral idiot, and no statesman believes that a government can be perpetuated by violence and fraud.”\textsuperscript{77} Other objections were simpler. Some officials were just opposed to living under the governance of a state constitution written by blacks. Whatever their motive, in 1890 Mississippi legislators gathered to legalize white supremacy and disfranchise black voters.\textsuperscript{78}

The new Constitution of 1890, often called the Second Mississippi Plan, legally removed black political rights. Mississippi legislators enacted poll taxes, literacy tests, and an “understanding clause,” that circumvented direct racial stipulations, yet targeted African Americans. This “understanding clause” was important. Even if black citizens paid the Poll Tax, white registrars could prevent them from voting by issuing ridiculous literacy tests that asked African Americans to interpret random sections of the Mississippi Constitution. The actual interpretation rarely mattered. Literacy tests were passed and

\textsuperscript{75} See Bolton, \textit{The Hardest Deal of All: The Battle Over School Integration in Mississippi, 1870-1980} (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 10.
\textsuperscript{76} See Noble, \textit{Forty Years of Public Schools in Mississippi}, 98-104.
\textsuperscript{77} Quoted in Horace Mann Bond, \textit{The Education of the Negro in the American Social Order} (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1934), 171.
failed at the digression of the registrar. And the registrars were always white. So even doctors, lawyers, and teachers were unable to register to vote due to what was deemed a lack of understanding of various sections of the Mississippi Constitution. Blacks fought the new voting laws, but in 1898, the United States Supreme Court upheld the racist registration tactics in *Williams vs. Mississippi*. Other states followed suit. Mississippi had set the precedent for disfranchising black voters within the constraints of the United States Constitution. Across the South, the Fifteenth Amendment was rendered irrelevant.  

The results for black education were devastating. African American government officials were removed from office, losing their ability to implement any educational policies. White legislators took over the decisions and diverted resources away from the previously promising black schools. The state invested far less in black school buildings, purchased fewer books, and filled these substandard institutions with inferiorly trained teachers charged with teaching absurdly large classes. It wasn’t uncommon for single-teacher classrooms to top 100 students from multiple grade levels. This was no way to teach. Additionally, state funds for county districts were unequally diverted to white schools by Democratic politicians. Whites in majority black counties enjoyed the greatest spending advantages because the dollars earmarked for large numbers of African American students could be distributed among far fewer white pupils. The discrepancies occurred across the South. But as historian Leon Litwack noted of Mississippi, “No state gave less to black education between 1890 and World War II.” By the 1913-1914 school year, black pupils, on average, received only 19% of the funding spent on white students.  

Between the end of the Civil War and 1890, two traditions of white supremacist responses to African American educational gains severely restricted blacks’ ability to

---

79 The “understanding clause” allowed white registrars to determine if a potential black registrant could sufficiently explain any given portion of the Mississippi Constitution. See McMillen, *Dark Journey*, 38-48.

learn. After an initial period of violence, politically conscious white “Redeemers” carried the day, inflicting blow after crippling blow to black public schools. Seeking to recover much of what was lost during the Civil War, they stripped blacks of the right to vote and constructed a horribly oppressive Jim Crow educational system that stood for nearly a century. The problem wasn’t the separation of races. Mississippi public schools had always been segregated. The issue was the incredible inequality between the separate school systems. That inequity was a function of disfranchisement, not racial segregation. There were no black legislators who could oversee school funds or appoint new superintendents. So this dual system of separate and unequal schools continued until the 1960s. Through much of the next century, black schools were ripped of their resources. Their teachers were overworked, underpaid, and censored. And of course, the schools were always subject to attacks. What remained were bastions of inequality that offered mere shards of the educational dream. The results were devastating. As Christopher Span writes, “the schools that African American children would attend from 1880 until the late 1960s would primarily educate them for a life of second-class citizenship and servitude.” However they sought to achieve their motives, the goals were analogous. They attacked education to block the black pursuit of opportunity and procure greater advantages for whites.  

* * *

81 Span, From Cotton Field to Schoolhouse, quote on 176. In 1955, Historian C. Vann Woodward’s seminal study Southern segregation argued that Jim Crow was constructed during the last decade of the 19th Century rather than immediately after Reconstruction. Twenty years later, Howard N. Rabinowitz argued that although Jim Crow laws were constructed in the 1890s, those laws represented preexisting traditions and customs in Southern cultural norms. Neither of these views, however, accurately explains the first public school system in Mississippi. De jure educational segregation was written into Mississippi’s Constitution during the height of Radical Reconstruction. So in regard to public education, Rabinowitz appears to be correct. Jim Crow did follow previously established patterns of segregation. But segregation was not inherently unequal. The disparities that characterized the Mississippi Jim Crow racial caste system developed after segregation, and were not legalized until the state’s 1890 Constitution. Jim Crow was indeed a system that followed existing cultural practices. But its real impact on black education was as a legal system that removed the Constitutional rights of Southern blacks, rendering them incapable of controlling educational resources. The interpretation of Jim Crow’s origins is largely jumbled by the language of the Civil Rights-era, in which all racial segregation, inherently including the Jim Crow system, was attacked by black and white activists. When discussing Jim Crow’s origins and oppressive nature, scholars should be careful to distinguish between racial separation and Jim Crow. They were not the same thing. Woodward was right. See C. Vann Woodward, The Strange Career of Jim Crow (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, Commemorative Edition of Third Edition, orig., published 1974); Howard N. Rabinowitz, “From Exclusion to Segregation: Southern Race Relations, 1865-1890,” The Journal of American History Vol. 63, No. 2 (Sept., 1976), 325-350; and C. Vann Woodward, “Strange Career Critics: Long May they Persevere,” The Journal of American History, Vol. 75, No. 3 (Dec., 1988), 857-868.
Freedpeople had seen the writing on the wall. Many were already on their way to the Delta even before the 1890 Mississippi Constitutional Convention. The Louisville, New Orleans, and Texas Railroad was selling land for cheap in Bolivar County. Expelled from the polls and threatened by the Klan, many African Americans gave up on ever enjoying rights as free men in their hometowns. So they simply left. Reconstruction had largely failed them and the state of Mississippi offered no promises. So they wanted to turn inward, to establish their own communities and their own institutions, especially schools. Places like Bolivar County offered a chance. Lying on the banks of the Mississippi River about halfway between Vicksburg and Memphis, most of the county was still a relative wilderness in the late 19th century. Blacks entered the region in search of their proverbial 40 acres and a mule, fighting through the brutal, rattlesnake infested Delta wilderness, clearing thousands of acres for farms. The railroad particularly targeted black settlers because it thought life in that Delta wilderness would be too hard for whites. Thousands of African Americans came as the 19th century closed. By 1900, over 35,000 people had arrived in Bolivar. Over 31,000 of them were black.82

Isaiah Montgomery, now 40 years old, bought the first 700 acres. He and another former Davis Bend slave named Benjamin Green moved their families to the new location and encouraged others to follow. By 1890, the Louisville, New Orleans, and Texas line was up and running. It just needed customers. The Railroad made a deal with Isaiah, agreeing to parcel out prospective plots if Montgomery would establish a black settlement. Isaiah took a crew to inspect the area, and eventually settled on a thickly forested spot just twenty miles east of the Mississippi River, located just off the railroad line. The railroad gave him control of 30,000 acres. He kept 840 for himself, and began travelling the state recruiting settlers for the rest. He described to his audiences the “wonderful possibilities and riches” available in the Delta. “They only had to accept this opportunity,” he proselytized, to “soon earn for themselves freedom and industrial independence.” Montgomery was convincing. And so despite the jungle-like vegetation, rattlesnakes, water moccasins, and the occasional black bear, thousands of black settlers

migrated to the Delta settlement. Montgomery named his small colony Mound Bayou, and in 1898 it was incorporated as America’s first all-black town.  

Tens of thousands of blacks turned their eye toward the developing Mississippi Delta, which was available for new settlement thanks to the companies such as the Louisville, New Orleans, and Texas Railroad. Railroads opened up previously unsettled areas of Mississippi, offering unprecedented agricultural access from the interior to the open market. The new lines cut through the sparsely populated areas of the Mississippi Delta, which in fact wasn’t a Delta at all, but rather an alluvial floodplain between the Mississippi and Yazoo Rivers. The Delta had the best cotton-growing soil in the Western Hemisphere. Centuries of river floods had washed rich sediment from the Mississippi River drainage basin across its flat fields, depositing the heaviest debris onto the riverbanks and washing the smallest, most supple soils throughout 7,110 sprawling square miles. Those ancient floods had left behind enormous beds of rich soil that in some places were up to sixty feet deep. That lush soil, however, also led to extraordinary undergrowth, nourishing millions of bushes and cypress trees, creating what Delta native William Alexander Percy called, “a chaos of vines and cane and brush.” At the onset of the Civil War, Delta society was largely limited to the Mississippi Riverbank. Only ten percent of the Delta was cleared for farming, limiting interior settlement.

The Mississippi Delta is often seen as a land lost in another era, a place that time forgot. But that couldn’t be further from the truth. The growth of railroads spurred black forays into the Delta. The new lines wanted customers and African Americans wanted their own land. So the railroads made deals with prominent black leader such as Isaiah Montgomery to guide settlers far into the Delta’s interior. Blacks were willing to carve through the lush walls of vegetation to eke out a living on the land that could still be

---


described as frontier. They dominated settlement. At the turn of the century, African Americans composed at least 88% of the total populations of the growing Delta Counties of Issaquena, Tunica, Washington, and Bolivar. The land promised them freedom and the railroads offered financial independence. Blacks poured into the region, moving into the back properties, away from the Mississippi River plantations, fighting unbridled nature to build their homes and dreams, responding to the broken promises of Reconstruction by pursuing freedom in separate communities. By 1900, blacks owned two-thirds of Delta farms.\(^85\)

African Americans sought to help themselves. Thousands of new black institutions popped up across the South. In the coming decades, these places, whether they were churches, schools, neighborhoods, or entire towns, served as bases for black communities. During the 1890s, Montgomery was becoming a major figure among a small assortment of predominant African American self-help leaders. Largely led by Tuskegee Institute founder Booker T. Washington, these Southern blacks believed that political concessions should be made in exchange for the right to develop internal economic power through thrift and education. Booker T. Washington advocated the creation of agricultural, mechanical, and technical schools to develop industrial skills and a sort of blue collar communal social respectability. Many viewed the schools negatively because they lacked an outward liberal arts curriculum. But their practicality helped many blacks who were able to develop basic skills and learn how to read. For some the vocational education was the gateway to a more sophisticated profession. Hundreds went on from industrial colleges to pharmacy or medical school. Through these early schools, the advocates of self-help manufactured opportunities within their own controlled spaces.\(^86\)


\(^86\) Since the 1930s, numerous scholars have discussed the severe limitations of the industrial style of education, dubbed an “educational compromise” by historian Henry Bullock. Southerners accepted Northern philanthropy to black schools and the development of African American colleges, as required to receive funds from the Morrill Act of 1890, in exchange for a particular type of education. This sort of education, often called the Hampton or Normal School Model, focused on industrial and vocational training rather than a liberal arts curriculum. This model was largely based on racist assumptions about African American intellectual capabilities. The Hampton Model in particular has been scrutinized because of its
Although these “accomodationists” often received widespread criticism, the fact of the matter is that in places like Mississippi, black political power had been almost completely stripped away with the violent Revolution of 1875. Of course black Mississippians wanted political equality. But their sheer survival was a far more pressing issue. Serving as the only African American delegate to the 1890 Mississippi Constitutional Convention, Isaiah Montgomery knew blacks were about to lose their legal right to vote. He probably had no idea that political disfranchisement would last for over seventy years, but he understood the basics of what was coming. Montgomery would later be criticized for not publicly protesting blacks losing the right to vote. But this criticism is unfair. In all reality, the fate of their voting rights was predetermined. As future Mississippi Governor James Vardaman later pointed out, “Mississippi’s constitutional convention of 1890,” he explained, “was held for no other purpose than to eliminate the nigger from politics.” “Not the ‘ignorant and vicious,” Vardaman clarified, “but the nigger.” Disfranchising black voters was the entire point of the 1890 Convention. It was why they had met in the first place. It is hard to imagine that as the lone black participant, Montgomery would have had much influence. And one can only ponder the consequences he could potentially face for defying the entire Mississippi racist, assimilationist policies that advocated the elimination of black cultural retentions to remove the “badge of slavery,” according to Robert Engs. Yet, the model was widely embraced by black educators across the South. Part of this was because many educational philanthropic organizations refused to cooperate with schools that did not practice industrial education. Despite their stated purposes, industrial schools often failed to achieve the results desired by their curriculum. African Americans were part of a larger racial caste system. The economic realities of Jim Crow would not necessarily offer fundamental economic and employment changes for industrially educated blacks. Occupational patterns conformed to the racial caste system, not black educational achievement. College educated blacks still fell victim to racial discrimination, and teaching was usually the only occupation they could procure. Yet, industrial education did have value. Literacy was always important to African Americans who constantly sought to transform the ability to read and write into social, economic, and political gains. As James D. Anderson has pointed out, “The same instructional process that taught the children of illiterate farm workers to read and write about industrial arts also enabled them to read and sign their names to voting ballots.” However widely historians have analyzed the industrial model, they have yet to fully engage Booker T. Washington’s claims that a major strength of the industrial school model was the potential benefit on black character and morality. This, of course, would be remarkably difficult to measure and offers problematic racial overtones, but was nonetheless an important goal for turn of the century advocates of black industrial education. See Henry Allen Bullock, *A History of Negro Education in the South: From 1619 to the Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), quote on 90; Engs, *Educating the Disenfranchised and Disinherited*, quote on 77; and James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel, Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 98. For more on the historiography of African American education, see Ronald E. Butchart, “‘Outthinking and Outflanking the Owners of the World:’ A Historiography of the African American Struggle for Education,” *History of Education Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (Autumn, 1988), 333-366.
legislature. Thousands of blacks had been lynched for less. What Montgomery did do at
the 1890 Mississippi Convention was make an impassioned plea for safety and
moderation, imploring for whites to allow black communities to grow and develop in
peace. Perhaps overly optimistic, yet mostly powerless, Montgomery believed that thrift
and self-help would eventually lead to better treatment from whites.87

There were traces of evidence to support his hopefulness. This “compromise” was
far from equal. But some whites saw virtue in his concessions. Even Vardaman
applauded his position, and advocated using small amounts of funds to support the
construction of black schools. Montgomery, the weary leader who learned to read in
slave quarters and had once served as Joseph Davis’s personal secretary, returned to his
new home and set to work helping black communities throughout the Delta build schools.
The first was raised in Cleveland, just a few miles down the road from Mound Bayou.
Others would follow. Montgomery was resilient. After disfranchisement, there was good
reason to be pessimistic, perhaps even nihilistic, especially with unrealistic criticisms
being lobbed at him from black leaders across the country. But he stayed his course. Like
his parents Ben and Mary, Isaiah T. Montgomery knew the value of an education. Mound
Bayou would be an extension of that early community Ben and Mary had helped
construct at the Davis Bend Plantation. Isaiah Montgomery carried those values to the
Delta.88

Montgomery spread his influence wide, encouraging education and community
development. Mound Bayou grew into a thriving business community, filled with banks,
sawmills, general stores, butcher shops, cotton mills, doctor’s offices, and an industrial
institute. Its civically-minded residents joined numerous community organizations.
Many of them organized statewide, offering connections to other blacks across
Mississippi and even throughout America. By the early twentieth century, Mound Bayou
housed branches of the Mississippi State Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs,

87 G.P. Hamilton, Beacon Lights of the Race, 283; and Vardaman quoted in McMillen, Dark Journey, 43.
As Stephen Cresswell has noted, “For many authors writing since 1890, Montgomery has been a traitor to
his race…Yet he was in step with the prevailing ‘accomodationist’ ideas espoused by many black leaders
of the time. Cresswell, Rednecks, Redeemers, and Race, 119.
88 During his time as editor of the Greenwood Enterprise, Vardaman made his racial views abundantly
clear. See William F. Holmes, The White Chief: James Kimble Vardaman (Baton Rouge, LAS: Louisiana
State University Press, 1970), 22-43, especially 39. Also see McMillen, Dark Journey, 3-71.
National Association of Colored Women, and the National Negro Business League. Isaiah Montgomery even helped found a new organization called the Committee of One Hundred that sought to develop a statewide network among Mississippi’s most prominent black citizens. By drawing on the resources of black communities across the state, Montgomery and his colleagues were making important early inroads. If black community leaders could organize across the state, they could consolidate whatever power and influence they had to help each other in profound ways.\(^{89}\)

They were also building national connections. Mound Bayou inspired throngs of black leaders from across the country. Booker T. Washington visited often and wrote about and discussed Mound Bayou with audiences across the country. In 1911, he observed that Mound Bayou wasn’t “merely a town,” but also, “at the same time and in a very real sense of that word, a school.” To Washington, it was an ideal model of post-Reconstruction black life. He noted, “It is not only a place where a Negro may get inspiration, by seeing what other members of his race have accomplished, but a place, also, where he has an opportunity to learn some of the fundamental duties and responsibilities of social and civil life.” Isaiah Montgomery’s Mound Bayou was the crown jewel of black settlement in the Mississippi Delta. As it grew and prospered, it symbolized the possibilities of black communities to an entire generation of race leaders. In its early years, Mound Bayou hosted scores of influential national black leaders. They came to observe the town and learn from it. Word of Mound Bayou spread through America’s growing black enclaves.\(^{90}\)

In 1891, Isaiah Montgomery caught wind of a young journalist named Ida B. Wells, that former school teacher who had grown up attending those early black schools and using the lessons she learned to read the newspaper to her father and his friends. By then, young Ida B. Wells had left her teaching position and become a well-known journalist. Wells’s reputation had been growing since 1887 when she left a teaching job to work for Reverend F. Nightingale’s *Free Speech and Headlight*. Nightingale, owner of

---


the Memphis paper and pastor at the Beale Street Baptist Church, had originally hired Wells to write articles about women’s issues. But he soon recognized her unique talent, and began allowing her to write more controversial pieces that helped expose the nature of Southern lynching. The articles were brilliant, and were soon being syndicated in newspapers across the nation, earning Wells the nickname “Princess of the Press.” Isaiah Montgomery read several pieces and invited the young writer to spend some time with him in Mound Bayou.91

Wells accepted Montgomery’s invitation and hopped on the Illinois Central Railroad for a quick foray into the Delta, a trip she would routinely take over the course of the following years. “Mr. Montgomery was just opening up Mound Bayou and I was frequently his guest in those early days,” she recalled. “We became the best of friends.” Montgomery also hocked her paper around the Delta, helping her to increase the circulation of the Free Speech and Headlight from 1,500 to 4,000 with most of the readership growth in the Delta where thousands of newly literate black migrants were clamoring for a race paper. She remembered the paper being “in demand all up and down the Delta spur of the Illinois Central Railroad.” Delta blacks loved her increasingly aggressive approach to the race question. Wells was writing for them. They were the ones under attack.92

Ida B. Wells was just embarking on a lifelong crusade against lynching. Through the power of the press, she sought to galvanize allies against black murderers, calling for a federal anti-lynching bill. They key was exposing the “Southern Horrors” to powerbrokers in the outside world who could pressure the crimes to end. She wrote exposés, detailing the motivations behind lynching and showing to the public that all the murders weren’t just in retribution to a crime. Wells also hit the lecture circuit, speaking out against lynching all over Northern cities and even England. But Wells couldn’t stop the violence. Lynching continued unabated. The black media its readers had yet to wield any real power. But it one day would. And those early efforts were a remarkable start. Wells was setting a precedent. And like dozens of other black leaders from that first

91 McMurry, To Keep the Waters Troubled, 76-149; Duster, ed., Crusade for Justice, quotes on 39 and 41; and Miriam DeCosta-Willis, ed., Ida B. Wells: The Memphis Diaries (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1994).
92 Ibid.
generation born out of slavery, she was enamored with Mound Bayou. Over the coming years, African Americans closely followed news from the small town. Decades later, when blacks had more power, a race story would emerge from Montgomery’s idealistic settlement that would forever change America.\(^9^3\)

Mound Bayou thrived. In its early days, it was like a dream come true, fulfilling many of the broken promises of Emancipation and Reconstruction. Just twenty-five years after Montgomery bought that first parcel of land, the town and its outskirts were home to 9,000 citizens. They developed an impressive network of black businesses, including banks, insurance companies, and cotton and lumber Mills that cleared approximately $600,000 in annual transactions (nearly $13 million today). The city continually attracted outside attention for its economic success. The blacks who lived in Mound Bayou asked little of the whites who ran Mississippi. They turned inward to help themselves and develop a thriving community of their own that became a national civic icon of black progress and potential. Mound Bayou’s most successful businessman was a man named Charles Banks, a Rust College alumnus who opened the Bank of Mound Bayou and founded the Mississippi Negro Business League. By 1915, Banks himself was worth approximately $100,000.\(^9^4\)

Mound Bayou’s schools, however, were its pride and joy. Education was the epitome of self-help and offered remarkable opportunities for advancement. Just as blacks were being removed from the voter rolls, the community was organizing its first college. Mound Bayou Normal opened in 1892. In 1910, visiting New York Times reporter Thomas H. Arnold observed that, “The character of the schools of Mound Bayou, the methods of administration, the scope of the curriculum, and, in short, the entire operation of the school system must command admiration.” By 1919, Mound Bayou had six public schools, two normal schools, and was planning the construction of a new $70,000 educational facility. “With such an array of scholastic facilities,” Arnold asked, “who can dispute the assertion that the Negro citizens of Mound Bayou are

\(^9^3\) “Southern Horrors” was the name of one of Ida Well’s most famous anti-lynching essays. See Jacqueline Jones Royster, ed., *Southern Horrors and Other Writings: The Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892-1900* (Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2007).

\(^9^4\) Jackson Jr., *A Chief Lieutenant of the Tuskegee Machine*, Banks’s worth on 155, also see 24-35 and 121-135.
seekers for knowledge and earnest workers in the field of race enlightenment and race upbuilding?”

Similar scenes played out elsewhere, but on smaller scales. Blacks could no longer vote. But they could pursue freedom through migration and education. As Jim Crow spread through the South, stripping African Americans of the promises of Reconstruction, blacks quickly learned that they would have to humbly and discerningly construct their own little pockets of freedom. They would have to help themselves. Across Mississippi and much of the Deep South, blacks went on the move. After a brief glimpse of outside help, it became conclusively clear that they would have to manufacture opportunity on their own. They built their own towns and neighborhoods, consolidating their resources, pouring community organizing efforts into business development and school construction, creating beacons of hope in response to a dream deferred.

---

Chapter 2: The Hub City of the New South

“A railroad is a ravenous destroyer of towns, unless those towns are put at the end of it and a sea beyond, so that you can't go further and find another terminus.”

-Mark Twain, 1867

On a scorching summer afternoon in the year 1880, a burly middle-aged man named Captain William Harris Hardy took a lunch break in the middle of a dense Mississippi forest. The pathless woods were thick and monotonous, stretching for miles in every direction. No large group of people had ever settled the area, not even Native Americans who found little use for the land. And Hardy had been in the forest for months, surveying the area for railroad construction. The forty-three year old Confederate Army veteran was exhausted, but he continued trudging through the forest. Sometime in the early afternoon, the Captain heard the distinctive sound of flowing water. A river or creek offered a short respite from the heat of the day and Hardy decided to take his daily lunch break. He walked toward the trickle and came upon a small clearing on the banks of the Leaf River. “The crystal clear water was a refreshing sight,” Hardy later recalled. On the riverbank sat a fallen log that Hardy used as a bench while eating his meal. Hot and tired, the weary traveler took a moment to enjoy the short break. He stretched out his long legs and lit a cigar, smoking and thinking as he studied a map of the state.

---

96 Mark Twain, “Notable Things in St. Louis,” Letter to the Alta California, printed on May 26, 1867.
Hardy’s employer, the New Orleans & Northeastern Railroad, was part of a German-owned railroad syndicate named Erlanger that was planning a route from New Orleans to Cincinnati. Appropriately nicknamed the Queen and Crescent City Route, this ambitious line would move goods between the Gulf of Mexico and Ohio much faster than any existing route. Products arriving in Cincinnati could then be quickly dispersed throughout the Northeast on existing rail lines, thus giving New Orleans rapid access to places like New York, Philadelphia, and Boston. The route was going to do wonders for regional commerce by connecting the major cities of the east to the Gulf of Mexico in unprecedented fashion. But it would have to cut through that dreadfully thicketed portion of southeastern Mississippi known as the Piney Woods. Surveying the region for railroad construction was an incredibly daunting task, to say the least. In most of the region, the longleaf yellow pine trees were packed so tight that you couldn’t roll a ball more than ten feet without bumping a trunk. And Captain Hardy’s section would need to cover nearly two hundred miles. But something about the place struck Hardy as he studied his map during that lunch break. He lingered for a while, looking around the area and even taking a short nap on a bed of pine needles before finally moving on. He returned a few months later just long enough to found a settlement named Gordonville on that exact spot, just off the riverbank. And then he recommended that the Queen and Crescent City Route cut right through it.98

The days following that moment in the Mississippi piney woods would be the best of Hardy’s life. He had overcome a great deal before finding that riverbank in the summer of 1880. The entire South had, really. Southern society had collapsed in the two decades since the South left the Union to fight for its right to remain a slave society. Dreams of independence dashed away by the Civil War defeat and replaced by the Republican Reconstructionist rule that lingered for more than a decade, officially ending just three years before Hardy’s lunch. The region still teemed with the devastation of the

Civil War. Millions were incredibly poor. Thousands more were literally starving. Their society was disordered and their economy was changing. Slavery had ended, and although the massive farms still remained, industrialization represented the future for many. Modern America afforded remarkable possibilities, offering opportunity for all, not just an antiquated aristocratic class. Wealth would be found outside the plantation. Hard working men could become leaders without an abundant inheritance. William Harris Hardy was among these innovative Southern white men who pursued the promises of modernization, embracing new industries, building new towns, and pioneering a new industrial frontier while helping to free the region from vestiges of war, defeat, and occupation. That summer spent out in the Piney Woods was just one step along the way.

Captain Hardy was a self-made man. An imposing figure at six-foot two-inches tall, the Lowndes County, Alabama native had first entered Mississippi in 1855 to help organize a private academy for boys. He arrived that year on the heels of a personal failure. A dreadful case of pneumonia had just forced the young man to withdraw from Tennessee’s Cumberland University just one year shy of graduation. The cold mountain air, a doctor advised him, could worsen his condition and possibly even lead to death. So the ambitious social climber rode down from the mountains, terribly disappointed as he headed home toward an unknown future in the middle of the Alabama cotton belt. His arrival surprised his family who suggested that he go to stay with a cousin in the Mississippi Piney Woods.99

Like many Southern sons who wouldn’t inherit great wealth and social status, William Harris Hardy had seen college as a way to advance his lot in life. That degree was the first step toward prominence. But diploma or not, Hardy arrived in Mississippi determined to succeed. His cousin offered him the job of overseeing the academy and Hardy spent his days guiding the growth of the school and his nights studying law. He taught himself enough to pass the bar the following year and then quickly found work in a Raleigh law office. That dreadful bout with pneumonia had forced Hardy to withdraw from college, but it would not dictate his future. As with any self-made man, Hardy created his own opportunities. Within a couple years, he opened his own law practice.

Then he fell deeply in love with a beautiful young woman named Sallie and was soon married. The young lawyer was totally smitten with his new bride. He doted on her constantly and was affectionate and warm. Hardy and Sallie were just starting a promising life together when the South seceded from the Union and America went to war. Hardy didn’t own slaves, but the twenty-four year-old was among the hundreds of thousands of Southern men who answered Jefferson Davis’s call to protect their way of life. He signed up for military service, willing to risk everything he had achieved for the Confederate cause.¹⁰⁰

Hardy was a born leader in stature and nature. He was exceptionally tall, weighed over 200 pounds, and had a booming voice that later earned him an impressive reputation as an orator. These qualities allowed the charismatic and influential young lawyer to raise a force of eighty fighting men to take on the Yankees. Hardy was commissioned as a company Captain on May 31, 1861, a position that paid the handsome sum of $130.00 a month. His men were integrated into the 16th Mississippi Infantry and given the nickname, the Smith County Defenders.¹⁰¹

The Defenders arrived in Manassas, Virginia on the heels of the First Battle of Bull Run. They lived and served in the hottest theatre of the Civil War, fighting through many of the war’s grueling battles for Northern Virginia alongside legendary Confederate generals Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, and James Longstreet. The 16th Mississippi Infantry was the only Mississippi command to participate in Jackson’s mythical Valley campaign in the Spring of 1862 when Stonewall Jackson’s infantry divisions became the fabled “foot cavalry,” gloriously routing Union forces up and down the Shenandoah Valley in one of the most audacious and brilliant military campaigns in American history.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Toney Hardy, No Compromise with Principle, 29-40. Examples of Hardy’s affection toward Sallie can be found in his letters in Box 2, William H. and Sallie J. Hardy Papers (hereafter, W & S Hardy Papers), USM.
¹⁰¹ “Register,” “Company Muster-In Roll,” and “Officers Pay Account (June 1-June 30, 1862),” Compiled Service Records of Confederate Soldiers Who Served in Organizations from Mississippi, 16th Infantry, Go-Hi, Roll #242.
¹⁰² William H. Hardy to Sallie Hardy, Manassas, VA, August 21, 1861, Box 2, W & S Hardy Papers; William Hardy to Sallie Hardy, April 22, 1862, Gordonsville, VA, Box 2, W & S Hardy Papers; and William Hardy to Sally Hardy, September 7, 1862, Camp near Frederick, MD, Box 2, W & S Hardy Papers. For a great discussion of the early Civil War in Virginia, see Edward Ayers, In The Presence of
But far worse days lay ahead. Hardy would miss many of them due to illness, but the rest of the Smith County Defenders saw too much of the war. They fought at Antietam, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, and the Battle of the Wilderness, four of the deadliest conflicts to ever occur on American soil. Nearly 60,000 Confederates spilled blood during those haunting days in the shadows of the Blue Ridge Mountains. They met countless defeats and witnessed unspeakable horrors. The surviving Smith County Defenders were among the troops who surrendered with General Lee at Appomattox Courthouse on April 9, 1865. Captain Hardy was lucky enough to withdraw from the Army before the humiliating surrender. The other men who lived through the war trudged home to a broken society.\[103\]

After the war, Captain Hardy and Sallie moved to Paulding, Mississippi where the Captain quietly resumed his law practice, eking out a bitter existence under Reconstructionist rule. Carpetbagging Northerners and newly freed African Americans took a share of political power from white Democrats. Yankees became governors and a black man was appointed a United States Senator. The federal government was also directing enormous resources toward helping educate the recently emancipated blacks. Hardy, like many Southern whites, looked forward to the end of Republican power. He was surrounded by allies. In 1871, whites in nearby Meridian organized to overthrow the town’s local black leaders, killing many and forcing others to flee. The riot attracted the attention of the federal government and helped serve as a basis for the 1871 Ku Klux Klan Act.\[104\]


\[103\] For more on the Civil War experiences of the Mississippi Sixteenth Infantry, see Robert G. Evans, ed., The Sixteenth Mississippi Infantry: Civil War Letters and Reminiscences (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2002). Additionally, numerous websites detail the battle record of the Mississippi Sixteenth Infantry. The best overview is offered by the Mississippi Sons of Confederate Veterans, and can be found using the following link: http://www.mississippiscv.org/MS_Units/16th_MS_INF.htm.

\[104\] For more on the 1871 Meridian Race Riot, see Allen W. Trelease, White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1995, orig.,
Hardy wasn’t involved in the riot, but he surely approved of the objective. His society had been crushed and was now ruled by Northern Carpetbagging Republicans and former black slaves. Men like Hardy eagerly awaited redemption, but were responsible enough to wait for a controlled and legal solution. Like his good friend and frequent house guest Lucius Q.C. Lamar, William Harris Hardy sought a diplomatic, permanent peace. Things seemingly calmed in the years after the 1871 Meridian riot. Hardy continued on with his life, even after having to bury Sallie the following autumn when she lost a tragic bout with malaria. He moved to Meridian where he joined a throng of former Confederates who were quietly beginning to galvanize the forces of change. Hardy edited the *Meridian Tri-Weekly Homestead*, rallying local sentiment against Reconstruction and calling for the impeachment of Republican Mississippi Governor Adelbert Ames.105

The Redemption came on Election Day in 1875. Hardy played a key local role in the Mississippi Revolution. His editorials in the *Meridian Tri-Weekly Homestead* helped sway local sentiment by advocating the overthrow of the Republican government and removal of blacks from the voter rolls. In the weeks before the election, Hardy travelled to other counties encouraging groups of white citizens to act. A family friend later remembered Hardy’s influence in Kemper County where the influential young attorney appeared just before Election Day to encourage local residents to “prepare for action.” Democrats, as had been previously noted, overthrew the Republican government in 1875, helping to redeem the sins of Reconstruction and returning Mississippi power back to the hands of its native white residents. Hardy was among the Redeemers who had rescued their society. Four years later, Hardy paid tribute to their leader by naming his next born son Lamar.106

Hardy went to work for the New Orleans & Northeastern Railroad after Reconstruction. His new job as a land surveyor sent him stomping all over the region including into the Mississippi Piney Woods during that summer of 1880. A hard-working

105 Toney Hardy, *No Compromise with Principle*, especially 111-137
and innovative employee, Hardy served the railroad in numerous capacities. He was at once the railroad’s general counsel, fundraiser, and even sometime engineer. The company was so impressed by his intellect and diligence that it placed him in charge of their most ambitious and important project, the construction of a bridge across Louisiana’s 630 square-mile Lake Pontchartrain.  

The bridge over Lake Pontchartrain would speed travel to and from New Orleans on the lake’s southern shore. But construction was a daunting challenge. Hundreds of engineers, speculators, builders, and railroad men ridiculed the idea of the bridge, predicting unmitigated disaster. No one had ever before sent a railroad that far over water. The track, they argued, would surely collapse under the enormous weight of a locomotive, sending passengers and cargo into the lake’s shallow waters. But Captain Hardy disagreed. The attacks bolstered his motivation. Whereas Hardy was a mostly self-educated college drop-out, many of his critics hailed from more privileged backgrounds and held distinguished advanced degrees. The determined Hardy set to work proving them wrong. He planned a bridge that would cover not only the six miles across the lake, but also span nearly fifteen miles of land, thus providing an inflexible foundation for the overwater section. A newly constructed creosoting factory sat nearby and processed thousands of trees, allowing Hardy to reconstruct a virtual underwater forest in the form of railroad trestles. The weight of cargo and passenger trains would be supported by over 15,000,000 feet of underwater supports and anchored by nearly fifteen miles of track secured into the opposing shores.

The first train to cross Lake Pontchartrain steamed into New Orleans on the evening of October 15, 1883. Captain Hardy had successfully proven his doubters wrong. In doing so, the amateur engineer had just fashioned the world’s longest working railroad bridge. The $1.3 million, twenty-one mile bridge offered an unprecedented route across, rather than around Lake Pontchartrain, saving merchants thousands of hours in shipping time and offering local passengers quick and easy access to the lake’s northern shore. Rum runners paid tribute to the Captain decades later, nicknaming the structure “Hardy’s

---

107 “Judge William Harris Hardy,” Box 2, Folder 8, W & H Papers, USM; and “Bridging Lake Pontchartrain,” The New York Times, November 1, 1881, 1.
108 Ibid. For more on Hardy’s Moonshine Bridge, see Davis, The Southern Railway, 186-187.
Moonshine Bridge.” Just a few months after the bridge’s completion, a train left from Cincinnati and arrived in New Orleans in a mere twenty-eight hours, setting a record for Southern travel. Travelers and cargo had been making trips from the Queen to Crescent cities for decades, loading onto steamboats for the multi-day jaunt up or downstream. But the paddlewheels were rapidly becoming outdated as railroad tracks spread across the South. A locomotive could make it from New Orleans to Cincinnati and back before a steamboat even reached the Ohio River in Cairo, Illinois.109

That same road also cut directly through the Mississippi Piney Woods where Hardy had spent that summer of 1880 surveying its route. The new track would create unprecedented opportunities in South Mississippi by connecting the dense Piney Woods with the rest of America. The underdeveloped region was finally showing some potential. As the New Orleans Daily Picayune noted, “The service which the road will perform for the people of Southern Mississippi is not small.” Railroads were taking over Deep South commerce and travel. Ingenuity and science would trump Mother Nature as Americans began to rely less and less on natural highways. And William Harris Hardy was right in the middle of it all, quickly becoming a very successful and widely respected railroad man. A year after completing the Lake Pontchartrain bridge, he changed the name of his Leaf River settlement from Gordonville to Hattiesburg in honor of his second wife Hattie. And then Hardy began planning a railroad of his own.110

Captain Hardy had exceptional drive, talent, and perhaps a bit of luck that vaulted him into a leadership role with the railroads firm. His employment with a railroad, however, was hardly unique for a former Confederate.111  The end of Reconstruction brought stability to Dixie, and stability attracted investment. Northern firms financed railroad construction and employed thousands of Southern men as they carved tracks across the surface of the postwar South, modernizing its landscape and connecting Dixie

110 “Our New Railroads,” The Daily Picayune, October 16, 1883, 4; and “Judge William Harris Hardy,” Box 2, Folder 8, W & H Papers, USM.
111 The New Orleans & Northeastern was funded by a coalition of New York and European financiers.
to the rest of the world. Modernization offered unprecedented opportunity. As Mississippi Governor Theodore Bilbo later recalled, this was “an age when possibilities of this country were unfolding themselves to the minds of men who had vision.” Like William Harris Hardy, many of these men were good, loyal Southerners who had answered the Confederacy’s call to fight. But their prewar allegiances were often disregarded to pursue financial opportunities provided by Northerner investors. It was a fascinating marriage between old combatants. The Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, for example, actually hired a man who had participated in the Great Train Raid of 1861 against the then-neutral railroad. Southern lawyers found the greatest opportunities working for the railroads that had helped defeat their beloved Confederate cause. Hundreds of them made a living representing Northern railroad interests in local courts. The Confederates swallowed hard and reached out their hand as the region modernized. Individualism reigned throughout Dixie. If the Old South was about honor, the New South was about profit. Principles would be redeemed elsewhere.  

The Old South hadn’t known railroads all that well. It was part of the reason they lost the war. Many New Orleans merchants in particular were quite satisfied with the trade routes provided by the Mississippi River and Gulf of Mexico. Railroads didn’t become common in Mississippi until the 1850s as the state’s plantation owners became increasingly wealthy just prior to the Civil War. Mississippi’s plantation economy came slow compared to places such as Virginia and North Carolina. The state didn’t generate massive agricultural revenue until well into the 1800s. Before it found cotton, Mississippi had a long history of failed cash crops. Aspiring French, British, Spanish, and American settlers learned hard lessons that Mississippi was bad for tobacco and rice. But then Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin and the First Industrial Revolution took off, both making the cotton trade boom. Mississippi produced approximately 10 million pounds of cotton


113 For more on early Southern railroad debates, see Craig Miner, A Most Magnificent Machine: America Adopts the Railroad, 1825-1862 (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2010), especially 156-171.
in 1820. By 1860, the annual crop exceeded 535 million pounds (Over roughly the same period, the number of African American slaves increased from 32,814 to 436,631). Thousands of ambitious farmers migrated to the Magnolia State to plant cotton and get rich. 114

So by 1850, the massive farms had spread far into Mississippi’s interior and needed new ways to transport their cotton. The massive Mississippi River was usually fine for cotton transportation, but the state’s smaller inland rivers were prone to dramatic water level changes that could stall shipments for days on end. Railroads were consistent and could reach virtually anywhere. Also, moving the crop from the interior could be an incredibly complicated process that often required numerous modes of transportation. Transferring bales of cotton between farms, wagons, docks, and boats could cause the crop to be over-handled. Train cars only had to be loaded once. Thus, railroad tracks slowly spread across Mississippi during the decade before the Civil War. Memphis merchants, who sought an overland route to the Atlantic to bypass New Orleans middlemen, helped complete a direct line to Charleston in 1857. During the 1850s, Mississippi’s total railroad mileage jumped from 75 to 872. But then, of course, their empire fell. 115

The Civil War destroyed much of Mississippi’s railroads. Both Union and Confederate armies tore up hundreds of miles of tracks to limit the opposing side’s ability to transport troops, weapons, and supplies. The tracks slowly started coming back after


115 See Stover, The Railroads of the South, 1865-1900, 3-15; Aaron W. Marrs, Railroads in the Old South: Pursuing Progress in a Slave Society (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); Davis, The Southern Railway, especially 118-127; and “Third and Fourth Annual Reports of the Railroad Commission of the State of Mississippi for the Years Ending September 30, 1888 and 1889,” 16, Mississippi Department of Archives and History (hereafter, MDAH), Jackson, MS.
the war, especially when Reconstruction ended. Wealthy industrialists laid better, more modern rails in the 1870s and 1880s, rapidly expanding and updating the existing Southern railroad systems. But Southerners didn’t control these new lines. Yankees and Europeans did. Union dollars migrated south, laying thousands of miles of tracks through a restructured Southern economic landscape. Southerners could never completely forgive their Northern counterparts for the Civil War, but they sure did welcome Yankee investment. The carpetbagging politicians of the Reconstruction era were persecuted, beaten, and even lynched. But the carpetbagging investors of the New South were received with open arms.116

Southerners didn’t exactly have a choice. The former Confederacy was broke. And Mississippi was worse off than any other state. Its prewar economy had relied almost exclusively on slavery-based agriculture. The value of its farms plummeted, causing a dramatic decrease in available investment capital. In 1860, Mississippi farms were collectively worth $190,760,367. Ten years later, they were valued at just $65,373,261.117

Railroads were just too expensive for postbellum planters to build. In 1870, one could scarcely construct a single mile of rail for less than $30,000 (approximately $500,000 today).118 The new Southern economy desperately needed outside capital to grow so they went in search of help. Outside investors poured capital into Mississippi throughout the 1880s, modernizing the state and making its interior more available for commerce. Railroads were the key because they could connect Mississippi’s interior to the rest of America. Captain William Harris Hardy was part of a larger trend. In the nine years after his 1880 lunch break, more than 1,200 miles of tracks were laid across the state.119

117 The available capital for investment was even more limited considering that from 1860 to 1870, the number of farms increased from 42,840 to 68,023. Thus, less equity was spread further, impeding financial flexibility. “General Agriculture Statistics, 1850-1990: Mississippi,” in Donald B. Dodd, ed., Historical Statistics of the States of the United States: Two Centuries of the Census, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993), 201.
118 Stover, The Railroads of the South, 1865-1900, 130-134.
No new Mississippi line was more important than the Illinois Central. Founded in 1850 as America’s first land grant railroad, it was first built to connect Lake Michigan to the Mississippi River with a line from the Chicago to Cairo, Illinois. The line soon rapidly expanded and headed into the South, adding over 2,500 miles of track in its first decade alone. In 1856, the Illinois Central opened service from Chicago to New Orleans, surpassing the mighty Mississippi altogether and becoming the world’s longest line. The Civil War was actually good for the Illinois Central Railroad. The company made a fortune transporting Union supplies and troops. Its annual revenue rose from $2,899,000 in 1861 to $7,181,000 by 1865. After the war, the Illinois Central kept expanding after the war. It became incredibly aggressive in the depleted South, acquiring hundreds of miles of land to expand its lines. By 1889, the company was operating 636.06 miles of track in Mississippi alone. Mississippi’s railroad traffic rapidly increased, bringing back the cotton industry from a postwar lull and opening additional avenues of opportunity. The new lines had a major impact on Mississippi’s economy. The social change they wrought was just as profound.

* * *

Mark Twain was wrong. Railroads didn’t destroy towns. They built them. Between 1870 and 1890, Americans laid an unprecedented fifteen miles of track per day as the nation’s railroad mileage jumped from 52,922 to 163,597, the largest twenty year increase in United States history. People followed the rails. Southerners gathered into hundreds of small regional urban centers built around new railroad depots. Atlanta, for example, wasn’t always a big city. On the eve of the Civil War, its population was just over 9,500. By 1890, over 65,000 called Atlanta home. In the decade between 1880 and 1890, Birmingham grew from 3,086 residents to 26,178, Richmond added nearly 18,000 citizens, and more than 62,000 people moved into Memphis and Nashville.

---

People were flooding into the cities of the New South, chasing the jobs created by railroads. The tracks became essential to Southern life. As historian Edward Ayers has noted, “by 1890, nine of every ten Southerners lived in a railroad county.” Mississippi was no different. Settlers arrived in new towns like sweet ants on a chocolate bar. The area around the new town of Hattiesburg was especially filled with construction. As one local later recalled, “From New Orleans to Meridian was a beehive of activity. Literally thousands of people were employed.”

The new railroads allowed for Hattiesburg’s first brush with fame. For a brief moment in 1889, William Harris Hardy’s young town became the epicenter of the international sports world when it hosted America’s last bareknuckle Heavyweight Boxing Championship. This momentous match featuring champion John L. Sullivan against challenger Jake Kilrain offered the richest payday to that point in boxing history and became one of the first American sporting events to receive worldwide coverage. The historic fight was originally scheduled to take place in New Orleans, but Louisiana Governor Francis T. Nicholls banned the bout because of pressure from citizens protesting the brutality of bare knuckle fighting. This was merely a minor setback. There was a backup plan. Sawmill owner and future Hattiesburg mayor Charles W. Rich had already constructed a ring on his property deep in the heart of the Mississippi Piney Woods. Fighters and spectators boarded a train that whisked them across Lake Pontchartrain on Hardy’s Moonshine Bridge and up the Queen and Crescent City route to Rich’s property, just outside of Hattiesburg. The fight was so popular that 3,000 passengers paid $15 each (the modern equivalent is approximately $360) for a spot on the train. Dozens of desperate stowaways hid on the tops of the rail cars, causing conductors to stop the train partway to throw them off. Those who paid got their money’s worth. The match lasted seventy-five rounds, spanning two hours and sixteen minutes before Kilrain’s corner threw in the towel. The event changed boxing forever. Seemingly every newspaper in America printed its results and John L. Sullivan became America’s first

---

125 Picayune native S.G. Thigpin was describing the exact line Hardy had been hired to survey. Hattiesburg sits directly between Meridian and New Orleans, which are 82 and 103 miles away, respectively. Quote from S. G. Thigpin, *A Boy in Rural Mississippi & Other Stories* (Kingsport, TN: Kingsport Press, 1966), 116.
sports superstar. The fight also demonstrated the capabilities of the railroads. Thousands
of people could hop on board, travel nearly one hundred miles, watch a boxing match,

Hattiesburg, or the Hub City as it was later nicknamed in a local contest, was
strategically located. It lies in the southeast corner of Mississippi, within one hundred
miles each of Jackson, Mobile, and New Orleans, three of the region’s most important
cities. Jackson is the Mississippi state capital. Mobile is Alabama’s largest port. And
when Captain Hardy founded the Hub City, New Orleans was America’s second busiest
port and the economic heart of the Deep South. When the railroads were finished, each
city could be reached within half a day from Hattiesburg. Because of its strategic
location, railroad tracks were built through the Hub City, eventually connecting
Hattiesburg to the Mid-Atlantic Coast via Atlanta and to Texas and California through
Natchez, Mississippi’s historic gateway to the West. The new town of Hattiesburg, as it
turns out, had been placed smack dab in the middle of a major intersection of Deep South
commerce and travel. That opportunistic geography is precisely what Captain William
Harris Hardy had noticed while studying his map during that lunch break in the summer
of 1880.\footnote{127}{“Judge William Harris Hardy,” Box 2, Folder 8, W & H Papers, USM.}

Hattiesburg grew quickly. Over a thousand settlers had arrived by the end of
1890, changing the sleepy village into a small town. The mostly white migrants came
from across the South, clearing small sections of the vast Mississippi Piney Woods to
build their homes and begin their new lives. Like Hardy, the Civil War had turned many
of their lives upside down. Their entire society was mangled and defeated. Local
governments were disorganized, towns had crumbled, infrastructures had been destroyed,
and former black slaves were free and equal. But fresh opportunities were available in the
growing railroad towns of the New South. So people came to places like Hattiesburg with
a little bit of hope. Whether washed out cotton planters, war widows, worn-down laborers, betrayed Populists, or laid-off rivermen, these new migrants were all chasing the dreams of modernity. Thousands arrived in the Hub City, leaving behind their old lives on the farm and tying their futures to the promises of the railroad. Hattiesburg soon outnumbered Augusta, the seat of Perry County where the Hub City was located. The new residents rejected the smaller town’s control over their resources and fashioned two new counties out of the previously unsettled, but recently booming Mississippi Piney Woods.128

Hattiesburg, teeming with its railroads and determined population of migrants, was a classic town of the New South. Its new residents embraced progress and technology, even at the hands of Northern capitalists and industrialists. They were connected to the rest of America like never before. And they wanted to be. In fact, they had to be. The growth of new industries depended almost entirely on Northern capital. The end of Reconstruction allowed a reconciliation of sorts. Hattiesburg’s early white residents embodied the progress and change and change of modernity, embracing industrial opportunity as they seemingly moved further and further away from the annihilated antebellum system.

Yet, despite the systematic changes to their lives, the haze of a strange hypocrisy hung over the Hub City. As whites migrated to Hattiesburg, embracing progress and change, they also held tightly to vestiges of a cherished but fading antebellum way of life that had been so ruthlessly ripped from their grasps. Romantic memories of the Old South lingered in their imagination even as their world was being transformed. The War was gone, but its memory panged through them like an echo, sending chilling reminders of a lost society and a defeat and occupation by men who did not come from among them. The Lost Cause lived in their imagination and flecked from the tip of their tongues as they remembered and honored mythical heroes from the past. Those early white Hattiesburgers quickly grew into a contradiction. They chased down the opportunities of the New South, moving to the freshly spawned railroads towns and plugging into

American modernity to start anew. And then they turned around and gave their new counties two incredibly evocative names from the past: Forrest and Lamar.129

* * *

Hattiesburg was birthed by the railroads. But it was lumber that would make her boom. Captain Hardy’s new settlement had been founded in the middle of one of America’s densest forests, the Mississippi Piney Woods. The Piney Woods are part the Longleaf Yellow Pine Belt, a massive stretch of forests ranging from North Carolina to Texas. The Mississippi portion of the forest was virtually untouched by the time Captain Hardy founded Hattiesburg. The virgin forest was pristine, pure, and thick, rolling for millions of acres over the vast rolling hills of southern Mississippi. Billions of trees grew out of the sandy, orange soils, stretching up to 150 tall and growing within the same relative proximity as blades of grass. Perhaps the most versatile North American tree, the wood is strong, resistant to decay and fire, highly resinous, and naturally beautiful. These traits made longleaf yellow pine attractive to a modernizing nation. Among other uses, the timbers are phenomenal for railroad ties, freight cars, dock-building, naval supplies, utility poles, and housing construction, both in framing and flooring. And there was enough of it in south Mississippi to make sawmill owners drool.130

Mississippians had been harvesting longleaf pine for decades by the time Captain Hardy arrived in that forest. But the state’s timber industry was always limited before the railroads. The massive timbers had to be loaded on wagons and pulled to rivers by teams of oxen, an incredibly arduous task in the dense Mississippi woods. Guiding large bulls through the thick forest was like trying to swim through sand. The difficulty of timber transportation limited lumbering to areas with easy access to major waterways. The small interior lumber industry relied on fast, tall-banked rivers and skilled raftsmen who would

129 The name Lamar is fairly synonymous with railroads. As historian C. Vann Woodward has noted, Lamar and his Senatorial colleagues were “avowed friends of the railroads and corporations.” C. Vann Woodward, Origins of the New South, 1877-1913 (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1971, originally published in 1951), 18.
walk along the shores with long poles, controlling the floating logs. Before railroads, gangs of rafters had to guide logs for miles downstream to hastily built sawmills scattered along the small rivers of south Mississippi. These early lumber drives must have been quite a scene, with dozens of unkempt rivermen driving thousands of fallen trees down slow rivers like herds of cattle across the plains. By 1880, the log drives were rapidly increasing in size and scope as the timber trade began to grow. The Leaf River saw a lot of action. There is a very good chance that Captain Hardy saw these lumber drives first-hand during his months speculating the area for the New Orleans & Northeastern Railroad. According to at least one source of local lore, a swarm of logs glided past him as he sat eating his lunch on the banks of the Leaf River on that hot August afternoon in the summer of 1880. The Captain must have known what the coming railroads were going to do for the lumber harvest.\footnote{For more on rafting, see Hickman, Mississippi Harvest, 17 and 106-113. In 1932, the Hattiesburg American reported that Captain Hardy did observe floating timber rafts during his lunch, but there is no definitive evidence to support the claim. See “Memories Stirred in Many By Golden Jubilee Play, Some High Spots Are Noted,” Hattiesburg American, October 15, 1932, 1.}

Mark Twain nostalgically remembered that old Southern timber industry, recalling the sight of massive lumber rafts “floating leisurely along, in the old fashioned way, mannered with joyous and reckless crews of fiddling, song-singing, whisky-drinking, break-dancing rapscallions.” But however appealing that leisurely life may have seemed, the floating system of the old Southern lumber industry was also incredibly dangerous. Thousands of trees floating down small rivers often caused logjams. And logjams killed people. One particular jam on the Pascagoula River in south Mississippi squeezed the longleaf timbers into a twenty-five foot tall dam, making a break costly and potentially fatal if stray logs burst over the river bank.\footnote{Mark Twain, Life on the Mississippi (New York: Signet Classic, 2001, originally published in 1883), quoted on 312; and Hickman, Mississippi Harvest, 112.}

The railroads laid in the 1880s made Mississippi lumbering safer and more efficient. Timbers could simply be stacked, tied, and placed on railroad cars, freeing lumberjacks from reliance on the unpredictable factors of current and gravity. Lumber transportation was never completely accident-free, but railroads gave the harvesters more control. The trains also opened up the industry in Mississippi’s interior. This was important. Proximity to a river or coast no longer mattered. Lumber could come from
anywhere in the Piney Woods. “Railroads,” Twain griped, “have made havoc with the steamboat commerce.” But the trains did more than just render steamboats obsolete. They created completely new avenues of economic opportunity in places like Hattiesburg by opening all parts of the Mississippi Longleaf Pine Belt for harvest. Railroads replaced rivers as the veins in the heart of the Deep South, pumping timber from the interior to almost everywhere in America.¹³³

Meanwhile, the North’s lumber supply was dwindling. Its vast forests of white pine had been under assault since the colonial period when the British Royal Navy chopped down thousands of the massive 200 foot tall trees to use as masts in their magnificent Man-of-War battleships. New England white pine had been so valuable to the English that the British passed laws in 1711 and 1721 making it illegal to chop down any trees that had potential as masts. Beyond warboat construction, the massive northern pines offered additional value for everyday usage. The lumber is excellent for buckets, shelves, and trunks. It also supplied much of the lumber for doorways, fireplaces, and clapboards as America grew throughout the 1800s.¹³⁴ Nearly two hundred years of virtually unchecked harvest had exhausted many of the great pine forests of the North. In 1896, the Chicago Tribune warned of partial extinction, declaring the entire lumber industry obsolete in Michigan and Wisconsin, with Minnesota soon likely sharing a similar fate. But America still needed timber. In fact, it needed it more than ever. New markets appeared just as white pine declined, creating lucrative opportunities for Southern foresters.¹³⁵

The United States Navy grew rapidly during the 1880s and 1890s. America had lost its western frontier and responded by following European colonization, turning an eye toward Latin America and Asian markets for economic expansion. Highlighted by the 1884 opening of the Naval War College, the American Navy was quickly expanding

¹³³ Twain, Life on the Mississippi, quoted on 311.
and modernizing. The growing military relied heavily on several types of timber products collectively referred to as Naval Stores. So too did fishermen, merchants, and recreational boaters. Traditionally produced from North Carolina pines by harvesters nicknamed “Tar Heels,” the raw material for Naval Stores are collected by cutting and chipping at the bottom of pine trunks then burning the tops to bleed out the tree’s tar. This thick, rancid substance is used to produce goods such as turpentine, tar, pitch, and rosin oil. Turpentine is great for waterproofing cloth, manufacturing rubber, lighting oil lamps, polishing shoes, and disinfecting supplies. Raw tar prevents rust on large guns and helps preserve underwater wood posts. Pitch stops leaks. And rosin is used to produce soaps and floor wax. Thousands of Mississippians found work in the burgeoning Naval Stores industry that sprouted out in the forests surrounding growing settlements like Hattiesburg. During the 1890s, Mississippi’s Naval Store production increased 600%. It was a major industry and important part of Mississippi’s coastal commerce. By the beginning of World War I, more tons of Naval Stores were exported from Gulfport than anywhere else in the United States.

Other technological developments created additional demand for Southern lumber. The turn of the twentieth century often invokes images of bright lights, large crowds, new skyscrapers, factories, massive ocean liners, and trolleys. Steel, electricity, and the telephone changed the way America lived. The nation modernized, producing another industrial revolution, enormous cities, and the largest buildings ever constructed. The Progressive and Gilded Ages hardly beseech thoughts of a tall, skinny tree with reddish-brown bark growing somewhere in the Deep South. But yellow pine was absolutely essential to modernization. America craved yellow pine like termites. It simply couldn’t get enough. Fire resistant, tall and skinny, but also heavy and strong, yellow pine

---


was perfect for American modernization. The nation’s cities were chocked full of it. Something had to hold the wires up off the ground.¹³⁸

Chicago found it first. During the late 1800s, the Windy City emerged as one of the world’s leading lumber wholesale centers. Timber trade played a major role in the city’s development. As the Chicago Tribune noted in 1907, “The effect of this great lumber trade on the growth of Chicago and the surrounding country cannot be overestimated.”¹³⁹ As the supply of white pine dwindled, Chicago merchants looked south for timber. Windy City lumberyards began importing large amounts of yellow pine as early as 1885. In 1892, the organizers of the upcoming Chicago World’s Fair used longleaf yellow pine for their massive structures designed to stun the world. They wanted as much as they could possibly get, at times agonizing over having to wait for more longleaf pine from the South. Millions of Southern timbers were used in the Fair’s avant-garde buildings. Workers estimated its placement rates as high as 174,000 feet of lumber per week. The Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building alone used an estimated 17 million feet of lumber. The structure covered 32 acres, and as one observer reported, was “half covered in, with glass in parts and in other parts with yellow pine boards.” The Fair impacted the yellow pine trade in more than one way.¹⁴⁰

The enormous electrical ambition of new companies like General Electric and Westinghouse at the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair infected city planners and civil engineers across the country. The Great White Way seized the nation’s imagination. America’s cities would never again be in the dark. As historian David Nye wrote, “Intensive lighting…emerged as a glamorous symbol of progress and cultural advancement.” Virtually every city in America wanted its downtown streets lit with electricity, and early twentieth century engineers quickly discovered that longleaf yellow pine made the best

¹³⁹ “Greatest of All in Building,” Chicago Daily Tribune, March 4, 1907, 17.
utility poles. The trees are strong, skinny, and straight, and can be easily formed into utility poles capable of holding thousands of pounds of wires, lights, and metal clasps. To this day, longleaf yellow pine remains the most widely used lumber for wood utility poles.\(^{141}\)

America devoured longleaf yellow pine as the Great White Way infected a nation. The Piney Woods were virtually reconstructed in cities across the country, carrying the electric revolution into America’s homes and holding aloft Ma Bell’s “highway of communication.” The New York City Board of Electrical Control described “a forest of tall poles” standing throughout their city. The growth of American cities offered seemingly limitless economic potential for longleaf harvesters. You couldn’t chop and sell the trees fast enough. One historian estimates that in 1910, the Illinois Central Railroad delivered more than 500 million feet of Southern lumber to Chicago alone. As Kansas City lumberman R.A. Long had declared, “No great body of timber has ever made or promises to make as good a percent of profit for its investors as has yellow pine.”\(^{142}\)

Throughout the early 20\(^{th}\) century, the Southern longleaf pine industry exploded. It was the largest lumber boom in American history. By 1910, yellow pine composed 36.6% of all timber cut in the United States.\(^{143}\) Southern lumber dominated the American lumber industry. Thousands of sawmills were erected across the region, producing hundreds of millions of dollars’ worth of lumber. Mississippi benefitted perhaps more than any other state. The value of the Mississippi lumber products grew alongside the decline of white pine and emergence of modern America. Between 1890 and 1900, the annual value of Mississippi lumber products grew from $1,920,335 to $15,656,110. Then


the trade absolutely exploded. By 1920, Mississippi was annually producing just shy of $90 million worth of lumber products.\textsuperscript{144}

Mississippi longleaf pine was now found in New York City utility poles, Chicago railway ties, and California homes. The lumber was going everywhere. It even began making its way abroad. Between 1910 and 1915, over 4.5 billion feet of yellow pine was shipped to Latin America, Europe, and Africa.\textsuperscript{145} The wood was used to build Australian fishing boats, Uruguayan warehouses, and German freight cars. Forty years after Hardy’s lunch break, New Orleans, Mobile, and the new Mississippi town of Gulfport each ranked among largest lumber exporting ports in the entire world. Mid-autumn shipping records from 1916 show yellow pine shipments leaving from those three ports to places like Barcelona, Copenhagen, Vera Cruz, Buenos Ayres, Belize, Genoa, Havana, Montevideo, and even as far away as Queenstown, New Zealand. Sawmill builders arrived in the Mississippi Piney Woods like prospectors to a gold rush. Fortunes were chopped out of the forest as a new industry exploded, providing thousands of jobs even for those who didn’t get rich. In 1890, 4,537 people worked in the Mississippi lumber industry. Twenty years later, there were nearly 40,000. And so Hattiesburg grew.\textsuperscript{146}

\* \* \*


Within ten years of Captain Hardy’s lunch, Hattiesburg was adding new residents nearly every day. People flocked to the Hub City in search of opportunities, making their homes near the railroads and building dreams in the lumberyards. Between 1890 and 1910, Hattiesburg’s population nearly quadrupled as the city added more than 3,000 residents. The Hub City grew alongside the Mississippi lumber industry. By 1893, fifty-nine sawmills in the Hattiesburg area were producing nearly one million board feet of lumber every day. The longleaf yellow pines were falling fast and the local economy boomed. There were plenty of prospects for those who arrived in search of work.\[147\]

During the October of 1893, however, the number of jobs took a dip when Hattiesburg was hit by her first tragedy. That autumn, a downtown fire destroyed twenty-six buildings, including the Wiscasset sawmill, one of the Hub City’s largest mills and biggest employers. At first, the tragedy appeared to be a major setback for local workers. The Wiscasset Mill had been a cornerstone of the burgeoning young city. The fire at the mill destroyed over 2,000,000 worth of lumber and caused $30,000 in damage. The flames also consumed a lot of jobs and the partially-insured Wiscasset mill owners couldn’t afford to rebuild. But the fire actually proved to be a blessing in disguise. The burning of the Wiscasset Mill attracted the attention of an opportunistic Yankee.\[148\]

As the nineteenth century closed, many of the old Northern lumber barons eyed opportunity in the South. Pennsylvania sawmill owner Judson Jones Newman was among them. The Scranton businessman’s white pine empire was dwindling. The decline wasn’t due to poor management or even falling demand. Newman had plenty of clients, and the recession of the early 1890s had left his business relatively unscathed. Newman was just running out of trees. His competitors were experiencing the same thing. The harvestable lumber was simply running out. The Pocono Mountains sat flush with white pine seemingly in his backyard. But trying to extract the massive trees down the steep slopes would have been a logistical nightmare. And all these conservationists and


\[148\] Sheet 1, Hattiesburg, MS, July, 1890, Sanborn Maps; “Southern New Items,” *The Savannah Tribune*, April 7, 1894, 4 for 2,000,000 and $30,000 stat; Skates, “Hattiesburg: The Early Years,” 5-11; and Hickman, *Mississippi Harvest*, 180-183.
preservationists were starting to impede on lumber extraction, arguing for the need to protect the remaining bits of nature in the Northeast. At the same time, his clients in small Pennsylvania towns like Allegheny, Johnstown, and Williamsport, and big cities such as Louisville, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and Chicago were already gaining a thirst for a new type of Southern wood. For a moment, the future was dim. But opportunity found Newman when a fire destroyed a large sawmill in a new Mississippi town. Newman caught wind of the tragedy, bought the empty site, and began building a massive new sawmill over ten acres of newly cleared land. In just over a year, JJ Newman Lumber was up and running, funneling lumber on the Queen and Crescent City Route to a bevy of lumberyards in cities such as Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Louisville. All parties benefitted. The ambitious lumberman had found a new timber supply while providing jobs for hundreds of locals. What JJ Newman didn’t realize, however, was that he had just barely scratched the surface.\footnote{John Ray Skates, “Hattiesburg: The Early Years,” in Kenneth G. McCarty, Jr., ed., Hattiesburg: A Pictorial History (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1982), 5-11; Hickman, Mississippi Harvest, 180-183; Sheet 2, Hattiesburg, MS, March, 1895, Sanborn Map Company Ltd., Digital Sanborn Maps, 1867-1970 (hereafter, Sanborn Maps); “Account Ledger: 1895-1896,” Newman Lumber Company Records, Box 1, USM. Notable buyers included, Philadelphia’s William M. Lloyd & Co. and Watson Malone & Son, Pittsburgh’s Nichola Brothers Lumber Co. and Curl Hutchison Lumber Co., and Louisville’s Falls City Lumber and S.P. Graham & Co., Louisville’s oldest lumber house.}

Soon after JJ Newman Lumber opened, another Pennsylvania lumberman named Fenwick Peck arrived at the Hattiesburg railroad depot. The timber trade ran through Peck’s blood. His family history in the lumber business dated as far back as 1839 when his grandfather moved from Massachusetts to Eastern Pennsylvania and started a sawmill near the banks of the Lackawanna River, appropriately naming it the Lackawanna Lumber Company. The sawmill was enormously successful, and would support generations of Pecks, many of whom made careers in the family lumber empire. By the company’s Golden Anniversary, the grandson Fenwick Peck was presiding over a firm with more than $750,000 in capital stock. Like many Northern lumber companies, the Lackawanna Lumber Company was running low on white pine and seeking ways to maintain production. So in 1896, Peck came to Hattiesburg. He liked what he saw in the young city and its surrounding forests. Local residents needed jobs and new workers arrived almost daily, helping to keep down labor costs. Additionally, land in the
surrounding forest was incredibly cheap. Since it was completely covered by longleaf pines and couldn’t be farmed, acres sold for a mere $1.25. Peck bought a controlling share of JJ Newman Lumber and began pumping in capital. He kept the company name but multiplied its size, buying as much land as he could and planning to build more sawmills. Fenwick Peck had far greater ambitions than JJ Newman ever did. Not only did he expand the company’s holdings, he was also going to build a railroad. 150

Peck named his new company the Pearl & Leaf River Railroad, but soon changed the name to the Mississippi Central Railroad. He laid track up to Sumrall, just fifteen miles away. Then he built another JJ Newman sawmill at the terminus. Eventually, the road was extended, reaching deep into the forest, stretching on to Prentiss and then Brookhaven where it met lines that took forest goods into Texas and on to the Pacific. The railroad created a lucrative timber byway through the dense forest. By 1904, twenty-six sawmills had opened along the Mississippi Central tracks. Every single one of them paid shipping fees to Peck’s firm, which also controlled Newman Lumber, their biggest competitor. The smaller companies had to. It was the only way for most of them to get their products to their clients across the United States and the rest of the world. Peck began making an absolute fortune. He quickly added additional lumber interests in New Mexico and consolidated all his lumber holdings under a new firm named the United States Lumber Company. By 1914, the Mississippi Central Railroad was earning over $650,000 (nearly $14 million today) a year in freight revenue. Lumber was 93% of their cargo. 151

As Peck organized the Pearl & Leaf, another important railroad was just being finished. The Gulf & Ship Island Railroad was Captain Hardy’s pet project, probably first conceived sometime in 1880 as he speculated land in that thick forest. Shortly after establishing the original Gordonville settlement, Hardy had also founded the town of


Gulfport on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, less than seventy miles south of the Hub City. He then began planning a line that would run through the dense forest between Hattiesburg and the coast. Gulfport, he imagined, could become Mississippi’s first deep water port and one of the busiest lumber ports in the country. Hardy must have been optimistic as he began construction on his new railroad. He had just completed the bridge across Lake Pontchartrain and was gaining a local reputation as a man of innovative vision. The *New Orleans Daily Picayune* praised the new road’s potential. “This road,” the paper noted “will transverse the richest pine lumber section of the world.”

The Gulf & Ship Island Railroad had originally been chartered in 1850 as Mississippi’s first land grant railroad, but its construction was halted by the Civil War. In 1882, Hardy organized a dynamic group of Mississippi Confederate veterans who revived the old charter. The most famous of these men was a former Confederate Colonel, writer, and politician named William Clark Falkner. Falkner, who served as Vice President of the new Gulf & Ship Island Railroad, later became famous because of his influence on his Pulitzer Prize-winning great-grandson, William Cuthbert Faulkner. The renowned novelist was captivated by his Confederate ancestor and returned the “u” back to the spelling of his family’s surname to honor his great-grandfather. He grew up telling teachers he “wanted to be a writer like my great-granddaddy” and modeled numerous characters after his namesake. The most notable of these characters was a fictional Confederate Colonel and railroad man named John Sartoris. Former Confederate Brigadier General Wirt Adams joined the group as President and William Harris Hardy served as chairman.

Over the next four years, Captain Hardy and his fellow Confederates set to work recruiting new investors for the Gulf & Ship Island Railroad. They also secured a labor contract through the Mississippi State Penitentiary that would help save money by providing cheaper workers. Most of the prisoners were black, and thus among the cheapest labor one could find. Firms like the Gulf & Ship Island Railroad rented the convict labor from the state without having to pay the prisoners much of anything. For many employers, the convict-lease system was merely a modern replacement for slavery. The company’s only responsibility was to feed the workers enough to keep them alive, something the Gulf & Ship Island often failed to do.\textsuperscript{154}

Construction on the new version of the Gulf & Ship Island Railroad began in 1886. Things looked promising. By March of 1888, there remained only twenty miles of grading to reach Hattiesburg. Everything looked in place. The \textit{Biloxi Herald} admired the initiative of a Southern-built railroad and optimistically predicted that the railroad would become “the crowning glory of grand southern enterprises.” But then, the Confederate leaders of the new Gulf & Ship Island Railroad suddenly met a string of bad luck.\textsuperscript{155}

On the afternoon of May 1, 1888 Gulf & Ship Island head Chairman Wirt Adams was walking the streets of downtown Jackson when he happened upon John H. Martin, a newspaper editor with whom he had a longstanding feud. After a brief exchange of words, an insulted and incensed Adams drew a thirty-four caliber revolver and shot Martin. Martin also pulled a gun as both men dove for cover. The pair exchanged several unsuccessful volleys in the streets of Jackson. The newspaper editor was a particularly bad shot. He clicked the trigger again and again, missing with each of the first five shots from his six-shooter. But he got lucky with the final shot, hitting Adams directly in the


heart and killing the former general and the President of the Gulf & Ship Island Railroad.\textsuperscript{156}

Hardy took over the Presidency of the Gulf & Ship Island, but the railroad was already in financial trouble. That summer, he travelled to New York and then London to recruit investors, but had little success. Hardy didn’t enjoy living in the massive cosmopolitan cities of the North Atlantic and liked the big city bankers even less. The following year, Gulf & Ship Island Vice President Falkner was also killed by a rival in Jackson. The railroad couldn’t escape its run of bad luck. Even worse news followed. At the end of 1888, the newly formed Mississippi State Railroad Commission ruled that the company had to return its convict workers because of horrible mistreatment. The Gulf & Ship Island Railroad was barely feeding and clothing its convict lessees. Dozens of those black workers had disappeared or died during the years of hard labor deep in the Mississippi Piney Woods. The lease cancellation stripped the young of its primary source of labor and left the railroad stagnant. With scattered leadership, drying finances, and no workers, the Gulf & Ship Island Company was unable to finish construction. The road went bankrupt and sat unfinished for years, waiting for someone wealthy enough to finance its completion. The former Confederates had failed. They needed a Yankee to finish the job.\textsuperscript{157}

The man who would finally finish the Gulf & Ship Island Railroad was a Pennsylvanian named Joseph T. Jones. Jones, who had made a fortune in construction and oil speculation, was recruited to the railroad by a Mississippi lawyer named E.J. Bowers. Based out of Bay St. Louis, E.J. Bowers was one of the many Southern lawyers looking to profit by working for Northern capitalists. His initial connection to Jones remains fairly unclear, but Bowers was credited as the link between the Pennsylvanian and the completion of the Gulf & Ship Island Railroad. Jones quickly jumped on the


\textsuperscript{157} Dozens of letters from Hardy’s New York and London trips to his wife Hattie can be found in the W & H Papers, Box 1, Folders 1-3; “An Era of Tragedies: History of the Gulf and Ship Island Railroad,” \textit{The Washington Post}, August 28, 1900, 4; “The Convict Lease Appealed,” \textit{The Biloxi Herald}, December 15, 1888, 5; and “Biennial Report of the Board of Control, Superintendent, General Manager and Other Officers of the Mississippi State Penitentiary, for the years 1888 and 1889,” J.F. Sessions, Chairman, (Jackson, MS: R.H. Henry, State Printer, 1890), 3-5. MDAH. The details of the Railroad Commission ruling are more adequately described in the following chapter.
opportunity. Like his fellow Pennsylvanians JJ Newman and Fenwick Peck, Joseph T. Jones easily recognized the tremendous opportunity for lumber shipping profits in the Mississippi Piney Woods. So he secured a $500,000 bond through his Bradford Construction Company to finish the Gulf & Ship Island line. He also paid nearly $200,000 to dredge a half mile-wide channel at Gulfport and build a massive wharf and dock that extended more than one hundred yards into the Gulf of Mexico, creating Mississippi’s first deep water port.158

E.J. Bowers and Joseph T. Jones were an odd pair. Bowers was a second generation Confederate with a deep family history of fighting for white supremacy and the Lost Cause. His father was a notoriously brutal Civil War cavalryman who helped found a Klan-like paramilitary terrorist organization called the Confederate Officer’s Corps. But like a lot of New South innovators, the younger Bowers sought opportunity through reconciliation. So he and the Pennsylvania businessman came together to finish the Gulf & Ship Island Railroad. Jones retained Bowers as the railroad’s general counsel and offered him a major share of stock. This arrangement had probably been negotiated before Jones invested in the railroad. Bowers was also appointed to the Gulf & Ship Island Board of Directors, a position he held until 1906 when he resigned to focus on what would prove to be a successful Congressional campaign. His role in attracting the Northern investor launched a promising career. Railroad investment not only accelerated the development of the New South, it also helped speed reconciliation and reunion. As Bowers’s infamously homicidal grandson would fondly remember nearly a century later, “The stable civilized carpetbagger movement, which I say was represented by Captain Jones and the Gulf & Ship Island Railroad, was able to make a coalition contact with responsible Southern lawyers.”159

Thanks to Jones and Bowers, the Gulf & Ship Island Railroad was finally completed in 1900, fulfilling the longstanding promise of a direct shipping line from the middle of the Piney Woods to the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Jones not only finished the railroad to Hattiesburg, he extended it all the way up to Jackson. Its tracks ran from the heart of the Piney Woods to the Gulf of Mexico, delivering longleaf pine timbers to the massive cargo ships that sat waiting to distribute large chunks of the Mississippi forest to the rest of the world. The road opened up immense possibilities for the local lumber industry. Even outsiders took note. The *Washington Post* predicted great things for Gulfport. “The fact that it is the terminal of the Gulf and Ship Island,” the paper noted, will make it an important lumber shipping point for years to come.” The paper was right about Gulfport’s potential for growth. Investors of all kinds built sawmills up and down the tracks, adding more than sixty in all. Between 1900 and 1905, approximately two billion feet of lumber was hauled down to Gulfport on those railroad tracks. Within a decade, the line was annually carrying 10% of all longleaf yellow pine produced in the entire South and more yellow pine timbers were shipped from Gulfport than anywhere else in the world. The sawmills between Hattiesburg and Gulfport made a fortune.  

New Gulf & Ship Island President J.T. Jones didn’t stop building with the railroad. He went all out in south Mississippi, also financing the construction of two massive hotels, one each in Gulfport and Hattiesburg. The Great Southern Hotel in Gulfport became one of the finest hotels in the United States. Jones installed a private residence where he and his family would spend their winters. The Pennsylvanian spared no expense. Painted the color of pine green and adorned with dark red terracotta roof tiles, the Great Southern stood watch over a beautiful Gulf Coast beach. Its pristine grounds were adorned with man-made fishing ponds, hundreds of palm trees, a clay tennis court, and a sloping sandy walkway to the edge of the Gulf. Jones installed an

---

160 Melodia B. Rowe, *Captain Jones*, especially 216-217; “An Era of Tragedies: History of the Gulf and Ship Island Railroad,” *The Washington Post*, August 28, 1900, 4; and Hickman, “Mississippi Forests,” in McLemore, ed., *A History of Mississippi, Volume II*, 215. For more on the growth of the Gulf & Ship Island Railroad, see Stover, *History of the Illinois Central*, 293-295; Hickman, *Mississippi Harvest*, 66-86; Fickle, *Mississippi Forests and Forestry*, 75; and Skates, “Hattiesburg: The Early Years,” 5-11. In its first year, the Gulf & Ship Island Railroad carried more than 300 million board feet. The cargo numbers increased dramatically each year as more sawmills were built upon the line. Within seven years, more than 800 million board feet was transported along the line annually.
impressive orchestra that soon gained a reputation as the finest ensemble in the entire Gulf Coast region.\textsuperscript{161}

In the coming years, Gulfport’s rapid development and financial promise earned it the nickname the “Newport of the South” among locals. The Great Southern Hotel hosted scores of Yankee visitors who owned or invested in area sawmills. Northern accents buzzed through the city. “Sitting in the hotel at Gulfport listening to the crowd of lumbermen conversing,” wrote a \textit{New York Times} reporter in 1901, “it is hard to realize that the stretch of water beyond is the Gulf of Mexico, and not Huron or Michigan.” The Northerners had arrived to extract the South’s resources. But they were welcomed because in doing so they provided thousands of jobs for Mississippians who flocked to new towns like Hattiesburg and Gulfport. New sawmill towns popped up almost overnight in the Mississippi Piney Woods, transforming patches of dense, unsettled forests into small but bustling centers of commerce.\textsuperscript{162}

In Hattiesburg, the Gulf & Ship Island Railroad track ran right through the heart of the downtown, crossing the New Orleans & Northeastern on the southern border of the JJ Newman Lumber mill, which by 1910 had become the largest sawmill in the state. Newman Lumber slashed timbers at breakneck speed. Its production dwarfed that of other local mills. Whereas the original Wiscasset Mill had once produced about 50,000 board feet of lumber per day, the Newman mills at Hattiesburg and Sumrall could churn out over 700,000. JJ Newman Lumber received job orders from across the nation, even the world. Chicago ordered more than two million feet in railroad ties for its new streetcar system. England bought railroad ties in 1915 to help with their war against Germany. The orders brought jobs. And for nearly forty years, Hattiesburgers would count on the steady wages from Newman, paychecks flowing from the company offices.

