

**SHELTER IN A TIME OF STORM: BLACK COLLEGES AND THE RISE OF
STUDENT ACTIVISM IN JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI**

DISSERTATION

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By

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ABSTRACT

The most underdeveloped area of study concerning the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's is the effect of Black student activism during the explosive decade. The field is currently dominated by two-dimensional studies that define student activism under the banner of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), or the Black Studies campaigns on white college campuses in the latter half of the decade. Assessing student protests merely through this lens yields a narrow view of this generation of activists. One cause of our failure to identify these students is that scholars of the Civil Rights Movement have ignored the very environment in which the majority of student activists lived, learned, socialized, and ultimately revolted. Analyses of Black colleges invariably conclude that they were paternalistic and their curriculums were conformist, if not geared toward assimilation. Students from these all-Black institutions in the South succeeded in their public and private assault against the policies of Jim Crow and at the dawn of the Civil Rights Movement they vaulted the struggle for human rights to unprecedented levels.

This dissertation is a local study of Jackson, Mississippi that focuses on the role of Black student activists at Jackson State University and Tougaloo College. These two institutions played critical roles in sheltering young men and women from the vicious hatred and infamous racism that defined Mississippi's customs and laws. It was within

this “closed society” that a “shelter” from political storms and state-sanctioned terrorism was most important. During the early sixties a radical new voice emanated from within the walls of these enclaves that challenged the political and social culture of Mississippi. A study of these voices and the environment that helped to create them will yield new insight into the complexity of southern politics and culture, and the role of historically Black colleges in the struggle for Black freedom.

This longitudinal study takes into consideration the social, political, and cultural environment of Jackson State University and Tougaloo College, two institutions that adequately reflect the fluid ideological changes in the student movement from its inception to its demise. This study examines the protest strategies, tactics, and other factors germane to the success and failure of the Black Student Movement in an effort to tease out the complexities of student activism and the environments that simultaneously produced, defined, and hindered their protest objectives. In addition, this community study illuminates the political ingredients and boundaries of Black student protest. This dissertation also examines the complex nature of administrative leadership at the respective schools and the nature of the communities that surrounded these institutions.

The goal of this study is to redefine our understanding of Black student activism and the shelter in which this generation was produced, Black colleges. This is essential to constructing new histories that provide thorough and accurate insight on an era that reshaped and reformed America’s political and social landscape.

Dedicated to the memory of my father, Paris Favors Jr., whose “tough” love molded me into the man that I am. I love you.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

M.W. Whitt rose in the pulpit of the Tougaloo Chapel on a hot Tuesday evening during the summer of 1889. A small crowd of alumni, students, and faculty gathered to hear him speak on the theme of “Difficulties Met and Overcome” during a convening of the newly founded Alumni Association. As an alumnus, Whitt had made his alma mater proud, graduating just four years prior and now studying Theology at Howard University. More importantly, he had not forgotten the mission placed before him as a young student at Tougaloo. Mississippi had become a virtual hell for its Black citizens and hope was in scarce supply. His words that night gave evidence of a charge that would continue to fall upon future generations of students being educated in the enclaves of Black colleges. In discussing Tougaloo, Whitt acknowledged that:

no students have passed through its consecrated walls without having been deeply impressed with the fact of their responsibility to God, as well as their duty to their fellow man; and the result is, that nearly all of those who have gone from here with the testimony and confidence of the Faculty, have met the difficulties of life with courage and success.¹

If “difficult” was the only obstacle waiting in the path of the young students under the sound of Whitt’s voice, then perhaps their assignment would not have been so formidable. Instead, the staggering tasks that awaited Black youth bordered on the

¹ “Address Before the Alumni,” *The Tougaloo Quarterly*, June, 1889.

inconceivable and the impossible. In the coming years, it would be the responsibility of institutions like Tougaloo to convince Black youth that the future of the race was intrinsically linked with their ability to accomplish the unthinkable and do the unworkable. Whitt's declaration of a rising tide of students who were fitted with confidence and a sense of mission would be essential in the development of a generation destined to provide both leadership and hope for years to come.

Founded in 1869, Tougaloo University was still in its infant stages at the time of Whitt's address. However, like most Black colleges, difficulties abounded for institutions grasping at the prospect of survival. The political landscape of Mississippi had been greatly altered in the last decade as Black Mississippians found themselves starting down a path tinged with evil, blood, and despair. In 1889, the same year that M.W. Whitt addressed his fellow alumni, twenty five Black Mississippians fell victim to lynch mobs, a state record for lynchings that was well ahead of the national average.¹ In the midst of such unmitigated violence and repression, Black communities sought a refuge that could provide hope for the future and shelter for those who were destined to confront the forces of white supremacy in the Magnolia State. However, waging a frontal attack on the surging white power structure of Mississippi was suicidal for institutions that were dependent on white support. While vocational and religious education was deemed acceptable by southern whites, liberal studies that often prodded and stimulated the consciousness of Black students was severely frowned upon. Moreover, any program of study that openly refuted the principles of white supremacy and created Black students

¹ Julius Thompson, *Black Life in Mississippi: Essays on Political, Social and Cultural Studies in a Deep South State* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2001) 65.

who sought to alter the social codes of the South was capable of further deteriorating race relations and placing Black Mississippians in an even deeper state of peril. A hidden curriculum was necessary if the mission of uplift was to be passed on to Black youth.

Shelter in a Time of Storm: Black Institutions and the Rise of Student Activism in Jackson, Mississippi, explores the generations of Black students produced by Jackson State University and Tougaloo College in the years that preceded the Black Power Movement of the late 1960s. It was during this early period that a hidden pedagogy of hope was critical to the development of Black youth in a state that candidly and unashamedly sanctioned the violent elimination of dissidence and nonconformity. The end of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century were tumultuous years for those who dared to publicly confront white supremacy in Mississippi. White terrorism regulated Black protest in the state. Thousands of Blacks migrated out of the state in search of peace and opportunity for their wearied souls. However, millions more stayed and did the best that they could with the best that they had. For those who resolved to remain in Mississippi, Black colleges and the students that they produced represented two realities. They were indeed the very best that Black Mississippi had to offer and they also represented an unfulfilled hope that longed for a generation that would eventually emerge free of the daily oppression that accompanied Jim Crow. For decades that hope went unfulfilled until insurgency took root in the local Black colleges of Jackson. In the years prior to that emergence, Black college students remained engaged in their mission despite the threat of repression that constantly surrounded them. They replicated the Second Curriculum that they themselves were products of.

The Second Curriculum was an evolving pedagogy and philosophy that was born in the wake of slavery. As millions of formerly enslaved Africans filled the cities and countryside's in search of hope and opportunity, one of their foremost concerns was providing an education for themselves and their children. As bondsmen, their right to education had generally been denied. However, with the demise of the "peculiar institution," the edification and enlightenment of their minds became one of their most pressing social issues. Initially, both white liberals and newly freed Blacks played an important role in attempting to convince white America that the education of African Americans could provide a pathway toward the full, but moderate integration of Blacks into a free society. They placed their hands toward the creation of spaces of enlightenment, where Blacks could learn specific trades and new industrial technologies. Not soon after the founding of these educational institutions, debates waged over whether Black America should adopt a curriculum based in vocational training or embrace the liberal arts. As this dispute over curriculum development ensued, a quiet, yet deliberate phenomenon was beginning to take place in these impoverished and segregated institutions. Whereas the first curriculum was debated and deployed in the spirit of the arts and letters, a Second Curriculum emerged that is best illustrated by the slave who illegally read David Walker's, *Appeal* by candlelight or received messages of hope and resistance delivered in a brushy arbor.

This hidden curriculum was a specific appeal to the heart and soul of the student. It was embodied in the legacy of resistance by formerly enslaved Africans and the immediate desires of newly freed Blacks who saw hope and liberation in the eyes of their own children. Regardless of whether Black children received lessons in Greek,

carpentry, Latin, or masonry, it was essential that they explicitly know their self worth and more importantly, understand their mission of service to their race. As Black colleges became engaged in the work of preparing teachers, ministers, and leaders who were charged to carry out this service, the urgency of this mission was passed on from generation to generation. For many whites who became engaged in the construction of Black colleges and even served as early participants in the Second Curriculum, the idea of developing a cadre of Black youth whose purpose would be to rewrite the racist social codes of the South and instantly and directly challenge the ideology of white supremacy was far removed from their innermost thoughts. However, for Black Americans who were the direct victims of white terrorism and political disenfranchisement, the immediate and absolute eradication of laws and ideologies that sought their social and economic demise was the most pressing and practical issue at hand. Moreover, if the existing generation of leaders, activists, and scholars, could not successfully tackle the problem, then it was imperative that future generations be trained and prepared to do so. The adoption of an unwritten yet implied Second Curriculum hid their aspirations for liberation away from hostile whites whose vision of Blacks as a permanent underclass, clashed with the purpose of a pedagogy laced with rhetoric of liberty, justice, and equality. The Second Curriculum quite simply was designed to navigate the destiny and mission of millions of Black youth who were perceived as the future liberators of their people.

This steady dose of optimism and confidence deliberately delivered in what many assumed was a non-threatening fashion kept hope afloat for Black Mississippians who sent their children off to schools to better themselves and their communities. Yet just

below the seemingly placid surface of the Black college environment, questions were being formulated and political consciousness was being expanded as the curriculum worked its slow but methodical purpose of lifting Black students beyond the wretchedness of their time. A historical analysis of this Second Curriculum and an examination of its ability to create spaces of uplift and influence in a hostile Mississippi is the primary focus of this dissertation.

Chapter Two, entitled “Masterpieces or Caricatures?: The Origins and Essence of Black Education in Jackson, Mississippi,” examines the rise of Black educational institutions in Jackson and measures their purpose and their mission. In the midst of a post-Reconstruction era that promoted a steady retreat on issues of civil and human rights, Black colleges became enclaves with one salient mission, educate and train those who would help lead the charge against southern terrorism. This “shelter” thus became one of the most important sources for agency within the Black community. Through their steady preparation and cultivation of teachers and ministers, Black colleges helped to provide ambition and direction. It is within this chapter that I introduce the Second Curriculum theory that notes the existence of a pedagogy whose express purpose was to embolden and nurture those whose hands were placed the future of the race, a factor that would be critical in the long range development of leadership on the Black college campus and the broader Black community. In addition, sources in this Chapter Two draw heavily upon evidence that demonstrates the Second Curriculum was more than just a bi-product of Mississippi schools, but rather a deliberate phenomenon taking root in Black colleges and schools across the South.

Chapter Three, entitled “Silence of the Oppressed: Expectations of Black College Students and Alumnus During the Nadir,” considers the increasingly hostile atmosphere in which Mississippi’s Black college alumni had to perform their life affirming work. The Nadir was an era that firmly cemented Mississippi’s place as the supreme champion of white supremacy. The constant torture and terrorism that threatened the lives of Mississippi’s Black citizens created a climate of fear that kept the majority of Black leadership either silent or seeking indirect and clandestine ways to combat an aggressive and determined enemy. It was in this harsh political climate that the shelter embodied within Black colleges became increasingly important. In this space the Second Curriculum animated and stimulated Black youth who were forced to confront such oppressive and unforgiving surroundings. As this period produced bolder forms of protest from an emerging Black left, activists expected more from students and Black institutions. A thorough analysis of this critique is conducted in this chapter in order to measure the demands being placed upon Black colleges.

Chapter Four marks the rise of an insurgent generation on the campuses of Tougaloo and Jackson State. Entitled, “How to Sail and Where to Anchor: Black Institutions and the Emerging Civil Rights Movement in Post War Mississippi, 1945 – 1960,” this chapter explores the post World War II era in America which witnessed an evolution of radical protest. Chapter Four assesses the impact of an expanding world view that witnessed anti-colonial movements in Africa and the return of Black war veterans who were determined to be noncompliant with the rules of Jim Crow. This new spirit found its way to Black college campuses as veterans took advantage of the government’s GI bill and enrolled in increasing numbers at institutions such as Jackson

State and Tougaloo. The chapter discusses the impact of these veterans and the rise of Black insurgency both locally and nationally which assisted in inspiring and informing Black college youth of their place in an unforgiving world. Topics such as the landmark Brown vs. Board of Education case, the murder of Emmett Till, and the advent of numerous bus boycotts throughout the south, are discussed in relation to their affect on the local student populations of Mississippi. Moreover, chapter three suggests that this period is perhaps the most significant in helping to dissolve the fear that had successfully held generations of students at bay. Many Black students were now prepared to sail into uncharted water and cast their anchors in the sea of freedom. However it was also during this period that Jackson State College, under the leadership of Jacob Reddix, exerted stronger control over its students out of fear of serious reprisals from the state. Neighboring Tougaloo College filled the vacuum of agency left vacant by the conservative nature of Reddix and Jackson State. The spirit of protest that was slowly being kindled throughout the country would catch fire and engulf Tougaloo College in the explosive decade of the 1960s.

Chapter Five marks the arrival of overt, radical student protest in Jackson, Mississippi. Entitled, “Cease to Live, Begin to Be: Wrath and Radicalism on Campus, 1960 – 1963,” this chapter focuses on the diverging paths of Jackson State and Tougaloo. Whereas one institution moved quickly to erase the presence of student activism, the other wholly embraced its position as an enclave of movement activity. With the Civil Rights Movement in full swing and Black students across the country serving as the new found foot-soldiers of the movement, Tougaloo College was transformed into a hotbed of student activism. Black students from Tougaloo conducted sit-ins, hosted rallies, and

became the catalyst for the local movement in Jackson. This chapter focuses on the transformation from simple hope and idealism to civil disobedience and protest. Chapter Five also notes the evolving perspective of the faculty that nurtured and groomed the young students in their quest for justice while simultaneously questioning their own role in a rapidly changing world. The personal papers and memoirs of key Tougaloo faculty are examined in an effort to illustrate the impact and role of this critical relationship between teacher and student. Conversely, the administration of Jackson State was steadfast in its suppression of voices of dissent. Here, I introduce the personal writings and memoirs of faculty members who were troubled by the harsh position of the Reddix administration, namely the personal memoirs of celebrated poet and author Margaret Walker Alexander who was a professor of English at Jackson State. This chapter clearly demonstrates that it was not only students who yearned to breathe and break free of the conformity and conservatism that had literally and psychologically imprisoned the masses of Black people.