\textsuperscript{161} This description of the Great Southern Hotel is drawn from historical postcards produced between 1902 and the late 1940s. The postcards can be found in Postcard Collection, USM. The collection is unprocessed, but the cards are alphabetized by city. For more on the reputation of the Great Southern Hotel Orchestra, see Lawrence Gushee, \textit{Pioneers of Jazz: The Story of the Creole Band} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 66.

just as consistently as the trickle of the shallow creek that quietly ran along the sawmill’s southern border.\textsuperscript{163}

Peck’s Mississippi Central Railroad dominated regional lumber freight commerce. The railroad shipped almost nothing besides lumber. In 1905, timber products made up 98\% of all freight shipped on the Mississippi Central Railroad. In 1909, the company extended the line all the way to Natchez, reaching across the Mississippi River toward Texas and the Pacific. Its 1914 freight revenue topped $600,000, increasing to over $1 million and $1.6 million per year by 1920 and 1925, respectively. If you owned a sawmill in the Mississippi Piney Woods and wanted your goods to travel to Texas or California, you probably needed the Mississippi Central Railroad. Fenwick Peck made an absolute fortune. At its peak, the value of his lumber holdings in Mississippi, New Mexico, and Pennsylvania was estimated to be $26,000,000 (more than $300 million today).\textsuperscript{164}

Sawmills and railroads kept adding thousands of jobs to the Hub City. JJ Newman Lumber employed more workers than any single firm in the entire state of Mississippi. 1,200 people walked through its doors every day. The Mississippi Central Railroad added approximately 400 jobs. Other sawmills, including the Tatum Lumber Company, Brookhaven Lumber, the Hattiesburg Planing Mill, Southern Lumber, and Rich Lumber employed hundreds more. The mills hired both white and black workers. Whites got the best jobs and blacks took what was left. The lumber boom brought thousands of workers and their families who needed places to shop and things to do. So other industries followed, creating even more jobs as the city kept growing. Hattiesburg’s population reached 11,733 in 1910; 13,270 in 1920; and nearly 20,000 by 1930. Thousands more lived further out in the countryside. Many commuted into town for work or were employed in the surrounding areas by logging companies. The ambitious migrants were

\textsuperscript{163} Sheet 1, Hattiesburg, MS, July, 1890, Sanborn Maps; and Otis Robertson, “JJ Newman Lumber Co,” in The History of Forrest County Mississippi, CO69.

“catching a vision seen by that noble spirit, the founder of Hattiesburg, Captain W.H. Hardy,” wrote the *Hattiesburg News* in 1912.165

Captain Hardy didn’t actually move to the Hub City until 1899, nearly twenty years after his lunch on that riverbank. His wife Hattie died four years beforehand and never lived in the city that bore her name. But the Captain had since remarried yet another young bride named Ida. The couple built a beautiful new mansion close to the downtown. The Captain opened a new law firm and he and Ida became ingrained in local society, regularly attending various social events and enjoying the immense local prestige that follows men who live the towns they created.166

By the time Hardy and Ida settled in the Hub City, trains from the downtown railroad depots could take you anywhere in America. The New Orleans & Northeastern cut through Hattiesburg on its way from New Orleans to Cincinnati. The Mississippi Central offered passage to Natchez and all points west. And the Gulf & Ship Island crossed through the Hub City on its way to Jackson where it connected with the Illinois Central to offer passage to Chicago. A local passenger car bulletin from 1909 advertised far reaching destinations such as Minneapolis, Buffalo, Baltimore, and Denver, all accessible from the heart of Hattiesburg. You just had to arrive at the depot and wait for the steel horses of American modernity to whisk you away.167

Hub City citizens quickly constructed a burgeoning new city, highlighted by an energetic and prosperous downtown. The city received its first telephone exchange in 1896, plugging local residents into Ma Bell’s highway of communication. During the summer of 1898, Hattiesburg erected its own state-of-the-art incandescent street lamps, immersing the Hub City in light. Dozens of new factories and businesses popped along


167 Mississippi Central Railroad Company Ad, *Hattiesburg 1909 City Directory*, USM.
those illuminated downtown sidewalks. The Hattiesburg Compress Company opened in 1897, becoming the city’s first industrial operation not associated with lumber or railroads. Others followed. New factory shops such as the Watkins Machinery, Komp Machine Works, and the Hattiesburg 8-Wheel Wagon Company added to the sawmill jobs, multiplying the opportunities available in the Hub City. The McInnis Canning Company packed Miss Hattie brand sweet potatoes and shipped them across Dixie.

Dozens of retailers packed into the two-story brick storefronts that framed the downtown. John McLeod’s Department Store was among them. You could buy almost anything at McLeod’s. The store sold everything from groceries like coffee, sugar, bacon, oatmeal, and flour, to clothing staples such as shorts, hats, elastic, and even silk. The store was open until the Great Depression, peddling a litany of groceries and office supplies to neighboring stores and their customers.168

Front Street ran through the center of downtown and was fully alive in the first decade of the twentieth century. The smell of chipped wood from the sawmills wafted through their city as the daily whistles of steam engines hummed through the downtown.

On a typical weekday in 1909, dozens of two-seat upholstered horse carriages clopped up and down the brick-paved boulevard, delivering passengers to downtown shops. Men in dark suits and bowler hats strutted down the city sidewalks, popping in and out of offices and stores as they went about their business. Casually dressed laborers strolled through the streets without their jackets, exposing the dark suspenders holding up their britches.

White women in broad straw hats and high-waisted skirts took the hands of coachmen to step down from their carriages. Dozens of other casually dressed white shoppers scurried about the downtown streets, looking for a new pair of slacks, a dress, or perhaps just a

soda to cool them from the warm Mississippi sun. The downtown was busy with the life of an adolescent city as people flowed up and down the thoroughfares going about their day.\textsuperscript{169}

If you walked east toward the Gulf & Ship Island Railroad tracks, you’d pass dozens of downtown businesses including the O’Ferrall Brothers Men’s Store, the Owl Drug Store, Central Hardware, Hanna & Steinwinder’s Barbershop, Abney Furniture, Deas & Duke Men’s Store, Graham’s Jewelers, the Hattiesburg Tailoring Company, the Oliver Cigar Store, and the Law Offices of J.E. Davis and Paul B. Johnson. Johnson was a good example of the type of men who moved to Hattiesburg. Fresh out of law school at Millsaps College in 1903, he spied opportunity in the booming Piney Woods and opened a new law office in Hattiesburg. He would later become Governor. So would his son. Capitalism consolidated downtown, offering opportunities for all.\textsuperscript{170}

One of the first grand cornerstones of downtown Hattiesburg opened in 1906. Built by the Pennsylvania Gulf & Ship Railroad financier Joseph T. Jones for just shy of $300,000 (over $7 million today), the Hotel Hattiesburg served numerous purposes. It contained the ticket office and waiting rooms for both the Gulf & Ship Island and Mississippi Central Railroads. The hotel also housed a first-floor barbershop and the city’s finest restaurant. Soon considered one of the finest new hotels in the entire South, the Hotel Hattiesburg hosted all the most important local gatherings and celebrations. Over the years, scores of dignitaries passed through its doors. The most notable guest was United States Vice President Thomas R. Marshall who stayed with his wife Lois in the hotel’s newly minted Vice Presidential Suite during a 1915 trip to the Hub City.\textsuperscript{171}

The white Hattiesburgers who lived and worked in Hattiesburg were proud of their city’s burgeoning downtown. The Carter and Ross buildings were completed in 1904 and 1907, rising above the small two-story brick storefronts and giving the Hub

\textsuperscript{169} This description was drawn from a postcard photograph of Front Street in 1909 that can be found in Postcard Collection, USM.
City some a slight semblance of a skyline. On their ground levels, each building housed a barbershop and drugstore where locals could make indulgent purchases. Men stopped in between the busy moments of their lives to pick up tobacco, enjoy a soda or get a shave.\textsuperscript{172}

Atop the Ross Building, Hattiesburgers erected a massive electric “Hub City” sign given to them by the utility holding company Henry Doherty & Co. The sign stood nearly fifty feet tall, held 1,400 light bulbs, and cost a reported $3,000 to build and install. A massive crowd packed into the downtown on Thanksgiving night in 1912 to celebrate the lighting of the new electric logo. The Hattiesburg High School Glee Club sang “America” as thousands of people gazed upon what one well-travelled man called “one of the prettiest signs ever looked upon.” Every night from six until one o’clock in the morning, the Hub City logo sign glowed in bright lights over the downtown. Locals beamed with pride. “Globe trotters,” bragged a \textit{Hattiesburg News} editorial, “will tell about this sign to the far ends of the earth.”\textsuperscript{173}

The New South was about new opportunities and Hattiesburgers planned for their children’s future by investing in education. Just a few years after the town was incorporated, they unofficially seceded from the Perry County School District to administer their own schools. In 1889, the Superintendent of Perry County schools complained to his supervisor that the people of Hattiesburg “have recently prevailed themselves of the provision of law and declared the town of Hattiesburg a separate school district, and secured teachers with a view to proving higher education than is afforded by the common schools in the county.” The migrants pooled their resources, consolidating the opportunities offered by the sawmill jobs. They didn’t want to share the tax dollars of innovation and made the cessation official a few years later with the creation of Forrest County.\textsuperscript{174}


\textsuperscript{173} This depiction is drawn from “The Slogan Sign Celebration Thursday,” \textit{Hattiesburg News}, November 25, 1912, 1; “Thousands Thrilled When Slogan Sign Stands Illuminated Against Sky,” \textit{Hattiesburg News}, November 29, 1 and 4; and “Hattiesburg’s Slogan Sign,” \textit{Hattiesburg News}, November 29, 1912, 4.

\textsuperscript{174} H.J. Holmes, “Reports of County Superintendents,” in “Biennial Report of the State Superintendent of Education to the Legislature of Mississippi, for the Years 1888 and 1889,” (Jackson, MS: R.H. Henry, State Printer, 1890), 223-225.
In 1893, residents passed a $15,000 bond to erect a new school for Hattiesburg’s white children. In 1911, they put the final touches on an impressive new high school. The massive new 21,268 square foot building included brand new electric lights and an 800-person auditorium. It sat right on Main Street near the lively downtown. White students thrived in their lively new school, enjoying rich experiences that included track and field competitions, oratorical contests, literary societies, choir concerts, poetry readings, candy sales, high school crushes, and lifetime friendships. In the spring, its graduating seniors put on a play at the downtown Lomo Theatre, pleasing their parents and neighbors with epic dramas and comedies that often featured alternative endings to the Civil War. Each May in downtown Hattiesburg, it wasn’t uncommon for the Confederates to win the War of Northern Aggression.175

In 1910, the Hub City entered a statewide competition to house Mississippi’s newly approved Normal College for teachers. Winning the bid took a bit of lobbying. Hub City leaders hosted members of the Mississippi Normal College Board at the Hotel Hattiesburg, offering them the finest accommodations the city had to offer. They served the Normal College committee shrimp cocktail, beef tenderloin, and imported Swiss cheeses while presenting their case to be chosen as the site of the new school. Hattiesburg, which at the time was Mississippi’s fastest growing city, impressed the Board with its hospitality and modernity. In addition, the JJ Newman Lumber Company offered to donate 600-acres of cut-over timber lands as the site of the new school. All of it helped, and Hattiesburg was awarded the Normal School. Mississippi Normal College was built on Hardy Street just west of the downtown. It opened its doors in 1912, offering 227 new enrollees courses in English, Math, History, and the Sciences.176

Churches offered even more stability and gave locals places to worship. The earliest residents had built three churches, First Presbyterian, First Baptist, and the Main

175 Otis Robinson, Facts About Hattiesburg (Hattiesburg, MS: Progress Book and Job Print, 1966, 3rd edition, orig., 1898), 49-53; Cook, “Hub City Historic District National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form,” 6; Grimsley, Hattiesburg in Vintage Postcards, 31; “Emily Cook’s Hattiesburg High School Memory Book, Parts 1, 2, and 3,” Box 2, Folders 4-6, Cook (Joseph Anderson) Family Papers, USM.
Street Methodist Church. Each was a small, rickety stack of white plank boards with modest congregations. As the Hub City grew, however, the expanding congregations constructed much more ambitious structures. In 1913, the Main Street Baptist Church moved into a new building that featured a massive entryway upheld by Greek Corinthian Columns and a fabulous auditorium whose rotunda was crowned by a gigantic glass dome. Main Street Methodist made a similar move. Its congregation relocated into a brand-new new red-brick, Gothic revival building, complete with pointed arches, parapet gables, rose windows, and a three-story bell tower that banged holy echoes over the downtown. The updated, modern churches symbolized prosperity and permanence. Not only were the migrants doing well, but they were there to stay. Hattiesburg was home. By 1918, the Hub City was home to over forty churches of varying denominations, including Baptist, Catholic, Episcopal, Jewish, Methodist, and Presbyterian, each playing a major role in the lives of new Hattiesburg residents.177

Life in the burgeoning Hub City of the New South was not without challenges, but the new residents met each head on. Railroads constantly ran off their tracks or collided, killing and severely injuring railroad workers. The New South was notoriously bad for railroad safety. In 1892, one out of every eighty-three Southern trainmen was killed. Another one in six got hurt on the job. The city’s sawmills were prone to fires. In 1903, a massive fire ceased production at the downtown Newman mill for six months. Five years later, another fire destroyed approximately 5,000,000 feet of lumber, causing $200,000 damage to the plant and searing several downtown storefronts. But the city helped the mill rebuild, offering a multi-year tax break. Hurricanes routinely came ashore from the gulf, disrupting commerce and transportation by knocking down thousands of yellow pine trees and obstructing railway traffic. A particularly destructive 1906 hurricane hit Biloxi and travelled all the way to Kentucky, killing over 130 Gulf Coast area residents and blowing down approximately one-quarter of the standing timber in southern Mississippi.178

177 Grimsley, Hattiesburg in Vintage Postcards, 55-60; Cook, “Hub City Historic District National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form,” 6. These church descriptions also come from personal observations made on December 13, 2009 and June 15, 2011.
On top of the hurricane threats, the Bouie and Leaf Rivers seemed to be constantly flooding. The residents who lived in the city’s lowest parts would have to leave their homes for days at a time to escape the flood, only to return to warped floors, destroyed valuables, and ornery water moccasins. One flood left nearly 1,000 people homeless between Hattiesburg and Meridian. Yellow Fever hit Hattiesburg in 1898 when future mayor Charles Rich, the man who hosted the last world’s bareknuckle heavyweight boxing championship, brought a terrible case back from New Orleans. Nurses had to be imported from Gulfport and New Orleans. One local woman survived a fever-induced coma only after her black maid threw her limp body in a hot bathtub. The entire town was quarantined and the New Orleans & Northeastern Railroad ordered all trains to “pass Hattiesburg at full speed.”

But the people who moved to Hattiesburg persevered, embracing the opportunities provided by the promise of the New South. They plugged into a modernizing America that offered seemingly endless opportunities for success. Poor white men who grew up as poor cotton farmers could become railroad clerks or sawmill managers. People from families that ran dying rural country stores became successful downtown entrepreneurs. Sharecropping families that had struggled with debt and poverty for generations took jobs with the local sawmills and enjoyed weekly paychecks, regular meals for their families, and schools for their children. Opportunities were available. And so Hattiesburg kept growing. Challenges were met with the determination and doggedness of a defeated society determined to recover a sense of order. They worked, grew, and learned together, constructing a new, rich life in the heart of Dixie. And in Hattiesburg they found hope.

September 29, 1906, 3; “Gale Brings Ruin to Cities on Gulf,” Chicago Daily Tribune, September 28, 1906, 1; and Federal Writer’s Project, Mississippi, 197. Hurricanes became far less deadly for Gulf Coast residents after the devastating 1900 Galveston Hurricane that claimed approximately 6,000 lives. Previously, the National Weather Bureau did not realize that the deadly Caribbean storms could travel northwest over broad distances. By 1906, much more credence was given to storm observations in Caribbean islands, particularly Cuba, offering more advanced warnings of storms. For more, see Erik Larson, Isaac’s Storm: A Man, a Time, and the Deadliest Hurricane in History (New York: Vintage, 2000). 179 “Twelve Lives Lost in Southern Flood,” The New York Times, December 12, 1919, 18; “Yellow Fever, 1898,” Box 10688, Folder: Health, WPA-Forrest; and “Article 1—No Title,” The New York Times, October 10, 1898, 3.
There were the basics of living in modern America; young love affairs and paychecks; new Model T’s and baseball games. But then there were also the things that crafted a distinct local identity, inherently shaping who they were. They gathered downtown on weekends and holidays. On Saturday mornings, hundreds of local whites walked between the brick storefronts, shopping and chatting with friends and neighbors. One local man remembered those weekend street scenes full of people who “spoke to everyone else by first or last name.” Every Fourth of July, the Hattiesburgers held massive downtown parades where they gave out prizes for the best company float. At Christmastime, the downtown stores stayed open past midnight and gave every white kid a box of firecrackers. On sunny summer evenings, local lumber company baseball teams played friendly but spirited contests, drawing thousands of spectators to the ball fields. Every so often, a circus arrived on the rails and paraded down Main Street as mysterious performers enticed locals with promises of sights never before seen. Curious boys sprinted out to the circus tents each morning, jockeying for a free pass to the shows by agreeing to water the elephants and clean the horse stalls. The rest of the patrons came to the shows in the evenings, crowding under standing room only big top tents to catch glimpses of the trapeze artists, stage clowns, and lions. On warm Sunday mornings, hundreds of locals gathered together on the downtown shores of Gordon’s Creek to baptize their children, no doubt dreaming of the remarkable opportunities that awaited their young people. And like thousands of New Southerners, the white people of Hattiesburg also vehemently, almost religiously, celebrated the legacy of the Lost Cause, clinging dearly to the memories of the sons, brothers, and husbands who fell on those Virginia battlefields and the cause for which they perished.\(^{180}\)

In 1896, a group of local white men created the Hattiesburg branch of the Sons of the Confederacy. Its sister organization, the United Daughters of the Confederacy, was

founded in Ida Hardy’s living room on a spring day in 1900. Both of the organizations nicknamed themselves after Nathaniel Bedford Forrest, that barbarous cavalryman and first Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan. Officially, they were called the Sons of Confederacy Nathan Bedford Forrest Camp #1353 and the United Daughters of the Confederacy, Nathan Bedford Forrest Chapter #422. Forrest, who died before Hattiesburg was even founded, lingered across time as an iconic symbol of the Lost Cause and cherished relic of Southern heritage. And Hattiesburgers widely embraced the cavalier general and Klan pioneer. He called to them like no one else.181

Under the leadership of Ida Hardy, the Hattiesburg Daughters of the Confederacy helped lead a communal celebration of the Lost Cause. The local Daughters were busy. They helped with the renovation and preservation of the Beauvoir House, the last home of Jefferson Davis. They also sponsored local student essay contests, giving rewards to the young minds who wrote finest essays promoting the Confederate cause and celebrating its leaders. In 1906, the Hattiesburg Daughters played a major role in organizing the national convention of the United Daughters of the Confederacy at Gulfport where they helped secure the funds to erect a Confederate monument at Arlington National Cemetery. The group also conducted cultural appreciation events such as the production of a special issue of the *Hattiesburg Daily News* called “Our Women in the War” that celebrated the major contributions of heroic Confederate women. Different members conducted research and wrote short articles on Southern women who did their best to help halt the Union Army’s advances. The ladies planned reunions for Confederate veterans, organizing free dinners and smokers for the old soldiers who were asked to wear their Civil War colors and badges. The role of the Daughters in naming the newly formed Forrest County is unclear. But they certainly enjoyed a prominent position in Hattiesburg. The organization even met in City Hall. Men took the jobs in Hattiesburg, but it was women who shaped its memory.182

---

181 “U.D.C. Founded 30 Years Ago,” *Hattiesburg American*, October 26, 1932, 1; and Tressie Graham Mangum and Mary Clement Perry, “United Daughters of the Confederacy, Nathaniel Bedford Forrest Chapter #422,” in *The History of Forrest County Mississippi*, C115.
182 Mangum and Perry, “United Daughters of the Confederacy, Nathaniel Bedford Forrest Chapter #422,” in *The History of Forrest County Mississippi*, C115; “Honor Confederate Dead,” *The Washington Post*, December 30, 1906, 12; Special Insert celebrating the role of women in the Confederacy found in
On October 12, 1910, the Daughters unveiled their finest initiative, a Confederate monument erected right next to the new Forrest County Courthouse. Dedicated to the “honor and memory of those who wore the gray,” the three story-tall marble monument features an armed Confederate soldier standing guard, bayonetted rifle in hand, over a fellow infantryman and Confederate heroin. An estimated 8,000 visitors descended on downtown Hattiesburg for the dedication ceremony, which took place that fall as Hattiesburg hosted the Mississippi Prosperity Celebration and Confederate Reunion. The Hattiesburg News declared the statue unveiling the “greatest event in Hattiesburg history,” assuring readers that “Forrest County, a mere baby in the state’s great sisterhood of counties, has started off right.”

The Hattiesburg United Daughters of the Confederacy were part of a larger Southern trend. The organization was popular across the South. By 1900, the United Daughters of the Confederacy had 412 chapters with over 17,000 members. By World War I, their membership was estimated to be as high as 100,000. One of the Daughters greatest accomplishments was the erection of Confederate monuments across Dixie. They were remarkably prolific. As historian David Blight has observed, “By the 1890s, hardly a city square, town green, or even some one-horse crossroads lacked a Civil War memorial of some kind.”

Hattiesburg Daily News, April 16, 1908; and veterans memorial and reunion announcement in “Heroes of the Lost Cause Will Be Honored Tomorrow,” Hattiesburg News, November 1, 1912, 1.
183 “Greatest Event in Hattiesburg History,” The Hattiesburg News, October 13, 1910, 1. This description was made based on personal observations on numerous occasions.
184 David W. Blight, Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2001), statistics on 272-274, quoted on 77. For more on women’s role in preserving the Lost Cause in historical memory, see W. Fitzhugh Brundage, The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2005). While a previous generation of historians such as Paul Gaston emphasized Civil War defeatism to the construction of the Lost Cause identity, recent scholarship has insightfully illuminated the centrality of race over Confederate defeatism to the construction of early 20th century Southern identities. Race and defeat both played major roles, but the championing of the Lost Cause that emerged at the turn of the century was also partially a response to Northern economic influences and control. Celebrating the harbingers of the Civil War was one of the only ways Southerners could maintain cultural aspects of what was quickly becoming not only a defeated but also a colonized society. This complicated identity revolved around resisting Yankeeism just as Northern industrialists were creating thousands of new jobs. As Cobb has poignantly observed, “Glorification of the Old South was at least in part a psychological device, designed to help humiliated southerners hold their heads up as they accepted much-needed investment capital from their Yankee conquerors.” Gaines Foster similarly notes that the Lost Cause “helped them cope with the cultural implications of defeat” and “served to ease their adjustment to the New South and to provide social unity during the crucial period of transition.” The figure of Nathaniel Bedford Forrest offers a multifaceted icon for both antebellum and Civil War-era cultural romanticism. Forrest, through his role as self-made slave trader, plutocratic cavalryman and revered Confederate general,
This Lost Cause resurrection was not merely a sentimental celebration of the past. Rather, it was an essential social device that eased the transition into a modern society. The Lost Cause allowed them to embrace a dependent new way of life while self-medicating with a cultural harbinger of resistance. They huddled in the shadows of marble monuments as they intractably tied their futures to the outside world. But the celebration was also more than just an internal psychological device to ease the sting of Yankee control. These messages were also meant for blacks. In celebrating the Lost Cause through the image of the barbarous Nathaniel Bedford Forrest, white Hattiesburgers weren’t merely antebellum nostalgia. They were also shaping modern white supremacy by commemorating a lost racial order. The impact of that reclamation extended far beyond county names and marble monuments. The same forces were also often demonstrated in sheer, unadulterated rage on black bodies.185

The first African American to be lynched in Hattiesburg was killed on June 2, 1890. The details are fairly vague. All we know is that the man was accused of raping a white woman and subsequently hung from a tree by a mob of between thirty to forty individuals. The message was loud, clear, and violent. Although Southern society was changing, the racial order would not. Blacks did not belong in a court of law. African American lives could and would be taken at any time, without question or remorse. It was a fundamental social truth, a dearly defended privilege of whiteness and horrifically violent extension of the Lost Cause.186


named Susie Hartfield to death. He was arrested and jailed. That following Thursday morning, a white mob arrived at the prison, demanding Johnson be turned over to them. The sheriff refused, but was quickly overpowered by the crowd. They stormed Johnson’s jail cell and found the black prisoner waiting to defend himself with a crowbar. But Johnson was no match. The mob had guns. They shot the black prisoner, took his crowbar, and then carried him to the scene of the alleged crime. The mob, numbering over 1,000 people by the time it reached the site, told Johnson he was going to die right then and there. They reportedly offered him a choice between being hung, burnt alive, or shot. Tom Johnson chose bullets. He also indicated the men he wanted to shoot, but this was denied to him. The mob was restless to blast atonement through their chambers into the accused man’s body. Plenty of them had guns and they all wanted to shoot. A member of the mob tied Johnson’s wrists to a tree, leaving just enough slack for him to kneel down, facing away from the crowd. Then Captain George Smith yelled “Fire!” and the volleys began. Tom Johnson was probably killed by the first few shots. But bullet after bullet continued slicing through the air into the black man’s flesh. The crowd pumped over five hundred rounds into Johnson, lifting his “lifeless body from the ground,” a report noted. The crowd then dispersed as Johnson’s father-in-law buried the mangled body right on the spot because the flesh was too shredded to be moved anywhere else.\textsuperscript{187}

Lynchings like that of Tom Johnson were increasing. Like the embrace of Lost Cause, the racial violence served as a last vestige of opposition to a changing world, a slight “revolt against modernity,” writes historian Amy Louise Wood. White Southerners had always used violence to harass, intimidate, and punish African Americans. But the attacks became increasingly vicious as the twentieth century approached. New Southerners who potentially competed with blacks for jobs sought to establish and maintain white supremacy in every aspect of life. Lynchings fulfilled a unique niche. In an industrializing world, lynching served as a harbinger to the racial mores of the Old South and a method of social control.\textsuperscript{188}


\textsuperscript{188} Amy Louise Wood, \textit{Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940} (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), quoted on 10. During the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century,
In Mississippi, racial violence was openly discussed and widely advocated. Led by Governor James Vardaman, groups of self-proclaimed “rednecks” took control of state politics at the turn of the century by uniting voters around an extremist anti-black platform. Vardaman built his entire career on rallying animosity toward the threat of black equality. Even after his term as Governor ended in 1907, the “Great White Chief” continued racial hatemongering through his white supremacist newspaper *The Issue*, which regularly featured numerous articles by Lost Cause literary icon Thomas Dixon and was once dubbed “the most persistent and outspoken foe of Negro equality in the United States.” Vardaman’s greatest levels of support came from the areas where Populism, the brief and disappointing farmer’s revolt, had been strongest just a decade before. Working–class Mississippi whites rebelled against the state’s plantocracy in part by using African Americans as a scapegoat.189

Governor Vardaman appealed to his electorate by arguing that no black citizen should be above any white man. He openly embraced racial violence, explicitly advocating lynching to ensure white supremacy. “If it is necessary,” he extolled in 1907, “every Negro in the state will be lynched; it will be done to maintain white supremacy.” Thousands of whites embraced the tactic. Between 1889 and 1945, 476 documented lynchings took place in Mississippi alone. A handful of whites were among those lynched, but most of the victims were black. The murders of African Americans were highly ritualized. Many resembled massive hunting ceremonies, complete with hounds and photographs showing the killers alongside the dead. It was a dehumanizing ritual designed to terrorize and punish black communities while viciously celebrating white supremacy. The next lynching to occur in Hattiesburg happened on July 25, 1899, four increased Negrophobia spread throughout the South. Much its spread was spurred by economic woes, especially falling cotton prices, and revolved around discussions of masculinity and sexuality. For an insightful discussion of the role of gender in the establishment of turn of the century white supremacy, see Glenda Gilmore, *Gender & Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), especially 61-146.

years to the day Tom Johnson was killed. A black man named Henry Novels had been accused of attacking Miss Rosaline Davis on a hot Saturday night. He was tied to a tree and shot dead by an angry crowd.\textsuperscript{190}

Captain William Harris Hardy agreed with Governor Vardaman. Hardy himself was a vicious white supremacist who once warned of “a race war in which the colored race will be practically exterminated.” To these men, Emancipation had rendered black lives useless. According to Hardy, Hardy, like many Southerners offered no repentance for slavery. Rather, he trumpeted its purported morality. In his memoir, Captain Hardy went to great pains to romanticize slavery, noting a run-in with a former servant who allegedly missed bondage so much that he wanted to leave his wife and children to return to Hardy’s service. “There was no place on earth,” Hardy claimed, “where the negro was treated so kindly as among the better class of Southern people during the days of slavery.” Freedom, according to Hardy, had destroyed black character. “The ‘new negro,’” he wrote in 1901, “has not the general intelligence, nor the politeness and refinement, not the industry, nor the love of truth and virtue, of the ‘old negro’—the slave.” The \textit{Hattiesburg Progress} agreed with the Captain, warning its readers in 1902 that “Every year the negro becomes more unreliable and more worthless.”

White supremacy was reconstructed in the New South through a broad rendition of the Lost Cause, ranging widely in sophistication and severity between the tactical and violent traditions established by Lucius Q.C. Lamar and Nathaniel Bedford Forrest. While Lamar remained their icon of Redemption, Forrest became a demigod of an unbending and incredibly violent white supremacy.\textsuperscript{191}

\* \* \ *

The poor Confederates souls who fell at Gettysburg spun in their graves on the night of November 21, 1906. That evening, dozens of their fellow Southerners gathered in the heart of Dixie to honor a Yankee. Twenty-six years before, Captain William Harris

\textsuperscript{190} Vardaman quoted in Neil McMillen, \textit{Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow} (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1990), quote on 224, statistic on 229; and “Negro Was Tied to a Tree and Shot,” \textit{The New York Times}, July 26, 1899, 2. For an insightful discussion of the function of celebratory lynching in early Modern America, see Amy Louise Wood, \textit{Lynching and Spectacle}.

Hardy had sat on a nearby riverbank when he had a lunchtime revelation and founded a new settlement on that exact spot. Driven by the growth of the New South within a modernizing America, William Hardy’s Hattiesburg provided thousands of white Southerners with new jobs, a fresh way of life, and a semblance of order in a chaotic postwar world. But Captain Hardy couldn’t quite fulfill all his New South dreams. He failed in his quest to complete the Gulf & Ship Island Railroad, which would have connected his new towns of Hattiesburg and Gulfport. Hardy and his fellow Mississippians realized the potential, but didn’t have the resources. They needed a bit of help.

When Hardy and his Confederate cohort fell short, Pennsylvanian Joseph T. Jones stepped in to finance the completion of the Gulf & Ship Island Railroad. The line cut through America’s densest longleaf yellow pine forest, opening up immense opportunities in the Mississippi Piney Woods. In the following years, that marvelous sawmill railroad would deliver billions of longleaf yellow pine timbers to the rest of the world, creating thousands of local jobs and unprecedented opportunity in south Mississippi. Hardy’s new towns Gulfport and Hattiesburg boomed as migrants arrived chasing the promises of the New South. Dozens more sawmill settlements popped up alongside the busy railroad tracks that ran between them. As the Hattiesburg Progress noted in 1902, “Along the line of this road are prosperous villages, towns, and cities with churches, newspapers, factories and farms, where before were nought to be seen but unbroken pine forests, utterly worthless because there was no way of getting their product to the market.” The future looked bright for thousands who entered the region looking for opportunity. Both Joseph T. Jones and William Harris Hardy made a fortune through the rapid rise of the Mississippi Piney Woods. Jones completed his investment in south Mississippi by building marvelous hotels in both Gulfport and Hattiesburg.192

On the night of November 21, 1906, Hardy and Jones were among a dignified group of men who gathered in the Hub City’s rapidly growing downtown to celebrate the grand opening of the Hotel Hattiesburg. The men toasted each other in the presence of a powerful group of friends and dignitaries. Banquet guests included Mississippi Governor

James Vardaman and the Congressman and future Senator John Sharp Williams. E.J. Bowers, the Mobile lawyer who had recruited Jones to invest in Mississippi, was there as well, fresh off a successful Congressional campaign. The Hotel served its guests an exquisite dinner of broiled Spanish mackerel, braised beef tenderloin, roasted duck, Saratoga potatoes, French peas, and strawberry ice cream. The renowned Great Southern Hotel Orchestra arrived from Gulfport to play a private show, entertaining dinner guests with a medley of the latest Broadway Ragtime hits such as “Dixie Blossoms” and “Vanderbilt Cup” alongside nostalgic Old South songs like “Take Me Back to Old Virginia” and “Massa’s in de Cold, Cold Ground.” This momentous occasion marked the pinnacle of a business association that would span more than twenty years. With the help of Jones, William Harris Hardy’s Hattiesburg had firmly established herself as the Hub City of the New South. After a disastrous War and nightmarish occupation, opportunity was shining through brighter than ever. But this interaction between the two old innovative railroad men was far more complex than their mutually assured financial success.193

Like William Harris Hardy, Joseph T. Jones of Pennsylvania had also once been a Captain. And he had met Mississippians before. As commander of the 91st Pennsylvania Infantry’s H Company, Captain Jones had first crossed paths with Confederates at Fredericksburg in December of 1862. Captain Hardy’s Smith County Defenders had been there as well, fighting only about 1,000 feet away at one point. Just five months later, the companies marched to Chancellorsville. Then in July of 1863 they went to Pennsylvania. Jones was at Gettysburg defending the short hill later known as Little Round Top as the Smith County Defenders took part in the ill-fated Picket’s Charge, a bold but disastrous maneuver that resulted in casualties for half of the approximately 12,500 men who desperately sprinted at the Union lines. Those momentous battles changed every man who fought in them. They changed America. And both the 16th Mississippi and 91st

193 “Menu from the Banquet Celebrating the Opening of the Hotel Hattiesburg,” “Hotel Hattiesburg Grand Opening Musical Program,” and “Hotel Hattiesburg Opening: A List of Toasts,” all found in Box 1, Folder 3, Hattiesburg Historical Photographs, USM; Rowe, Captain Jones; Michael A. Leeson, History of the Counties of McKean, Elk and Forest, Pennsylvania (Chicago, IL: J.H. Beers & Co., Publishers, 1890), 369-370.
Pennsylvania Infantries had been there, trying to blow each other off the face of the Earth.\textsuperscript{194}

Hardy and Jones would have met in battle had Hardy not fallen ill. It is impossible to know if anyone mentioned those battles during the Hotel Hattiesburg’s grand opening celebration. One can only imagine how that conversation may have gone. Regardless, forty-three years after Gettysburg, there sat Captains Jones and Hardy, two old veterans from opposing sides, toasting their cups under the flag of the Army of Northern Virginia in a state that vowed to never forget. They had come a long way from the horrors of those Virginia and Pennsylvania killing fields. Both men lived another decade beyond that night. By the time they each passed away during the winter of 1916-1917, Jones in December of a stroke, then Hardy in February of a heart attack, they had left a remarkable legacy, one that touched countless lives and forever changed the south Mississippi Piney Woods and Gulf Coast.\textsuperscript{195}

Similar scenes played out across the New South. Reconciliations occurred, dramatically bridging former enemies. Timber and railroad Carpetbaggers were not only welcome, but necessary. Mississippi’s antebellum economy depended on agricultural slavery, and the Emancipation Proclamation greatly hindered the profitability of cotton. Plenty of Mississippians still grew cotton, but many others were forced to look for new livelihoods as the twentieth century approached. Northern investment was essential to facilitate the growth and development of the New South. The railroads built cities and brought Southerners into mid-sized regional centers like Hattiesburg where jobs waited. The Gulf & Ship Island Railroad played a key role in the rise of the Hub City.

But while the new city dwellers embraced change, they also sought to restrict it. The economic and technological transformations were beneficial, and in many ways transformed their society. Social modernization, however, was unthinkable. As Southern journalist W.J. Cash observed, “If the war had smashed the Southern world, it had left the

\textsuperscript{194} The positioning and movements of the 91\textsuperscript{st} Pennsylvania Infantry and 16\textsuperscript{th} Mississippi Infantry during the battles of Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, and Gettysburg can be found in Col. Vincent J. Esposito, chief ed., The West Point Atlas of American Wars, Volume 1: 1689-1900 (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1959), maps 72 a & b, 86, and 98 a & b. For more on Company H of the Pennsylvania 91\textsuperscript{st} Regiment of Volunteers, see the Pennsylvania Volunteers of the Civil War website: \url{http://www.pa-roots.com/pacw/infantry/91st/91stcoh.html}.

\textsuperscript{195} Toney Arnold Hardy, No Compromise with Principle, 308; and Rowe, Captain Jones, 259-260.
essential South mind and will…entirely unshaken.” So while men like Captain William Harris Hardy embraced vast transformations in the Deep South, they also sought to protect white supremacy, lashing out against African Americans in incredibly violent and horrifying ways. But most blacks were already incredibly poor and disfranchised. Men like Captain Jones, the carpetbagging Pennsylvanian who killed Confederates at Gettysburg, should have been a much more attractive target toward the rage of Southerners looking to protect their old social order. But men like Jones also provided jobs. So the Confederates conceded, recovering parts of their old society as they could.196

Yet, this embrace of modernization alongside a defense of the old racial order was fraught with contradictions. The new economic order and old racial caste system were in conflict. There was a fundamental hypocrisy. It made no sense to suppress more than half the state’s population while trying to uplift Mississippi as a whole. And although the white New Southerners enjoyed brief victories and a restored sense of order, the very economic system they adopted would soon begin to slowly unravel the racial order they sought to protect. Modernity would also empower those at the very bottom of their new society. The new industries spreading across the South would also create openings for blacks, freeing thousands of former bondsmen from the land that had once held them captive. Mobility was crucial to African Americans. Many just left the farms, travelling to small black enclaves within the new cities and places in the Delta like Isaiah Montgomery’s Mound Bayou settlement where the railroads were offering land. For thousands of black Mississippians, the view from the bottom rail looked far better than the one from the cotton field.

Chapter 3: In the Shadows of Modern America

“The negro just can’t resist an excursion. If he can’t go himself he will go to the depot to see it go by…Yesterday, about excursion time, it was almost impossible to reach the Northeastern depot on account of the surging crowd of black humanity.”

-Hattiesburg Daily Progress, June 17, 1902

On a clear late summer afternoon in the year 1893, nearly two thousand black Americans sat in the shadows of modern America, waiting for their leader. It was Colored American Day at the Chicago World’s Fair. And they had arrived to see Frederick Douglass, the eloquent spokesman of their race. Sitting inside Festival Hall, its ceiling held high by neoclassical Greek Corinthian columns, they were surrounded by the most powerful demonstration of technology to ever take place on American soil. Just south of Festival Hall was the Transportation Building. Designed by famous “father of the skyscraper” architect Louis Sullivan, the Transportation Building’s entrance was framed by an enormous gold-plated shimmering archway and filled with the latest innovations in land and sea transportation. Chicago’s new elevated train ran right through it. On the other side of Festival Hall sat the Horticulture Building. The innovative greenhouse featured the world’s largest sprinkler system and the wondrous Mammoth Crystal Cave, a bedazzling man-made grotto filled with vibrant crystal-shaped glass pieces inspired by the quartz formations found in a cave just outside of Deadwood, South Dakota. Just across the lagoon rose the Manufacturers and Liberal Arts Building, the Fair’s most impressive structure. Designed by future New York Stock Exchange architect George B. Post, it sprawled over an astounding thirty acres and was large enough to house four Roman Coliseums. Inside, visitors could spend days wandering through

exhibit halls showcasing the latest marvels of the industrial world. A collection of innovative young companies held demonstrations at the Fair. Included among their ranks were American Bell, Remington, and General Electric. Another cutting-edge firm named Westinghouse lit the walkways surrounding Festival Hall, allowing visitors to stroll through the spectacular exhibits well into the evening, earning the Fair the nickname the “White City.” The exhibition’s most famous attraction was George Ferris’s magnificent 264-foot steel wheel that rotated visitors over the Fair, spinning grand ideas about the possibilities of electricity and steel into the heads of America’s civil engineers and city planners. Innovation ruled the day at the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair. The entire event was an astonishing technological spectacle, a marvelous fête of modernity.\footnote{“Appeal of Douglass: Colored Americans Sit Under the Spell of his Words,” \textit{Chicago Tribune}, August 26, 1893, 3. A map and images of the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair can be found in Stanley Appelbaum, \textit{The Chicago World’s Fair of 1893: A Photographic Record} (New York: Dover Publications, 1980). Louis Sullivan, dubbed “father of skyscrapers” by biographer Mervyn D. Kaufman, played a major role in the development of modern American architecture. He developed the principle of “form follows function,” pioneered skyscraper design, and inspired a generation of architects known as the Prairie School that included Frank Lloyd Wright, who worked for Sullivan’s firm for five years and in the 1890s designed Sullivan’s famous vacation home in Ocean Springs, Mississippi, just fifteen miles east of Gulfport. See Mervyn D. Kaufman, \textit{Father of Skyscrapers: A Biography of Louis Sullivan} (Boston, MA: Little, Brown & Co., 1969); and Hugh Morrison, \textit{Louis Sullivan: Prophet of Modern Architecture} (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1998), especially 148-160. Horticulture and Transportation Building descriptions supplemented by “Golden Door of Transportation Building,” \textit{Chicago Tribune}, September 17, 1893, 35; and “Through the Looking Glass,” \textit{Chicago Tribune}, November 1, 1893, 9. A list of exhibitions on display in the Manufacturers and Liberal Arts Building can be found in David J. Bertuca, Senior Compiler, et. al., \textit{The World’s Columbia Exposition: A Centennial Bibliographic Guide} (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996). For more on the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair, see Norman Bolotin and Christine Laing, \textit{The World’s Columbian Exposition: The Chicago World’s Fair of 1893} (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002).}
participation in any meaningful way. In a massive industrial dreamland demonstrating the incredible promises of the twentieth century, African Americans had been left out. And Frederick Douglass was incensed.\textsuperscript{199}

By that August afternoon, Douglass had been the spokesman of his race for nearly fifty years. Born into slavery in 1818, the extraordinary former bondsman had learned to read on the streets of Baltimore, tricking local school children into teaching him letters he didn’t know. For young Douglass, education offered seemingly limitless potential for both intellectual and physical freedom. He devoured every piece of literature within his grasp. At the age of twenty, he escaped slavery and soon became one of America’s most important abolitionists. He published his life narrative in 1845, “hoping that this little book may do something toward throwing light on the American slave system.” But the narrative accomplished even more. By illuminating the horrors of slavery from the slave’s perspective, it became a dark treasure, a black pearl of wisdom in the American experience. The narrative was widely read and highly influential, serving as the most powerful literary anti-slavery argument in history. Douglass’s words stirred principles, changed minds, and galvanized allies of justice. Generations of both blacks and whites were inspired. Booker T. Washington later remembered that as a young boy, “one of the reasons why I wanted to go to school and learn to read was that I might read for myself what he had written.” During the following years, the man known as the “Little Giant” travelled the globe shining light on the horrors of American slavery and serving as a hulking opponent to racial injustice. After Emancipation, he continued fighting inequality, championing rights for immigrants, women, Native Americans, and especially newly freed blacks. Douglass commanded attention unlike any black man in the history of America. By the summer of 1893, the legend of his orations had grown to mythical

proportions. “Few men,” a contemporary writer noted, could “equal him in his power over an audience.”

The black audience waiting inside that Festival Hall auditorium must have been rippling with excitement. Even if they hadn’t read the narrative, they had certainly heard the legend. Many had waited months for this moment. In June, the *Washington Post* reported that African Americans were already “all agog over the plan.” Some had travelled thousands of miles to Chicago, arriving on the rails of the Illinois Central, which by 1893 had stretched its tracks deep into Dixie, offering a one-day journey from the Jim Crow South to the Windy City. They would not be disappointed.

At three o’clock that afternoon, the seventy-five year old Douglass was escorted to the stage by Isabella Beecher Hooker, sister of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* author Harriet Beecher Stowe. In an address titled “The Race Problem in America,” Douglass unloaded. “Shaking his white mane and trembling with the vehemence of his eloquence,” the *Chicago Tribune* reported, “the old man for more than half an hour held 2,500 persons under a spell.” The denial of blacks from the White City struck a deep chord with Douglass. He warned the audience of the racist stereotypes being promoted on the streets of the Fair. Aunt Jemima had made her commercial debut in Chicago, reinforcing the stereotypical image of an overweight black mammy. Fair officials celebrated Colored American Day by serving thousands of watermelons to black visitors, suggesting that the fruit would serve as the highlight for African American visitors deemed too ignorant to enjoy the surrounding grandeur of modernity. Douglass scoffed. He was infuriated by the depictions of black women as overweight mammies and of black masses as mindless pickaninnies. He saw danger in those portrayals, telling his audience, “They have filled

---


the Fair with the sound of barbaric music, and with sights of barbaric rites, and denied to the colored American any representation.”

There were scores of other issues. He saw the injustice as a microcosm of the dire situation facing African Americans as the twentieth century approached. So Douglass drew his lens wide. “Men talk of the negro problem. There is no negro problem,” he argued. “In fourteen States of this Union wild mobs have taken the place of the law. They hang, shoot, burn men of my race without injustice and without right,” he scolded. Yet, Douglass was stubborn with pride and perhaps even optimistic. Despite recent assaults on black rights, he utterly believed in the promise of American liberty. “We love your country,” he explained. “The problem is whether the American people have honesty enough, loyalty enough, honor enough, patriotism enough to live up to their own Constitution.” In his climax, he set forth the determination of an oppressed but resilient people, noting, “We negroes,” he exclaimed, “have made up our minds to stay just where we are.” The crowd roared. Men and women in the audience scrambled toward the stage for the chance to shake his hand. The speech, according to the Tribune, “burned itself into the memory of those who listened.”

Frederick Douglass was right. As the twentieth century approached, blacks indeed had cause for concern over their role in a modernizing America. The so-called “Negro Problem” dominated American racial discourse. But as Douglass indicated, black voices were excluded from the solution. Yet, to many, appeals from black leaders were outdated and symbolic of an antiquated order. Perhaps Douglass himself had become outdated. The absolutes of his generation couldn’t be applied to this modern “Negro Problem.” Black freedom was no longer a dual sided issue, a choice between freedom and slavery. To many whites, the sins of slavery had been erased. Freedom was enough. And now those black laborers could toil on their own just like everyone else. But as blacks struggled for a foothold in modern America, Southerners constructed the Jim Crow

202 “Appeal of Douglass: Colored Americans Sit Under the Spell of his Words,” Chicago Tribune, August 26, 1893, 3.
203 “Appeal of Douglass: Colored Americans Sit Under the Spell of his Words,” Chicago Tribune, August 26, 1893, 3. As powerful as his message may have been, Douglass undoubtedly held back. Later that year, he offered a more aggressive assessment, warning Chicagoans that “If the American people continue to tolerate the murders of negroes in the South there will come a day of vengeance.” “Frederick Douglass is Angry,” Chicago Tribune, December 6, 1893, 6.
system, a complex code of racial mores designed to restrict and control that freedom at every turn. They sought to protect the burgeoning opportunities of modernization, unjustly monopolizing the Promise of the New South. The status of African Americans was in many ways actually regressing in the years after the end of Reconstruction. And as Douglass had pointed out, America was ignoring their plight.

But modernity had another fate in mind. Opportunity seeped through holes in a flawed system. It was impossible for Southerners to uplift their society while leaving behind almost half of their population. African Americans found openings for freedom through education, mobility, and cohesion. Excluded from much of modern America, blacks gathered in protected spaces and built their own societies. They didn’t follow Douglass’s advice to stay put or his successor Washington’s counsel to “cast down your bucket.” Rather, they went on the move, pursuing opportunity with the same vigor and cunning as Douglass had chased literacy on those streets of Baltimore. In the New South, teeming with its railroads and lumberyards, they found openings in modernity and gaps embedded within Jim Crow. The scene in Festival Hall on Colored American Day at the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair was an allegory for black life at the turn of the century. Across the country, African Americans were rallying around each other and creating their own pockets of freedom, consolidating power and finding inspiration in the shadows of a modern America that so readily excluded them.\(^{204}\)

\[\ldots\]

**\* \* \*\**

Turner Smith entered the classroom to escape the fields that haunted his heritage. His parents had been slaves on a cotton plantation, and Turner vowed early in life to eradicate field labor from his bloodline. As a young adult, he dreamed of going to school. One day, fed up with farming for others, he abandoned a mule in a cotton field and walked almost twenty miles with just a couple of dollars in his pocket to attend Meridian Academy. The academy was one of the two black Mississippi colleges founded by the

Methodist Freedman’s Aid Society. The other was Rust College (originally Shaw University). Although it received financial support from the Methodist Church, the school was largely run by a throng of newly educated former Mississippi slaves. Among them were veterans of the Freedmen’s Bureau schools. These were the early freedpeople who had so adamantly pursued the dreams of education after the Civil War. Later renamed the Haven Institute, the school trained teachers. And Turner Smith was among its early pupils.²⁰⁵

After graduation, Turner taught in several black communities near Meridian. He met and married another young teacher named Mamie Grove, and they moved to Ellisville. As their family grew, Mamie quit teaching to focus on their children. But the family soon began to struggle. White Mississippi legislators were siphoning funds away from black public education. African American teacher salaries became a casualty of unequal spending. Their pay plummeted, causing Turner increased anxiety about his ability to feed his continuously growing family. He gave up teaching in 1900 to seek other opportunities. Turner and Mamie saw an opening in Hattiesburg. They moved their family to the Hub City and settled on Jackson Street. Turner opened a small shop named Smith’s Store and worked several odd jobs to supplement the family income. Mamie and the children ran the store in his absence. Although Turner didn’t teach in the local black school, his educational background made him a cherished member of the growing black enclave that was sprouting near the middle of downtown Hattiesburg. He was particularly valued for his role as a Sunday school teacher. The move to Hattiesburg facilitated remarkable opportunities for the Smith family. Turner and Mamie raised a big, beautiful family on Jackson Street in the young Hub City of the New South. They became leaders in their community while continuously instilling in their children the value of an education. None of their sons would ever pick cotton.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁶ E. Hammond Smith, interview; and 1909 Hattiesburg City Directory, USM.
The Smiths were among hundreds, then eventually thousands of new arrivals to the Hub City. Most took railroad and sawmill jobs. They came from all over. Many trickled in from Alabama, escaping from the difficult plantations of the Black Belt. Some were from Louisiana. Others arrived from elsewhere in Mississippi, hailing from places like Vicksburg, Natchez, West Point, and dozens of small farming settlements. The Mississippi migrants came from the communities that decades before had so strongly believed in education that they built schools, protected teachers, and even paid their children’s tuition just days out of slavery. Those educational dreams had largely been stamped out by the Revolution of 1875. So many blacks went on the move. They arrived in places like Hattiesburg determined to build their own little pockets of freedom, taking various jobs and eking out whatever living they could manage. The early migrants grouped together, finding hope in education and spirituality. Schools and churches were built first. They gathered in those spaces seeking solace among each other. There was power in togetherness and strength in modernity. But not all of the first blacks arrived as wide-eyed and ambitious as Turner and Mamie Smith. Some of them came in chains. Captain William Harris Hardy brought them there.207

By 1886, over one hundred African Americans were in the region as forced laborers, chained and working together in conditions far worse than many of their enslaved ancestors. As Chairmen of the Gulf & Ship Island Railroad, one of Hardy’s first acts was to secure a six year lease for convict labor from the Mississippi State Penitentiary. He would use these cheap workers to lay the railroad track between Gulfport and Hattiesburg, completing his line from the Piney Woods to the Gulf Coast. On March 13, 1884, the Mississippi State Legislature authorized the transfer of the Hamilton Company Convict lessees to the Gulf & Ship Island group. Upon raising the necessary funds to begin construction, the railroad received its new laborers and sent them to work. The system reeked of slavery. The black workers were paid virtually nothing. They were also poorly fed and clothed. Those who tried to escape could be shot. Gulf & Ship Island President and former Confederate General Wirt Adams must have

been thrilled. Just twenty-one years after he had lost the free human labor on his Vicksburg plantation, he regained control over another forced black workforce.²⁰⁸

Convict labor was one of the first major tenants of the early Jim Crow system that emerged after Reconstruction. Designed to profit from free labor and restrict black movement, it was incredibly unjust. In 1876, the year after Redemption, Mississippi passed the statute known as the “Pig Law.” The law stated that anyone convicted of stealing a commodity with a value over ten dollars (just over $200 today) could be punished with up to five years in prison. Within two years, the state’s prison population more than quadrupled. Approximately eighty-five percent of the inmates were black. In 1876, the newly elected Democratic legislature also passed the Leasing Act, giving the state the ability to lease prisoners to firms or even individuals. The system fit well with the New South. Start-up industrialists like Captain Hardy could lay infrastructure for cheap. And states would profit while reducing their prison expenditures.²⁰⁹

Railroads had leased black laborers since the antebellum period. But that system was different than its Jim Crow-era replacement. Slaves usually received at least semi-humane treatment by lessees who were required to return bondsmen alive. The new system offered less physical protection to black workers because their lives and bodies weren’t as highly valued. Black men dying no longer meant a loss of wealth. Safety and decent treatment went by the wayside. Working conditions were terrible. Many labor camps were far worse than even antebellum plantation life because food and shelter were not as readily available as on settled farms. Medical attention was virtually non-existent. Slow workers were lashed. Disobedient ones were thrown into “sweat boxes,” coffin like cells with an air hole the size of a silver dollar. Thousands of others met worse fates.²¹⁰

²¹⁰ For more on the typical conditions of convict-labor in the South, see Walter Wilson, Forced Labor in the United States (New York: International Publishers, 1933), especially 68-83. For more on the employment of convict labor within the context of the industrializing South, see Edward Ayers, Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the Nineteenth Century American South (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 185-222; Alex Lichtenstein, Twice the Work of Free Labor:
The John Henry of American folklore was a real man. He was a convict laborer. And it killed him. While the fictitious John Henry died honorably racing a machine on his own free will, the real John Henry was one of more than one hundred black convict laborers who was killed during the two-year process of boring out the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad’s Lewis Tunnel in West Virginia. Railroad work was remarkably dangerous due to falling rocks and respiratory diseases. Mississippi lacked the dramatic tunnels of Appalachia, but railroad work was nearly as deadly. In 1882, Mississippi lost an astounding 126 of its 735 black convict workers. Railroad companies in particular abused convict-lessees, whose lives they valued little. The men were killed by disease, industrial accidents, malnutrition, and sheer cruelty. Over the coming decades, black railroad workers ominously spread the ballad of John Henry through labor camps just as slave spirituals had once crossed between Southern plantations, warning each other of an early death, but also celebrating that growing mythical folk hero.\footnote{1882 death rate taken from Oshinsky, \textit{Worse Than Slavery,'}46; and Scott Reynolds Nelson, \textit{Steel Drivin’ Man: John Henry, The Untold Story of an American Legend} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), especially 21-40 for information on finding the origins of the John Henry ballad and 73-92 for more information on the construction of the Lewis Tunnel and John Henry’s death. For more on the typical conditions of convict-labor in the South, see Walter Wilson, \textit{Forced Labor in the United States} (New York: International Publishers, 1933), especially 68-83.}

The threat of convict labor loomed ominously over Southern blacks. For being convicted of stealing anything worth ten dollars or more, blacks could be whisked away and forced to work in chain gangs for years on end. They were shot if caught trying to flee. Many were never heard from again. All-white juries regularly sent black men to the chain gangs based on a whim, or less. Some were indeed guilty. But others were innocent. To most, it was the threat that mattered. Lynching was also frightening. But the chain gang occurred more often. Even if an African American didn’t end up as a convict lease laborer, the possibility posed dangerous prospects. Perhaps a relative, friend or neighbor had been sent off to work in some undisclosed locale. Maybe that person never came back. The rotating neo-slavery work camps sprang up across Mississippi, becoming

an efficient and profitable labor system for dozens of Mississippi industries, especially railroads.\textsuperscript{212}

The railroads around Hattiesburg were no different. Each of the city’s three major railroad lines, the Gulf & Ship Island, the Mississippi Central, and the New Orleans & Northeastern, used convict labor. By leasing black convict workers, the railroads laid the groundwork for a newly industrializing Southern landscape. Captain Hardy’s Gulf & Ship Island Railroad Company sent their leased convicts to work constructing a line from the Piney Woods to Gulfport that would crack open enormous possibilities for the Mississippi lumber trade. But even they went too far. The Gulf & Ship Island Railroad treated their convicts worse than any lessee in Mississippi history. Conditions for those black workers were so awful that in 1888 the Mississippi State Penitentiary Board cancelled the lease. The New Orleans & Northeastern wasn’t much better. It employed black workers to clear the Queen and Crescent City Route, the very line that Hardy had been surveying during the summer of 1880. Near modern-day Hattiesburg, witnesses reported seeing men chained together for days on end, wading through knee-deep alligator and snake infested swamps, “their thirst driving them to drink the water in which they were compelled to deposit their excrement.”\textsuperscript{213}

When the Mississippi State Penitentiary revoked the Gulf & Ship Island Railroad’s convict lease, it described a “state of servitude worse than slavery.” Penitentiary Superintendent W.L. Doss acted on complaints received from local residents who were appalled by the condition of the workers leased by the Gulf & Ship Island Railroad. Superintendent Doss declined to go into particulars because the details were too gruesome, but he cited ten basic reasons for the cancellation of the lease. They included inhumane treatment, insufficient clothing, sub-letting laborers without proper authority, and failing to provide convicts with proper medical attention. The convict workers also died for the railroad. 225 of them disappeared either through death or escape during those

\textsuperscript{212} As Douglas Blackmon has noted, “The return of forced labor as a fixture in black life ground pervasively into the daily lives of far more African Americans.” Douglas A. Blackmon, \textit{Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War I} (New York: Anchor Books, 2009), quote on 7.

\textsuperscript{213} Oshinsky, \textit{“Worse Than Slavery,”} quote on 44-45. For more on the employment of convict labor within the context of the industrializing South, see Ayers, \textit{Vengeance and Justice}, 185-222; and Lichtenstein, \textit{Twice the Work of Free Labor}. 
horrifying years working in those Piney Woods for Captain William Harris Hardy, the celebrated architect and founder of Gulfport and Hattiesburg. During that time, they had graded seventy miles of road, laid twenty-two miles of tracks, and cut ties for another twenty miles. Hundreds of those black convicts unwillingly gave their lives to Hattiesburg for the lumber boom that was about to make the Hub City rise. They were essential to its development. Yet, they have no monuments.

Railroads characterized Southern Jim Crow in numerous ways. On June 7, 1892, a well-dressed thirty year-old New Orleans shoemaker named Homer Plessy bought a first-class railway ticket to Covington, Louisiana. He boarded the East Louisiana Railway car at the corner of Press and Royal Streets and sat in the first-class section, a space strictly reserved for white passengers. Plessy, who was one-eighth African American, knew he could be arrested for sitting in the white section. His actions violated an 1890 Louisiana statute that stated, “No person or persons shall be admitted to occupy seats in coaches other than the ones assigned to them on account of the race they belong to.” But arrest was his plan. He was seeking a confrontation. So there he sat among white beach goers on that hot summer day as the train began to chug down the railroad tracks of the New Orleans & Northeastern Railroad’s recently constructed Queen and Crescent City Route. The popular route took local travelers across Captain William Harris Hardy’s bridge over Lake Pontchartrain before veering off toward the beaches of Covington, where thousands of New Orleans residents spent hot summer days. The train was still about ten miles away from the bridge when a conductor asked Plessy to move. The passenger refused, and was arrested and subsequently convicted of violating the statute. Plessy and his imported New

214 The number of workers who died on the railroad is fairly hard to track. At least sixty of the state’s 500 convict lease workers died during the final year of the Gulf & Ship Island’s lease. Fifteen additional men were unaccounted for. Presumably, some escaped. But others may have been shot by the Gulf & Ship Island Railroad supervisors for various of acts of resistance. The previous year’s total is unavailable, but as historian James Lemly has shown, the average death rate for convict railroad workers between 1882 and 1887 was 15%. The state’s convicts would never again die at the rate as they had while working for the Gulf & Ship Island Railroad. The following year, nineteen convict lease workers died throughout the state. Regardless, in a state that has historically treated its black citizens worse than any other, the Gulf & Ship Island Railroad’s treatment of black convict-lease laborers stands out. “Biennial Report of the Board of Control, Superintendent, General Manager and Other Officers of the Mississippi State Penitentiary, for the years 1888 and 1889,” J.F. Sessions, Chairman, (Jackson, MS: R.H. Henry, State Printer, 1890), 3-5, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, MS (hereafter, MDAH); “The Convict Lease Appealed,” The Biloxi Herald, December 15, 1888, 5; “Convicts on a Railroad,” The New York Times, December 4, 1888, 2; James Lemly, The Gulf, Mobile, and Ohio: A Railroad that had to Expand or Expire (Homewood, IL: Richard D. Irwin, Inc., 1953), death rate statistic on 290.
York lawyer Albion W. Tourgée appealed the verdict. A month later, criminal district court Judge John Howard Ferguson upheld the conviction. Tourgée took the case to a higher court.\textsuperscript{215}

Railroads formed the boundaries of race in American society, separating blacks and whites. Their cars became the racial battlefields of a modernizing nation. Segregation statutes were enacted on railroad cars before other public spaces because there were no alternative modes of travel. Even in the face of severe discrimination, African Americans had to ride the same railroad as whites. Passenger cars themselves became symbolic sites of resistance. Despite a rising numbers of laws, many African Americans simply refused second-class status. Blacks pitched racial battles on the rails, making cars into a site of resistance. Homer Plessy was hardly the first black Southerner to be arrested for refusing to move out of the white section of a car. Former Tennessee slave Robert Reed Church constantly refused colored car seating, setting an example for his daughter Mary who at sixteen years-old forced a conductor into submission by threatening to sue when he demanded she switch cars. Some acts of resistance were less tactful. In 1883, the then twenty-one year-old schoolteacher Ida B. Wells actually bit a man who tried to yank her off a train car.\textsuperscript{216}

\textsuperscript{215} \textit{Plessy v. Ferguson}, 163 U.S. 537 (1896). This brief narrative was recreated using basic facts from the Plessy case alongside the New Orleans & Northeastern Railroad and Hardy’s Moonshine Bridge described in the previous chapter. For more see, Keith Weldon Medley, \textit{We As Freemen} (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing, 2003), especially 13-35; and Mark Elliot, \textit{Color-Blind Justice: Albion Tourgée and the Quest for Racial Equality from the Civil War to Plessy v. Ferguson} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), especially 262-295.

\textsuperscript{216} Duster, ed., \textit{Crusade for Justice}, 18; and Mary Church Terrell, \textit{A Colored Woman in a White World} (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2005, orig., 1940), 295-307. For more examples of resistance to segregated railroad and street car laws, see Kelley, \textit{Right to Ride}; and Barbara Young Welke, \textit{Recasting American Liberty: Gender, Race, Law, and the Railroad Revolution, 1865-1920} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), especially 280-322. The origins of the Southern segregation laws that comprised a major aspect of the Jim Crow system remain one of the most widely contested debates among Southern historians. C. Vann Woodward’s 1955 \textit{The Strange Career of Jim Crow} astutely observed that segregation statutes did not immediately follow Emancipation. Rather, the legalized and mandatory segregation of the Jim Crow era began in the late 1880s. As Howard Rabinowitz has pointed out, however, although Jim Crow segregation laws may have originated in the late 1880s, they actually followed traditional patters of segregation that existed since Emancipation. Thus, de facto preceded de jure segregation. Yet, as Richard C. Wade noted in 1964, these customs and systems of segregation existed in Southern cities, both before and after the Civil War. Urbanization is the common denominator. The great wave of Jim Crow laws that Woodward so perceptively observed were a direct response to the urbanization of the New South. As blacks moved into Deep South cities, whites responded by segregating urban opportunities and access, even prior to Emancipation. The railroads of the New South became key sites for a particular reason.
The first major legal challenge to the constitutionality of Southern railway car segregation was actually made by a railroad company. In 1888, the Louisville, New Orleans, & Texas Railroad was indicted in Mississippi for failure to comply with a new state statute that required all railroad companies to provide, “equal but separate accommodation for the white and colored races by providing two or more passenger cars for each passenger train.” In contesting the ruling, the Louisville, New Orleans, & Texas Railroad, the same company that was parceling land to Isaiah Montgomery in what would become the town of Mound Bayou, was not making a bold stand against racial injustice. Rather, they were simply worried about their bottom line. Racial separation on railroad cars wasn’t economically efficient. To comply with the statute, the company would need separate first-class cars for each race. If both sections remained only partially filled, then the company would not be able to maximize profits on its first-class car service. It could even lose money. Facing a perpetual fine of $500 for each violation, the Louisville, New Orleans, & Texas Railroad questioned the state’s right to enforce segregation on a privately owned railroad.217

The case reached the United States Supreme Court. But the nation’s highest court agreed with the state of Mississippi, verifying state’s rights to enforce segregation within their borders. The lone dissenter was Justice Louis Harlan who adroitly observed the potential hardship for companies that operated in the Lower Mississippi River Basin. There are twelve states in the region. If each one required different seating regulations on passenger interstate trains, railroad companies could lose a fortune. After losing the case, the Louisville, New Orleans, & Texas Railroad decided to get out of the Southern passenger car business altogether. Luckily for other passenger carries, other Southern

---


states simply followed Mississippi’s example. This was a law for blacks. By the end of 1891, nine Southern states had passed railroad racial segregation laws. Louisiana, of course, was among them. Seventy-two days after the *Louisville, New Orleans & Texas Ry. Co. v. Mississippi* decision, Louisiana State Representative Joseph Saint Amant proposed House Bill #42, legislation emulating the recently upheld Mississippi law mandating segregation. Governor Francis T. Nicholls signed the act into law on July 10, 1890 forcing “equal but separate” racial accommodations on railroads cars.

In 1892, Homer Plessy had been picked by the New Orleans Comité des Citoyens, a group of elite educated black citizens, to test the recent Louisiana railroad segregation law. Plessy was one if its youngest members. Although states’ right to regulate railroad segregation had been firmly established by the 1890 *Louisville, New Orleans & Texas Ry. Co. v. Mississippi* case, Plessy’s racial ambiguity offered a compelling case. The Comité des Citoyens probably didn’t hope to overturn the entire system of legalized Southern segregation. Rather, their case was based on Plessy’s racial background. They were challenging the singular conductor’s ability to racially classify passengers as black. Historical memory has painted *Plessy v. Ferguson* as the transformative case in deciding the legality of compulsory railroad car segregation. But as the *Washington Post* noted during the *Plessy* proceedings, “the practical questions at issue in the case have already been decided in favor of the validity of the law involved.” Predictably, the Supreme Court again ruled in favor the state’s right to enforce the segregation statute, further validating the original 1888 Mississippi law defining the legal segregation that would come to define the Jim Crow era in the American South.

---


219 “Capital Chat,” *The Washington Post*, April 14, 1896, 6. For more, see Charles A. Lofgren, *The Plessy Case: A Legal-Historical Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). The *Plessy* case has received far more attention from historians than it did from contemporary legal scholars. Beyond the actual Supreme Court ruling, it is difficult to find contemporary scholarly accounts. As legal scholar Stephen J. Riegel has pointed out, the case went unmentioned in the *United States Supreme Court Reports: Lawyer’s Edition, Harvard Law Review*, and *Yale Law Review*. Furthermore, as Riegel has shown, the “separate but equal” doctrine had a long history in lower federal courts that set important precedents for the more well-known 1896 decision. See Stephen J. Riegel, “The Persistent Career of Jim Crow: Lower Federal Courts and the ‘Separate but Equal’ Doctrine, 1865-1896,” *The American Journal of Legal History*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (January, 1984), 17-40. It should be noted, however, that the case was discussed in the *Central Law Review, Michigan Law Journal, American Law Review, Virginia Law Register*, and several localized
In the form of locomotives, American modernity ostensibly steamed over the lives of black citizens. White Southerners embraced change, chasing the dreams of a new economy and way of life in railroad towns like Hattiesburg. They used power to consolidate these opportunities, only including blacks to enhance the promise of the New South. Modernity was built on the backs of the men who worked on the chain gangs, and defined by the segregation of the railroad. As with slavery, a new society rode black labor like a parasite, relying on the very African American workers they claimed to be unfit to live among them and certainly undeserving of their newfound freedom. Rights were stripped away to preserve cheap labor and racial inferiority. Jim Crow set on. African Americans would live at “Freedom’s Edge,” as historian William Cohen called it, suspended in a world between slavery and freedom. In a great tragedy, Reconstruction failed blacks, sending them spinning into a period historians refer to as the “nadir” of American race relations, the lowest point since Emancipation, a heartbreaking time full of lynching, race riots, segregation laws, disfranchisement, and hatred that would linger through the 1950s. Yet, this is merely the simplest history. Oppression is the easiest narrative to follow. The tragic onset of Jim Crow is merely one side of American modernity. However oppressive industrialization may have seemed, something else was growing under that storm.\footnote{According to Cohen, Jim Crow laws were a mere extension of the South’s failed Black Codes struck down by the Radical Republican Congress during Reconstruction. These efforts focused on limiting black mobility and work. See William Cohen, \textit{At Freedom’s Edge: Black Mobility and the Southern White Quest for Social Control, 1861-1915} (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1991). The term “nadir” was first coined by historian Rayford W. Logan, who periodized the era during the years 1877-1914.}

\footnote{According to Cohen, Jim Crow laws were a mere extension of the South’s failed Black Codes struck down by the Radical Republican Congress during Reconstruction. These efforts focused on limiting black mobility and work. See William Cohen, \textit{At Freedom’s Edge: Black Mobility and the Southern White Quest for Social Control, 1861-1915} (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1991). The term “nadir” was first coined by historian Rayford W. Logan, who periodized the era during the years 1877-1914.}

periodicals. See Brook Thomas, ed., \textit{Plessy v. Ferguson: A Brief History with Documents} (Boston, MA: Bedford Books, 1997), 127-139. It is also worth reminding that the 1870 Mississippi legislature, numbering highly in blacks, composed similar legislation for its public schools, calling for racially equal but separate institutions. Therefore, the segregation statutes that spread through the South were not merely imposed upon blacks, but often accepted and perhaps even desired. Railroads, however, complicated Southern segregation because there was no comparable African American alternative for inland travel. Northern railroads initially resisted racial segregation because separate cars were incredibly economically inefficient. The \textit{Louisville, New Orleans \& Texas Ry. Co. v. Mississippi} ruling enabled Southern states to compel Northern companies to provide racially separate cars. Northern-owned railroads responded to local statutes by simply transforming first-class coaches into white-only sections rather than operate additional first-class cars for blacks that may not have attracted enough customers to ensure a profit. The Plessy case was about who could decide who belonged on those cars, which was a pertinent question in the incredibly racially diverse turn-of-the-century New Orleans society. Contrary to popular belief, a favorable outcome would not have impacted customary or legal segregation practices regarding all African Americans across the South. For a broader discussion, see Welke, \textit{Recasting American Liberty}, especially, 249-375; Lofgren, \textit{The Plessy Case}, especially 44-60; and Elliot, \textit{Color-Blind Justice}, 262-295.
In 1902, the *Hattiesburg Daily Progress* mocked the throngs of local blacks that would gather by the railroad tracks to watch the trains go by. “The negro just can’t resist an excursion,” the paper derided. “If he can’t go himself he will go to the depot to see it go by.” African Americans were indeed fascinated by the railroads, but the paper never understood the meaning. They had no clue why captivated black masses gathered by the depots to watch the passing locomotives. But blacks had good reason to be so interested in the massive iron chariots. Railroads offered incredibly profound prospects for better lives. Turn of the century locomotives were dynamic, offering much more than oppression. They also steamed across the South, providing unprecedented mobility and jobs away from the plantations. As modernization trampled thousands of black lives, millions of others found in it opportunity. They too would be the benefactors of jobs, both directly on the rails and by industries created by the tracks. A ride on the rails offered relief. The trains became something vivid in the black imagination. Locomotives were the new “sweet chariots,” “Exodus Trains,” or even “Overground Railroads” to later writers. They remained beacons of light for decades. As Langston Hughes would later recapitulate, “Got a railroad ticket, Pack my trunk and ride. And when I get on the train, I’ll cast my blues aside.” And although the Hattiesburg railroads often served as reminders of inequality and Jim Crow battlegrounds, they also offered a respite and an opening.\(^\text{221}\)

---


While white Southerners tried to hoard the promises of modernity, Northern railroad companies rushed to hire black workers. Blacks were desperate for wage labor jobs, and large railroad companies took advantage, offering positions both in and out of the South. As an Illinois Central official recalled “We took Negro labor out of the South until it hurt.” Southern blacks were the cheapest workers you could find. And there was an abundance of them in Dixie. The same forces that spread railroads across the South, bringing whites into railroad towns like Hattiesburg also created opportunities for blacks. Railroads hired thousands of African Americans as firemen, brakemen, switchmen, and general laborers. These were the lowest jobs in the railroad industry, but blacks took them nonetheless. In 1890, nearly 50,000 African Americas worked for the railroads. By 1910, American railway companies employed more than 100,000. Approximately eighty-five percent of them worked in the South.222

Some industries only hired African Americans. Passenger cars desired black porters as they attempted to recreate the luxuries of home in their dining and sleeping cars. The presence of black servants was a primary staple for the reproduction of a fashionable home life on the rails. The carried bags, punched tickets, delivered meals, and shined shoes. Some even offered haircuts. Sleeping Car innovator George Pullman decided as early as 1867 to employ only black porters on his famous sleeping cars. By 1915, his well-known Pullman Palace Car Company employed more blacks than any other firm in the United States. Blacks took the jobs to reach into the middle-class. They found power with the Pullman jobs, forming a large national union titled the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. In 1925, they recruited a thirty-six year old socialist orator named Asa Philip Randolph to lead the union. The Sleeping Car Porters gained power, finding strength in numbers and mobility. Over the coming years, Randolph would

The term “Overground Railroad” first appears in literature as the title of a chapter in Joseph R. Gay, Progress and Achievements of the Colored People (Washington D.C.: Austin Jenkins Co., 1913), 108-114. 222 Illinois Central official quoted in Howard W. Risher, Jr., The Racial Policies of American Industry, Report No 16: The Negro in the Railroad Industry (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), 38; “Illinois Central Increases Pay,” Chicago Daily Tribune, October 13, 1901, 1; and Theodore Kornweibel Jr., Railroads in the African American Experience: A Photographic Journey (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 52. Also, it should be noted that black railroad work gained increased during the years just prior to emancipation. At the onset of the Civil War, nearly 15,000 slaves were working on Southern railroads, many of whom had been rented by railroad companies. For more, see Kornweibel, Railroads in the African American Experience, 67; and Aaron W. Marrs, Railroads in the Old South: Pursuing Progress in a Slave Society (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).
continuously play a crucial role in the black freedom struggle. Like so many of his
generation, his leadership was rooted in education. His father James was a veteran of the
Florida Freedman’s Bureau schools, and taught Asa how to read at a very young age. He
too knew the value of an education.²²³

Hattiesburg was a convenient hub for porters. Long and short railroad routes ran
through the Hub City. The Gulf & Ship Island railroad was supplementing its lumber
freight by advertising vacation excursions from Jackson to the Mississippi Gulf Coast.
Roundtrip fares ran for just $2.00, and hundreds of Jacksonians hopped on the rails for
the six-hour trip to the coast. Trains ran twice a day, offering convenient access to the
Gulf of Mexico. African Americans took jobs as waiters and bagmen on the luxury cars.
So blacks found jobs. Pullman Porters were versatile and mobile. Many must have
enjoyed the mobility of their work as they crossed the country on the steel rails.
Thousands of them, born in the 1880s, were the sons of former slaves. Those jobs were
far removed from the long days their parents had spent on plantations, squatting to pick
cotton under a scorching sun, unable to walk off the farm without fear of severe lashings,
or worse. Charles Holloway, Hub Thigpen, Wayne Bailey, and John Coleman were
among the early blacks to move to Hattiesburg for jobs as porters on the Gulf & Ship
Island line.²²⁴

These were good jobs. Railroad workers were the lucky ones. Although African
American railroad workers were often paid less than their white counterparts, they were

²²³ Larry Tye, Rising From the Rails: Pullman Porters and the Making of the Black Middle Class (New
York: Owl Books, 2004); Kornweibel, Railroads in the African American Experience; and Andrew E.
2007). For an example of interracial unionism in the Jim Crow South, see Robert Korstad, Civil Rights
Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth-Century South (Chapel
Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007). That interracial model, however, was hardly
characteristic for most Southern black workers. In the railroad industry, for example, unions were strictly
racially segregated well into the 1950s and 1960s. For more, see Eric Arnesen, Brotherhoods of Color:
Black Railroad Workers and the Struggle for Equality (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001),
especially 116-150.
²²⁴ Gulf & Ship Island Railroad Advertisement and the occupations of nearly all black Hattiesburg residents
can be found in the 1909 Hattiesburg City Directory, USM. Jack Santino’s wonderful study of Pullman
Porters includes numerous oral history interviews where former porters describe the vast differences
between their lives as Pullman workers and that of their parents. Additionally, this is not to say that
Pullman Porters did not experience discrimination. But the point is that their potions offered flexibility and
middle-class status in black communities. See Jack Santino, Miles of Smiles, Years of Struggle: Stories of
at least free from the obligations of the plantation. As railroad historian Theodore Kornweibel has written, “One of the greatest motivations for seeking railroad work was to avoid sharecropping.” Sharecropping wrought devastating results that could span generations, crippling black families and tying them to cotton farms. Sharecroppers were farmers who agreed to rent a portion of a planter’s land in exchange for a share of the crop. In theory, the agreement seemed reasonable. But mitigating factors caused horrific cycles of perpetual debt. Landowners often simply cheated black farmers. Many planters doctored scales, charged absurdly high interest rates for cash loans to buy seed or equipment, lied, or simply settled disputes with shotguns. The system always favored the landowner. A bad harvest could spin a sharecropper further into debt, burrowing that piece of land deeper into a family’s destiny and creating a cycle of never ending poverty. In 1900, the state passed a law making it illegal for tenants to leave their shares during the harvest season. If a jury decided that a tenant had entered into a sharecropping contract with the intent to commit fraud, the black workers faced a fine of $100 and imprisonment. A landlord could pay the fine, springing the prisoner from jail and embedding them even deeper into that planter’s service. Landowners became much like antebellum slave owners, regarding black farm laborers as “their niggers,” according to Neil McMillen. Mississippi’s legal framework enabled the constant creation and reinforcement of involuntary servitude. Just to get off the farm, some blacks had to flee the state, sometimes leaving behind family members to become hostages of the cotton fields. The wage labor jobs of the New South offered another reprieve. As Edward Ayers has noted, “Once a young person got old enough to set out on his or her own, virtually any place was better than staying on a sharecropping farm.” The blacks who migrated to Hattiesburg were among the lucky ones who managed to get off the plantation.225

Railroads created jobs in more ways than one. They also helped develop new industries that made Southern cities grow. Blacks took those jobs too. As the century turned, Northeastern American cities were stuffed fat with the daily arrivals of thousands

of Europeans. But the immigrants weren’t moving to the South. Most industrial jobs were in the North. As United States Immigration Commissioner Robert Watchorn explained to the *New York Times* that “American wages are the honey pot that brings the alien flies.” “If a steel mill were to start in a Mississippi swamp, paying wages of $2 a day,” he theorized, “the news would hum through foreign lands in a month.” But Mississippi didn’t produce steel. So it didn’t get many immigrants. Yet, thousands of people were trickling into its cities for jobs, exponentially expanding urban centers. Hattiesburg grew faster than any other city in the state. What Mississippi did produce during that era was lumber. And for many blacks, that was the honey. By the turn of the century, Hattiesburg had become the epicenter of the Southern lumber industry. Just like railroads, lumber offered a way off the plantation. And approximately one-third of Southern sawmill employees were black. Even more made a living working out in the forest for the railroads or Naval Stores companies.  