The final chapter is entitled, “The Scales of Righteousness: Determination and Co-optation on Black College Campuses, 1963 – 1966.” As Black student activists continued to support and actively participate in direct action protest in Mississippi, they faced numerous obstacles and strategic dilemmas. White supremacists appeared unrelenting in trying to maintain the existing social order. Chapter Six explores the ideological and physical battle lines that were drawn between determined Black youth and perhaps the even more determined white power structure. This chapter is explicit in its attempt to explain how these battle lines became increasingly hazy for Black student activists who gained a new ally in scores of white college students who participated in the

crowning event of student activism in the 60s, Freedom Summer. The festering of age old frustrations concerning the devaluation of Black life surfaced with the assassination of Medgar Evers, the murder of four school girls in Alabama, and the newfound concern with Southern violence following the murder of three civil rights workers; two white, one Black. Although bloodshed was not new to movement activists, the overwhelming distress of Black student activists was directed towards federal authorities and the sudden interest for northern whites following the death of two young white men. These new developments angered and disenchanted many Black youth who had suffered endlessly at the hands of white supremacy with little response from the general public.

The pendulum continued to swing between hope and doubt during these years as the future of Tougaloo as a haven for movement activity came into question following a decision to remove one of the student's biggest sympathizers, President Adam Beittel. The replacement of Beittel marked the beginning of a new era for Black colleges that were supportive of the Civil Rights Movement. Concerned about the level of student activism sweeping across the country, colleges and universities came under closer scrutiny by local and federal authorities. Black institutions such as Tougaloo were targeted for co-optation with the hope that expanded financial opportunities for institutions desperate for greater sponsorship and funds would placate militant musings and radical activity. Private corporations and educational foundations increased their funding of Black colleges seemingly at the expectation that students would be enticed by the opportunity of personal achievement and economic success and forsake their activity and interest in the struggle for Black liberation. Opportunities for federal employment became abundant as campuses hosted Federal Employment Days. Even students actively

involved in the movement were lured out of grassroots organizing and political agitation through service in new federal programs such as Head Start. Black student activists were caught in a “Catch-22;” maintain their positions as political agitators connected to the Black community, or become the strange bedfellows of a government that worked secretly to silence them. The former offered a pathway towards constructing communities that were self-sufficient and dependent upon their own visionary leadership. The latter presented an opportunity to provide better educational opportunities and nurturing for impoverished Black school children while simultaneously removing political rabble rousers out of the governments hair and onto its payroll. Numerous Black student activists chose the latter and, moreover, became apart of an expanding Black middle class that responded to the new opportunities available only to a few, while the masses of Black Americans remained locked in a struggle to escape the clutches of institutionalized racism.

Chapter Six concludes its examination of political and economic co-optation by illustrating the peculiar and dubious nature of private corporations through the lens of the Brown University/Tougaloo College Partnership, a controversial relationship between two institutions worlds apart. For the promise of faculty and student exchange opportunities, and more importantly, greater access to foundation monies, Tougaloo slowly relinquished its role as an enclave for movement participants. Students were being steered in a totally different direction by those who desired a different purpose for Black institutions. As the scales of righteousness continued to teeter back and forth, Black students questioned deeply many of these moves to *improve* their institutions and embraced a growing shift in the ideological principles of the movement. This conversion

in ideology found students more defiant about their dissatisfaction with the goals of non-violent direct action tactics adopted by the Southern based clergy and their followers. The co-optation of Black institutions quickened the demobilization of a movement that was just beginning to embrace a more militant tone. As chants of Black Power and demands for the Second Curriculum to replace the first surfaced on Black college campuses, the movement that was sparked by youthful idealism and the courage of Black students entered into its waning stages.

Black colleges reached an apostasy with the dawning of the Black Power era. Though numerous institutions would play host to conferences and seminars that harangued endlessly on the possibilities of the new ideology, the materialization of a unified plan of action remained just out of reach of students and activists who fought among themselves as well as the forces of federal infiltration and co-optation. Black colleges were slowly transitioning into corporate breeding grounds, a ploy that channeled Black students away from their missions of community uplift and directly towards more self-serving means of employment. Although the structure of the Second Curriculum was left intact, the ends it was designed to serve were modified with the hope that the same generation of insurgents that had emerged to bring America to the brink of social revolution could never be produced from within the enclaves of Black colleges again.

The sources used in this dissertation are diverse. I have attempted to comb through years and volumes of student newspapers in order to present a true reflection of student thought. Both Tougaloo and Jackson State's newspapers have been utilized to this end. Local Mississippi newspapers have also been employed in order to tap into the local perspective during the periods of this study. I have also been afforded the

opportunity to talk to numerous participants in the struggle for Black liberation in Mississippi. Although I taped interviews with twenty two movement participants, I have only used half of those in this dissertation. A full list of informants is included in my acknowledgements. Interviews with participants were arranged and gathered through purposive or judgmental sampling. This technique allowed me to select individuals that were deemed most useful and representative to the study. It must also be noted, that snowball sampling, a technique that allows respondents to suggest others informants to interview was also used as a means of gathering supportive data. To complete this study I have made use of several archives and gained access to personal papers and memoirs of several former students, faculty, and, administrators. A full list of those papers and archives are included in the bibliography of this dissertation.

The need for a dissertation such as this one is further advanced by the lack of secondary sources that have fully taken up the impact and role of Black colleges and schools during the struggle for Black liberation. Although many of these secondary sources are excellent local studies that provide snapshots of various historical eras, most authors who have conducted research on these crucial institutions, have failed to apply a longitudinal study that would allow a full spectrum of analysis and understanding. Works falling in this category include, Raymond Wolters, *New Negro on Campus: Black College Rebellions of the 1920's*, William Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865-1954*, Vanessa Walker, *Their Highest Potential: An African American School Community in the Segregated South*, Robert Norrell, *Reaping the Whirlwind: The Civil Rights Movement in Tuskegee*, August Meier, *A White Scholar and the Black Community, 1945-1965*, Kenneth King, *Pan-Africanism*

and Education: A Study of Race Philanthropy and Education in the Southern States of America and East Africa, Dwight O. Holmes, *The Evolution of the Negro College*, Harry Edwards, *Black Students*, Henry Drewry and Humphrey Doermann, *Stand and Prosper: Private Black Colleges and Their Students*, William Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom*, Horace Mann Bond, *The Education of the Negro in the American Social Order*, and James Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860 – 1935*. There are litanies of studies that are episodic in nature, covering only various events that occurred in and around Black college campuses. I have chosen not to include them in this brief historiography because their purpose is to expose the circumstances surrounding the event and not the culture or history of Black colleges and their role in the struggle for Black liberation. It is my hope that this dissertation adds a significant contribution to the literature by helping us further understand who these students were by examining the enclaves that produced them.

This dissertation's primary focus is on the generations that predated the advent of Black Power on college campuses. It was during these difficult and trying years that Black institutions in Mississippi planted seeds of resistance that advanced the struggle by whatever means available to them. Most often, these tactics emphasized two essential ideas, uplift and survival. The list of Black scholars and leaders who emerged from these institutions is tremendous, complete with pacesetting luminaries and inglorious servants to the masses. These enclaves of hope were critical components in the struggle for Black liberation. By historicizing these complex institutions, it is my hope that we can achieve a greater understanding of how these institutions served as shelters in a time of storm.

CHAPTER 2

MASTERPIECES OR CARICATURES: THE ORIGINS AND ESSENCE OF BLACK EDUCATION IN JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI

“If what “is possible” was to be demonstrated, there must be institutions for those whose gifts, attainments, character, and example should make them a constant and large uplifting hope for others; a steadying power and a wise guidance for those not equally privileged or endowed, and which should give opportunity for the youth of the future, whose intellectual capacity might justify the largest mental furnishing. Therefore they said, educate, educate, educate! in all ways, from the lowest to the highest, for whatever is possible for a full-orbed manhood and womanhood.”

**- *A Crusade of Brotherhood*
Augustus F. Beard
1909**

The piney woods and red clay landscape of the south, offered little that could reassure and console the millions of formerly enslaved Africans who witnessed the dawning of what historians have referred to as their “Nadir”. The devaluation of Black life and the unmitigated violence against African Americans that characterized life in the South for decades following the Civil War, created a social and political chasm that would navigate the struggles of Black people for years to come. Responding to the political storms that swirled around him, H.P. Jacobs, a Black Baptist minister from Mississippi, declared, “we find in the face of all that heathenish teaching, that slavery is dead; and as such we all ought to be engaged in building up the old waste places.”¹ Jacobs, who was a former fugitive slave, linked together with fellow Baptist ministers

¹ Patrick H. Thompson, *The History of Negro Baptists in Mississippi* (Jackson, Mississippi: W.H. Bailey Printing Co., 1898), 62.

who recognized the necessity of providing a physical and psychological shelter from the raging tempest of southern white aggression.

To achieve this end, Jacob and other Black Baptists acquired an old Marine hospital that would serve as a seminary to educate young ministers and to train Black teachers. After much deliberation, trial and setbacks, their labor produced Natchez Seminary in Natchez, Mississippi. The school opened its doors on October 23, 1877, almost eight years after Jacobs and his cohorts had proposed the development of a school to serve Black youth. During the fall of 1869, the same year that the idea for a school in Natchez was first mentioned, the American Missionary Association (AMA) transformed the former Boddie plantation in Tougaloo, Mississippi, from what once was a well of pain and sorrow into a place of shelter and refuge; designating it as the future site of a normal and agricultural school for Blacks. Natchez Seminary became Jackson College upon moving to Jackson, Mississippi in October of 1883. The institution officially came under state control in 1940 and achieved university status on March 15, 1974. The normal and agricultural school founded by the AMA in 1869 would later be named Tougaloo University on May 13, 1871 and finally changed its name to Tougaloo College in 1916.

While it is clear that both of these institutions provided education for former slaves and their descendants, the results of the social and political space created by these enclaves is an area that deserves more scholarly attention. Conceived in paternalism and molded in the fashion of northern white colleges in regards to pedagogy and curriculum, historically Black colleges and the students they produced were never expected to challenge the dominant paradigm of white supremacy in the south. Nor were they

expected to serve as agents of change by constructing self esteem and expanding the intellectual horizons of children who were destined to carry forth the struggle for liberation. They were expected to produce “good” Christian citizens with an industrial or vocational background who understood their role and place in the southern caste system.¹ Schools such as Hampton and Tuskegee Institute embodied this non-threatening curriculum and served as models for what white southerners saw as the possibilities and limits of Black education. The northern philanthropist William Baldwin noted for example, “that the Hampton program would achieve the proper racial hierarchy by teaching Black youth to “work with their hands,” to have “few wants” and to stay in their “natural environment.”² However, the legacies of Black colleges are as “peculiar” as the system of slavery from which it begat. As Black institutions matured and grew in number, the original vision of their founders and white supporters was replaced by a sense of empowerment that grew with every passing generation.

What role did southern Black colleges play in the flowering of courage and conviction among its graduates? Did the environment provided by Black colleges hinder the development of consciousness among its students and graduates as some scholars have suggested? Or did these institutions, facing great external and internal pressures, nonetheless find ways to provide space for young Black minds to grow, expand, and

¹ The AMA was responsible for the founding of several Black colleges in the south. One of their primary goals was to bring “civility” and “morality” to a “benighted” people fresh from the bonds of slavery. By establishing these schools during the wake of the Civil War, they, along with their Black supporters, took deliberate care to ensure that southern whites did not perceive these schools as threats to the social structure. For more on the AMA and their role in the founding of Black colleges in the south, see Augustus Beard, *A Crusade of Brotherhood: A History of the American Missionary Association* (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1909).

² James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860 – 1935* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988) 82.

believe in their own capabilities? This study will show that not only did these institutions provide that space, but that a Second Curriculum, seldom mentioned in past scholarship, taught Black youth the intrinsic value in unity and collective power. In the larger society, unsheltered and exposed to rhetoric that attempted to convince them their social status was sub-human at worse and second-class citizenship at best, young Black students most certainly would have faced daunting challenges in developing their self-esteem and finding their self-worth. Commenting on the prospects of an integrated school system at the height of racial antipathy in the south, scholar and activist W.E.B. Dubois concluded that such a system would destroy the intellectual gifts stored inside the hearts and minds of Black children. He noted that "...the result of the experiment may be complete ruin of character, gift, and ability and ingrained hatred of schools and men. For the kind of battle thus indicated, most children are under no circumstances suited."³ Institutions such as Tougaloo College and Jackson State reassured Black students of their self-worth and intelligence. But what is more, they provided Black students a safe haven to exchange ideas with their peers, make valuable contact with their Black instructors, learn of events that took place throughout the African Diaspora, and most importantly to receive a charge that upon their graduation, to work for the upliftment of the race.

During the early stages of Black education in the south, the paramount task for these institutions was self-preservation. Many Black colleges that relied on their funding from the state gradually transferred stewardship of the institutions from white to Black hands. These new caretakers of the institutions were placed in a precarious position. To

³ W.E.B. Dubois, "Does the Negro Need Separate Schools," *The Journal of Negro Education*, (June, 1935) 334.

provide education and hope for the African American masses, Black college presidents had to depend on the good graces of the white “city fathers” and financing from the state, both which were given under the presumed condition that Black schools would not challenge the dominant paradigm of white supremacy. Private schools were under no less a burden to submit to the control of their white trustees and major benefactors. What the renowned Black educator Horace Mann Bond referred to as the “awakening of private conscience,” can be best interpreted as an attempt by private financiers to control the intellectual development and direction of young Black Americans. Organizations such as the American Missionary Association and foundations such as the Phelps-Stokes Fund and the General Education Board poured millions of dollars into privately controlled institutions with the understanding that the end product would form a cadre of both docile workers and conservative leaders.⁴ The vision of Black institutions producing young Black men and women who would one day help turn the tide of swelling race hatred and oppression could not take hold if those institutions were controlled by those who benefited from white supremacy. Historian James Anderson notes:

As Black colleges became increasingly dependent on donations from northern industrial philanthropist, the missionaries and Black educators found it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to accept philanthropic gifts and assert simultaneously that many of the political and economic aims of the philanthropists were at variance with the fundamental interests of the Black masses.⁵

⁴ For more information on the role of private contributors to Black colleges see Horace Mann Bond, *The Education of the Negro in the American Social Order* (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1966), Kenneth James King, *Pan-Africanism and Education: A Study of Race Philanthropy and Education in the Southern States of America and East Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), J.L. Curry, *A Brief Sketch of George Peabody, and the History of the Peabody Educational Fund Through Thirty Years* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), and Merle Curti and Roderick Nash, *Philanthropy in the Shaping of American Higher Education* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1965).