The first black lumberman to carve out a living near present-day Hattiesburg was a former slave named Wes Fairley. This legendary forester was like the black answer to Paul Bunyan. During the Civil War, he had escaped bondage in Perry County, and fled to the Union Army lines to join the fight against slavery. His exact role is unclear. But at some point he helped guard Confederate prisoners, probably at Fort Massachusetts on Ship Island, just south of modern-day Gulfport. As legend has it, one particular prisoner named Lorenzo Nolley Dantzler greatly appreciated the tender care he received by Fairley, and the two men formed a bond that would last for thirty-five years. Shortly after the war, Dantzler opened a sawmill in Moss Point, just off the Pascagoula River. Fairley stayed in the Mississippi Piney Woods and tried his hand in the state’s emergent lumber industry. He organized interracial teams of rafters to guide logs down the Pascagoula River to sell to sawmills like Dantzler’s. Fairley’s crews were good at a time when harvesting lumber was the most dangerous. He gained a reputation for overcoming nature’s constraints, crafting ways to guide logs through shallow water and over sandbars. Meanwhile, the L.N. Dantzler Sawmill grew into one of Mississippi’s

---

largest early timber companies. Many of Fairley’s offspring remained in the lumber industry for years. Several moved to Hattiesburg.\textsuperscript{227}

Wes Fairley was merely the first. Flocks of other black lumbermen came as the longleaf yellow pine trade boomed. They found jobs fast. The JJ Newman Lumber Company hired a lot of them. Shortly after the large Newman Sawmill opened, eight shacks reserved for black workers popped up just across the New Orleans & Northeastern Railroad tracks. The small wooden homes were so close to the mill that the workers could have tossed a note from their front porches to call in sick. These inhabitants were among the first black settlers to arrive in Hattiesburg. We know that they worked for Newman, but not much else. Their stories are lost to history. But we also know they had options. That was the importance of lumber work. They could come and go as they pleased. Their journeys off the plantations and toward better lives were just beginning. Maybe some stayed in Hattiesburg. Perhaps others took their wages and left for other places. Regardless, during the early days of JJ Newman Lumber, early black workers laid in those small dwellings next to the massive sawmill, their homes so close to the railroad tracks that the wooden shacks must have shook like a wet dog whenever a train would go by. However they had arrived and wherever they would go, the jobs at JJ Newman Lumber were an important first step toward a greater freedom. Newman became synonymous with black workers. Even the company logo was black.\textsuperscript{228}

Thousands of African American workers found employment in Southern longleaf yellow pine. Like the railroads, hundreds of sawmill owners desired black labor. “I would rather have one black man in a sawmill than two white men,” a local lumberman noted.


“All he wants is three square meals a day and his wage paid to him every Saturday night.” Although whites sought a racial monopoly in industrial jobs, some tasks were so unpleasant that they happily offered tasks known as “nigger work” to African Americans. Piney Woods blacks performed general labor tasks that ranged from sweeping shop floors to inspecting trees for defects. Many blacks were also carriage operators, usually the most dangerous job in the plant. Black mill hands operated the carriages that guided logs into massive bandsaw blades that split timbers in two, often sending large, sharp shreds of Pine flying into the industrial workspace. Carriages malfunctioned. If a gear or bandsaw blade became damaged or bent, pieces of the saw itself could come flying toward carriage operators, making the job deadly. Hattiesburg native Osceola McCarty’s grandfather broke his vertebrae in one such accident.229

Another predominantly black job included operating the temporary logging railroads called spur lines that delivered timbers from the forest to the sawmills. Hundreds of black workers served as “graders” or “road monkeys,” laying new track and maintaining the spur lines. These jobs were also incredibly dangerous. In 1912, a thirty-seven year-old twelve year Newman Lumber veteran named John Boyd was working in the forest just south of Hattiesburg when he fell between two timber trains and was crushed between the cars. Less than a week later, Ten-Mile Lumber employees Ernest Reed, Robert Walker, and Andrew Giller were killed in an explosion that violently “tore the bodies of all the victims to shreds.” Another man named Bill Lloyd was decapitated by a train on a dummy lumber line. The jobs were incredibly dangerous and often paid little. But black workers still flocked to the lumberyard jobs, willing to do almost anything to free themselves from the plantations.230


Naval Stores work was probably the worst job associated with the Mississippi lumber industry. Because of that, the workforce was usually about 90% black. Many were imported Tar Heels, hired from the North Carolina Naval Stores industry. By 1916, more tons of Naval Stores products left Gulfport’s harbor than any other port in the world. Thousands of blacks were employed in the area, conducting the arduous task of harvesting naval stores. Turn of the century naval stores workers labored in camps located deep in the forest. Each camp consisted of between fifteen to thirty crops, with one harvester working each crop. Crops consisted of over 10,000 boxes cut into the side of yellow pine trees. Workers known as chippers would “tap” the trees by cutting two or three of these six-inch-wide boxes into each tree to collect the sap, or “dip,” that flowed from the marrow of longleaf pines. Trees could stop bleeding sap in less than a week so chippers had to keep a steady eye on their flow. Their days were spent walking through the forest carrying long metal blades with hooked ends to re-open healed trees. When the boxes filled, the dip was taken to a 65-gallon still where it sat over a furnace. The heated dip produced a nose-burning vapor that collected in a chamber above the still. When that solution cooled, the end result was turpentine. Rosin, pitch, and tar were produced from the byproducts of the excess dip. Collectively, these products are referred to as naval stores.\(^\text{231}\)

The Naval Stores industry offered numerous hazards. Hours spent swinging those heavy, wooden chipping tools resulted in severe scrapes, blisters, scores, and cuts. The work was also incredibly exhausting. Turpentine men hiked across dozens of acres every day, chopping and chipping into trees for hours on end. Those who worked at the turpentine stills were prone to illness. Inhaling turpentine condensation could cause numerous respiratory diseases. Workers were often isolated from black communities, making them even more susceptible to abuse from camp managers. Naval Stores work could at times resemble sharecropping. Turpentine camp isolation benefitted owners who set-up overpriced shops on their grounds, overcharging for goods, and drawing black workers into debts that would be repaid through long hours in the forest. Some distillery

\(^{231}\) This description of Piney Woods turpentine harvesting is taken from an account of a former African American Piney Woods turpentine worker named Tom Walley and various oral histories with turpentine workers conducted by local historian Gilbert Hoffman. See Thigpen, *A Boy in Rural Mississippi & Other Stories*, 176-206; and Hoffman, *Steam Whistles in the Piney Woods*, especially 79-82.
owners only paid piecemeal, leaving any illiterate or even just intimidated blacks unable to contest unfair compensation.\textsuperscript{232}

Still, many blacks jumped at the chance to work in such conditions. They made the best of a hard life, seeking to construct vestiges of a permanent community in those Piney Woods settlements. Many camps built churches. Some had both Baptist and Methodist congregations. Black women followed the camps, supporting the woodchippers by cooking meals and washing clothes. Some turpentine harvesters would work just periodically, only returning when their family needed the money. A sort of sawmill or logging camp culture emerged from these moving industrial spaces. The Mississippi Delta is the uncontested home of the Blues, but many of the genre’s songs were about lumber work. Mother of the Blues Ma Rainey sang songs such as “Log Camp Blues.” The boogie-woogie Blues that later heavily influenced both Rock and Roll and Country Music grew from the travelling log-camp musicians. Blues pioneer Mississippi Matilda Witherspoon grew up in the lumber camps just outside Hattiesburg. The legendary Jelly Roll Morton travelled through those camps in 1904, entertaining and gambling with the turpentine workers. The legendary Robert Johnson was from Hazelhurst, a small sawmill town. Lumber offered mobility and escape, even in its most oppressive form.\textsuperscript{233}

Most black women arrived in Hattiesburg as maids and nannies, there to fill the dreams of whites who sought status, prosperity, and convenience through the employment of domestic servants. Having a black woman working in the kitchen or nursery was a status symbol for many. The domestics completed various tasks, especially caring for children, washing clothes, and preparing meals. But Southern black domestics didn’t blindly accept mistreatment. They created methods of empowerment, switching jobs, blacklisting dangerous or cruel employers, and pan-toting extra food from white


kitchens to feed their own families. The prominent white neighborhoods in Hattiesburg were just across the railroad tracks on the other side of the Newman Mill. Black women ventured toward Bay Street as their men headed into the mills, both groups getting paid by the hour and having the ability to either leave or simply switch jobs if they so wished.  

Hattiesburg jobs attracted black workers from across the state. Ariel Barnes remembered her father moving the family to the Hub City simply because he “found more work here than where he came from.” Richard Boyd’s family arrived in Hattiesburg when his father took a job with JJ Newman Lumber. Eberta Spinks’s father moved his family to one of the small lumber towns outside Hattiesburg before settling in the Hub City. She always wondered, “Why did my dad move on a sawmill job? He was farming and doing good.” Like thousands of others, her dad probably took a job at a Hattiesburg sawmill because of the freedom provided by wage labor. N.R. Burger, who was born in the lumber town of Brookhaven and later moved with his family to Hattiesburg, remembered the prevalence of black sawmill workers. “As a young boy,” he recalled, “I realized was that the mills were manned by blacks as common laborers. The superintendents were mostly black.” Sawmill companies kept imprecise employment records. But their old photographs show the racial dynamic of the mills. Dozens of old lumber company photographs from firms such as JJ Newman and Tatum Lumber show employees posing for company pictures in two rows. In every picture, behind a contingent of seated white employees, stands a string of black workers, men who had moved to the Hub City in search of a freedom available through the promises of the New South. Jobs could always be found in sawmills at the outskirts of town. As the Hattiesburg Daily Progress reported in 1902, “Negroes will board these trains going to the sawmill and then board the [sic], after working a few days, to return to the city.”

---

1910, Forrest County was home to nearly 8,000 blacks. Their numbers were growing rapidly.  

Most blacks who moved to Hattiesburg settled near Mobile Street, a sixty foot wide, dusty pathway that stretched north from the downtown to the banks of the Bouie River. The black neighborhood was framed by the rails and the rivers. The tracks of the Mississippi Central and Gulf & Ship Island Railroads formed the western southern and western borders while the Bouie and Leaf rivers framed the north and east. The neighborhood sat within a few hundred yards of the spot where Captain Hardy ate his transformative lunch in the summer of 1880. That proximity to the river made it the least desirable place to build permanent homes. The rivers flooded constantly so white migrants shied away from the low ground, leaving settlement open for the thousands of black workers who arrived to earn the wages paid by the sawmills and railroads.

Beginning in the 1880s, hundreds of folk houses were constructed in the neighborhood. They popped in long rows along the dusty roads near Mobile Street. Some were larger than others, but they mostly looked alike. The small plain houses featured short, steep metal roofs, double sashed windows, and narrow wood siding carved from the surrounding forest and usually painted green or white. Every home featured a front porch, shaded by flat shed roofs upheld by skinny wooden supports. Those porches may not have looked like much, but they were important. A community came together on those porches. During the hottest months, residents escaped from their humid abodes to the shade of the porches where a breeze might make the afternoons more bearable.

---


236 Department of Planning & Community Development Neighborhood Development Division, “Historic Hattiesburg: The History & Architecture of Hattiesburg’s First Neighborhoods,” Box 1, Folder 1, Hattiesburg Department of Urban Development Collection, USM, especially 6:1-6:3 and 11:3-11:4; and Jessee Oscar McKee, “The Residential Patterns of Blacks in Natchez and Hattiesburg and Other Mississippi Cities” (Ph.D. diss., Michigan State University, 1972).
Neighbors sat out front of their homes, fanning themselves in the sweltering heat, preparing their dinners, braiding their children’s hair, playing music, relaxing after work, and waving and chatting with passersby.237

Near every home was a church. Much of that early black life centered on the church. Mount Carmel Baptist opened its doors in 1886, becoming the first black church in the Mobile Street neighborhoods. Later that year, St. Paul’s Methodist Church opened its doors less than four blocks away. Others popped up in bunches. In 1891, the African Methodist Episcopal Church began services on New Orleans Street, just a block east of Mount Caramel. To the north lay another Methodist Church. True Light Baptist Church opened in 1903 just a few hundred yards away. Mt. Zion Baptist opened the same year on the other side of town. It’s hard to say a lot about those first congregations. The names of the first pastors, deacons, and some charter members can still be found encrypted on some of the church cornerstones, but the lives of these individuals are hard to track beyond that. Nonetheless, it is safe to say that they all saw opportunity in the Hub City of the New South. Each of them arrived in the tide of modernity, probably unsure of their future, but also undoubtedly fleeing farm jobs in search of better lives among the growing black community of Hattiesburg. They were all migrants, every single one of them.

Hattiesburg was brand new. The lumber boom was just beginning. Any of those early settlers over the age of twenty-five had probably been born a slave. The others were most assuredly the sons of daughters of former bondsmen. Some kind of hope carried them there. And their common dreams brought them together. They wanted to worship in peace, to send their kids to school, to have decent paying jobs that offered mobility and a little bit of dignity, and to recover vestiges of freedom in the wake of the broken promises of Reconstruction.238

Black churches played a central role in the Mobile Street neighborhood. They were among the first structures built and one of the few institutions completely controlled

237 Ibid.
238 Mrs. Margaret Boutwell, “Assignment #26—Church History,” May, 1937, Box 10687, Folder: Churches, Negro, Series 447: Historical Research Material, 1935-1942, Works Project Administration Historical Survey (Hereafter WPA-Forrest), Mississippi Department of Archives and History (hereafter, MDAH), Jackson, MS; This information is also derived from personal observations made at the former site of True Light Baptist Church and current site of St. Paul Methodist Church in Hattiesburg, MS on October 8, 2011.
by African Americans. Local residents poured their resources into churches. Each had electric lights and a stove, while most of their homes did not. The buildings transcended religious beliefs. Of course rooted deeply in faith and Christianity, they also provided sites of protection and education, offering blacks a sanctuary away from the horrors of Southern Jim Crow, an existence riddled with lynchings, arrests, and assaults. The community organized in these spaces. Black churches offered classes for adults and children. Congregations took up collections to help each other in times of need, providing insurance against the cruel, crippling casualties of industrial accidents. When a wife lost a husband to the railroad or sawmill, she could turn to the congregation and God. Churches were a daily reminder of togetherness and faith. Mount Caramel sat in the heart of black Hattiesburg. People walked by it on their way to shop, go to work, run errands, or gather near the downtown depots to watch the trains go by. The other churches were located next to banks, around the corner from schools, and across the street from barbershops, watching peacefully over daily black lives. Hundreds of families moved into their environs, building homes and a community around the churches.\(^{239}\)

St. Paul, True Light, and Mt. Zion would swell in membership over the coming decades. Their members were extremely active, participating in dozens of mutual aid societies, ensuring the welfare of their black neighbors and helping to carve out spaces for dreams on the fringes of a segregated society. Undoubtedly, some of them moved to places like Jackson, New Orleans, or even further. Others stayed put, laying deep roots in the Hub City. Wherever they ended up, those early congregations provided a foundation for something later to come. One can only imagine how they would have felt if they could have seen that first day of Freedom School in 1964 when hundreds of beaming black youths poured into those churches, standing hand-in-hand in the shadows of those pews, belting out freedom songs.

Commerce followed the migrants. New black residents needed stores, and those industrial jobs of the New South gave them cash to spend. But Jim Crow regulations

\(^{239}\) Sheet 13 and 16, Hattiesburg, MS, March, 1910, Sanborn Maps; McCarty, interview; Department of Planning & Community Development Neighborhood Development Division, “Historic Hattiesburg,” Box 1, Folder 1, Hattiesburg Department of Urban Development Collection, USM, especially 6:1-6:3; McKee, “The Residential Patterns of Blacks in Natchez and Hattiesburg and Other Mississippi Cities,” especially 84-94.
barred them from enjoying much of the downtown commerce available to Hattiesburg whites. They couldn’t eat at the Hotel Hattiesburg or sidle up to the counter at John McLeod’s Drug Store to order a fountain soda. Some shops catered to black customers. But these exchanges were surrounded by the daily humiliations and insults of Jim Crow life. Sandwiches were delivered through swinging back doors to blacks who waited in alleyways next to the trash. Shoes couldn’t be tried on in stores nor returned if they didn’t fit properly. Dress sizes were estimated. Hats needed to be eyeballed.²⁴⁰

So blacks shopped among themselves. Dozens of stores popped up along the dirt roads of Mobile Street, supported by the Hub City’s burgeoning black community. The wages of the New South jobs trickled down. They all shopped there. Turpentine distillers, Pullman Porters, undertakers, bellhops, laborers, landscapers, laundresses, preachers, teachers, deliverymen, lumbermen, firemen, nannies, cooks, and maids all spent their money in those Mobile Street neighborhood stores. When Hattiesburg turned twelve years old in 1906, Mobile Street was already thriving. The center of black Hattiesburg life was home to shops such as Kennard Furniture, Howell Furniture, The Star Men’s Clothing Shop, and The People’s Drug Store. There were two groceries and a restaurant. Six black barbershops competed for haircuts. Hardaway’s, Carmichael’s, and Burnsides’s stood out. A two-story hotel named the Glenmore housed migrant workers and musicians. Sam Carmichael lived and cut hair on the 200 block. He was a something of a local magnate whose holdings included a butcher shop, barbershop, billiard room, and later a dance hall and skating rink. Dozens of businesses opened up along the black community’s central vein. Hundreds of those rowhouses and their lively porches were scattered throughout.²⁴¹

Formal storefronts were merely one aspect of that bustling commercial center. Many residents helped make ends meet by selling homemade goods, cutting hair, or taking in boarders. A good number of entrepreneurs operated out of their own homes. The tailor LC Bush lived and worked on the 600 block of Mobile Street. E.H. Williams

²⁴⁰ For more on everyday Jim Crow discrimination in early twentieth century Mississippi, see McMillen, *Dark Journey*, especially, 3-32.
²⁴¹ Sheet 6, Hattiesburg, MS, October, 1906, Sanborn Maps; Sheet 16, Hattiesburg, MS, March, 1910, Sanborn Maps; *1905 Hattiesburg City Directory*, USM.
worked for him there, but lived two blocks away. Just down the street, H.A. Dean built a small, wooden dwelling off the side of his grocery store. A doorway connected his home and business. New shops opened constantly. In the coming years, the community added more grocery stores, barbershops, and tailors. A bicycle shop opened near Mobile and East Seventh Street. Just around the corner opened a bank named Magic City. Birmingham, Alabama’s nickname is the “Magic City.” So maybe the owners came from there; but then again, maybe not. Hattiesburg touched the entire South through its railroads. They could have been from anywhere. What mattered was that Hattiesburg blacks needed their own bank. So they got one. And its owners named it whatever they pleased. It was closed by 1915, yet another butcher taking its place. We don’t know a lot about that Magic City Bank. But it held a prominent role in the middle of that black thriving black neighborhood for a few years. In 1908, its total holdings topped an impressive $13,000 (the historical equivalent of more than $300,000). It’s probably safe to say, however, that its owners didn’t end up picking cotton.242

Black migrants continuously poured into the Hub City in those early years as Hattiesburg grew. By 1918, Hattiesburg was not only home to the major sawmills and railroads, but also two foundries, three gravel shops, three steam laundries, two metal sheet concerns, two cabinet works, four printing plants, an oil mill, brick works, fertilizer company, three cross arm factories, a canning plant, and a mattress factory. All of them employed blacks. The wages earned by the black workers may not have always been much. But those dollars flowed out through the dusty dirt paths of Mobile Street like a slow spring flood. Dozens of entrepreneurs took notice, moving to the city or turning their homes into storefronts. By the end of World War I, the Mobile Street neighborhood had two confectionaries, five cleaners, two dentists, two doctors, four furnished boarding houses, two shoemakers, half a dozen barbers, two tailors, six restaurants, and fifteen grocery stores. The black community even had its own version of a Chamber of

242 Sheet 6, Hattiesburg, MS, October, 1906, Sanborn Maps; 1905 Hattiesburg City Directory, USM; Sheet 16, Hattiesburg, MS, March, 1910, Sanborn Maps; Sheet 14, Hattiesburg, MS, August, 1915, Sanborn Maps; McCarty, interview; Department of Planning & Community Development Neighborhood Development Division, “Historic Hattiesburg,” Box 1, Folder 1, Hattiesburg Department of Urban Development Collection, USM, especially 6:1-6:3; McKee, “The Residential Patters of Blacks in Natchez and Hattiesburg and Other Mississippi Cities,” especially 84-94; and “Hattiesburg, Miss.,” The Freeman, October 17, 1908, 8 for $13,000 statistic.
Commerce called the Colored Men’s Business Association. “They had cleaners. They had funeral homes. They had stores,” remembers Eberta Spinks. “Everything that you could imagine was on Mobile Street.” Dinner was served at the Blue Moon Café, movies shown at the Star Theatre, and ice cream scooped at the Chester Jackson Ice Cream Shop. Ariel Barnes remembered a neighborhood filled with “grocers, tailors, [and] butchers.” Some businesses stayed open for only a short time. Others lasted decades. Thanks to Jim Crow, black customers had no choice but shop at black owned stores. Doctors, merchants, and janitors all ate together. Their nickels and dimes went into the bellies and heads of the children of the cooks who served them their dinners. Segregation built a community. As white Hattiesburg sprouted on top of a hill, the black Mobile Street neighborhood grew in its shadow.243

The blacks who moved to Hattiesburg lived under a sword of racial oppression, but found ways to manufacture happiness. The teachers, entrepreneurs, and other professionals especially found ways to enhance their lives. Many local leaders belonged to the Howell Literary Club, which met on Sunday afternoons after church to read scripture, listen to addresses given by local leaders, and judge debates between local intellectuals over issues such as child labor. Black business leaders organized the Negro Progressive Business League to “unite, foster, and promote” local African American entrepreneurships. Local Hattiesburgers also held massive dinner parties with oysters, fried chicken, and white wine, and gathered on warm afternoons to listen to the four-man Hattiesburg Big Four String Band. Dozens of locals would occasionally gather in the evenings to read copies of the black Indianapolis Freeman newspaper, which often printed stories detailing the social lives of African Americans who lived in the Mobile Street neighborhood and sent notice of their activities to the Indianapolis paper. Locals could buy copies of the paper at the G.T. Spence’s cobbler shop on Mobile Street to read about the latest events from local black society. Their neighborhood and friends offered

243 Polk’s Hattiesburg City Directory, 1918 (R.L. Polk & Co. Publishers, 1918), USM; Spinks, interview; and Barnes, interview.
subtle escapes from the racial horrors that haunted their lives outside of those black enclaves.  

Sometime between 1895 and 1900, J.B. Woods opened a little multifaceted shop at 509 Mobile Street. The building housed a restaurant, grocery store, and butcher shop on the bottom level with a rooming house upstairs. The shop isn’t listed in early city directories, probably because of its reputation as a part-time brothel. Travelling musicians stayed there, arriving from New Orleans on the Queen and Crescent City Route and entertaining black Hattiesburgers on weekend nights. But even in its early days, the Woods Guesthouse also held a political function. Owner J.B. Woods held Republican Party meetings there from 1921 to 1956, encouraging the few registered local black voters to vote for the party of Lincoln. Their political ambitions were the stuff of dreams. Even if an African American somehow managed to register to vote, made it to the polling place on Election Day, and cast his ballot, no member of the Party of Lincoln was ever coming close to getting elected in Forrest County. That wouldn’t change until the Civil Rights Movement. Most of the time, two Democrats just ran against each other. But Woods could dream. In the long arc of history, where generational influences run deep, even the earliest, least likely dreams matter. The site gained a reputation, leaving behind a long legacy of political ambition and activism. Because of that foundation, the Woods Guest Home was an easy selection as the local headquarters for 1964 Freedom Summer activists.

In 1916, a man named Malachi Collins and his business partner E.W. Hall founded a funeral company named the Hall & Collins Undertakers and Embalmers. It was the first black-owned funeral home in Hattiesburg. Funeral directors served a crucial

---

244 “Hattiesburg, Miss.,” The Freeman, March 7, 1908, 3; “united, promote…” quoted in “Hattiesburg, Miss.,” The Freeman, November 7, 1908, 1; “Hattiesburg, Miss.,” The Freeman, March 14, 1908, 8; “Hattiesburg, Miss.,” The Freeman, November 14, 1908, 1; and Sheet 15, Hattiesburg, MS, March, 1910, Sanborn Maps.

245 Department of Planning & Community Development Neighborhood Development Division, “Historic Hattiesburg,” Box 1, Folder 1, Hattiesburg Department of Urban Development Collection, USM, especially 6:1-6:3 and 11:3-11:4; Sheet 12, Hattiesburg, MS, August, 1915, Sanborn Maps; and “Fire Destroys Historic Hotel,” Hattiesburg American, September 18, 1998, copy in Folder 1, Woods Guest House Collection, USM. Folder 1, Woods Guest House Collection, USM. As Jessee Oscar Mckee observed, it is difficult to track the exact number and locations of many businesses because not all had a name and many operated from private residences. See McKee, “The Residential Patterns of Blacks in Natchez and Hattiesburg and Other Mississippi Cities,” footnote #25 on 92.
but often overlooked role in the black communities of the New South. Collins’s formal training was actually in teaching. As the son of former slaves, he deeply valued education. His parents had constantly pushed their kids to learn, and Malachi fulfilled their educational dreams for their children in 1909 by earning a degree from Rust College. Several years down the road, he saw opportunity in Hattiesburg’s burgeoning black community and with his partner opened that new undertaking business at 630 Mobile Street in the heart of black Hattiesburg. Like dozens of other small business owners, Malachi and his wife Mary moved into the same building where they worked. The quickly became integral parts of the neighborhood. Their young daughter Clarie grew up surrounded by a rich family life and was reared by two parents who deeply valued education. Clarie would make them all proud with her degrees. She went on to earn a bachelor’s from Spelman College, a Master’s from Columbia University, and later an honorary doctorate from her father’s alma mater Rust College, where she served on the Board of Trustees.²⁴⁶

Hundreds of other families migrated to the Hub City, settling together in that rising Mobile Street neighborhood. Betty, Cara, and Laura Atkins moved onto Railroad Street and took in laundry. Tommie Durant found a job at Newman Lumber while his wife Winnie made extra cash as a washerwoman. TL Pratt took over the ministry at St. Paul’s Methodist church, and his wife Emma taught at the local school. Lula Fairley was one of the students. Lula’s father worked as a tailor. The widow Mary Croft took in boarders on Currie Street. Bud and Octavia Amos moved to Whitney. She was a cook and he worked at the Mississippi Central Railroad shops. Mason Sims opened a restaurant. Frank Cox found a job at the People’s Drug Store at 426 Mobile Street. We can’t tell the complete story for all of these lives that intersected in Hattiesburg. But it is clear that black folks were arriving en masse in this sprawling Hub City of the New

South, building their own dreams on the backs of modernity. They too would find opportunity in lumber and railroads.²⁴⁷

Most black Hattiesburg children grew up attending a wooden schoolhouse with red doors. Located near the intersection of Mobile and Sixth Streets, it rested in the heart of the black community, just around the corner from the Mount Carmel Baptist Church. The school was overcrowded. Virtually all new Hattiesburg migrants sent their kids to the schoolhouse with the red door. Its faculty consisted of between six to eight black teachers, with as many as one hundred students pouring into each class. But education always offered something special, and the school served as a springboard for some young Hattiesburgers who ventured out into the state to attend one of Mississippi’s small black colleges. Many returned home and forever made lives among the community that thrived in that neighborhood.²⁴⁸

Turner Smith, the man who dropped that plow in the middle of a cotton field to go to college in Meridian, made sure his sons received an education. All his boys completed school. Most of them went off to college. Four became doctors. Their father’s emphasis on education had a generational impact. His son Hammond continued beyond a bachelor’s degree. After graduating from Alcorn State Agricultural and Mechanical University in Lorman, Mississippi, Hammond went on to receive a pharmacy degree from Meharry Medical College in Nashville. He graduated in 1924 and moved back to Hattiesburg. The following year, Hammond opened a drug store on Mobile Street and stayed in business until 1980 when massive companies like Walmart began crushing small Southern businesses. Three other brothers became physicians, their father’s love of education deeply ingrained in their values. They thrived in college. Their educational achievement made them leaders to the blacks who lived around them in that Mobile Street neighborhood. It also gave them space, even freedom. The Smith brothers for years formed a local medical dynasty. Their offices were not only centers for healing and

²⁴⁷ The 1909 and 1918 city directories include the occupations and employers of all listed black Hattiesburg residents. 1909 Hattiesburg City Directory, USM; and Hattiesburg City Directory, 1918, USM.
²⁴⁸ Barnes, interview; Boyd, interview; E. Hammond Smith, interview; McCarty, interview; Mrs. Mattie Lou Hardy, interview by Priscilla R. Walker, transcript, unspecified location, October 24, 1995, USM-OH; and Burger, interview.
support, but also a haven. Important gatherings would be held there in the years to come. That little wooden Mobile Street neighborhood school had given them important start.  

The black neighborhood also had a seedier side, or perhaps merely a more controversial one. Working-class life was hard. Just being black in the Jim Crow South was stressful. And those workers with aching backs and tired minds also had dimes in their pockets. They needed places to relax, to blow off steam. And there were certainly places to do so on Mobile Street. Laws were shattered inside the walls of those wooden rowhouses. The neighborhood was home to a lot of whiskey, especially after Prohibition. Black bootleggers were arrested almost weekly. One man named John House had nine full pints, seven half pints, and five quarts of whiskey on his person when he was arrested in 1916. Prostitutes frequently entertained their guests at the Woods Guest House. A nearby juke joint called the Red Goose offered a spot for a night of drinking, dancing, or more tragically a knife fight. Sawmill workers took the lumber trains into town for an evening of excitement. Fights often broke out, spilling onto Mobile Street from the juke joints. There were plenty of conflicts between African Americans, even sober ones too. In 1907, Joseph Pettus, President of the People’s Bank and a local black leader, shot and killed one of his cashiers and stole $2,700 from the vault. We’ll probably never know why. Nonetheless, he was tracked down and arrested. The movement of people to cities to start businesses and send their children to school offers a civilizing or even peaceful tone. But the South of the early 20th century was a violent place. Although they could find a measure of solace in that Mobile Street neighborhood, black life in Hattiesburg was hardly peaceful.

Racial oppression loomed ominously at every turn, threatening lynching, the chain gang, or just daily humiliations. The city fattened its pockets by fining blacks for random offenses. Hattiesburg police issued daily citations to blacks for offenses including swearing, vagrancy, and public intoxication. The all-white police force was oppressive and racist. There was no way to fight the accusations in the Mayor’s Court. In 1902, a

249 E. Hammond Smith, interview.
black woman named Emma Houze was fined $3.50 (almost $90 today) for allegedly swearing while downtown. Maybe she swore. Or perhaps someone simply misheard her. Quite possibly she was just being fined for being black at the wrong place and time. It didn’t really matter. The case was typical. Mississippi had stripped away black rights. African Americans were not to be recognized in a court of law. Their testimonies would not count. Black defendants would often have to pay random and excessive fines. The Hattiesburg Daily Progress reinforced negative stereotypes by printing sporadic editorials on the demerits of black character. In 1902, it told its readers, “It requires no practice for a negro to lie. Indeed it would require considerable practice for him to tell the truth.” Accusations were as good as convictions.251

Other offenses resulted in more serious punishments. By the turn of the century, Mississippi had abolished the convict-lease system because of its horrific nature. But that didn’t stop local officials from using city prisoners for municipal projects. The Hub City reconstructed a version of the chain-gang for crimes such as small scale theft, public vagrancy, and assault. Hattiesburg used free black convict labor to maintain its streets and complete small improvement jobs. Overseers and even conscientious white citizens ensured convict industriousness and hard work. On a late spring day in 1902, a convict named Will Smith picked his lock while working on a downtown chain gang and fled into the surrounding forest. News of the escape spread like wildfire and local residents rallied quickly, joining policemen and a team of bloodhounds to pursue Smith into the woods. The convict made it six miles into the forest before bloodhounds and the mob tracked him down and returned the prisoner to his chains. Many considered the chase a sport. A reporter from the Hattiesburg Daily Progress covered the story, telling readers that, “The chase was a beautiful one…That nigger ran, that nigger flew, that nigger tore his shirt in two.”252

251 “Mayor’s Court,” Hattiesburg Daily Progress, May 24, 1902, 4; and “Legs and Lies,” Hattiesburg Daily Progress, July 24, 1902, 2.
252 “The Dogs Ran Him Down,” Hattiesburg Daily Progress, June 5, 1902, 4. Most of the literature on black life in the Jim Crow South highlights the dramatic and horrifying experiences of blacks in long-term prison camps or even in northern cities, but daily police harassment and periodic, uncontestable fines probably affected a larger number of African Americans who were constantly harassed by law enforcement officials.
For more serious accusations, death waited. Any African American accused of a crime was subject to collective action. Whites were eager to enforce racial supremacy on those black bodies. It may be overkill to call them barbaric, but those many whites were certainly enthusiastic about death. Mobs formed at the drop of a hat to attack and punish black perpetrators. When Mrs. Ed Gardner told her husband of being raped by a black man on the Pearl & Leaf River Railroad (the original name of the JJ Newman Company’s Mississippi Central Railroad), dozens of white vigilantes poured out of their houses from all over the city. They carried crowbars, pitchforks, handguns, and shotguns, determined to hunt the perpetrators. The only clue they had was that the offender was a mulatto. That hardly narrowed their choices. About 10% of Mississippi blacks, or nearly 90,000 (or 5% of the entire state population), were of mixed race at the turn of the twentieth century. That left a lot of options. Yet, off went the mob with their guns and bloodhounds to dish out their form of racial justice. There would be no trial if the perpetrator was found. The judicial system was for whites. As the *Hattiesburg Daily Progress* noted, “if found he will very likely be lynched.” The lynchings weren’t just punishment for the accused. They were also a cruel ritualistic warning to all local blacks, one designed to show that their bodies and that society belonged to whites. The irony of the accused man’s mixed-race ancestry was probably lost to the mob as they combed the streets of Hattiesburg looking for the mulatto who dared to force himself upon a white woman.253

Just hours into the search, Mrs. Gardner’s husband caught sight of a mulatto named Walter Bankhead crossing the street and miraculously identified poor Bankhead as the man who had raped his wife. It is a wonder how Gardner “knew.” Maybe he was just tired. At the very least, the mob had probably grown anxious. The crowd grabbed Bankhead and marched him to the sheriff’s office where he was charged for sexually assaulting Mrs. Gardner. The mob went home to rest and probably spread further word of a lynching to take place that night. Meanwhile, Bankhead proclaimed his innocence to the jailer, claiming to have a white alibi. When the mob reassembled that night and

arrived at the prison to lynch the accused mulatto, the local sheriff stood them down, citing his duty to uphold the law. Two companies of men arrived to escort the black prisoner to safety in Jackson. The *Hattiesburg Daily Progress* applauded the sheriff’s office on the grounds of legality, sympathizing with the legal obligations that prevented him from enjoying the lynching. “If, without overriding the law, the negro could have been put to death,” the paper noted, “they would not have objected in any way.”

Moving Bankhead to Jackson saved his life. One can only imagine the terror the accused black prisoner experienced as he waited in the cell, unsure if the mob would prevail and pull him out into the streets where they would do God-knows-what to his body. Seven years before, a 1,000-person mob had pumped 500 shots into Tom Johnson’s flesh, lifting the black man’s dead body from the ground like a rising ghost. Perhaps Bankhead hadn’t heard of Tom Johnson’s story. Maybe he had. Either way, as a black man in the Jim Crow South, the threat of lynching lingered over his life like a swinging pendulum blade. The lesson for blacks was that you could be killed at any moment, without a fair trial or repercussions. It was an essential part of Jim Crow. And Bankhead must have welled up inside, sitting in that cell, wondering if he would die for being black, actually mulatto, at the wrong time in the Jim Crow South. But then he had a stroke of good luck, if you could call it that.

Five days after Bankhead was nearly lynched, another black man named Will Dantzler confessed to raping Mrs. Gardner. Dantzler tried to retract his confession the next day, but his fate was sealed when Mrs. Gardner positively identified him as the man who had attacked her on that railroad car. On June 30, Dantzler was convicted of rape and sentenced to death. For reasons unknown, the District Attorney still sought an indictment against Bankhead. But the grand jury refused, allowing the black man to go free after twenty-four harrowing days in custody for a crime he did not commit. Mrs. Gardner verified that Dantzler was the man that had attacked her. At 11:34 on the

---


255 For more on the Tom Johnson lynching, see Chapter 1.
morning of August 1, 1902, a trap door sprung open under Will Dantzler’s feet and a rope snapped his neck. Bankhead’s whereabouts were unknown.256

The following summer, a mob would not be stopped at the prison gate. On August 8, 1903, a black prisoner named Amos Jones was lynched by a mob of angry Hub City residents. Earlier that morning, Jones was in jail awaiting trial for attempted murder on a Gulf & Ship Island Railroad car when he and three other prisoners, one black and two white, launched an escape attempt. The exact details of their escape are unclear, but we know that at least one of the men jumped jailer M.M. Sexton and then freed the others. During the ensuing raucous, Sexton was shot three times, allegedly by Amos Jones. Deputies arrived on the scene before the inmates could make a clean break and subdued the prisoners. Only the other black inmate escaped. As word of the attempted escape spread through the city, a mob formed to enact justice on Jones. The parade of angry white citizens entered the jail and pulled Jones out of his cell and down to the street in front of the jail. Then they tied a noose to his neck and dragged him through the downtown to Gordon’s Creek. By the time they arrived at a bridge a half mile away from the jail, Jones was unconscious, or perhaps even dead. But the crowd wasn’t finished. Next, they strung his body high on a telegraph pole and “emptied their revolvers into it.” The white prisoners remained in their cells. There is no word on what became of the black escapee.257

Other incidents of violence peppered black life in Hattiesburg. African Americans were not always mere victims. But resisting mistreatment often led to fatal consequences.

In 1905, two members of a Hattiesburg municipal chain gang conspired to murder their


257 This narrative is drawn from “Mob Lynched Negro,” The Washington Post, August 9, 1903, 1; “Dragged Negro to Death,” The New York Times, August 9, 1903, 1; and “Negro Shoots M.M. Sexton and is Lynched by Mob,” Hattiesburg Daily Progress, August 10, 1903, 4. The quotations are from the Washington Post article.
sixty-eight year old overseer. According to the Washington Post, the men rushed the guard and quickly overpowered him, killing him with their bare hands. Then the convicts fled to the home of a local black barkeeper named Ed Lewis who helped them out of their chains so they could flee unencumbered into the forest. Their timing, however, was terrible. At that moment, Hattiesburg was surrounded by a military-backed yellow fever quarantine line that was controlling movement in and out of the city. As the prisoners fled, one of them was shot in the head by a soldier. He didn’t die; not yet. The other ran free somewhere into the countryside. The prisoner who had been shot was interrogated and eventually offered the black bartender Ed Lewis as their accomplice. Both Lewis and the attempted escapee were thrown in jail as a crowd scoured the countryside for the other runaway.258

At nine o’clock that evening, a one thousand-man mob descended upon the prison and dragged them out. Some in the mob started a fire, suggesting they burn the men alive. But that was turned down in favor of a more humane death. The crowd marched the two black men, the convict and the barkeep who had removed his chains, to a local bridge. They placed nooses around each of their necks and pushed them off the side, snapping their vertebras, and probably killing them within seconds. Then they pumped several volleys into each man’s dangling, lifeless body before dispersing. “The lynching,” reported the Washington Post, “was conducted in an orderly manner.”259

Blacks would not always stand by as wild-eyed, barbarous white mobs lynched members of their race. In Wiggins, one of the lumber towns founded just south of Hattiesburg on the Gulf & Ship Island Railroad, African Americans gathered to stop a lynching. The trouble started with an attempted arrest. Two deputies tried to take a black man named William Smith into custody. But Smith refused. And he was armed. He shot at the deputies, fatally wounding one of them, before retreating into his home where he barricaded the doors and windows and refused to come out. A white mob arrived with torches, threatening to burn him alive if he did not surrender. Surrounded and out of options, Smith succumbed to the warning and was escorted to the city jail. That evening,

the mob reassembled outside the jail, almost undoubtedly with the aim of killing the prisoner. They lobbed dynamite into the jail and fired several volleys into Smith’s cell. But their melee was interrupted. Sometime after Smith’s arrest, a group of black citizens had also gathered to stop the lynching they knew was coming. As the white crowd harassed Smith, the black assembly entered the scene and began firing into the lynch mob. The crowd scattered. At least one member of the white group was killed, and numerous individuals on both sides were shot in the ensuing volley. Smith himself was badly injured and had to have both his arms amputated. But he survived the night. The black crowd had saved his life.260

The violent aspect of Hattiesburg Jim Crow is fairly easy to document. Death sends a clear and loud message. Harder to fully capture is the everyday segregation that pervaded black life. The full enjoyments of modern Hattiesburg, the Hub City of the New South, were not available to African Americans. They could not dine at the best restaurants in the burgeoning downtown. Nor could they check into the hotels. Their children did not perform senior plays at downtown theatres every May. Nor were they baptized in Gordon’s Creek on warm Sundays. None of them ever wondered away lazy Saturdays sitting at soda fountains, sipping root beer floats and spending extra nickels on handfuls of candy. They would never attend the new state teacher’s college. Nor could they run for Mayor or serve on the Board of Directors of the Chamber of Commerce. The railroads and lumber made the Hub City rich and prosperous, offering for thousands alternatives to the poverty stricken lives of sharecroppers. But the vestiges of slavery and racial apartheid made her ugly and unfair for the thousands of blacks who arrived in Hattiesburg. The segregation of the Jim Crow South shielded from blacks the prospects of modern America, and the daily humiliations served as reminders that the opportunities of this society were not for them. Their experiences were interplay between modernization and the past, where the opportunities of the New South confronted the historical legacies of slavery and racial oppression.261

261 For more on everyday Jim Crow discrimination in early twentieth century Mississippi, see McMillen, Dark Journey, especially, 3-32; “Hotel Hattiesburg Opening Banquet,” Image, Box 1, Folder 3, Hattiesburg Historical Photographs Collection, USM.
The negative aspects of black life in Hattiesburg sent some residents onto other cities in search of greater freedoms and opportunities. In 1924, Malachi Collins picked up his family and moved to Jackson. He bought the old Frazier Funeral Home from its previous owner G.F. Frazier who was on his way to Cleveland. The new Frazier and Collins Funeral Home sat at 406 Farish Street, in the heart of Jackson’s largest black neighborhood. More business was available in the state capital, which between 1920 and 1930 would more than double in population, passing Meridian as Mississippi’s largest city. Malachi Collins’s quickly became Jackson’s most important black Funeral Home. But Hattiesburg had given him a start. His success on Mobile Street enabled Collins to put down a $5,000 down payment (more than $60,000 today) on that new Farish Street business. Mobile Street offered mobility. Malachi maintained contact with Hattiesburg blacks for the rest of his life. Many of them drove up to Jackson in 1939 to attend his funeral. That funeral home propelled the family. The mother-daughter team of Mary and Clarie ran the family business for another fifty years, becoming a widely respected and important name among black funeral home directors. Young Clarie was civically active, joining the local NAACP and Mississippi Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs, and eventually formed her own organization called Womanpower Unlimited that helped a group called the Freedom Riders in 1961. Clarie’s economic independence was crucial when the Movement came. Those roots were laid in the early days during the rise of Mobile Street.  

Jim Crow was not merely a synonym for segregation, a condition of separate. It was a pervasive racial training of sorts, an early parasite on black self-esteem. It meant fear and the absence of hope. If you were black, the daily humiliations were designed to break you before you could even take a job. Walking down the street became a trial.

---

People were pushed from the sidewalks to the streets. Men became boys to strangers in front of their children. People disappeared into the night. Whites arrived in some places like the Grim Reaper. Their presence at a jail, workplace, or even schoolyard often meant death. Jim Crow grew into the psyche of black Mississippians like a tumor. The memory of a friend gone kept some awake at night. Women silently swallowed the stories of groping hands or even rape just to allow their peace for their families as another sun rose. Black men crept through downtown, hoping never to be accused as something as trivial as lingering with a look too long on the wrong person. The children never knew all their parents went through, but they learned the lessons fast. Jim Crow cut them at their knees. It changed and shaped who they were. Only a long list could document all the daily counts of Jim Crow horror. But surely, the daily reminders haunted them. And they all experienced it. That way of life hung over them like a debt, gathering stress and grinding into their souls. Hattiesburg was a place from which people fled.

But it was also a place where people arrived. Thousands moved there. And that same system also brought blacks together. Each of them faced common dangers, similar limitations of freedom. And many sought community and mobility by gathering in places like Hattiesburg. Yet, in their communities, they too could be people, enjoying the ability to let race slip into a secondary issue. The stress of being black in Jim Crow Mississippi melted away into Saturday night smiles and deep collective breaths of song on Sunday mornings as they gathered in their churches dreaming of a different type of world. Like Malachi Collins, some used it as a temporary stopping point. But even if they only stayed for a few years, months, or even days, Hattiesburg served as an important entrée toward a better life, a vessel to elsewhere. For plenty of others, Hattiesburg was the final destination, the better life promised to them through wage labor and a strong black community. And they found it near Mobile Street. By 1921, the neighborhood was home to 638 black residences with approximately 5,000 black residents scattered throughout Forrest County. Despite the lynchings, arrests, and harassment, they kept coming. Opportunity was calling them there.²⁶³

Mobile Street grew in that floodplain, just a slight slope down from the Hattiesburg city center, sitting quite literally in the shadows of the Hub City. Whites had Main and Front Streets, but blacks had Mobile. Their community grew strong in that space. They found control on those streets and freedom in those church groups and juke joints. Opportunity sprouted deep in the heart of the black neighborhoods of the New South. On Saturday nights, their bodies pulsed with possibilities and faces beamed with smiles as they strolled through their neighborhood after a hard week in the sawmills, waving to neighbors on the porches of those rowhouses. Their lives were difficult. But they were also better here than they had been elsewhere. The Mobile Street neighborhood was their little pocket of freedom. A generation built equity, establishing deep roots, laying a foundation. Their children went to school in that neighborhood, those young hands free from the cotton burrs and cracked fingers from which their parents fled. Power would come through school lessons, business receipts, and the rise of their black churches. Mobile Street had everything they needed. As one resident later remembered, “Mobile Street was our city. Mobile Street supplied all the needs of our community.” They too, were New Southerners, chasing the dreams of modernity, fighting for livelihoods away from the farms that dominated the lives of their ancestors.264

*   *   *

Eight days after his Colored American Day address, Frederick Douglass was scheduled to speak in front of the Labor Congress. He was glad to do so, and used the opportunity to warn the Labor Congress of the dangers and difficulties facing Southern black sharecroppers. But Douglass was also growing older. By 1893, the elder spokesman was seventy-five years old. His time was nearing an end. So he brought along two of the race’s rising stars, offering for each the chance to speak in front of the Labor Congress. During the previous months, Booker T. Washington and the journalist Ida B. Washington, and the journalist Ida B.

---

264 Hardy, interview; “Mobile Street District,” in Department of Planning & Community Development Neighborhood Development Division, “Historic Hattiesburg,” especially 6:1-6:2, Box 1, Folder 1, Hattiesburg Department of Urban Development Collection, USM; E. Hammond Smith, interview; and Mrs. Lillie McLaurin quoted in Department of Planning & Community Development Neighborhood Development Division, “Historic Hattiesburg,” 6:2, Box 1, Folder 1, Hattiesburg Department of Urban Development Collection, USM.
Wells had emerged as two of the most influential black voices in America. Douglass probably saw in each a bit of himself. Both Washington and Wells were gifted orators and former slaves whose education had set them apart, creating leadership roles among their race. Douglass extended invitations for both to join him in front of the Labor Congress gathering on September 2, 1893. Washington spoke first.\(^\text{265}\)

By the late summer of 1893, Booker T. Washington was well known in some circles, but had yet to achieve the national recognition he would gain over the next few years. Washington had first stood out as a prize pupil at Samuel Chapman Armstrong’s Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, a Freedmen’s Bureau offshoot in Virginia. His impactful orational style had developed during his time at Hampton as he participated in numerous debating societies while contemplating a career as a teacher, lawyer, or preacher. Shortly after graduation, Washington taught for a while at Hampton before Armstrong recommended his pupil to lead Alabama’s Tuskegee Institute, an all-black institution modeled after the Hampton school. Washington was a capable academic leader and fundraiser. Tuskegee did well under his watch. Washington also maintained a busy schedule, often travelling with Armstrong to supplement Hampton fundraising efforts. The mentor liked to show off his articulate and deliberate protégé as if Booker T. Washington was a sort of living black proof of the potential of industrial education to advance African American character and morality. Washington’s complementary role gave Armstrong credence, but it also limited his individualism and belittled his own agency. In 1890, the *Chicago Tribune* called the emerging black leader “competent and cultivated,” as if referring to a maturing harvest.\(^\text{266}\)

Washington’s slow but steady emergence into the public sphere was hastened on May 11, 1893 when Samuel Chapman Armstrong died of a heart attack. The Fair had opened just ten days prior, and Armstrong’s death catapulted Washington into position as

\(^{265}\) “Progress of Colored Brothers,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 3, 1893, 8; Reed, *All the World is Here*, 129-130.  
the South’s preeminent advocate of black industrial education. So Douglass tapped him to speak to the Labor Congress. Washington was characteristically tactful, criticizing sharecropping because of its detrimental effects on both races. “The crop lien system has fastened its fangs on all forms of business” he testified, “affecting the white man as well as the black man.” Washington also played on the need for black character development, warning that “this system affects the black man morally as well as industrially.” And as always, Washington knew his audience. Not wanting to step on any Northern industrialist toes, he closed by optimistically arguing that Southern blacks could “sooner conquer Southern prejudice than cope with Northern competition.” Washington was far more accommodating and less abrasive than many other black leaders. This approach made him stand out to whites among a promising throng of black educators and journalists who assembled during Douglass’s final years.267

Less than two years later, Frederick Douglass was standing in the foyer of his Cedar Hill home on a cold February evening when he suddenly fell to his knees. He and his wife Helen had just returned from a day at the National Association for Women’s Suffrage Convention in Washington D.C.’s Metzerott Hall, where he had sat on a platform next to his longtime friend Susan B. Anthony, supporting yet another crusade for justice. After dinner, he and Helen were preparing to venture back into the crisp February night for a trip to an evening speaking engagement at the nearby Hillsdale Church when he collapsed from a heart attack and suddenly died. The carriage driver was sent ahead to deliver the terrible news to another anxious crowd. Frederick Douglass was seventy-seven years old when he died on that Wednesday evening of February 20, 1895. Perhaps the most extraordinary black man to ever live in America, he was the first national leader of the race. His death left a wide dearth and leadership vacuum in black America. No one individual could fill it. But more than anyone else, Booker T. Washington would emerge.268

It probably should have been Wells. She was more outspoken and better connected, counting among her allies the influential Boston publisher William Monroe Trotter and educators Anna Julia Cooper and Mary Church Terrell, the woman who as a sixteen year-old had intimidated a conductor into letting her sit in the white section of a train car. She had spoken in Europe on numerous occasions, and her column was syndicated in black papers on both sides of the Atlantic. Wells was also far more aggressive and bold. She could be. Life in the North allowed for it. Yet, as a woman it is questionable how both whites and blacks would have responded to her as the voice of a race. Also, life happened. In the spring of 1895, Wells fell in love with a black Chicagoan named Ferdinand Barnett, a fellow veteran of the 1893 World’s Fair protest. They were married on June 27, 1895. She had her first child in 1896. Three more followed. For a brief time she contemplated leaving the public eye altogether, struggling to reconcile her public and private lives. Children took precedent. Wells changed her lifestyle, leaving her public position as journalist and lecturer, and as she explained, retiring “to the privacy of my home to give my attention to the training of my children.” Understandably, motherhood hindered travel. She would, however, maintain an active role from Chicago, running her husband’s black newspaper, attending meetings of the Association of Colored Women’s Clubs, helping to create the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and later forging an alliance with United Negro Improvement Association founder Marcus Garvey.269

Meanwhile, Booker T. Washington prepared for the next great American exhibition. He had been asked to speak at the 1895 Atlanta Exposition. The Exposition’s white planners had sought to legitimize their proposal by adding an African American leader. They chose Washington because he advocated the less-threatening Industrial model in the tradition of his mentor Samuel Armstrong. Unlike the 1893 Chicago Fair, the leaders of the Atlanta Exposition pledged an entire Negro Building. In exchange for an endorsement and public speech, Washington would have free reign to design and manage the exhibit. Washington accepted and appointed his friend Isaiah Montgomery of Mound Bayou as a deputy commissioner. Black America again rippled with excitement.

269 McMurray, To Keep the Waters Troubled, especially 244-282; and Duster, ed., Crusade for Justice, Wells quoted on 250.
Perhaps they would have another moment like the one Douglass had delivered two years earlier. The stage was set for Washington’s coronation as the new public leader of the race. There were great expectations. The Washington Colored American told its readers, “every colored woman, man, and child who can possibly get there ought to go, if for no other reason than to hold up the hands of Prof. Washington, as the children of Israel held up the arms of Moses while he fought the battles of the Lord.”

Washington, however, was no Frederick Douglass. Neither could he be. He lived in a far more dangerous place. Bellicose black leaders did not find as many allies in rural Alabama as the Washington D.C. suburbs. Washington must have been haunted by Douglass, the man he would succeed, but never fully replace. Throughout his career, Washington “frequently had to joust with the ghost of Frederick Douglass,” writes his biographer Louis Harlan. The Wizard of Tuskegee disappointed in Atlanta. Surrounded by thousands of white Southerners, he coalesced, telling his fellow blacks to “caste down your bucket where you are” and advising that “the agitation of questions of social equality is the extremist folly.” His five minute speech met an enormous reception, cementing him as the nation’s most widely recognized black leader in the place of Douglass. White southerners loved it. They saw him as the antithesis of Douglass, a man urging his people to focus solely on work and quit agitating for rights. The Atlanta Journal Constitution applauded his efforts, noting that “His address yesterday proved his depth of thought and the deep study he has given the living issues of the day.”

Many blacks, however, hated it. Ida B. Wells was among the detractors. To them, Washington had cowed, bowing to white masters and betraying his brethren. They saw it as the public acquiescence of a race. But Washington’s leadership was more complicated. From a position of influence, he railed against lynching, advocated civil rights, and gained access to an American power structure that reached as far high as the White

---


House. Throughout his career, Harlan writes, Washington was “like a house servant concealing a part of his personality from his master.” He also developed strong economic ties with black Southern communities, especially Isaiah Montgomery’s thriving town of Mound Bayou. As Northern blacks such as William Monroe Trotter howled over Washington and his 1895 Atlanta Exposition Address, Southern blacks just kept searching for freedom and a better future for their children. Influenced by Washington or not, they turned inward, building their own communities and enjoying what freedom they could. Most, however, never did cast down their buckets.272

What blacks actually did was move. Their lives in the Jim Crow era were full of constant motion. They moved to villages, small towns, larger cities, and even the North, constantly searching for the freedom promised by Emancipation. Modernity was crucial. The wages of the New South offered mobility, helping to create a fundamentally different world view. As famous black sociologist E. Franklin Frazier noted, “Some of the men had their first glance of the world beyond the plantation or farm when they worked in sawmills, turpentine camps, or on the roads.” Hattiesburg was just one such example. There were dozens, perhaps hundreds, of other black communities that developed in those cities of the New South. Neighborhoods grew through the cracks of innovation and gathered strength in the shadows of modernity. Segregation limited their residential choices, but it also helped form powerful communities.273

In Birmingham, Alabama blacks joined the throngs of rural laborers who pursued jobs brought by the steel industry. The “Magic City” grew like a weed as the century turned. In 1880, approximately 3,800 citizens called it home. Just thirty years later, the city’s population exceeded 130,000. That number included over 50,000 blacks, who flocked to the city in record numbers, attracted by the all-black settlements established by firms such as the Tennessee Coal and Iron Company, which offered to build schools and houses for employees and their children. Black enclaves popped up throughout the city.

African Americans found employment in diverse industrial occupations and built churches and schools around their homes. Banks, barbers, insurance companies, and undertakers followed, producing a black middle-class.\(^{274}\)

Birmingham’s First Baptist Church opened in the early 1880s and served as a hub for local communal activities. Its pastor William Pettiford founded the city’s first missionary society and in 1887 was elected President of both the Colored Baptists State Convention and Birmingham’s Ministerial Association. He also helped found a successful bank, school, and became a close ally of Booker T. Washington, working to advance the interests of the black business community as a lieutenant of the economic and educational force later dubbed the “Tuskegee Machine.” The size of the First Baptist congregation grew as Pettiford’s influence rose. By 1900, the church counted near 1,000 members and enjoyed elite status among Birmingham’s black churches. In 1908, Reverend Pettiford planned a marvelous new building to house his esteemed congregation. The new structure opened in 1911 as “a testament to the abilities and achievements of Birmingham’s blacks,” writes historian Lynne Feldman. Its reputation attracted a massive following. On Sunday mornings, black citizens travelled from across the city to attend the newly anointed Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, the finest black institution in the city.\(^{275}\)

In Atlanta, Georgia, blacks poured into the Auburn Avenue neighborhood in the southern part of the city’s working-class Fourth Ward. As the twentieth century approached, the industrializing New South brought more jobs and migrants to Sweet Auburn. Atlanta blacks took jobs as railroad laborers, skilled craftsmen, laundresses, maids and educators, each wave of migrants creating additional opportunities for entrepreneurs to follow. The Wheat Street Baptist Church was organized in 1870. Nearby Ebenezer Baptist Church was founded in 1886. When new pastor Alfred Daniel Williams


took the pulpit in 1894, the church counted fewer than fifteen members. But the community was growing rapidly. Within ten years, membership reached 461, forcing the church itself into a nomadic state until a more permanent structure was finished. A few years later, the congregation organized to build Booker T. Washington High School, Atlanta’s the first public high school for blacks. Like the early black Hattiesburg schools, it was vastly overcrowded. Teachers remembered enrollments reaching as high as three times the building’s capacity. The school lacked resources and basic amenities such as an auditorium. But the city’s only black school was able to recruit passionate and gifted black instructors who could not find employment elsewhere. As one local resident claimed, “We had one of the best faculties of any high school in this city, white or black.” The teachers lived among their students and helped inspire their pupils, sending waves of black champions from their doors. As teacher Pearlie Dove noted, “There are students who went to Washington High School who are in very prestigious places now, and who have done very good work, despite the limitations that we had.” Reverend Williams didn’t send his daughter Alberta to Booker T. Washington High School. She already held a degree from the Hampton Institute by the time it opened. But Reverend William’s own grandson Martin Luther King Jr. went there, skipping through its front doors for two years before graduating early to enroll at Morehouse College.

* * *

276 Benjamin C. Ridgeway, *Atlanta’s Ebenezer Baptist Church* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2009), especially 6-14; Clifford M. Kuhn, Harlon E. Joyce, E. Bernard West, Michael L. Lomax, eds., *Living Atlanta: A Oral History of the City, 1914-1948* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2005, orig., 1990), quotes on 141 and 142-143, respectively. For more on late nineteenth century Atlanta black community formation, see Allison Dorsey, *To Build Our Lives Together: Community Formation in Black Atlanta, 1875-1906* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2004), especially 29-81 for economic development and church organization. For a discussion of early elite black families, see August Meier and David Lewis, “History of the Negro Upper Class in Atlanta, Georgia, 1890-1958,” in David J. Garrow, ed., *Atlanta, Georgia, 1960-1961: Sit-Ins and Student Activism* (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing, Inc., 1989), 3-16. One measure of the success of Atlanta’s growing black community is the way whites resisted its expanding and increasingly visible power and influence. In 1906, thousands of white citizens launched an attack against African Americans, killing at least twenty black citizens and injuring hundreds of others. This attack spearheaded the development of a society that sought to restrict potential future African American racial advancements. As David Godshalk has pointed out, the most visible targets of advancement were black teachers, ministers, and newspaper editors, who were all leaders of the most influential black-controlled institutions. See David F. Godshalk, *Veiled Visions: The 1906 Atlanta Race Riot and the Reshaping of American Race Relations* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).
During the early winter months of 1917, an enterprising black barber named Robert Horton opened the doors to the brand new Hattiesburg Barber Shop. Sitting in the middle of a settlement of more than 150 Pine Belt black families, the shop must have almost always been packed. Horton, a former Deacon of the First Baptist Church, was a community stalwart. It is easy to imagine the scene on a typical Saturday afternoon, men stopping in for a shave or haircut, ambitious young boys sweeping the floors, the smell of alcohol and tonic wafting through the air, and the sound of men gossiping about the things men discuss in barber shops. During a lull in the barbershop bravado, perhaps a customer would open a copy of the *Chicago Defender* and share a notable story or two from the black newspaper. Horton’s Hattiesburg Barbershop was one of numerous places to grab hold of the *Chicago Defender*, which arrived in bunches every Saturday. The black customers would stop by to grab one for the road or even sit and listen to another client read the headlines while waiting on a haircut or shave. Horton had first started selling the *Defender* in 1916 at his old barbershop in the heart of black Hattiesburg. That was a full year before he opened up the new Hattiesburg Barbershop. The *Defender* came more regularly now. It was a lot easier to get at his new location on South Rhodes Avenue, in the heart of Chicago’s south side, just blocks from where Douglass made his 1893 Colored American’s Day Address.\(^{277}\)

In a way, it was the Fair that brought them here. As Douglass approached the stage on that August afternoon, sitting among the anxious audience was a young Hampton Institute student named Robert Sengstacke Abbott. A tenor in the Hampton quartet, Abbott was a native of St. Simons, Georgia and the son of former slaves. Like so many from his generation, Abbott had been raised in a family that cherished education. His stepfather had sent him to a Methodist school in Savannah that had been started in 1868 as the city’s first secondary school for blacks. Upon graduation, Abbott enrolled at Hampton and soon became the first freshman ever appointed to the college’s revered quartet. In the summer of 1893, the singing foursome travelled to Chicago to perform on Colored American Day at the World’s Fair. Abbott was deeply inspired by Douglass and

impressed by the industrial marvels of the White City. Four years later, he fled the Jim Crow South and returned to the site of the Fair. Although his formal college training was in printing, in Chicago he studied law, dreaming of a way to help the advancement of his race. He graduated from Kent College of Law in 1899. But he was soon told that his dark complexion would never allow for a career as an attorney. Incredibly well educated, but rather lost in the world, the young man searched for an opportunity to contribute to black American life.278

Abbott was just one of thousands of African Americans who migrated to Chicago in the 1890s. By 1900, fewer than twenty percent of Chicago blacks had been born in Illinois. But like Abbott, many of them found severe limitations. Regardless of education, most became servants of varying degrees. 65% percent of black males and 80% of females worked as domestics or in some form of personal servitude, taking jobs as chauffeurs, waiters, or elevator operators. Pullman Porters formed an upper-class of sorts, enjoying local prestige. One porter remembered, “Once in Chicago, you weren’t anybody unless you were a Pullman Porter…We led all the social life.” By 1910, fifteen thousand more blacks had arrived in the Windy City. Despite limited opportunity, the city offered an attractive escape from the terrors of Southern Jim Crow. A sizeable black community was developing on Chicago’s south side. Robert Sengstacke Abbott saw an opportunity.279

In May, 1905, Abbott started hocking a paper he named the Chicago Defender door-to-door, haughtily calling it “The World’s Greatest Weekly.” Three black papers already existed, including the one ran by Ida B. Wells, but her paper largely catered to the upper-crust of black Chicagoans. And besides, those early years of the twentieth century were the golden age of newspaper competition. So Abbott threw his hat in the ring. He ran off three hundred copies of his six-column, four-page chronicle and distributed them throughout Chicago’s south side, charging two cents apiece. The paper caught on. Abbott

278 Roi Ottley, The Lonely Warrior: The Life and Times of Robert S. Abbott (Chicago, IL: Henry Regnery Company, 1955), especially 1-80; Reed, All the World is Here!, 8; and Bontemps and Conroy, Anyplace But Here, especially 88-110.

captured black Chicago’s attention by printing front-page stories about their lives and whereabouts. It was doggedly indentured to the service of the black community, announcing neighborhood initiatives, detailing local social functions, and perhaps most importantly reporting lynchings from the South, allowing migrants to keep an eye on the land from which they had fled and where many relatives remained. With antagonizing headlines like “100 Negroes Murdered Weekly in United States by White Americans,” the Defender grew in popularity.\textsuperscript{280}

Abbott was ambitious. But the response to the paper outside Chicago must have exceeded even his wildest dreams. Pullman Porters took the burgeoning race paper with them on return trips to the South, passing them out at railroad depots and in black neighborhoods like the Mobile Street section of Hattiesburg. Black porters on the Gulf & Ship Island Railroad earned a particular reputation for spreading the Defender. The Windy City was infectious. Black southerners clamored for it. Within a decade of its publication, over two-thirds of Defender subscribers lived outside of Chicago. It was particularly revered in the sawmill and railroad towns near Hattiesburg. The Chicago Commission on Race Relations found that in Gulfport, blacks who read the Defender were regarded by their communities as “intelligent.” Men in Laurel, the lumber town just north of Hattiesburg, bought the paper even if they couldn’t read, “simply because it was regarded as precious.” In Hattiesburg, it was reported that “Negroes grab the Defender like a hungry mule grabs fodder.” By the 1920s, the “World’s Greatest Weekly” regularly came rolling down the tracks of the Illinois Central Railroad, offering visions of freedom and hope to Southern black dreamers.\textsuperscript{281}

The paper’s influence transcended sheer rhetoric. It literally moved people. As Douglass had done for Abbott on that summer day in 1893, it would inspire migration. The Defender attracted weary souls to Chicago, offering them some hope, an exodus from the Jim Crow South. The paper called for them, encouraging northern migration and even setting a date for a “Great Northern Drive,” slated to begin on May 15, 1917.

\textsuperscript{280} Ottley, \textit{The Lonely Warrior}, especially 81-139.
Opportunities were there. World War I had ground Eastern European immigration to a halt while Northern factories still needed labor more than ever. Thanks to the railroads, Chicago was only a day away. Unprecedented numbers of blacks began arriving in the city as part of a movement known as the Great Migration. Most of these migrants were not sharecroppers. Making that initial escape from the plantation was crucial. In 1920, the Chicago Commission on Race Relations estimated that as many as 75% of black male migrants had worked in the lumber, railroad, steel, or iron industries. They were also highly literate. New South industrial jobs had offered the first step. Hattiesburg blacks took advantage of the mobility of wage labor. If they could save the better part of two or three paychecks, moving to Chicago became an option. Those wages bought train fare, the first few meals, a first month’s rent, and some flexibility as they looked for work. A large group of Hattiesburg blacks realized this opportunity at the end of 1916. After getting their second December paychecks, 100 black workers at the JJ Newman Lumber Company collectively quit on the spot, saying that they were going north.

Other Hattiesburgers sought jobs and travelled together, forming communal migrant support groups. In early 1917, the barber Robert Horton and his wife left the Hub City for Chicago with a party of over forty. All the new migrants came through the Illinois Central Terminal, an epic train station that stood like a cathedral on the shores of Lake Michigan, complete with a ten-story clock tower that chimed the hour of welcome to the new black migrants. Horton’s group stepped out into the freezing Chicago winter, and began their new lives, settling together in Chicago’s Southside Bronzeville neighborhood. They weren’t the only ones. Other migrants formed clubs. The Illinois Central was offering discounted rates for groups of ten or more. Numerous Hattiesburg groups arrived during the early winter months of 1917. In January, thirty-one Hub City refugees arrived at the Illinois Central Depot. The Defender reported their arrival, noting that “they intended to stay.” Thirty more Hattiesburgers arrived in March. Their leader

---

told the *Defender*, “We are here for keeps…I will take my chances with the northern winter.” Two weeks later, the Defender reported the arrival of 120 migrants who arrived in Chicago from Hattiesburg. Smaller groups came too. One letter to the *Defender* from Hattiesburg identified four or five men who wanted to come to Chicago as laborers.\(^{283}\)

Some Hattiesburg whites tried to slow the migration. The Hub City needed those black workers. The Hattiesburg JJ Newman sawmill actually shut down for a short period after it lost those 100 workers in December of 1916. To stop the migrants, some local sawmills raised their daily pay. One railroad ticket agent just simply quit selling to blacks. But the exodus continued. “The big factories, in their call for laborers,” griped the *Hattiesburg News*, “have attracted to within their walls, thousands of the track laborers of the railroad companies.” By the end of 1917, approximately 2,500 blacks had left the Hattiesburg for Chicago.\(^{284}\)

None of those early migrants could have been in Hattiesburg long. Some of them were older than the city itself. The thirty year-old Hub City was merely a temporary stop for many on the way up to Chicago and other Northern locales. Some arrived in Hattiesburg and worked only as long as they needed to make it North. Other Hub City residents wrote to the *Defender*, asking for jobs. One Hattiesburg man mentioned his work in the lumber yards. “I am a yellow Pine Lumber inspector,” he noted. “My job pay me well,” he explained, but “My wife and children are anxious to come north…I know I can make good in any lumber yard.” The Hattiesburg migrants were just the tip of the iceberg. Over an eighteen month period during 1917 to 1918, 50,000 blacks arrived in Chicago.\(^{285}\)


Chicago wasn’t free of problems. There was job discrimination, housing segregation, and unemployment, especially after the War. In 1919, a seventeen year-old boy was stoned to death when he floated over into the white section of a Lake Michigan Beach. The ensuing riot led to thirty-eight deaths, 537 injuries, and left over 1,000 people homeless, most of them black. Life remained hard. But what blacks did in Chicago, in Hattiesburg, in all of America, really, was consolidate power. They grew strong. In Chicago, blacks joined black rights organizations such as Marcus Garvey’s United Negro Improvement Association, the Urban League, and in smaller numbers, the NAACP. They elected the first black Democratic Congressman, Oscar DePriest, who became “a national symbol of the possibilities of organized black political action in the North,” according to Ira Katznelson. Carter G. Woodson founded his Association for the Study of Negro Life and History there in 1915. A few years later, Claude Barnett, inspired by the Defender’s impact, founded the Associated Negro Press. As Ida B. Wells had done in the late nineteenth century, black Southern expatriates maintained a keen eye on racial injustice in the South, constantly speaking out against lynching and directing their votes toward the politicians who promised the most for black rights across the nation. In an era known as the “nadir” of black life, modernity offered chances for freedom. Power would come as black clusters formed in the urban spaces of the New South and eventually the North. The roots of the greatest victories in recent black history originated here, firmly grounded in the rapidly maturing communities that grew strong in the shadows of modern America.286

Chapter 4: Broken Promises

Louis Edward Faulkner had been among the early dreamers, one of the thousands who arrived in Hattiesburg during the first years of the twentieth century to take a job on the railroads and build a life in the sawmills. The Pennsylvania native had graduated from Mansfield State Normal School in 1902 at the age of nineteen and began a career as a teacher. He taught for a year, but quickly became dissatisfied with his chosen line of work. Louis Faulkner’s ambition went beyond the constraints of a classroom. There was change all around him. America was modernizing, and Faulkner wanted to be a part of it. Modernity offered far more potential for prestige and pay than teaching. He looked for opportunities industrialization. The locomotives were a good fit. Railroad companies were hiring. Although Faulkner lacked formal training, he was college educated, thus meeting the basic requirements for an entry level engineering job. In 1903, the young man accepted an engineering position with a West Virginia railroad. Then he made another jump, taking a job with the Buffalo & Susquehanna Railroad, a growing syndicate of logging railroads operating between Western Pennsylvania and New York. The road was growing fast, quickly replacing the antiquated Erie Canal. Faulkner slowly moved up the ranks, earning a meager reputation as an engineer. He was becoming an industrial man. But Faulkner’s employer faced a problem. Its customer base was dwindling. The Buffalo & Susquehanna was a logging railroad tied directly to the Pennsylvania and New York timber industries. That industry was dying. Pennsylvania White Pine was running dry. So Faulkner started looking for another opportunity. He wouldn’t have to go far. His future still lied in lumber. The entire American lumber
industry wasn’t altogether dying; it was just moving. And so Faulkner would simply have
to move with it.287

One of the Buffalo & Susquehanna Railroad’s best clients was the Pennsylvania
lumber magnate Fenwick Peck. Peck’s Lackawanna Lumber Company used the Buffalo
& Susquehanna to ship its timbers between sawmills and buyers. Peck’s company was
also running low on lumber. But he was a forward thinker and able to adjust with the
times. He had just purchased controlling stock in the new JJ Newman Lumber in
Hattiesburg and built his own logging railroad to avoid having to pay profit-poaching
shipping companies like the Buffalo & Susquehanna. Peck was pumping in capital and
needed good men to run his operation. Louis Faulkner was one of those good men, an
experienced and education railroad engineer who was ambitious enough to chase
opportunity deep into the sparsely settled Mississippi Piney Woods. In 1905, Faulkner
accepted a position with the Mississippi Central Railroad and moved his young family to
Brookhaven, where the railroad had a second office. He did well. Faulkner rapidly
ascended up the Mississippi Central ranks. In just seven years, he advanced from level
man to resident engineer, then division engineer, and eventually chief engineer. In 1912,
he was promoted to General Manager of the Mississippi Central Railroad, a position that
required him to relocate to Hattiesburg. He moved his family into the downtown of the
booming Hub City and settled into a life among the Hattiesburg elite.288

Thomas Smiley (T.S.) Jackson and William Scion Tatum (W.S.F.) were also
among the elite white migrants who found prosperity as Hattiesburg grew. Jackson was


among the tragic first generation of white Southerners who came of age during the horrible aftermath of the Civil War. Confederate general Robert E. Lee asked Ulysses S. Grant for the terms of surrender on Jackson’s first birthday. T.S. spent his childhood wrapped in the vestiges of Reconstruction. He grew up poor on a struggling cotton farm near present-day McComb, about 100 miles west of where William Harris Hardy founded Hattiesburg. Jackson spent much of his childhood bent over in the hot Mississippi sun picking cotton. He hated it. Every night he’d come home to his family’s small cabin with cracked hands and a stiff, aching back. When asked about it later in life, Jackson classified the work as being “so hard he didn’t care to refer to it.”

But Jackson had few options. Turn of the century Mississippi offered limited opportunities for the undereducated sons of white poor cotton farmers. So at twenty-one years old, Jackson followed in his father’s footsteps. He married his childhood sweetheart and began renting a little piece of land to grow cotton. But he always dreamed of a way out of the family business. His hatred for the daily back-breaking work fostered enormous personal ambition. He desperately wanted to rise out of those cotton fields that haunted his youth. So after selling his first cotton crop in 1890, Jackson bought some land on credit and opened a little country store. The store did well and allowed him to buy some more land. On that new plot, he opened a little cotton gin to go along with that small country store. The two kept Jackson out of the fields. But as he approached his thirtieth birthday, he found himself wanting even more. Like thousands of others, he spied opportunity in a rapidly growing Mississippi town deep in the Piney Woods. And so he sold everything and planned a move, arriving in Hattiesburg just twelve years after Captain William Hardy’s transformative lunch on the banks of the Leaf River. The Hub City needed a shoe store. So T.S. Jackson opened one. Again, he did well. But again, it wasn’t enough. Even greater opportunities beckoned the innovative entrepreneur. So he sold the shoe store and bought the Fain Grocery Company. He quickly expanded the business as Hattiesburg boomed. By 1905, he had organized it into the Merchants Grocery Company, the city’s largest and most successful grocer. Jackson had become one

289 T.S. Jackson, “Glimpses of the Past: When I Was Twenty-One,” Hattiesburg American, January 29, 1929, 4. Jackson’s date of birth is listed on his tombstone in the Oaklawn Cemetery on Hardy Street in Hattiesburg, MS.

164
of Hattiesburg’s most important local businessmen. He joined the Commercial Club, soon rising to a prominent role within the Hub City’s growing business community. He built a new house and finally settled down as one of Hattiesburg’s leading men. He had come a long way from the painful labor of his childhood that pinched his back and cracked his youth.290

W.S.F. Tatum was a native of Bethel Springs, Tennessee. Born in 1858, he grew up in the fog of Reconstruction as his family eked out a meager living in the mercantile business. W.S.F. Tatum spent his youth in his family’s small general store, and eventually inherited the small shop from his father. He could have spent his lifetime in that store, struggling like his father to balance monthly accounts, maintain inventory, and fight off competitors in a constant battle to provide for his family. Running a general store in the rural South was an ominous existence. And Tatum knew it. The prospective difficulty of that life almost cost him the love of his wife whose father was rightfully weary of the prospects for the young grocer. W.S.F. went through great pains to convince his lover’s father that he could provide for a family.291

But Tatum, like Jackson and Faulkner, was a man of vision. Using excess profits, he began slowly acquiring the acreage surrounding the family store. The land was full of tall trees, and W.S.F. began chopping them down to sell the timbers. Throughout the 1880s, Tatum bought even more land as the timber trade grew. Then he made the biggest gamble of all. Opportunity was calling Tatum in the Mississippi Piney Woods. In 1893, he sold everything and bought a tract of land near Hattiesburg, just off the tracks of the New Orleans & Northeastern Railroad. In 1893, Tatum moved his family to south Mississippi and built a large sawmill on his new property. He then founded a company town named Bonhomie where his workers could live, and more importantly shop. Tatum supplied everything for his employees, the jobs, the housing, a school, and he even a general store. He hired both whites and blacks, but only the whites could send their

290 Ibid.
children to the school. Bonhomme was a brilliant idea, one that mirrored the innovative company towns constructed by Northern industrialists like Andrew Carnegie. The sawmill, the settlement, and the store consolidated to generate perfect profitability. On payday, sawmill workers gave their wages right back to their employer when they bought goods at the company store. W.S.F. was innovative and always seeking to expand. He kept buying more land, acquiring nearly 2,000 heavily forested acres. The Tatum sawmill grew. W.S.F. became rich. As the century turned, his sawmill was surpassed in productivity only by JJ Newman Lumber. His wealth increased exponentially over the following two decades. By 1924, Tatum’s company was operating its own twenty-four mile railroad, and he had bought over 26,000 acres of land. From the son of a poor merchant to the Hub City’s wealthiest man, Tatum had made quite a leap.\textsuperscript{292}

Although Hattiesburg was pioneered by Captain William Harris Hardy and northern investors like Captain Joseph T. Jones, its early years were shaped by men like Faulkner, Jackson, and Tatum. These men formed the daily local economic core of the city, participating in the daily commercial transactions and leading municipal decisions through Hattiesburg’s Chamber of Commerce. As opportunistic businessmen congregated in Hattiesburg to make a living off the growing population of New South laborers, they organized into an elite body of middle and upper class leaders to run the city. Originally called the Commercial Club of Hattiesburg, the Chamber of Commerce wielded more power than any other organization or political office. It included only white entrepreneurs. Blacks were considered secondary citizens and thus excluded even though many had similar goals and talents. The Chamber of Commerce controlled municipal celebrations, conventions, publicity, and even elections. They were more important than the mayor and his cabinet, and even met in City Hall beginning in 1925. T.S. Jackson was elected the organization’s second President and longtime secretary, serving through much of the Great Depression. Louis Faulkner served his term as Chamber of Commerce President in 1920 and remained on the Executive Committee for much of the rest of his

\textsuperscript{292} This biographical information for W.S.F. Tatum is derived from “Lumber King Tells Story of Purchase,” \textit{Hattiesburg American}, January 7, 1924, 1; “Quiet Observance Marking Half Century of Happiness and Activities for Couple,” \textit{Hattiesburg American}, June 8, 1931, 5; “W.S.F. Tatum Dies; Funeral Saturday,” \textit{Hattiesburg American}, October 7, 1949, 1; Personal observations of the tombstone at his gravesite in Hattiesburg’s Oaklawn Cemetery on June 7, 2011; Hoffman, \textit{Steam Whistles in the Piney Woods}, especially 106-178; and Smith, “A Study of Place-Names in Forrest County, Mississippi.”
life. W.S.F. Tatum was the outlier of the three, holding a less powerful municipal position. He merely served two terms as Hattiesburg’s Mayor. During Tatum’s second stint, his son West was elected President of the Chamber of Commerce. Like anywhere else, wealthy men ruled the town. They were also the men who would scramble like mad during the Great Depression to help save it.²⁹³

*   *   *

Not all the migrants became rich, but most shared a common vision. They came to Hattiesburg seeking opportunity. Most Mississippians still worked in agriculture, especially blacks. But farm work paid very little and seldom offered opportunities for advancement. Some agricultural laborers worked only enough to live. Others couldn’t even manage that. As one migrant recalled, “on a farm you didn’t know if you were going to get anything or not.” Sharecropping could easily spin people deep into debt, tying their futures to the land. And Mother Nature’s cruel disasters like the boll weevil or a nasty flood could cripple advancement across generations. The industrial jobs of the New South offered a more attractive labor exchange for working-class people. Employees were virtually always rewarded for their work. Paychecks and financial growth were a constant. And if the agreement failed, you could just quit and leave. So as the South began industrializing, thousands abandoned rural farm life in search of the new industrial jobs. Between 1880 and 1920, the number of Mississippians working for wages increased tenfold. Their total earnings topped $51 million by 1919. Hattiesburg was a crucial site of industrialization. As the railroads, sawmills, and other industries sprouted throughout the Hub City, new migrants arrived in search of the better opportunities delivered by modernity. Retail followed the migrants and created even more jobs. Between 1914 and 1919, the number of wage earners working in Hattiesburg increased from 587 to 1,267. By 1920, the city’s manufacturing establishments paid their workers

²⁹³ “Past Presidents, Commercial Club of Hattiesburg and Hattiesburg Area Chamber of Commerce,” Box 1, Folder 1, Hattiesburg Area Chamber of Commerce Records, USM (hereafter, CoC);
an estimated $86,000 per month (the historical equivalent of approximately $933,000). The Hattiesburg JJ Newman sawmill alone composed more than a third of the total.\textsuperscript{294}

Those wages were essential for the migrants. People carved lives out of their paychecks. The newcomers erected houses, bought cars, got married, and started families. Those earnings were everything. The wages bought coffee, bread, milk, flour, and sugar. Families counted on Friday paychecks to purchase yarn, coats, underwear, shoes, and socks. They traded nickels for Coca-Colas, novels, nylons, hats, pens, pencils, and stationery. Dollars went toward church donations, medical bills, prescriptions, shotguns, laundry, and coal. Even more, the wages provided life’s joys for many; celebration dinners at the Hotel Hattiesburg, movies at the Strand Theatre, graduation presents, jewelry, birthday cakes, fountain sodas from the Corner Drug Store, college tuitions, and vacations on the Gulf Coast. Even young boys earned few extra dollars delivering newspapers or groceries, saving up the money for a used bike or a box of firecrackers. As migrants flocked to the Hub City, the wages became a part of who they were. The promise of those earnings brought them to Hattiesburg in the first place. Those paychecks were a foundation, a promise, and even an identity. But unfortunately, they were also an untenable bond. After a few hopeful decades, something all of a sudden went terribly wrong.\textsuperscript{295}

Hattiesburg’s economic foundation was laid during the largest timber boom in American history. In the years after Captain William Harris Hardy’s 1880 lunch on the banks of the Leaf River, the Hub City grew from a backwoods settlement into one of America’s busiest lumber centers. Sawmills sprang up around the city offering thousands of jobs and forming the backbone of a community. Those jobs brought a town to life. But the boom didn’t last. By the mid-1920s, a nasty recession began spreading through the


\textsuperscript{295} Wells, interview. For more on consumerism in the South, see Ownby, \textit{American Dreams in Mississippi}. 168
Hub City. Sawmill work was rapidly disappearing, and the promises of the New South were reneged as the city slipped into what would become the Great Depression. The origins of South Mississippi’s recession were not a mystery. The basis of this downturn was far less complicated than factors like inflated stock prices, abused credit, and bank closings. Hattiesburgers could find their economic woes in the areas just outside the city. All they had to do was take a walk in the woods. Huge chunks of the forest were simply gone.

They should have seen it coming. Decades before, famed conservationist Gifford Pinchot had warned of the demise of Southern lumber. In 1906, he and National Lumber Manufacturers’ Association President N.W. McLeod cautioned American lumbermen that “There is less than twenty years supply of Yellow Pine in the South.” Several lumber firms were also weary of Yellow Pine’s decline and helped lead a small Yellow Pine conservation movement. As early as 1895, a group of Alabama lumbermen proposed minimum price scales to ensure fair competition within the parameters of conservation. By 1900, over 300 sawmills in Georgia, Florida, and South Carolina agreed to run at two-thirds capacity. But there was little conservation in south Mississippi. W.S.F. Tatum was actually one of the few Mississippi lumbermen who didn’t blindly cut down every tree on his property. He ordered employees to save any trunk less than ten inches in diameter. But Tatum was an outlier. Cutting policies were dictated by outside investors who cared little for the region’s environmental health or its long-term employment prospects. Most of the lumber companies chopped trees with the discretion of a lawnmower.296

According to a 1929 Mississippi Forestry Commission study, a fully stocked acre of longleaf pine forest can expect to produce approximately 33,500 board feet of lumber. In 1893, Hattiesburg sawmills produced 1 million board feet of lumber. Based on the 1929 study, that production would have required 30 forested acres. Since Mississippi longleaf pine trees covered nearly 12 million acres, those losses seemed like nothing. There was seemingly plenty of timber to go around. But 1893 was just the start of the

lumber boom. Over the next three decades, dozens of sawmills sprouted in the forest. The new companies invested in the latest harvest technologies, bringing skidders and spur lines deep into the Mississippi forest to clear vast swaths of the Piney Woods. It was such a promising industry. Modern America caught longleaf yellow pine tree fever. The Southern wood became the nation’s most popular timber, and supply seemed endless. So the new sawmills went at the trees with reckless abandon, clearing acre-after-acre to meet the demand. Production skyrocketed as the century turned. By 1906, it was estimated that the sawmills along the Gulf & Ship Island Railroad alone were producing 4.5 million board feet of lumber per day.²⁹⁷

Despite the early warnings, lumber production in the New South had become such an essential part of their lives. Hattiesburg’s sawmills eventually produced more than $7,000,000 worth of lumber every year. A society was built on those timbers. People arrived in places like Hattiesburg, clamoring for sawmill jobs and building lives in the communities created by timber. Any attempt at preservation broke the promises of the wage jobs of the New South. Conservation simply meant less work, or worse, less profit. Many probably felt like President Theodore Roosevelt when he told the American Forest Congress in 1905, “Wood is an indispensable part of the material structure upon which civilization rests.” That was certainly the case for Hattiesburg. The forest fed a population, and so the trees kept falling. Losses mounted at staggering rates. The sawmills ravaged the landscape of the New South, tearing up millions of trees and shipping their processed trunks off to the world. Hattiesburg officials turned the other cheek while sawmills cleared the land of its forests. Outside investors who owned companies like JJ Newman Lumber simply didn’t care. But something had to give. Southern longleaf yellow pine was eventually going to run out.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁷ “Probable Yields from Fully Stocked Longleaf Pine Stands on University of Mississippi Land in South Mississippi,” November 21, 1929, Box 105, Folder 2, Bilbo Papers; Nollie W. Hickman, Mississippi Harvest: Lumbering in the Longleaf Pine Belt, 1840-1915 (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1962), especially 160-177; and James E. Fickle, Mississippi: Forests and Forestry (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 75. Great maps of the dozens of Hattiesburg area railroad dummy lines are available in the How Railroad Map Collection at the USM.
²⁹⁸ The text of Roosevelt’s speech was reprinted in “Value of the Forest: Mr. Roosevelt on the Problems of Preservation,” Washington Post, January 6, 1905, 2
Many locals were simply in denial and disregarded the warnings. In 1902, the *Hattiesburg Daily Progress* mocked a recent visitor to the city who had dared question the potential longevity of the town’s booming lumber industry. “The man who expects to live until the timber is exhausted,” the paper noted, “must think he has a very long lease on life.” Even twenty-three years later, after one of the nation’s leading foresters toured the state and warned Mississippi to develop a forestry department for conservation, the local paper remained in denial. It justified the decline of the forests, noting that “Our forests have been cut to serve the useful purposes of all our people and not to satiate any ruthless mania for destruction.” It was as if the editors believed the trees grew faster for a good cause. After all, their society was constructed on the jobs provided by the fall of those timbers. Their hopes and dreams were built on the strength of those ever-lasting tree trunks that provided thousands of jobs. In 1925, the *American* did finally concede that locals should start thinking about conservation, but the situation it reassured “does not justify hysteria or panicky alarm.” Unfortunately for Hattiesburg, the paper was wrong. The forest had already declined to a critical level. The industry was already doomed. As the Hattiesburg American tried to assuage fears, JJ Newman Lumber was already laying off workers. There was just no sugar-coating that.\(^{299}\)

\(^{299}\) Pamphlet produced by The Commercial Club, Hattiesburg, MS, 1915, Box 2, Folder 2, Hattiesburg Historic Photographs Collection, McCain Library and Archives, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS (hereafter, USM); and *Hattiesburg Daily Progress*, July 17, 1902, 2; and “Future Lumber Supply,” *Hattiesburg American*, February 12, 1925, 4.
grown across the vast rolling hills like waves in the ocean now sat parched fields full of decaying stumps.\footnote{This calculation was made using an average board foot production of 200,000 feet per day over 260 working days. In some years it easily could have been more or less. J.L. Langston and Lee R. Palmetree, “Lumber Industries—Past and Present,” September, 1935, WPA-Forrest, Newman statistic on 3; and J.J. Newman Lumber Co., Sheet 29, Hattiesburg, MS, May, 1925, Sanborn Map Company Ltd., Digital Sanborn Maps, 1867-1970 (hereafter, Sanborn Maps).}

In 1929, the newly formed Mississippi Forestry Commission reported that the lumber industry had cleared 78% of the state’s longleaf pine forest. Only 2.6 of the 11.7 million acres of Mississippi’s longleaf yellow pine forests remained. Even worse was the harsh reality that they couldn’t just plant new trees and continue their torrid pace. For three decades, Mississippi sawmills had torn away at a virgin forest. That was important. A virgin forest produces far more wood than a young one. An eighty year-old forest can produce as much as 33,500 board feet per acre, but that number drops with age. At forty, a forest can still produce about 11,000 board feet per acre. But a twenty-year old forest only produces approximately 1,000 board feet per acre. The sawmills would never again have access to an untouched virgin forest. Even if Hattiesburgers had planted new trees the moment they began cutting them down, the level of production could never be duplicated, let alone maintained. There existed no solution to this problem. The massive lumber boom that created so many jobs and brought settlers and prosperity to the Mississippi Piney Woods could never happen again. That landscape had been utterly destroyed. A way of life hung in the balance.\footnote{The Forest Service U.S. Department of Agriculture, Timber Depletion, Lumber Prices, Lumber Exports, and Concentration of Timber Ownership, 19-20; “A Study of the Effect of Fire on Longleaf Pine,” Box 105, Folder 2, Bilbo (Theodore) Papers, USM; and “Probable Yields from Fully Stocked Longleaf Pine Stands on University of Mississippi Land in South Mississippi,” November 21, 1929, Box 105, Folder 2, Bilbo Papers.}

As the forest ran dry, JJ Newman owner Fenwick Peck shifted his attention to New Mexico where timber was still abundant. He probably didn’t care much about Hattiesburg. This was merely the predictable result of capitalism’s cruel effect on the environment. After all, the Pennsylvania lumbermen had only come South because of the decline of White Pine in the North. His brother moved to Hattiesburg to oversee the operation, but Peck was merely a temporary investor and sometime visitor. He had little regard for the forest and approached lumber harvest in Mississippi with reckless abandon.
It was a classic example of the common tactic nicknamed “cut-out-and-get-out.” The Piney Woods wasn’t the only victim. Similar devastation happened across the United States. Between 1890 and 1920, an astounding 700 billion feet of timber was cut out of American forests. Southern trees fell faster than anywhere else. In 1920, the United States Forestry Commission predicted that 97% of Southern sawmills would cut out within a decade. Left behind would be hollowed sawmills in heartbroken communities. The Hub City was just one of many.\textsuperscript{302}

In early January of 1924, JJ Newman Lumber announced that it would end its night shift, cutting daily production hours from twenty-four to sixteen. Those men who worked the night shift would have to find other jobs. Some had worked there for decades. The paydays from the Newman mill had helped feed their families. But that was over now. In 1923, the payroll at the Newman Hattiesburg sawmill was just shy of $360,000. The cut in production hours dropped the following year’s total payroll to just over $236,000, a sharp decline of approximately $124,000 per year (the modern equivalent is $1.5 million) and a 34% decrease in paid employee wages. That was only one year. The payroll dropped year-by-year in a gradual but continuous decline. By 1929, the last available year in which the statistics were available, the company’s Hattiesburg sawmill payroll was only $225,295. Wages had shrunk considerably and would continue to fall until a sad November day in 1935 when the last Newman sawmill closed.\textsuperscript{303}

It is impossible to accurately measure the effect of the Newman layoffs on all of Hattiesburg. But it is important to remember that the 1920 Newman payroll constituted over one-third of all wages earned in the Hub City. In one way or another, the cuts at JJ Newman Lumber must have impacted nearly every resident. The sheer size of the Hattiesburg Newman plant must be considered. The layoffs directly affected hundreds of Hattiesburg households. As one local historian has estimated, one-ninth of Hattiesburg’s entire population either worked at Newman or lived with someone who did. Certainly, there were other places to find work. There was more than one sawmill. But in reality, the


cuts at JJ Newman Lumber were just the tip of the iceberg. Its declining wage labor payroll merely happened on the grandest scale. The entire lumber industry surrounding Hattiesburg was in a free fall by the mid-1920s. There had at one time been at least thirty mills in the vicinity of Hattiesburg with dozens more scattered throughout the surrounding Piney Woods. Similar payroll records are not available for these other mills. But if all experienced a simultaneous decline, thousands of workers would have been laid off, removing millions of dollars in wages from the local economy.\(^{304}\)

Local lumber shipments offer a more concrete glimpse into the regional decline of the lumber industry. The picture is grim. In 1925, the Mississippi Central Railroad was carrying 500,000 tons of forest products a year. Just six years later, the railroad moved less than 175,000 tons. Lower shipping rates meant fewer jobs in both the railroads and lumberyards. Over that same period, 1925 to 1931, the total board feet of lumber produced in Mississippi dropped from 2,562,120 to 656,723. Less lumber meant less work. Most of the layoffs were gradual or seasonal, making them hard to track. But complete and sudden shutdowns are obvious. In the 1920s, Ferguson Lumber, James Hand Lumber, Helen White Lumber, Love Lumber, the Major-Sowers Saw Mill Company, Nortac Manufacturing, and Red Creek Lumber, all sawmills in the Hattiesburg vicinity, closed their doors. The lumber collapse was endemic of the entire state. By 1940, Mississippi sawmills employed only 10,366 workers. Just thirty years prior, over 40,000 men held jobs in the industry. The economic base of a region was eroding. All across the longleaf pine belt, jobs were falling as fast as the trees.\(^{305}\)

The Northern capitalists who had built Hattiesburg were pulling back by the mid-1920s. The Gulf & Ship Island Railroad, the line first dreamed of by William Harris Hardy and eventually completed by Northern businessman J.T. Jones, was reeling. In 1925, its Pennsylvania owners sold their controlling interest to the Illinois Central


Railroad for $5,000,000, putting the line in the hands of the nation’s largest carrier and also further threatening the dozens of smaller regional railroads. The Gulf & Ship Island, which had once been dubbed “the crowning glory of grand southern enterprises,” was now being sold to a dangerous syndicate. No one could compete with the Illinois Central. Huey Long, the anti-monopoly watchdog of the Louisiana Public Service Commission, openly criticized the move noting, “There will not be a single free, unmonopolized, open crossing of the Mississippi for a distance of 525 miles.” The merger also cost local jobs as the Illinois Central consolidated the smaller company into its massive network, moving various administrative offices to McComb or even Chicago. Accounting offices closed and local managers were laid off as the Gulf & Ship Island was folded into the massive conglomerate known as the Main Line of Mid-America. Optimists predicted the resurgence of the railroad as a Gulf Coast tourist carrier. But realists knew the road’s glory days were over. Lumber was in a free fall and vacationers now had cars. The promising lumber towns that sprouted along the tracks from Hattiesburg to Gulfport began corroding. They would never be the same. Many still sit empty and poor today, lucky to have a McDonalds.306

It is hard to overstate the impact of the closings on Hattiesburg. JJ Newman Lumber and the Gulf & Ship Island Railroad were more than just employers, places to punch a time card and spend a third of your day. They were local institutions. Families grew on the backs of those companies. Generations built equity through hours worked in the mill. For some, “working for the Newman Lumber Company had been ordained from childhood,” as one local has noted. When Newman’s Hattiesburg sawmill closed its doors for good on November 15, 1935, out walked a throng of broken husbands and sons who had known little else. Their lives must have stung with uncertainty as they punched those clocks for the final time. Some had worked at the mill for forty years. Newman workers weren’t alone. The Hattiesburg Veneer Plant also closed, leaving an empty $75,000 payroll in its wake. The Major-Sowers Lumber Company cut out and left 300 men gasping for employment. These jobs are what brought people to Hattiesburg in the

first place. Those industrial promises are what had built the Hub City of the New South. And now they were becoming unglued as the companies pulled out. “When the timber was gone,” Hub City native Buck Wells bitterly remembered, “they folded up their carpetbags and left.”

Naturally, there would be a trickle-down effect. The workless men would stop spending their money at downtown stores. The unemployed workers quit buying the luxuries that helped make them American, and focused solely on the goods that would keep them alive. Fountain sodas were obsolete for the families of laid-off men. Coca-colas suddenly became less affordable and new dresses were no longer feasible. Local stores lost customers. Plenty were forced to close. And even those that remained open were forced to lay off workers. The great sea of downtown activity was running dry. The city center began decaying. Hattiesburg seemed doomed to become an abandoned lumber town. There was fear among civic leaders. As the successful grocer T.S. Jackson warned, “The situation at Hattiesburg is critical…This decrease in business will continue from year to year until we are reduced to a cross roads, overgrown, county town.”

Desperate signs entered Hattiesburg life throughout the 1920s. Jobless men walked the downtown streets asking for work. A local poet described “beggars here and there” with “poor [people] gathered in knots near stinking retail stores hoping for a better day.” Failing firms closed, leaving hollowed out empty downtown storefronts with goodbye and thank you notes tacked in the windows. Virtually no company was immune. The Commercial National Bank suspended business due to heavy withdraws and a lack of deposits. The Hotel Hattiesburg fought off a steady string of robberies only to default on its taxes in 1929. Poor men drifted through the Hub City. After a 1931 drought, the New York Times reported the city’s highways “filled with men on the move.” Hundreds rode the trains through town. Hoboes gathered under railroad bridges, menacing the once thriving city with their desperation. A homeless former carpenter named Jack Martin


lamented the lack of Hattiesburg jobs to a local reporter as he and his travelling companion ate stew out of a bucket underneath the old New Orleans & Northeastern Railroad Leaf River Bridge. The Depression hurt them all, inflicting blow after crippling blow like a desperate mindless fighter. In one of the cruelest twists of fate, the beloved 64-year-old downtown peanut vendor George Ely Nall was killed by a reckless driver. “Uncle George” was older than the city itself and had been selling peanuts in Hattiesburg as far back as anyone could remember. He left behind a wife and daughter. Hattiesburg even lost its beloved Pinetopper baseball team, which slinked out of the city $5,000 in debt. Local residents couldn’t fill the stands. The tragedies mounted as the promises came unglued. Hattiesburgers needed help. 309

* * *

Mississippi Central Railroad General Manager Louis Faulkner did his part by donating money to a bevy of local organizations. During the Depression, he sent checks to the Red Cross, Bible Society, Salvation Army, American Legion, Palmer Orphanage, Hattiesburg High School, Mississippi Normal College, Mississippi Women’s College, Hattiesburg Boys Brotherhood, Mississippi Children’s Home Society, and the Lion’s Club Doll and Toy Fund. In 1928, he gave the local YMCA an incredibly generous donation of $60.00. That was a lot of money then. Faulkner’s kindness earned him a reputation. Dozens of organizations sent him letters asking for donations to ease the sting of the horrible recession. He often answered with a check, but not always. The Principal of the all-black Prentiss Normal and Industrial Institute wrote Faulkner for help when a tragic fire destroyed the school’s grist mill, delivering a devastating blow to its food supply. School officials weren’t sure how they were going to feed their students that winter. But Faulkner turned the other cheek. He didn’t send a donation to the all-black

Prentiss Normal Industrial Institute. He did, however, send money to the all-white Prentiss High School for new marching band uniforms.\footnote{YMCA official J. Maury Gundy to Faulkner, Hattiesburg, MS, October 18, 1928, Box 1, Folder 4, Faulkner Papers. Dozens of letters requesting and acknowledging donations can be found in Box 5, Folders 1 and 2, Faulkner Papers.}

More than anything, Louis Faulkner poured his energies into the local Boy Scout troop. He served as the organization’s treasurer, parlaying his business relationships into successful fund-raising campaigns. In 1929, he mailed an ambitious appeal to close friends, prominent Hattiesburg citizens, and local businesses asking for both time and money. The mailing requested that people spend time thinking about supporting the Boy Scouts, attend meetings to support the Boy Scouts, and donate money to support the Boy Scouts. In each letter, Faulkner asked potential supporters to commit either 195 or 60 minutes of their time and send a monetary donation. Although Faulkner asked a lot from potential benefactors, his Boy Scout fundraising campaign was incredibly successful. Over 500 white Hattiesburg citizens sent checks to the Boy Scouts, ranging from $5.00 to $50.00. Faulkner also struck gold with local businesses. JJ Newman Lumber, the Gulf States Creosoting Company, Hattiesburg’s First National Bank, the Mississippi Central Railroad, the new Hercules Powder Plant, and Komp Machinery all donated $100. Other companies sent gifts ranging in size from $25.00 to $50.00. Faulkner raised nearly $9,000, easily surpassing his $4,000 goal for the Pine Burr Area Boy Scouts. The organization allowed boys to learn about nature while stressing environmental conservation, something locals desperately needed.\footnote{Memo from L.E. Faulkner to numerous recipients, Hattiesburg, MS, November 9, 1929, Box 3, Folder 6, Faulkner Papers. Copies of signed pledges from local businessmen can be found in Box 3, Folder 7, Faulkner Papers. Lists of contributors to the Boy Scout fundraising drive can be found in Box 3, Folder 8, Faulkner Papers.}

The response to the Boy Scout campaign was fairly typical for white Hattiesburgers. The community galvanized around charity to fight the Depression. Not every organization met its goal, but they could almost always count on some form of assistance from fellow citizens. Even as the jobs fell and the downtown withered, Hattiesburgers held out for hope, finding solace in a notion of togetherness. They were resilient and resourceful. They gathered at the Public Library on the third Thursday of every month to hash out their problems and brainstorm solutions. Three times a year,
hundreds of locals gathered downtown in support of the Hattiesburg Little Theatre. The all-white troupe used exclusively local talent to put on its periodic shows. It charged adults fifty cents and children a quarter for a night of entertainment. The proceeds went to the performers and their families. The manager of the Saenger theatre enticed crowds to Saturday night dime showings by giving away free boxes of groceries for prizes. Despite the hardships, the city still held its Mardi Gras celebration, crowning a King and Queen each February. On Halloween, they still held a large downtown parade followed by a dance at the Hattiesburg Country Club. The October celebration was large enough to resemble “Mardi Gras of New Orleans very closely,” noted one observer. When the local branch of the Red Cross launched a fundraising drive, local citizens sent in over $7,000 in donations. A year earlier, the Salvation Army had raised $3,000 in just four days. As T.S. Jackson asserted in a 1930 Chamber of Commerce newsletter, “The ‘Hattiesburg Spirit’ is not dead.” The community seemingly manufactured hope. But what they really needed were jobs.\textsuperscript{312}

The Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce led the struggle to bring full employment back to the Hub City. The organization was critical to the town’s hopes for prosperity. It was led by the city’s most important business leaders. Louis Faulkner, T.S. Jackson, and W.S.F. Tatum all played major roles, strategizing ways to lift their community out of the Depression. Jackson headed up the Industrial Affairs Committee before becoming the organization’s secretary. He appealed for the involvement of his fellow business leaders. It was their duty to deliver the city from the Depression. As Jackson wrote in a widely circulated memo, “The man who has been prosperous in this community has a greater responsibility and is indebted to his fellow citizens.” Their fates were connected.

Faulkner served on the Chamber of Commerce Executive Board. Tatum ran for Mayor. He was elected in 1928. Just days after taking office, Tatum’s son West took over as President of the Chamber of Commerce. Both the Mayor’s Office and Chamber of Commerce headquarters operated out of City Hall. From their downtown headquarters,

\textsuperscript{312} Frances Griffith, Unnamed Document, Box 10687, Folder: The Arts, WPA-Forrest; Wells, interview for grocery giveaway; “J.C. Fields Issues Appeal for Donations to Red Cross, many Hundreds Need Help,” \textit{Hattiesburg American}, February 2, 1931, 10; “New Quarters Provided for Relief Office,” \textit{Hattiesburg American}, February 13, 1931, 1; “Only $3,000 is Raised by Army Workers,” \textit{Hattiesburg American}, March 8, 1930, 8; and “Chamber of Commerce Organization for 1930,” Box 4, Folder 1, Faulkner Papers, USM.
the Chamber of Commerce attempted to guide the Hub City through its darkest moments.313

The men who led the Chamber of Commerce were incredibly proactive. They looked inward, asking local companies to promote civic-wide initiatives. Although the most prosperous citizens would lead, all community members were asked to contribute and sacrifice for the greater good. The Chamber of Commerce organized collective sales events, circulated promotional brochures, and placed ads in the Hattiesburg American, encouraging people to shop downtown. They supported local public initiatives, advocating the increase of taxes to help build and maintain new civic structures including a new library, post office, and hotel. With some the assistance of a citywide bond, donations from Newman Lumber, the Mississippi Central Railroad, and Louis Faulkner’s concrete pipe company, the new library opened just off downtown on May 22, 1930. The structure was quite lovely. The beautiful two-story orange brick building featured a gorgeous red Spanish-style terra cotta roof and twin curved stairways that led to a second story entrance. Within five years, its collection topped 13,000 volumes. The new post office opened in the early years of the 1930s. To this day, the granite and limestone structure serves as the Hub City’s main post office. Chamber of Commerce officials also pushed for funds for a new Hotel. They were able to raise $215,000 from the local community, which put them just shy of the construction costs. The Chamber of Commerce filled in the rest through individual donations and their general fund. The beautiful new nine-story brick tower was completed in 1929. They seemingly spared no cost for what became Hattiesburg’s largest building. The façade was adorned with chevron and lozenge molding and completed with massive open-winged eagles that cornered the outside of the building’s top floor and stared out over the downtown. Officials named it the Forrest Hotel, once again paying homage to the vicious

313 “What Chamber of Commerce is Doing Now,” Hattiesburg American, June 5, 1924, 8; Jackson, “The Handwriting on the Wall,” Hattiesburg, MS, Undated Memo (probably composed sometime between 1928 and 1930), Box 3, Folder 14, Faulkner Papers; and “West Tatum Chosen New Chamber of Commerce Head,” Hattiesburg American, January 9, 1929, 1.
Confederate cavalryman. Although Hattiesburg struggled, small municipal amenities opened, offering temporary jobs and making some of their lives slightly more bearable.\textsuperscript{314}

But despite the progress, the Chamber of Commerce struggled with the most fundamental issue. Hattiesburgers could only do so much to fix their broken economy. It was clear, after all, that the trees couldn’t grow back. The sawmills would never again hum through triple eight hour shifts, offering thousands of jobs and employing generations. The future of Hattiesburg remained unclear. To survive, the city had to somehow replace the sawmill jobs. “Unless Hattiesburg brings new industrial plants, new capital, more payrolls,” T.S. Jackson warned, “the city that you love so well, will no longer be prosperous, but will decline from year to year until we will be like a deserted saw mill town.” Hattiesburg had to find a new economic base, a permanent one. But just like the previous generation, Hattiesburgers didn’t have the resources to construct a new industrial base. Just as Captain William Harris Hardy had needed the Pennsylvanian Joseph T. Jones to finish his Gulf & Ship Island Railroad, this next generation of local businessmen required outside assistance. To be even more specific, they too needed the help of Yankees.\textsuperscript{315}

By the beginning of 1929, the Chamber of Commerce was moving full speed to attract industrial investment from outside sources. Dozens of committees were formed and asked to launch new programs. The Industrial Affairs Committee marketed local resources such as clay and pine straw to outside consumers, seeking patents for products derived from each. The Paper Mill Committee produced a study detailing available local raw supplies to entice a large investor to open a new factory. Hattiesburg seemed like an


\textsuperscript{315} T.S. Jackson, “The Handwriting on the Wall,” Hattiesburg, MS, Undated Memo, Box 3, Folder 14, Faulkner Papers.
ideal location. The committee mailed inquiries to numerous American paper companies. A Convention Committee spent $400 to produce a promotional brochure, detailing all of Hattiesburg’s merits. They sent the mailing off to most of America’s regularly meeting organizations, encouraging them to choose the Hub City as a future conference destination. The Industrial Affairs Committee hosted a group of New York investors who were interested in building a weaving plant in the South. The Chamber of Commerce also appealed to the federal government, submitting a proposal for a new narcotic farm in Forrest County. They saw immense potential in government investment, noting that “wherever this farm is located, the government will spend millions of dollars.” The farm was designed as a rehabilitation center for drug addicts and a place where American scientists could gain easy access to subjects for drug research. Hattiesburg lost its bid to Lexington, Kentucky.\textsuperscript{316}

The Chamber of Commerce explored all means to attract investors. In October, they proposed that pantyhose pioneer Amazon Hosiery move its factory from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to Hattiesburg. In 1930, they invited automobile magnate Henry Ford to open one of his popular vocational schools in the Hub City. Ford declined, noting that the schools only operated in the Detroit-area. The Chamber of Commerce explored hundreds of potential opportunities, forming an endless number of subcommittees in charge of attracting various industries. Proposals included brick, tile, and pottery factories, the construction of a federal soldiers’ home, and a canning plant. More suggestions included a hat factory, a battery manufacturing plant, a clay products plant, and a pickle plant. These were all closely considered concepts taken seriously at Chamber of Commerce meetings. But the Chamber of Commerce had limited success.

\textsuperscript{316} Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce Publicity Committee, “The Hattiesburg Spirit,” March 17, 1930, Hattiesburg, MS, Box 4, Folder 1, Faulkner Papers; T.S. Jackson to Industrial Affairs Committee, Hattiesburg, MS, March 7, 1929, Box 3, Folder 14, Faulkner Papers; and T.S. Jackson to Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce Members, Hattiesburg, MS, October 24, 1928, Box 3, Folder 13, Faulkner Papers. Various correspondence of Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce Paper Committee can be found in Box 3, Folder 14, Faulkner Papers; T.S. Jackson to Industrial Affairs Committee, Hattiesburg, MS, June 27, 1929, Box 3, Folder 14, Faulkner Papers; R.W. Dunn to Industrial Affairs Committee, Hattiesburg, July 27, 1929, Box 3, Folder 14, Faulkner Papers; T.S. Jackson to Executive Committee, Hattiesburg, MS, August 5, 1929, Box 3, Folder 14, Faulkner Papers; and T.S. Jackson to Executive Committee, Hattiesburg, MS, September 25, 1929, Box 3, Folder 14, Faulkner Papers. For more on the history of the American Narcotic Farm in Lexington, Kentucky, see Nancy D. Campbell, J.P. Olsen, and Luke Walden, \textit{The Narcotic Farm: The Rise and Fall of America’s First Prison for Drug Addicts} (New York: Abrams Press, 2008).
They were growing desperate. At one point, Louis Faulkner even sent a letter to his employer Fenwick Peck, making a personal appeal for his boss of over twenty-five years to invest even more capital in Hattiesburg. Faulkner and Peck were close enough friends to exchange Christmas gifts, but his letter in the winter of 1929 reeked of desperation. He was on the verge of begging for $3,000 to help recruit a garment factory to the Hub City, noting that the local citizens had done all they could on their own.  

Meanwhile, as the Chamber of Commerce tried to resurrect a decayed economic core and the sawmills ground to a halt, the remnants of a once thriving downtown businesses community bonded together to fight the recession. The *Hattiesburg American* encouraged local whites to shop at the downtown stores because “the real relief of the economic situation lies in the hands of the consuming public.” Many of the leading stores organized “Dollar Days” on Fridays and Saturdays throughout the Depression, offering to even the poorest citizens an opportunity to shop at the city center stores. They also held the occasional “Thrift Week,” an extended sale. Wonderful specials were available. Lane’s Shoes charged only $1.25 for two pairs of pantyhose. Modern pump heels and Oxford shoes could be had for less than $3.00. The Blue Ribbon Bakery offered Friday specials. Mincemeat, raisin, coconut, or chocolate pies only cost twenty-five cents each. The Fine-Bros Matison Company offered an entire $1 selection of purses, towels, soap, Fostoria Glassware, bed spreads, draperies, and even ladies lingerie. There were ways to survive.

The most inventive local relief program was the *Hattiesburg American’s* clever “Church and Charity” campaign, a coalition between the newspaper, downtown stores, 

---

317 Unsigned Memo to the Industrial Affairs Committee, Hattiesburg, MS, October 24, 1929, Box 3, Folder 14, Faulkner Papers; “Activities of the Chamber of Commerce, Hattiesburg, MS, from January 1st, 1930 to December 15th inclusive, 1930, Box 4, Folder 2, Faulkner Papers; Ford response reported in Minutes of the Monthly Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce Meeting, March 18, 1930; Minutes of the April 12, 1932 Chamber of Commerce Meeting, Hattiesburg, MS, Box 1, Folder 4, CoC; Louis Faulkner to Fenwick Peck, Hattiesburg, MS, December 31, 1928, Box 3, Folder 14, Faulkner Papers.

and local white churches and charities. Over a series of four monthly contests, Hattiesburg residents were given the chance to vote for their favorite local white charities. Whichever charity received the most votes won a $100 prize. The second and third places charities received $65 and $35, respectively. “Church and Charity” ran for four consecutive months, giving out at least $200 each time. But there was a catch. Residents had to earn votes. The only way to do that was by making purchases at certain downtown stores. Only the retailers who paid to join the contest were included among the list of “Church and Charity” participants in the *Hattiesburg American*. Thus, having your clothes washed and pressed at Phoenix Laundry, buying a new coffeepot at Fowler Appliance, or doing your weekly grocery shopping at the Hattiesburg Grocery earned you varying amounts of votes. The firms who placed ads, the *American* noted, “should be shopped diligently.” Votes were earned on a sliding scale depending on how much money customers spent. A twenty-four pound bag of flour gave buyers eighty votes. One pound of coffee was worth thirty-five. The Church and Charity contest was a perfect marriage of commerce and relief. The *Hattiesburg American* was helping generate downtown revenue, offering large donations to charities, and increasing its own revenue. The contest was “open to every white church or organization.” Eighteen charities joined. Hattiesburgers were resourceful, bonding together to confront the challenges of the recession. 319

In January of 1931, the Red Cross launched a massive local initiative. Seeking to raise $10,000 to distribute meals to needy families, the national relief organization asked for donations in a series of articles printed in the *Hattiesburg American*. The national Red Cross office provided initial funds to be used for relief efforts while local fundraisers gained momentum. On January 12, 1931, needy Forrest County families could begin arriving at the Red Cross headquarters in Hattiesburg’s City Hall to apply for relief. Over the next month, the local Red Cross received over 2,500 applications and provided relief to approximately 500 families in the form of food vouchers. Meanwhile, local donations

came trickling in, consolidating resources for future rounds of relief. For a moment, the Red Cross campaign looked promising. They were really helping.320

But then the Red Cross experienced several issues. Besides the daily challenges of gathering and distributing supplies, the Red Cross encountered three major problems in its attempts to help the people of Hattiesburg. The first was that some families were travelling to the downtown relief office from other cities and lying to locals about their residence. The campaign was designed primarily for Hattiesburg families and Red Cross officials had to take extra time to verify residences. The second problem was that even some local families were exaggerating their poverty to collect assistance. People lied about the number of children they had to gain additional food vouchers. Other struggling families exaggerated time laid-off or low-balled savings accounts. Fraudulent claims from foreign counties took time to investigate, but were fairly easy to spot. But local claims were difficult to track. Red Cross field workers had a difficult time verifying family incomes, living conditions, and family size so they called on local residents to report relief fraud. Although it was impossible to completely eliminate dishonest grafters, community efforts did help alleviate the first problem. But then a third problem emerged. This one was much more complicated and brought the Red Cross in direct conflict with local residents. The third problem was that some of the families applying for relief were black.321

By early February, 1931, Red Cross and Hattiesburg city officials were fielding protests over the presence of African Americans seeking relief at the Red Cross’s City Hall office. Local whites wanted them gone. Even the poor whites that desperately

320 This series of articles was printed in the Hattiesburg American in January and February of 1931. See especially, “Proportionate Giving,” editorial, Hattiesburg American, January 28, 1931, 4; “J.C. Fields Issues Appeal for Donations to Red Cross, Many Hundreds Immediately Need Help,” Hattiesburg American, February 2, 1931, 10; “Nothing for Grafters and Sponges’, Red Cross Head Asserts,” Hattiesburg American, February 3, 1931, 7; and “Red Cross Head Scores Critics,” Hattiesburg American, February 10, 1931, 7. The massive increase in 1931 Red Cross funds was partially due to a nationwide call from President Herbert Hoover to assist drought victims the previous year. See David E. Hamilton, “Herbert Hoover and the Great Drought of 1930,” The Journal of American History, Vol. 68, No. 4 (March, 1982), 850-875.

needed assistance were appalled at having to wait in the same lines or be served at the same counters as blacks. Some of the impoverished whites even threatened violence, promising to beat-up African American applicants. Red Cross field worker Margaret Butler-Bishop deflected the complaints, declaring that the Red Cross, “knows no race, creed or color lines: hunger and suffering are universal and the organization’s policy is to deal with all needy alike.” But this stance didn’t work for places like Hattiesburg. Since its birth, the Hub City’s entire downtown, and certainly its City Hall were for whites only. That whiteness was as much a part of their identity as the sawmills or the railroads. For many, it was all they had left. Racial superiority was the one remaining promise of the New South, a last gasp of pride in a storm is destitution. 322

Mayor W.S.F. Tatum remained publicly silent on the issue as he contemplated a solution. But the complaints kept filing in. The most effective protests came from upper class women, presumably the members of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, whose headquarters were also in City Hall. Finally, a few days after the initial objections, Mayor Tatum relented. He took a hard line. To prevent violence, protect charity for whites only, and ensure that the Daughters of the Confederacy didn’t have to walk by or see any poor blacks on their way to their second floor headquarters, Mayor Tatum ordered the Red Cross to leave. In explaining the eviction, Tatum cited that walking through lines of blacks was “embarrassing to ladies who visited the City Hall on business and otherwise.” So rather than inconvenience Hattiesburg’s finest wives, Tatum expelled the Red Cross from the building. When the organization moved too slowly for his taste, he had assistants move the national relief organization’s office equipment to the sidewalk in front of City Hall, literally kicking them to the curb. The Red Cross supplies sat in front of City Hall for hours. They had nowhere to go. After a few hours, Saenger Theatre manager Matt Press offered a storeroom next to his building. Eventually, the Red Cross was allowed to operate out of the Forrest County courthouse basement. 323

322 “Red Cross Head Scores Critics,” Hattiesburg American, February 10, 1931, 7; and “Tatum Says Aid Seekers Hold Up Work,” Hattiesburg American, February 12, 1931, 1.
323 “Tatum Says Aid Seekers Hold Up Work,” Hattiesburg American, February 12, 1931, 1; Mayor’s Office statement included in “City Fathers Say Red Cross Action Hasty,” Hattiesburg American, February 14, 1931, 1; “Mississippi Mayor ‘Fires’ Red Cross,” Chicago Defender, February 21, 1931, 1; and “Inhumanity in Mississippi,” Wyandotte Echo, April 10, 1931, 1.
Charity was segregated. Just like the best jobs, the homes, schools, stores, dance halls, barbershops, hotels, and restaurants, relief help was often for whites only. Jim Crow continued to play out as it had for decades in the Hub City. Blacks existed all around them but lived in a different world. Through good times and bad, the best parts of civic life were reserved for whites only. This was a strict policy. Even the Red Cross wasn’t exempt. Yet, however dominant that racial order remained, one part of it was changing in a very serious way. Those who wanted to see Hattiesburg prosper once again had to make one concession. As the Chamber of Commerce transformed into a virtual public relations firm to attract outside investors, they became increasingly troubled by the most violent aspect of Jim Crow. They had to face a reality as they tried to appease outsiders. Lynching was simply bad for business.

Hattiesburg leaders knew that to many potential investors, lynch mobs signified instability. Potential investors did not want to send their executives, managers, and capital to chaotic communities. Nor do they want to hire throngs of killers to run their new factories. Men who participated in mindless murderous mobs did not make strong candidates for supervisiorial positions. And whether or not the Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce realized this, many of these new investors also wanted black workers. Every new company to ever enter the Hub City had hired black employees. Southern black workers were the cheapest labor east of the Mississippi River. And just as Southerners had done for centuries, the northern industrialists wanted to glean profits off those black bodies. As the Chamber of Commerce sought to generate positive publicity, it became clear that lynching was unattractive, and that they would have to take steps to stop it. In 1929, when the stock market fell and dragged the rest of America into the Depression Hattiesburg was already experiencing, the Chamber of Commerce took a remarkable step.

* * *

At about midnight on the evening of December 26th, 1928, approximately a dozen white men knocked on Emmanuel McCallum’s front door. McCallum lived with his wife and daughter in Arledge Quarters, a young black community developing just south of downtown Hattiesburg. Mrs. McCallum answered the door as her husband slept
in the back bedroom. Their six-year old child slept in another bedroom with Mrs. McCallum’s fourteen year-old younger sister. The men rapped on the McCallum’s front door and demanded entrance in the name of the law. They were lying. These men were not deputies. Mrs. McCallum probably knew that, but she was powerless to stop them. The group stormed the house and found Emmanuel sleeping in the back bedroom wearing nothing but his undershorts. They grabbed the half-naked black man and dragged him out of the house while his wife watched. The white men threw Emmanuel into one of their two cars and sped off into the night. They were going to kill him.  

Emmanuel McCallum worked as an auto mechanic and car washer at the Municipal Auto Sales Company. Six weeks earlier, he had helped a white clothier named William D. Easterling pull a car out of a ditch. McCallum completed the job, but Easterling refused to pay him. There was a nasty exchange. The details are fairly unclear, but there was some sort of a physical altercation. McCallum may have punched the white man in the face. Regardless of what transpired, Easterling reported the incident to the local sheriff, and McCallum was arrested. The black prisoner sat in the local jail for days, but was turned free on $500 bond when no one arrived to press charges. McCallum returned to his job at the garage on Main Street. Over the next several weeks, Easterling began harassing the black mechanic. He twice tried to abduct McCallum from his job at the Main Street garage. On another occasion, an unidentified group of whites arrived on McCallum’s doorstep, but were rebuffed by a handful of McCallum’s black friends who sat waiting in the home with guns. Yet, the white posse remained determined. Black men were not gathered with guns when the group of white men returned to the McCallum home on the night after Christmas.  

The white men drove McCallum to a nearby gravel pit and tied a noose around his neck. They slung the other end of the rope over a low pine tree branch. The white men pulled the loose end of the rope, lifting McCallum four feet off the ground then stepping

---

324 The description of this lynching is drawn from “Negro’s Body, Half Clothed, is Found on Richburg Hill, Hattiesburg American, December 27, 1928, 1; “Mississippi Ends Old Year by Lynching Two,” Chicago Defender, January 4, 1929, 1; “Man ‘Hanged by Hands Unknown,’ Jury Verdict,” Washington Post, December 28, 1928; and “Inquiry Into Another Lynching,” Washington Post, January 1, 1929, 2.  
325 “Just Suppose,” Hattiesburg American, December 29, 1928, 4; “Negro’s Body, Half Clothed, is Found on Richburg Hill, Hattiesburg American, December 27, 1928, 1; and “Mississippi Ends Old Year by Lynching Two,” Chicago Defender, January 4, 1929, 1.
back to watch him die. Because McCallum was lifted rather than dropped, gravity didn’t kill him by breaking his vertebrae like in jailhouse executions. Rather, McCallum just dangled alive from the branch, probably watching the faces of his killers as they stared back at him. His vertebrae intact, the forty-three year old father and husband hung from that low branch slowly strangling to death. The small group left McCallum’s body on the tree where he was found the next morning. A group of bystanders was looking at the body when a *Hattiesburg American* photographer drove up and began talking pictures. Someone in the crowd remarked, “It ought to be against the law to take pictures of anything like that.” A coroner’s jury visited the scene of the lynching and returned a verdict of “death at the hands of parties unknown.”

Local Hattiesburg business leaders were disturbed by the McCallum lynching. The *Hattiesburg American* called for McCallum’s house to be dusted for fingerprints. But then a mysterious fire at two o’clock the next morning burnt the McCallum home to the ground. Thankfully, his wife and daughter had left to stay with her father, a retired J.J. Newman Lumber employee. Black residents were terrified. Dozens of families immediately packed their belongings and left the city. Many were headed for Chicago. The Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce called an emergency meeting of citizens to address the lynching. On the night of December 28th, the City Hall auditorium filled with what the *Hattiesburg American* dubbed the city’s most “honest, law-abiding, God-fearing, determined men.” The killing particularly incited local white ministers. Reverend Joseph Smith of the Main Street Baptist Church minced no words. “I am painfully tired of these perfunctory verdicts of coroners’ juries,” he cried. “I want the cowardly, cringing, white-livered, yellow-blooded scoundrels arrested and convicted.” Other concerned preachers in the Hattiesburg Ministers Association issued a statement declaring, “The Christian sensibilities of our community have been outraged by an atrocious murder disguised as a lynching.” The Chamber of Commerce also condemned the murder. They too sought results, vowing to “underwrite any amount necessary for the employment of detectives, the offering of suitable rewards and the expenditures of any

---

other funds necessary for the apprehension of the guilty parties.” The citizens requested that circuit court Judge Robert Hall initiate a grand jury investigation into the lynching. Then they began collecting money to pay for McCallum’s funeral expenses.327

The Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce formed a special committee to respond to the lynching. The committee consisted of prominent local business leaders. Louis Faulkner was elected chairman. The committee drafted six resolutions and presented them to the mayor, and sent the notoriously racist Mississippi Governor Theodore Bilbo, a man who routinely defended the practice of lynching throughout his political career. The resolutions included an official condemnation of the act, a formal recording of the town’s “sense of shame,” pledge of full cooperation in assisting law enforcement officials, request for a special grand jury investigation, and underwriting “the expenditure of any funds necessary for the apprehension and conviction of the guilty parties.” And then the committee made a completely unprecedented gesture in the history of Mississippi race relations. They offered a $20,000 reward for the “apprehension and conviction” of the group of white men who killed Emmanuel McCallum.328

Judge Hall answered the call for a grand jury investigation. At that time in Mississippi, grand juries were still used to investigate unsolved crimes or public complaints. Prominent citizens usually served. West Tatum, the mayor’s son and new head of the Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce, was selected as foreman. The grand jury met for four days, pouring over evidence and interviewing forty-two witnesses in their search to uncover the identity of the “parties unknown.” The identity of one of McCallum’s assailants, however, was hardly a mystery. This was not an indecipherable case. Mounds of evidence pointed to William Easterling, the man with whom McCallum had the conflict just six weeks prior. Local Sherriff Bud Gray outlined the original dispute between Easterling and McCollum, noting that shortly after the initial arrest he was compelled to transfer the black prisoner to another jail because the threat of a

potential lynching. Furthermore, McCallum’s employer Charlie Ross told the *Hattiesburg American* that Easterling had threatened McCallum on two separate occasions at the Municipal Auto Sales Company. Needless to say, Easterling should have been thoroughly investigated in the search for the killers. It is unknown exactly what else that grand jury found in its four-day investigation, but it is clear that William Easterling not only had a strong motive to attack McCallum but had even made previous attempts. Yet, none of the evidence or suspicion was enough to produce an indictment against Easterling. In fact, the grand jury didn’t indict anyone in the murder of Emmanuel McCallum. They were not willing to bend white supremacy that far. What they did do was issue a proclamation stating that the lynching left “a blot upon the fair name of Forrest County.” Judge Hall applauded their findings, telling the grand jury that “your searching investigation will make lynchers think twice before they take a human life and will go a long way toward checking mob violence in this part of the state.” Although McCallum’s killers remained free, Hattiesburg’s civic leaders were taking a clear symbolic stand against lynching. This was no small gesture. Less than thirty years before, Hattiesburg’s largest newspapers treated lynch mob searches for black victims like fox hunts, often noting their likelihood and later condoning the actions. This rhetorical stance surrounding the McCallum lynching was of an entirely different tone.329

The Hattiesburg city leaders’ anti-lynching stance was not all that unique. By the late 1920s, much of Mississippi’s leadership class had taken a strong rhetorical stance against lynching. Many pastors and newspaper editors had for years railed against lynching, but still the practice remained. The tone began changing in the early 1920s. In 1924, the Mississippi state bar association produced a pamphlet titled, “The Mob in Mississippi.” The pamphlet decried the notion of a lynch mob and its role in the state’s history. It featured Lucius Q.C. Lamar on the cover, quoting the great redeemer who once reportedly said, “An angry mob has neither the head to think nor the heart to feel.” In the pamphlet, Mississippi politicians and religious leaders criticized lynching as a racial practice in Mississippi. State Speaker of the House Thomas Bailey noted that, “mob

---

violence weakens the morals of a people.” The sentiment spread throughout the state. At a 1925 meeting in Hattiesburg, Methodist Episcopal Bishop W.N. Ainsworth declared, “The difference between mob rule and law is the difference between savagery and civilization.” Mississippi Supreme Court Justice J.G. McGowan declared, “I am unalterably opposed to lynching and mob violence. It was a mob that killed Jesus.” His colleague Justice George H. Ethridge similarly offered, “Lynching is one of the greatest evils that confronts civilization in time of peace.” Less than twenty years after Governor James Vardaman openly advocated lynching in defense of white supremacy, a new wave of white Mississippi leaders were taking a rhetorical stand.330

Much of this rhetoric could be seen throughout the South. Beginning shortly after World War I, the most visible and political Southerners began condemning the lynch mobs that had for years pervaded their society and created a nightmarish existence for millions of blacks living under specter of Jim Crow. Much of this action was in response to an anti-lynching bill proceeding through the United States House of Representatives. In 1921, United States Congressman Leonidas C. Dyer of Missouri introduced an ambitious anti-lynching bill to the House of Representatives in response to the massive upsurge in racial violence that followed the end of World War I. The proposed bill would give national agencies the power to conduct federally supported Southern lynching investigations and prosecutions. The constantly undefined “parties unknown” would be subject to investigation by federal officials, not racist Southern sheriffs or insincere grand juries. Trials would take place in other locations, removing Southern juries’ ability to acquit murderers in spite of often overwhelming evidence. The Dyer Bill was eventually defeated. But it made it through the House of Representatives, helping to influence Southerners to curb the unruliness of their mobs. If they lost control, then there was a chance that the federal government would step in. That reeked of Reconstruction.331

330 The description of this pamphlet is drawn from a story reported in the Chicago Defender. See “Dyer Bill Scares South into ‘War’ on Lynching,” Chicago Defender, December 26, 1925, A1.
The rise of Southern anti-lynching sentiment was also spearheaded by new groups of liberal white women who joined Southern ministers in echoing an anti-lynching tone. The rejection of lynching by white women added an interesting dynamic. They were the very group that was purportedly protected by the chivalrous justification for lynchings, which were often vindicated by citing the need to protect the purity of Caucasian women’s purity. For many of these women, the prevention of lynching was a humanistic cause. Members of the Mississippi YWCA gathered in Jackson in 1927 to denounce racially charged mob murder. The most visible Southern white woman in the anti-lynching campaign was Jessie Daniel Ames, the daughter of a Palestine, Texas railroad man. On November 1, 1930, she gathered with twenty-six peers in Atlanta to form an organization they named the Association of Southern Women Against Lynching (ASWAL). In the coming years, the organization filtered throughout the urban South, gathering thousands of signatures from Southern women who pledged opposition to lynching.332

Because of this growing anti-lynching sentiment, by the 1930s it was typical for Southern race murders like that of Emmanuel McCallum to generate strong public responses. Lynching was falling out of favor, especially in Depression-bitten cities like Hattiesburg. But this didn’t necessarily indicate a revolution in morality. Yet, during the recession millions of Southerners clung more dearly to white supremacy than ever before. But in those hard times, even the most virulent racists understood the need for capital. The $20,000 reward offered by the Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce was not completely altruistic. The Hub City needed new investors. And new investment required a harmony. As an Alabama court official explained to NAACP investigator Walter White that although members of white lynch mobs wouldn’t be convicted, “we’ve got to make some show—we’re expecting a lot of money to be invested down here.” Even the morally-driven ASWAL President Jessie Daniel Ames understood the economic realities by eliminating local tries, thus removing the ability of hometown juries to acquit members of lynch mobs.

332 “Group of Leading Women of State Go on Record Opposed To Present Mob Murder Wave,” Hattiesburg American, June 17, 1927, 1. For more on the white Southern women anti-lynching campaign, Jessie Daniel Ames, and the Association of Southern Women Against Lynching (ASWAL), see Jacqueline Dowd Hall, Revolt Against Chivalry: Jesse Daniel Ames and the Women’s Campaign Against Lynching (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), especially 159-222. Nearly all members of ASWAL lived in the urban South.
of lynching. “The South is going after big industry at the moment,” Ames noted, “and a lawless, lynch-mob population isn’t going to attract very much outside capital.”

By 1928, the largest and most pressing concern of the Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce was the attraction of outside investors. They considered the growth of new industries crucial to their recovery from the depths of the Great Depression. This was a different Depression than what much of America would face over the coming decade. In the South, much of the industries had literally been cut down. They needed to restructure virtually their entire economy. Condemning the lynching of Emmanuel McCallum was crucial to marketing the Hub City as a desirable location for Northern investors to build new factories. City leaders said as much, explaining the economic motives for stopping lynching. “Recognition of the fact that law and order is the primary requirement of community life,” noted the Hattiesburg American, “means that as Hattiesburg’s Chamber of Commerce seeks for new factories, it also seeks to strengthen the moral fibre [sic] of the community.” “Commercial growth and moral advancement,” the paper stressed, “go hand in hand.” T.S Jackson agreed. “This terrible crime,” Jackson lamented, “has upset everything the Chamber of Commerce has done for the last five years.” Louis Faulkner also chimed in. “We might as well cease all stockraising efforts, stop our work to build a bigger Hattiesburg,” Faulkner groaned, “unless we can build a better Hattiesburg and make this town safe.” Anti-lynching was not necessarily a moral crusade, but it was a fracture in the racial norms of their society. Southern city leaders were forced to try to control runaway racial violence and recognize black humanity to attract investment.

The Hattiesburg American was optimistic that the local response to the McCallum murder would deter future killings. Although the grand jury never formally indicted anyone for McCallum’s murder, “The mass meeting of outraged citizens, the strong charge of Judge Hall, the searching and determined investigation of the grand jury and its stinging condemnation of this lynching,” the paper argued, “mark import steps in the molding of an overpowering public sentiment against mob murders in Mississippi.” But

333 White, Rope and Faggot, court official quoted on 9; and Jessie Daniel Ames quoted in Hall, Revolt Against Chivalry, 169.
334 “Real Civic Leadership,” Hattiesburg American, December 29, 1928, 4; and “City Leaders in Vitriolic Words Condemn Killers and Call for Punishment,” Hattiesburg American, December 29, 1928, 1 and 7, both quoted on 7.
the deterrent was limited. Lynchers would not face imprisonment or capital punishment. White supremacy reigned in a powerful way. Convictions weren’t a real threat to the murderers of blacks. Hattiesburg wouldn’t convict a white man of killing an African American for nearly forty years. Those convictions wouldn’t come until 1968, after the Civil Rights Movement had obliterated their racial caste system.335

But the public outcry did have an impact. Those who wanted to kill were deterred by others who reminded them of the need for help from the outside world. Whites could not kill with complete immunity. Men who committed lynchings were ostracized in the public eye. This was a severe penalty for some but not all. Public condemnations only mattered to men with status. Because public condemnations were the only deterrent, Hattiesburgers merely relegated the ugliest portion of Jim Crow to a segment of the population who had nothing to lose. Lynching was largely warped into a poor man’s crime. Local leaders and prominent businessmen wouldn’t take part for fear of losing their status or even their livelihood. They could be ostracized by the Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce and local media for casting a dark shadow on the Hub City. There was a clear lesson from the McCallum murder. Although William Easterling was never thrown in jail, he was run out of town. Just three weeks after the McCallum lynching, Easterling sold his clothing shop at a discount and snooped out of the Hub City. He moved back a few years later and worked as a laborer, but he never again opened his own store.336

The historical record doesn’t show what local blacks thought about the McCallum lynching and the response by the Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce. The murders were always scary. And the lynching reward certainly could not remove the pang of yet another reminder of racial violence. Many must have been incensed over the lack of justice while others digested yet another story of an unsolved white-on-black murder like slow poison that weighed on their souls and reminded them that justice was not for blacks. They had all known victims before. These lessons had come early. But they also

must have felt something encouraging about the response of the Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce. Older residents probably remembered days when 1,000-man mobs would scour the streets of Hattiesburg with semi-conscious black victims in tow. Some might have even been there in the summer of 1895 when Thomas Johnson was shot more than 500 times, lifting his lifeless body off the ground like a ghost. Regardless of the motivations, those days were gone. There were loud voices of reason among the whites and the fear of death could not have been as intense as it had been just twenty years before.

Hattiesburg’s white architects could only control so much of the growth of the Hub City. From the beginning, they had relied heavily on outside investors who provided opportunities they never could. Even the Captain William Harris Hardy had desperately needed Northerners like Joseph T. Jones to help open the economic potential of the New South as it rose in the turn of the twentieth century. Hattiesburgers once again needed help. They did what they could, organizing locally and restricting the best relief for whites only. But because of the need for investment, they had to show a willingness to curb one of the most dramatic and effective forms of racial oppression and terror. Outside forces were changing the racial caste system designed by the earliest dreamers. It was the first of waves of factors that would ultimately destroy much of the basic aspects of the white supremacist society their pioneers had designed.
Chapter 5: Those Who Stayed

Hattiesburg was a land of migration. People came and left. Blacks arrived by the thousands, searching for better lives than what they found on plantations. Former sharecroppers arrived in the Hub City looking for work and chasing the promise of a better life. Hattiesburg transformed them from farmhands into merchants, teachers, porters, cooks, barbers, laundresses, deliverymen, and railroad men. The Hub City offered hope and opportunity. But it also served as a transition. Many of the migrants only came to leave. The Hub City for them was like the turnstile between the ticket office and the train, a mere formality on a longer journey. Going north was on many of their minds even before they arrived. Like the 100 black JJ Newman Lumber employees who quit together in 1916 to leave for Chicago, Hattiesburg was merely a stopping point. Some arrived in Hattiesburg and stayed only just a few weeks or months, earning just enough to pay for the train fare north or the first few months’ rent in a Chicago boardinghouse. Young black hopefuls left even before that, confident that anyplace was better than Mississippi. Married men went early, leaving behind spouses who would join when they found work. Some wives did the same. Parents went north and left children with relatives. Children went too, searching for better lives than their parents ever had. By 1917, an estimated 2,500 people had left the Hub City for Chicago and were followed by thousands more in coming decades. But not all the blacks arrived in Hattiesburg just to leave. Plenty more found rich new lives in the Hub City, and chose to stay.\footnote{2,500 statistic taken from James R. Grossman, \textit{Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration} (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 111. See Chapter 3 for a discussion of the 100 Newman Lumber employees who left in 1916.}

Among those who stayed was Turner Smith, the former black teacher who had abandoned a plow in the middle of a cotton field and walked to college in Meridian. That moment completely altered his life and sealed a better fate for his children. When he and
his wife Mamie arrived in Hattiesburg around 1900, they settled among dozens of other migrants who congregated into the growing Mobile Street neighborhood as they took the sawmill and railroad jobs. The couple opened up a little shop called Smith’s Store and sold goods to their neighbors. Customers from the growing local black community kept the store afloat. Mamie ran the shop during the day while Turner worked as a carpenter for white investors who built rentals to house the waves of incoming black migrants. Turner and Mamie built a life in Hattiesburg. They had six babies. The first was Charles Wesley, who by 1909 was old enough to work in the family store while his younger brother Hammond was still in school. Charles and Hammond were named after preachers Turner had seen and admired. The third son was named Martin Luther Smith after the German theologian. The last two boys were named for famous abolitionists. Their names were Wendell Phillips Smith and William Lloyd Garrison Smith. Their only daughter was born last. She was named Mamie, after her mother.338

After a few years in Hattiesburg, Turner and Mamie bought a plot of land on Dewey Street just about a quarter-mile away from the heart of Hattiesburg’s growing black downtown. They built a four bedroom house and raised their children there. The boys split two rooms while the daughter Mamie had her own. The large downstairs living room was filled with love and a piano. On any given night, the house reverberated with singing and dancing. Christmas was the best. Turner rarely danced, but he must have swelled with hope and happiness as he watched his children. His parents had been slaves, and even within the context of Jim Crow Mississippi. Those babies he raised would have opportunities that seemed unimaginable to the generations that came before. Hammond remembers that his father liked to head off to bed with the house still vibrant and alive. Turner and Mamie laid deep roots in Hattiesburg, living among that growing black enclave that grew in the Leaf River floodplain. Turner taught Sunday school at the Methodist church and Mamie began running a little side garden, producing extra vegetables to feed the family and sell in the community. The couple sent each of their children went to that unnamed schoolhouse with red doors. Most black boys in

338 E. Hammond Smith, interview by Orley B. Caudill, transcript, Hattiesburg, MS, April 8, 1982, University of Southern Mississippi Center for Oral History & Cultural Heritage (hereafter, USM-OH); and 1909 Hattiesburg City Directory (unpaginated), McCain, USM.
Hattiesburg went off to work in the sawmill or railroads when they grew large enough, but not the Smith children. Turner and Mamie Smith stressed education. All of their children received high school degrees.\footnote{Polk’s Hattiesburg City Directory, 1918 (R.L. Polk & Co. Publishers, 1918), 382-384; and Smith, interview.}

When Hammond finished the equivalent of eighth grade, he enrolled in the Alcorn Agricultural and Mechanical School to finish high school. Hattiesburg didn’t yet have a secondary school for blacks so Hammond had to leave the Hub City to further his education. During summers between the school years, Hammond came home and worked with his brother Luther as a deliveryman for a local ice company to make extra money for school. He stayed at Alcorn for eight years, earning his high school then college diploma. After graduating from Alcorn, he enrolled at Meharry Medical College in Nashville, the South’s only medical school for African Americans. Education was worth sacrifice and Hammond labored through his late twenties, working nights to put himself through Meharry. He finished in 1924 with a degree in pharmacy.\footnote{Smith, interview.}

In 1925, Hammond returned to Hattiesburg, where he found an office space waiting for him. While Hammond was in school, his father Turner was saving money for his son’s return. Turner managed saved enough to buy a small two-story building on Mobile Street. He gave the facility to his sons. The older brother Charles had also earned a medical degree and was one of only a handful of black doctors in Mississippi. Hammond bought his first run of pharmaceuticals on credit and officially opened the Smith Drug Company in 1925. He was open for the next fifty-five years. Charles ran his medical practice upstairs. The Smith family medical dynasty thrived in that space on the 600 block of Mobile Street. Hammond’s pharmacy was a neighborhood institution, serving thousands of customers who often stopped by to admire his college degrees hanging proudly on the walls. Charles delivered hundreds of local babies and treated thousands of ailments. The fourth Smith brother Wendell was one of the store’s first clerks. Hammond built a life in that store. A few years later, he married a Meridian girl.
named Lucille and bought a house on Dewey Street, just a couple doors down from his parents and older brother Charles.\footnote{Polk’s Hattiesburg City Directory: 1935 (R.L. Polk & Co. Publishers, 1935), 229-232; Smith, interview; and Dr. Isaac Thomas interview by Jessie Flowers, transcript, Hattiesburg, MS, December 23, 1994, USM-OH, F341.5.M57 vol. 733.}

The Smiths weren’t the only black medical family in Hattiesburg. Early on a man named Dr. James Randall and his wife Daisy moved into the Mobile Street neighborhood years earlier and had been seeing patients in his home longer than most people could remember. Dr. Jerome S. Love started his practice in the 1910s. Both families were affluent among their neighbors. Dr. Randall gained a reputation for only being seen in suits. He lived and worked in a large white home on New Orleans Street, complete with a beautiful wraparound porch and backyard storage shed. Randall practiced there for years before moving to a split office right on Mobile Street. Love’s office was located just up the street in a two-story building on the corner of Seventh and Mobile Street. Love and his wife Flonie lived in a large ranch home just behind his office. The ambitious couple also ran a few businesses on the side. She opened the Hub City Café on Mobile Street and he ran a dance hall on the first floor of his practice.\footnote{Polk’s Hattiesburg City Directory: 1935, 138; Smith, interview; Thomas, interview; Richard Boyd, interview by Charles Bolton, transcript, Hattiesburg, MS, August 29, 1991, USM-OH; Sheet 15, Hattiesburg, MS, March, 1910, Sanborn Map Company Ltd., Digital Sanborn Maps, 1867-1970 (hereafter, Sanborn Maps); Sheet 14, Hattiesburg, MS, August, 1915, Sanborn Maps; and Sheet 14, Hattiesburg, MS, April, 1931, Sanborn Maps.}

There were other success stories. A lot of barbers found opportunity on Mobile. Gayther Hardaway and Fred Patton owned two of Hattiesburg’s first black barbershops. Opening sometime between 1903 and 1906, Hardaway’s Barbershop and was located in the heart of Mobile Street. Gayther lived with his wife Minnie just off East Sixth and ran the store for over twenty years. In 1919, Gayther opened up a grocery store and operated it through the Second World War. Fred Patton and his wife Maria had arrived in the Hub City in the 1910s, and he worked as a day laborer for various Hattiesburg firms until he could save enough to open his own shop in 1915. Through the 1920s and much of the
1930s, Patton’s Barbershop was known as one of several places where you could grab a copy of the *Chicago Defender*.\(^{343}\)

Other notable companies included the Woods Grocery and Sam Carmichael’s diverse string of businesses. The Woods Grocery rested in the heart of Mobile. By 1921, J.B. Woods was regularly holding secret Republican Party meetings there while his wife Lenon made dresses for sale in their nearby home. Sam Carmichael was an early local black magnate. His successful barbershop led to the opening of additional stores including a billiard hall, dance hall, and butcher shop. When Sam passed, his son Bill opened the Circle Beer Garden, which remained a popular and notorious venue for years to come. The businesses sprouted across Hattiesburg’s black downtown through the 1910s and 1920s as thousands of migrants from rural migrants arrived from the cotton fields of Mississippi and Alabama in search of a better life. These black institutions fulfilled dreams and provided stability and peace to a new generation of ambitious migrants who arrived in the Hub City.\(^{344}\)

Hattiesburg’s black entrepreneurs carved out promising possibilities within the immense challenges of black life in Jim Crow Mississippi. White supremacy was as much a part of the municipal framework as the trolleys that ran downtown. African Americans met countless racial barriers to opportunity. The systematic laws of the Jim Crow South such as literacy tests and understanding clauses kept them from voting while the racial mores of Jim Crow life challenged them daily. Their social interactions with whites were remarkably stressful and often humiliating. For blacks, interracial interactions consisted of stepping down from the downtown sidewalks, enduring countless demeaning racial epithets, placing payments on the counter in lieu of a hand-to-hand exchange, abiding by the restrictive and unequal “Colored” accommodations at every turn, experiencing random and brutal police harassment, and the countless indignities met by black women at the hands of offensive white men. There were

\(^{343}\) *1909 Hattiesburg City Directory; Polk’s Hattiesburg City Directory, 1918, 407 and 371; Polk’s Hattiesburg City Directory: 1935, 75, 121, and 331; Sheet 7, Hattiesburg, MS, October, 1906, Sanborn Maps; Smith interview; and “Mississippi Barber Dies in Accident,” *Chicago Defender*, August 14, 1937, 4.  

\(^{344}\) “Fire Destroys Historic Hotel,” *Hattiesburg American*, September 18, 1998, copy in Folder 1, Woods Guest House Collection, USM. For more on Woods’s and Carmichael’s early businesses, see Chapter 3, 34-35.
innumerable daily reminders of their racial place. At every turn, blacks were told again-and-again-and-again that they were second-class citizens, if that.\textsuperscript{345}

As if the daily reinforcement of Jim Crow wasn’t enough, there was also the poverty. The Great Depression that crippled millions of American lives left black Mississippians rooted at the bottom. Like most disasters of the twentieth century, it hit them harder and worse than everyone else. During the Depression, some barely had enough to eat. Others didn’t even have that much. There are hundreds of horrifying tales of poverty, especially in the Delta where the early promises of the late nineteenth century had been peeled back by violence, racial oppression, droughts, floods, and the boll weevil. Poor blacks lived in Hattiesburg too. In fact, almost all of them were incredibly poor if measured by the standards of any industrial country. Even most of the businessmen weren’t rich. In 1929, Mississippi’s black-owned stores had average net sales of just $2,709 (approximately $26,000 today). The last remaining sawmill jobs paid very little and many of the service positions paid less. Local whites were of course also hurting but they at least had some promise of relief whereas black Hattiesburgers were excluded from much of the Hub City’s community relief efforts. African American were largely excluded from local fundraisers like the \textit{Hattiesburg American’s} 1932 Church and Charity campaign. Nor did they receive large donations from philanthropists like Louis Faulkner or enjoy the full promises of New Deal programs like the WPA and CCC. In a city willing to expel the Red Cross if it catered to impoverished African Americans, black Hattiesburgers were left to fend for themselves.\textsuperscript{346}

And then there was the violence. In 1921, Arthur Jennings was murdered for killing the black concubine of a white male. Twenty year-old John Gray was lynched in 1923 for defending a black woman against a white rapist. His body was found abandoned in a ditch after a group of whites kidnapped him from the local sheriff. Other sorts of


\textsuperscript{346} For more on black poverty during the 1920s and 1930s, see Neil McMillen, \textit{Dark Journey}, especially 111-194, statistic on 191; and Nan Elizabeth Woodruff, \textit{American Congo: The African American Freedom Struggle in the Delta} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).
violence also lingered over their heads. For a teenage boy, walking home through the wrong neighborhood could mean a busted jaw, blackened eye, or concussion from an unseen brick. For black women, downtown strolls often resulted in disturbing and humiliating sexual harassment and unchecked verbal abuse. Black girls had to grow up faster than everyone else. Working in the wrong home could mean the lingering sting from a makeshift switch or the pain and rage of an unreported rape. Black men were killed for trying to stop those assaults. John Gray’s family knew that.  

Although not all Hattiesburg whites participated or encouraged the abuses, few made any effort to stop them. Open and brazen white supremacy thrived in the Hub City. The violence was hardly hidden. The local Klan Klux Klan was as visible in Hattiesburg as one of the local rotary or garden clubs. They held public initiations like summer carnivals. The ceremonies were announced days in advance in the local newspaper and even at some churches. At one initiation on a February Saturday night in 1925, the Klan charged $1.00 admission and raffled off a Studebaker Automobile. Sometimes the white supremacist group was even asked to perform civic service duties. The Klan surged across America through the 1920s by railing against urban vice, which they believed was invading American cities through ethnic and racial minority groups. So in many cities Klansmen were embraced by city officials as community leaders by city officials. Many local administrators joined themselves. In 1924, Forrest County sheriff H.C. Norsworthy deputized members of the White Knights to crack down on crime in the black community, especially bootlegging. One can only imagine the terror felt by local blacks as the Klansmen strolled through their streets. This brand of Klansmen didn’t even need sheets. They had badges. Klansmen even spoke in churches, offering lessons on morality and faith to keen congregations. In 1930, the Court Street Methodist Church welcomed former head of the Mississippi Klan Fred Wankan for a Sunday guest lecture titled “Home and Its Relation to the Church.”


348 Display Ad—Public Initiation K.K.K., February 20, 1925, Hattiesburg American, 8; “Ku Klux Aid in Hattiesburg Dry Raids,” Hattiesburg American, February 1, 1924, “Former Ku Klux Head to Speak in City
Not all the violence came at the hands of whites. Some blacks turned on each other, as all people do, attacking members of the race over trivial matters such as lover quarrels. The pages of the *Hattiesburg American* are filled with reports covering dozens of such attacks, including stabbings, assaults, and murders. In the first week of June in 1926, a woman named Henrietta Harris stabbed an acquaintance she suspected of having an affair with her husband. The following June, John Jenkins and Charlie Baty were arrested for killing another black man in a domestic dispute. Another black man named Will Barnes stood trial for whipping his wife so hard that she “almost fainted.” Will Barnes was a notorious local criminal who had been shot by the previous year for trying to break into a local woman’s home. 349

Barnes was one of dozens of local blacks who turned to crime. Most of the arrests weren’t for offenses against each other. Theft and bootlegging were most common. African Americans were constantly arrested and convicted of stealing whether they were guilty or not. If mere accusations were enough to motivate lynch mobs, they were also certainly enough to make a conviction that would send accused blacks to the chain gangs for years on end. Prohibition offered even more lucrative illegal opportunities. Black alcohol smugglers were arrested almost weekly through the 1920s. In 1925, a man named Charles White tried to slip by authorities by dressing as a preacher and smuggling pints in a briefcase underneath a Bible, but he was apprehended alongside the other two members of his corn whiskey ring. The *Hattiesburg American* seemingly convicted the accused in its front pages before the trial and its coverage was unbalanced and undependable. So were many of the actual convictions. But the endless stories of the crime and violence that filled black lives offers an eerie glimpse into the often unstable nature of black

---

Hattiesburg life through the 1920s. The reminders were constant and brutal, infecting their lives like a bacteria and grinding an intense fear and hatred into their souls. Yet, despite the daily difficulties of black life, many of the black migrants stayed in the Hub City. Turner Smith and his sons, Gayther Hardaway, Fred Patton, Sam Carmichael, and J.B. Woods could have left. Every single one of them could have packed up their dreams and moved to Chicago as did thousands of others. In fact, two of Turner’s sons did leave. Martin Luther Smith and William Lloyd Garrison Smith abandoned the Hub City to open medical practices in Cleveland and Los Angeles, respectively. Martin Luther tried to get Hammond to join him in Cleveland, but the older brother refused. Hammond tempted enough that he once to journeyed to Columbus, Ohio for the state pharmacy licensure test. But the Mobile Street stalwart just couldn’t ever bring himself to leave for good. His pharmacy was already well established by the time his brothers left and Hattiesburg was home to him. He had grown up there on Dewey Street, surrounded by the happiness of a loving family and boosted by the promises of education. Even in the midst of the racial challenges, he found happiness there and elected to stay. In the long view it seems to have been a good decision. As an old man, Hammond remembered, “I’m glad I stayed now.”

Hattiesburg’s black population grew steadily throughout the early twentieth century. Despite the racial horrors, thousands of blacks still viewed the Hub City as a place of opportunity. Hattiesburg was almost always better than the plantations they left behind. Life in the Hub City offered the mobility of wage labor and communal solidarity through black churches and schools. So even during the Great Migration, as thousands of blacks left for Chicago, new Southern migrants quickly filed into places like the Hub City to take the open jobs and live among each other. In 1918, an official from the National Urban League observed that Hattiesburg had already been “depopulated of Negroes and repopulated again.” As the thousands left, even more arrived to take their place. They

350 “Three More Arrests in Connection with Money Theft at Hotel,” Hattiesburg American, May 28, 1926, 8; and “Negro Sells His Whiskey By Scripture,” Hattiesburg American, February 2, 1925, 1. For more on black-on-black crime, see McMillen, Dark Journey, 202-204.