⁵ Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*, 276.

Philanthropic organizations and foundations routinely reflected racist assumptions on the capabilities of Black students and the prospects of race relations in the Deep South. When the possibility of Tougaloo appointing its first Black faculty member arose in 1877, the A.M.A. pressured the school's administration to suspend all talk of doing so. Author Clarice Campbell notes, "When Thomas Chase, representing the A.M.A, asked where a colored teacher would sit at meals, Colonel Power proposed that she be put at the head of a student table. Neither the state board nor the A.M.A. official was prepared for Black and white to eat at the same table."⁶ Subsequent issues connected to the hiring of African American faculty resulted in the A.M.A. drastically cutting its funding to Tougaloo.⁷ Yet Black colleges managed to stay financially afloat, keeping their doors open despite their economic hardships. In such an environment, open discussion of the social and political strivings of the race would have certainly brought the wrath of whites and the foreclosure of schools that served as one of the few beacons of pride and hope for southern Blacks.

Were Black colleges actually meeting the goals intended by their white supporters or were they following a different agenda? What were they teaching their students and what type of social and political impact were their graduates making once they left their respective institutions? Clearly the colleges founded for the purpose of educating former slaves and their descendants patterned their curriculum on that of their white counterparts. Courses offered at Jackson College at the turn of the century included;

⁶ Clarice Campbell and Oscar Rogers Jr., *Mississippi: The View From Tougaloo* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1979) 104.

⁷ These funds would eventually be returned to Tougaloo as the era progressed and the hiring of Black faculty was viewed as acceptable and beneficial to the mission of the institution.

Algebra, Grammar, General History, History of Mississippi, Ethics, Latin, Greek, Physiology and Health, and the Bible. In reality, the early Black colleges were hardly colleges at all. The majority of these institutions were high schools at best. Jackson College did not grant its first Bachelors degree until 1924, 47 years after it first opened its doors to students. With a curriculum that seemingly lacked any history of the Black Diaspora or study of pressing contemporary issues, it would seem as though Black colleges were simply molding young men and women who would never question the status quo or directly challenge their status in a white world.

Perhaps the most obvious absence in the curriculum at Black institutions was the lack of history that embraced the role and contributions of Black people. To the credit of Black colleges and their administrators, this void was not due to lack of want by either students or faculty. In most cases, Black colleges had neither the proper faculty to adequately teach the subject nor the vast literature at their disposal. Discussing this problem, the preeminent historian Carter G. Woodson noted, “they have been handicapped, however, by the lack of teachers trained to do advanced work and by the dearth of unbiased literature adequate to the desired illumination.”⁸ Early Black historians such as Woodson, Charles Wesley, and W.E.B. Dubois, were scrambling to counteract the litany of scholarship that inadequately recorded the role or capabilities of newly freed Blacks. One of many obstacle faced by these Black scholars was the lack of funding to support their research. As historian William Banks commented, “Dubois was particularly riled when a white Mississippi planter with no scholarly credentials received

⁸ See Carter G. Woodson, “Negro Life and History in our Schools” in *The Journal of Negro History* (July, 1919) 278.

funds from the Carnegie Institution to conduct a historical study of Blacks. Dubois himself had been turned down when he requested funds for a similar study.”⁹ This reality handicapped both Black scholars and Black institutions.

Nonetheless, Black colleges found various ways to celebrate the culture of Black people. The libraries of most colleges made Black publications accessible to students whose interest in scholarship reflecting Black contributions was extremely high.¹⁰ College students were made aware of the world around them but seldom were instructed to accept that reality as permanent. To this end, students accessed Black newspapers either through their college libraries or at local places where they were sold. Their inclination to receive knowledge of Black culture through the press was met with little resistance from college faculty. Hortense Powdermaker, in her major work, *After Freedom: A Cultural Study of the Deep South*, noted, “Metropolitan dailies from Jackson or Memphis, Negro weeklies--chief among them the *Chicago Defender*--are read especially by those who go on to secondary school or college...The Negro papers, with their emphasis on race, are a constant stimulus to race consciousness.”¹¹

Thus while the study of Black history and the story of the struggle were absent from the formal curriculum, they were manifest in the extra-curricular activities that students engaged in on Black college campuses. Perhaps no other clubs or organizations

⁹ William M. Banks, *Black Intellectuals: Race and Responsibility in American Life* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996) 39.

¹⁰ See Mollie E. Dunlap, “Recreational Reading of Negro College Students,” *The Journal of Negro Education*, (October, 1933).

¹¹ Hortense Powdermaker, *After Freedom: A Cultural Study in the Deep South* (New York: The Viking Press, 1939) 320.

reflect this fact better than the literary societies at Black colleges. In the early stages of Black college development, these organizations competed with athletics as one of the most popular extra-curricular activities among Black students. Students who participated in literary societies and debate teams were extremely popular on campus. James Weldon Johnson recalled, “they thrilled the large audiences that filled the chapel on special occasions; and the applause they received was without question a higher approbation than the cheers given to players on the baseball field.”¹² The founding of these societies represented not only an opportunity for students to develop their own sense of self worth and place, but it also allowed them to make contact with faculty who encouraged this personal development. Historian Monroe Little added, “Tougaloo College’s faculty and students founded the Willard and Cheeseman Literary societies...Elsewhere, there was hardly a Black school that did not have at least one literary society.”¹³

While literary societies were also popular on white campuses during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, their focus differed greatly from the societies on Black campuses. Perhaps more important were the books that were read and subjects debated amongst literary society members. The subject materials embraced by these societies further illustrate a Black student body that was not disconnected from the Black community or the Black world for that matter. Among the several topics debated and discussed on Black college campuses were, “was Phyllis Wheatley the greatest of African

¹² James Weldon Johnson, *Along This Way: The Autobiography of James Weldon Johnson* (New York: The Viking Press, 1935) 79.

¹³ Ibid, 136.

poets”, “Black protest against Jim Crow ‘car laws’ in the South”, and “textbooks for Black schools by Black authors.”¹⁴

By the 1920’s, Black institutions of learning were also observing Negro History Week, a celebration instituted by Carter G. Woodson in 1926. This celebration was of great importance considering the unmitigated race hatred and terrorism that defined the every day existence of Black life down south. But within the enclave of Black institutions, young men and women found the message of self-love and pride that they desperately needed to contravene the constant flow of white hostility. Black educational institutions offered them an opportunity to be comfortable with their Blackness and embrace their heritage. They were not beast of burden nor were they the footstools of the world. Within the enclave, students represented the hopes and dreams of former slaves and their cultural background was not to be looked upon with disdain; it was to be venerated. As Powdermaker noted:

Many of the larger colored schools attempt to emphasize Negro history, and have special periods devoted to the accomplishments of outstanding Negroes. Some of the Negro children know something about all the prominent members of their race--poets, prizefighters, or tap dancers. Sometimes the schools join together to celebrate a “Negro History Week,” during which race consciousness and race pride come to the fore. The knowledge of Negro achievement increases the student’s self-respect and gives him a respect for his race, beyond anything his parents and grandparents ever had. More than this, it enhances his own expectations....As his expectations enlarge, so do his demands.¹⁵

Neither the purpose nor the pedagogy of Black education in the south lacked a spiritual message that sustained hope amidst political and social chaos. Christianity both then and now served as a powerful force in an area known now as the “Bible belt”.

¹⁴ See Monroe Little, “The Extra-Curricular Activities of Black College Students 1868-1940,” *The Journal of Negro Education*, (Spring, 1980) 137.

¹⁵ Powdermaker, 321.

Offering both spiritual release and social commentary, Christianity was the bedrock of Black life in Mississippi and throughout the south. The education of Black youth was largely viewed as an opportunity to insert God into the curriculum and, more importantly, into the daily lives of young men and women. However, white religious organizations such as the American Missionary Association and the American Baptist Home Mission Society were predisposed to the idea that Blacks were licentious and amoral. The result of this distortion was that during the early years of institutions such as Tougaloo and Jackson State, the campus environment was exceptionally rigid with an emphasis on moral training for young men and women.

Although a curriculum inclusive of religion was established to provide a moral compass for Black students and training for Black ministers, the implicit social critique found within the scriptures meant much more to a Black community that was in desperate need of political and social uplift. Southern Blacks openly embraced Christianity. A message that spoke of “liberation from bondage” and “the meek shall inherit the earth,” resonated within communities and schools that needed hope and empowerment in their darkest moments. The majority of Black institutions were founded to train ministers and teachers. These two professions spoke to the most pivotal concerns of Black America; leadership and the direction of the future. The shelter provided by Black educational enclaves was essential in the development of both. With this understanding in hand, Blacks in Mississippi and throughout the south would place their faith in the God that sustained them through slavery and the gift that He presented to them upon their liberation from bondage: education. In her study of Black life in Mississippi, Powdermaker captured the importance of this phenomenon.

Education has become a symbol representing escape from all that made life difficult and attainment of all that has so far been withheld. Christianity offered hopes of a world to come. The new faith recommends a means to better things on earth. The one preached passive endurance for the sake of future reward. The other encourages an active attempt to capture benefits here and now.¹⁶

Young ministers trained at southern Black schools not only became recognized leaders of their congregations, but often made their churches centers for outreach and uplift. They learned their responsibility to serve their community during their training at Black colleges. One college administrator commented, “the aim of all the religious work in our institution is to build up a strong Christian character, to develop the spirit of service, and to train in the methods and the habit of religious work.”¹⁷ Religious work was not reserved for those who sought training as ministers. Courses on religion and the doctrines of Christianity were embedded in the early curriculums of Black colleges and all students were given the opportunity to enroll in these classes. Those students who chose religious education received a message of servitude and compassion that was consistent with the teachings of the gospel. Reinforcing this message, several Black colleges offered their students opportunities to engage in community service. Among these activities were: ministering to the poor, prison visitations, assisting at retirement homes, orphanages, and asylums, serving as Sunday school teachers, assisting various temperance societies, and working with the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) and the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA). One institution, Fisk

¹⁶ Powdermaker, 300.

¹⁷ David Henry Sims, “Religious Education in Negro Colleges and Universities,” *The Journal of Negro History*, April 1920, 199.

University, actually established its own settlement house.¹⁸ Speaking to the role of religious studies at Black colleges in the 1920's, David Henry Sims noted, "Religious education is the process by which the individual in response to a controlled environment achieves a progressive, conscious social order based on regard for the worth and destiny of every individual...The end of religious education is service."¹⁹ Students did not shy away from enrolling in religious courses that emphasized service to the broader community. According to the *Religious Education Magazine*, out of a total of 16 college students enrolled at Tougaloo in 1915, 11 opted to enroll in voluntary courses for religious education.²⁰

Christianity was not just part of the local ethos in Mississippi. The core of this belief system and its interpretation within the Black community rested upon both anticipation of a better life in the "hereafter" and hope for improved conditions in the "here and now". To this end, Black colleges immersed their future ministers into a reservoir of hope and the tradition of the Black church. This tradition, both overtly and covertly offered a social critique ensconced in a spiritual message. Theologian James Cone observed:

Black theology is a theology of liberation because it is a theology which arises from an identification with the oppressed Blacks of America, seeking to interpret the gospel of Jesus in the light of the Black condition. It believes that the liberation of the Black community is Gods liberation. The task of Black theology then, is to analyze the nature of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the light of oppressed Blacks so they will see the gospel as inseparable from their humiliated

¹⁸ Ibid, 194

¹⁹ Ibid, 203

²⁰ Ibid, 207

condition, and as bestowing on them the necessary power to break the chains of oppression. This means that it is a theology of and for the Black community, seeking to interpret the religious dimensions of the forces of liberation in that community.²¹

While numerous studies have illustrated the role of the church in the struggle for Black liberation, few studies have examined the Black colleges and institutions throughout the south that were the training grounds for these ministers.

In a landscape that would remain largely dependent on the agrarian lifestyle for much of the twentieth century, Black Mississippians still valued education and sought to attain it by whatever means available to them despite being caught up in the unprincipled economic system of sharecropping. Black institutions located in the rural south, offered their students more than the routine curriculum aimed at preparing future teachers and ministers. In the Deep South and especially in Mississippi, the practicality of education meant lessons with hammer and hoe along with the acquirement of arts and letters. The most prominent advocate of industrial and vocational education was Booker T.

Washington. Washington, himself a graduate of Hampton Institute, promoted industrial education as the foundation upon which Black Americans, particularly those living in the south, should build upon. Washington's vision was deeply influenced by his southern ties and his understanding of the agrarian lifestyles that defined the lives of former slaves.

He noted:

There were young men educated in foreign tongues, but few in carpentry or in mechanical or architectural drawing. Many were trained in Latin, but few as engineers and Blacksmiths. Too many were taken from the farm and educated, but educated in everything but farming...And yet eighty-five per cent of the

²¹ James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1986) 4.

Negro population of the Southern states lives and for a considerable time will continue to live in the country districts.²²

Washington's zeal for industrial education won him many supporters both Black and white. His sojourns through the south brought him into contact with whites who viewed his influence as helpful in cultivating a tenuous relationship with local Blacks. Yet Washington understood that both his message and his status could be easily interpreted as a threat to poor whites that would have to compete with a skilled class of Black laborers. In a region of the country where lawlessness and terrorism was the common method of dealing with "out of place" Blacks, Washington embraced the only solution he believed would be in the best interest for both parties: segregation. In his famous speech at the Atlanta Exposition in 1895, Washington professed before a crowd of whites that, "in all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress."²³ This message resonated loudly in states like Mississippi. In the Magnolia State, anything resembling race mixing met swift reprisal or worse. In 1901, Jackson College, for instance was forced to move to the west side of the city due to its growing proximity to Millsaps College, a local white school.²⁴ Segregated institutions like Jackson State and Tougaloo survived by following local customs and embracing a non-threatening curriculum; anything else would have

²² Booker T. Washington, *The Negro Problem: A Series of Articles by Representative American Negroes of Today* (New York: AMS Press, 1903) 13.