351 Smith, interview.
came as groups, families, and even churches in search of the opportunities available in the Hub City and a way to get off the farm.\textsuperscript{352}

Sometime during the First World War, Osceola McCarty’s grandmother and grandfather left their lives as farmers and moved to Hattiesburg. McCarty’s grandfather took a job at a sawmill while her grandmother Julia took in laundry. Osceola’s grandfather was killed in a horrific sawmill accident soon after the move, but the family managed to survive. Julia took in as much laundry as she could in order to put food on the family table. Osceola was forced to drop out of school to work full time in sixth grade when an aunt fell ill and the family needed more income. She always regretted being unable to finish her education. Osceola wanted to be a nurse, but the urgency of her aunt’s ailment stopped those dreams from coming true. Osceola worked as a laundress for the rest of her life, casting aside her educational dreams to care for her family. There are countless stories like this from Mississippi towns like Hattiesburg. Without help from the rest of their society, black families relied deeply on one another. But Osceola McCarty was unique. She became the most famous black laundress in American history. Through the years, McCarty scrimped and saved every penny she could, combining it with inheritance from her relatives. Decades later, she made an astonishing $150,000 donation to the scholarship fund at the University of Southern Mississippi, a school neither she nor her peers could have attended in their youth. The gift earned McCarty national acclaim and the Presidential Medal of Freedom. “I wanted a scholarship for children what couldn’t,” she explained. Osceola McCarty certainly appreciated the transformative power of an education even though she was unable to achieve on herself.\textsuperscript{353}

The McCarty’s were just one family among many who arrived in Hattiesburg as others fled the South. Hattiesburg’s black population never stopped growing. Between 1920 and 1930, when blacks left the South at record breaking rates during the apex of the black northern exodus known as the first Great Migration, Hattiesburg’s African


American population actually increased thirty-eight percent. The Chase family arrived from Pike County, the Boyd’s came from Clark County, and the Thomas’s moved to Hattiesburg from nearby Perry County. Overall, more than 2,000 settlers arrived in the city’s ever expanding black neighborhoods. They settled in new places too since Mobile Street couldn’t support them all. Hundreds of newcomers packed into a new black neighborhood just south of the JJ Newman Lumber sawmill, adjacent to the river, which of course, was prone to flooding. The new black settlement wasn’t as busy as the Mobile Street neighborhood, but it grew quickly and included over two hundred residences by 1921.\footnote{U.S. Bureau of the Census, \textit{Fourteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1920, Volume 2: Population General Report and Analytical Tables}, 77; U.S. Bureau of the Census, \textit{Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930, Population: Volume III, Part I Alabama-Missouri} (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1932), 1294; Veola Chase interview by Annie Pope, transcript, December 22, 1995, USM OH; Boyd, interview; Thomas, interview; and Jesse Oscar McKee, “The Residential Patterns of Blacks in Natchez and Hattiesburg and Other Mississippi Cities” (Ph.D. diss., Michigan State University, 1972), especially 94-96.}

The waves of black migrants who arrived in Hattiesburg continued to give rise to a vibrant black business community. Local black commercial trade grew like wet grass throughout the 1920s, constantly expanding the number of entrepreneurs and economic diversity. Because of Jim Crow, African American entrepreneurs played larger and more important social roles than their white counterparts. The black community relied on them not only for their shopping needs, but to help provide social spaces and serve as role models to young people. Hattiesburg’s black businesspeople embraced this role, collectively organizing to lead and embracing the old communal self-help traditions pushed by early black pioneers Isaiah T. Montgomery and his close ally Booker T. Washington. For decades, the Hub City was home to a large branch of Washington’s National Negro Business League. Gayther Hardaway, the barber turned grocer, was President of the Hattiesburg branch through the 1930s. Dr. James Randall was the Vice President and Dr. Charles Smith served as Secretary. The self-help traditions advocated by early pioneers played out among Mobile Street’s businessmen. President Hardaway regularly attended meetings of the National Negro Business League across the country to learn from and exchange ideas with other community leaders. The Hub City’s leading
black entrepreneurs also formed an organization called the Hattiesburg Business League to help coordinate local activities. Hardaway was also the President.\textsuperscript{355}

Hattiesburg’s black entrepreneurs helped lead numerous community self-help programs through much of the early part of the Depression, sponsoring dozens of social and fundraising events. It is impossible to track all of their activities, but we know of a few. On January 1, 1928, the Hattiesburg Business League sponsored an Emancipation Day celebration outside of Gayther Hardaway’s grocery. Dr. Charles Smith served as master of ceremonies and Dr. James Randall introduced a guest speaker from Mobile. In 1930, grocer J.B. Woods helped a group of local ministers organize a fundraising effort for the construction of a new playground for black children. Woods himself met with the Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce and convinced the white businessmen to sell land to the black group. The Hub City’s black business community also organized the formation of the Negro Auxiliary of the Red Cross. In October of 1932, Chairman Gayther Hardaway launched a massive organizing drive with the goal of attracting 500 local members. Local leaders would go door-to-door collecting pledges from supporters. The drive opened with a large rally that met outside Hardaway’s grocery store. The spirited crowd received their campaign materials and sang a rendition of “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” before filtering out into the black neighborhoods to organize. Another group called the Colored Upbuilding League was able to gain financial support from whites for the construction of a training home for young black maids. The school was obviously problematic because it placed black women on a limited professional track, but blacks probably supported the idea because jobs were so limited for black women anyway and at least this training school compensated young women as they were trained. The Hattiesburg Negro Business League threw a large fair in May of 1934 to raise money for a new school playground and the high school’s science department. The Fair included a parade through the black downtown and a talk on “Negro Improvement” from the visiting principal of the Prentiss Industrial Institute. Through the 1920s, local blacks organized

against tremendous odds to uplift their communities within the confines of an incredibly oppressive system.\textsuperscript{356}

The businessmen were also connected to large organizations, representing the interests of black Hattiesburgers at meetings across Mississippi and America. Gayther Hardaway served as Hattiesburg’s representative to the Committee of 100, a black statewide organization originally founded in 1923 to unite Mississippi’s leading black citizens to discuss the general improvement of their people. Hardaway was elected to the Board of Directors in 1929. He also travelled to the 1928 National Business League conference in New York City and served on the national organization’s Executive Committee. I.C. Harper, who owned a watch repair shop on Mobile Street, was black Hattiesburg’s representative to the Mississippi Afro-American Sons and Daughters hospital committee. The 55,000-member Afro-American Sons and Daughters were organizing the construction of a black hospital and Harper lobbied for Hattiesburg. He was even able to convince the Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce, desperate for any type of local investment, to offer a subsidy for the project. Gayther Hardaway, Dr. Love, and Dr. Randall also served on the committee. Grocer J.B. Woods was the local principal of politics and regularly represented his community at national Republican Party meetings. In 1924, he was among hundreds of Southern blacks who arrived at the Republican National Convention in Cleveland, Ohio to demand that the G.O.P. do more to ensure the right of blacks to vote in the South. Woods was the alternate delegate from Mississippi’s Sixth Congressional District in 1924 and later served as the district’s primary delegate through the 1940s, always demanding the advance of blacks’ right to the franchise that had been stripped away in 1890. Through groups like the National Negro Business League, Republican Party, and the statewide Committee of One Hundred, representatives from strengthening black communities continuously gathered in dialogue through the

\textsuperscript{356} “Hattiesburg, Miss.,” \textit{Chicago Defender}, January 21, 1928, A8; Minutes of the June 26, 1930 Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors Meeting, Box 1, Folder 2, Hattiesburg Area Chamber of Commerce Records, USM (hereafter, CoC); “Negroes Rally to Red Cross,” \textit{Hattiesburg American}, October 22, 1932, 8; “Colored Group Seeks Support for New Home,” \textit{Hattiesburg American}, January 3, 1929, 8; and “Fair a Success,” \textit{Chicago Defender}, May 12, 1934, 4.
1920s and into 1930s, connecting the leaders from growing communities of those who stayed.357

Other community initiatives flowed out of the schools. Hattiesburg’s earliest black migrants grew up attending a small, wooden schoolhouse with red doors on the corner of Sixth and New Orleans, just a block away from Mobile Street. Turner and Mamie Smith’s children were among the generation who went to school in that little wooden building with the red doors. There were two other schools for young students, but no high school. Students who wanted to continue beyond eighth grade needed to leave town. Black Hattiesburg educators were dismayed at having to send their students to high school outside of the city. Third Ward School Principal W.H. Jones took it upon himself to keep one of his graduating classes enrolled in Hattiesburg, forming a ninth grade class for a select few. In 1920, he personally taught a group of his students who wanted to matriculate into the ninth grade without leaving the city. Meanwhile, the community organized under his leadership to lobby for the construction of a local black high school. The city approved the measure just at the end of the lumber boom and built a beautiful brick structure over the sight of the old schoolhouse with the red door, just a block away from Mobile Street. The two-story brick building opened in 1921 as one of the finest black schools in Mississippi. Principal Jones named the new school Eureka, meaning “I found it.”358

Eureka played a crucial role in local black life. The building itself was a virtual rite of passage for generations. If you were black and wanted to go to school beyond the eighth grade, you attended to Eureka. Thousands of students came through there.


Compared to the opportunities available to other Mississippi blacks, Eureka was an incredibly good school. School officials offered courses in arithmetic, English, chemistry, physics, and several foreign languages. In the back was a small building where domestic science was taught. Marie Washington Kent was among the first to graduate from Eureka and remembers Principal Jones teaching a Latin class and his wife running the school’s music department. Another teacher named Mrs. Clark conducted courses in Negro history, connecting her eager young pupils with ancestral icons of the black past to offer students with a brighter sense of their futures.359

The actual Eureka building was more than a place to learn. It became a crucial part of local and even statewide community organizing efforts. In 1927, school officials used the Eureka building to host a summer normal institute to train undereducated black teachers from across the state. Nearly two hundred teachers arrived from twenty-seven Mississippi counties to spend the summer at Eureka. In 1930, school and church officials sponsored a program titled “Negro Health Week,” offering free sanitation and basic medical care clinics to local residents. Eureka was also home to the Luxis Club, an organization formed by students at Eureka High School and advised by Reverend R.L. Vernando of the Mt. Carmel Baptist Church. It was an improvement association that sought to achieve the “mental and moral improvement of Hattiesburg youth.” School officials also helped expose their students to other black institutions, providing a glimpse into the possibilities awaiting them on college campuses outside of Hattiesburg. Eureka students enjoyed programs like performances by the Tougaloo Choir from Jackson, Fisk University’s famous Jubilee Singers of Nashville, and a speech made by Tuskegee Institute President and Booker T. Washington successor Robert Moton. The school fostered a wonderful environment for learning. Osceola McCarty attended Eureka as a young child and remembered years later, “I just really enjoyed going down there to school.”360

359 Burger, interview; Kent, interview; and Ariel Barnes interview by Sarah Rowe, transcript, April 1, 1993 and Ariel Barnes interview by Priscilla Walker, transcript, January 6, 1995, USM-OH.
360 “Negro Normal School in Full Swing,” Hattiesburg American, July 1, 1927, 5; “Negro Health Week Workers to Meet Monday Morning,” Hattiesburg American, March 3, 1930, 10; “Colored Youth is Organized,” Hattiesburg American, February 2, 1931, 7; Sheet 10, Hattiesburg, MS, May, 1925, Sanborn Maps; Barnes, interviews; and McCarty, interview.
Entrepreneurs and educators delivered resources, but it was everyday local people who manufactured hope. Because their daily lives were full of unforeseen abuses, spirituality was a practical matter for black Mississippians. Something had to get them through. Their faith didn’t require jobs or money, just togetherness and courage. A female-led organization named the Colored Neighborhood Society regularly gathered to sing at the homes of black women in the Mobile Street neighborhood. Their other activities are fairly unclear, but we know that they sang. At a meeting at Pearl Johnson’s house during the first week of March in 1925, it was reported that the group sang numerous songs, including the old African American spiritual, “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot.” Some of them undoubtedly learned the song from their parents and grandparents who sang the old spiritual as slaves in the cotton fields. Like the generations who came before, the music drew them together and promised a better life. Another group called the Community Choir was formed out of several local congregations and rotated performances between Hattiesburg’s black churches and even sometimes attracted white spectators. Music was solace. The blacks who came to Hattiesburg arrived with generations of spirituals embedded in their souls. The songs had been passed down since slavery. From the cotton fields to the dusty streets of black Hattiesburg, those spirituals helped fabricate hope as they lost themselves in the traditional words and prayers of an oppressed people while gleaning courage through the strength of their community. They sang all the time; in their homes, on the porches of friends, and on Sunday morning church services as they packed the pews of their proud brick cathedrals many had helped build with their own two hands.361

Those churches offered the most crucial sanctuaries. St. Paul and True Light were particularly important. Each was well established by the 1920s. St. Paul was founded in 1882 and True Light was organized in 1903. Those early congregations were formed by the first black migrants to arrive in the Hub City at the turn of the century looking for the sawmill and railroad jobs. The churches had a combined membership of over 800 by the

1930s. Both congregations were incredibly active. St. Paul Methodist, where Turner Smith and his family attended, hosted a Sunday school, Epworth League, Stewardess Band, Lola J. Hall Ladies Aid Society, Women’s Foreign Missionary Society, Women’s Home Missionary Society, and the Queen’s Esther Circle Number 1. The groups organized fundraisers for their less fortunate members, sponsored special programs, held revivals, and organized social activities, adding an essential layer of community organizing to the local efforts of entrepreneurs and educators. In 1930, its congregation organized to build a new two-story red brick church that to this day continues to host Sunday services and organizational meetings.362

True Light’s congregation was just as active. Its members enjoyed numerous organizational activities including involvement in the Home Mission, Willing Workers Club, Baptist Young People’s Union, Deborah Club, Business and Social Club, and Pastor’s Aid Club. Both congregations were chock full of civically conscious and socially active members. St. Paul and True Light churches stood out in black Hattiesburg, but they were hardly alone. The old Mount Carmel Church on the corner of Mobile and Seventh was also very active, and so were nearly a score of others. By 1935, the community counted nineteen active congregations. The churches were central to black Hattiesburg life. They provided a communal space for relief, spirituality, and peace. Black Hattiesburg was at its finest on Sunday mornings as troops of black families strolled down the dusty streets of their community in freshly pressed suits and newly polished shoes to gather and sing in the sacred spaces where they found hope and unity.363

362 “True Light Baptists Church News Program,” The Union Messenger, Vol. 1, No. 1, November 29, 1934, 1; Mrs. Margaret Boutwell, “Assignment #26—Church History,” May, 1937, Box 10687, Folder: Churches, Negro, Series 447: Historical Research Material, 1935-1942; Works Project Administration Historical Survey (Hereafter WPA-Forrest), Mississippi Department of Archives and History (hereafter, MDAH), Jackson, MS; and Polk’s Hattiesburg City Directory: 1935, 334-335. This information is also derived from personal observations made at St. Paul Methodist Church in Hattiesburg, MS on October 8, 2011.

363 “True Light Baptists Church News Program,” The Union Messenger, Vol. 1, No. 1, November 29, 1934, 1; Mrs. Margaret Boutwell, “Assignment #26—Church History,” May, 1937, Box 10687, Folder: Churches, Negro, Series 447: WPA-Forrest; and Polk’s Hattiesburg City Directory: 1935, 334-335. This information is also derived from personal observations made at the former site of True Light Baptist Church in Hattiesburg, MS on October 8, 2011.
Local people poured into those structures every Sunday for weekly services, but they came on other nights too. It was typical of southern black churches to leave open doors for the community. Black Hattiesburgers gathered in the evenings to perform plays and songs, hold debates and recitals, and have suppers. There were other places to congregate as well. The Mah-Jong Social Club threw periodic dances at Dr. Love’s garden of Joy Hall. Black businesses, fraternities, school graduations, ballgames, and dozens of local social clubs provided more social havens, places to escape the maddening daily humiliations and terrors of Jim Crow. Among each other and away from the daily specter of race, blacks could take deep breaths and even relax, stealing quiet moments of departure within the storm of Jim Crow. Sometimes those escapes were even simpler. There were Friday night bridge parties, children’s birthdays, luncheons, teas, and even just an evening rocking away and singing on a neighbor’s porch.364

Black life in Hattiesburg was always difficult and often terrifying. One cannot blame those who found opportunity elsewhere and left. The motivation for departure was usually pretty simple. As one Mississippi migrant explained, “I just want to be somewhere where I won’t be scared all the time.” But those who stayed in places like Hattiesburg weren’t merely the doomed and hopeless left in the wake of the millions who left. Many decided not to go. They leaned on each other to build meaningful lives despite the menacing racial oppression and the eventual sharp decline of the sawmill and railroad jobs. They weren’t a population that was just merely violated and abused, dangling from a thread in the Depression. Those who stayed were resourceful and resilient, crafting hope and courage within the confines of unjust society. Under the foreboding clouds of Jim Crow grew a strong and proud community where supper clubs and church spirituals exposed pockets of rainbows that made their lives bearable and even sometimes happy. And because so many of their friends and families left, those who stayed were also never alone.365

*   *   *

364 This description of daily social activities is drawn from “Hattiesburg, Miss.” social updates that appeared in the Chicago Defender between 1921 and 1939; and “Mah-Jong,” Chicago Defender, July 29, 1933, 7.
365 McMillen, Dark Journey, migrant quoted on 264.
Robert Abbott’s *Chicago Defender* opened 1929 with a brazen headline: “Mississippi Ends Old Year By Lynching Two.” That first story of the New Year chronicled the horrible killing of a Hattiesburg auto mechanic named Emmanuel McCallum, who on the night of December 26, 1928 had been ruthlessly ripped out of his bed by a group of white murderers posing as lawmen. The *Defender* recapped the horrific lynching, noting how McCallum had slowly strangled to death and was later found with his face “showing signs of intense torture.” According to a subsequent story, a fire was set to the McCallum home to cover-up any lingering evidence of the kidnapping. Local blacks were terrified the paper noted. 150 of them allegedly gathered their belongings and left for the North. “Every train leaving this section of the country,” the *Defender* reported, “carries with it men, women and children bound for Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, Indiana and Wisconsin.”

With good reason, the *Defender* was incensed over the McCallum lynching. Its readers must have been too. But coverage like this is why they read the *Chicago Defender* in the first place. By the 1920s, the paper reported nearly every race murder to occur in Southern towns. Ida B. Wells had been the first to send race news up and down the tracks of the Illinois Central. She began doing so in 1891 when she and Isaiah Montgomery hocked copies of the Memphis *Free Speech and Headlight* from Mound Bayou through the rest of the Delta. In the coming years, Wells’s race columns made her the most famous black journalist in the world. Her exposes on Southern racial violence were syndicated in newspapers across the globe. By the time Robert Sengstacke Abbott founded his *Chicago Defender* in 1905, Wells had shrunk into a less active newspaper role, running her husband’s *Chicago Conservator* and raising her growing family. Now a competitor, Abbott learned an important lesson from the pioneering newswoman. Big boisterous race stories from the South sold copies. All the migrants still had relatives and friends in the Dixie and wanted to follow race stories from the places they once lived. Robert Abbott’s *Defender* developed into Chicago’s most brazen black paper, reporting news from the South and eventually even calling for black Southerners to migrate to the Windy City as he and Wells had done themselves. The importance of race news in the

---

366 “Mississippi Ends Old Year by Lynching Two,” *Chicago Defender*, January 4, 1929, 1; and 150 Families Leave Town,” *Chicago Defender*, January 19, 1929, 1.
black Chicago media only grew in scope as hundreds of thousands of black Southerners moved to the Windy City and wanted to keep abreast of those who stayed.\(^{367}\)

Although Wells had been reporting lynchings for decades, this second generation of coverage in the 1920s and 1930s was more impactful because the hundreds of thousands of blacks who moved to the Windy City could now vote. Black Chicago migrants were instinctually interested in Southern race news and further galvanized by a growing collection of African American organizations including the NAACP, National Negro Congress, and Urban League who rallied their constituents around the plight of Southern blacks. In places like Chicago, this created additional pressure on politicians to support the fight for lynching justice in the South. Their support created grassroots momentum for anti-lynching legislation like the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill, which would have made lynching a federal crime and thus prosecutable in federal courts where murderers could not be let off by all-white juries composed of their friends and neighbors. Federalizing lynching investigations promised for more indictments and convictions. Blacks threw their support behind politicians who advocated such legislation. As NAACP Secretary James Weldon Johnson told President Calvin Coolidge in the election year of 1924, “There is no matter on which the colored people of the United States have felt so strongly and so unitedly since the Emancipation Proclamation as the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill.” The impact was felt throughout the American cities where blacks moved and could vote. Congressman Leonidas C. Dyer’s own congressional district included a large black neighborhood in St. Louis. The bill was never passed, but this type of political influence was unprecedented. By casting a gaze on Southern racial horrors, large groups of northern blacks could help those who remained in places like Mississippi. As historian Patricia Sullivan has observed, “The exodus of

blacks from the South elevated the possibilities for those who stayed.” Ida B. Wells would have been proud.368

The Defender also actually found some solace in the response of Hattiesburgers to the murder. In fact, the paper was cautiously optimistic about the reactions of Hattiesburg whites to the lynching. “For the first time in the history of Mississippi,” the Defender noted, white citizens authorized “the expenditure of any other funds necessary for the apprehension of the guilty parties who entered the home of Emmanuel McCallum ‘in the name of the law.’” Although the northern black paper probably didn’t recognize the full breadth of the motives behind the all-white Chamber of Commerce’s $20,000 award, it certainly appreciated the effort. In a second page editorial titled “Light From Darkness,” the Defender noted that “An unusual thing is happening in Mississippi.” “Time was when Mississippi led America in the drive for the yearly lynch record and proud of it.” “It is inspiring,” the paper observed “to see those same white people up in arms and obviously serious about catching the persons responsible.” A week later, the black northern weekly reprinted an encouraging editorial from the Hattiesburg American that denounced the lynching. “Mississippi,” the Chicago Defender wistfully noted in 1929 “may be making progress toward civilization after all.”369

The coverage of the McCallum lynching was just the tip of the iceberg of Hattiesburg news in the Chicago Defender. The thousands of migrants who poured out of the Hub City during the 1910s and 1920s remained vehemently interested in the activities and lives of those who stayed. Plenty of good news arrived with the bad. Some migrants received their news through personal exchanges such as letters and telegrams. Others just simply grabbed a copy of the Defender to read about the daily highlights from black Hattiesburg. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the Chicago Defender printed thousands of stories detailing black life in the Hub City. Nearly every issue of the “World’s Greatest

369 “Mississippi Ends Old Year by Lynching Two,” Chicago Defender, January 4, 1929, 1; “Light from Darkness,” Chicago Defender, January 5, 1929, A2; “Other Papers Say,” Chicago Defender, January 12, 1929, A2; and “Jury Fails to Convict in Lynch Case,” Chicago Defender, January 19, 1929, 2.
Weekly” was full of the latest updates from Mobile Street. The paper covered too many events to count. The social announcements ranged widely and included lists of party attendees, graduation notices, social club activities, dinner reception menus, high schools athletics scores, retirement parties, engagement parties, birthday parties, meetings, lists of Chicagoans hosted in the Hub City, and notices of Hattiesburgers visiting Chicago. Although the source of each announcement isn’t always discernible, it is clear that dozens of local socialites constantly reported on Mobile Street neighborhood news, sending wires and letters to the Defender that described all local social events and developments, keeping the migrants abreast of the happenings in the lives of those who stayed.370

While regularly occurring Hattiesburg updates detailed the everyday tea parties and luncheons, larger or more important events received special notice in the Defender. The newspaper ran a front page story in 1932 when Mayor W.S.F. Tatum kicked the Red Cross out of City Hall, noting that the racist mayor acted in frustration “because he couldn’t inject Mississippi tactics into the local branch of the Red Cross.” Other events that drew special notice included the appearance of the Rust College Glee Club in front of 150 guests at the annual Hattiesburg Silver Moon Social Club Party and the engagement party that Turner and Mamie Smith threw for their daughter. More feature articles included a Friday night bridge party thrown in honor of visiting Chicagoan Lelia Burns, the conviction of a local man named W.T. Wallace for practicing voodoo, a visit of Afro-American Sons and Daughters leader T.J. Huddleston, the massive birthday party Arthur Peters threw for his daughter Maudi Mae, the graduation party for Eureka and Alcorn graduates thrown at the masonic lodge, and the 1933 Elks Banquet where guests were entertained by musicians from the Alabama Tuskegee Institute.371

370 The actual number of Hattiesburg events is difficult to quantify. My general estimates are made by observing that Hattiesburg updates appeared in virtually every issue of the Defender over a fifteen year period, and that each update contained between 3-7 separate announcements. I think it is safe to estimate that at least 2,000 separate black Hattiesburg events were announced in the national edition of the Defender. This total does not include special stories, of which there are hundreds. Reporters were only sporadically credited.

Of course, the Defender wasn’t merely just sold in Chicago. In 1929, its circulation outside of the Windy City was an estimated 79,000 copies per week. Pullman Porters who worked on the railroads brought copies south on the railroad tracks and passed it along to young men who sold them in the barbershops and grocery stores that dotted Southern black communities. A lot of black Hattiesburgers probably grabbed their copy on the way home from the downtown mills or white neighborhoods where they worked. Others bought their issues on the weekends in the black Mobile Street district or listened to their friends read the latest Defender news as they sat in salons and barbershops waiting for haircuts. Southern blacks loved the newspaper because of its commitment to covering race stories from Dixie. The lives of the black men and women of Hattiesburg were excluded from the pages of the Hattiesburg American, but local people could just pick up a copy of the Chicago Defender to read about the latest happenings in their own neighborhood. It must have been a small thrill for many to see their names in the Windy City paper. As the grocer J.B. Woods told a Defender reporter at the 1936 Republican National Convention, Hattiesburgers “are strong for the Chicago Defender and feel lost without it.”

Hattiesburgers were wild for the Northern weekly and even felt a personal connection with the Chicago paper. In 1932, a lonely local girl named Edwina C. Collins wrote to the Defender asking for pen pals. The newspaper printed her letter. “I have written to several girls,” she wrote, “but I failed to receive an answer…please tell all the gang from 12 to 16 years of age to write to me. I promise to answer all letters.” Edwina was looking for friends through the Defender. Her letter shows something powerful about the individualistic potential of the Chicago paper. Imagine that, a local black youth sending a letter 700 miles away in the hopes of easing loneliness in her Mississippi hometown. Whether young or old, thousands of blacks like Edwina saw some sort of inherent power in the pages of the Chicago Defender. It was a constant connection to the

“Magician, Healer Gets Chain Gang,” Chicago Defender, January 10, 1931, 5; “Graduates Are Guests of the Royal Zophangs,” Chicago Defender, June 24, 1933, 6; and “Elks Annual Banquet Held at Clubhouse,” Chicago Defender, July 1, 1933, 7.

outside world. Other local children wrote too, asking to belong to the *Defender’s* famous Billiken children’s club. Many of their activities were also covered by the Chicago weekly. An example included Fredna Drake’s fourth birthday party in 1935. Young people across the South were attracted by the *Defender’s* 1935 subscription contest, which offered a trip to Chicago as a reward. Whoever sold the most $2.00 subscriptions would earn a free journey to the Windy City in the summer of 1935. Melvin Bailey was the Hattiesburg contestant with the highest local sales.  

There were thousands of extraordinary connections between Chicago and Hattiesburg. The migrants never completely left the Hub City behind as they fled to Chicago. Even those who moved took a piece of home with them. Hundreds of Hattiesburg families and friends settled together, maintaining local identities through the migration. Hattiesburg remained a spiritual homeland for many. Robert Horton, the barber who had arrived in Chicago in 1917 along with 150 other local families and opened the Hattiesburg Barbershop, was just one such example. The Hattiesburg Barbershop was just one such example. In coming years, other migrants founded institutions such as the Hattiesburg Social Club and another club simply called the Hattiesburg Club, which made regular contributions to the *Chicago Defender* Christmas Fund, the Urban League, and the NAACP. There was a constant flow in either direction as visitors travelled between the two cities. Hattiesburgers were welcomed for brief Chicago visits by migrants from their hometowns. Visitors from the South would stay with migrants and attend large parties thrown in their honor where they would chat with familiar faces, catching up, gossiping, and remembering. The Chicago-based Hattiesburg Social Service Club hosted dozens of guests in the early 1930s, including Dr. James Randall and his wife Daisy in the summer of 1930. A few months later, the Hattiesburg Social Service Club treated Hub City visitors Mrs. Neal and Mrs. N. Jones with a series of bridge parties and luncheons before their trip culminated with a surprise party in a south side home on the night of September 25th. The pair was greeted by old friends and entertained with literary readings and a solo performance. Hattiesburgers could always

---

count on the warm hospitality of their long distance neighbors and former friends when they arrived in the Windy City, even just for a visit. The black Hattiesburgers stuck together in and out of the South, organizing hundreds of social activities within their midst and building lives through each other. The Hattiesburg Social Service Club held regular meetings even if there were no visitors from the Hub City among them.374

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Hattiesburg blacks were never as isolated behind the curtain of Jim Crow as one might think. What emerged through the vast black migrations of the interwar period was a sort of Hattiesburg diaspora. Northern migrants settled and socialized with people from their hometowns, maintaining an eye on the happenings of black neighborhoods like Mobile Street through papers like the Chicago Defender. As blacks congregated in Northern cities, they remained intently focused on the status of their Southern brothers and sisters. Events such as the murder of Emmanuel McCallum could become national race stories in the black media. Lynchings drew the greatest response and always would, but other events also attracted interest. Even tea parties and bridge clubs were chronicled in the pages of the Defender as the paper catered to audiences in Chicago and Mississippi. Important avenues of communication grew and expanded between local black communities and the migrants who left, forming important foundations for using increased Northern influences to launch constant and dedicated efforts to help the lives of the black Southerners who stayed.

*   *   *

Per capita, no Mississippi town received more attention in the Chicago Defender than Isaiah Montgomery’s Mound Bayou. The all-black town had been the municipal darling of black journalists since the days of Ida B. Wells’s frequent visits to see her dear friend Isaiah Montgomery. During Mound Bayou’s early years, dozens of other black leaders frequently visited the town and shared their experiences with audiences across the country, expounding its merits drawing increasing attention to America’s most successful

example of black self-help and educational success. Booker T. Washington was a regular
guest, and constantly cited the example of Mound Bayou on speaking tours and in
virtually every book he wrote. Although the Mound Bayou settlement and its environs
never grew beyond 8,000 residents, the town emerged as a beacon of potential in African
American life. It was a municipal icon, attracting dozens of African American leaders
and speakers to the small all-black town in the Mississippi Delta. Isaiah Montgomery
remained one of black America’s most celebrated leaders. In the summer of 1921, he
travelled to Washington D.C. and was rumored to have met with President Warren G.
Harding to discuss the status of race and the Republican Party in Mississippi. 375

Isaiah Montgomery lived a long time. When he passed in March of 1924,
African Americans across the country mourned. The former slave who founded
America’s most successful all-black settlement by trumpeting education and self-help
was a relic of the past who offered a vision for the future. Montgomery, that ambitious
young former slave who grew up in a reading family on the Davis Bend plantation left
quite a remarkable legacy. Beyond Mound Bayou’s sheer visibility, the most important
aspect of Montgomery’s activism in the 1920s was helping organize the Committee of
One Hundred the year before he died. The Committee of One Hundred was composed of
prominent black businessmen from across the state and was designed to connect black
leaders from various Mississippi communities. The state’s leading race men gathered in
annual meetings to connect with each other and brainstorm ideas for uplifting African
Americans. Gayther Hardaway led the Hattiesburg branch for years and served on the
statewide board of directors in the late 1920s. Because of potential white resistance, the
nature of Committee activities was often kept hidden thus making their exact activities
hard to track. But the idea to facilitate conversations between communities was
important. The Committee formed a cohesive and ambitious body of African American
leaders thirty years before organizations like the NAACP established anything at the state

375 “Club Woman Speaks to Mound Bayou Citizens,” Chicago Defender, April 26, 1924, 3; “Mound Bayou
Celebrates Its Anniversary,” Chicago Defender, July 13, 1929, 3; “Mound Bayou Celebration Draws
Visitors from Across the Country,” Chicago Defender, July 24, 1937, 4; and “Mound Bayou Founder
Confers with President,” Chicago Defender, August 27, 1921, 1. See Chapter 1 for a discussion of early
Mound Bayou history and Isaiah Montgomery’s early relationships with Ida B. Wells and Booker T.
Washington. Also see August Meier, “Booker T. Washington and the Town of Mound Bayou,” Phylon,
Vol. 15, No. 4 (4th Qtr. 1954), 396-401.
level. The NAACP did establish a handful of early branches in Mississippi. In fact, Mound Bayou was the second one and Montgomery was a member. But the national organization didn’t spread far. The Committee of One Hundred didn’t make a major impact during Montgomery’s life, but in the coming years it continued to connect black leaders from across the state and would ultimately lay the groundwork for the emergence of the NAACP in the postwar era.376

The Chicago Defender paid close attention to Mound Bayou even after Montgomery’s death. Montgomery’s daughter Mary, named for her mother, replaced her father in the black public eye. Later recognized by the Defender as “one of the country’s best known club workers,” Mary was very politically and civically active. In 1924, she became the first African American woman elected to the Republican National Committee and served as the party’s Mississippi Chairwoman. Mary’s husband Eugene Booze, a Clarksdale native who had arrived in Mound Bayou during the settlement’s first decade, was the city’s representative to the Committee of One Hundred. Eugene and Mary were probably Mississippi’s most visible black couple throughout the 1920s. When they visited Chicago in 1928, a Defender reporter followed the couple through town, reporting their various movements and social activities. The reporter so closely followed them that even the couple’s chauffer received praise. By the late 1920s, the offices of the Chicago Defender were a virtual landmark for Southern visitors to the Windy City and Mary and Eugene stopped in for a tour. A year later, the first black couple of Mississippi received similar treatment while visiting New York, including an article in the New York Age chronicling the couple’s visit to that newspaper’s offices. The Defender routinely followed the Mound Bayou couple in the coming years, continually reporting on their activities as they travelled to Chicago to raise money for Depression-bitten Mississippi families, spent time in Washington D.C. talking to Republican leaders, and met with

President Herbert Hoover who had first encountered the pair during his tour of the 1927 Mississippi River flood.377

The Defender also covered famous visitors hosted by Mound Bayou. In 1929, celebrated black educator Mary McLeod Bethune arrived in the “Negro Capital of Mississippi” in 1929 to help the town celebrate its forty-second birthday. The following year, Chicago’s first black elected Congressman Oscar DePriest ventured down the tracks of the Illinois Central Railroad for the city’s annual Founder’s Day. Most visitor coverage didn’t receive full-length articles, but the Defender regularly included the names of lesser-known Chicagoans who visited Mound Bayou and printed major news from the city. In 1931, the race paper covered the meeting of the National Federation of Colored Farmer’s Inc., a three-day session hosted by Mound Bayou where the nation’s leading black farmers gathered to organize. Throughout the 1930s, the Defender ran dozens of Mound Bayou articles covering various events such as high school graduations, holiday festivals, and a special visit to the town by fictional Chicago Defender children’s editor Bud Billiken who in 1936 visited 800 Billiken Club members at the Bolivar County Training School and recounted his Southern journey in a series of special Defender articles.378


In 1937, the Defender again shone a spotlight on Mound Bayou in a series of articles covering the city’s euphoric Golden Anniversary celebration. Fifty years had passed since Isaiah Montgomery founded his all-black town in the middle of the Mississippi Delta wilderness. Mound Bayouans celebrated their Golden Anniversary in full force that summer. From July 11 to July 18, the black town hosted hordes of visitors anxious to help celebrate the city’s heritage. The festivities opened at the three story Bolivar County schoolhouse with stirring tributes to Mound Bayou founders Isaiah Montgomery and his partner Benjamin T. Green. Black leaders from across the Delta arrived for the ceremonies. The Defender reported that every town within 100 miles sent a representative to help the town celebrate. The anniversary celebration was even announced in northern mainstream papers including the New York Times and Washington Post. 379

Mound Bayou burst with energy throughout that Golden Anniversary week in the summer of 1937. Like everywhere else, the city was hard-bitten by the Depression, but they remained extremely proud of their town’s legacy and determined to celebrate its past. The weeklong celebration was filled with “glowing tributes” to Montgomery, community dances, films of black heavyweight boxing champion Joe Louis, numerous parades, and a series of concerts. Mound Bayou had always been an epicenter of black Mississippi leadership and the Golden Anniversary week naturally included a political component. Black fraternal leader James Finley Wilson attracted a large crowd when he arrived to extoll the virtues of an anti-lynching bill and call for the abolishment of disfranchisement and Jim Crow segregation. The all-black town proudly exhibited its thriving business district that included a chiropractor, lawyer, dentist, two undertakers, real estate dealers, and plumbers, four social clubs, building contractors, beauty shops, filling stations, and eleven barbershops. The Defender noticed the impressive financial

district, praising the Mound Bayou Chamber of Commerce and noting that despite the Great Depression, “there are abundant opportunities for the development of other business enterprises in the area.”

The most notable guest of the Mound Bayou Golden Anniversary was the pilot Colonel John C. Robinson. Nicknamed the “Brown Condor,” Robinson was a pioneer of black aviation. A Gulfport, Mississippi native, Robinson was one of six black pilots who graduated from Booker T. Washington’s Tuskegee Institute in 1920. He moved to Chicago and started America’s first black pilot organization and an aviation school for African Americans. Robinson earned acclaim as an early pioneer of black aviators, but his real rise to fame came in 1935 when he travelled to north Africa to join Ethiopia’s fight for independence. Ethiopia was invaded by Italy in October 1935, marking the beginning of the Second Italo-Abyssinian War. Despite lacking formal combat training, Robinson boldly left America to fly planes in support of the Ethiopian effort against the Italian fascist Benito Mussolini. Ethiopia was severely outgunned and quickly fell to the Italian invaders, but Robinson’s domestic popularity soared. Thousands of African Americans had pledged to help Ethiopia defend itself, but the Brown Condor was one of the very few who actually went into action. Upon his return in 1936, Robinson became one of black America’s most celebrated icons and certainly its first father of flight. While the rest of America had Amelia Earhart and Charles Lindberg, African Americans had the Brown Condor. Robinson attended the Mound Bayou celebration at the height of his fame, speaking to large crowds and even taking guests up into the sky for short but thrilling rides in his airplane.

---


The largest crowd arrived for Jessie Owens Day. Owens had skyrocketed into American celebrity the previous summer at the 1936 Berlin Olympics when he sprinted his way four gold medals and stunned German Nazi Party officials who believed in the complete athletic superiority of the Aryan race. Those victories made Owens the most famous black athlete in America not named Joe Louis. He was a cause celeb not only for the nation’s African American population, but for all United States citizens. An estimated crowd of 10,000 turned out for Jessie Owens Day in Mound Bayou to meet the speedster and see him demonstrate his running technique. It was the largest social gathering in the history of the Mississippi Delta. Owens was so impressed with his reception that he reportedly inquired about purchasing a home in the all-black town. Later that same night, Mary Booze capped the most exciting day of the Golden Anniversary by throwing her husband Eugene a phenomenal birthday fete. All the most prestigious guests attended. Owens and Colonel Robinson were there. So was the attention of much of black America.  

Despite the jubilee of Mound Bayou’s Golden Anniversary, life in Isaiah Montgomery’s all-black town was certainly not free of challenges. The city was hit hard by the Depression and falling cotton prices of the 1920s and 1930s. The farmers of Mound Bayou struggled, and thus so too did their banks and merchants. But as they had done in the past, the citizens of Mound Bayou joined together to fight the crippling recession. They formed co-ops, hosted statewide farmers meetings, and also sought federal relief. The Defender closely followed their actions, reporting on their resiliency. “You don’t beat the citizens of Mound Bayou that easily,” the paper reported.

---


Like the rest of America, Mound Bayou would come out of the Depression with the coming of World War II. The citizens helped the war effort. City leaders launched successful war bond drives. One local merchant launched a cigarette drive and sent a donation of 30,000 cigarettes to the men fighting at the front. Volunteers placed two stickers on each pack. One read “Victory for all,” the other, “Mound Bayou, Miss.” Hundreds of local young men left to help fight the fascists, causing one local farmer to gripe, “The draft has taken away all of our young men who were responsible for producing crops.” But the war also brought back the cotton trade. Prices rose to normal levels and the town once again began to flourish. Mound Bayou was coming back in full force by the middle of the war. New buildings were built and locals started rejuvenating downtown stores. “They’re planning big things,” the Defender noted in 1943.  

Mound Bayou citizens also once again poured resources into their schools, most of which had been founded by Isaiah Montgomery during the town’s earliest days. Education remained their cultural backbone and Mound Bayouans continued proudly calling their city the “Negro educational center of the Delta.” The lessons of self-help and racial advancement floated through generations, having a major impact on the pride of a people. “Psychologically Mound Bayou Negroes are different,” wrote one Chicago Defender reporter after visiting the small town. Sixty percent of young people who graduated from the consolidated school went on to college at places like the Tuskegee Institute, Hampton, Alcorn A & M, or Fisk University. But even those who didn’t attend college received what the Defender dubbed, “the best rural school education available to Mississippi negroes.” Five decades after Isaiah Montgomery chopped out a little section of the Mississippi Delta for his all-black town, education remained the most essential value for the black families that lived and grew in Mound Bayou.


385 Mound Bayou Foundation Pamphlet, Mound Bayou, Bolivar, MS, 1929, “Negro educational...” quote on 5, Box 1, Folder 24, Dr. T.R.M. Howard Papers (hereafter, Howard Papers), Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Chicago Public Library, Chicago IL; and
Aside from schools, the greatest point of post-Depression pride for Mound Bayou was the opening of the town’s 60-bed $100,000 Taborian Hospital. The medical facility was desperately needed. The Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority had for years operated a health clinic in the small town, but the entire region was in dire need of a hospital. Ninety-eight percent of black children born in the region were delivered by midwives. Even after the completion of the hospital, Delta blacks only had an estimated 1.4 hospital beds per 2,000 residents. The idea for the all-black hospital had been floated for years. At one point, Hattiesburg had also been in the running. But the Depression largely crushed the momentum and the foundation for the Taborian hospital wasn’t laid until 1940. The hospital finally opened in February, 1942 in front of a massive 7,000-person audience. From the day it opened, the Taborian Hospital was one of the best medical facilities for blacks in the entire South. It was equipped with numerous examination rooms, laboratories, and even an x-ray machine and stood in the heart of the Mississippi Delta as a beautiful symbol of black communal accomplishment. Hospital news regularly appeared in the *Chicago Defender* along with stories featuring its new lead surgeon, a magnanimous young doctor named Theodore Roosevelt Mason (T.R.M.) Howard.386

Dr. T.R.M. Howard had an interesting background. Born in 1908 to an illiterate Kentucky tobacco worker and maid, he grew up incredibly poor in a black community haunted by violent white nightriders. Howard’s ascension to one of America’s most famous black doctors is a remarkable story. He grew up greatly admiring his mother’s employer, a white physician named Dr. Will Mason. From an early age, Howard recognized that education could ensure for him a better life than his parents. He always strove to succeed in school. Dr. Mason was a greatly impressed by Howard’s educational enthusiasm and formed a special relationship with the son of his black maid. Mason became an almost surrogate father-type and Howard would later add Mason to his name to honor the white doctor. Mason remained a mentor to Howard as the eager young pupil


progressed through school. In 1924, the doctor offered to help young T.R.M. pay the tuition at Oakwood Junior College in Huntsville, Alabama. Howard did well at Oakwood and continued receiving support from Mason. From Oakwood, he went on to earn degrees from Union College and eventually a medical degree from the College of Medical Evangelists in California.\footnote{This biographical information is drawn from David T. Beito and Linda Royster Beito, \textit{Black Maverick: T.R.M. Howard’s Fight for Civil Rights and Economic Power} (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009), especially 1-44.}

In 1942, T.R.M. Howard accepted the role of head surgeon at the Mound Bayou Taborian hospital. He enjoyed the new prominent role in Mound Bayou and thrived in the historic black community. Because of the demand for healthcare, Howard opened a private clinic in addition to his hospital work. In-fighting led to his 1947 dismissal as the hospital’s chief surgeon, but he maintained his own local practice and expanded his business interests. Within ten years of his arrival in Mound Bayou, Howard owned a restaurant, construction firm, large farm, and built the first swimming pool, the first one ever opened to Mississippi blacks. He even built a zoo. Howard made a fortune and emerged in the 1940s as one of South’s most successful black businessman. He was a modern symbol of the long tradition of self-help advocated by the early black leaders Isaiah Montgomery and his ally Booker T. Washington. Howard even later served as the President of Washington’s National Negro Business League. In step with the educational priorities of Mound Bayou, Howard also used his own resources to support the growth of local schools and in 1951 received the Distinguished Service Award from the all-black Mississippi Teachers Organization in honor of his commitment to education.\footnote{Enoc P. Waters, “Post-War Building Boom Seen In Mound Bayou By Founders,” \textit{Chicago Defender}, March 20, 1943, 8; and Beito and Beito, \textit{Black Maverick}, especially 1-44.}

The enterprising surgeon was also highly politically engaged. He had to be. Mound Bayou was and always had been a politically charged settlement. As its mayor Benjamin Green said of politics in 1943, “it’s a serious business.” Howard’s political role grew along with his continued accumulation of wealth. Howard was emerging as a leader, an aggressive one. From his roost in Mound Bayou, Howard began advocating for black voting rights throughout the state, a right lost during the Revolution of 1875. By
1950, he was hosting an annual “Freedom Day,” a massive voting rights rally filled with invited leaders from across the state. Howard was certainly not the first black Mississippian to promote voting rights, but few before him were more aggressive and brazen. Violent retribution was always a possibility for any who promoted black advancement, but Howard was well protected. He built a compound near Mound Bayou and stocked it with guns and two bodyguards. Howard himself was a crack shot who had learned to shoot during his boyhood in Kentucky when his mother would give the boy enough money for a handful of shotguns shells and tell him to kill dinner or go hungry. T.R.M. Howard was seemingly fearless and remarkably outspoken, making him a perpetual favorite with members of the black media and one of the best known African American leaders in the country. The Defender and dozens of other national blacks followed his career over the coming years. Howard became the new symbol of Mound Bayou, the postwar generations’ Isaiah Montgomery. African Americans continued to follow Mound Bayou and its charismatic new leader in the years after World War II. The municipal darling of black America would capture their attention one more time.389

Chapter 6: A Way of Life

The men began appearing at Camp Shelby on a hot September Sunday, weary and uncertain, but desperate to work. They came by the thousands, gathering like small cities on the sandy orange hillsides next to the employment office. The tattered workers arrived however they could. Roads leading to the camp were packed with the creak of rust-bitten vehicles, the highway “jammed with cars, trucks, bicycles, and anything else that would roll” according to one Hattiesburg American reporter. Some of the men had hoboed their way on railroad cars then hitch-hiked or walked the final leg of their journey. The camp was ten miles from Hattiesburg’s downtown train depot. One man had come all the way from Rhode Island, travelling across a thousand miles of America’s backroad byways in search of a job in the Mississippi Piney Woods. The workers arrived from at least seventeen different states, but most were locals from the dying lumber towns of south Mississippi. A large black man had walked from near Prentiss, making the entire forty-mile trek without proper shoes. Blood soaked through the makeshift bandages on his feet. He said his last meal had been a hamburger the night before. He needed a job. They all did.

The migrants took their places in the applicant queue and waited out the night as the scent of days on the road wafted through the air. Thousands of jobs were available the next morning. Those hired would find work; good work. Experienced bricklayers were to be paid $1.25 per hour. Journeyman carpenters would make up to $1.00. Even unskilled common laborers could earn up to fifty cents an hour. Those wages meant food and shelter. Even more, they meant dignity. The men who took jobs that Monday morning

would be able to lift their heads, send money back to their families, and enjoy the luxury of a good, honest day of work during the worst Depression to ever hit America. There were both white and black men. The races mostly kept to themselves, but they were all some kind of hungry. So they slept on those hillsides, warming themselves by the glow of campfires and trading stories from the road. Local residents brought tables and opened makeshift drink stands. Young boys walked the lines, selling peanuts. As the evening grew late, the waiting workers covered themselves in prickly but warm pine tree branches and fell asleep dreaming of the jobs waiting for them when they woke.391

An estimated 10,000 workers chased jobs to that hillside just outside of Hattiesburg during the final summer days of 1940. Their arrival marked the beginning of a remarkable recovery. That autumn, the Hub City would begin a rapid climb out of the Great Depression. Camp Shelby provided a new foundation, one that would help save the town. In the midst of that crippling recession, only war mobilization could offer that type of promise. The Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce tried to attract more jobs to the area throughout the 1930s, but there was just never enough work to go around. The same could be said of President Roosevelt’s New Deal. Programs like the Works Progress Administration (WPA), with its throng of local construction projects had never approached this level of employment. The WPA had targeted Shelby as a potential site for relief. In the six years prior, the New Deal organization spent $400,000 on maintenance and improvements out at the camp. Convict laborers chipped in too, whipping the camp into “spick span shape” according to one WPA observer. Those jobs had been somewhat helpful, and the camp looked nice. But $400,000 spread over six years provided only a glimmer of relief for a region teeming with thousands of workless men and women. War mobilization offered a unique opportunity. The spending in the fall of 1940 was going to be on a completely different scale. The federal government had earmarked $11 million for immediate Camp Shelby improvements. The building program included plans for a 10,000 unit tent camp, 294 mess halls, 24 officers buildings, 36 administration buildings, 19 infirmaries, a 2,000-bed hospital, 50 repair shops, and 37

391 “Announce Shelby Wage Scale,” Hattiesburg American, September 14, 1940, 1; John Frasca, “Army of Job-Seekers Lay Siege to Shelby,” Hattiesburg American, September 17, 1940, 1; and “Camp Shelby Work Begins: Job-Hunters Swarm Into Hattiesburg,” Hattiesburg American, September 16, 1940, 1.
warehouses. That was in the summer of 1940, more than a year before America went to war. Even more jobs would come.\(^{392}\)

In response to the dark fascist clouds spreading across Europe and Asia, the federal government increased weapons production and began mobilizing troops. In September 1940, the War Department announced a $200 million spending initiative. Much of that money went to the construction of training facilities like Camp Shelby. The camp was first built to train troops for World War I, but for over twenty years had sat vacant. The site needed serious renovations. A Charlotte firm named J.A. Jones Construction Company won the contract to rebuild the camp as a permanent troop site large enough to hold 42,000 in-training soldiers. The Jones Company announced it would hire local men to complete the job. A September 13 headline in the *Hattiesburg American* advertised 5,000 open jobs. Smaller newspapers throughout the surrounding Piney Woods lumber towns ran similar ads. By mid-October, the government asked for more accommodations, increasing the camp’s capacity to 52,000 soldiers. So the Jones Company hired even more men. On October 16th, 10,000 workers had jobs. By Halloween, the number topped 12,000. Civilian workers were paid more than $500,000 in wages at the end of October. Their earnings trickled into Hattiesburg. The once promising Hub City started coming back to life.\(^{393}\)

The news of workers gathering at Camp Shelby like bees on a hive captured the imagination of Hattiesburg residents. Updates from the camp buzzed through the city. People were constantly discussing the construction work and wondering about the incoming soldiers. Camp Shelby was on their minds. The *Hattiesburg American* began


running a daily column called “Shelby Briefs.” The city knew that opportunity was coming, even for those who didn’t find jobs in the forest. Everyone stood to benefit. Local residents waited for the soldiers to arrive, primed to take advantage. They rented out apartments and rooms to the young soldiers and camp workers, charging absorbent rates alongside rising demand. The rent on one house reportedly jumped from six to fifty dollars per month, forcing out the previous tenants in favor of soldiers who could afford the higher rates. A Jackson company invested in a $500,000 housing project adjacent to the camp. Soon, the hotels and restaurants would be filled with soldiers from across the country. Commerce boomed. Local merchants began staying open at night and hiring extra workers to compensate for the massive influx in business as the Hub City swelled with consumers.394

The troops would inflate the city’s infrastructure, providing even more jobs. The Mississippi Central Railroad invested $200,000 to rebuild an abandoned lumber spur that would shuttle one-thousand-man trains between Camp Shelby and Hattiesburg. The WPA announced a $350,000 airport project to transfer troops and later continue as a municipal airport. Hattiesburg had for years wanted a larger airport. Southern Bell announced the construction of a new $135,000 phone exchange. The city water systems supplied 5,000,000 gallons per day to Camp Shelby. The Mississippi Power Corporation experienced a twenty-six percent spike in business. Local farmers were swamped. The demand for military training gave them all the business they could handle. In the first half of December alone, the mess halls at Camp Shelby ordered 22,364 eggs, more than 20,000 pounds of turkey, and over 300,000 bottles or cans of milk. Farmers couldn’t produce enough. They bought livestock and hired help. Even young girls who couldn’t work at the camp became involved. Paramount Studios needed them for newsreels, and requested that they come out to Camp Shelby to “look pretty, smile and wave their hands to soldiers.” In one way or another, Camp Shelby offered something for them all. Everyone stood to benefit. Perhaps the only person who didn’t appreciate Camp Shelby’s

394 “Camp ‘Problem’ Meeting at City Hall Tonight,” Hattiesburg American, September 17, 1940; “High Rent Hurts,” Hattiesburg American, October 12, 1940, 8; and “Syndicate Announces Enterprise,” Hattiesburg American, October 12, 1940, 1. For more on Camp Shelby’s impact on Hattiesburg, see William Theodore Schmidt, “The Impact of Camp Shelby on Hattiesburg, Mississippi, 1940-1946 (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern Mississippi, 1972).
impact was Hattiesburg High School football coach Pinky Rohm. He had good reason to be sour. Poor Coach Rohm lost a pair of all conference guards and two starting running backs to the Camp Shelby labor force, and his normally stout varsity squad was blown out 42 to 0 by McComb in their first Big Eight Conference game.\textsuperscript{395}

Hattiesburg needed Camp Shelby. Government spending saved the Hub City from an ominous fate. The Great Depression had come early to South Mississippi, settling in well before Black Tuesday in October of 1929. By the 1930s, the city sat festering. The outlook was bleak. Jobs were drying up. Sawmills were laying off workers, drastically cutting hours, or even closing altogether. The city’s commercial base was decaying. The remaining downtown merchants desperately needed customers, but people didn’t have money to spend. The Great Depression was hardening. Locals responded similar to their predecessors. They attracted some new industries, but not enough to save the city. The ravenous Hub City sat waiting for help and city officials turned to outsiders to save their society. Government spending and expansion was their only way out. And so local whites took what they could while once again trying to hoard the most promising opportunities provided by outsiders.\textsuperscript{396}

* * *

By the time the \textit{Hattiesburg American} ran its “Church and Charity” campaign in October of 1932, Hattiesburg had been in the throes of the Depression for nearly a decade. That autumn, the \textit{American} finally conceded that “the forests are dead as an industry.” Work at JJ Newman Lumber was grinding to a halt. In November, the


\textsuperscript{396} Buck Wells, interview with Lawrence Knight, transcript, Hattiesburg, MS, April 24 and 28, 1997, University of Southern Mississippi Center for Oral History & Cultural Heritage (hereafter, USM-OH), Hattiesburg, MS. The WPA met conservative attacks throughout 1939 and 1940. It remained, but many programs were cut back. For a specific discussion of WPA legislative debates in 1939 and 1940, see David L. Porter, \textit{Congress and the Waning of the New Deal} (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1980), especially 61-88.
company that built the town would cease production, laying-off almost all its remaining employees. The only workers left would be charged with selling inventory. When that was finished, they would be laid-off too. Yet, despite the lingering recession, the American remained optimistic. Many Hattiesburgers felt the same. They really had no other choice. Locals had been struggling for years and hoped that they had already taken the hardest blow. As the rest of the nation bore down for a long recession, many Hattiesburgers began to feel hopeful. They thought the worst was over. “We’re Coming Out of the Trenches,” the Hattiesburg American proclaimed that autumn. “Business is brisker and there is a freer circulation of money.” The newspaper was probably just trying to increase local morale and its own advertising revenue. But the proclamation wasn’t a complete distortion. By the fall of 1932, there was indeed reason for optimism, and perhaps even cause for celebration. So in October, they had a party.397

During the last week of October in 1932, Hattiesburgers vigorously celebrated the Hub City’s Fiftieth Birthday with a weeklong celebration titled the Golden Jubilee Week. Talk of the commemoration buzzed through the downtown. It lifted spirits and generated optimism. Hope seeped through the city. The Hub City’s sixth annual industrial exposition ran the week before, and a record thirty-three organizations sponsored displays. Awards were given for the best canned okra, orange marmalade, and roast beef plates. Makers of the finest quilt won a cash prize. During Golden Jubilee Week, the Kiwanis Club sponsored numerous events, including a series of historical lectures. The Hattiesburg American ran dozens of articles, detailing the city’s rich history as a railroad and lumber town. White civic pride was at high tide. A new football field opened on the campus of the all-white State Teacher’s College. They named it Faulkner Field for Louis, who had helped conceive the idea and secure the labor to grade the playing surface. There was even a Thursday night fashion show, showcasing the city’s prettiest young white women and the latest goods sold by downtown boutiques. Captain William Harris

397 “Hub City Exposition Ready to Open,” Hattiesburg American, October 19, 1932, 8; “Prize Winners Are Announced,” Hattiesburg American, October 24, 1932, 8; “The Next Fifty,” Hattiesburg American, October 26, 1932, 4; and “We’re Coming Out of the Trenches,” Hattiesburg American, November 8, 1932, 6.
Hardy’s sons Lamar and Toney sent their best regards and appreciation from New York City, where both worked as lawyers just like their father.398

Golden Jubilee Week was far more than a sentimental celebration of the past. The highlight of the week was actually a prospective opportunity for the future. During the middle of their birthday celebration, Hattiesburgers hosted representatives from Reliance Manufacturing, a Chicago-based shirt manufacturer interested in the Hub City as a possible destination for a new factory. Hattiesburgers virtually drooled over the possibilities. Reliance was a proverbial big fish. Their famous “Big Yank” work shirts were sold in hundreds of J.C. Penny stores across the country. Chamber of Commerce officials estimated that the new factory would provide over 600 jobs and an annual payroll over $250,000. This type of industrial implant was exactly what they had been looking for, what Hattiesburg herself needed.399

The weather was uncharacteristically cold that week, but Hattiesburgers went all out for their Chicago guests. They dubbed Wednesday October 26th “Reliance Day.” The Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce bought two full-page ads in the Hattiesburg American, welcoming Reliance officials to the Hub City. The company was presented with a petition signed by local women who expressed interest in working in the factory. Louis Faulkner headed the Chamber of Commerce Reliance Welcoming Committee. The Chicago representatives were treated to a noon luncheon, city tour, and then finally an inspection of possible factory sites. Locals were instructed to be upbeat and friendly if they encountered the Chicago group. Sodas were to be served with smiles and coffee poured with a little extra care. The Hattiesburg American called for everyone’s participation, encouraging them to lift their heads and walk with a sense of pride. “Some folks will be embarrassed by the vacant store buildings,” the paper acknowledged, but “every town has vacant store buildings and Hattiesburg probably has fewer of them than any city its size in the South.” That evening, 175 distinguished locals paid fifty cents each

398 “Golden Jubilee Celebration Brings Many Visitors Here,” Hattiesburg American, October 26, 1932, 11; “Rotary Holds Golden Jubilee Celebration at its Annual Meeting,” Hattiesburg American, October 25, 1932, 1; and “Sons of Hardy Are Grateful,” Hattiesburg American, November 1, 1932, 8.
399 Report of Special Committee on Reliance Manufacturing Company, Box 1, Folder 5, CoC; and Minutes of the October 11, 1932 Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors Meeting, Box 1, Folder 4, CoC.
to attend an evening banquet at the Hotel Hattiesburg in honor of their Chicago guests. Louis Faulkner served as toastmaster.⁴⁰⁰

Although every citizen was asked to participate, most probably had no clue just how desperate city officials were to land Reliance. The Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce had been flirting with the Reliance Manufacturing Company since late summer when an obscure Chicago consulting company named the Fantus Factory Locating Service contacted them to gauge interest in a Reliance shirt factory. Fantus was hired by Reliance to find suitable sites for new factories. Their influence would grow rapidly in the coming decades, peaking in the 1950s as the South rapidly industrialized. Factory placement was a good business to be in. Desperate dried-up sawmill towns like Hattiesburg were fairly easy to find, and Fantus would receive a $2,500 commission for placing the factory in Hattiesburg. The Chamber of Commerce of course jumped at the opportunity, immediately forming yet another committee to court the big company. It was a great opportunity. Hattiesburg was desperate for any type of factory, and Reliance was indeed a big fish. But there was just one catch.⁴⁰¹

The Reliance Manufacturing Company knew that Hattiesburg was desperate. So they asked for several things. The first was for local officials to subsidize the factory to the tune of $4,000 per year for ten years. They also requested that Hattiesburg provide a manufacturing-ready factory site and building, and finally that the Reliance Company be exempt from local taxes for five years. In return, the company guaranteed 500 jobs with at least a $250,000 payroll. The Chamber of Commerce debated, but they couldn’t have

⁴⁰⁰“Hub Citizens Welcome Reliance Officials,” Hattiesburg American, October 26, 1932, 1; “Rotary Holds Golden Jubilee Celebration At Its Annual Meeting,” Hattiesburg American, October 25, 1932, 1; Display Ad—“Welcome to Hattiesburg Executives of the Reliance Manufacturing Company,” Hattiesburg American, October 26, 1932, 8-9; and “Reliance Executives Return to Hub City for Further Factory Survey,” Hattiesburg American, October 27, 1932, 1; the petition reportedly “went a long way toward convincing the representatives of The Reliance Manufacturing Company that Southeast Mississippi was the place to locate several of their factories,” Report of Special Committee on Reliance Manufacturing Company, Box 1, Folder 5, CoC; “some folks will be embarrassed” quoted from “Cleanliness,” Editorial, Hattiesburg American, October 24, 1932, 2; and Minutes of the October 11, 1932 Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors Meeting, Box 1, Folder 4, CoC.

⁴⁰¹Minutes of the Chamber of Commerce August 30, 1932 Meeting, Box 1, Folder 4, CoC Records; Minutes of Meeting of Special Committee for Reliance Manufacturing Project, September 22, 1932, Box 1, Folder 4, CoC; and Minutes of Meeting of Special Committee for Reliance Manufacturing Project, September 23, 1932, Box 1, Folder 4, CoC. For more on the Fantus Factory Locating Service, see James C. Cobb, The Selling of the South: The Southern Crusade for Industrial Development (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993).
ever really been serious about declining the terms. They needed the jobs too badly. So they began to plan. They got a huge boost when Mayor W.S.F. Tatum helped them out by pledging $30,000 of his own cash to help with the subsidy payments. He would be repaid by bonds posted by the Chamber of Commerce over a longer period. Then the organization took out a $50,000 mortgage to help pay for the building site. But costs exceeded the loan, so they sold bonds and asked for cash donations from local companies. Ultimately, the building cost them over $70,000. The one hidden bonus was that at least all the building work and supply sales would go to local companies. Reliance wouldn’t pay rent for a decade, but the shirt-making company agreed to open a new Hattiesburg factory. And so on May 1, 1933, the Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors and Reliance officials agreed to the contract. Optimism seeped through the city. They had finally gotten their big factory. Reliance wasn’t a solution, but those jobs and wages sure would help a lot of families.402

Perhaps the most important aspect of that readily improving mood of that fall was the upcoming Presidential Election of 1932. Hattiesburgers were chomping at the bit to vote for Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the smiling charismatic Democratic Governor of New York, and they hoped the rest of the country would join them in doing so. Mississippi had gone to the Democratic in every Presidential election since the Revolution of 1875 when blacks were stripped of the right to vote. The Party of Lincoln would not carry the Magnolia State. Regardless of candidates’ stances on political and economic issues, Mississippi was voting Democrat. There was no drama there. But the national Democratic Party had only sent one man to the White House since 1892. And even that had been a fluke. Virginia Democrat Woodrow Wilson was only elected in 1912 because former President Teddy Roosevelt returned from his adventures abroad to

402 Minutes of Meeting of Special Committee for Reliance Manufacturing Project, October 17, 1932, Box 1, Folder 4, CoC; Minutes of Meeting of Special Committee for Reliance Manufacturing Project, October 21, 1932, Box 1, Folder 4, CoC; Minutes of Meeting of Special Committee for Reliance Manufacturing Project, October 27, 1932, Box 1, Folder 4, CoC; Report of Local Finance Committee Reliance Factory Fund, October 10, 1933, Box 1, Folder 7, CoC; List of Contracts for Reliance Building, Box 1, Folder 7, CoC; and Reliance Contract, Box 1, Folder 5, CoC.
split the Republican vote with his idealistic Bull Moose Party. Since Wilson, however, the Democrats had gone cold.\footnote{For a narrative of the 1912 Presidential Election, see James Chace, \textit{1912: Wilson, Roosevelt, Taft and Debs—The Election that Changed the Country} (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005).}

Luckily for Mississippi, political change was coming. By the Presidential Election of 1932, the Great Depression was just settling in and much of the nation blamed Republican President Herbert Hoover. The President was vilified by the public for his inability, or even outright refusal, to do more for America’s poor. Hoover offered some relief, but not enough in many people’s eyes. The public demonized him for his lack of action. America’s poor blamed their fortunes on Hoover, dubbing their ramshackle shantytowns “Hoovervilles” and calling the newspapers they used for warmth “Hoover Blankets.” His political death knell came in the summer of 1932 when a group of World War I veterans known as the Bonus Army was violently evicted from their makeshift camp in Washington D.C. after demanding their service bonuses thirteen years early. Images of United States troops slugging it out with World War I veterans appeared on front pages across the country. The entire fiasco wasn’t necessarily Hoover’s fault. The military men who evicted the Bonus Army were certainly also to blame. And many Americans citizens didn’t support the immediate payment of bonuses demanded by the veterans anyway. Franklin Roosevelt opposed immediate payment too. But still, Hoover took the fall. The widespread sentiment was that the situation could have been handled better. “Hoover is going to get the royal boot of the veterans and other thousands of voters who side with them on the basic issue” predicted the \textit{Hattiesburg American}. Americans were proud but desperate. They didn’t expect charity, but just needed a bit of help. Roosevelt offered promise.\footnote{“Laying a Ghost,” \textit{Hattiesburg American}, October 21, 1932, 2. See William E. Leuchtenburg, \textit{Herbert Hoover: The American Presidents Series: The 31st President, 1929-1933} (New York: Times Books, 2009).}

Hattiesburg whites felt much like the rest of the country. They didn’t see themselves as vagabonds. Their society had been built from scratch by two generations of innovative men of vision. From Confederate veteran William Harris Hardy and his lunch on that riverbank in 1880, to the migrants Louis Faulkner, T.S. Jackson, and the Tennessean W.S.F. Tatum, their society had been built by ingenuity, grit, and hard work.
It had been pulled from the ashes of a burnt out South, replacing the deep scars left by the Civil War with industry, promise, and hope. But the mismanagement of the timber that fed their society created a massive void. They had slashed their own dreams. And so they needed help. Roosevelt offered hope. Unsurprisingly, there was little local dissention on Election Day in 1932. 91% of Hattiesburgers cast ballots for Roosevelt.405

With Roosevelt, the Hattiesburgers were no longer alone, struggling to rebuild their slipping society in the midst of a vast recession. The new President appealed to the American people by spending his evenings in their living rooms. In a series of nationally-broadcast programs known as the “Fireside chats,” Roosevelt laid out for the American people his ideas for relief, alleviating their greatest fears and trying to instill confidence in the government by promising to help. “When Roosevelt was making his famous fireside chats,” remembered one local, “you couldn’t find a soul that had a radio in his whole family [that] wasn’t wrapped up in it.” “Everybody in the South thought Roosevelt was the greatest thing that ever lived,” Buck Wells later recalled.406

The Hub City had lost its foundation, trees. And the federal government would provide a new one, saving Hattiesburg from a miserable slide into oblivion. In a bevy of experimental legislation enacted during his first two years in office, Roosevelt would unleash the power of the federal government in what he dubbed a New Deal for the American people. The idea behind his wave of legislation was to repower the American consumer. The United States would step in to give Americans jobs through experimental measures such as the National Recovery Administration (NRA), Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), and Works Progress Administration (WPA). Hattiesburgers benefitted from each part of that New Deal. These tactics made sense to people who lived in places like the Hub City of the New South, and they gladly accepted the federal help. Government dollars would replace the sawmill jobs while improving their communities as a whole. Everyone stood to benefit. It was ok to exchange work for relief, especially in that era when the entire country was hurting and in need of a little assistance. This wasn’t charity to them, just a new opportunity. “Nobody wants Mississippi to become a beggar

405 “Relief is Coming,” Editorial Hattiesburg American, November 1, 1932, 6; and election results found in “Forrest County Vote,” Hattiesburg American, November 10, 1932, 1.
406 Wells, interview.
at the government’s back door,” the Hattiesburg American editorialized that fall. “But other states are being helped by the federal relief commission and there is no reason why this state should not be included in the project.”

The short-lived NRA particularly helped the new Reliance plant. The program benefitted American workers by stamping a Blue Eagle logo on products produced in factories that paid minimum wages and offered reasonable working hours for their employees. Reliance became an NRA company. Across the country, consumers knew that the goods adorned with the NRA Blue Eagle logo supported good, hardworking American workers like the women who worked at the new Reliance plant in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Reliance sales boomed when the company joined the NRA. In 1934, its first quarter sales numbers broke all previous records. Plenty of work was coming to Hattiesburg.

The CCC also helped. Opening in the spring of 1933, the CCC was designed to combat three generations of American environmental abuse. The Mississippi Piney Woods wasn’t the only place to misuse its natural resources. Across the United States, millions of early twentieth century industrialists and farmers had ravaged and ruined millions of acres of America’s landscape. The CCC provided conservation jobs to young men, putting them to work in an effort to rescue the environment. The young men improved parks, planted trees, built rural roads, and protected the forest from fires, insects, and disease. The CCC quickly became one of America’s most popular New Deal measures. During the organization’s lifespan, it employed approximately 2.5 million Americans. Those young people helped change the American landscape. By June of 1936, the organization had planted approximately 570 million trees. The program was

---

407 A discussion of Reliance NRA efforts and benefits for Hattiesburg factory can be found in Minutes of Special Meeting of the Board of Directors of Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce, August 15, 1933, Box 1, Folder 7, CoC; and “Relief is Coming,” Editorial, Hattiesburg American, November 1, 1932, 6. For more on the consumer-based philosophy known as Keynesianism that drove much of New Deal strategy, see Alan Brinkley, The End Of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995).
tailor-made for places like the Mississippi Piney Woods, where the forests had been so ruthlessly torn out of the soil and young men wondered about looking for work.  

Mississippi had 34 CCC camps. Hundreds of locals from Hattiesburg and the surrounding lumber towns found jobs out in the forest. The *Hattiesburg American* ran dozens of front-page stories advertising jobs and reporting CCC activities. The CCC fought fires in the resurging forest and planted millions of longleaf yellow pine tree seedlings. By 1937, the paper reported that over 8 million trees have been planted by nearly 200 workers. “Pine tree seedlings,” the *American* gleefully reported, “are basking in the balmy spring sunshine, stretching their leafy little arms skyward and growing in terms of dollars and cents daily.” They also erected thousands of utility poles, helping bring telephone service and electricity to rural customers. The CCC was fulfilling its mission for the people of the Piney Woods, offering a handful of jobs and atoning for decades of environmental sins. And of course, like all forms of welcome relief in south Mississippi, locals consolidated the opportunities of federal relief to whites only. An anti-discrimination clause in the original CCC bill prevented Mississippians from complete discrimination. Federal authorizes threatened to cease individual states’ CCC funding if blacks weren’t included in the program. So Mississippi hired forty-six to demonstrate racial integration. In a majority black state, African Americans composed just 1.7% of Mississippi’s entire CCC workforce, demonstrating a vast racial disparity in the federally funded program.  

The WPA helped too. It arrived in 1935 as part of Roosevelt’s expanded relief program known as the Second New Deal. Like the CCC, the WPA was designed to employ workers in projects that benefitted the American public. The program hired men to build new city parks, improve high schools, fix bridges, and widen streets.

---


410 Examples include “18 Million Pine Seedlings to be Planted,” *Hattiesburg American*, November 26, 1935, 1; “Forest Fires,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 29, 1936, 1; “Forestry,” *Hattiesburg American*, March 14, 1936, 1; statistics reported and paper quoted in “Nearly 8 Million Pines Are Set Out,” *Hattiesburg American*, March 24, 1937, 1; “CCC To Hold Open House,” *Forrest County News*, April 1, 1937, 1; Salmond, *The Civilian Conservation Corps*, 84 for statistic on Mississippi CCC camps and see 88-101 for more on African American workers and the CCC program. Only 250,000 of 2.5 million CCC workers were black. As Salmond observes, “The Negro never gained the measure of relief from the agency’s activities to which his economic privation entitled him.”
Hattiesburgers pursued funds as aggressively as possible. They needed all the federal government help they could get and fully intended to use federal relief to help solve their local problems. The Chamber of Commerce led the push for federal relief. Just fifty days after President Roosevelt created the WPA by signing the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act of 1935, the Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce passed a motion to “take an active part in getting some of the money which is being appropriated by the Government for certain projects.” Louis Faulkner was head of the Local Relief Committee.411

The WPA programs were vast and ambitious. Numerous projects improve the city’s infrastructure and give work to jobless men. The workers widened dozens of downtown streets, built miles of sidewalks, and cleaned out Gordon’s Creek. The WPA paid the cost of the Forrest County Beautification Project, a campaign to improve the scenery of local schools and parks. Members of the Hattiesburg Garden Club supplemented the WPA wages by organizing donations of trees, shrubs, flowers, and lumber. WPA workers built benches, planted gardens on school grounds, landscaped cemeteries, mowed grass, and pruned shrubs all over the county. The Chamber of Commerce met often in 1935 to plan the distribution of the relief funds. Louis Faulkner was one of the few men who at first actually criticized the New Deal, but by 1935 he headed up the Relief Committee. The Hattiesburg American praised the Chamber of Commerce for its work distributing funds, dubbing it “one of the most successful years in the history of the civic body.”412

The federal programs also helped revitalize their schools and galvanize the community. In 1937, the WPA provided $33,000 for construction of a new gymnasium for the all-white Hattiesburg High School, whose boys and girls basketball teams had

412 “Pine Street: Start Widening Work,” Hattiesburg American, January 9, 1940, 8; Wells, interview; J.L. Langston, “Beautification Project--#1227 Forrest County,” Box 10687, Folder: Forrest County Agriculture, WPA-Forrest; India Lou Bryant, “Assignment #16—Section ‘C’ Landscaping—College Grounds,” Box 10687, Folder: The Arts, WPA-Forrest; “Building In Hattiesburg And Vicinity Picks Up Speed,” Hattiesburg American, December 5, 1935, 6; Minutes of the May 28, 1935 Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors Meeting, Box 1, Folder 9, CoC; and “C. of C. Banquet Ticket Deadline 9 a.m. Friday,” Hattiesburg American, December 5, 1935, 12.
been playing at the YMCA and YWCA. The new state of the art gym exceeded constructions costs, but the WPA chipped in an additional $15,000 more to finish the structure. The new WPA-built gym opened on February 16, 1937 to a massive crowd. The boys and girls Hattiesburg High School Tiger basketball teams played a double-header against Purvis. The girls lost the opening game 30 to 15, but the boys redeemed in the nightcap, winning by a wide margin of 32 to 17. Local whites enjoyed the gym for decades. Overall, the WPA poured over $50,000 into rejuvenating the Hattiesburg High School, planting trees and shrubs, painting its walls, and, replacing blackboards, making the all-white school a better equipped and nicer place to learn.413

One of the most historically useful Forrest County WPA projects was a massive study of Forrest County life and history as part of the WPA’s innovative Writers’ Project. A bevy of locals were employed between 1935 and 1942 to conduct research on Hattiesburg to submit to a body of other WPA writers who were compiling a book titled *Mississippi: The WPA Guide to the Magnolia State* as part of a nationwide series. Local researchers humped all across Forrest County compiling data on local businesses, churches, schools, daily events, and even flora. They produced thousands of pages of notes for the WPA, detailing daily Hattiesburg life during the Great Depression. All the notes were collected and deposited in the state archives where they remain today. Even if portions of their information weren’t used for the official WPA Guide, later historians would find them helpful while reconstructing Hattiesburg life during the Great Depression.414

The WPA Writer’s Project employed a handful of individuals who had met hard luck. Jos Langston was a former clerk whose wife worked at a store called the Rose Shop to help make ends meet. We don’t know all the details of how WPA work helped their family, but just two years after Jos took a job with the government agency, the couple moved into a nice little ranch bungalow behind the Sacred Heart Catholic Church. Local

414 Works Progress Administration, *Mississippi: The WPA Guide to the Magnolia State* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1938). The research notes are available at the MDDAH.
WPA historian Frances Griffith was a former stenographer at the Leaf Hotel. She was married to a laborer named Charles, and they had two kids. She published articles from her research in the small weekly called *The Forrest County News*, spinning yarns of legendary Hattiesburg moments and people. Most writers were single or widowed women who probably needed the money the most. WPA writers India Bryant and Lois Hunt lived by themselves. The widows Mrs. Willie B. Vinson and Beulah Summers certainly enjoyed the extra income. WPA jobs were important and diverse, employing broad ranges of people who helped revitalize the local infrastructure and capture segments of Hattiesburg life. The only group that was largely excluded was local blacks. A few black workers held WPA jobs running nurseries for young children, but nearly all the other jobs went to whites. Federal relief jobs benefitted thousands of whites, but they weren’t the sole source of employment. As the 1930s wore on, Hattiesburgers did begin to have some glimmer of industrial hope.415

In the summer of 1933, the Reliance Shirt Company opened their new factory on the corner of Ferguson and Railroad Streets on the southern border of downtown. The first paychecks went out on August 8th. Workers received a collective total of $617.68. In the coming months, the bi-weekly payroll rapidly expanded. The first paychecks in September totaled $2,884.20. A month later, the factory payroll was up to $5,059.42. 365 people worked there. By 1937, Reliance employed 825 men and women. The *Hattiesburg American* featured the employees in a cover story, noting their job satisfaction. The company’s top 400 employees each made $12 per week. The employees at Pioneer Silk were paid even less. They made an average of $454 a year (just shy of $7,000 today). Those paychecks again infused the small tokens of daily life into Hattiesburg families. They never made great money, but certainly earned enough to help feed their families

415 Frances W. Griffith, “Founders’ Day,” *Forrest County News*, February 18, 1937, 3. Other articles are available in subsequent editions. Information on the WPA writers was gained from cross-referencing their names in the *Polk’s Hattiesburg City Directory* for the years 1935 and 1937. Both are available at USM. The WPA Historical Research Material is cited throughout this chapter and available at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History. Similar research notes exist for other counties as well.
and put roofs over their children’s heads. The *Hattiesburg American* called the plant “a symbol of the spirit of accomplishment.”

Several other new industries moved to the city during the heart of the Depression, replacing many of the jobs that had fallen with the lumber. Tatum Lumber was the only large sawmill to survive the initial lumber shortage. It provided jobs to up to 400 men even through the mid-1930s. It lasted because it used only the best wood and didn’t produce nearly the same board footage as Newman. But even it would cut out in 1938, well before the recession ended. But other industries began to grow. People were finding new uses for the wood and even the cut-over sections of the once proud forest.

The Hercules Powder Company had opened a Hattiesburg plant in 1920, just before the fall of the sawmills. The Delaware-based chemical and explosive firm had grown wealthy during World War I and was seeking a way to break into the Naval Stores industry. The price of Naval Stores products skyrocketed during the war, but the declining Southern lumber industry made harvest more difficult. Nonetheless, the innovative Hercules firm had plans for a new distillation process. Rather than bleed the tar out of large, living trees, they crafted a way to steam it out of stumps. This steam-solvent process would allow them to produce turpentine from stumps. Shortly after World War I, company scouts began scouring the nation for cut-over lands. Barren forests were easy to find in America, but few were as vast as the areas just outside of Hattiesburg. As company executive Leavitt Bent recalled of a visit to the Mississippi Piney Woods, “you could see for yourself that literally billions of old stumps were available.” Southern workers were also fairly cheap and eager to work, especially African Americans. Sensing opportunity Hercules built a $500,000 factory in Hattiesburg, just a tick away from the black Mobile Street neighborhood. The company signed a deal with Newman Lumber, paying the northern-owned lumber company 75 cents an acre to remove stumps along Newman’s Mississippi Central Railroad. Over 75,000 acres were available. It was a perfect marriage. Hercules needed stumps and Hattiesburg had plenty.

---

416 Sheet 19, Hattiesburg, MS, April, 1931 + August, 1949, Sanborn Maps; Payrolls at Reliance Mfg. Co., Box 1, Folder 7, CoC; Minutes of the October 10, 1933 Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors Meeting, Box 1, Folder 7; and *Hattiesburg American* quoted in Beulah Summers, “The Reliance Manufacturing Company,” March, 1937, Box 10688, Folder: Industry, WPA-Forrest.

of them. The company hired hundreds to work out in wood camps blasting stumps out of the ground and then delivering to the factory on Seventh Street where they were used to produce naval stores products. Hercules never entirely replaced the Newman mill, but it offered several hundred jobs that would outlast the recession.\footnote{“Industries,” Box 10688, Folder: Industry, WPA-Forrest; Wells, interview; and Davis Dyer and David B. Sicilia, \textit{Labors of a Modern Hercules: The Evolution of a Chemical Company} (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1990), Bent quoted on 136.}

Numerous sawmill companies followed Hercules’s lead, switching from tree gravest to Naval Stores as the forests ran dry. The Dixie Pine Products Company shifted gears in 1927 from a sawmill to a strictly Naval Stores factory. It bought 100,000 feet of pine each month from the few remaining sawmill companies to extract pine tar for turpentine production. Thanks to a strengthening global market, both Dixie Pine and Hercules grew during the mid-1930s. Dixie Pine had 100 employees by March of 1935. Two years later, Hercules employed over 400 workers in constant 24-hour shifts. The best Naval Stores customers were overseas. The industry grew as Europe again geared for war. England and Germany were by far the Naval Stores Industry’s best customers, consuming approximately 40\% of the industry’s exports. By 1936, the soon-to-be-warring nations were annually importing millions of dollars of Turpentine, Pine Oil, Gum Rosin, and Wood Rosin. Business slowed down in 1939, but then exploded in 1940 when America began mobilizing for war.\footnote{J.L. Langston and lee R. Palmertree, “Lumber Industries—Past and Present,” September, 1935, and Beulah Summers and Margaret Boutwell, “Forrest Counties Most Important Industries,” March, 1937, both located in Box 10688, Folder: Industry, WPA-Forrest; “Dixie Pine Company Adds Workers For New Mill,” \textit{Hattiesburg American}, March 26, 1935, 6; “Imports and Exports,” Box 10687, Folder: Forrest County Agriculture, WPA-Forrest; Dyer and Sicilia, \textit{Labors of a Modern Hercules}, especially, 183-220; and Division of Foreign Trade Statistics, \textit{Foreign Commerce and Navigation of the United States, 1936: Volume II} (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1938), 42-48.}

Other industries arrived throughout the Depression, offering opportunities for despairing jobseekers. These industrialists found cheap workers in the laid-off lumbermen of the South. By 1937, over forty such industrial plants had opened across Forrest County. None of these companies would ever offer the levels of employment as the sawmills, but they helped provide temporary supplements for both white and black workers as the economy floundered. The Gulf Coast Creosoting Company waterproofed timber and employed about 50 people. Meridian Fertilizer provided 105 jobs. A massive
farm named Vickers Plant farms opened on a 500 acre tract in the countryside and employed between 400 to 500 seasonal laborers. Other companies such as Hub City Ice, the Hattiesburg Brick Works, Gordon-Van Tine Tire Company, and Weldmech Steel Products employed between twenty-five to fifty people each. The Pioneer Silk Mill opened in 1935, providing 500 jobs. It made raw silk to be sold and shipped around the country. Pioneer Silk was one of several factories included in a 1937 *National Geographic* special feature about Mississippi’s growing industries. A local girl who worked at the mill probably got a kick out of her picture appearing in one of America’s most popular magazines. By the time the article appeared, the company was struggling to get raw silk because of the Second Sino-Japanese War, but it did maintain a workforce for several more years.420

In many ways, the new companies helped locals rebuild a life. They not only provided jobs and wages but helped rebuild a sense of identity for local white workers. Reliance Manufacturing had a lounge for its workers named the Dixie Club. Employees enjoyed couches, game tables, a cafeteria, and a reading room. The club even had a dance hall where white employees gathered for Saturday night socials, fraternizing among their co-workers and enjoying the copious benefits of employment. Near Christmas, Reliance employees gave back to their communities by sponsoring a dance to benefit the Lions Doll and Toy Fund. They also turned out in droves to watch the company sponsored softball, baseball, and basketball teams compete in the Hattiesburg Twilight Leagues. Local company contests drew hundreds of spectators and received coverage in the sports section of the *Hattiesburg American*. Reliance Manufacturing and Hercules were always near the top. They became rivals in all sports. Hercules was particularly competitive. They gained a reputation for hiring men solely based on their athletic abilities. Some of them men who played for company teams were rumored to work only part-time at the plants, if they even worked there at all. Fingers were pointed and accusations of

recruiting flew the air. But the best company teams didn’t care. Wins were all that mattered. Victories were good for company morale, and all the biggest rivals competed like that anyway.421

Throughout the 1930s, the Chamber of Commerce scrapped to save their city, doing all it could to recover its industrial base. By 1939, there were fifty-two industries operating in the Hub City, providing much-needed work for locals. Paychecks came back into the lives of many and helped thousands begin to recapture the shattered potential of that once promising society. A few sawmills still produced timber, but the biggest industrial employers were the Northern-based Reliance and Hercules companies. Most of the other industries were small, but they all provided jobs. But along with the influx of new jobs came new citizens. As the small lumber towns surrounding Hattiesburg decayed and thousands of Mississippi farms failed, the broken families of south Mississippi arrived in the Hub City seeking a chance. The promises of the New South had failed so many of them. Jobs were falling all over the state. Between 1919 and 1939, the total amount of wages paid to working Mississippians shrunk from just over $51 million to $27 million. Thousands went on the move searching for work. Rumors of new companies and government work brought desperate men and families into the Hattiesburg. The Hub City was a haven for hope, a last ditch of opportunity. But their arrival made competition for jobs fiercer and stretched those wages thin. Not everyone could have a job and even those who did were regularly laid off. Some companies laid off workers as often as every other day. So despite some promising industrial growth, relief dominated local employment through the 1930s. The federal government provided more jobs than any company new or old. Southerners needed the New Deal more than any other region. In 1940, 1,310 Forrest County residents were employed in relief work, far more than any other industry and twice as many who still held jobs in sawmills or with railroads. Government spending was by far Hattiesburg’s most important industry. The Chamber of

Commerce helped Hattiesburg tread water, but it was the federal government that delivered air.\textsuperscript{422}

T.S. Jackson, Louis Faulkner, and W.S.F. Tatum couldn’t ever quite bring Hattiesburg over the hump. They had struggled hard for more than a decade, but the future remained bleak as the 1930s closed. Jackson died early, passing away in 1934 just after Reliance opened. Tatum closed his own sawmill in 1938. Faulkner’s Mississippi Central Railroad was hemorrhaging money on its passenger service and was soon forced to begin cutting service. The railroad ended its passenger service to Natchez in early 1941 after thirty-seven years of continuous service. One of the laid-off conductors had been delivering passengers to Natchez since 1904 when the road was loaded with potential. The promises of the New South had crumbled for many. But the Chamber of Commerce kept pushing, desperate to save its beloved Hattiesburg from the plight of the crumbling lumber towns that surrounded the Hub City. They had seemingly tried everything to replace the old industries, but could never find a permanent solution. Thousands of desperate families remained scattered across their region as uncertainty clouded their future. They were seemingly out of options. But then everything suddenly changed during the final days of summer in the year 1940. Just ten miles out in the decimated forest, Camp Shelby sprang to life.\textsuperscript{423}

\*   \*   \*   

Camp Shelby was originally established in 1917 when the United States entered the First World War. America needed bases to train its war-going soldiers and began establishing military training camps across the country. The bases were desirable to hundreds of small American cities. The promise of thousands of troops and weeks of construction work would be a welcomed injection of consumers and jobs into any local economy. So as military officials gathered in New York City during the spring of 1917 to


\textsuperscript{423} Personal observations of the tombstone at his gravesite in Hattiesburg’s Oaklawn Cemetery on June 7, 2011; Hoffman, Steam Whistles in the Piney Woods, 133-178; and “Abandon Passenger Service to Natchez,” Hattiesburg American, March 1, 1941, 10.
select the last training sites, dozens of representatives from ambitious American towns appeared in the Big Apple to lobby for bases in their cities. Among these groups were several members of the Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce. Most city representatives, however, experienced great difficulty getting an extended audience with military men. Army officials were understandably busy. Throughout much of April and May, the Hattiesburgers tried unsuccessfully with General Leonard Wood, the former Army Chief of Staff who first achieved fame during the Spanish-American War as commander of a force that included Theodore Roosevelt’s celebrated Rough Riders. But then the Hattiesburg group discovered a massive advantage. A Piney Woods colleague named Dr. George McHenry, founder of McHenry, Mississippi, one of the little sawmill towns along the Gulf & Ship Island Railroad, knew General Wood. The two men were old military buddies who had struck a friendship more than a decade before while serving in the Philippines. McHenry’s small lumber town could use the business. If a new military base was built near Hattiesburg, he could sell lumber to it. So the Piney Woods entrepreneur reached out to General Wood, using his personal connection to secure a meeting June 23, 1917. The meeting went well, and on July 2nd, the famous general ventured down to the Mississippi Piney Woods to inspect Hattiesburg as a potential site for a troop training base. He liked what he saw. And so on July 12, 1917, Secretary of War Newton D. Baker accepted General Wood’s recommendation, and announced that Hattiesburg, Mississippi and Hammond, Louisiana had been selected as the last two sites for the nation’s sixteen National Guard training centers. The Hattiesburg site was named Shelby after Kentucky Revolutionary War hero Colonel Isaac Shelby.424

Although Camp Shelby was large, its initial impact was temporary. The Army spent $1,253,200 in 1917 to build Camp Shelby. Thanks to those abusive sawmills, the area was already virtually deforested. The most difficult task was stump clearance. But even that was a large challenge. Most builders had never seen so many. In a 1917 story

424 Southern locales were selected for fourteen of the training sites due to their favorable climates. California received the other two amid controversy and protest from New England politicians, especially Massachusetts Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, who argued that their region would most closely resemble the temperate French climate in which the war was being fought. Nonetheless, military officials chose the South because they did not want severe weather to restrict training activities. Older, *The City of Hattiesburg, 1884-2009*, quote on 31; and “Select Last Sites for Guard Camps,” *The New York Times*, July 13, 1917, 4. For more on General Leonard Wood, see Jack McCallum, *Leonard Wood: Rough Rider, Surgeon, Architect of American Imperialism* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).
National Geographic reported that builders had to blast over 180,000 stumps out of the ground to clear enough flat space for the Camp Shelby. Thousands of men found work clearing the rolling hills. The Hattiesburg American, which changed its name from the Hattiesburg News after America’s entry into the war, reported that on average 3,500 men were employed during the original construction of Camp Shelby. Surely, the employment was welcome to many. But the work only lasted about four months, and the sawmills were still churning out wood. Jobs weren’t as scarce as they would be when Shelby reopened. Also, it was fairly obvious that these jobs were temporary. Even the most permanent buildings were merely hastily assembled clapboard barracks designed for immediate and provisional use. Its facilities looked more like tent cities than permanent training grounds.425

During World War I, the Camp hosted up to 40,000 troops at a time. Those visiting soldiers provided a brief local boom for Hub City businesses as they flooded the downtown, looking for places to shop. Merchants were so busy that they hired extra clerks and doubled employee shifts to meet the booming consumer demand. Some stayed open as late as midnight. “There are always so many people in here,” explained one local retailer, “that we haven’t the heart to make them leave without their purchases.” But that first boom was fairly short-lived. The troops who trained at bases like Camp Shelby quickly helped the United States and her allies overwhelm their depleted German enemies to win the war. American troops fought in Europe for just over a year before the Central Powers surrendered. Camp Shelby was quickly disbanded. It had served its purpose and was no longer needed. So for nearly twenty years the site was largely ignored. The forest crept into Shelby, growing over the camp’s dirt roads and swallowing its few remaining buildings.426

425 “Army Total Near $50,000,000,” The New York Times, October 25, 1917, 3; “Camp Shelby,” National Geographic Magazine, November, 1917, 472; “Camp Shelby Building Figures Run Way Up Into the Millions,” Hattiesburg American, January 29, 1918, 3; and “Builders of Camp Shelby Ready to Leave for Home,” Trench and Camp December 25, 1917, 1. This description of the original Camp Shelby is also drawn from the publication Birdseye View of Camp Shelby (Hattiesburg, MS: Robb & Cornwell, Unknown Year), which can be found in Box: Amos 18, Folder: Birdseye View of Camp Shelby, Grimsley Research Collection, USM.
426 Clara Rodgers Dunn, “Hattiesburg Merchants Busiest After Nightfall,” Trench and Camp, October 31, 1917, 1 (Trench and Camp was the short-lived Camp Shelby newspaper produced between 1917 and 1919. Copies are available at MDAH); and “Tent Camps to be Abandoned,” Washington Post, November 30,
In the 1930s, the desperate Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce turned their attention to Shelby as they searched for opportunities that would help lift them out of the Depression. More specifically, they sought WPA dollars. They recognized that work at the Camp could provide local jobs and if the government decided to train reserve forces there, additional customers for the rest of Hattiesburg. Louis Faulkner proposed a Camp Shelby Committee. In 1935, that committee hosted General William L. Grayson, a Spanish American War Veteran who was also influential with the WPA. They pulled out the usual stops, taking General Grayson on a local tour and then hosting a dinner for him at the Hotel Hattiesburg. Grayson’s influence helped produce a small initial grant. And then after he left, they decided to target even more funds for Camp Shelby’s improvement. The Chamber of Commerce stimulated WPA funds with local convict labor to help improve the Camp. They also asked for even more money. In the summer of 1937, Louis Faulkner and two others ventured to Atlanta to meet with General George Van Horn Moseley, Commander of the Fourth Corps Area. They pitched to Moseley the prospect of using federal funds to make Shelby a full brigade camp. Whatever they said worked. Van Horn recommended Camp Shelby as a training site, comparing it to North Carolina’s Fort Bragg and Louisiana’s Fort Beauregard in terms of potential usage in case of war. That fall, the WPA approved $40,000 to be used to further improve Camp Shelby with the prospect of making it into a permanent military base. Thanks to the federal government, a few workless men were able to find jobs out at Shelby. Then came the explosion of 1940.427

On September 6, 1940, in what one writer called, “the most significant event in the history of Hattiesburg,” Mississippi Governor Paul Johnson signed Camp Shelby over

---

427 Minutes of the May 28, 1935 Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors Meeting, Box 1, Folder 9, CoC; Letter from Louis Faulkner, C.E. Fairley, and G.M. McWilliams to R.W. Dunn, President of Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce, Hattiesburg, MS, August 2, 1937, Box 1, Folder 10, CoC; Letter from General Van Horn Moseley to Brigadier General John A. O’Keefe, Atlanta, GA, July 27, 1937; and Letter from Camp Shelby Committee to Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors, November 26, 1937, Box 1, Folder 10, CoC. Grayson’s WPA influence is most widely recognized in his role in raising the necessary WPA funds to refurbish Savannah, Georgia’s minor league baseball stadium in 1941. Today, Grayson Stadium is the oldest minor league baseball stadium in the country. For more on Grayson Stadium, see Josh Pahigian, The Ultimate Minor League Baseball Road Trip: A Fan’s Guide to AAA, AA, A, and Independent League Stadiums (Guilford, CT: Lyons Press, 2007), 185-187.
to the federal government. Johnson was one of Hattiesburg’s native sons. He wasn’t born in Hattiesburg, but had moved to the bourgeoning lumber town in 1903 to open a law office in the booming new Hub City downtown. After a career as a local judge, he served as the local district’s Congressional representative from 1919 to 1923. He was probably Hattiesburg’s most visible and trusted lawyer. During the fiasco of the McCallum lynching, he was the attorney hired by the Chamber of Commerce to conduct a special investigation. In 1939, the rising attorney and staunch New Dealer won the Governorship. The following year, he had the pleasure of signing over his hometown’s Camp Shelby to the federal government, immediately injecting millions of dollars and thousands of jobs into Hattiesburg’s struggling and desperate economy. In just the first year, the Chamber of Commerce estimated the federal government spent approximately $22 million on Camp Shelby’s rise.428

As Shelby grew in the forest, the Chamber of Commerce fashioned an entirely new organization to manage the relationship between the town and Camp. They formed the Mississippi Camp Shelby Association in November, 1940, just a month after the first troops began arriving. Like the Chamber of Commerce, the group was composed of city leaders, including lawyers, bankers, company presidents, and small business owners. They wanted to enlarge Camp Shelby as much as possible and ensure its permanence after the war. The base turned into a long term ambition. Louis Faulkner and West Tatum served on the Board of Directors of the Camp Shelby Association. Numerous subcommittees formed to focus on specific issues including Housing, Entertainment, Legislative, Finance, and Roads. Faulkner headed up the City Relations Committee.429

The results came quickly. Employment at Camp Shelby exceeded even the Chamber of Commerce’s wildest dreams. Just five weeks after men gathered on that hillside, 12,623 people had jobs at Shelby. It became by far the city’s largest employer and most important industry. Even after the Camp was finished, up to 5,000 civilian

428 Schmidt, “The Impact of Camp Shelby Mobilization on Hattiesburg,” quote on 9; Financial Statement: Chamber of Commerce and Traffic Bureau, January 1, 1929 to December 31, 1929, Box 4, Folder 1, CoC; and “Report of the Chamber of Commerce President of 1940,” Box 1, Folder 15, CoC.
429 Minutes of the November 27, 1940 Meeting of Camp Shelby Association, Box 11, Folder 2, CoC; Minutes of the December 2, 1940 Meeting of Camp Shelby Association, Box 11, Folder 2, and CoC; Minutes of the December 17, 1940 Meeting of Camp Shelby Association, Box 11, Folder 2, CoC.
workers were employed at the Camp as it hosted thousands of troops during World War II. 1,000 men remained on its payroll until the summer of 1946. 430 9,000 soldiers arrived from Ohio at the end of October, pumping even more possibilities into local commerce. Their arrival benefitted seemingly every local industry. The Hattiesburg American noted the remarkable gains. Within just four months of Shelby’s mobilization, 66 new companies opened their doors, real estate transactions increased by 20%, land values rose 20%, soft drinks sales grew 77%, laundry services increased 60%, automobile sales increased 100%, and buildings permits increased 50%, alongside countless informal exchanges. Hattiesburg experienced growth across the board. The number of restaurants in the Hub City increased from 52 to 100. Nearly every service station within ten limes of Camp Shelby paid to have refrigerators installed to sell beer to the soldiers. All of that growth occurred in just the last quarter of 1940, more than a year before America entered World War II. This boom was just the beginning. Over 40,000 additional troops were scheduled to arrive in the coming months. As the American noted in January of 1941, “The future business outlook for Hattiesburg is bright.” For towns like Hattiesburg, the New Deal had been a Band-Aid. Camp Shelby was going to be a cure.431

Although their success was due almost exclusively to government spending, the men of the Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce felt as if they had done their job. New President Thad A. Fowler praised the group for their establishment of Camp Shelby. “If this group were asked to name the one accomplishment of 1940 of this Chamber that meant more to Hattiesburg and that territory within a radius of 75 miles, I am sure the unanimous reply would be ‘The establishment of Camp Shelby.’” The Camp continued to rise in 1941. A seemingly endless number of soldiers were pouring in from across America, injecting life into the Hub City. Thousands more were scheduled to come.

430 “1100 Civilians Will Lose Jobs at Shelby,” Hattiesburg American, June 27, 1946, 1.
Shelby was a godsend. Hattiesburg benefitted from World War II more than any city in the state. For the first time in nearly two decades, the future looked promising.432

Prosperity came in waves when America went to war. Over 500,000 soldiers were trained at Camp Shelby during the war. Its population swelled to as high as 100,000, making the base at times the largest city in Mississippi. Hattiesburgers made a killing in rent. A 1944 study found that local annual rental income had reached over $3,800,000. Local OPA rent director Robert Fletcher estimated that $2,500,000 of this rental income was solely due to the presence of soldiers and war workers. Rent on one room in the average house averaged $30 a month, and more than 3,500 Forrest County homeowners rented out at least one room. Locals would have charged more without price controls. The office received an average of 150 protests a month and investigated dozens of high rental prices.433

Downtown businesses were packed full of soldiers. Retail made a comeback. Thousands of customers descended on the downtown every weekend like a tidal wave. WPA workers teamed with the Chamber of Commerce to produce and distribute a pamphlet titled “A Serviceman’s Guide to Hattiesburg and Area,” detailing local sites of interest, USO clubs and, recreation centers, churches, clubs, and restaurants. In a 1944 letter home, a young Camp Shelby soldier named Frank Mann described the crowds of soldiers, reporting home that the bus lines for the trip from Camp Shelby to Hattiesburg were longer than the eye could see. On some nights thousands of men went into town to enjoy downtown the Hub City’s shopping, movies, restaurants, and girls. The frustrated and bored soldier Frank Mann lamented to his family that he waited three and a half hours for busses to take him the ten miles to Hattiesburg. The Hub City wasn’t the most exciting place in the world for these soldiers. “Hattiesburg’s o.k., but it’s dull and there isn’t much to do,” one young man told a visiting Chicago Tribune reporter. But besides the occasional weekend trip to New Orleans and the Gulf, the Hub City was the only place they had to shop, see a movie, or go on a date with a pretty local girl. And

432 “Report of the Chamber of Commerce President of 1940,” Box 1, Folder 15, CoC; Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors Meeting Program, January 21, 1941, Box 1, Folder 14, CoC; and “Hattiesburg Leads in Business Gains,” Hattiesburg American, March 5, 1941, 1.
433 “Rent Income Here Nearly $4,000 a Year,” Hattiesburg American, October 19, 1944, 1; and “Key Signifies Camp Construction End,” Hattiesburg American, March 15, 1941, 1.
Hattiesburg was happy to have them. Local citizens were enthralled by the camp. A new column called “Shelbyettes” soon graced every issue of the *Hattiesburg American*. There was simply too much interest in the Camp for the old standby “Shelby Briefs” to adequately cover by itself.\(^{434}\)

The greatest sign of prosperity was in bank deposits. In 1935, local bank deposits totaled just shy of $5.4 million. In 1939, local banks held just over $6.5 million. Then in 1940 came Shelby. By the end of Shelby’s opening year, local deposits topped $9 million. But that was just the beginning. When the war ended, local deposits reached $29,362,739.43. Hattiesburg was back. Virtually every industry grew. As the Chamber of Commerce head President Fowler noted during the heart of the war, because of Camp Shelby, “the entire city has undergone a remodeling, an expansion program, and shows an increase in all lines of business.”\(^{435}\)

The Hub City was returning to its glory days when innovative men like William Harris Hardy had created opportunities in the Piney Woods and opportunistic dreamers filled Hattiesburg’s neighborhoods, building off the opportunities created by the promise of the New South. But the sawmills and railroads weren’t a permanent lifeline. Like slavery and the steamboats, they too would fall victim to progress. The interminable juggernaut of American modernity always wrought change. Throughout the Depression, Hattiesburgers looked beyond their own means as a way to save their town. They coped as they could, but were desperate and asked for help. When the federal government offered assistance, they took it and asked for more, their benefits outweighing their contributions. When companies looked for sites to build new factories, they begged them to come, offering tax breaks, free rent, and even subsidies. But even the new factories and government intervention could only go so far. Much of the region still lay helpless by the close of the 1930s. So in the fall of 1940, their hearts and minds followed those tattered

\(^{434}\) Frank Mann to Ma, Camp Shelby, June 1944, Box: Amos 18, Folder: Correspondence: Frank Mann (April 9-December 1, 1944), Grimsley Research Collection, USM; A Serviceman’s Guide to Hattiesburg and Area,” Box: 10688, Folder: Hattiesburg, History of, WPA—Forrest; and Jack Thompson, “Shelby Troops Hope for Rain to End Blackouts,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 19, 1941, 8.

\(^{435}\) “The Impact of Camp Shelby Mobilization on Hattiesburg,” 63; and Memo from Mr. Fowler, Date Unknown [From sometime in 1942 or 1943], Box 1, Folder 15, CoC.
workers to the sandy, orange hillside just outside their city, desperate for a way out of the recession and thirsty for a new economic foundation.436

Yet, this reaction wasn’t a radical break from what they had known before, a hiccup in thinking caused by the Depression. Rather, it was something else. They always needed outside help because they simply could not achieve prosperity themselves. The Hub City was founded by Southerners, but financed by Yankees. It was Pennsylvanians who made those sawmills buzz in the first place. The towns of the New South like Hattiesburg were never as independent as they later claimed. Nor did they want to be. The town had a legacy. They had always relied on outside interference. From its foundation, Hattiesburgers sought outside assistance at the hands of others and then tried to hoard opportunity among whites. Racial exclusion dominated their society. The locals who were so desperate for opportunities sought to exclude and demean blacks in an effort to protect their own dwindling prospects. They compromised their racial mores when they had to, but these dogmas remained a foundation of their existence, a principle of their society. Their reliance on outside interference, quite simply, was a way of life.

436 As Historian Harvard Sitkoff writes, “As the votes and speeches of Southern politicians made clear, their region desperately needed and wanted the cornucopia of assistance provided by the AAA, the CCC, the NRA, and the TVA. The South, in fact, shared more bountifully in New Deal largesse than any other section and paid the least per capita in taxes.” Harvard Sitkoff, A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), quoted on 103.
Chapter 7: A Generation of Champions

As thousands of desperate job seekers descended on that Hattiesburg hillside on a September Sunday afternoon in the year 1940, another group of workers gathered over a thousand miles away in Harlem. Like the men who collected on the hills next to Camp Shelby, the group who met in Harlem had also arrived from across the country in search of better opportunities. But the similarities between the groups ended there. Unlike the interracial collection of 10,000 men who camped at Shelby, the Harlem group also included women. It was also nearly completely black. Then there was also the nature of the gatherings. The men who arrived in Hattiesburg that September afternoon begging for work were despondent and jobless whereas those who arrived in Harlem were hopeful and employed. In fact, the Harlem assemblage was actually a gathering of strength, a crescendo of sorts. The men and women who met in New York were the apex of the opportunities that black workers found in the shadows of modern America. They were the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. And they had gathered to flex a common muscle.437

Sunday September 15, 1940 marked the opening day of the Fifteenth Annual Convention of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. Thousands of black workers gathered in Harlem for the event. The collection was dominated by hundreds of train car porters, maids, dining car cooks, and waiters who worked on America’s railroad passenger cars. They congregated on the corner of 128th Street and Seventh Avenue, shaking hands and meeting their union brothers and sisters from across America. Over two thousand people gathered on that corner throughout the late morning and early

afternoon. At one o’clock, the large crowd began moving. They marched south on Seventh Avenue, travelling through the heart of Harlem as they raucously celebrated the opening of their convention. Thousands of black onlookers packed the adjacent sidewalks to cheer them on. Some observers even jumped into the street and joined the parade. They marched together in a loud buzz, strutting and strolling down Harlem’s main streets as if they had just won something. After three-and-a-half miles through the capital of black America, the parade finished at the corner of 129th Street and Seventh Avenue where the Salem Methodist Episcopal Church awaited an audience. Thousands tried to squeeze into the church. They stood shoulder-to-shoulder as those who couldn’t fit clung to hotly contested spots on the adjacent sidewalks. Brotherhood members were joined by hundreds of nonmembers. Seemingly everyone in Harlem wanted to hear the opening declaration given by Asa Philip Randolph, the magnetic President of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. The crowd must have been ambitious and excited. There was indeed good reason to celebrate.438

The black men and women who worked on America’s sleeping cars had been trying to organize for over fifty years, but had never experienced a moment like the one taking place in Harlem during September of 1940. Throughout the early decades of the 20th century, hundreds of thousands of blacks found opportunities in the jobs provided by a modernizing America. These jobs offered wage labor and mobility, or perhaps most importantly a way off the farm. The Pullman Palace Car Company was among the largest employers of black workers in the United States. Headed by Abraham Lincoln’s son Robert, the company was earning $16.8 million a year by 1925 while carrying more than 35 million annual passengers in their travelling luxury cars. Pullman needed a lot of Porters, and all the Porters were black. In the railroad industry, Pullman Porters earned less than most whites, but more than any other African Americans. They were paid an average base salary of almost $1,000 per year (the modern equivalent is $12,000) plus tips. Pullman Porters weren’t rich, but their jobs were highly regarded in black

438 This description is drawn from “Randolph Urges Porters To Fight for Lynch Bill,” Chicago Defender, September 28, 1940, 4; “Mrs. Roosevelt to Address Pullman Porters,” Chicago Defender, September 14, 1940, 3; and “Porters Vote Curb on Reds in Union,” The New York Times, September 15, 1940, 14.
communities. Some were attracted by the steady wages and chance to travel. Others like the clean-cut uniforms. As an Alabama man named E.D. Nixon explained, “I’d been wanting one of those jobs on the Pullman car ever since I got down there and saw those porters standing up side the train with those white coats on.” Thousands of blacks clamored to take jobs as Pullman Porters through the early twentieth century. Some only took the jobs to stimulate or supplement mobility or education. Among the list of Pullman veterans are iconic African American figures such as Thurgood Marshall, Langston Hughes, Morehouse President Benjamin Mays, poet Claude McKay, NAACP leader Roy Wilkins, and Malcolm X.  

The desirability of Pullman jobs also made labor organizing difficult. Plenty of new recruits were available to replace discontent workers. Pullman Porters for years struggled to organize for better pay, hours, and working conditions, but early efforts to unionize were short-lived and ineffective. In 1925, several ambitious Porters gathered in Harlem to organize a new union called the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and Maids. This group chose a new tactic for its organization. Rather than organizing solely among themselves, they sought a charismatic outsider, someone who was ambitious, influential, and also immune to the internal politics or repercussions of union leadership. They chose a radical and dynamic Harlemite named Asa Philip Randolph.

A. Philip Randolph grew up in a home that highly valued education. His father James had learned to read in the Florida Freedmen’s Bureau schools after the Civil War and passed a lifelong passion for learning to his sons. Asa grew up in a “reading household” writes his biographer Cornelius Bynum. James exposed his children to a rich selection of classics, including Shakespeare, John Keats, Mary Shelley, Jane Austen, and, of course, the Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass. In 1907, Asa Randolph graduated from the Cookman Institute, a black Jacksonville secondary school funded by

---


440 See Tye, Rising From the Rails, especially 113-168; and Bynum, A. Philip Randolph and the Struggle for Civil Rights, 119-135.
Northern Methodists. After graduation, Asa avoided the pitfalls of agricultural work by taking a series of wage-paying jobs. He worked as a grocery store clerk, chemical company porter, and a laborer in a fertilizer factory where he was paid seventy-five cents a day. The wages allowed him mobility, and in 1911 he used his savings to leave the South for Harlem. In the coming years, Asa became highly involved in black New York political life. He was an outspoken leader for several causes. He protested the famous Marcus Garvey United Negro Improvement Association movement, joined the American Socialist Party, and spent scores of evenings hobnobbing alongside the likes of legendary black Harlemites A’Lelia Walker and Hubert Harrison at elaborate Harlem parties. In 1917, Randolph founded an influential liberal black newspaper called The Messenger and continued to rise to prominence through its circulation. When black employees of the Pullman Palace Car Company sought to organize a stronger union under a charismatic and outspoken leader, Randolph was a natural choice.\footnote{This biographical information is drawn from Bynum, A. Philip Randolph and the Struggle for Civil Rights, 1-115; Tye, Rising From the Rails, especially 113-144; and William H. Harris, Keeping the Faith: A. Philip Randolph, Milton P. Webster, and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, 1925-37 (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1977), especially 26-65.}

In the coming years, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters struggled to gain influence and power. The Pullman Company fought back against organized labor, discouraging black workers from joining the Brotherhood, offering small wage increases, forming a company controlled in-house union, and personally attacking Randolph. In 1931, the Brotherhood had only 1,091 members, just barely 10% of all Pullman workers. Two years later, there were only 658. But the Pullman Porters gained strength as the Depression hardened. The election of Franklin Roosevelt helped immensely. In 1934, the President signed into law the Railway Labor Act of 1934, forcing the Pullman Company to recognize the Brotherhood. This enormous victory legitimized the union and increased its leverage. Within just four years, membership rose by more than 800%. On the heels of the victory, the Brotherhood plugged into what was left of the American House of Labor and the emerging but short-lived Depression-era Popular Front, joining the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and continuing to form alliances with various labor groups including female domestic workers, sawmill employees, and black industrial laborers. Randolph extended his own individual reach by playing major roles in both the National
Negro Congress and the Negro Labor Conference, organizations which sought to unite black trade union members in a political coalition that would push an ambitious civil rights agenda. So by 1940, the Brotherhood was at the height of its influence. They had allies scattered across the country, especially in the continuously growing northern black enclaves that were packed with migrants from the South. Millions of African Americans had arrived in places like Harlem and Chicago from small across Dixie and were ready vote. The African Americans who had moved to the North would play a major role in local and national elections. Led by organizations like the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, blacks were in a unique position to exchange votes for rights and resources.442

Because of these developments, the Fifteenth Annual Convention of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters in September of 1940 drew the attention of influential New York politicians who were interested in winning huge numbers of black votes. The Brotherhood’s Executive Board realized they would have a powerful audience. The group met the day before the Convention opened to approve a series of thirty-nine resolutions to present Convention visitors and speakers. Like many blacks, the Executive Board members of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters were deeply concerned about the limited opportunities facing the African Americans who remained in the South. Almost instinctually, Northern migrants sought to transform their own increased opportunities into more rights for Southern blacks. The members of the Executive Board were from Detroit, St. Louis, New York, Oakland, and Chicago, but focused nearly all of their demands on the plight of those who had stayed in the South.

Included among their resolutions was the abolition of Southern poll taxes and white primaries, the passage of an anti-lynching bill, the dismantling of the Ku Klux Klan, fair treatment for black soldiers, and larger federal relief appropriations for blacks.443

In the days after that opening parade, the convention attendees watched an impressive throng of white powerbrokers arrive to pay them homage. Among those to speak at the Porter Convention were New York City Mayor Fiorello La Guardia, New York State Governor and future Senator Herbert H. Lehman, New York Senator James Mead, American Federation of Labor (AFL) President William Green, United States Secretary of Labor Francis Perkins, and the First Lady Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt. Black leaders Walter White and Mary McLeod Bethune were also present, keeping a watchful eye on the white statesmen who one-by-one catered to potential black constituents by calling for the advancement of African American civil and legal rights. At the opening session, AFL leader Green told 3,500 anxious attendees that no American organization was “doing more to break down race prejudice and race hate than the American Federation of Labor.” New York City Council President Newbold Morris predicted the end of Jim Crow within a decade. At an 800-person dinner the next evening, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt told the group that “the color line is gradually being broken down and becoming a thing of a past.” Governor Lehman echoed her sentiments the following day. Northern white politicians hadn’t paid this much attention to the status of black Southerners since Reconstruction. The migrants forced them to by flooding the cities. The impact would be felt all over.444

Migration had made them powerful. Blacks could vote in the North, and wielded that influence to help their Southern brethren. This dynamic fundamentally changed

443 “Porters Vote Curb on Reds in Union,” The New York Times, September 15, 1940, 14; “Mrs. Roosevelt To Address Pullman Porters,” Chicago Defender, September 14, 1940, 3; and “Randolph Urges Porters To Fight For Lynch Bill,” Chicago Defender, September 28, 1940. 4.
American race relations as the federal government became highly motivated to wield unprecedented influence throughout the American South. The greatest irony of this increasing influence was that Southerners had also voted for, and in fact needed, the government expansion endorsed by the wave of New Dealers who swept into office in the 1930s and would remain there until after World War II. The very Administration that offered such enormous relief in the form of WPA funds would respond to Northern black voters to begin cracking the Southern racial caste system. The results would be felt in places like Hattiesburg, Mississippi, where locals picked up copies of the Chicago Defender and read about the emerging promises and racial victories of the World War II era. What was happening in New York and eventually Washington D.C. would greatly affect them all.

The workers who gathered near Camp Shelby on that September Sunday in 1940 probably weren’t thinking of the black confab assembled a thousand miles away in Harlem. The reverse is true as well. It is highly unlikely that anyone who marched through the streets on Harlem on that Sunday afternoon cared much about the rise of Camp Shelby in the middle of the Mississippi Piney Woods. But the black men among them were as connected as if the gatherings occurred a mile apart. Events like the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters Convention would create prospects for African Americans across the country as the blacks who left the South consolidated power in the North while keeping an eye on the South and doing nearly all they could to improve the lives of those who stayed. Opportunities would trickle from the 1940 Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters Convention through the heart of Dixie.

* * *

As much as they loved the Defender, black Hattiesburgers wanted their own newspaper. They needed it. Like every other aspect of public life in the Hub City, African Americans were largely excluded from the pages of the Hattiesburg American. The only regularly occurring black presence in the Hattiesburg American was an absurd black cartoon character named Hambone. In a syndicated daily feature titled “Hambone’s Mediations,” the ridiculous caricaturization smiled like an idiot while stumbling through
life ripping off mediations such as “Bob ax me ef I lef’ de barbecue cause I’se insulted, but lawdy me! Cain’ nobody insult me—I’se a ma’ied man!!!!” There were serious and educated black men through the city, but only Hambone received much attention. Local black residents were usually only mentioned in the newspaper when they were killed, arrested, or humiliated. The paper covered scores of arrests, beatings, fights, and other aspects of the ugliest parts of local black life. At times it ran special features that mocked black poverty or destitution. When two young African American brothers aged six and ten tried to sing for money outside the Forrest County Courthouse, the Hattiesburg American ran the headline “Two Piccanninnies Sing in City Hall for Pennies to Buy Food,” deriding their desperation and suggesting that they were probably doing more than their allegedly lazy father. Black church news was printed every so often, but the daily activities of black Hattiesburgers were usually ignored unless they were negative. This was typical across the state. So black Hattiesburgers simply decided to produce their own paper that would cover the positive aspects of their lives.445

The Union Messenger debuted on Thanksgiving morning in the fall of 1934. It was published by a group called the Union Choir Service and designed to highlight the positive aspects of black Hattiesburg life. The paper’s editors encouraged people to send news from the black neighborhoods. They printed updates from local church gatherings and the minutes of social clubs, much as the Chicago Defender did from afar. Like most of black life in Hattiesburg, The Union Messenger was supported by the local black churches and entrepreneurs, the crowning institutions of black Hattiesburg, a generational product of the foundations laid by those eager early blacks who arrived in the Hub City of the New South chasing the promises of wage labor. A throng of ministers from Hattiesburg’s most civically active churches asked their congregations to donate money toward the newspaper effort. They included Reverend E.A. Wilson of St. Paul Methodist, J.H. Ratliff from True Light Baptist, Reverend C.G. Wells at Mt. Zion Baptist, and

445 This particular example of Hambone’s Mediations is taken from the November 4, 1935 issue of the Hattiesburg American; and “Two Piccanninnies Sing in City Hall for Pennies to Buy Food,” Hattiesburg American, August 8, 1932, 7. The series “Hambone’s Mediations” ran from the 1910s through 1968 in the Memphis Commercial Appeal, drawing the constant ire of African American leaders across the South. See Michael K. Honey, Going Down Jericho Road: The Memphis Strike, Martin Luther King’s Last Campaign (New York: Norton & Co., 2007), 128-150.
Reverend Woullard at Morig Star Baptist. All the churches were old and well established by 1934. They’d been organizing in and among one another for decades.446

Dozens of other organizations and businesses took out ads in that first issue of *The Union Messenger* including the Hattiesburg Negro Business League which bought an ad encouraging the paper to “Go Forward.” By 1934, the Hattiesburg Negro Business league was basically like the black Chamber of Commerce. Excluded from the activities of the regular Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce, they organized various social functions and relief efforts through the black business community. Included in the Negro Business League were the doctors’ offices of Charles Smith, James Randall, and J.S. Love, Hammond Smith’s Pharmacy, Fred Patton’s Barbershop, Webster’s Funeral Service, Gayther Hardaway’s Grocery, and the New Dixie Café, whose owner Paul Weston was the also editor of *The Union Messenger*. The entrepreneurs who belonged to the Hattiesburg Negro Business League were local leaders and among the finest examples of the opportunities available to those who stayed.447

Dozens of other organizations and clubs also pitched in to help sponsor *The Union Messenger*. They included the Ladies’ Aid Society, the Home Mission Society, Colored Federation of Colored Women, Afro-American Sons and Daughters Hattiesburg Lodge No. 212, the Ministers Wives Alliance, the Local Change of Friendship Club, the Girls’ Luxis Club, and the Poro Club. Along with the churches and businesses, these social clubs formed the axis of black life in the Hub City. If a family needed help feeding their children, if a home burned down, if a breadwinner was hurt, or even if a couple just needed something to do on a Saturday night, the local black clubs in Hattiesburg were the place to turn for a solution. Some were church-based. Others spanned the community. The clubs and organization of black Hattiesburgers were lively and active. They threw parties, held concerts, collected charity, and even sometimes just played bridge. And still,

there were more social clubs that weren’t recognized in the newspaper, including the Silver Moon Club, Social King Club, Happy Heart Club, and the Peanut Social Club.448

Local blacks organized to take care of their own because they were so readily excluded from much of the opportunities of the New Deal and Great Depression-era relief. Churches organized basic social services such as insurance and food donations to needy families. In 1934, the Hattiesburg Negro Business League, various civic organizations, and local churches partnered to sponsor a Doll and Toy drive. Locals were encouraged to donate unused or extra dolls to families who were unable to provide Christmas gifts for their children. Black children didn’t get much help from local white churches, but members of the African American community organized to ensure that they too would open packages on Christmas morning. The groups also sponsored a football game and minstrel show at Eureka High School, donating all proceeds to the toy fund. Gayther Hardaway was the chairman of the Doll and Toy Fund Committee. Dr. Charles Smith was also on the committee. Hattiesburg’s leading black businessmen and doctors lived within blocks of the Hub City’s most impoverished citizens and organized together to lift the black community.449

America was mired in the middle of the Great Depression. And Mississippi was struggling as much as any state, maybe worse. Blacks, mired in the social and economic poverty of Jim Crow, were at the bottom of the totem pole in the poorest state during the worst economic period in American history. Yet, here was black Hattiesburg, vibrant and energetic, chocked full of dozens of civically active and socially minded community leaders who helped their brothers and sisters wade through the depth of the Depression years before anyone in Hattiesburg had ever heard of the New Deal. The Union Messenger didn’t last long. Most black Mississippi papers didn’t. But that community continued to struggle and even thrive. The charity pouring out of the hearts and homes of local blacks helped guide their people through the Depression. Dozens of black churches

and organizations had already been active for decades. By the 1930s, collective communal action was not only a tradition, but a common sense practicality.450

By the 1934 debut of the *Union Messenger*, Hattiesburg’s Mobile Street neighborhood had fostered the growth of an incredibly diverse community of entrepreneurs. The black downtown was thriving like never before. Mobile Street was teeming with black-owned businesses. The dozens of barbershops and restaurants remained staples in the middle of a rapidly diversifying business community. By 1935, a new generation of businesses included Mrs. Loveless’s confectionary and ice cream parlor, a dentist, multiple undertaking services, an insurance company, a jewelry repair shop, a dry cleaner, a beer garden, a movie theatre, several shoe shine parlors, three doctors, pharmacists, and even a black-owned filling station, all completely supported by thousands of local black customers. “You name it, and it was there,” remembered one local resident. Some blacks shopped at white stores too. But being among whites was often dangerous and sometimes downright deadly. So they avoided the white stores when they could, preferring instead to shop at safe places like Hardaway’s Grocery Store where they were waited on by friends and neighbors who respectfully addressed them as “Sir” or “Ma’am” when they approached the cashier in the small wooded stores to pay for their flour, corn meal, sugar, and eggs.451

The customers who shopped in those black businesses were unscrupulous workers who found opportunities within the worst recession in American history. African Americans suffered the worst of the Depression. They were among the first fired and last hired. And many of the railroad jobs they had once enjoyed were going to desperate whites. Across Mississippi, white vigilantes attacked black railroad men for crossing the new employment color line that was redrawn during the Depression. The early 1930s saw the outbreak of a minor shooting war over Mississippi railroad jobs. Whites wanted jobs as brakemen and firemen, infringing on positions that had been historically black since

---

the rise of Mississippi railroads during the era of Captain William Harris Hardy. In the summer and fall of 1931, four black brakemen and firemen were shot on the job. An unfortunate black railroad worker named Frank Kincaid was shot that August and survived only to be killed in November. Brakeman Ed Cole was murdered the following February. Black railroad employees Turner Sims and Aaron Williams were shot a month later. During the summer of 1932, the \textit{Hattiesburg American} counted fifteen black Mississippi firemen that had been killed or wounded by gunfire in the previous year. The message was clear, even though there wasn’t always a proper warning. If a white man wanted a job, you gave it to him or risked death.\footnote{Arnesen, \textit{Brotherhoods of Color}, especially 120-121; “Attempt Made to Kill Negro,” \textit{Hattiesburg American}, August 9, 1932, 1; and Howard W. Risher, Jr., \textit{The Racial Policies of American Industry, Report No 16: The Negro in the Railroad Industry} (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), 40-41. For more information on black railroad laborers in the Jim Crow South, see Joseph Kelly, “Organized for a Fair Deal: African American Railroad Workers in the Deep South, 1900-1940 (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 2010).}

But despite the rapid losses across Mississippi, Hattiesburg provided a slight solace for black workers. African Americans took many of the jobs created by Hattiesburg’s continuous industrial development. The Chamber of Commerce was mostly concerned about jobs for whites, but the factories all wanted black workers, and the black neighborhoods offered the most convenient sites for the new factories. Whites didn’t want the industrial stench floating over their churches and schools, so firms like the Hercules Powder Company, Meridian Fertilizer, and the Hattiesburg Compress Company all opened adjacent to the black neighborhoods. And they all hired African Americans. Hundreds, perhaps even thousands of blacks worked at those new industries during the 1920s and 1930s even during the heart of the Depression. Those jobs, just like the sawmill positions taken by the generation before, offered a way off the farm.\footnote{The locations of new industries are clear on local fire insurance maps as early as 1925. See Insurance Maps of Hattiesburg, Sheet 1, Hattiesburg, MS, May, 1925, Sanborn Maps. These locations and their proximity to the black community are also based on personal observations made on March 10, 2012.}

There aren’t accurate records of how many blacks worked at Hercules, but they came to the plant by the thousands throughout the late 1930s when the company was selling its chemical products to Germany and England. One employee estimated that by the start of World War II, thirty-five percent of the plant’s 1,500 employees were black.
Even at the tail end of the Depression, the company had “white jobs and black jobs,” according to former employee Richard Boyd. The company even housed black workers. It built a row of houses on a small street called Hercules Quarters where generations of black employees lived. Included among them was an intergenerational black family clan named Gaddis who sent a small group of fathers, sons, and uncles into the chemical plant every day. Richard Boyd started at Hercules in 1941 and worked there for over thirty years, first as a yard laborer, then sample collector, and finally a lead man as he slowly moved up the factory ranks. Boyd was the son of a sawmill worker who migrated to the Hub City earlier to in the century to escape the fields. His parents had arrived from Clark County decades earlier when his father Richard took a job with J.J. Newman Lumber. For many black Hattiesburgers like Richard Boyd, the Hercules plant was the second generation’s equivalent of Newman Lumber. Every African American who grew up in Hattiesburg during the 1930s had a relative, neighbor, or friend who worked there.454

The chemical processing work at Hercules was dangerous and hard. The jobs were also rigidly segregated and unfair. The black men who worked at Hercules couldn’t even enter the plant through the front entrance; they had to go through a side door. They also couldn’t play on the Hercules company softball or basketball teams that played in front of large evening crowds in Hattiesburg’s ever popular Twilight Leagues. Nor could the black workers join the social clubs for Hercules factory workers, sit in the break rooms, or take their wives to the company dinners and dances. But hundreds of blacks took the jobs anyway. As with everything else, they created their own. The African American workers at Hercules formed their own social club. Their President in 1936 was a plant employee named Muffy McCoy. Muffy probably didn’t have much. He lived on the left side of a split dwelling on 7th and Alpha Streets in a tiny rental that only had one window. But Muffy McCoy was also the President of the all-black Hercules Social Club. And he gathered with them other men in that clubs and their wives every fourth Friday night at eight o’clock. The men who belonged to the Hercules Social Club were a community within another. They spent those Friday nights playing bridge, singing,

laughing, and talking about their days. Those nights at the end of long weeks and even longer months must have been highlights in their lives as they gathered amongst themselves free from the wicked realities of race and work that dotted most of their days. There were subtle escapes in the Jim Crow South, even for the blacks who worked the worst jobs. Many arrived or stayed in the Hub City just hoping to have a place to live, work, worship, and send their kids to school. Hattiesburg gave them all of that, even if they were black.  

Most local black women worked in domestic service industries. Approximately three out of every four adult black workers in the Forrest County labor force were engaged in some sort of home housework. Those domestic service positions included jobs as laundresses, maids, nannies, washerwomen, cooks, or all the above. The women who worked in laundry either took it in on their own or worked at one of the local laundry firms such as Peerless Laundry and Dry Cleaners or Phoenix Laundry, a popular local washing company that picked-up and delivered laundry. Cooks worked at local homes, preparing the meals white women served to husbands on weekday evenings when the downtown offices and stores closed for the day. Dozens more worked in the black restaurants in the Mobile Street neighborhood. Hundreds of maids were employed at downtown hotels and white people’s homes. Black female domestic workers filled the city. According to the 1940 census, they were the largest labor force in Forrest County, just outnumbering the number of white males employed by federal government relief programs.

Domestic work offered numerous challenges, especially for black women working in private homes. Being around whites always offered the possibilities of humiliation and harassment. But spending hours between those walls particularly increased the occasions of those daily indignities and also exposed workers to the increased possibilities of mental, physical, and sexual harassment and abuse. A lot of

---

455 “Hattiesburg, Miss.,” Chicago Defender, March 7, 1936, 22; Sheet 34, Hattiesburg, MS, April, 1931 + August 1949, Sanborn Maps; and Polk’s Hattiesburg City Directory: 1937.
women avoided the potential pitfalls of housework by sticking to laundry. Laundresses usually had either one of two common arrangements. Some travelled to their clients’ home and worked in their backyards. Using the homeowners’ wash pot, they would boil the clothes, rinse them, hang them on the line, starch them, and then again leave the clothes on the line to dry. Some were paid extra to return later in the day to iron the clothes. The other common option was to take in laundry. Some black women had their own wash pot or even a small washing shack where they would boil, scrub, and hang the clothes right outside their own homes. Sometimes several women gathered at the home of a neighbor to work together. Either way, life as a laundress often allowed black women to limit the potentially dangerous close contact with whites. The work wasn’t easy. Black women carried large loads and spent much of their days bent at their backs, leading to arthritis and lifelong bouts lower back pains. But at least they could help provide meals for their families and work together with a sense of dignity.457

Hundreds of other local African Americans still found work in many of the historically black jobs. Even through the Depression, there was still work for chauffeurs, laborers, porters, messengers, deliverymen, draymen, servants, waiters, and janitors. Many black workers shifted between these positions, leaving jobs in search of better pay or after disputes with employers. There also remained a few brave black firemen and brakemen who worked for local railroads. Black jobs didn’t completely dry up, even during the Great Depression. Opportunities for work were there for many. And so the African American population grew as black Mississippians came to the Hub City in search of work. Many settled near the Mobile Street neighborhood while others began settling in other black enclaves throughout the city. The most notable of these were

Arledge Quarters, where Emmanuel McCallum lived, Jerusalem Quarters, and the slowly growing unincorporated settlement of Palmer’s Crossing.458

Palmer’s Crossing was a black settlement located just a couple miles outside of Hattiesburg. It particularly attracted migrants from rural areas. Because Palmer’s Crossing wasn’t incorporated into Hattiesburg proper, there were few housing ordinances and property restrictions. And since the community rested far away from the downtown, local policemen could easily be paid to ignore any illegal activity. There was a bit more civic freedom to be had in Palmer’s Crossing. Locals grew large fields of crops, raised pigs and horses, and ran their own moonshine. The dynamic black community also had juke joints, dance halls, a row of prostitution houses, and a school they named DePriest after the first black congressman elected from Chicago. Like Eureka High School in the Mobile Street neighborhood, DePriest received strong support from the local black families of Palmer’s Crossing who poured their energy and resources into their neighborhood school, making it a springboard toward greater opportunities.459

The black communities of Hattiesburg and Palmer’s Crossing were filled with working-class blacks gathered together throughout the Great Depression to create better lives. They countered difficult days with vibrant nights, collecting on front porches in the evenings with plates of catfish to sing and pray or arriving in juke joints with shining shoes and freshly pressed dress shirts to jitterbug away the night. Hattiesburg and Palmer’s Crossing were both prime stops on the Southern Chitlin’ Circuit, the unofficial collection of African American nightclubs that thrived in black neighborhoods across Dixie. Virtually every community had a local hot spot. Gifted young Southern bluesmen travelled by train or bus to play their music in shoddy but energetic shacks full of vibrant working people who could dance until the sun rose. The greatest reformations in blues

458 U.S. Census Bureau, Sixteenth Census of the United States, Manufactures: 1940: Volume II: Characteristics of the Population, Part 4: Minnesota-New Mexico (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1943), 233. The exact growth of Hattiesburg’s black population between 1920 and 1940 is difficult to measure because the city was not large enough for the census to provide detailed counts, but the census does show that by 1940, there were 10,935 African Americans in Forrest County. For more on the varying nature of black work between 1900 and 1940, see McMillen, Dark Journey, 154-194.
459 Jack Alan Smith, “A Study of Place-Names in Forrest County, Mississippi,” (Ph.D. diss., Auburn University, 1969), 141; and Clearese Cook, interview by Kim Adams, transcript, November, 1994, USM-OH.
and jazz didn’t occur on the stages of Harlem and Chicago. They happened on the chitlin circuit in front of hardworking and fun-loving black Southerners who gathered elbow-to-elbow in sweaty Mississippi clubs like Yazoo City’s Afro Auditorium, Natchez’s Rhythm Club, Hattiesburg’s Harlem Night Club, and the Embassy Club of Palmer’s Crossing, which held up to 1,000 patrons when packed full. Louis Armstrong played at the Embassy Club. So did B.B. King. In the coming years, the club hosted dozens of regional favorites and later nationally known stars including Otis Redding, Sam Cooke, and the electrifying James Brown.\footnote{460}

Talent constantly seeped through the city. The musicians stayed in Palmer’s Crossing and the Mobile Street neighborhood, entertaining locals with legendary early renditions of rhythm and blues and rock and roll. In 1936, a Jackson talent scout named H.C. Spier arrived in the Hub City to record several notable artists passing through town. He set up a makeshift studio on Mobile Street and captured tracks called the “Barbeque Bust” and “Dangerous Woman” played by a group named the Mississippi Jook Band. According to \emph{Rolling Stone Magazine}, these recordings were the first Rock & Roll records ever cut in the United States. Working-class blacks held court in the energetic institutions that brought their neighborhoods to life. Escapes could be found in many ways. “They used to say that they lived for Saturday night,” remembered one local.\footnote{461}

Hattiesburg blacks also enjoyed following their own baseball team, which competed in a semi-pro Southern Negro league. The first Hattiesburg baseball team was formed during the 1920s, but had fizzled out sometime during the recession. A new team returned to the Hub City in the 1930s and played its games in a small new stadium built

\footnote{460} Preston Lauterbach, \emph{The Chitlin’ Circuit: And the Road to Rock ‘n’ Roll} (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2011); Rolling Stone Magazine, \emph{The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock and Roll: The Definitive History of the Most Important Artists and Their Music} (New York: Random House, 1992), especially 3-16, quote on 4; and James Brown with Nathan Whitaker, \emph{Role of a Lifetime: Reflections on Faith, Family, and Significant Living} (New York: Faith Words, 2009), “Chapter 2: Roots and Sacred Trusts.” CBS \emph{The NFL Today} host James Brown is the grandson of former Embassy Club owner Milton Barnes. The club was renamed the Hi-Hat after a 1957 fire.

\footnote{461} Lauterbach, \emph{The Chitlin’ Circuit}; Rolling Stone Magazine, \emph{The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock and Roll: The Definitive History of the Most Important Artists and Their Music} (New York: Random House, 1992), especially 3-16; Brown with Whitaker, \emph{Role of a Lifetime}, “Chapter 2: Roots and Sacred Trusts”; Buck Wells quoted in Buck Wells, interview with Lawrence Knight, transcript, Hattiesburg, MS, April 24 and 28, 1997, USM-OH.
in the heart of Palmer’s Crossing. Nicknamed the Black Sox, the local baseball club played other regional black teams during the 1930s as they barnstormed through the minor leagues of Southern black baseball. The Black Sox had a successful run in the mid-1930s and received sporadic coverage in the *Chicago Defender* as they matched up against nearby rivals such as the Laurel Black Cats. The younger brother of legendary Negro League pitcher Satchel Paige was a star on the 1934 team. Baseball was just one part of the show. Between innings, spectators were also entertained by performances from the musicians and dancers who gave short previews of performances that would come later that night in the nearby clubs and dance halls.\(^{462}\)

The real gem of local black sports, however, was the vaunted Eureka High School football squad. Throughout the 1930s, the Eureka Tigers routinely produced some of the finest football teams in all of Dixie, drawing thousands of spectators to their games against other black Mississippi schools. 2,000 spectators attended the big Thanksgiving Day game in 1935 when Eureka beat Jackson’s Lanier High School. The Tigers’ big breakout season came the following year when they rode a stout defense to win the 1936 Mississippi State Championship. Only one team scored on them the entire season. The 1937 squad did even better by winning the state title without giving up a single point. The powerhouse program won another state championship in 1940 and was selected to play in a special Christmas Day exhibition game against the Tennessee champions from Haywood High School from Brownsville. Eureka jumped out to an early lead, but eventually lost their momentum and fell by a score of 13 to 6.\(^{463}\)

The Eureka Tigers High School football team helped galvanize the community. Thousands of locals rallied around the championship teams. They were so good. Even


local whites regularly paid the fifty cents to attend the black high school games, which were often the only African American events covered in the *Hattiesburg American*. School officials used the momentum to organize resources to help improve the school. Teachers, principals, and students needed all the local support they could get. Nearly all the WPA funds went to the all-white Hattiesburg High School and the state of Mississippi spent far less on black schools than white ones.

White legislators and school district superintendents had been siphoning off funds earmarked for black schools since the Mississippi Revolution of 1875. In 1929, Mississippi spent an average of $31.33 on white students and only $5.94 on blacks. In 1942, the state spent $47.95 and $6.16 on white and black students, respectively. Black teachers earned far less pay than their white counterparts and were expected to teach larger classes. In 1940, the lowest paid black Mississippi teachers were paid just $360 per year while the highest paid whites earned up to $1,700. White teachers instructed an average of thirty students while black classrooms averaged forty-seven. The disparities between white and black schools weren’t just in the statistics. Young black Mississippians saw the inequalities every day. They saw the long list of white names written on the inside tab of hand-me-down textbooks. And they saw the school busses full of white kids taking students to school. Some blacks walked further than whites rode to get an education. They didn’t have the same cafeterias or athletic fields. Many of the buildings were falling apart and others were cramped and crowded. Some black students had to walk a dozen or so miles to school. They went through so much more than white students to achieve an education. Most of them never finished high school, but those who did found opportunity through education. It was the most promising way to improve your life.464

Despite the funding inadequacies, Eureka remained an incredibly strong school. The local black community did what it could to make up for the funding disparities. Hattiesburg blacks deeply valued education and they consolidated their resources to

---

preserve their precious school. As the 1937 Eureka team was on the way to its second state championship, the Eureka P.T.A. was wrapping up another financial drive. The money helped pay for the students to put on a pre-Christmas program, and also to help fund the football team. The local P.T.A. captains came from diverse backgrounds, demonstrating the communal support for Eureka. Jennie Brown was a housewife with no children, Frank Calloway was a janitor with one, and Beatrice Edwards was a single mom with three children. The teacher representatives included Cora Jones, Susie Neal, the preacher’s wife Martell Thornton, and Charles Smith’s wife Myrtle. Even if they didn’t have children in the school, plenty of locals supported Eureka and invested time in the students’ education. The brakeman Isaiah Reed and his wife Maggie were also among the local P.T.A. captains. They also had no children. The Eureka students themselves didn’t just sit and wait for help from their elders. Two years before the P.T.A. drive, each grade in the entire school competed in a fundraising drive to raise a new hedge around the building. As white Hattiesburgers monopolized local tax dollars and federal government relief, blacks found ways to help themselves as they always had.465

Eureka was a communal beacon of hope. Its students were like part of an extended family. Class of 1937 alumni Veola Chase remembers that “All of the children were community children.” Students did what they were told not only by their parents but also by other local adults as if part of a massive family. Their teachers lived among them, sitting across the aisle in church, bumping into them in the barbershop, and passing each other carrying groceries home from the market. Some of the teachers like Principal N.R. Burger and Mrs. Marie Washington Kent had been Eureka students themselves and were deeply tied to the community. The small, tight-knit community poured their resources and love into Eureka. Parents came into the school, packing the seats for graduations and fixing food for banquets and suppers. It was common even for adults who didn’t have young people in the school to attend graduations. Spring ceremonies were packed with well-wishers who just wanted to see their neighbors’ kids graduate and feel some hope about the young people’s futures. The instructors were gifted and committed, and

produced waves of success stories. For many, the school was a springboard for a better life. In 1936, a white WPA official reported that from Eureka came “quite a number of young men and women who have gone to colleges.” One successful alumnus named Dr. Isaac Thomas later remembered, “My life has been made, much, much fuller by attending Eureka between 1935 and 1938. I never would have gone to college. I never would have been a professional man if I hadn’t attended Eureka.”

Isaac Thomas also remembered looking up to Hammond Smith as a child. Hammond Smith and his brother Charles played key roles in the lives of many black youngsters. Smith’s Drug Store was just a couple hundred feet away from the High School, and local students spent thousands of hours of free time inside the store. The Smith Drug Store was a popular local hangout. It sold the basic run of toiletries, patent medicines, black cosmetic supplies, tobacco, and filled prescriptions, but also offered magazines, confectionaries, ice cream, and soft drinks, making it a magnet for local black youths who needed places to gather. Teenagers met there on weekend nights to drink malts, gossip, and giggle. Smith’s Drug Store was more than just a pharmacy. It was a social institution, a place where you went to see your friends or look for a new crush. Local teens spent hours there, laughing, arguing, teasing, and falling in love. Because the Drug Store was a social center, Hammond and his brother were elevated into a higher status in the community. The brothers were local role models and examples. Young people learned lessons in their presence, talking to them, working for them, and gaining an understanding of how to live and succeed in that proud black community. Isaac Thomas always remembered Hammond Smith’s Alcorn and Meharry degrees hanging on the wall. “I walked in and I saw the license on the wall, saw the diplomas and things.” Thomas remembered. “And I just made up my mind right then that I wanted to be a pharmacist.” Hammond Smith never raised any children of his own, but he impacted entire generations of local young people from behind his shop counter. Men like

---

466 Chase, interview; Burger, interview; Kent, interview; “Ethel Jones Honor Guest at Gay Party,” *Chicago Defender*, June 2, 1934, 4; “Hattiesburg, Miss.,” *Chicago Defender*, December 25, 1937, 23; “Hostess,” *Chicago Defender*, June 24, 1933, 7; “quite a...” quoted from Martin L. Bartee, “Races and Nationalities of County,” May 15, 1936, Box #10689, Folder: Negro, WPA-Forrest; and Thomas, interview.
Hammond and his drug store were part of an important community dynamic. Those who stayed and found success on Mobile Street helped raise the generations that followed.\textsuperscript{467}

Mobile Street really began exploding in the late fall of 1940 when soldiers in-training began arriving at Camp Shelby. Black soldiers arrived at Camp Shelby for training and had no choice but to cater to local black businesses because of the city’s strict segregation laws. Thousands of black GIs spent their money in the black downtown during the war years. The Works Progress Administration’s Serviceman’s Guide to Hattiesburg and Area included a section strictly for black soldiers, detailing local places to have dinner, see a movie, go dancing, or take a date. Some of the places to drink like Bill Carmichael’s club were off limits to soldiers, but the black servicemen went there anyway. African American soldiers composed approximately fifteen percent of Shelby’s massive wartime population, delivering a lot of buying power to Hattiesburg’s black downtown. Thousands of them descended on Mobile Street and Palmer’s Crossing on Saturday nights. Many of the outside soldiers weren’t conditioned to the Jim Crow laws and had a hard time with the authority of local white law enforcement officials. Numerous incidents of violence peppered the soldiers’ experience in Hattiesburg, including a 1940 incident where two soldiers were shot during an altercation with a white law enforcement officer.\textsuperscript{468}

Hammond Smith remembered the immense opportunities of the war years.

“Anybody could make it back then if you could get the stuff to sell, anybody could make it.” “That was my big years, during the war years” he recalled forty years later. Smith was so busy during the war years that he hired extra employees and began staying open until midnight some evenings. Up to fifteen people at a time were working at his drug store during the war. Other burgeoning entrepreneurs plugged into the opportunity brought by Shelby, increasing the size and scope of Hattiesburg’s bustling black

\textsuperscript{467} Thomas, interview; Williams, interview; and Edwards, \textit{The Southern Urban Negro As a Consumer}, especially 120-150.
downtown. By 1946, there were fifteen black-owned restaurants on Mobile Street alone, with more than forty scattered throughout the city. That same year, there were eight black-owned cleaners whereas six years before there had been none. The negative aspect of Shelby’s rise was that Eureka High School became at times unbearably overcrowded. But for businesses, Shelby was great.469

The rise of Camp Shelby in 1940 greatly benefitted local blacks just as it did for Hattiesburg as a whole. Hattiesburg blacks received a huge influx of jobs, giving them more flexible opportunities for work. Plenty of blacks were among the men who gathered at Shelby to take jobs as the camp mobilized. African Americans didn’t get the best jobs at the Camp, but the ones they received were often better than local work. So many simply quit their current jobs and headed out to the growing military base in search of steady work and decent wages. Osceola McCarty remembered many of her neighbors who “done quit working and go to the camp.” Shelby offered better pay and working conditions. In response, several Hattiesburg firms began raising pay to entice the black laborers back to the industrial factories. According to Hercules employee Richard Boyd, “the employment situation got 300 percent better.” Palmer’s Crossing native Clearese Cook’s father struggled to find work during the Depression, but found opportunity with the opening of the military base. “Camp Shelby,” she remembered, “made a difference in our family, and not only in our family, other black families…we were able to have a whole set of books.”470

The arrival of the soldiers also helped local black laundresses. Black or white, all the soldiers needed clean clothes and local black women dominated the laundry industry. Local whites felt entitled to cheap black labor and unofficially banded together to pay very little for laundry. But soldiers from the North drew regular paychecks and were perfectly willing and able to pay decent prices for laundry service. Osceola McCarty later remembered that the soldiers stationed at Shelby would pay up to five times her normal rate for clean laundry. Shelby troops outbid local whites, drawing black washerwomen

469 Smith, interview; Polk’s Hattiesburg City Directory: 1946, 572-573; and Schmidt, “The Impact of Camp Shelby Mobilization on Hattiesburg, Mississippi, 1940-1946.
470 Boyd, interview; McCarty, interview; and Cook, interview.
out to the camp to wash and press their uniforms. Black maids also found work at Shelby. Some of the officers’ wives paid more than local whites, making it worthwhile to journey the ten-miles out to the Camp.

In 1942, the federal government built a new USO center for African American soldiers in the heart of the Mobile Street neighborhood. The beautiful new facility was complete with lounge couches, a fireplace, two club rooms, reading and writing rooms, a kitchen, and an auditorium. The Chicago Defender called it “one of the most modern USO centers in the United States.” It employed dozens of locals and served as a site of entertainment for blacks from across the region. Busses of girls would come down from Laurel to dance with the black troops. The USO center remained an important center of social life for black Hattiesburgers through the war. They moved many local gatherings there, holding large rallies and social events where locals would socialize with the troops and organize to support the war effort. In August of 1942, over 2,500 people packed into the center when famed black educator Mary McLeod Bethune arrived to deliver a morale-boosting lecture. Jessie Owens also visited black troops in the Hub City and stayed in the home of local teachers Edward Tademy and his wife Rhoda. Black life at Camp Shelby escalated through the war as nearly 500,000 men moved through the training facility on their way to war. Camp life was so busy that the Chicago Defender began running separate updates for Camp Shelby and Hattiesburg. They were like two black cities, side-by-side, each stimulating the other. Like other black populations across the country, black Hattiesburgers envisioned far greater opportunities that would come with the war.

The night after Eleanor Roosevelt’s speech to the Fifteenth Annual Convention of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, she sat down and wrote a letter to her husband.

---

471 McCarty, interview; and Boyd, interview.
suggesting a conference with the black Brotherhood leaders. In what historian Doris Kearns Goodwin called “a turning point in race relations,” an embattled Eleanor Roosevelt left the 1940 Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters Convention in Harlem vowing to help eradicate racism from America’s armed forces. She returned to Washington a few days later and urged her husband to hold an audience with the black leaders from the Harlem confab. Nine days later, Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters President A. Philip Randolph and NAACP head Walter White were sitting in chairs at the White House talking with President Franklin Roosevelt. The meeting offered the black leaders the chance to voice their concerns over African American life on the eve of World War II. From that White House meeting, A. Philip Randolph began organizing a march on Washington the following summer to protest segregation in defense spending. To thwart the threat of a march, President Roosevelt, at the advice of New York City Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, enacted Executive Order 8802, which barred discrimination in wartime industries. As America mobilized for war, blacks were explicitly included. Other advances soon followed.473

Just a few months after signing Executive Order 8802 and just days before the Presidential Election of 1940, Franklin Roosevelt made Benjamin O. Davis the first African American general in the history of the United States Army. The Chicago Defender applauded the promotion while optimistically noting the increasing possibilities for the race as America mobilized for war. Then during the war, the government authorized a poll tax exemption given to Southern soldiers, freeing black World War II veterans from one of the fundamental functions of disfranchisement. The Defender reported each development, offering for Southern blacks promising news that greater freedoms were coming.474

474 “B.O. Davis Becomes First Negro General,” Chicago Defender, November 2, 1940, 1. Smith v. Allwright legally ended the white primary. Although historians have astutely questioned the tangible impact of Smith v. Allwright, the collective actions of the federal government symbolized to African Americans important steps toward ensuring the franchise. For more on the Poll Tax exemption, and black
More encouraging news came in April of 1944 when the Supreme Court decided a monumental case named Smith v. Allwright, which outlawed the white-only primary, another major component of Jim Crow disfranchisement. By only allowing whites to vote in primary elections, white politicians eliminated any potentially pro-black candidates well before the actual election. By denying blacks the chance to vote in primary elections, white segregationists completely controlled candidate selection. Any nominee with potential appeal to black voters was eliminated during primary voting. Thus, even if blacks could cast ballots, both candidates were usually undesirable, rendering their ballots impractical, especially in the face of voter intimidation. The expulsion of blacks from voting rolls was a strong and definitive legacy of that Mississippi Revolution of 1875 and the subsequent Mississippi Plan of 1890. Although some elite black Mississippian were able to register in some places, African Americans hadn’t registered in large numbers since 1890. The only exception was in the black-controlled town of Mound Bayou.475

Hattiesburg blacks were greatly encouraged by the Smith v. Allwright Supreme Court decision. Soon after the federal ruling, small groups of local black leaders began appearing at the local voter registration office to try and register to vote. The white registrar L.M. Cox turned them away several times before finally allowing a handful to register. Among those who registered with Boyd was Edward Trigg, a local successful businessman who arrived in Hattiesburg as an insurance salesman around World War I but by then had opened up a grocery. J.B. Woods also registered. He was the local

475 Smith v. Allwright, 321 U.S. 649 (1944). Although historians have astutely questioned the tangible impact of Smith v. Allwright, the collective actions of the federal government symbolized to African Americans important steps toward ensuring the franchise. For more on Smith v. Allwright, see Dittmer, Local People, especially 1-40; Payne, I’ve Got the Light of Freedom, 29-66; and Lawson, Black Ballots, 23-54.
representative to the Republican National Committee and had been active in politics since the 1920s. Also able to register was Reverend James Ratliff of True Light Baptist Church and his successor Reverend Ridgeway. Reverend Ridgeway went on to have a long career. He was still the pastor of True Light Baptist twenty years later when the church opened its doors to one of the most successful Freedom Schools in Mississippi.\footnote{Boyd, interview; \textit{Polk's Hattiesburg City Directory}, 1918; \textit{Polk's Hattiesburg City Directory}: 1935; and \textit{Polk's Hattiesburg City Directory}: 1937.}

Turner Smith didn’t live out the war and would miss seeing the greatest advances in black Hattiesburg life. But his legacy lived through his sons who formed a thriving medical dynasty on Mobile Street. Hammond carried two things from his father for his entire life, the value of an education and the need for self-sufficiency. None of Turner Smith’s kids were going to end up in a field. That fact was ordained from the moment he dropped his mule in that cotton field and walked to college. Hammond also inherited his father’s deep political ambitions. Turner would never vote because of Mississippi’s strict laws against black political participation. But Hammond always remembered his father’s desire to cast a ballot for the Party of Lincoln. “My daddy,” remembered Hammond, “had three loves: his family, the Methodist Church and the Republican Party.” Turner would have been proud when his sons Hammond and Charles were among the first blacks registered in Hattiesburg, and even more so when his sons began holding NAACP meetings in their offices in the coming years.\footnote{Smith, interview; \textit{Polk's Hattiesburg City Directory}: 1946 (R.L. Polk & Co. Publishers, 1946); and Hattiesburg, Sheet 14, April, 1931 + August, 1945, Sanborn Maps.}

The generation of black youths who came of age in Hattiesburg during the Depression and the early war years were raised by vibrant and loving community. Their lives must be considered within the constraints of Mississippi Jim Crow. But they also had unprecedented opportunities. Many of them could count on community support in their early years of school. Some even dreamed of a college education. Others knew that a lifetime at the Hercules plant or the Meridian Fertilizer Factory probably waited them. They weren’t great jobs, but at least they were enough to provide for families or even buy a ticket to Chicago in search of a better life. Those who stayed had the support of social clubs, Mobile Street entrepreneurs, churches, the Eureka High School, and the support
found in the best parts of their community. The members of that next generation would find comforting spaces waiting for them. Waves of champions would emerge from that community.

Victoria Jackson of Palmer’s Crossing was among the champions. Her family had first arrived in the Hub City two generations earlier when her grandfather became one of the thousands to move into the Mississippi Piney Woods to pursue the promise of jobs. Her grandfather constantly stressed independence and scrimped and saved to purchase a small plot of land where his family would live for decades. They understood that better futures waited their children if they found independence and avoided work on farms or in white households. “One of the primary rules in my grandfather’s and grandmother’s domain,” Victoria remembered, “was they didn’t allow their children to work for white folks.” Victoria Jackson came of age in that Palmer’s Crossing community, finding shards of opportunity within the confines of the Jim Crow South. She even spent some time working at Camp Shelby when the base began hosting soldiers during the war. “Out there people were treated humane,” she remembered.\footnote{Victoria Gray Adams, interview by Katherine Mellen Charron, transcript, Petersburg, VA, April 22, 2002, in author’s possession.}

Victoria Jackson would become perhaps Hattiesburg’s most famous Civil Rights activist and is more readily known by her married names, Victoria Gray Adams. In her lifetime, she co-founded a major alternative political party, became the first Mississippi woman to run for national office, and was one of the first three black women ever seated as guests on the floor of the United States House of Representatives. But before she ever knew of the remarkable life that lay before her, Victoria Jackson was just a girl growing up in the Palmer’s Crossing community outside of Hattiesburg. Even as a black child reared in Mississippi during the height of the Great Depression, she saw opportunity through the nature of her community. As she explained in a 1945 high school essay, “The background and history of my town is very important to me, because I feel it played the major part in my decision of what I wanted to do in life. It is just an average town, but there is one exception, it is owned and operated almost wholly by Negroes.” Like thousands of others, Victoria Jackson came of age living within the constricting confines
of Jim Crow. But she also grew up in a proud community that wholeheartedly galvanized around collective communal action, improving lives and providing opportunities for those who came to Hattiesburg and elected to stay.479

Jesse Brown was another of the local champions produced by that strong black community. Born in 1926, Jesse Brown grew up in Depression-bitten Hattiesburg and Palmer’s Crossing. His family struggled to make ends meet, but Jesse his family by taking local odd jobs, including selling the black *Pittsburgh Courier* for a brief time, delivering laundry, serving drinks at a night club, taking odd jobs as a laborer, and in 1940 joining the growing labor force out at Camp Shelby. But Brown also found support in the local black schools and the community that supported them. He spent many of his days engulfed in the lessons provided at Eureka High and under the close watch of a community of dedicated teachers. Like many local blacks, he also vehemently read dozens of issues of the *Chicago Defender* that were found in the barbershops and grocery stores of Mobile Street. Despite the Depression-era hardships, education always mattered. Brown graduated salutatorian of his high school class and followed Eureka principal Nathaniel Burger’s advice to attend college out of the state.480

Jesse Brown chose to attend The Ohio State University, like his idol Jesse Owens who had stayed in the Mobile Street neighborhood and spoke at the black USO while Brown was in high school. Jesse arrived at Ohio State as one of only a handful of black students and spent his evenings serving drinks and food at local sororities and fraternities to earn his tuition. In the summers, he returned to Hattiesburg to work at a local cleaner. After repeatedly being denied admission into Ohio State’s aviation program, Brown left the university in 1946 after passing an entrance exam for the Navy’s Aviation Cadet Training Program. Brown thrived in the program and within two years became the first African American Naval Aviator in United States history. The former Eureka High student’s picture appeared in black newspapers across the country, celebrating the greater

possibilities available to a new generation of young African Americans. Brown went on to distinguished service in the Korean War, personally destroying five railroad cars and damaging fifteen others during his first combat bombing run. His aircraft commander dubbed Brown “one of the best pilots in the air group.” Brown was also among the first Navy pilots to perish in the Korean War when he was shot down that December. He died a national hero and celebrity. His story was peppered across nearly every newspaper in America and Brown was posthumously awarded the Purple Heart and the Distinguished Flying Cross. Although Jesse Brown died, his celebrity symbolized incredible possibilities for the waves of champions who emerged from black Hattiesburg. Whether they wanted to fight for their country, start a new business, or maybe even just register to vote, their futures were filled with unprecedented promises unimaginable to generations that came before. 481

Not every black Mississippian lived in a town that held a Camp Shelby. But virtually all of them encountered opportunity with the coming of war. Generations of champions came of age in the 1930s and 1940s, hailing from the foundations laid before. Many of them were the products of resilient communities that had bonded together to encounter and even sometimes thrive in the heated racial climate of the Jim Crow South. That newest generation sensed opportunity through their wartime experiences and promising signs of support coming from Washington D.C. They felt like a part of American than any generation since the Civil War. So by the end of World War II, many of the black Mississippians who came of age during the 1930s and 1940s were anxiously optimistic about their future opportunities. The greatest irony, of course, is that their opportunities came by way of the ones that also saved whites. Mississippians had voted for Roosevelt and helped implant Eleanor as First Lady. Their continuous reliance on outside help to save their society would ultimately loosen their racial grip on

opportunities as black men and women emerged who had an unbinding faith in America and believed that they too could enjoy the freedoms promised by the democracy.