²³ Diana Wells, *We Have A Dream: African American Visions of Freedom* (New York: Carrol & Graf Publishers, 1993) 125.

²⁴ Natchez Seminary moved from Natchez, Mississippi to Jackson in 1882 in order to secure a central location in the state. They changed their name to Jackson College a year later to honor Andrew Jackson, for whom Jackson, Mississippi is named.

assuredly brought their demise. Washington's observations of Mississippi further illustrate his attempts to paint a picture of optimism on race relations and the role that industrial education could play in nurturing that relationship. In a visit to Mississippi in 1908 he contended:

It is generally supposed that the coloured man, in his efforts to rise, meets more opposition in Mississippi than anywhere else in the United States, but it is quite as true that there, more than anywhere else, the coloured people seem to have discovered that, in gaining habits of thrift and industry, in getting property, and in making themselves useful, there is a door of hope open for them which the South has no disposition to close.²⁵

The Washingtonian philosophy of casting buckets where one stands was designed to prepare students who needed the utilitarian skills to earn a living. A clear example of this purpose can be found in the establishment of Piney Woods Country Life School in 1909. Piney Woods was located a few miles outside of Jackson, Mississippi and was one of several financially struggling schools that served the Black youth across the state. As its founder, Laurence Jones, campaigned across the state raising funds for Piney Woods he validated the significance of the curriculum that would be adopted there. Beth Day, the schools chronicler, writes:

Before one group of backwoods folks who had commented admiringly on his polished speech and manner of dressing Laurence began a second address with, "*Esse quid hoc dicam vivis quod fama negatur et sua quod rarus tempora lector amat?*" Then, as they nodded in delighted and self-deprecating wonder at such scholarship, he lashed out, "What does that sentence in Latin really mean to you or to me? Does it earn my living? Does it put meat on my table? No, it's nothing but showoff. Our problem, yours and mine, is to find how to make the most of our land and our gardens so that we can eat all year round. We must learn how to do jobs well, so that folks will hire us." With that he whipped out a copy of *Wallace's Farmer* and read to them practical advice on raising better food crops and the necessity for more sanitary conditions around

²⁵ Booker T. Washington, *My Larger Education: Being Chapters From My Experience* (New York: Doubleday, 1911) 197

a farm.²⁶

Despite what seemed to be a very pragmatic pedagogy being adopted in rural Black schools, there were many who viewed this curriculum through the stained lenses of racism. Most Black schools in the south adopted curriculums like that of Piney Woods that equipped their students with the skills that would help them pursue careers in various trades and crafts upon their graduation. However it was not done without the close supervision and begrudging support of local whites. Although many whites doubted the abilities of young Black minds to grasp more thought provoking literature, even more feared the consequences of a curriculum that taught Black students that their gifts could help awaken and organize a people suffering at the hands of southern terrorism. White supporters consequently promoted Black education while simultaneously advertising Black ignorance. When reviewing a curriculum that stressed the liberal arts over industrial training for Blacks, the president of the State Teachers Association in Mississippi concluded that it was like “giving a stone to him who asks for bread.”²⁷ Clearly the racist views of whites coupled with the accommodationist policies of Booker T. Washington made for strange bedfellows. Southern whites openly marginalized the opportunities for African Americans to survive and thrive and Washington’s followers attempted to create sufficient, albeit unequal space, for the betterment of Blacks. Yet Washington’s vision of a Mississippi that offered ample opportunity for Blacks and a

²⁶ Piney Woods remains as one of only five historically Black boarding schools in the United States that is still in operation. For more information on the history of this school and its mission see Beth Day, *The Little Professor of Piney Woods: The Story of Professor Laurence Jones* (New York: Julia Messner, 1955), 29.

²⁷ Stuart Noble, *Forty Years of the Public Schools in Mississippi: With Special Reference to the Education of the Negro* (New York: Teachers College Press. Columbia University, 1918), 104.

door of hope that swung open without white resistance was a mirage. Economic and political intimidation and state sanctioned violence continued to ebb the tide of Black protest and resistance at the turn of the century, fostering a culture of frustration and fear in Mississippi and throughout the south. If Black education was to serve as the catalyst for a people ascending from the ashes of slavery, then it would have to be composed of much more than lessons in agriculture and industry or even a curriculum patterned after the finest New England schools.

As *de jure* and *de facto* segregation anchored into southern societies, African Americans turned to one of the few outlets of hope that remained: Black educational institutions. The schools were poorly equipped with meager resources and most of the teachers were barely “qualified” to be instructing students. But streams of students emerged from the surrounding cotton fields and plantations and poured into one room school houses that if judged on “equal” standards could barely be called a room let alone a school. Those students with academic promise and a burning desire for further studies enrolled into local Black colleges and institutions. Black parents concluded that if the race was to be “uplifted”, then it would be by those who sought and attained education. One Mississippi student recalled, “My parents were poor yet they kept me supplied with books and saw to it that I attended our rural school regularly. At the age of fourteen I entered Tougaloo University.”²⁸ Early reflections on Black education demonstrate that Black parents who could afford to send their children off to school were seldom concerned with what type of education was to be received. Black parents placed value in

²⁸ *The College Bred Negro American* (The Atlanta University Publications, No. 15, 1910) 64.

the environment and the outcome which they prayed would present better days for future generations. Whether this education resembled industrial education or liberal arts was of little consequence for many parents. The parents of one student desired that schools provide students with an education “in obedience to their inclinations and gifts and without prejudice for or against any particular training.”²⁹ The environment cultivated by Black schools was important in recognizing and uncovering the gifts of children that had been cast away by mainstream society. What was needed was an environment and a school that practiced holistic education. Institutions that found worth and value in dusty Black bodies and untapped minds would be necessary if the prayers of Black parents were to be answered. The simple wish of one parent embodied the hopes of a million when he/she concluded, “I propose to give them as complete an education as they can receive.”³⁰

Black colleges such as Jackson State and Tougaloo would have to do much more than simply shelter their students from the storms of white tyranny. If students were to emerge from Black campuses as those who would help uplift the race, then they must be empowered from within the enclave. It was critical that institutions provided space that constructed Black self-esteem, not dissembled it. This environment would have to produce a curriculum that spoke not to the mind alone, but one that ministered to the heart and soul as well. Famed activist and Howard University educator Kelly Miller noted in 1908 that, “it is the spirit, not the letter that maketh alive.”³¹ The spirit that

²⁹ Ibid, 83.

³⁰ Ibid, 84.

³¹ Kelly Miller, *Race Adjustment: Essays on the Negro in America* (New York: The Neale Publishing Company, 1908) 273.

circulated within Black colleges and the missions of these schools therefore had to make these campuses social refuges with life affirming powers rather than the repressive, sterile, life draining institutions that they have often been depicted as. Had they been the latter, then it is inconceivable that they could have produced the future activist, leaders, poets, and scholars that they did. What Miller was alluding to was the unwritten Second Curriculum that placed the hope for tomorrow into young men and women that filed into Black schools and classrooms on a daily basis. This Second Curriculum inspired and uplifted the spirits of young Black minds and in doing so, provided the window of opportunity to one day openly challenge the systematic and institutionalized racism that gripped the nation.