Of the generation of black Mississippian champions who came of age in the 1930s and matured during the War, a single dynamic individual man stands out: Medgar Wiley Evers of Decatur, Mississippi. Evers was like a microcosm of the forces that had given strength to black Mississippians through the early twentieth century. He fits the model perfectly. Born on July 2, 1925, Medgar came from a family that embraced the deep-rooted traditions of self-help and education. Years before Medgar was born, his parents had made up their minds to stay off the farm. This was not a family of sharecroppers. Medgar’s father James moved the family to Decatur to take a job in the sawmill industry. Medgar’s parents struggled to make ends meet, but they cherished their financial independence. His mother made money however she could. She took in laundry and boarders and ran a small food stand. The Evers family also operated a small local barbershop out of their home. Medgar’s parents always stressed economic independence, constantly warning him about relying on whites for employment. They also pushed education as a lifelong pursuit and path to happiness. That exposure to learning deeply affected Medgar. From an early age, he was considered the academic star of the six Evers children, his interest growing with each educational success. Learning was like a competition for Medgar. As a young high schooler, he would spend hours staring over the pages of his parents’ dictionary just trying to expand his vocabulary. Like millions of other Southern blacks, he also grew up reading the Chicago Defender every chance he got. On warm evenings after dinner, Medgar could often be found on the back porch of the Evers home pouring over the pages of his parents’ copy of World’s Greatest Weekly. He and his brother even sold the Defender for a brief period before pressure from local whites forced him to stop.482

At seventeen years old in 1943, Medgar Evers followed his brother Charles into the service to help defeat the Axis powers. He played a logistical role in helping defeat

482 This biographical information is drawn from Charles Evers and Andrew Szanton, Have No Fear: The Charles Evers Story (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1997), especially 1-44; and Michael Vinson Williams, Medgar Evers: Mississippi Martyr (Fayetteville, AK: University of Arkansas Press, 2011), especially 13-54, quoted on 23.
the Axis Powers in Europe, serving in Belgium and Northern France as the allies drove to Berlin. Although Medgar earned two combat stars and the Good Conduct medal, his World War II service was rather nondescript among other World War II veterans. The most exceptional aspect of Medgar’s wartime experience was the way it affected him upon his homecoming. Like many black servicemen, Medgar saw a glaring contradiction between the mission of World War II and the Southern racial caste system. After being honorably discharged in April of 1946, Medgar returned to Mississippi and vehemently rejected Jim Crow for the rest of his life.483

Medgar and his brother Charles were also emboldened by the 1944 Smith v. Allwright decision and the federal government’s increasingly visible commitment to protect the rights of black soldiers. So on Medgar’s 21st birthday, he and Charles walked through a group of whites blocking the Newton County courthouse door, and registered to vote. That fall, they led four other men down to the polls, but were rebuffed by “250 rednecks, dressed in overalls, holding shotguns, rifles, ands pistols,” according to Charles. The opposing force probably grew in Charles’s memory, but it was certainly menacing enough to turn away the four black men, each carrying a firearm. The Evers brothers didn’t get to vote in 1946. But they did in 1947, becoming the first African Americans in Decatur, Mississippi to cast a ballot in the twentieth century.484

In 1948, Evers used the G.I. Bill to enroll at Alcorn State. Medgar thrived at the competitive all-black institution where classmates were sometimes ridiculed for receiving C’s on report cards. By his junior year, the business administration major was Class President, editor of the campus newspaper, a member of the debate team and choir, and a star in Varsity football and track. The two-time all-conference back didn’t just stand out because of his activities and athletic prowess. There was something different about Medgar. He wasn’t interested in drinking or smoking with his fellow students. He also refused to help his enterprising brother’s bootlegging business, despite repeated requests. Myrlie Beasley, a fellow Alcorn student and Medgar’s future wife, remembered that

483 Williams, Medgar Evers, 27-31; Evers, Have No Fear, 48-51; and Myrlie Evers with William Peters, For Us, the Living (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1996, orig., 1967), especially 23-25.
484 Evers, Have No Fear, 60-64.
Evers carried himself with a “certain refinement, the air of a gentleman.” He was always engaged with the outside world, constantly focusing on current events and international news. His knowledge and sophistication were impressive. He commanded respect while exuding dignity. But Medgar was also humble and engaging. People not only looked up to Medgar, but also genuinely liked him. He was a charismatic leader and friend. At Alcorn Medgar stood out in a good way.485

Evers graduated in the spring of 1952 and accepted a job offer from Magnolia Mutual, a black-owned insurance company. It is easy to imagine that a lot of companies wanted to hire a young man like Medgar Evers. He was smart, determined, and ambitious, but also firmly grounded in Mississippi. Medgar always vowed to be among those who stayed. Surely there was competition for his services. But Evers was attracted to Magnolia Mutual. So in July of 1952, the twenty-seven year old went to work selling insurance door-to-door as he and his young bride Myrlie began building a life together. Their first child Darrell Kenyatta was born the following summer. Medgar’s son was delivered by his new boss, who was not only the head of Magnolia Mutual but also a doctor. His name would have been familiar to readers of the Chicago Defender. The man who hired Medgar Evers fresh out of college in the spring of 1952 was the surgeon T.R.M. Howard. Medgar and Myrlie Evers were headed to Isaiah Montgomery’s Mound Bayou. The coming years would be eventful.486

485 Burger, interview; Myrlie Evers, For Us, the Living, 1-33, quoted on 10; and Williams, Medgar Evers, 13-54.
486 Charles Evers, Have No Fear, 60-67; Williams, Medgar Evers, especially 55-84; and Myrlie Evers, For Us, the Living, 76.
Chapter 8: Collisions

Shortly before the Christmas of 1951, a forty year-old black postal worker named Amzie Moore opened a letter from a group calling itself the “Bolivar County Invitational Committee of the Purposed Delta Council of Negro Leadership.” The letter invited Moore to a gathering scheduled for the night of December 28th, 1951 in the gymnasium of the black high school in Cleveland, Mississippi, just a few miles from where Amzie lived. The purpose of the meeting, the letter explained, was to organize a “Delta Council of Negro Leadership” that would “Guide our people in their civic responsibilities regarding education, registration and voting,” and “in all things which will make us stable, qualified, conscientious citizens.” The letter was signed by the Mound Bayou doctor TRM Howard. Moore made plans to attend the meeting.487

Amzie Moore came from a legacy of poverty. Like many Delta blacks, he was the grandson of slaves and son of sharecroppers. His ancestors had spent much of their lives bent at the waist under a scorching sun picking cotton, and Amzie seemed destined for a similar life. Sharecropping offered such little promise, especially in the Delta. The black families who worked those farms were among the poorest people in America. Amzie’s family was so poor that as a child he regularly went to bed hungry. By the age of twelve, Amzie was also out in the fields, driving a plow mule through the lush soil to plant rows of cotton that would make somebody else rich. Millions of black Mississippians had ventured out to the fields for the first time at even younger ages. Few had ever really come back. They had nighttime and weekend respites, but most of them would spend their lives in those fields, producing billions of tons of cotton for the rest of the world. The only promises made to most of them were a lifetime of hard days and hungry nights.

487 The Bolivar County Invitational Committee of the Purposed Delta Council of Negro Leadership to Amzie Moore, Mound Bayou, Mississippi, December 10, 1951, Box 7, Folder 2, Amzie Moore Papers (hereafter, Moore Papers), State Historical Society of Wisconsin (hereafter, SHSW), Madison, WI.
Those days plowing rows in the hot Mississippi sun must have been miserable for twelve year-old Amzie as the young boy strained under both the weight of the plow and a forlorn future.\footnote{Amzie Moore, interview by Mike Garvey, transcript, Cleveland, Mississippi, March 29, 1977, University of Southern Mississippi Center for Oral History & Cultural Heritage (hereafter, USM-OH).}

As a teenager, Amzie spent the money he earned picking cotton on two things: food and clothes. New clothes were particularly important to young Amzie. He needed them to attend school. And he needed school to escape the ancestral realities of life as a black Mississippi cotton worker. Amzie was always attracted to education as a way out of the fields. “I always had a desire to get some form of education,” he remembered, “because at that time we felt like that education was the solution to the poverty of the poor and ignorant.” But Mississippi didn’t emphasize black education and poor black communities couldn’t always make up the difference. Delta blacks were particularly undereducated. By 1950, only four percent of black adults in the region held a high school diploma. Some communities didn’t even staff a full high school faculty. Amzie’s own high school only went through the tenth grade. He considered trying to enroll in Rust College, but was told that he didn’t qualify for admission because all new students had to have completed the twelfth grade. Because he was black and born in Mississippi, Amzie Moore never had that chance.\footnote{Discharge Certificate, Box 1, Folder 1, Moore Papers; 4% statistic found in “The General Condition of the Mississippi Negro,” Box 17, Folder 9, 1960 report by the Congress of Racial Equality, Congress of Racial Equality-Southern Regional Office Papers, SHSW; and “because at that time…” quoted in Moore, interview.}

When his schooling ended, Amzie did his best to stay out of the cotton fields. Throughout his late teens and early twenties, he took a series of part-time jobs to make ends meet. At the age of twenty-three, Amzie caught a lucky break when he was hired at the local Post Office. Postal work was a godsend to poor Delta blacks like Amzie Moore. The job kept him out of the fields and paid him a decent wage. He was able to marry and build a new home with the government job. Postal work also offered internal status in the black community and Amzie soon began making social connections in Mound Bayou, the
A historic black town located less than ten miles north of Cleveland. Amzie ran in the same social circles as Isaiah Montgomery’s daughter Mary and her husband Eugene.\textsuperscript{490}

Mound Bayou remained a focal point of black Mississippi politics in the 1930s just as it had for decades. Mary Montgomery was the national Republican Party’s Mississippi Chairwoman and Eugene was a regular delegate at the Republican National Conventions. Mary and Eugene pulled Amzie into their small cadre. In 1936, Amzie joined the local Young Republican Club and successfully registered to vote for the first time in his life. Amzie spent much of his mid-to-late twenties as part of that small bright group of proud blacks who lived and worked out of Mound Bayou. His life was interrupted, however, in 1942 when he was drafted to fight the Japanese in World War II. He spent just over two years fighting with the U.S. Army’s Tenth Air Force on the Asian mainland. At home, Amzie couldn’t try on a hat in a department store or sip a milkshake at most lunch counters, but here he was, 10,000 miles from Mississippi, humping through Burmese forests with an all-black anti-aircraft battalion, risking his life for somebody else’s freedom.\textsuperscript{491}

Amzie survived World War II and was honorably discharged at Camp Shelby on January 17, 1946. Over the next few years, he led a fairly uneventful and peaceful life. Amzie returned to Cleveland and his Post Office job, where he worked for the next twenty-two years. He also joined the American Legion Post 220 Mound Bayou chapter and spent much of his time going to his local church and enjoying life with his wife. The pair later used the GI Bill to open a little service station and beauty shop. Amzie also found himself constantly wondering about ways to improve the lives of the impoverished blacks who lived around him. Delta blacks were among the poorest groups of people in America. In 1950, the annual median income for non-white rural Mississippians was a mere $390 (the modern equivalent is just shy of $3,500). As a Postal worker with a steady income, Amzie was far better off than most of his black neighbors. It was for this reason that in December 1951 Amzie was one of five hundred Delta blacks to receive a discharge certificate.\textsuperscript{491}

\textsuperscript{490} Moore, interview.

\textsuperscript{491} Discharge Certificate, Box 1, Folder 1, Moore Papers; and Moore, interview. See previous chapter for a discussion of Mary and Eugene Booze’s political activity. For more on postal work and black opportunity, see Philip F. Rubio, \textit{There’s Always Work at the Post Office: African American Postal Workers and the Fight for Jobs, Justice, and Equality} (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).
letter from the Bolivar County Invitational Committee of the Purposed Delta Council of Negro Leadership.\textsuperscript{492}

Those who gathered in the Cleveland Colored High School gym on that December Friday night were the black elite of the Mississippi Delta. There was the pharmacist Aaron Henry of Clarksdale, the dentist Dr. Emmett J. Stringer of Columbus, the doctor Clinton C. Battles of Indianola, the funeral home magnate T.J. Huddleston Jr. from Yazoo City, and the Postal worker and World War II veteran Amzie Moore of Cleveland. Other guests included college presidents, doctors, church leaders, clubwomen, principals, teachers, ministers, and entrepreneurs. This educated elite hailed from dozens of small towns that dotted the region and had emerged by the 1950s as leaders in their local black communities. They arrived in Cleveland that night and took seats in the gymnasium as they waited for the man who had called them there.\textsuperscript{493}

When Mound Bayou’s Dr. TRM Howard took the stage and laid out an ambitious agenda. “Let us prepare ourselves for the hour that is before us,” Howard told the assembly. “We, the Negro leaders of the Mississippi Delta,” he said, “must take our full share of responsibility in preparing our people for first class citizenship.” He told them they should organize to secure black voting rights, alleviate poverty, further black educational opportunities, and offer greater access to healthcare. Most in the crowd were

\textsuperscript{492} Discharge Certificate, Box 1, Folder 1, Moore Papers; Poll Tax Receipt Waiver, Box 1, Folder 1, Moore Papers; American Legion Membership Card (1951), Post 220—Mound Bayou, Mississippi; Moore, interview; income statistic taken from “The General Condition of the Mississippi Negro,” Box 17, Folder 9, 1960 report by the Congress of Racial Equality, Congress of Racial Equality-Southern Regional Office Papers, SHSW; and five hundred figure taken from David T. Beito and Linda Royster Beito, \textit{Black Maverick: T.R.M. Howard’s Fight for Civil Rights and Economic Power} (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 71. Mississippi Vocational College, now Mississippi Valley State University, was a school founded in 1946 by the all-white Mississippi state legislature to provide alternative higher educational opportunities for blacks in anticipation of a potential federal school integration order. See Charles C. Bolton, \textit{The Hardest Deal of All: The Battle Over School Integration in Mississippi, 1870-1980} (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 33-60.

\textsuperscript{493} Moore, interview; Aaron Henry, interview by Neil McMillen, transcript, Clarksdale, MS, May 1, 1972, USM-OH; Moore, interview; and Prospectus of the First Annual Meeting of the Mississippi Regional Council of Negro Leadership, Box 1, Folder 62, Dr. T.R.M. Howard Papers (hereafter, Howard Papers), Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Chicago Public Library, Chicago IL; “Mississippi Leadership Meeting Set,” \textit{Chicago Defender}, April 12, 1952, 5; and Aaron Henry with Constance Curry, \textit{Aaron Henry: The Fire Ever Burning} (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2000). This prospectus lists the organization’s committee members. For more on black Mississippi doctors and their roles as community leaders, see John Dittmer, \textit{The Good Doctors: The Medical Committee for Human Rights and the Struggle for Social Justice in Health Care} (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009), especially 1-37 for an early background that includes discussions of Stringer and Battles.
willing and able to follow Howard. They were local community leaders who hailed from strong, resilient families and were bolstered by the recent developments after the War. Each was propelled by the chance to enjoy opportunities unimaginable to previous generations of Mississippi blacks. Dr. Howard split them into sixteen sub-committees each tasked with addressing a specific set of issues. He asked each committee to begin discussing solutions, and to plan on meeting again the following spring. Howard emphasized that this initial meeting was a big moment. “May the generation of black men and women who follow us on tomorrow, say of us on this date we planned wisely for the good of all who dwell within our borders.” It was indeed a momentous occasion. What followed would fundamentally alter race relations in the American South.  

* * *

October 7, 1949 marked a day of transition for Hattiesburg. That Saturday, hundreds of locals gathered in the downtown Oaklawn Cemetery under a cloudy autumn sky to bury one of the earliest dreamers, the logging mogul and three-time Hub City mayor W.S.F. Tatum. Tatum had arrived in Hattiesburg in 1893 “looking for pine trees” and quickly became one of the greatest success stories in Hattiesburg history. His sawmill and various local economic interests turned him into the Hub City’s richest man. Tatum’s company employed hundreds of workers and supported generations of Tatums to come. “He was our most distinguished pioneer,” eulogized Mayor D.W. Holmes who declared a city-wide “day of mourning.” Municipal offices closed early and locals were asked to remember the deceased local magnate in their prayers. It was a day of remembrance, but some in the Hub City were too wrapped in celebration to grieve.  

As an older generation gathered to remember the past, thousands of others came together to celebrate the present. As Tatum was laid to rest, festivities were already underway across town. For many locals, that Saturday morning opened with jubilee as  

---

494 Howard’s address to the December 28th, 1951 organizational meeting is reprinted in the Prospectus of the First Annual Meeting of the Mississippi Regional Council of Negro Leadership, Box 1, Folder 62, Howard Papers. For more on the formation of T.R.M. Howard’s black leadership group, see Beito and Beito, Black Maverick, 69-89.

the Mississippi Southern College Homecoming Parade wound its way through the downtown. Over forty sororities, fraternities, and student organizations paraded through the Hub City in custom-made floats, their energy captivating thousands of excited onlookers who packed the sidewalks in rows six-people-deep. Dozens of incredibly creative and detailed floats competed for a cash prize. The Kappa Alpha fraternity took home the award with their “Champagne Float” featuring a pretty white female student sitting in a glass flute surrounded by bubbles. Later that evening, the Mississippi Southern football team walloped the McMurray College Indians of Abilene, Texas by a score of 55 to 32 in front of 10,000 cheering fans. Locals beamed with pride and celebrated long into the night.496

Among the impressed members of that Homecoming football crowd was Mississippi’s 49th Governor, the highly charged and wildly popular Fielding Lewis Wright. Wright reached the height of his popularity one year earlier when he helped lead a Southern political revolt against the Democratic Party, which he and many other Southerners thought was catering too much to black voters like the ones who met in Harlem in 1940 to march with A. Philip Randolph and his Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. Even more racially inflammatory political developments followed the war.

In 1946, Franklin Roosevelt’s successor President Harry S. Truman formed an advisory group called the President’s Committee on Civil Rights. Truman’s committee recommended federal action such as making lynching a federal crime and abolishing the Poll Tax to help advance blacks rights in Dixie. Southern Democrats were incensed. African American political gains threatened their ability to control and disperse the immense opportunities available in the postwar era. So Fielding Wright and a number of fellow Southern leaders defected from the Democratic Party in 1948. They formed an alternative third party called the Dixiecrats and nominated a Presidential ticket of South Carolina Governor Strom Thurmond and Fielding Wright in a mostly symbolic stand against federal support of black rights. It was a difficult contradiction to balance. They wanted government assistance and enjoyed the New Deal, but just didn’t want to see

496 “Southern Prepares For Big Day,” Hattiesburg American, October 7, 1949, 1; “MSC Homecoming Parade A Honey,” Hattiesburg American, October 8, 1949, 1; and “Southerners Hit Road For First G.S.C. Game This Week,” Hattiesburg American, October 10, 1949, 6.
blacks siphon off the same opportunities. Nonetheless, despite some cautionary threats to their “way of life,” white Hattiesburgers had great reason for optimism in the years following the war. And nothing symbolized postwar opportunity in Hattiesburg more than the rise of Mississippi Southern College.497

Mississippi Southern had been up and running since 1910 when the Hub City beat out Jackson and Laurel as the site for the state’s new teacher’s college. But the school never had a large enrollment or very many resources. It had been a site of federal relief work in the 1930s as several hundred men helped beautify the campus, most notably building the lovely Lake Byron on the corner of Hardy Street. During World War II, the enrollment was only about a few hundred students. It was very difficult for many locals to pay the tuition, and jobs for graduates were scarce anyway.

Mississippi Southern began growing in the postwar years. The GI Bill helped tremendously, allowing thousands of white veterans to enroll for the 1946-1947 academic year. Many of these new students were from working-class families and had probably never dreamed of college before the War. But the GI Bill gave them unprecedented access to higher education and Mississippi Southern was happy to teach them. The sons and daughters of former lumber workers, WPA hands, and old railroad men saw a better future waiting for them on the Mississippi Southern campus and ventured out to the corner of Hardy Street to pursue it. College officials struggled to house them all and eventually bought and moved several structures from Camp Shelby to ease the housing shortage. By 1950, enrollment had reached 2,000 students. Five years later, more than 5,500 students were enrolled for courses.498

498 Chester M. Morgan, Treasured Past, Golden Future: The University of Southern Mississippi, 1910-2010 (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), especially 64-97 for postwar growth; 3500 statistic in “McCain Sets Goal of 5000 Students Within Three Years,” Hattiesburg American, April 3, 1956, 1;
The growth of Mississippi Southern College created all sorts of economic opportunities for Hattiesburg. Increasing student numbers created more jobs for local workers and additional customers for local retail. And thousands of people came into the Hub City from across the region for football Saturdays. Hattiesburg’s businessmen sought to take advantage of Mississippi Southern’s growth. They even offered Mississippi Southern College President Dr. R.C. Cook a spot on the Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors. Many members adamantly supported the growing college. Louis Faulkner was among the benefactors. It wasn’t uncommon for him to donate $1,000 to a campus cause. Mississippi College promised great opportunities for its student body and the city of Hattiesburg in the years to come. But it was also clear that the great promises of Mississippi Southern College were for whites only. Events like the 1949 Homecoming game helped reinforce that message.499

The Mississippi Southern College football team was nicknamed the Confederates. Their mascot was a decorated soldier named “General Nat” for Nathaniel Bedford Forrest, the infamous confederate cavalryman who ordered the murders of 292 captured black soldiers at Ft. Pillow and became the first imperial wizard of the KKK. In 1955, Mississippi Southern hired a new President named William D. McCain, an ardent neo-Confederate who personally oversaw the daily activities of the national Sons of Confederate Veterans.500

Nathaniel Bedford Forrest was McCain’s personal hero. The new Mississippi College President kept a painting of the murderous Klansman over his desk. “Hopefully General Nathaniel Bedford Forrest,” McCain once wrote, “whose courage and valor gave this countys name will continue to inspire victory over adverse circumstances and good citizenship.” McCain was hardly alone. For generations of white Hattiesburgers, the reverence for the old general and former slave trader never wavered. Dozens of women turned out every second Friday for the meetings of the local chapter of the United

499 Mississippi Southern College to Louis Faulkner, Hattiesburg, MS, November 28, 1953, Box 1, Folder 15, Faulkner Papers; Louis Faulkner to Dr. R.C. Cook, Hattiesburg, MS, December 15, 1953, Box 1, Folder 15, Faulkner Papers; and Dr. R.C. Cook to Louis Faulkner, Hattiesburg, MS, December 18, 1953, Box 1, Folder 15, Faulkner Papers; and William McCain to Louis Faulkner, Hattiesburg, MS, October 18, 1955, Box 1, Folder 15, Faulkner Papers.
Daughters of the Confederacy. “The records of their noble deeds should never die,” reminded their president in a late 1940s speech. Those Saturday football games were a vivid reminder of the burgeoning white supremacy that grew on the corner of Hardy Street and Route 49. Violent symbols of white supremacy played out on the gridiron on tranquil autumn Saturdays as massive all-white crowds rose to their feet as an all-white team nicknamed the Confederates followed “General Nat” onto the field.501

The Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce helped usher in other postwar opportunities for the people of the Hub City. The Chamber was still made up of the same types of men—local business owners, realtors, attorneys, and the various white collar types who found the most success in the Hub City of the New South. As one member succinctly reminded them in 1947, “Hattiesburg’s best talent has always unselfishly and willingly served on this board.”502

Louis Faulkner remained on the Board of Directors through the end of 1948. The postwar Chamber again fostered growth, creatively crafting new ways to guide Hattiesburg into permanent prosperity. Even before the end of World War II, they began organizing resources into a collective reserve called the “Post-War Development Fund.” They solicited contributions from local businessmen including real estate agents, banks, attorneys, retailers, and auto dealers to purchase a $75,000 United States Treasury Bond, which they used to pay the salaries of office staff and as a nest egg for future investments or hard times. Just like the previous generation of Hattiesburg leaders, the new Chamber of Commerce officials sought to recruit new investors. There were unprecedented opportunities for new industries as the entire South rapidly industrialized in the postwar era. The postwar boom brought increased industrial investment and Northern industrialists looked to Dixie. Southern labor was cheap and Southern towns still needed factories. Chamber of Commerce officials were constantly busy. In the first seven months

501 Pamphlet—Madge Hoskins Holmes Chapter United Daughters of the Confederacy, Box 2, Folder 3, Burney (Madge) Papers, University of Southern Mississippi Libraries Special Collections (hereafter USM), Hattiesburg, MS; Undated Speech, Box , Folder 6, Burney (Madge) Papers, USM; McCain quoted in Many Authors, The History of Forrest County Mississippi (Hattiesburg, MS: Hattiesburg Area Historical Society, 2000), 14; and Bradley G. Bond, “Unmitigated Thievery’: The Case Against William David McCain,” Journal of Mississippi History, Vol. LXXII, No., 2 (Summer 2010), 163-198.
502 Speech Made by Mr. W.A. Thomson, transcript, January 27, 1947, Box 2, Folder 5, CoC.
of 1949, the Industrial Affairs Committee conferred with sixteen different organizations.  

The only problem with the postwar industrial boom was that some Northern firms expected too many concessions from prospective Southern cities. They demanded subsidies, tax exemptions, renovated facilities, and even guaranteed control over labor unions. Many municipalities had to commit millions to get a firm to sign a contract.

In 1947, a New York-based wall board manufacturer named the National Gypsum Company began courting the Hub City. The Gypsum firm wanted the Hub City to provide a plant site and pass a $2.5 million dollar bond to subsidize half of the factory’s local start-up costs. Gypsum’s president flew to Hattiesburg and told the Chamber of Commerce that the factory would provide approximately 460 jobs and contribute $2 million annually to the local economy through wages, utility payments, and supply costs. But members of the Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce scoffed at the deal. $2.5 million was simply too high a price. They countered with $1.5 million, but Gypsum didn’t bite.

The Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce could afford to be selective than many Southern towns because they weren’t hurting quite as bad as other places. Hattiesburg already had Camp Shelby, Hercules, the Reliance factory, and Mississippi Southern, and didn’t need one big fish to save their city. So rather mortgage their future to secure one

---

503 List of Directors of the Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce for 1947, Box 2, Folder 5, CoC; Post-War Development Fund Ledger, 1945, Box 11, Folders 3-6, Hattiesburg Area Chamber of Commerce Records, USM (hereafter, CoC); Post-War Development Fund, Box 11, Folder 7, CoC; Minutes of the Regular Monthly Meeting of the Board of Directors of the Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce, April 12, 1948, Box 2, Folder 6, CoC; Minutes of the Regular Monthly Meeting of the Board of Directors of the Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce, May 24, 1948, Box 2, Folder 6, CoC; and L.Y. Foote, Affairs Committee at Membership Meeting on July 25, 1949, Box 2, Folder 7, CoC.

504 Minutes of a Special Meeting of the Industrial Affairs Committee and the Executive Committee of the Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce, September 5, 1947, Box 2, Folder 5, CoC; Minutes of a Special Joint Meeting of the Industrial Affairs Committee and the Executive Committee of the Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce, September 12, 1947, Box 2, Folder 5, CoC; Minutes of a Special Joint Meeting of the Industrial Affairs Committee and the Executive Committee of the Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce, September 15, 1947, Box 2, Folder 5, CoC; Minutes of a Special Joint Meeting of the Board of Directors, Industrial Affairs Committee and the Executive Committee of the Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce, September 12, 1947, Box 2, Folder 5, CoC; Minutes of a Special Meeting of the Industrial Affairs Committee and the Executive Committee of the Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce, October 2, 1947, Box 2, Folder 5, CoC; and Minutes of the Regular Monthly Meeting of the Board of Directors of Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce, Box 2, Folder 6, CoC.
big plant, they welcomed several smaller companies that didn’t demand as much from the town. The Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce was patient and allowed jobs to trickle in by the handful rather than attempting to industrialize in one big swoop as other more desperate Mississippi towns were forced to do. Smaller plants such as the Funsten Pecan Company, Price Brothers Concrete, the Mississippi Tank Company, Forrest Farms Chicken Processing Plant, Dixie Pine Products Company, and the Hattiesburg Brick Works, either started anew or grew in size, combining to offer thousands of local manufacturing jobs.

Several longstanding local companies also took off in the years after the war. No one benefitted more than Louis Faulkner who became quite wealthy during the postwar boom. His Faulkner Concrete Company regularly raked in six figure profits throughout the late 1940s and offered a local annual payroll of nearly $35,000. Leveraging his success, Faulkner expanded, opening new factories in Mobile, Jackson, Meridian, and Gulfport. Additionally, Faulkner’s longtime employer, the Mississippi Central Railroad (MCRR) made a comeback beginning in 1940 as the war progressed and America renewed its appetite for consumption. After slowly dwindling for decades, the railroad’s shipping numbers more than doubled between 1939 and 1945. The MCRR had always been a timber railroad, but in the 1940s and 1950s the type of forestry product changed. Paperboard, wallboard, and pulpwood replaced the timbers the road had once shipped, signifying a slow but gradually increasing resurgence of the lumber industry. The timber trade would never return to what it once was, but its diversification created several hundred local jobs for both black and white workers throughout the 1940s and 1950s. Conservation met innovation to resurrect vestiges of the Mississippi Piney Woods timber industry and send new building materials out into America’s expanding residential suburbs.505

505 Faulkner Concrete Pipe Company Statement of Earnings 1/1/46 thru 11/30/46 Box 5, Folder 9, Faulkner Papers; Faulkner Concrete Company Analysis of Labor Costs, December 28-January 31, 1947, Box 5, Folder 9, Faulkner Papers; Faulkner Concrete Company Analysis of Labor Costs, February 1-February 28, 1947, Box 5, Folder 9, Faulkner Papers; Freight Carried During Year-Revenue, 512-519, MCRR Annual Report (1939), Box 117, Folder 11, Sub-Series J: Annual Reports, Series II: Mississippi Central Railroad Collection (hereafter, MCRR), USM; Freight Carried During Year-Revenue, 512-519, MCRR Annual Report (1945), Box 117, Folder 17, Sub-Series J: Annual Reports, Series II: Mississippi Central Railroad Collection (hereafter, MCRR), USM; Freight Carried During Year-Revenue, 512-519, MCRR Annual Report (1950), Box 116, Folder 14, Sub-Series J: Annual Reports, Series II: Mississippi Central Railroad Collection.
Hattiesburg grew faster than ever after World War II, once again becoming a place where thousands could find steady wages and better lives. In 1939, after the sawmills fell silent and the railroad freight slowed, Mississippians only earned about $27 million in wages. By 1947, however, the state’s payroll had rebounded to just over $116 million. Within a decade, statewide payrolls topped $180 million, offering awesome opportunities for wage labor in towns like Hattiesburg.506

Between 1940 and 1950, Hattiesburg’s population grew by forty percent, the largest rise in the city’s history. The Hub City was developing into one of the key light manufacturing regions of the state and by the early 1950s offered more than 3,000 factory jobs within the city limits and nearly 2,000 positions in the nearby surrounding areas. With the wave of new residents and jobs came the revival of the local retail, services, and restaurants. You could find jobs again in the Hub City. By 1953, 2,450 locals were employed in retail alone. In 1956, the Mississippi Business Review reported unprecedented business growth across the state. The state’s economy had never been better as a whole. Hattiesburg, it was reported, experienced the fastest economic growth of any city in the entire state. And so the new residents continued to come.507

* * * *

By 1946, the black Reverend J.H. Ratliff had been preaching at the True Light Baptist Church for nearly two decades. It had been an eventful run. True Light was one of the busiest black congregations in Hattiesburg and had a long history of activism. Ratliff himself was a member of the Committee of One Hundred, the group that had been founded in 1923 and once included Isaiah Montgomery. For years, Ratliff had organized various types of community meetings at True Light and had been instrumental in the 1934 publication of the black newspaper the *Union Messenger*. His most lasting

---


contribution to black Hattiesburg life, however, probably occurred toward the end of his career on September 9, 1946 when he and a handful of blacks including local clergymen and entrepreneurs founded the Forrest County chapter of the NAACP.508

The men who started the local branch of the NAACP came from the city’s black entrepreneurial and religious elite. They included Vernon Dahmer, a man who lived out in the nearby Kelly Settlement and ran a grocery store and sawmill, Benjamin Franklin (B.F.) Bourn, who ran one of Mobile Street’s most successful groceries, Reverend Willard Ridgeway, who would succeed Reverend Ratliff at True Light, and the brothers Hammond and Charles Smith. Each charter member had the same ambition: register to vote.509

Since 1890, Mississippi had continuously prevented fully-qualified black adults from registering to vote by using literacy tests and understanding clauses. Every decision rested with a white Circuit Court Clerk who sat behind a desk deciding who was eligible to be a first-class citizen. The clerks would ask white registrants easy questions, such as the name of the current governor or county in which they lived, if they asked anything at all. Blacks were treated completely differently. They would be asked to do things such as interpret random sections of the State Constitution. Most black voters, of course, failed to answer the question to the registrar’s indeterminable standards. Some of the clerks didn’t even bother with the pretense of fairness, choosing instead to ask absurd, unanswerable questions. Forrest County clerk Luther M. Cox, Jr., who had been proudly violating the Fifteenth Amendment since 1936, was known for asking potential black registrants “How many bubbles are in a bar of soap?”510

Because of these antics, only about six percent of age-eligible Mississippi blacks had registered to vote by the early 1950s. The Hattiesburgers who formed the first Forrest

508 “Our Aim,” The Union Messenger, Vol. 1, No. 1, November 29, 1934, 1; Mrs. Margaret Boutwell, “Assignment #26—Church History,” May, 1937, Box 10687, Folder: Churches, Negro, Series 447: Historical Research Material, 1935-1942, Works Project Administration Historical Survey (Hereafter WPA-Forrest), Mississippi Department of Archives and History (hereafter, MDAH), Jackson, MS; The History of Forrest County Mississippi, 36; and Gordon A. Martin, Jr., Count Them One By One: Black Mississippians Fighting for the Right to Vote (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), especially 9.
509 Martin, Count Them One By One, especially 3-18;
County NAACP branch vowed to change that. Like thousands of African Americans across the state, they were highly encouraged by the national developments they probably read in the Chicago Defender. Registering to vote meant many things, such as control over local schools, the ability to pressure elected officials to improve black life, and also the reclamation of first-class citizenship. Several of them were involved in statewide organizations and were often embarrassed to answer “no” at meetings when their professional peers asked if they were registered to vote. Some of them, including Vernon Dahmer, had registered before. But Hattiesburg made all its citizens re-register in 1949, and the black citizens who entered Cox’s office for that round of registration were ruled ineligible. But the members of that early Forrest County NAACP held an optimistic faith in the possibilities of postwar American democracy. And so with the help of an audacious local white lawyer named T. Price Dale, they took the local registrar Luther Cox Jr. to federal court.511

The fifteen African American plaintiffs named in Peay v. Cox were teachers, businessmen, and pastors. Each was a product of the proud and strong institutions developed over decades by local blacks. B.F. Bourn was one of Mobile Street’s most successful grocers. Milton Barnes owned Barnes Cleaners with his wife Alene. I.C. Peay was the pastor at Mount Zion Baptist Church. Vernon Dahmer was one of the wealthiest black landowners and businessmen in Forrest County. R.C. Jones and Addie Burger taught at Eureka High School. And Dr. Charles Smith owned a medical practice above his brother Hammond’s pharmacy. When their suit was thrown out by a native white Mississippi judge named Sidney Mize, the group prepared affidavits and sent them to NAACP special Council Thurgood Marshall who was two years into his massive assault on racially segregated public education that would capitulate with the 1954 Brown v. Board decision. Marshall passed along the affidavits to friends in the Justice Department and requested “an immediate investigation of these complaints.” “Negroes as well as other Americans in this country,” Marshall reminded Assistant Attorney General James M. McInerney, “expect the Department of Justice will vigorously defend the right of all Americans to exercise the franchise.” The Hattiesburg case was covered in dozens of

511 John Dittmer, Local People, six-percent statistic on 28; Richard Boyd, interview by Charles Bolton, transcript, Hattiesburg, MS, August 29, 1991, USM-OH; and Martin, Count Them One By One, especially 3-18.
America’s local black newspapers and NAACP official Walter White would for years refer to the Hattiesburg case in speaking engagements across the country.512

Ultimately, the case stalled, slowed down by a lengthy series of bureaucratic memorandums passed between the United States and Mississippi Attorney Generals, the FBI, and the Department of Justice. Then in 1955 a follow-up FBI investigation found no evidence of discrimination in registering voters because five African Americans were successfully able to register in Forrest County between January and May of 1955. The number of whites who registered over the same period was 2,195. The final finding from new United States Assistant Attorney General Warren Olney III was that “no further action is desired in this matter.” The process of the court case sent two messages to local blacks. The first and unfortunate one was that no law mattered without attorneys who enforced them. The second and more hopeful one was that plenty of allies existed outside of the Magnolia State and were very interested in helping blacks gain the right to vote. The plaintiffs moved forward. Most of them would indeed get to vote during their lives.513

Despite most blacks’ inability to register to vote or attend Mississippi Southern, Hattiesburg after the war still offered unprecedented opportunities for African Americans. Mechanization trimmed agricultural jobs even further and so thousands poured off the plantations looking for work. Just like whites, blacks arrived in the Hub City for jobs. In 1950, 93% of the non-white male labor force was employed. Nearly all worked wage labor jobs. Many of the new plants hired black workers, as did most of the old. Throughout the postwar era, thousands of blacks worked at the Hercules Powder Company and the Meridian Fertilizer Plant, both of which were located just blocks from the heart of Mobile Street. Other black workers found jobs as deliverymen, general laborers, chauffeurs, or porters. One quarter of black women over the age of fourteen

513 Martin, Count Them One By One, voter registration statistics and Olney quoted on 22.
worked as maids and nannies in white Hattiesburg homes. Others were teachers, cooks, or laundresses. These jobs weren’t the pinnacle of opportunity in postwar America, but they were good for black Southerners. Hattiesburg was a better place for blacks than most Mississippi towns. The median income for black families in Forrest County was more than double that for most counties in the Delta. Per capita, Hattiesburg’s African American community was the second wealthiest state. It isn’t saying much to be one of the richest black populations in the nation’s poorest state, but their affluence compared to other black areas symbolized opportunity in the Hub City. Black life was better in the Hattiesburg than most other places in Mississippi. And so the people came. By 1950, nearly 10,000 African Americans called Hattiesburg home.  

The new migrants packed the churches built by the generations before, filling the pews of True Light Baptist, St. Paul Methodist, Mt. Zion, and Mt. Carmel. They joined the social clubs and aid societies and patronized the stores. The postwar era was the golden age of black business in Hattiesburg. A new generation of entrepreneurs opened barbershops, salons, and restaurants in the historic district, replacing the older shops run by a generation before. Mobile Street grew like never before. The local black downtown exploded with opportunity. If you lived there in 1950 and walked three blocks north from where the railroad tracks crossed Mobile, you’d pass the Dixie Café, the Star Theatre, the Bus Stop Café, Della’s Beauty Land, Lee’s Hot Dog Stand, the Four Eleven Café, the Hub City Barber Shop, King Patton’s Barbershop, Gladys Mosley’s Beauty Shop, the Hi-Class Cleaners, Mary White’s Restaurant, Mr. and Mrs. Hawthorne’s Barbershop and Salon, the Railroad Café, Willie White’s Shoe Shine Stand, The Electric Barbeque, Mac’s Grill, Lillie McLaurin’s News Stand, the Fountain Food Store, the Jackson Dairy Queen, Hunt’s Barbeque, the Red Rose Barber Shop, the Woods Guest House, and Bourn’s Grocery Store. The storefronts and restaurants of the bustling black downtown  

were filled with the vivacious men and women who came to Hattiesburg by the thousands to take jobs and build better lives.\textsuperscript{515}

Eureka High School still sat strong and proud in the heart of the black community, sending waves of champions from its doors. So many blacks moved to Hattiesburg that a new high school named the Royal Street High School opened in 1949 to accommodate the bursting population. Each school had a gifted and impressive faculty. In 1955, seventy-five percent of Hattiesburg’s sixty-three black teachers held bachelor’s degrees. They were leaders in their communities. Many had matriculated through Eureka themselves when the black high school was barely a decade old. The local alumni who returned to teach included Principal Nathaniel Burger, Mattie Lou Hardy, Marie Washington Kent, and Ida Sandifer. Hattiesburg did not have a college for blacks, so they all went elsewhere. Burger had a master’s degree from Cornell and Sandifer one from New York University. But something called them back to the Hub City and they returned to lead.\textsuperscript{516}

Black teachers were underpaid and vastly overworked, but took great pride in their jobs. In 1951, white Hattiesburg teachers started their careers earning $2,120 per year and blacks only $1,437, more than thirty percent less. But they were also talented and supported by a vibrant local community. The teachers were entwined within the fabric of black life. They visited their students’ homes, served on PTA groups, volunteered after hours, and interacted with their pupils well beyond the schoolhouse door. Learning was a communal experience. A neighbor might grab a truant student and offer a community whipping for skipping school. Local doctors answered questions about how to get into college. Teachers were role models and held to higher moral standards. They were visible everywhere. The young students saw them in church, at the newsstand, in the barbershop, and across the dining room table. Most Hattiesburg blacks hadn’t graduated high school, but virtually all supported those who did. Eureka High School

graduations were packed with well-wishers, many of whom didn’t even have children receiving diplomas. Crowds numbering well over 3,000 bundled up on chilly autumn evenings to watch the celebrated Eureka High football team play their rivals.  

Even within the confines of Jim Crow, a black community continued to thrive in and along Mobile Street. The black downtown buzzed as it always had. In fact, it was busier than ever. There were over 1,000 black residences in the Mobile Street neighborhood alone with more than 800 dotting the other growing black enclaves framed by the railroad tracks. Hundreds more lived in Palmer’s Crossing. Hard-working men and women filled those homes and gave life to a vibrant community. There were still social clubs and church meetings, Sunday suppers and choir services. Dancers found places to twirl and partners to squeeze. By the early 1950s, Milton Barnes’s Hi-Hat Club out in Palmer’s crossing was regularly hosting mega-sized acts like Otis Redding, Sam Cooke, Al Greene, and Ray Charles. Hundreds crammed inside, spinning and smiling past daybreak and the roosters’ morning crow. Dozens of families made their living on the Mobile Street traffic. The hiss of deep friars and smell of deep-friend chicken permeated the air on hot sticky nights as men and women walked home from work. You could still drop into Hammond Smith’s pharmacy to get an ice cream float or pop into one of the barbershops to pick up a copy of the Defender and read about the biggest race news from across America, including the latest happenings of the Chicago-based Hattiesburg Social Club which met regularly through the 1950s. Men and women laid dominoes and played bridge on porches as young people skipped through jump ropes and hop scotch courses. There were love affairs, birthday parties, revivals, and potlucks. The people worked and played and lived. They weren’t yet full citizens of their broader society, but there was still a measure of freedom to be found and happiness to be had.  

* * *

517 “Pay Increased But Salaries Still Unequal,” Chicago Defender, April 28, 1951, 2; Burger, interview; Hardy, interview; Sandifer, interview; Ariel Barnes, interview by Sarah Rowe, transcript, no location given, April 1, 1993, USM-OH; Victoria Gray Adams, interview by Katherine Mellen Charron, transcript, Petersburg, VA, April 22, 2002, in author’s possession; Polk’s Hattiesburg City Directory: 1950, 14; and 3,000 statistic noted in “Dragons, Stars,” Chicago Defender, November 25, 1950, 16.  
518 Jessee Oscar McKee, “The Residential Patterns of Blacks in Natchez and Hattiesburg and Other Mississippi Cities” (Ph.D. diss., Michigan State University, 1972), statistics found on 104; and James Cohen, interview by Mike Garvey, transcript, Hattiesburg, MS, February 2, 1976, USM-OH.
By the time World War II veteran Medgar Evers arrived in Mound Bayou to work for the Magnolia Mutual Life Insurance Company, his new boss TRM Howard had formed that collection of black Delta leaders into an organization called the Regional Council of Negro Leadership (RCNL). Initiated by the wave of letters to people like Amzie Moore in December of 1951, the RCNL held its first annual meeting just two months before Medgar and Myrlie’s arrival. TRM Howard was optimistic about the possibilities of elite black leadership, but he also sought to expand his power base by connecting to the black Chicago media. The doctor recognized the impact and interest available to Southern blacks if they were able to galvanize Northern support. Howard’s first direct appeal to the black Chicago media came in 1946 when he contacted Associated Negro Press founder Claude Barnett in 1946 to try and draw Northern black support for the construction of a black veterans hospital in Mound Bayou. Five years later, Howard plugged into the black Chicago media’s historical interest in Mound Bayou as he organized the first RCNL meeting. He knew that his position as a prominent doctor and successful businessman in Isaiah Montgomery’s Mound Bayou settlement would garner attention. As if to reinforce the importance of attracting the Chicago media, he invited the influential black Chicago Congressman William Dawson to give the keynote address and convinced the iconic gospel singer Mahalia Jackson to perform. The event drew an estimated 7,000 guests, including a thirty-four-year-old future civil rights legend named Fannie Lou Hamer.519

By 1951, the black Chicago media had added two additional important outlets, Jet and Ebony magazines. Both were founded by southern migrant John H. Johnson, a native of Arkansas City, Arkansas, a small sawmill town located just across the Mississippi River only about thirty miles from Mound Bayou. Like many black Southerners, Johnson grew up eagerly reading the Chicago Defender whenever he could. His family actually migrated to Chicago in 1933 when Johnson was fifteen. He graduated high school and

spent his early years working for the Supreme Liberty Life Insurance Company newsletter before taking out a $500 loan to start his own Negro Digest, a pocket sized monthly that “digested” America’s race stories for black readers. Negro Digest flew off black-owned newstands in America’s cities and its circulation reached 100,000 by the end of its first full year. But Johnson had even bigger goals. He envisioned an African American answer to the mainstream magazines Life and Look. His goal was to produce a monthly publication that printed stories and large pictures documenting the lives of extraordinary African Americans. As a lifelong Chicago Defender reader, Johnson also realized the value in covering Southern race news. Migrants wanted to read about the places they were from and Southern blacks were excluded from local newspapers. He called the new magazine Ebony and launched it on November 1, 1945. The first run of 25,000 copies sold out within hours. By the end of the following year circulation reached over 300,000. In 1951, Johnson folded his old weekly the Negro Digest and launched a new version of a pocket-sized weekly black news magazine that he called Jet. The early issues were filled with Southern race stories. Within six months it too was selling 300,000 copies a week. 520

TRM Howard was an early star in Johnson’s Ebony and Jet magazines. He graced the pages of the Chicago publications almost monthly in the first half of the 1950s. It was a wonderful marriage. Howard needed the publicity and black readers loved hearing positive race stories from the South. Jet was just over a month old when Howard’s name first graced its pages on December 6, 1951. In a feature called “Words of the Week,” Howard was quoted as saying, “You have to be a black man in Mississippi at least 24 hours to understand what it means to be a Negro in Mississippi.” 521

Five months later, Howard returned to the pages of Jet in a story about the first annual meeting of the RCNL and the speaker Rep. William Dawson. The Chicago Defender also covered the planned event. The black leaders of Chicago and the Delta had known of each other for years, but what TRM Howard was facilitating was a network of cooperation. He was always available for interviews with the black Chicago media and

521 “Words of the Week,” Jet, December 6, 1951, 10.
hosted black dignitaries when they arrived in Mound Bayou, just as Isaiah Montgomery had once done for Ida B. Wells. It was the same dynamic, only now, blacks lived in a world with massive Northern urban populations and very powerful allies.\footnote{Miss. to Hear First Negro Congressman in 60 Years, “Jet,” April 24, 1952, 9; Mississippi Leadership Meeting Set, “Chicago Defender,” April 12, 1952, 5; and Prospectus of the First Annual Meeting of the Mississippi Regional Council of Negro Leadership, Box 1, Folder 62, Howard Papers.}

Over the next few years, the RCNL tried to organize local blacks with mixed results. Its largest single-issue campaign was the 1953 protest against the lack of washrooms available to blacks at roadside gas stations and restaurants. RCNL leaders organized a local boycott against segregated gas station restrooms and distributed nearly 100,000 bumper stickers with slogans such as “We Don’t Buy Gas Where We Can’t Use the Washroom.” There were mixed results. Some service stations put in black bathrooms. Others didn’t.\footnote{Campaign of the Week, “Jet,” October 16, 1952, 23; Henry, interview; and Moore, interview.}

The RCNL also tried to register large numbers of black voters. From the opening meeting of black Delta leaders, Howard explicitly told his followers that their goal should be to “make democracy work in Mississippi.” From Isaiah Montgomery to Mary and Eugene Booze and eventually to TRM Howard, Mound Bayou continued as the black political capital of Mississippi. Dr. Howard gleaned power from the community that lived in the all-black town and flexed that muscle to militantly push black voting rights in 1951. Mound Bayou blacks had for years been a small, enclosed political enclave, but what Howard was doing was different. He explicitly advocated statewide black voting rights and attracted thousands to the RCNL annual festivals in Mound Bayou where he treated them with rousing speeches from America’s most famous black political leaders and ensured that attendees received voter registration cards.\footnote{Howard quoted in Prospectus of the First Annual Meeting of the Mississippi Regional Council of Negro Leadership, Box 1, Folder 62, Howard Papers.}

More than anything else, the greatest success of the RCNL was to attract national attention through its massive annual rallies, which also helped further elevate Dr. Howard in the black public eye. By 1954, the annual Mound Bayou meetings were attracting audiences numbering as high as 10,000 people. The black media was all over it. Mound Bayou once again commanded their attention. In the spring of 1955, the National Negro
Publishers Association awarded the RCNL with the Russwurm Award for distinguished service to humanity. Howard himself travelled all over the country, speaking at events for the National Negro Business League and the National Medical Association, and regularly appearing in both *Jet* and *Ebony* magazines. He was quickly gaining a national reputation for his militant advocacy of self-help in the nation’s most racially oppressive state.\(^{525}\)

The RCNL also played an important role in bringing the NAACP to the Mississippi Delta. This was incredibly important. The NAACP had first appeared in Mississippi in 1918 and 1919 with new chapters in Vicksburg and Mound Bayou, respectively. Isaiah Montgomery himself was among the first to join. But the organization could never establish itself among local blacks and lacked the backing of national NAACP officials who considered Mississippi a lost cause. Over the next two decades, the organization experienced several cycles of growth, collapse, and reorganization with virtually no permanent success. Belonging to the NAACP in the nation’s most oppressive state was incredibly dangerous. Black Mississippians were beaten and killed for far less offenses. So by the beginning of World War II, there were only one hundred or so NAACP members in the entire state.\(^{526}\)

The nation’s premier black rights organization grew throughout the South in the years following World War II, but growth came slow to Mississippi. Most chapters were comprised of small groups of professional men like that in Hattiesburg. Many of these included members of the historic Committee of One Hundred, the group of black leaders from across the state who met to discuss the problems facing black communities. They began joining in the mid-1940s while RCNL members began signing up in 1952. Clarksdale pharmacist Aaron Henry, Columbus dentist Emmett Stringer, Indianola doctor Clinton Battles, and Cleveland postal worker Amzie Moore had all been at that first RCNL organizational meeting and together served on the “Separate But Equal”


\(^{526}\) See Nan E. Woodruff, *American Congo: The African American Freedom Struggle in the Delta* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 116-128; McMillen, *Dark Journey*, 314-318; and Dittmer, *Local People*, especially 29-31. Neil McMillen argues that part of the low membership numbers can be explained by the emigration of “the most assertive and advantaged blacks” during the preceding years.
committee. We don’t know if they discussed the NAACP membership then, but within months of that initial meeting, each local leader had founded an NAACP branch in their respective hometowns. The following year, RCNL members Reverend George Lee and grocer Gus Courts founded a chapter in Belzoni, a small Delta town located about fifty miles south of Mound Bayou. The organizational affiliation of these men didn’t matter as much as one may think. They didn’t have to pick or privilege between groups. The RCNL generated regional energy and connected black leaders while the NAACP branches served as productive modes of political organizing and plugged those communities into a national dialogue. Regardless of their affiliation, these black leaders shared the same motivation: convince blacks to try to register to vote. And that’s exactly what they did. Belzoni leaders Rev. George Lee and Gus Courts were indicative of this effort. Over the next three years, they helped nearly one hundred local blacks register to vote.  

This was the environment Medgar and Myrlie Evers entered when they arrived in Mound Bayou in July of 1952. A hotbed was just warming. Evers instantly became involved with the NAACP and within weeks was recruiting new members throughout the Delta. Myrlie was never sure how Evers first became involved, but it was almost certainly through his connection with RCNL members, especially Amzie Moore and the pharmacist Aaron Henry, both of whom also served on Magnolia Mutual’s Board of Directors by 1952. Medgar Evers had been actively interested in the advancement of the race since his days reading the Chicago Defender on his parents’ front porch. He had served in World War II and first tried to vote in 1946 before going on to a standout college career. Considering Medgar’s background, he probably felt right at home among men like Dr. Howard, Amzie Moore, and Aaron Henry. Evers went to work right away, spending his days selling insurance to local blacks and also organizing for the NAACP throughout the Delta. Growth was slow but steady. By the end of 1954, the state NAACP

---

327 Prospectus of the First Annual Meeting of the Mississippi Regional Council of Negro Leadership, Box 1, Folder 62, Howard Papers; Beito and Beito, Black Maverick, 78; McMillen, Dark Journey, 308-312 for Committee of One Hundred joining NAACP; Dittmer, Local People, 32-33; and Charles Payne, I’ve Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), especially 29-66.
had 3,101 dues paying members. It has played a significant role in the lives of black Mississippians ever since.\textsuperscript{528}

In January 1954, Evers went against the wishes of his family and applied to law school at the University of Mississippi. This was a dangerous maneuver. Ole Miss was hallowed white supremacist ground, and there is no predicting what repercussions would happen during a protracted dispute. Myrlie Evers thought the move was “selfish and foolish.” Medgar’s parents also disagreed. But Medgar went forth, dismissing his family’s views as being “short on long term wisdom.” The national NAACP caught wind of the case, and backed his efforts. Although the United States Supreme Court’s \textit{Brown v. Board of Education} decision ruled racially segregated schools unconstitutional in May, Evers was still rejected that September. He considered fighting the decision, but ultimately decided not to pursue the case any further after a period of consultation with NAACP lawyers. It was a wise choice. The next black man to try to integrate Ole Miss was arrested by police and thrown into a mental institution. Thank goodness Evers wasn’t arrested, or worse. Over the next seven years, he would do wonders for black Mississippians.\textsuperscript{529}

Just as he had with his Alcorn classmates and the Dr. Howard, Evers left quite an impression on the national NAACP, which was seeking ways to increase its Southern presence. In order to capitalize on his talent, ambition, and determination, the organization named the brave young activist its first Mississippi State Field Secretary. The NAACP primarily wanted Medgar to organize branches across the state, shape local programs, and report on the violence experienced by local black leaders. Evers spent ten days training in New York City before moving to Myrlie and his young family to Jackson where he was paid $4,500 per year (just over $35,000 today) to become a full time civil

\textsuperscript{528} 1955 Annual Report Mississippi State Office NAACP, 2, Box 2, Folder 39, Evers (Medgar Wiley and Myrlie Beasley) Papers, MDAH.
\textsuperscript{529} Myrlie Evers, \textit{For Us}, 118; Myrlie Evers-Williams and Manning Marable, eds., \textit{The Autobiography of Medgar Evers: A Hero’s Life Revealed Through His Writings, Letters, and Speeches} (New York: Basic Books, 2005), Myrlie quoted on 12 and 13; and “Mississippi Police Seize Negro Seeking to Enroll at University,” \textit{The New York Times}, June 6, 1958, 25. The next applicant’s name was Clennon King.
rights activist. His office opened on Farish Street in the heart of Jackson’s historic black neighborhood on January 23, 1955.530

Four months after Evers opened his Jackson office, TRM Howard’s RCNL held their largest celebration yet. By that spring, Howard was appearing in nearly every weekly Jet magazine issue and was probably the best known black political activist in the South. On April 29, 1955, an estimated crowd of 13,000 packed onto Howard’s Mound Bayou property to hear Detroit Congressman Charles Diggs Jr. give a rousing address. The Chicago Defender wrote that members of the anxious audience arrived by “mule back, wagon load, truck, car, bus, train and air.” Nearly every major black media outlet in the country at least mentioned the Mound Bayou event. Plenty sent reporters and photographers.531

The moment was particularly special for the Diggs family. The congressman’s father claimed to have been born in Mound Bayou during the 1890s as Isaiah Montgomery was just organizing the settlement. Diggs, Sr. sat among 13,000 audience members in 1955 as his impressive young son encouraged the crowd to “keep up the fight to make democracy live.” Numerous RCNL members also spoke and made an impression on members of the black northern media. Jet magazine reporter Simeon Booker particularly remembered the Belzoni minister George Lee, later calling him a “spell-binder.” The RCNL spent a reported $5,000 on three tons of barbeque chicken and ribs, 500 cases of soft drinks, and 300 gallons of ice cream. Jet magazine particularly appreciated the historical significance of the Mound Bayou meeting, noting that “Not since Booker T. Washington dedicated the town’s oil mill in 1909 have so many Mississippi Negroes attended a public gathering.”532

530 Myrlie Evers, For Us, 98-143; and Williams, Medgar Evers, 85-116 for Evers NAACP start, quoted on 93.
Just eight days after the RCNL’s enormous 1955 conference, the Reverend George Lee was out late on a Saturday night picking up a suit for his Mother’s Day service the next morning when a car approached from behind and shot out the rear passenger-side tire on his car. The men in the trailing vehicle then pulled along the right side of Reverend Lee’s slowing car and fired a shotgun blast through the side window, ripping off a major section of Lee’s lower left cheek and part of his jaw. Lee managed to climb out of his car as two nearby witnesses hurried to help him. One of the witnesses, a black taxi driver, rushed Lee to the hospital, but the minister died before arriving for treatment. The shooting was unquestionably an act of retribution for Lee’s role in local black voting initiatives and the recent massive demonstration held by the RCNL. But rather than slow the growing RCNL, the shooting drew Dr. Howard and his allies into action.533

Within minutes of the shooting, Reverend Lee’s wife Rose picked up the phone and called Dr. Clinton Battles. Battles drove to the hospital with a local black undertaker and NAACP member named T.V. Johnson. Battles and Johnson examined the body themselves because they knew the local coroner wouldn’t conduct a proper investigation. Accuracy in a shooting involving a car was important. Battles probably anticipated that the local sheriff would try and dismiss the murder as a traffic accident and that any chance of an outside investigation needed an accurate report of Lee’s death. It was a good move. When the local sheriff later tried to call the murder a routine traffic accident, Battles was able to prove otherwise.534


534 This narrative is reconstructed from 1955 Annual Report Mississippi State Office NAACP, 2, Box 2, Folder 39, Evers Papers; “Vote Drive to Avenge Lynching,” Chicago Defender, May 28, 1955, 1; “Mississippi Gunmen Take Life,” Jet, May 26, 1955, 8-11; “Lynching in Mississippi: Minister Shotgunned to Death Gang Style,” Chicago Defender, May 21, 1955, 1; “Exclusive Pictures of Lynch Victim’s Funeral,” Chicago Defender, May 28, 1955, 5; Simeon Booker, Black Man’s America, 162-163; Mendelsohn, The Martyrs, 5-13; and Evers, For Us, 158-159.
Battles and Johnson also began making calls, but soon discovered that the local telephone lines had been mysteriously cut. So one group of Lee’s associates and friends got in their car and drove to TRM Howard’s home in Mound Bayou. None of these men lived far apart. They all lived right in that central region of the Mississippi Delta. Belzoni was less than fifty miles to Mound Bayou. When the frantic men arrived in Mound Bayou, Dr. Howard picked up the telephone and called to Detroit Congressman Charles Diggs, who had just been at Mound Bayou only eight days before. Diggs, in turn, telephoned the White House and reported the incident to one of President Eisenhower’s aides.535

Meanwhile, another group of Lee’s associates drove to Jackson to see Medgar Evers. Evers then called the national NAACP office. Southeast Regional Director Ruby Hurley made immediate plans to go to Jackson. Less than 36 hours after Reverend Lee was shot, Ruby Hurley and Medgar Evers were in an Oldsmobile sedan heading up to Belzoni. They spent time interviewing local witnesses and reported their findings to the national NAACP. Word of the Lee murder also spread through the black media. Stories about Lee’s murder were printed in Jet, Ebony, the Atlanta Daily World, and of course the Chicago Defender. The Defender and Jet took the coverage one step further and actually published the image of Lee in his coffin at the funeral. Jet included an inset of a snapshot featuring the smiling preacher and a caption explaining, “Bullet fired by unknown whites tore jawbone and flesh from left side of face of Rev. George Lee.” The potential impact of the image was somewhat limited by a calculating mortician. Lee’s entire jawbone and cheek had been ripped away by the shotgun blasts from that anonymous assassin, but the mortician actually sewed his face back together for the open casket.536

535 Ibid.
By late May, the NAACP and RCNL’s allies across the country had successfully pressured the FBI into an investigation. Unfortunately, no indictment was handed down. The inquiry stalled because of an all-white coroner’s jury, threats against witnesses, and a local sheriff who insisted that Lee’s death was the result of a typical fatal car crash or a shooting by “some jealous nigger.” Still, the events following the Lee murder shows that by the spring of 1955 the RCNL network had become incredibly efficient and well-connected. The publicity generated by Lee’s murder was a direct result of the RCNL’s swift reaction and recently established outside contacts. Simeon Booker of Jet noted that by the time George was killed, “a civil-rights network covered Mississippi. There were no areas in which Negroes could be attacked, assaulted or killed without someone learning about it.” “Once the report was made,” Booker continued, “investigators moved in to gather the facts and telephone them to Northern Negro newspapers and United States authorities.” Between 1882 and 1951, Mississippi blacks fell victim to 534 reported, yet usually ignored, lynchings. But by the mid-1950s, the murder of an African American in the Mississippi Delta could become national news and force an FBI investigation. That had never quite happened before.

One can only wonder if Dr. TRM Howard and his RCNL Delta cohort appreciated the historical significance of the moments that followed the murder of the Reverend George Lee. They were probably too busy mourning their friend and planning their next steps. Howard himself worked on raising awareness and galvanizing additional support for the RCNL. A month after Lee’s murder, he spoke in front of the Chicago Council of Negro Organizations, an influential group composed of leading black figures representing the NAACP, Chicago Urban League, YMCA, and Chicago Negro Chamber of Commerce, telling his Windy City allies “we will not retreat.” Yet, the historical significance is important for understanding the Lee case and Mound Bayou’s impact on black America over a long period of time.

Sixty-four years before, Isaiah Montgomery had hosted the young journalist Ida B. Wells in Mound Bayou as she cut her teeth as a journalist covering black life in the

---

537 “FBI Still Probing Lee’s Death,” Chicago Defender, August 20, 1955, 5; Booker, Black Man’s America, quoted on 169; and Daniel T. Williams, Eight Negro Bibliographies (New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1970), 534 statistic on 6.

Delta. Like the RCNL, Wells spent much of her career trying to force change by exposing the murder of black Mississippian to the rest of the world. She passed away in 1931, but would have been pleased by the media response to the George Lee killing that Howard and his RCNL cohort generated. So much had changed in those six decades. Blacks found cohesion and opportunity in and out of the South. Their migration north enabled the rise of a strong black media, giving birth to publications like the *Chicago Defender* and eventually *Jet* and *Ebony*. Blacks who left constantly kept an eye on those who stayed and pressured Northern politicians to do the same. Northern blacks also elected their own representatives such as Congressman Charles Diggs, whose father had been born in Mound Bayou, and who sought to use his power to cross the Mason-Dixon line to help African Americans still living in his homeland. 1955 was the culmination of this potent and dynamic relationship between Chicago’s black media and Mississippi activists. It was a long history that started with the autonomous black community of Mound Bayou, America’s finest municipal example of black self-help that for decades had captured black America’s attention and offered safe spaces for black journalists. Unfortunately, even more powerful days were coming.

Three months twenty-one days after George Lee was killed, a 14 year-old boy from Chicago named Emmett Till walked into Bryant’s Grocery and Meat Market in Money, Mississippi and made some sort of antagonistic gesture or comment to the white woman working behind the counter. Whatever he actually said or did is lost to history. There are numerous versions, but all are contested. Regardless, three nights later, the white woman’s husband and his half-brother arrived at the house where Till was staying. Against the protests of Till’s great uncle, they dragged the youth out into the black Mississippi night. The grown men took the fourteen year-old boy to an abandoned small metal warehouse and unloaded on the boy in dramatic and deadly fashion, beating him severely and cutting off his penis. After the savage assault, the men shot Till and tied an eighty pound cotton gin fan to his body and dumped him into the Tallahatchie River.539

Howard’s RCNL cohort caught wind of Till’s disappearance and immediately went to work. Once again they wanted to force an outside investigation to bring Till’s murders to justice and get this type of killing to stop. Within days of the disappearance, the RCNL veterans Medgar Evers, Aaron Henry, and Amzie Moore were filtering out onto local cotton plantations to interview blacks and find witnesses who could offer information about the missing boy. Money is located only about thirty miles away from the home base of the RCNL in Mound Bayou. Day trips took them there. Concerned for their lives and sympathetic to others’ fears, the group stalked the Delta in overalls and bandanas to blend in with the sharecroppers. NAACP Southeast Regional Director Ruby Hurley quickly returned to Mississippi and joined them. She later described the scene, “I had to put on some cotton-pickin’ clothes, literal cotton-pickin’ clothes for those days, and make my way on to the plantation…I really got a feeling of what the Underground Railroad during the days of slavery was all about—how word would be passed by just the look in an eye.” Hurley and the RCNL coalition eventually turned up five witnesses, several of whom were willing to testify against the two suspects arrested when Till’s body was found just three days after being dumped in the Tallahatchie.

Emmett Till’s mother Mamie was stunned at the condition of her fourteen year-old son’s body. Emmett had been so badly beaten that he could only be identified by the ring he wore. Mamie decided on an open casket to “Let the people see what they have done to my boy.” An estimated 50,000 people attended Till’s Chicago funeral. On September 22, 1955, Jet published the picture of Till’s collapsed and unrecognizable face just has they had done three months earlier with the Reverend George Lee. Till’s mutilated corpse graphically illustrated an unfathomable level of brutality, shocking Jet readers. The image and subsequent story captured the nation’s attention. America’s black media was relentless, reporting on every aspect of the case. Within a month, Mamie had received over 1,000 letters and telephone calls and $4,000 in donations. The sheriff of

---


nearby Greenwood was so frustrated by all the phone calls he received from Northern newspapers that he promised, “One more call and I’m goin’ North.”

The widespread media coverage quickly garnered a response from national powerbrokers. The pressure had actually been mounting for weeks. Even before Till’s body was discovered, attorneys for the Chicago NAACP branch had wired the United States Attorney General requesting a federal inquiry. Charles Diggs also called for an investigation, compounding the pressure from the Lee killing just three months earlier. Soon after the body was found, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover responded to a wire and promised an investigation, Chicago mayor Richard Dailey urged President Eisenhower to pursue the killers, and former President Harry Truman endorsed a conviction. The pressure was substantial. In September, Medgar Evers, Ruby Hurley, Thurgood Marshall, NAACP head Roy Wilkins, and NAACP chief lobbyist Clarence Mitchell gained an audience with United States Assistant Attorney General Warren Olney III to discuss the rash of race murders in the Mississippi Delta. *Jet* ran a picture of the meeting. Even ten years before, the killing of a fourteen year-old black boy eliciting a meeting with the Assistant Attorney General of the United States would have seemed like a pipe-dream. The pressure led to an indictment. Two white men were going to stand trial for the murder of a black boy in Mississippi. This was no small thing.

Although Howard wasn’t lurking through the Delta digging up witnesses alongside Evers, Moore, Henry, and Hurley, the Mound Bayou doctor was the major figure in the black media, only behind the victim Emmett and his mother Mamie. When Till’s mangled body was pulled from the Tallahatchie River, Howard flew to Chicago to oversee the transfer of the boy’s body to his mother. During the trial, Howard hosted the

---


black witnesses, Emmett’s mother Mamie, and a rotating number of black journalists at his Mound Bayou home. Howard’s compound, which Jet magazine dubbed the “Negro press headquarters,” was loaded with guns and bodyguards. Many of the black reporters covering trial the stayed with Howard, including Simeon Booker, a friend who was working for Jet, and James Hicks of the National News Service. The Defender alone sent eight reporters, one of whom even spent time out in the fields helping the search for witnesses. Without Howard’s protection, the visiting black reporters could have been susceptible to violence and likely would have been turned away from any black-owned hotel that would be prone to local threats. Even white reporters visited the “Negro press headquarters,” including Murray Kempton of the New York Post and William Desmond of the New York Daily News.543

Most people know the rest of the story. The men who killed Emmett Till were ultimately acquitted. But regardless of the verdict, the murder and subsequent trial attracted enormous national media attention. It was one of the biggest race murder stories of the century. Northern mainstream media outlets responded with an increased focus on Southern race stories, ushering in a new era of mainstream journalism known as “the race beat.” The RCNL’s longstanding relationship with the black media exacerbated the significance of the murder. Because of their efforts, the Emmett Till lynching was transformed into a massive media event surrounding the trial. Without the RCNL, there is no guarantee that Bryant and Milam would even have been indicted, thus eliminating the month-long spectacle of a trial and subsequent outrage over their acquittal. Till’s age certainly helped capture America’s attention, but black kids had been getting lynched in Mississippi for decades.544


544 For more on the Emmett Till case the beginnings of the Southern “race beat,” see Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff, The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation (New York: Knopf, 2006), especially 75-108. Several witnesses eventually refused to testify, and those who did eventually fled the state in fear of their lives. See Davis W. Houck and Mathew A. Grindy, Emmett Till and the Mississippi Press (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 72-106.
Just two months after Till was murdered, a twelve year-old boy named Tim Hudson was murdered near Holly Springs for being too friendly with a white girl. Hudson was killed in the northern part of the state, close to, but ultimately outside the immediate RCNL network. Compared to the Till case, Hudson’s murder went virtually unnoticed. The Chicago Defender ran a single story on the murder with a front page picture of Hudson’s mother hovering over her poor son’s lifeless body just like Mamie Till, but the attention ended there. Tragically, there were no indictments, drawn-out trials, or nationwide protests for Tim Hudson. He was not a martyr. What made the Till case different was the involvement of the RCNL. And it was TRM Howard who made the RCNL. 545

Throughout the fall of 1955, American cities were filled with demonstrations protesting the Till verdict. On October 2, between 50,000 and 60,000 protestors followed Congressman Charles Diggs through the streets of Detroit and collectively donated $14,064.88 to the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. Meanwhile, 15,000 black New Yorkers followed Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters President A. Philip Randolph on another march through the streets of Harlem. That same day, Dr. TRM Howard was in Baltimore leading an estimated 2,500 marchers who helped raise $3,001.50. Altogether on October 2, 1955, over 100,000 African Americans took to the streets of Northern cities, marching en masse to demonstrate their hatred of Mississippi Jim Crow. In the coming months, thousands of dollars poured into the offices of the RCNL from northern advocacy groups. 546

Baltimore was just the beginning of TRM Howard’s travels that fall. A few days later, he spoke in Pittsburgh. He was in California the next week. On October 9, Howard addressed a crowd of 5,000 at the Los Angeles Second Baptist Church. The following day, he was the keynote speaker at a Los Angeles Freedom Seals banquet where baseball great Jackie Robinson served as toastmaster. Two weeks later he was back in Pittsburgh,

545 Medgar Evers Memorandum to unlisted, Jackson, MS, November 3, 1955, reprinted in Evers and Marable, The Autobiography of Medgar Evers, 39; Alex Wilson, “Probe Mystery Death of Mississippi Boy, 12,” Chicago Defender, November 5, 1955, 1. A small pocket publication called The American Negro also featured the image of Hudson’s mother overlooking her son’s body on the cover of its January 1956 issue. Dr. T.R.M. Howard was in the middle of a speaking tour when Hudson was killed.
546 “100,000 Across Nation Protest Till Lynching,” Chicago Defender, October 8, 1955, 4; and “Gifts Pour in for Squeeze Victims,” Chicago Defender, February 18, 1956, 7.
where he spoke to a 3,000 person audience that contributed $4,000 to the NAACP on the spot and sent a 3,000-signature petition protesting the Emmett Till case to United States Attorney General Herbert Browell. Pittsburgh mayor David L. Lawrence was in attendance and also spoke, capitalizing on the opportunity to garner additional black votes. Next, Howard stopped in New York where he was honored by the American Veterans Committee for service “above and beyond the normal call of citizenship” for his role in the Till case.547

That fall, Howard’s tour swung south. On the night of November 27, 1955, he arrived in Montgomery, Alabama to speak at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, a middle-class black church that had grown strong in the shadows of modernity. The old church building had been erected in 1889 by a group of dedicated black Baptists who had arrived in the city searching for opportunities away from the cotton fields. As in black communities across the South, those migrants poured their resources into their community church. Through the years, Dexter’s congregation organized to push for education, fight poverty, and improve the lives of growing numbers of Montgomery blacks. Dexter held its first NAACP meeting in 1918 and members of its congregation were promoting voter registration as early as 1919. This was a strong and proud church with a history of communal organizing and fiery leadership.548

Dexter’s new pastor was a young ambitious leader named Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The church was also home to a group called the Women’s Political Council, a collection of educated church women who encouraged voter registration, protested city segregation, and promoted education. Members of the Women’s Political Council were present on the night of November 27, 1955 when TRM Howard unloaded his rage over the Emmett Till case. Sitting among them on that Sunday night was a forty-two year-old


NAACP veteran named Rosa Parks. She was famously arrested the following Thursday. “I thought about Emmett Till,” she later explained, “and I just couldn’t go back.”

* * *

Like thousands of other white Mississippians, Louis Faulkner had had enough by the time the United States Supreme Court handed down its pioneering *Brown v. Board* decision on May 17, 1954. By deeming racial school segregation unconstitutional, the court threatened an essential function of Jim Crow. Whites monopolized opportunities for their children at an early age by controlling the resources given to young students in schools. Integration would shatter their ability to concentrate educational opportunities among whites, something they had done for nearly a century. There had been threats to Southern white dominance for years, but for white supremacists like Louis Faulkner *Brown* was the last straw. And to top it all off, less than two months after the court order, Faulkner received a copy of a disturbing letter forwarded from a colleague in South Carolina. The letter included a memo from the NAACP asking benefactors to help it raise $100,000 to help fight the school integration challenges that would surely follow the momentous Supreme Court decision. Faulkner couldn’t believe it. An organization of outside blacks was threatening his privileges as a Southern white male. Much of Faulkner’s adult life had been built on these opportunities that were now being assaulted. So the seventy-year old Louis Faulkner sprang into action.

Faulkner’s reaction was fairly typical of Mississippi’s white community leaders. *Brown v. Board* raised hell throughout the state. And white supremacists focused their wrath on the local NAACP branches. Aaron Henry remembered that early on, “most


550 Charles Williams to Rev. Harry Fosdick, Jacksonville, FL, June 3, 1954, copy found in Box 23, Folder 1, Faulkner Papers; Louis Faulkner to Charles Williams, Hattiesburg, MS, July 12, 1954, Box 23, Folder 1, Faulkner Papers; and Louis Faulkner to Charles Williams, Hattiesburg, MS, July 19, 1954, Box 23, Folder 1, Faulkner Papers.
whites did not consider the NAACP as a great threat, since they advocated working within the framework of the law,” but a few years later, “the Supreme Court decision put us and the NAACP into total disrepute.” The white supremacists flew off the handle. Even legislators and judges openly vowed to resist the United States Supreme Court decision. Mississippi’s leaders seemingly lost control, trumpeting and posturing like they were at a Klan rally. The state’s politicians offered a bevy of catastrophic statements. Representative John Bell Williams noted that “Negro education and interracial comity suffered their most damaging setback since the War Between the States.” Representative William A. Winstead claimed the decision retarded educational progress in the American South “for at least half a century.” Ten days after the decision, Senator James Eastland launched into a bitter tirade on the Senate floor. He told the Senate, “Let me make this clear…The South will retain segregation.” It was almost as if they briefly considered seceding again from the Union simply because the Supreme Court said that black children had a right to equal education. As historian John Dittmer has insightfully observed, “What was happening was in many aspects a replay of the year 1875.” Whites predicted all sorts of calamitous results of integration, but they were most concerned about control of opportunity. White Mississippians simply did not want to squander their limited resource on black opportunity. They never had and many of them never would.551

The problem for Mississippi white supremacists, however, was the growing power of blacks who lived outside their state. As they struggled to control those who stayed, the migrants who moved to places like Chicago continuously exerted their political and media influence to improve the lives of those who stayed in the South. Louis Faulkner was gaining in age and lacked any real political power, but he presented an idea to Mississippi’s segregationist leaders. He proposed attacking the national-level NAACP by calling into question the organization’s non-profit status. This would disallow tax-exempt donations. Completely outmatched, but clinging to a glimmer of hope, Louis Faulkner mimeographed 1,000 copies of an NAACP fund-raising request and sent them

to every single southern Attorney General, Governor, Mississippi Supreme Court justice, hundreds of choice local southern city officials, and various other persons of influence. Then he began writing federal officials. In a letter to T. Coleman Andrews of the Internal Revenue Service, Faulkner argued that the “N.A.A.C.P. is not operating as a charitable and educational organization, and, therefore is not entitled to the exemption provisions of the law.” Louis Faulkner, the ambitious Pennsylvanian who had arrived in Hattiesburg during the lumber boom and had seen the city through its brightest and darkest moments, would spend the rest of his life fighting against racial equality.  

Louis Faulkner could never win his fight against the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. The NAACP and the NAACP Legal Defense Fund were two separate entities. Numerous officials wrote to Faulkner explaining as much and noting that NAACP Legal Defense Fund attorneys had provided the necessary documentation to ensure their tax-exempt status. But Faulkner either didn’t accept or understand the decision. This was an outside power infringing on his longstanding privilege of whiteness and he just couldn’t believe it. Louis Faulkner acquired the names of numerous Treasury Department officials and began forwarding them all the pro-black literature he could get his hands on. Friends from across the South sent him copies of literature produced by any black rights organization. Faulkner forwarded copies of NAACP mailings, RCNL memos, and issues of a racially radical Jackson-paper named The Eagle Eye to Treasury Department officials, noting that they were all involved in some sort of conspiracy. He also continuously wrote to FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, boldly asking for information from the FBI’s confidential NAACP file. At one point, Faulkner even wrote the White House to appeal to President Eisenhower.  

---


Faulkner’s brief crusade against the NAACP was desperate and doomed. But he remained heartened by the encouragement bestowed upon him by his segregationist peers. His close friend Tom P. Brady of Brookhaven called him a “voice crying in the wilderness.” Mississippi Senator James Eastland praised him for “doing fine work,” reassuring him that “the position you take is the right one.” During his campaign, Faulkner corresponded with a who’s who among Mississippi’s segregationist leaders including Senators John Stennis and Eastland, Representative William Colmer, and future Mississippi Governors John Bell Williams and James P. Coleman. So the encouraged old Hattiesburger kept punching away at his typewriter, fighting another lost cause as he spent his final few days on earth desperately trying to block Mississippi opportunities from blacks.554

By 1954, Mississippi segregationists couldn’t control what the NAACP did at the national level. So they consolidated power within their own borders, forming a massive statewide organization with local branches called the Citizens Council to help fight the coming onslaught. This was the white supremacist answer to the NAACP and a direct regional answer to the national organization they could not control. It attracted white-collar and middle-to-upper class members. Faulkner was a member. So too was the new President of Mississippi Southern, Dr. William McCain. Others members were scattered throughout the Chamber of Commerce. The Citizens Council spread like wildfire in Mississippi. 60,000 Mississippians joined in the first year. Within two years, there were more than 80,000 dues-paying members in sixty-two of Mississippi’s eighty-two counties.555

The Citizens Council set itself apart from the Klan. They were the postwar generation’s Lucius Lamar, consolidating economic and political power to maintain white supremacy and access to opportunities. They did not explicitly advocate violence

554 Tom Brady to Louis Faulkner, Brookhaven, MS, July 18, 1955, Box 23, Folder 2, Faulkner Papers; and James Eastland to Louis Faulkner, Ruleville, MS, September 6, 1955, Box 23, Folder 2, Faulkner Papers. Numerous copies of The Eagle Eye, NAACP memos, and RCNL letters are scattered throughout Faulkner’s correspondence in Box 23. 
555 “The Citizens’ Council: A History,” Address by Robert P. Patterson to the Annual Leadership Conference of the Citizens’ Councils of America, Jackson, MS, October 26, 1963. A transcript of this speech was printed in the event program, which is located in Bingham Papers (1 Folder), SHSW.
against blacks. Rather, the Citizens Council preferred to use economic pressure when possible. Attorney and Citizens Council co-founder Arthur Clark, Jr. explained, “It is the thought of our group that the solution to this problem may become easier if various agitators and the like be removed from the communities in which they now operate. We propose to accomplish this through the careful application of economic pressures.” The Citizens Council denied loans, cut off suppliers, and fired the most visibly active African Americans. They also worked with the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, an anti-integrationist investigative division of the state government that spied on black activists and provided information about their activities to local white authorities. Although the Citizens Council was seemingly more civilized than the Klan, it was every bit as racist. As a member of the Hattiesburg branch explained, “The black race in our opinion hadn’t advanced to the point where they could contribute anything to the schools…you don’t bring their intelligence and all up in a few hundred years. The white race is probably ten thousand years ahead of them in its intelligence.”

The Citizens Council immediately targeted Dr. TRM Howard’s RCNL cohort, the most visible group of activist in the state. Citizens Council intimidation was swift, painful, and felt by nearly all of them. The Columbus dentist Emmett J. Stringer lost his liability insurance, experienced a complete inability to “get credit anywhere in Mississippi,” and his wife was fired from her teaching post. The Indianola physician Dr. Clinton Battles was framed on a bogus DWI charge and then suddenly lost all his patients at once when the Citizens’ Council threatened to blacklist any local workers who visited his office. T.V. Johnson, the black undertaker who had helped Battles examine Reverend Lee’s body, was forced to resign from the organization after local whites threatened to dismiss workers who patronized his funeral home. Cleveland postal worker Amzie Moore had recently started a new business with his wife and was shocked when the entire balance of his mortgage came due without notice. The following year, he was audited by

---

the IRS. Dr. TRM Howard was too independently wealthy for the Citizens Council to apply immediate economic pressure. But the organization managed to have the 47 year-old’s selective service status altered by his local draft board, threatening him with induction into the military. In Belzoni, the local Citizens Council sent white businesses a list of the ninety-five African Americans who had registered to vote. Within weeks, Gus Courts’s bank cut off his credit, citing his role as Belzoni NAACP branch President. Courts resigned, but he didn’t take his name off the voter rolls. He was later approached by Citizens’ Council representatives who threatened to “make it hard for him to stay in business” if he did not quit voting. When Courts refused, his rent tripled.557

The Hattiesburg Citizens Council was founded on the night of March 22, 1956. Its first organizational meeting was announced on the front pages of the Hattiesburg American, encouraging concerned local white citizens to attend the gathering in the circuit courtroom of the Forrest County courthouse. One hundred prospective members turned out, disappointing local leader and attorney Dudley Conner who urged more people to come out for the next meeting in two weeks. Noting that annual dues were only $5.00, Conner stressed that Forrest County should have 5,000 members of the local Citizens Council. They would never get that many. Upon reconvening, the Hattiesburg Citizens Council elected its local officers. Conner was chosen to serve as president. A local lawyer named Thomas Davis was elected vice-president, real estate agent Dennis Frost became treasurer, and a postal clerk named David Reed was appointed secretary. It is unclear if Louis Faulkner and Mississippi Southern College President William D. McCain were at the initial meeting, but they soon also joined the organization, which received constant updates on local black activities from the Sovereignty Commission.558

557 Stringer quoted in “Integration Foes Arise in the South,” The New York Times, November 21, 1954, 52; “How the South is Organizing to Silence Negroes,” Ebony, March 24, 1955, 10-13, for Battles and Moore; United States Treasury Department to Amzie Moore, Washington, D.C., July 16, 1956, Box 1, Folder 2, Moore Papers; Williams, Medgar Evers, for Battles DWI charge; “Vote Drive to Avenge Lynching,” Chicago Defender, May 28, 1955, 1; “Memorandum to Mr. Wilkins from Mr. Current,” December 13, 1954, reprinted in Evers-Williams and Marable, eds., The Autobiography of Medgar Evers, 21-27; “Ask U.S. Credit Freeze In Mississippi,” Chicago Defender, January 22, 1955, 1; Letter from U.S. Treasury Department Internal Revenue Service to Amzie Moore, July 16, 1956, Box 1, Folder 2, Moore Papers; Beito and Beito, Black Maverick, 102-103 for Howard’s selective service status; Mendelsohn, The Martyrs, 4 for Belzoni list; and “make it hard” quoted in “Miss. Whites Force Negro Grocer From Store,” Jet, March 24, 1955, 6.

Hattiesburg blacks weren’t hit as hard by the Citizens Council as the leaders in TRM Howard’s RCNL cohort. But they were impacted nonetheless. The State Sovereignty Commission followed suspected NAACP members and recorded their license plate numbers at various all-black gatherings. Local white supremacists knew who many of them were and remained prepared to retaliate against them for any sort of overt activism. NAACP members had to meet in secret or not at all to avoid persecution.

The one person who was actually hurt the most by the Citizens Council was a white newspaper editor named P. D. East, a native Mississippian newspaper man who ran a small weekly out of Petal, the tiny suburb just east of Hattiesburg. East began his newspaper career running the newsletter of two local labor unions before opening up his own paper in Petal in 1953. Over the next two years, he began publishing increasingly controversial editorials including several that called for the legalization of liquor sales (Mississippi was dry until 1966) and one that called Abraham Lincoln’s death “unfortunate.” East also began writing about race. He mocked the Mississippi justice system when Emmett Till’s killers were acquitted and soon began pointing out to his white readers that “the Negro wants to be treated like a human being” and “in the state of Mississippi, a Negro asking to register to vote is about like asking Satan for a drink of ice water.” These stances were far too racially radical for many local whites.559

The final straw came in 1956 when he openly referred to the Citizens Council as the “Klan Council” and ran an article titled “Jack-Ass” that mocked their actions. Because of his brazen racial stance, East was soon blacklisted by local advertisers. By the summer of 1956, only one local advertiser maintained a spot in his paper which used to carry nearly forty. His local circulation fell to nine. But not even that was enough. East began receiving regular threats and someone started following his wife. By the end of the following year, there were grumblings of a Citizens Council-backed reward on his life, prompting his brother-in-law at one point to call and warn East, “they’re going to kill

District Chairman,” *Hattiesburg American*, April 9, 1956, 17; The occupations of each man can be found in *Polk’s Hattiesburg City Directory: 1958* (Richmond, VA: R.L. Polk & Co. Publishers, 1958), 98, 136, and 326, respectively; and Bond, “‘Unmitigated Thievery.’”

you.” East published his paper sporadically under tremendous stress before moving out of Mississippi in 1963. The response to his anti-segregationist stance ultimately resulted in the failure of his newspaper career, one arrest, two divorces, and contributed to a bout with alcoholism that would eventually kill him. Without firing any shots, the Hattiesburg Citizens Council and its allies sent a clear message that they were willing to ruin anyone’s life for advocating for equal opportunity.  

The mobilization of the Hattiesburg Citizens Council helped feed an organic groundswell of anti-black backlash. Much of it was unorganized and violent. That spring, it was even more dangerous than usual to be black in Hattiesburg. In April, four black teenagers were downtown talking to each other when a group of older white youths hit one of them and then chased the boys into another group of whites waiting for them down the street. Earlier in the month, an arsonist broke into the beloved all-black Eureka High School and set fire to a desk stuffed with paper, causing $6,000 worth of damage. In May, a black woman was standing on a city curb when a group of whites drove by shouting racial epithets and pelted her with an egg. A few weeks later, 17-year-old black youth was walking home on a Sunday night when a group of older white youths jumped out of a car and beat him unconscious. Most of the violence appears to have been conducted by white males between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one, but there is no telling if one group was responsible for all the acts or many people were involved. It should be noted, however, that each took place in the spring of 1956, just as the local Citizens Council was being formed. It is impossible to divorce the anti-integrationist fervor created by the organization of the Hattiesburg Citizens Council from the wave of racial violence that swept through the city in the spring of 1956. As P. D. East wrote in his unpopular Petal Paper, “We do not believe that Council members were in any way involved.” “But it is interesting to note that prior to the organization of the Citizens Council here there were no such acts reported.”

---

561 East, The Magnolia Jungle, 189; “Damage To Negro School About $6,000,” Hattiesburg American, April 6, 1956, 1; and P.D. East “The Bigger and Better Bigots Bureau,” June 7, 1956 Editorial reprinted in Editorial Reprints from the Petal Paper, Box 1, Folder 3, East (P.D.) Papers, USM.
Because of organizations like the Citizens Council, NAACP membership and black voter registration numbers plummeted throughout the South. Between 1955 and 1958, the NAACP lost nearly 50,000 members and 246 branches in the South.\footnote{Payne, I've Got the Light of Freedom, 43.} Mississippi’s NAACP membership mirrored the regional trend. At the end of 1956, Evers reported 4,639 dues paying members. By 1957, that total had dropped to just 1,536 because the Citizens Council pinched them financially, cutting off access to suppliers, calling-in bank loans, threatening black customers, and passed their names along to more violent sects of segregationists. As Evers lamented, “it is not the lack of interest, but fear.”\footnote{1956 Membership and Freedom Fund Contributions Received from Mississippi Branches, Box 2, Folder 47, Evers Papers; Total 1957 Memberships and Freedom Fund Contributions Received and Suggested Membership and Freedom Fund Goals for 1958, Mississippi, Box 2, Folder 47, Evers Papers; Dittmer, Local People, especially 48; and Williams, Medgar Evers, Evers quoted on 144.}

Hattiesburg was hit particularly hard. Its local NAACP membership dropped in the late 1950s. In 1955, there were 110 dues-paying members of the Forrest County NAACP branch. But the numbers fell as the Citizens Council grew. Only twenty-five members remained at the end of 1956, the year the local Citizens Council was founded. Five of those few NAACP stalwarts dropped off the following year. Among the last remaining members were the brothers Hammond and Charles Smith. It was harder for the Citizens Council to get to them in part because they owned their own building. They could thank their father Turner for that. He paid for those offices in 1925, about thirty years after making that fateful decision to drop the cotton plow in the middle of that field and walk away from the farm forever. Hammond couldn’t quit the NAACP if he tried. He was already a life member.\footnote{1956 Membership and Freedom Fund Contributions Received from Mississippi Branches, January 1-December 12, 1956, Box 2, Folder 47, Evers Papers; Total 1956 Memberships and Freedom Fund Contributions Received and Suggested Membership and Freedom Fund Goals for 1957, Mississippi, Box 2, Folder 47, Evers Papers; Total 1957 Memberships and Freedom Fund Contributions Received and Suggested Membership and Freedom Fund Goals for 1958, Mississippi, Box 2, Folder 47, Evers Papers; and Cohen, interview.}

Despite the local decline in NAACP membership, there remained a throng of defiant black Hattiesburgers through the late 1950s. Virtually all of these individuals were entrepreneurs or pastors. They included the local pastors Willard Ridgeway, W.H. Hall, B.J. Hines, Timothy Wingfield, Elijah Jones, Willie Nobles, Henry Clark, the
grocer Benjamin Franklin Bourn, and the landowner and sawmill operator Vernon Dahmer. Johnnie M. Barnes, an agent for the Universal Life Insurance Company served as the branch President in 1958 and his wife Pearlena was the secretary. The manager of Universal Life Richard Spears was also a member. So were the brothers Hammond and Charles Smith. The group met in safe spaces. Small meetings regularly occurred in Hammond’s Smith Drug Store throughout the late 1950s. NAACP Field Secretary Medgar Evers often gathered with local NAACP members in hushed tones in the back room of the Mobile Street staple. Larger meetings usually took place in churches and drew the attention of local white officials. Local Police Chief William “Bud” Gray reported a 1958 meeting among these black Hattiesburgers to the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, noting “the negroes are staying away from the subject of Integration and are only talking about voting.”

You didn’t need a membership card to help. Reverend J.C. Chandler of the Mt. Carmel Baptist Church asked members of his congregation to donate $10.00 each to the NAACP even if they weren’t able to join due to fear of reprisals. The ministers of Hattiesburg’s Mt. Carmel Baptist Church had been coming together for seventy-five years, collecting sums from their congregants to help organize ways to improve the lives of black Hattiesburgers. Many in the congregation added to the NAACP fund by contributing to the collection baskets being passed through the Sunday service audiences. They saw the NAACP as a way to advance their own interests, and quietly supported the organization without ever buying a membership card. When two members of the church voiced their displeasure with using the church as an NAACP fundraising site, Reverend Chandler kicked them out.

The ministers were also involved in several similar rights groups. Reverend C.H. Hall was a member of Martin Luther King Jr.’s Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and Reverend Ridgeway played a prominent role in the

565 Mississippi Branch Officers for 1958, Box 3, Folder 25, Evers Papers; List of Forrest County NAACP Members, SCR ID # 2-5-1-53-8-1-1, Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission Records, 1994-2006, MDAH (hereafter, MSSC); addresses and occupations found in Polk’s Hattiesburg City Directory: 1958 (Richmond, VA: R.L. Polk & Co. Publishers, 1958); Cohen, interview for Evers in Smith Drug Store; and William Gray to L.C. Hicks, Hattiesburg, MS, February 14, 1958, SCR ID # 2-3-0-5-1-1-1, MSSC.
566 Zack J. VanLandingham to Director, State Sovereignty Commission, no location given, December 17, 1958, MSSC;
Improvement Association of Mississippi, a church-based statewide action group. Several other ministers belonged to the citywide Negro Ministerial Improvement Association. Black Hattiesburg ministers had been meeting for decades, exchanging ideas about ways to improve the lives of their congregants and planning action. This new wave was just seen as more overtly political because it was connected to the NAACP. So the ministers were watched closely, especially Reverend Willard Ridgeway.567

In 1957, Evers recommended that Reverend Ridgeway be included among a group that was going to Washington D.C. to testify about racial voter discrimination in front of a Senate Judiciary Subcommittee that was getting ready to begin debating a bill that would offer greater protection to black voters in the South. Ridgeway testified alongside the old RCNL veteran Gus Courts, telling the Committee that “I was flatly refused the right to register along with 17 other Negroes who were in the office of the registrar at the same time that I was” Ridgeway told a powerful group of American legislators.568

The Civil Rights Act of 1957 ultimately survived a filibuster on the Senate floor to be signed into law on September 9, 1957. The bill was fairly weak. NAACP head Roy Wilkins dubbed it “a small crumb from Congress.” But it did establish a new Civil Rights Division and represented the first major piece of federal civil rights legislation since 1875. Ridgeway was particularly heartened. Belonging to the local NAACP allowed him to testify in front of America’s most important powerbrokers and helped reinforce the burgeoning notion that assistance from the outside world would soon help black Mississippians gain the right to vote.569

567 SCR ID #2-126-1-29-1-1-1 – SCR ID #2-126-1-29-7-1-1, MSSC; “Photo Standalone 47,” Chicago Defender, October 5, 1957, 21;
But there was of course a local backlash. After Ridgeway appeared in Washington D.C., several unnamed members of his True Light congregation received warnings from Citizens Council head Dudley Conner who tried to control the pastor through his congregation, warning that they would be penalized if their pastor continued his civil rights activities. Ridgeway experienced a major backlash after his 1957 testimony. His car was repossessed and his son-in-law was denied a home loan. Threats were also made on his life, prompting several members of his congregation to at times guard his home with guns. Yet, despite the intimidation met by Ridgeway, his NAACP colleague and personal friend Johnnie Barnes went to Washington, D.C. himself two years later to testify in front of a similar Congressional subcommittee.  

The small local NAACP was moving far too fast for many Hub City blacks. Some prominent members of the local community took steps to halt its growth. The pastor of Vernon Dahmer’s church, Reverend R.W. Woullard, kicked him out of the building for trying to hold an NAACP meeting. He also regularly reported to Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission officers, detailing what he knew about the local NAACP and the Negro Ministerial Improvement Association. Local blacks responded by boycotting Woullard’s funeral home, but his cooperation with the Sovereignty Commission continued in the late 1950s.

The local Hattiesburg NAACP activists received a boost in 1955 when a Korean War veteran named Clyde Kennard arrived from Chicago. Kennard was a native of Eatonville, Vernon Dahmer’s home community located just a few miles outside of Hattiesburg. He had been delivered into the world by the doctor Charles W. Smith on June 12, 1927. Kennard moved to Chicago in 1939 with his sister, leaving their mother and stepfather behind on their small piece of land. He attended school in the Windy City and before eventually joining the U.S. Army and serving for seven years, including time


570 Zach J. Van Landingham to Director, State Sovereignty Commission, December 17, 1958, SCR ID #9-0-0-27-1-1-1, MSSC; Williams, Medgar Evers, 149; and “‘No Justice’ In Miss. Leader Tells Group,” Chicago Defender, April 27, 1959, 2.

in Korea. In 1955, his stepfather died and Kennard returned to Mississippi to help run his mother’s farm.\(^{572}\)

Kennard returned to Mississippi an ambitious man. Virtually everyone who knew him referred to him as “intelligent” and a “deep-thinker.” Either living in Chicago or serving in the military made him completely unable to accept the second-class status afforded to Mississippi blacks. Upon Kennard’s return, he was infused into the small, but durable group of local NAACP leaders. Vernon Dahmer lived nearby. Kennard was also determined to further his education, and boldly applied to Mississippi Southern. A college degree had been a longtime dream for Kennard. He had spent time at North Carolina’s Fayetteville Teachers College and the University of Chicago before moving back to Mississippi. But there was no school near Hattiesburg that admitted black students. The immense postwar opportunities of Mississippi Southern were for whites only.\(^{573}\)

Soon after Kennard’s return to the Magnolia State, he called the registrar at Mississippi Southern to ask for a brochure. Shortly after, he called again to ask for an application. During this conversation, Kennard “stated that he was a Negro.” No application was sent so Kennard went to Mississippi Southern to speak with new college president William McCain. The registrar and McCain both informed Kennard that he would have to supply five recommendations from Mississippi Southern alumni living in Forrest County. Everyone in the room knew this was impossible. No blacks had ever graduated from Mississippi Southern and very few whites would be willing to write on his behalf. Even asking someone to do so could be dangerous, especially considering the breadth of the local Citizens Council. Kennard’s appeals to have the five letters of recommendation waived were denied. For a brief time, he dropped the case.\(^{574}\)

Over the next two years, Clyde Kennard struggled to make ends meet and run his mother’s farm. He worked for the downtown company Matison Brothers Department


\(^{573}\) Zach J. Van Landingham, Clyde Kennard Report, December 17, 1958, SCR ID #1-27-0-6-1-1-1 – SCR ID #1-27-0-6-37-1-1-1; and Dorie Ladner, interview by author, recording, Jackson, MS, March 22, 2012.

\(^{574}\) Ibid.
Store, performing general labor for its owner Dave Matison and earning $25.00 a week. Matison, like most other people, liked Kennard and frequently took his family to see the black farmer’s chickens. Kennard also served on the Board of Trustees at the local black school in Eatonville and attended NAACP meetings. Vernon Dahmer was also a prominent member of both groups. After being forced to take out a second mortgage on their farm, Kennard’s mother came into some money in June of 1958 when the Mississippi State Highway Department paid Kennard and his mother over $11,000 to reimburse them for an eminent domain claim for taking part of their property for road construction. The extra cash offered the family more flexibility, and prompted Kennard decided to reapply to Mississippi Southern.575

That fall, Kennard terrified the new registrar Aubrey Lucas when he called and asked for four applications, stating that several other African Americans at Eatonville wished to apply. He also wrote a letter published in the Hattiesburg American in which he noted, “I am a segregationist by nature and I think most negroes are…but experience has taught us that if we are ever to attain the goal of first class citizenship, we must do it through a closer association with the dominant group.” This is when the Citizens Council stepped in. After initially considering a proposal to dynamite Kennard’s car, local Citizens Council head Dudley Conner offered to take care of the Kennard situation “without any violence and without any publicity and bad effects.” The State Sovereignty Commission recruited several black leaders to try and speak with Kennard. Taking the advice of local black educators including Royal Street High School Principal Nathaniel Burger and looking at certain economic retribution, Kennard decided in January, 1959 to withdraw his application from Mississippi Southern.576

But a few months later, something again stirred in Kennard. He contacted Mississippi Southern, restating his intention to enroll. That fall, he vowed to come to the campus to register for classes alongside white students. Kennard arrived on campus on the morning of September 14, 1959. President William McCain asked Kennard to visit

him first to personally hand him his admissions rejection letter. Police officers were stationed at the Registration Building to stop Kennard if he tried to enter. Several reporters also arrived on campus, causing fear of an embarrassing scene for university officials. After a brief meeting with President McCain, Kennard was ushered out of the building through a side door to avoid reporters. He was then arrested by local law enforcement officials who claimed they had seen him speeding earlier that morning and had also since discovered whiskey in his car. Kennard went to jail.577

When Clyde Kennard made bond, he immediately got into his car and drove to Jackson to meet with Medgar Evers. Kennard had been attending NAACP meetings in Jackson for at least a year, and Evers, who tried to apply to Ole Miss on his own five years before, knew his story well and helped galvanize NAACP support. Nonetheless, Clyde Kennard was convicted of reckless driving and possession of whiskey. Medgar Evers attended the trial and was subsequently held in contempt of court after shouting in protest upon hearing the verdict. Both convictions were eventually overturned thanks to NAACP lawyers, and Kennard briefly continued his work with the local activists. His most valuable contribution that fall was to team with Reverend Willard Ridgeway to help develop and mentor an NAACP Youth Council branch at the True Light Baptist Church that included future Civil Rights Movement icons Dorie and Joyce Ladner of Palmer’s Crossing.578

But Clyde Kennard’s local future was determined from the moment he tried to enter Mississippi Southern for the third time. The rest of his life would be miserable. Although his initial conviction was overturned, the local Citizens Council, which had vowed to “get at Kennard through his mother,” saw to it that the Forrest County Cooperative foreclosed on his mother’s farm. And then in 1960, Kennard was arrested on charges that he had stolen $25.00 worth of chicken feed from the Forrest County Cooperative. The manager of the Forrest County Cooperative in 1960 was James A. Tatum, the grandson of W.S.F. the old lumber baron. An all-white jury convicted

578 Letter from Joyce Ladner to Medgar Evers, Hattiesburg, MS, October 12, 1959, Box 2, Folder 10, Evers Papers; and Ladner, interview.
Kennard in ten minutes and he was sentenced to seven years hard labor in Parchman Penitentiary where he eventually developed a terminal form of stomach cancer.\textsuperscript{579}

Mississippi Southern College President William D. McCain and Clyde Kennard stand as a remarkable contrast depicting the racial limitations of opportunities available to Hattiesburgers in the Jim Crow era. The two men could not have been more different. Kennard was a humble and ambitious, deep-thinking and hard-working veteran of the Korean War who spent much of his time in the service of others, whereas McCain was an arrogant plagiarist who had rode political connections and traded personal favors to advance his status and was later discredited by the American Historical Association for copying a student’s Master’s thesis for an article. But Kennard was black and McCain was white. That was the biggest difference and the greatest tragedy of Jim Crow. Dignity didn’t matter. McCain enjoyed a litany of postwar opportunities whereas Clyde Kennard was thrown into jail for merely suggesting that he too deserved a chance. As Kennard once wrote, “What we request is only that in all things competitive, merit be used as a measuring stick rather than race.” From William Harris Hardy to William D. McCain, the opportunities found in the Hub City were strictly meant for whites only. Instead of merit, there was race. For people like Clyde Kennard, the results were devastating and tragically unfair.\textsuperscript{580}

\begin{center}
\textbullet\quad\textbullet\quad\textbullet
\end{center}

There were always rumors of death lists in the Delta. The black leaders who lived there fought through them, but the warnings were impossible to ignore. The men and women in TRM Howard’s RCNL cohort knew they would be on them. Their friend George Lee had been among the first to fall. In addition, one of their radical colleagues, a black Jackson-based publisher named Arrington High, printed “death lists” in his weekly

\textsuperscript{579} Zach J. Van Landingham to Director, State Sovereignty Commission, September 9, 1959, SCR ID # 1-27-0-31-1-1-1, MSSC; Polk's Hattiesburg City Directory: 1960 (Richmond, VA: R.L. Polk & Co. Publishers, 1960); and Minchin and Salmond, “‘The Saddest Story of the Whole Movement’.”

\textsuperscript{580} Clyde Kennard, “Letter to Editor,” Hattiesburg American, December 6, 1958, 2-A; and Bond, “‘Unmitigated Thievery.’”
Eagle Eye newsletter. At the top of every death list, real or imagined, was the Mound Bayou doctor TRM Howard.\textsuperscript{581}

Howard’s role in the Emmett Till case and his growing national reputation made him public enemy number one for Mississippi’s white supremacists. Local Mississippi dailies widely documented his crucial role in the Till case and the murderers’ defense attorney even put him in the crosshairs during his closing argument. By the end of 1955, the Citizens’ Council had allegedly placed a $1,000 reward on his head and was planning his murder. At first, Howard resolved to stay, vowing to “die as an American in defending the rights of the Negro before I leave.” He sent his wife and children to California for their safety and divided and sold his seven-room house and 758 acre property for $185,000 (the modern equivalent is nearly $1.5 million) between several black farmers rather than sell to whites. Howard moved into the offices of his medical clinic for a short time and stubbornly refused to quit fighting. But ultimately, a growing faction of conservative Mound Bayou blacks turned their back on the doctor who was routinely drawing America’s attention to their doorstep. A new Mound Bayou mayor banned all future RCNL meetings in the all-black town. Howard ultimately conceded, “I feel I can do more alive in the battle for Negro rights in the North than dead in a weed-grown grave in Dixie.” The indomitable RCNL leader moved to Chicago in 1956 with his family and spent the rest of his life in the Windy City.\textsuperscript{582}

Dr. TRM Howard opened a medical center in Chicago’s South Side, just a few blocks south of the site of the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair, and led a fruitful and prosperous existence for much of the rest of his life. He attended lavish parties and gallivanted with the likes of former Olympic champion Jesse Owens, unsuccessfully ran for Congress in 1958, often went on elaborate hunting safaris to Africa and India, and regularly graced Jet and Ebony Magazines. Ebony unofficially named him “America’s

\textsuperscript{581} The lists always included Evers and Howard. For more on the Eagle Eye see Julius E. Thompson, The Black Press in Mississippi, 1865-1985 (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1993), 51-57. For more on the purported “death lists,” see Evers, For Us, 160.

\textsuperscript{582} Houck and Grindy, Emmett Till and the Mississippi Press, especially 72-125; “100,000 Across Nation Protest Till Lynching,” Chicago Defender, October 8, 1955, 4; Beito and Beito, Black Maverick, especially 144; “Dr. Howard’s Wife, Tots Leave Miss.,” Chicago Defender, December 17, 1955, 1; “die as an” quoted in “Howard Sells Property in Miss. For $185,000,” Alabama Tribune, December 23, 1955, 4; “Acting Mayor Of All Negro Town Moves To Ban Race Agitator,” Alabama Tribune, December 30, 1955, 1; and Booker, Black Man’s America, 169.
greatest black hunter.” Howard remained very politically active, especially in the Chicago League of Negro Voters. In his later years, he ran an illegal abortion service for young single women, raised money for the children of the assassinated leader Malcolm X, protested Chicago Black Panther Fred Hampton’s 1969 murder, and was a major contributor to local political campaigns. Jessie Jackson’s Operation PUSH campaign was founded in Howard’s living room in 1971. Howard lived until 1976 when he passed away as one of the most important black activists in the history of both Mississippi and Chicago.\footnote{Amzie Moore to T.R.M. Howard, May 24, 1958, Box 1, Folder 3, Moore Papers; “Dr. Howard’s Safari Room,” \textit{Ebony}, October, 1969, 132-138; and Beito and Beito, \textit{Black Maverick}, especially 115-228.}

Gus Courts was less fortunate. Courts was checking receipts in his grocery store on the night of Friday, November 25, 1955 when someone leaned out the window of a passing car and blasted three .38 caliber shells tearing into his abdomen, left leg, and left arm. Courts was rushed fifteen miles to Indianola where he was treated by Dr. Clinton Battles and then taken another twenty-five miles away to Howard’s Mound Bayou hospital for surgery. The Belzoni NAACP leader, whose close friend and ally George Lee had been killed just six months before, was probably correct when he later insisted that going to Battles instead of the local hospital saved his life. News of the Courts shooting exploded in the black media, adding to the momentum started by the Lee and Till murders. The \textit{Chicago Defender, New York Amsterdam News, Atlanta Daily World, Pittsburgh Courier,} and \textit{Alabama Tribune} all featured front page headlines and accompanying stories on the Courts shooting, further cementing the newly established fact that black shootings in the Delta could attract massive amounts of media attention. The black media never missed a chance to relate the Courts shooting to the Lee and Till murders.\footnote{Alex Wilson, “Belzoni Grocer Describes Attack,” \textit{Chicago Defender}, December 3, 1955, 1; Clyde Reid, “Mob Shoots NAACP Leader,” \textit{New York Amsterdam News}, December 3, 1955, 1; “White Asks Probe of Near Lynching,” \textit{Chicago Defender}, December 10, 1955, 1; “Miss. Man Shot Down While Standing In Front of Store,” \textit{Atlanta Daily World}, December 11, 1955, 1; “Exclusive! Gus Courts Reveals Why He Was Shot,” \textit{Pittsburgh Courier}, December 10, 1955, 4; “FBI Probes Shooting of Miss. Grocer,” \textit{Alabama Tribune}, December 2, 1955, 1; Medgar Evers, “1955 Annual Report Mississippi State Office NAACP,” 7, Box 2, Folder 39, Evers Papers. Also see Beito and Beito, \textit{Black Maverick}, 137.}

But Courts didn’t want to end up a martyr. Medgar Evers, whose own brother Charles moved to Chicago in 1956, urged Courts to sell his store and relocate to Jackson.
But the Belzoni leader was already in his mid-60s and he simply wanted to live the rest of his life in peace. Courts left for Chicago and vowed never to return to Mississippi. He opened a new grocery store in the heart of Chicago’s Southside where he spent the rest of his life as a celebrated local community darling. His final years were spent playing Santa Claus at local Christmas parties and regularly appearing in the pages of the Chicago Defender which often interviewed the refugee about Southern race relations. He was also often in contact with his old RCNL comrade Howard, supporting his 1958 Congressional campaign and seeing him at various NAACP events. True to his word, Gus Courts never returned to Mississippi. He stayed in Chicago until complications with diabetes ended his life in 1969. But like many migrants, he kept an eye on the South, at one point sending a check to the Montgomery Improvement Association and even briefly considering a return at the age of seventy-four when three young civil rights workers were murdered during the 1964 Freedom Summer.585

Others trickled out of Mississippi throughout the late 1950s as the Citizens Council suppressed the state’s most visible black activists. Arrington High, the publisher of the radical Jackson Eagle Eye newspaper Publisher, was thrown into a mental institution only to escape by hiding in a casket and being smuggled out of the state by friends. He then moved on to Chicago where he lived near Dr. TRM Howard and continued publishing his Eagle Eye over the next twenty years. The Indianola doctor Clinton Battles also moved away, leaving for Kansas City just after Gus Courts went to Chicago. One can hardly blame the black men and women who fled Mississippi during the 1950s. The state was a scary place for those who pushed for equality. But the Citizens Councils couldn’t chase everyone away.586

Medgar Evers, the brazen native Mississippian who grew up reading the Chicago Defender on his parents’ back porch, fought for his country in World War II, stared down


586 In a letter to Amzie Moore, Howard reported, “The ole ‘Eagle Eye’ is right here with me, I see him every day.” T.R.M. Howard to Amzie Moore, undated, Box 1, Folder 3, Moore Papers. “Arrington High as Told to Marc Crawford, Jet Exclusive: I Escaped Mississippi in a Casket,” Jet, February 27, 1958, 11-13 and “Crusading Publisher Who Fled Mississippi in Casket Dies; Returns for Burial,” Jet, May 16, 1988, 64-65; and Mendelsohn, The Martyrs, 19 for Battle.
a mob in an attempt to vote at twenty-one, and cut his teeth working for Dr. TRM Howard in Mound Bayou, resolved to stay. In 1958, he told Ebony magazine that “Mississippi is a part of the United States. And whether the whites like it or not, I don’t plan to live here as a parasite. The things that I don’t like I will try to change. And in the long run, I hope to make a positive contribution to the overall productivity of the South.” Nothing could move Medgar Evers. He stood unblinking in the middle of an explosive racial storm, intractably resolving to stay. If anything, he gained strength in the face of persecution. So did RCNL stalwarts Aaron Henry of Clarksdale and the postal worker Amzie Moore of Cleveland. And their courage for doing so simply cannot be understated.587

When TRM Howard left Mound Bayou, Jackson became the hub of black statewide organizing with Howard’s protégé Evers at the epicenter. For the rest of his life, Evers was a relentless organizer and activist. By the mid-to-late 1950s, he was essentially doing for the state what the RCNL activists had done for the Delta just a few years earlier. Although NAACP membership dropped, word spread. Medgar and Myrlie Evers became a dynamic two-person organizing team. They had help on the ground from dozens of activists who subversively tried to organize black communities, but the pair remained at the center of NAACP efforts in Mississippi. Each typed, dictated, and wrote thousands of pages of reports, requests, memos, and records. They sent mail across the country, corresponding with national leaders, Mississippi activists, and supporters who they would never meet. In Medgar’s first eleven months on the job, he and Myrlie sent out 3,002 pieces of mail. Over 4,500 more came out of their office in the next two years. Medgar was deadly serious and passionate. He wouldn’t even let Myrlie sit on his lap while the couple was alone in the office. The NAACP was his employer, but the black freedom struggle in Mississippi was his life’s work. It was something he was born into. All the blacks of that generation were. But Medgar’s individual gifts allowed him to do it full time. He also hit the road.588

587 Medgar Evers, as told to Francis H. Mitchell, “Why I Live in Mississippi,” Ebony, November, 1958, 65-70. According to Myrlie, at one point, the NAACP offered to transfer the Evers family to a new position in California. Medgar, whose conviction grew with each murder, refused. See Myrlie Evers, For Us, 225-226. 588 1955 Annual Report Mississippi State Office NAACP, 2, Box 2, Folder 39, Evers Papers; and Myrlie Evers, For Us, 138-140
Evers spent much of the late 1950s behind the wheel of his Oldsmobile sedan driving thousands of miles across Mississippi to organize local NAACP branches. One can only imagine Medgar in his thirties, humming across the state in his Oldsmobile sedan with a .38 special in the glove compartment, squinting through tired eyes at the Mississippi road, covering thousands of miles to meet with friends in back rooms and speak in front strangers in churches, trying to convince terrified groups of blacks that their time to fight had arrived. His car would have been known to the state’s leading white supremacists. He was the most wanted man in the state. But Medgar’s resolve backed him out of the driveway day after day, the car allowed him to fulfill a destiny. He pulled onto state highways and cruised toward local people who sought freedom. He drove 13,372 miles in 1955, 12,775 miles in 1956, and 16,622 in 1957, wrapped in an unstoppable quest for racial freedom.589

Medgar’s conversations with those small groups of local people must have been incredible. Their conflicts were profound, and the stories of what happened in those living rooms, offices, kitchens, churches, and fields are surely some of the most courageous and inspirational moments in recent American history. Evers greatly admired those brave enough to join that fight. Their courage only strengthened his resolve. At the end of 1955 he wrote, “It is most heartening to see, in the face of tremendous difficulty, the increased interest Negroes have shown in our fight for freedom in a state where the word freedom is used mythically.” As Myrlie remembered, “for the first time in generations, there was hope.”590

So the diminishing NAACP numbers don’t really tell the whole story. As Historian Robin Kelley has shrewdly observed, “The collapse of an organization does not necessarily signify the destruction of a movement or the eradication of traditions of radicalism.” Although NAACP membership and voter registration numbers declined, something important was happening for Mississippi blacks during those late years of the

590 1955 Annual Report Mississippi State Office NAACP, Box 2, Folder 39, Evers Papers; 1956 Annual Report Mississippi State Office NAACP, Box 2, Folder 39, Evers Papers; and Myrlie Evers, For Us, quoted on 146.
1950s. Like the Mt. Carmel congregation on Hattiesburg’s Mobile Street, many Mississippi blacks supported or appreciated the NAACP without being a member. Amzie Moore knew that the black community around him was sympathetic to his cause but weary of potential results. “They were interested in things that could have been provided by the NAACP,” Moore recalled. But “they simply weren’t interested in getting their names in the paper.” And whether they knew it or not, the black communities themselves fueled the activism of its most prominent businessmen, doctors, educators, and pastors, the very people who emerged as NAACP leaders in the late 1950s. The community propped up its leaders and helped keep them independent. So even though the Citizens Council was launching an all-out attack on all forms of black activism, a growing underground NAACP network was fighting to manufacture opportunities by bridging the communities that produced them with the power created by outside organizations. As Aaron Henry remembered, “The years from 1956 to 1961, although relatively calm, marked significant advancement for us.”

The years after World War II saw a collision in Mississippi between an historical way of life and the increasing power and connectedness of black America. Something was slipping away from Southerners like Louis Faulkner and his Mississippi allies. They had always sought to increase their own opportunities through Northern and federal involvement in their society. But now, those very same powers were attempting to force them to include blacks in the immense prospects of the postwar era. Millions of blacks migrated north and kept an eye on the South, creating for Southern blacks an unprecedented number of allies who held the power to respond to and subsequently pressure Northern powerbrokers into action. The black media exploded in the 1950s with stories from Mississippi like the killing of George Lee and Emmett Till while the NAACP offered for many Mississippi blacks a lifeline from outside the storm of the white supremacist forces that galvanized to stop Brown v. Board from being implemented in the Magnolia State. There were only a handful of NAACP leaders by the late 1950s, but each was supported in varying ways by their local communities and directly

---

connected to the outside world. And thanks in part to the efforts of statewide coordinator Medgar Evers they also became very well connected among each other.

As Evers helped introduce Mississippi’s NAACP leaders to the national organization, he also sought to develop internal networks. He wanted the burgeoning coalition of local activists to know and rely on each other. Evers’s close friend and ally Ed King remembered that “Medgar knew the importance of their communicating with each other.” Evers would hold two to three rotating meetings across the state to tie the local branches together. Every May, he held a statewide meeting that often featured a prominent NAACP figure like Thurgood Marshall, to help connect local Mississippi NAACP members to the national organization and “really fire up people’s hopes” according to King. But those regional meetings were just as important. Evers began developing a statewide network of leaders, similar to the one Howard had built in the Delta with his RCNL and even reflective of the Committee of One Hundred organized by black Mississippians in the 1920s. Soon, through the annual statewide NAACP conferences and quarterly regional gatherings, Medgar’s old RCNL Delta contacts came in touch with other black Mississippi leaders. A magnanimous population gathered.592

Throughout the late 1950s, embattled RCNL veterans such as the Cleveland postal worker Amzie Moore and the Clarksdale pharmacist Aaron Henry came in close and regular contact with people such as McComb’s C.C. Bryant, Amite County’s E.W. Steptoe, Mileston’s Hartman Turnbow, and Hattiesburg’s Vernon Dahmer, Reverend Willard Ridgeway, Benjamin Franklin Bourn, Johnnie Barnes, and the brothers Charles and Hammond Smith. “Those were people,” remembered Ed King, “who sort of had said, ‘when the fullness of time comes I’ll be ready.’”593

592 Ed King interview by author, recording, Jackson, MS, March 27, 2010, in author’s possession.
593 Ibid.
Conclusion: People of Spirit

In the fall of 1961, two young men from McComb named Hollis Watkins and Curtis Hayes began appearing on porches in Hattiesburg’s black communities, knocking on creaky wooden doors and asking to speak with locals about registering to vote. Some turned them away immediately. Others politely listened for a while before saying no. Very few had ever tried to register and most were afraid to do so. But some were interested in what they two young men had to say. Those who showed interest were invited to mass meetings that took place in the evenings in local black churches. At these mass meetings, Watkins and Hayes tried to convince locals that they could and would win the right to vote if they were willing to go down to the courthouse to try and register to vote. The mass meetings were small at first, but increased in size over the coming weeks as some of the more receptive locals went back to their social clubs, beauty parlors, and churches to vouch for the young men and encourage their neighbors and friends to attend. Vernon Dahmer hosted Watkins and Hayes and helped introduce the pair to the small collection of local NAACP leaders including B.F. Bourne, the Smith brothers, and several local ministers who helped inject the organizers into the framework of black Hattiesburg. Slowly but surely, the mass meetings grew. Watkins and Hayes melted into the soul of the black Hattiesburg community, targeting educators, entrepreneurs, and church leaders to help draw hundreds of local people into a burgeoning Movement that would crack the most rigid racial barriers to black opportunity in the Hub City.594

Just over a year before Watkins and Hayes arrived in the Hub City, a bright-eyed twenty-seven year-old New Yorker named Bob Moses knocked on Amzie Moore’s door

594 Hollis Watkins, interview by author, recording, Jackson, MS, December 18, 2009, recording in author’s possession.
in Cleveland, Mississippi. Amzie had seen better days. The old RCNL veteran’s life was in disarray. He constantly struggled with money. The mortgage on his service station had been revoked. His hours at the post office had been cut to just a few per week. And he had been audited by the IRS. The financial issues weren’t even the worst of it. Several of Amzie’s friends had been killed and others had fled Mississippi in fear. Amzie himself must have also lived in constant fear. One can only imagine the stress. On top of all that, he was also recently divorced. All of these tragedies mounted during what should have been the prime of his life. World War II veterans like Amzie Moore had been promised more. They were supposed to enjoy opportunity in the postwar years, not persecution. But Amzie had big dreams that cost him dearly. He wanted blacks to be able to vote and fought hard for that right. He struggled against those who controlled a society that cared more about skin color than character or service. Moore’s personal tragedies were the fallout for his pursuit of freedom. Amzie could have stopped. Or he could have simply left Mississippi altogether. His celebrity friend the doctor TRM Howard generously offered to help him get started in Chicago if Amzie decided to move to the Windy City. But Amzie turned him down. He wasn’t ever going to leave Mississippi. Something kept him there. Shortly before his divorce was finalized, Amzie tried to explain this resolve to his exasperated wife. “Doll I am not working but two hours each day,” he wrote, “but I must remain here to carry on the fight for freedom. Mississippi needs me.”

Amzie Moore was a man of incredible fortitude. So too was Bob Moses, the young New Yorker who appeared on his doorstep in the summer of 1960. They would be friends the rest of Amzie’s life. Moses ventured south that summer a few months after seeing still shots and newsreel video footage of more than 50,000 young black college students sitting-in at lunch counters across the South, defying Jim Crow in a massive wave of civil disobedience. It was the beginning of a massive Movement, an

595 “How the South is Organizing to Silence Negroes,” Ebony, March 24, 1955, 10-13; United States Treasury Department to Amzie Moore, Washington, D.C., July 16, 1956, Box 1, Folder 2, Amzie Moore Papers (hereafter, Moore Papers), State Historical Society of Wisconsin (hereafter, SHSW), Madison, WI; Final Decree of Divorce, May, 1960, Box 1, Folder 1, Moore Papers; TRM Howard to Amzie Moore, Chicago, Ill., n.d., (probably 1958), Box 1, Folder 3, Moore Papers; Amzie Moore to TRM Howard, Cleveland, MS, May 24, 1958, Box 1, Folder 3, Moore Papers; Amzie Moore, interview by Mike Garvey, transcript, Cleveland, Mississippi, March 29, 1977, University of Southern Mississippi Center for Oral History & Cultural Heritage (hereafter, USM-OH); Amzie Moore to wife, Cleveland, MS, January 18, 1960, Box 1, Folder 4, Moore Papers.
unprecedented and direct assault on Jim Crow. The faces of those students called to
Moses. “I could feel how they felt, just by looking at those pictures” he later explained.
During his spring break, Moses headed down to his uncle’s home in Newport News,
Virginia and joined a picket line where he met an official from Martin Luther King Jr.’s
Southern Christian Leader Conference (SCLC). Later that summer, he hopped on a bus to
Atlanta to work in the SCLC headquarters. One of the first people Moses met was Ella
Baker, a veteran activist who had just helped organize sit-in leaders from across the
South into a group named the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).
SNCC had a small corner space in the SCLC offices and Moses became acquainted with
several of the young sit-in leaders who arrived in the Atlanta SNCC offices from across
the country. 596

Moses volunteered with SCLC for several weeks, but soon became frustrated with
the tedious and grinding pace of office work. Much of their time was spent at desks
producing memos or other documents and taking orders from others. There was also a lot
of bureaucracy. Almost everything had to be run through King or one of his senior aides.
Moses wanted to be more directly involved and said as much to Baker. Baker had spent
much of her life working with the NAACP and knew dozens of embattled activists who
could use immediate help. She gave Moses a list of her contacts and sent him into the
Deep South to see how he could help. The list included leaders scattered across Alabama,
Louisiana, and Mississippi in cities such as Talladega, Birmingham, New Orleans,
Shreveport, Clarksdale, Gulfport, and Biloxi. It also included Amzie Moore of Cleveland,
Mississippi. Moses visited a lot of dedicated black freedom fighters that summer. He
stayed with Amzie longer than anyone else. 597

596 Bob Moses, interview by author, recording, Jackson, MS, March 27, 2010, recording in author’s
possession; 50,000 statistic taken from Clayborne Carson, In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of
the 1960s (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 11; “I could feel how they felt…” quoted in
John Dittmer, Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois
Press, 1994), 102; and Eric Burner, And Gently He Shall Lead Them: Robert Parris Moses and Civil Rights
background and SCLC involvement. For more on the organization of SNCC, see Carson, In Struggle; and
Barbara Ransby, Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision (Chapel Hill,

597 Moses, interview; and Burner, And Gently He Shall Lead Them, especially 9-31
What Bob Moses found in Amzie Moore was a local black iconic leader who was besieged by white supremacists but also intimately connected to a magnanimous group of black Mississippians who were organized and led by the NAACP Mississippi Field Secretary Medgar Wiley Evers. Moses could tell early on that Amzie “had a hell of a network throughout the state.” These African American leaders hailed from communities that had been organizing to produce better lives for decades. Many of them were the grandsons and granddaughters of former slaves and had found ways off the farm, starting their own businesses or gaining an education to take places as elite members within local black communities. They achieved status through education, entrepreneurship, or war service. Many had been active for years. Amzie Moore himself was a grizzled veteran. His political battles originated in the 1930s when he was part of Mound Bayou’s Young Republicans Club led by the daughter and son-in-law of Isaiah T. Montgomery. Not all the local leaders had been voter registrants in the 1930s like Amzie. But most of them held predominant roles in their local communities, organizing through entrepreneurial groups, churches, and schools to help their neighbors live better lives. Some had grown up like Medgar Evers, reading the pages of the Chicago Defender whenever they could. They represented the African American enclaves across the state that had for years been building institutions and collectively organizing in search of better lives within the confines of Jim Crow. By 1960, the group was strong and very well-connected thanks in large part to Mississippi NAACP Field Secretary Medgar Evers.598

Amzie Moore, like Moses, had also seen the massive assault on Jim Crow launched by young Southern blacks earlier that year. Bob Moses represented a connection to that Movement. Moore envisioned a new phase of the Mississippi struggle, injecting the essence of that brazen Jim Crow rejection into the decades-long quest to vote. As Moses later explained, Moore was interested in “finding out more about me and really look at the opportunity of capturing this sit-in energy.” Through his experiences with the Mound Bayou RCNL and the especially the Emmett Till case, Amzie Moore also realized that potential allies lay waiting across America and that increased attention could help the lives of black Mississippians local action could draw massive amounts of

598 Moses quoted in Burner, And Gently He Should Lead Them, 30.
attention that would help their cause. So Moore encouraged Moses to stay for a few days. He took Moses to his church, the traditional center of black community organizing, and watched how the Northerner engaged with black Mississippians. Moore also introduced Moses to a wave of his old RCNL allies who arrived at Moore’s home to meet the new young activist and speak with Amzie. Bob Moses couldn’t stay long. He had to return to New York where he was slated to teach in the coming fall. But he vowed to come back and encouraged Moore to visit Atlanta to recruit more SNCC workers. When Moses returned the following summer, a new phase developed. Bob Moses and the massive wave of people who followed him would spread across the state and align with local people to launch an all-out assault on Jim Crow. By the time they were finished, the oppressive racial caste system that for years limited black opportunity in Mississippi would be gone.\footnote{Moses, interview; and Moore, interview.}

>>>When Moses returned to Mississippi, he operated within the network of NAACP community leaders established by Medgar Evers during the preceding years. Medgar Evers never had much contact with Moses, but the Movement moved through the channels he had carved during the previous years, crisscrossing the state late into the night in his Oldsmobile sedan. Amzie Moore, of course, was part of this network. So were scores of other audacious individuals. Moore decided to send Bob Moses down to McComb to meet with NAACP stalwart C.C. Bryant. McComb was a town similar to Hattiesburg in that it had been founded by a Northern railroad man and offered blacks jobs off the plantation. Bryant himself was a former railroad worker and barbershop owner. C.C. Bryant helped introduce Bob Moses around McComb, taking him into the local churches, presenting him to other black leaders, and creating a safe space for him to begin organizing. “C.C. Bryant was the person who actually started this thing,” remembered Moses.\footnote{Curtis C. Bryant, interview by Jimmy Dykes, transcript, no location given, November 11, 1995, USM-OH; Moses, interview; Moses, interview; Carson, \textit{In Struggle}, 45-55; Wesley Hogan, \textit{Many Minds, One Heart: SNCC’s Dream for a New America} (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 56-66; and Dittmer, \textit{Local People}, 99-115, Moses quoted on 99.}

Within six weeks, Moses had expanded his efforts from McComb in Pike County into Amite County, home of Medgar Evers NAACP ally E.W. Steptoe. He had also been
joined by a rush of Movement forces that included legendary SNCC leaders such as Diane Nash, James Bevel, Marion Berry, Chuck McDew, Ruby Doris Smith, Charles Sherrod, and Travis Britt. This group helped further recruit young local McComb students into the Movement and brought the direct assault on Jim Crow to downtown McComb lunch counters with a series of aurum sit-ins for which they were arrested. One of the people Moses met was a young man named Hollis Watkins who had been a member of the NAACP Youth Councils organized by Medgar Evers. Watkins had been interested in the NAACP since the day an NAACP membership card unexpectantly popped out of his father’s wallet as they worked in the fields together. His father said nothing, but Watkins knew. For blacks like Watkins, who was the same age Emmett Till would have been, the NAACP was merely one route toward a greater goal. When Watkins met Moses, he joined SNCC as well and began canvassing potential voters, participating in local sit-ins, and eventually joining several other young people in a 1961 boycott of McComb’s black High School, which had been called in response to the expulsion of a student named Brenda Travis who had been thrown out of school for participating in the McComb sit-ins. They were once again arrested.601

As Moses and Watkins sat in jail for about five weeks, C.C. Bryant’s NAACP ally Vernon Dahmer arrived from Hattiesburg. The two men had grown to know each other through Medgar Evers’s regional meetings and communicated on a regular basis. Dahmer had caught wind of the recent activity in McComb and like Amzie Moore and C.C. Bryant, recognized great value in applying the momentum of the sit-in movement to Hattiesburg where a small enclave of NAACP leaders including the grocer B.F. Bourn, Reverend Willard Ridgeway, insurance agent Johnnie Barnes, and the brothers Hammond and Charles Smith had been organizing for years. When Watkins and another McComb native named Curtis Hayes were released, C.C. Bryant sent them to Hattiesburg to work with Dahmer.602

The Movement was permeating Mississippi through numerous entrée points, most notably an increasing number of SNCC activists who were recruiting small numbers of

---

601 Bryant, interview; Moses, interview; Watkins, interview; and Dittmer, Local People, 99-115.
602 Watkins, interview; Moses, interview; and Bryant, interview.
local people like Hollis Watkins to join their assault on Jim Crow and the 1961 Freedom Rides conducted by the Congress of Racial Equality. People were pouring into the historically black enclaves all across the state, arriving in droves and helping propel the activism of others. Local blacks also joined the assault, especially in Jackson where nine students from Tougaloo college were arrested for trying to integrate a public library. In Hattiesburg, it came with the arrival of Hollis Watkins and Curtis Hayes. Louis Faulkner died earlier that year and would miss the greatest local advancements in black opportunities. He would not have liked what came next within five years, local blacks would repeal the most crucial aspects of Hattiesburg Jim Crow, integrating downtown stores, public transportation, local schools, and registering to vote en masse.  

Hollis Watkins and Curtis Hayes moved onto Vernon Dahmer’s property and spent the coming weeks canvassing potential voters in Hattiesburg. They encountered a people who had been organizing for eighty years to improve their lives and realize visions of freedom. Dahmer introduced Watkins and Hayes to local leaders such as B.F. Bourn and Johnnies Barnes who helped introduce the pair to Hattiesburg’s black community. Watkins and Hayes went house-to-house in Hattiesburg’s black neighborhoods, knocking on doors and talking with local citizens. They asked about registering to vote, something most Hub City blacks had never attempted to do, and invited people to evening gatherings they dubbed “mass meetings.” The meetings took place in local Hattiesburg churches. Despite the dangers, a lot of local pastors opened their church doors for voter registration meetings as they had for years enabled the meetings of supper clubs, newspaper meetings, choir services, clubwomen’s meetings, and church suppers. Watkins remembered that it “was not hard to get a church to have a voter registration meeting.” Blacks had been meeting in those churches for decades. Many such as St. Paul and True Light were almost as old as the city itself. From those meetings, a local movement was born. 

---

604 Watkins, interview.
The mass meetings weren’t initially large. Much of the black community was slow to respond. There were plenty of discouraging moments. The people of Hattiesburg were often afraid and for very legitimate reasons. But Watkins and Hayes found greater support in Hattiesburg than in McComb. The strength lay within the Hub City’s entrepreneurs, educators, and pastors, the durable pillars of self-help that had been deeply rooted in the opportunities they discovered in Hattiesburg and away from the farm. Watkins found his base in the proud educational and business communities of Hattiesburg. “I think part of it also had to with especially the business people realizing that their economic stability was not dependent upon the white community, but was dependent upon being backed and supported from the black community,” Watkins recalled nearly five decades later. “Other than the business community,” he added, “there were those who was a part of what you could say the educational community.” “They had a better understanding of what their rights were. And had a better understanding of the system, how it worked.”

Watkins and Hayes plugged into a vibrant community, infusing a new era of this fight and building off existing institutions to include working and middle-class people into the Movement. Businesses, churches, and schools came first, and then the people followed. Among those to be grabbed by the burgeoning Civil Rights Movement was Victoria Gray Adams of Palmer’s Crossing who first encountered Watkins and Hayes working at a meeting at the local St. John United Methodist Church. The granddaughter of a lumberman who moved to the area years before to get off another man’s farm, Gray Adams had worked at Camp Shelby during the war years and moved around throughout the 1950s with her military husband. “By the time the movement came along,” she remembers, “I was back in Mississippi.” She first became involved at a voter registration meeting at the St. John’s Episcopal Methodist Church and soon began teaching prospective voters how to register and taking them down to the courthouse after being trained as a Citizenship School teacher through SCLC’s Citizenship School program ran

605 Watkins, interview.
by Septima Clark. Gray Adams took over much of the leadership when Watkins and Hayes left Hattiesburg for the Delta.\textsuperscript{606}

Victoria Gray Adams helped cultivate a slow but sure growth of people in the Hattiesburg Movement. She pulled them in through the social clubs, beauty parlors, and churches. Buying something from her beauty supply company came with the added bonus of learning about the next mass meeting. Over the coming year, through mass meetings and canvassing, thousands of black Hattiesburgers embraced the burgeoning local Civil Rights Movement, disregarding potential ramifications in favor of total freedom. Factory workers, ministers, barbers, hairdressers, teachers, and preachers disregarded a lifetime of racialized lessons to go down to the courthouse and try to register to vote. Virtually all of them were denied by the registrar, Theron Lynd, but in doing so, they helped compose a large chunk of the evidence used to back what would become the Voting Rights Act of 1965.\textsuperscript{607}

The Civil Rights Movement exploded across the South as SNCC and its allies attacked Jim Crow head-on. As images and horror stories emitted out of the region, the Movement only grew in size and gained power. Pictures of police officers using water hoses on children in Birmingham drew domestic and international pressure and resulted in President Kennedy on June 11, 1963 calling for what would become the Civil Rights Act of 1964. That night, Jackson Mississippi NAACP Field Secretary Medgar Evers stepped out of his car in his driveway and was gunned down by a white supremacist sitting across the street in the bushes. The murder horrified the American people. Everyone heard about the Evers killing. Even a dusty-haired white kid from Duluth, Minnesota wrote a song about it called “Only A Pawn in Their Game.” The movement was reaching all corners of American society and violent reactions only helped it spread. Just a few weeks after Evers was killed, a liberal Stanford professor named Allard

\textsuperscript{606} Victoria Gray Adams, interview by Katherine Mellen Charron, transcript, Petersburg, VA, April 22, 2002, in author’s possession; and Watkins, interview. For more on the SCLC Citizenship Schools, see Katherine Mellen Charron, \textit{Freedom's Teacher: The Life of Septima Clark} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

\textsuperscript{607} SCR ID #2-55-7-4-1-1-1; SCR ID# 2-55-7-4-2-1-1; Gordon A. Martin, \textit{Count Them One By One: Black Mississippians Fighting for the Right to Vote} (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2010). Martin was one of the lawyers who filed suit in \textit{United States v. Lynd}. See Martin and \textit{U.S. vs. Lynd}, 301 F.2d 818 (1962).
Lowenstein flew into the state, arriving on the same day that Clyde Kennard succumbed to the stomach cancer he contracted while imprisoned at Parchman. Treatment may have saved his life had it come earlier, but he wasn’t released until eight months after being diagnosed with the potentially fatal cancer.  

Nonetheless, even as the martyrs passed, the Movement grew and more people arrived. Thousands of local black Mississippians took up the fight, building on decades-old community institutions to combat Jim Crow. Hattiesburg would be at times the most active Civil Rights Movement site in the state of Mississippi. Local people were constantly being called into action, taking a leap of faith into the Movement and being supplemented by throngs of outsiders who arrived from across the nation to join this new phase of the black freedom struggle. For so many of them, it had been a long time coming. They found togetherness and hope in the communities that produced them, but the assault on Jim Crow lifted the racialized banner of opportunity in the Hub City that had hovered over black life like a haze for more than eighty local years. Their expectations had changed. By the end of 1963, the *Gulfport Daily Herald* noted that Hattiesburg was embossed a “rights siege” and that “A New Negro has emerged in Mississippi.”

Black Hattiesburgers organized beyond their community to join the nation’s burgeoning Civil Rights Movement. Their churches, schools, businesses, and even front porches were packed with voter registration meetings and the community was infused with thousands of bright-eyed dreamers who arrived from all across America to join the black freedom struggle in its most aggressive phase. The Civil Rights Movement that spread across the American South between 1960 and 1966 built on foundations laid by generations before to embrace a new strategy. In places like Hattiesburg, thousands of local blacks who had always organized in search of freedom cast off doubts of


609: “Hattiesburg Still in Rights Siege,” *Gulfport Daily Herald*, December 7, 1963, clipping found in Box 1, Folder 8, Ben-Ami (Rabbi David Z.) Papers, University of Southern Mississippi Libraries Special Collections (hereafter USM), Hattiesburg, MS.
repercussions and attempted to register to vote. The massive influx of outside activity helped, but it was really the dedication and support of their peers.

Peggy Jean Connor was another local woman who taught Citizenship Classes like Victoria Gray Adams. She was a graduate of Eureka who opened her own salon on Mobile Street during the early 1950s as Mobile Street neared its prime. Connor was particularly galvanized by the murder of Medgar Evers. She remembered thinking “well they can’t kill all of us.” After training as a Citizenship School teacher in Georgia, Connor returned to Hattiesburg and recruited from her hair salon and taught classes at True Light. “There was no problem getting into the church to hold my classes,” she recalled. “Truelight [sic] Church has always been a civil rights Church.” Connor would go on to a long and prolific activist career. She was the first African American elected to serve on the Forrest County Democratic Executive Committee and the plaintiff in the court case Connor v. Johnson that curbed white legislators’ ability to gerrymander state congressional districts after the Voting Rights Act.⁶¹⁰

Because Hattiesburg turned into such a massive site, it received a massive influx of Civil Rights activists from the outside world. These were people and organizations that saw news coverage in Birmingham or were hurt by the story of the murder of Medgar Evers. The Citizens Council couldn’t touch their bank rolls or mortgages and violent responses only drew more attention. On June 7, 1963, the National Council of Churches announced the formation of a Commission on Religion and Race. In the first two years, the Commission received $450,000 in support and made a firm and definitive commitment to support the Civil Rights Movement in the American South. It also sent waves of ministers into Southern locales to help register voters and participate in local Movements. Meanwhile, with the help of Lowenstein, the academic who arrived in Mississippi after learning of the Evers murder, SNCC nearly 1,000 college-aged volunteers into Mississippi in what was known as Freedom Summer. 1964 was the pinnacle. Between January and August of 1964, over 600 volunteers arrived in

Hattiesburg to register voters, help run community centers, and teach Freedom Schools. They filled the Hub City with Movement hands and were hosted by brave individuals who had become swept up in the possibilities of the Movement. The black Hattiesburgers were “people of spirit,” as Freedom Summer volunteer Barbara Schwartzbaum remembered them nearly fifty years later.611

So when the Freedom Schools opened on July 2nd, 1964, they found waiting for them an anxious generation of young people who were the products of a remarkably active and vibrant community. 575 students signed up for Freedom Schools before the schools even opened. The Movement was all around them and black children couldn’t wait to get involved. They also were the product of a strong black school system and community that deeply valued education and poured resources into its schools. Local teachers and the best students were revered in black Hattiesburg. When True Light Baptist, Mt. Zion Baptist, St. Paul United Methodist, Priest Creek Missionary Baptist, and St. John United Methodist opened their doors on the morning of July 2nd, the rambunctious kids came pouring in. They represented a population of young people who valued education and wanted to join the burgeoning Movement that was exploding all around them. Many of their parents and grandparents had been organizing out of those churches for decades.612

An estimated 3,000 local African Americans participated in the 1964 Freedom Summer in some capacity. They were harassed, fined, beaten, arrested, shot at, threatened, and even killed. But in the months and year after Freedom Summer, Hattiesburg blacks cast off Jim Crow. It was certainly difficult, but they cracked legalized segregation and opened thousands of previously unavailable opportunities. Their actions included sit-ins, marches, bus boycotts, store boycotts, picket lines, and constant organizing. Local people took all the initiative from the Civil Rights workers who briefly

entered their lives. As one of the last few remaining outsiders reported in March of 1966, “the work here in Hattiesburg has fallen mostly into the hands of the local people now.” When they were finished the formalized racial barriers to opportunity were gone. Discrimination still certainly existed, but blacks could register to vote, go to schools just as good as the ones whites attended, enroll at the University of Southern Mississippi, serve on a jury, press charges, become a police officer, shop downtown, and sidle up to a lunch counter on a hot summer day to an iced sweet tea. The most tragic symbol of that victory was the conviction of four men who arrived at Vernon Dahmer’s home on the night of January 10, 1966 and firebombed it. The convictions were the first of the sort in Mississippi History. The man who ordered the killing was Samuel Holloway Bowers, grandson of E.J. Bowers, the lawyer who brought the Pennsylvanian Joseph T. Jones to Mississippi to invest in the Gulf & Ship Island Railroad. Bowers wasn’t convicted until 1998. He died in prison. In response to a massive local and national outcry to the Dahmer murder, the Chamber of Commerce helped rebuild the family home. The worst of the racial barriers to opportunity had been thoroughly dismantled.613

*   *   *

Since Emancipation, black Southerners organized within their own communities to improve their lives. Almost universally, they valued education and economic autonomy, the two most fundamental things denied to them during slavery. While much of the South remained an agricultural haven for tobacco and cotton planting in the years after the end of slavery, hundreds of urban enclaves of all sizes offered Southerners alternative lives away from the fields. Both black and whites arrived in the cities of the New South in search of opportunity. Whites sought to consolidate the opportunities of New South employment among their race. Blacks were to be excluded or at the very least limited from gleaning the full possibilities of this new economic order that was largely based on the railroads built by outsiders. This exclusion was manifested in basic job and

educational discrimination, but also by the separation of races in all aspects of life as if to constantly and publicly reinforce the lesson that the finest opportunities in a modernizing South, one that so readily plugged into the prospects of a developing nation, were not for Africa Americans.

But the blacks who moved to places like Hattiesburg were also able to craft freedom within this system. What happened in the Hub City and on Mobile Street is reflective of larger trends across the South. African Americans also found jobs offered by modernity and used them to achieve mobility. Most notably, thousands of the new jobs offered a way off the farm and eventually a ticket out of the South altogether. Blacks who moved North kept a watchful eye on those who stayed and would eventually garner sufficient strength to begin pressuring seemingly disinterested Northern federal-level politicians into making calls for better treatment or more rights for Southern black communities they left behind. Meanwhile, those who stayed were bonded together by race. They didn’t even have a choice if they wanted one. Jim Crow ensured that tight-knit black communities developed in cities across the South. African Americans turned inward, embracing the early self-help traditions advocate by Booker T. Washington, pouring resources into their schools and churches, and often developing vibrant business communities supported by their own race. The origins of the Civil Rights Movement lie in these very communities that began struggling and organizing to help black Southerners achieve better lives as early as the 1860s, but especially in the decades surrounding the turn of the twentieth century as the New South emerged and filled with African Americans who began building institutions. These institutions produced generations of black leaders through all eras of American history. Champions emerged from their midst.

This pattern of black exclusion and strength-building in the margins of the opportunities provided by modern American life reinvented itself in varying forms through the rise of the New South, Great Depression, and World War II. Several realities through each era improved various aspects of African American life in the Deep South, especially the anti-lynching stances taken by Southern progressives and city leaders who felt the need to control lynchings to attract outside investment. Southern blacks also greatly benefitted from the actions of migrant populations in the North who’s rapidly
increasing numbers and constant diasporic interests produced growing political power and an incredibly influential black media, especially in Chicago. The *Chicago Defender*, *Jet*, and *Ebony* were all founded by migrants and read throughout the country, helping connect African Americans across regions. The Jim Crow system hovered over black Southern life through the 1950s and limited racial access to available opportunities, but African American leaders, especially entrepreneurs, clergy, and educators, built on the power generated by migration to push for more rights, especially the right to vote. Meanwhile, African American communities bonded together as they always had to improve their lives and develop strength as they resourcefully and resiliently manufactured their own opportunities. They always had and they always would. But this community organizing tradition was not the same activity as the assault on Jim Crow in the 1960s. Nor should it all fall under the banner of a “Movement.”

The Movement affected every community differently. Many were transformed in far different ways than Hattiesburg. I am not arguing that what happened in the Hub City should define the periodization of the Civil Rights Movement. But by examining the longer history in a Southern community, it becomes very clear that the foundations rest in the 1890s and that black communities were never stagnant. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s built on longstanding community organizing traditions to crack open Jim Crow. The college students who started the sit-ins of the 1960s were products of the black communities that developed in the first half of the twentieth century. They particularly reflected its educational values. Many of the students came from tight-knit black school systems or were the sons and daughters of teachers themselves. They came of age in churches that had for years been used as organizational spaces. Beginning with the sit-ins that swept the American South in the spring of 1960, wide sects of blacks and white allies rejected Jim Crow, spreading out across the South to attack it. In nearly every locale, they were joined by local African Americans who organized in traditional black communal spaces to develop and house a broad Movement. The widespread and direct assault on Jim Crow symbolized a new era of activism designed to end Jim Crow. And that is exactly what it did. Throughout the 1960s, Jim Crow was eradicated from hundreds of Southern cities. It was a complete and utter rejection of the systematic denial of opportunity that had dominated so much of the history of the modern Jim Crow South.
It also fundamentally altered the nature of Southern black communities in unforeseen ways.

* * *

The historic Mobile Street neighborhood still sits in the shadows of downtown Hattiesburg. Every October, the neighborhood hosts a celebration called the Historic Mobile Street Renaissance Festival. The weather that time of year is perfect, usually in the mid-70s and sunny. Crowds descend on the historic black neighborhood from morning to night. Couples hold hands and kids skip through the streets and wait in line to jump in one of the inflatable playgrounds. Three blocks of Mobile Street are closed off to traffic and filled with throngs of people waiting in line for pulled pork or fried catfish, listening to live music on the jazz stage, buying artwork, catching up, telling stories, and walking through the hallowed out spaces of a once proud community. Groups gather in the dozens of empty lots for quiet conversations. Elderly men and women tell younger people about the buildings that once existed in each spot; a bank, a church, or school. They share memories of working as a paper boy for Mrs. McLaurin’s newsstand or sweeping the floors of the barbershop that once stood on the corner.\(^{614}\)

Hammond Smith’s drug store sits right in the middle of the festival, empty and white. Its shelves are naked. Some are cracked and hang loose, badly in need of repair. There is a picture sitting in the display window. The image captures a group of eloquent black men in suits, sitting or standing with hats in their hands. Hammond Smith and his brothers are among them. The photograph shows the men who escaped the perpetual poverty of farm life to sell goods to generations on Mobile Street and lead a community. They are the people who thrived within the confines of Jim Crow, who pursued education across the country to achieve status in their local community. The photograph sits alone in that naked window, the men in the image watching the outside world move along as they had done in person decades before. People pass and look at the photograph, but most don’t know the black faces in the image or appreciate what Mobile Street once was.\(^{615}\)

\(^{614}\) Observations made by author on October 1, 2011; and 2011 Historic Mobile Street Renaissance Festival Schedule of Events, in author’s possession.

\(^{615}\) Ibid.
Those October days are when Mobile Street is at its finest. Normally it is an empty shell of its former self. The street is only partially filled with half-dilapidated buildings and a few spare restaurants that have bars over their windows and keep irregular hours. There are large empty patches of grass where buildings caught fire, flooded, or collapsed, and were never rebuilt. Crooked cracks line the sidewalks. Vines grow up the side of buildings that don’t look safe enough to enter. Several historical markers dot the street, denoting where the first rock n’ roll album was recorded and the former site of the Freedom Summer headquarters, the Woods Guesthouse. Mt. Carmel still stands proudly on the corner of Seventh and Mobile, right across from where Gayther Hardaway ran his grocery store, but its congregation has moved into a new building. Another group meets there now. Nearby, the Eureka High School has been renovated to reflect its former glory, but is hardly used. The most gifted black teachers are free to work elsewhere now or even take different sorts of jobs. True Light has also moved after buying an old church building that was abandoned by a white congregation that moved into mega-structures away from the city. St. Paul’s still hold services where it always has. Vestiges of that history remain imbedded in the few remaining neighborhood buildings and memories of the people who lived in the Jim Crow era.

In today’s South, the Hammond and Charles Smiths of the world probably wouldn’t live in that black community. They could live, shop, and eat wherever they wanted. It is a major victory of the Civil Rights Movement, the destruction of everyday Jim Crow. But that very system of Jim Crow, which limited black opportunities and was so incredibly oppressive and deadly, also crafted the very communities that supported the Movement that killed it. Blacks still own businesses and work throughout the city. But since the destruction of Jim Crow, the number of organic black companies has shrunk drastically. Hammond Smith’s pharmacy probably couldn’t survive today against the massive Walmarts, CVS stores, and Walgreens that dot the city and accept dollars from all races. Thousands of black Hattiesburgers now work and shop in the Walmarts that bookend the city. Some are quite happy to be there and certainly enjoy the freedom to spend their time and money as they please. That is no small thing. But decades ago, their time and dollars would have cycled through their own communities rather than the bank accounts of multi-million dollar corporations. Those dollars would have gone into the
hands of the people who ran the groceries, cafes, and barbershops of that once vibrant community.

Hattiesburg itself has sprawled miles away from its historic core since integration. Thousands of whites have packed their lives and families and moved out past the highways, away from the Hattiesburg public school schools, which are now over 90% black. Commerce followed them. Some of America’s largest chain stores now dot Hardy Street for miles outside the old city core. The migrants left a decaying downtown in their wake. The Hub City sits silent on most weekend afternoons. There are still a few places to eat and drink, but downtown Hattiesburg is no longer a place where people spend Saturday afternoons strolling through the shops and restaurants and chatting with passersby. You don’t go downtown to buy furniture, shoes, or groceries anymore. Those items are now bought at the stores owned by mega corporations that operate out of faraway places like Minneapolis. A downtown association sometimes draws people back into the city center for the occasional concert, play, or festival, but the Hub City has largely been gutted. The only sound one can hear on most evenings is the occasional train horn as it passes through the old downtown. Racial progress has flipped the city inside out, leaving an old historic core for the blacks who can’t afford to move and the last whites who remain embedded in the old historic area.

African Americans have more opportunities than they ever had in the South. But losses were imbedded within those iconic victories. Hallowed out neighborhoods now sit in the former sites of bustling black downtowns. Some African Americans still live in these spaces. Most of them are poor, and although they can ride on the front seat of the bus, one cannot help but wonder if they really have more opportunities than the generation before. Few black communities are capable of self-sustenance as they once had been. The city and many of their people have moved away from them, crossing the highway and sprawling out far from the downtown. The decline of Jim Crow was a victory of the Movement. But it ultimately led to the fall of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of incredibly resilient black communities where a people lived and grew and often thrived together even within the confines of Jim Crow. Mobile Street was never wealthy, but before desegregation, it always had a soul. What remains in the dead neighborhood’s
wake are mere memories and the legacy of the freedom it helped to produce for those who would leave it behind.
Bibliography

Manuscript Sources

*The Amistad Research Center, New Orleans, LA*

Collins Family Papers, 1889-1978

Collins Funeral Home Records, 1937-1987

Harvey, Clarie Collins, 1907-1990

Madison Papers, Joseph E.

Martinband Papers

*Kent State University Special Collections and Archives, Kent, OH*

Staughton Lynd Collection, 1886-1999

*King Library and Archives, Atlanta, GA*

Papers of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, 1959-1972

Records of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, 1964-1965

*National Archives and Records Administration, Washington D.C.*

Records of the Field Offices for the State of Mississippi, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1872, Record Group 105

“Biennial Report of the State Superintendent of Education to the Legislature of Mississippi, for the Years 1888 and 1889,” (Jackson, MS: R.H. Henry, State Printer, 1890).

Hilda C. Wilson Papers

Historical Research Material, 1935-1942, Works Project Administration Historical Survey.

Impeachment Trial of Thomas W. Cardoza, State Superintendent of Education (Jackson, MS: Power & Barksdale, State Printer, 1876).

Medgar Evers Papers


State of Mississippi Oral History Program

Tubb (J.M.) Papers, 1943-1974

Queens College, City University of New York Benjamin S. Rosenthal Library Special Collections, Flushing, NY

Mark Levy Collection (1959-2008)

The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, WI

Allen, Pamela Papers, 1967-1974

Baker Papers, Ella, 1959-1965

Beech Papers, Robert, 1963-1972

Belfrage Papers, Sally, 1962-1966 (microfilm)
Congress of Racial Equality Records, 1941-1967

Freedom Information Service Records, 1962-1979

Fusco Papers, Liz, 1964-1965

Futorian Papers, Aviva, 1964-1965

Hard Papers, Sandra, 1964-1966

Hardy (William H. and Hattie Lott) Papers

Hardy (William H. and Sallie J.) Papers

Hexter Papers, Christopher, 1964

Highlander Research and Education Center Papers

Hunn Papers, Eugene, 1964-1966

Irwin Papers, Dilla E., 1964-1966

Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law Records

Lynd Papers, Staughton, 1938-1997

Martinez Papers, Elizabeth Sutherland, 1964-1966

Moore Papers, Amzie, 1912-1982

Morey Papers, Hunter, 1962-1967

Nicolaus Papers, Martin and Victoria, 1964-1965

Robinson Papers, JoAnn Ooiman, 1960-1966

Rothschild Papers, Mary Aicken, 1965-1974

Seese Papers, Linda M., 1964-1965

Semstein Papers, Mendy, 1963-1966
Smith, Benjamin Papers, 1955-1967
Smith Papers, Robert, 1979
Tecklin Papers, Jerry, 1964
Vogel Papers, Lise, 1964-1965
Walker Papers, Samuel, 1964-1966
Zinn Papers, Howard, 1956-1994

University of Southern Mississippi Libraries, Hattiesburg, MS

Adams (Victoria Gray) Papers
Adickes Papers
Ben-Ami (Rabbi David Z.) Papers
Bilbo (Theodore) Papers
Will D. Campbell Papers
Connor (Peggy Jean) Papers
Dahmer (Vernon F.) Collection
Davis (Charles) Papers, 1970s-1980s
Dukes (James K.) Papers
East Collection
Ellin Freedom Summer Collection
Fairley (J.C.) Civil Rights Collection, 1960-1990
Faulkner (L.E.) Papers
Funchess (Glenda) Civil Rights Collection, 1964, 1994

Glass Mississippi Freedom Summer Diary

Goodman Civil Rights Collection


Grupper and Beech Civil Rights Collection

Gulf & Ship Island Railroad Minute Book Collection

Harris (Anthony J.) Civil Rights Memoir

Hattiesburg Area Chamber of Commerce Records

Hattiesburg Department of Urban Development Collection

Hattiesburg Historic Photographs Collection

Hawthorne (Gracie) Civil Rights Collection

Helfrich (Robert B.) Papers

Howe (Tony) Railroad Map Collection

Newman (J.J.) Lumber Company Records

Paul B. Johnson Papers

Erle E. Johnston, Jr. Papers

Kershner (Charles) Papers

Kwanguvu (Umoja) Freedom Summer Collection

Ladner (Dorie Ann) Collection

Lelyveld (Rabbi Arthur J.) Collection

Mantinband (Rabbi Charles) Papers
Michaels (Sheila) Papers, 1960-2000

Mississippi Central Railroad Collection

Railroad Collection, 1913-1937

Phillips (Mamie L.) Civil Rights Memoir, 1960s

Oral History Collection

Owen (David) Freedom Summer Collection

Randall Freedom Summer Photographs

Rue (Myrtis) African American Hattiesburg Collection

Shaw Freedom Summer Collection


Spears Civil Rights Collection

Speer (Klaus and Elisabeth Clark) Papers, 1963-1965 (M352)

Stoner (Peter) Papers, 1964 (M 168)

Tusa (Bobs M.) Freedom Summer Research Collection, 1997-2001

United States vs. Theron C. Lynd, Registrar of Voters for Forrest County, Mississippi - Legal Case, 1961-1967 (M 27)

Wade (Daisy Harris) Papers, circa 1939-1998 (M 334)

Zeman Freedom Summer Collection

Zwerling Freedom Summer Collection

Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Chicago Public Library, Chicago, IL

Dr. T.R.M. Howard Papers
Abbott-Sengstacke Family Papers, 1847-1997

_Walter P. Reuther Library, Detroit, MI_

American Federation of Teachers Inventory Parts I & II

American Federation of Teachers Local 231: Detroit Federation of Teachers Records

Dillard Collection, Ernest C. and Jessie M.

Henry Papers, Aaron

**Interviews Conducted by Author**

Adickes, Sandra, New Brunswick, NJ, 7/5/10

Clark, Colia, New York City, 7/7/10

Ellin, Joseph, Kalamazoo, MI, 8/13/2010

Funchess, Glenda, Hattiesburg, MS, 12/16/09

Guyot, Lawrence, Jackson, MS, 3/25/10

King, Ed, Jackson, MS, 3/27/10

Ladner, Dorie, Jackson, MS, 3/22/2012

Landess, Ira, New York City, 7/7/10

Levy, Mark, New York City, 7/8/10

Lynd, Staughton, Phone Interview, 7/25/08

Lynd, Staughton, Niles, OH, 12/22/08

Lynd, Staughton, Niles, OH, 12/8/09

Michaels, Sheila, Columbus, OH, 6/18/10
Moses, Robert, Mansfield, OH, 11/3/08
Moses, Robert, Jackson, MS, 3/27/10
Pace, Paula, New York City, 7/7/10
Randall, Herbert, Phone Interview, 8/9/08
Randall, Herbert, Shinnecock Indian Reservation, NY, 7/6/10
Schwartzbaum, Barbara, New York City, 7/9/10
Tobias Booth, Heather, Oxford, OH, 10/9/09
Wade, Daisy Harris, Hattiesburg, MS, 10/6/2011
Watkins, Hollis, Jackson, MS, 12/18/09
Zellner, Dottie, Phone Interview, 7/27/08
Zibulsky, Stanley, Queens, NY, 7/9/10

Interviews Conducted by Others

Mississippi Department of Archives and History
Bowers, Samuel Holloway, 10/24/1983, 1/30/1984, 11/5/1984

University of Southern Mississippi Center for Oral History & Cultural Heritage
Adams, Victoria Gray, Petersburg, VA, 4/22/2002
Barnes, Ariel, Hattiesburg, MS, 1/6/1995
Boyd, Richard, Hattiesburg, MS, 8/29/1991
Burger, N.R., Hattiesburg, MS, 5/11/1982
Chase, Veola, Hattiesburg, MS, 12/22/1995
Cohen, James, Hattiesburg, MS, 2/2/1976

Cook, Clearese, Hattiesburg, MS, 12/1994

Hamilton, M.W., Petal, MS, 2/13/1978

Hardy, Lou, location unknown, 10/24/1995

Henry, Aaron, Clarksdale, MS, 5/1/1972


Moore, Amzie, Cleveland, MS, 3/29/1977

Sandifer, Ida E., location unknown, 11/20/1994

Smith, E. Hammond, Hattiesburg, MS, 4/8/1982

Spinks, Eberta, location unknown, Spring, 1995

Stevens, George A., Hattiesburg, MS 4/27/1976

Thomas, Isaac, Hattiesburg, MS, 12/23/1994

Washington, Marie Kent, Grenada, MS, 6/16/1995


Williams, Iola, Hattiesburg, 11/6/2006

Woullard, R.W., Hattiesburg, MS, 2/20/1995

Memoirs, Testimonies, Oral Histories, Reports, Document and Photographic Collections


*Polk’s Hattiesburg City Directory*. Numerous years.


U.S. Census Bureau. *Numerous Years.*


**Court Cases**


*Plessy v. Ferguson,* 163 U.S. 537 (1896).

**Newspapers and Magazines**

*Biloxi Herald*

*Chicago Defender*

*Chicago Tribune*

*Cleveland Call and Post*
Secondary Sources: Articles, Books, Theses, and Dissertations


Noble, Stuart Grayson. *Forty Years of the Public Schools in Mississippi, With Special Reference to the Education of the Negro*. New York: AMS Press, 1918.