Holistic education with the goal of collective survival and betterment served as the core of the Second Curriculum. Many Black teachers saw students as extensions of themselves. This did not mean that professors saw students on the same intellectual level, but that professors understood that they too were just a wrong glance or word away from being subjugated to the same mob justice that any other Black person could and did receive in the south. The collective struggles of Black people kept them linked in some way, shape, or form. The development of Black community served as a shelter in itself, and professors, staff, and students were all apart of that same community connected by the color of their skin. Holistic education, therefore, became the essence of Black education in the south as instructors at Black educational institutions saw collective value in nurturing the student academically and personally. Alvis Adair writes that:

the teacher and pupil share a common interest and mission. The teachers view themselves as ethnically responsible for preparing these youths for future leadership and for making contributions to this unique mission, namely the

liberation and enhancement of the quality of life for Black people. Herein lies the unique Black teacher-pupil partnership that is not likely to be duplicated in the desegregated school setting.³²

In Black schools across the south, teachers made social uplift for the race part of their unwritten curriculum. Their contact and influence upon Black youth was fashioned in a way that reinforced self-esteem that if left in the hands of white society would have surely been crushed or utterly destroyed.

This legacy of holistic education withstood the passage of time. As Black college students at schools like Tougaloo and Jackson State received their charge, they went forth to encounter Black youth in various capacities, most notably as teachers themselves. They, like their predecessors, understood that any instruction shrouded in dispassionate and callous technique would have produced educated minds lacking any race pride or consciousness. This lesson proved important in the gradual cultivation of a student generation that would possess the courage and conviction to take bold steps in their attack on Jim Crow policies in the south. In discussing this training, Vanessa Walker concluded that:

This system of community values-values that were possibly reinforced in their colleges-as well as the influence of the school leadership is significant in explaining which definitions were adopted. Thus, while the principal may be said to have nurtured, rewarded, and reinforced the principles he felt to be important for student development, his prodding's frequently worked in conjunction with the teachers' existing belief systems.³³

³² Alvis Adair, *Desegregation: The Illusion of Black Progress* (New York: University Press of America, 1984) 122.

³³ Vanessa Walker, *Their Highest Potential: An African American School Community in the Segregated South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996) 207.

The principles of Black educators in the south were undoubtedly shaped by the training they received while students at Black colleges. Although the white supporters of these segregated institutions approved of the curriculums that espoused industrial training or even liberal arts mastery, they never imagined the impact that the Second Curriculum had in swelling pride and confidence amongst Black students. One southern white claimed that “if there is one thing southern white man cannot endure it is an educated Negro.”³⁴ What many southern whites objected to, however, was not necessarily an “educated Negro” that knew how to fix a plow or instruct a classroom. The greatest threat to the social order in the south was an ‘educated Negro’ that actually believed in him or herself. Many of them gained that belief within the shelter of Black colleges and universities.

In areas such as Mississippi, institutions such as Jackson College and Tougaloo were expected to be a part of the “control” mechanism as much as any other device that southern whites could imagine or invent. Author William Watkins notes, “Black education thus became the central political weapon by which Blacks would be introduced and inducted into America’s social organization. Black education invited Blacks to participate in, without disrupting, the social order.”³⁵ Watkins makes a valid point that is sustained when one examines the history behind the purpose. However, when one examines the history behind the outcome, there is a different picture. Within the walls of “Black education” there was another lesson being taught. The control that the “white architects of Black education” intended to always stay in place, eroded throughout the years. Black social movements such as Pan-Africanism and the Harlem Renaissance, and

³⁴ Lorretta Funke, “The Negro in Education,” *Journal of Negro History*, January 1920

³⁵ William Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865-1954* (New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 2001), 181.

the efforts of local Black people, who challenged the white power structure throughout the years, contributed to the rise in Black consciousness and resistance. Yet does not the environment that one is nurtured and sustained in make a difference in their personal convictions and goals? While at Fisk, did W.E.B. Dubois receive words from professors that encouraged and pushed him through? Was Zora Neal Hurston impacted by her tenure at Howard? Watkins ignores the impact of the Second Curriculum. Within the walls of “Black education” emerged a movement that disrupted the prevailing social order. Black students, from Black schools, receiving “Black education” of a different sort, would be influenced by their time spent at Black institutions, by the relationships developed amongst faculty and friends, and by the confidence in themselves only sustained within these southern sanctuaries. Historian Manning Marable notes:

People who experience a kind of holistic oppression find ways to develop an enclave. They find ways to develop values that nurture young children so that they are not given the message and internalize the message that we are nobody. And they are also given one other value; a sense of dignity and a sense of mission.³⁶

Black control and more importantly the hiring of African American faculty presented a new era for Black schools. Although some Black administrators’ interaction with staff and faculty could be considered tantamount to an overseer versus slave relationship, they could not at all time and all ways control the close interaction of faculty and students. Historically, this relationship proved to be critical to the advancement of “radical” activity and the rise in political consciousness among Black students. In 1911, Jackson College, under increasing pressure by parents and students, appointed its first Black president. Lelia Rhodes, the compiler of Jackson State’s history wrote:

³⁶ *Making Sense of the Sixties: We Can Change the World*, video, PBS Video, 1991.

February 1911, President Barrett submitted his resignation to the board. He strongly recommended that, in an effort to establish rapport, to effect improved relationships between the races and to dispel doubts among the Black brethren of the community who had begun to voice their dissatisfaction with the white administrators (many viewing the latter's services as paternalistic). They felt that Jackson College should be run by a Black administration and faculty.³⁷

Rhodes went on to note that following the appointment of a Black president and the increase of Black faculty, enrollment rose as well. Clearly students as well as the communities surrounding Black colleges felt a sense of empowerment with the presence of an enclave whose purpose was to help uplift the Black race. But was it more than the presence of Black faculty and administrators that inspired students? What type of conversations took place in the private hours shared by instructor and student? Did professors with memberships to the NAACP or the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) discuss political issues with students publicly or privately? Did Black women working more intimately with students in the dorms and in other capacities assigned specifically to women play a special role in encouraging students to aspire to higher goals that would elevate the race?³⁸

Prevailing analyses of Black colleges invariably conclude that they were paternalistic and their curriculums were conformist if not geared toward assimilation. There are those scholars who have portrayed Black colleges as conservative fantasy lands

³⁷ Lelia Rhodes, *Jackson State University: The First Hundred Years, 1877-1977* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1979) 47.

³⁸ For more on the role of women in the Civil Rights Movement, see Aldon Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: The Free Press, 1984), Jo Ann G. Robinson, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It* (Knoxville, The University of Tennessee Press, 1987), Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), and Tiya Morris, *Black Women's Civil Rights Activism in Mississippi: The Story of Womanpower Unlimited*, Ph.D. dissertation, Purdue University, 2002.

where Black students were neither encouraged to make contributions back to the Black community nor were they aware of the racially charged storms that swirled around them.³⁹ Professor Horace Cayton recounts a discussion with a colleague on the famous “lifting the veil” statue found on the campus of Tuskegee University. Both the conversation and the symbolism of the statue capture the essence of the mission of Black educational institutions like Tougaloo and Jackson State. Cayton concluded, “I studied on it a long time but for the life of me I couldn’t figure out if Booker T. was lifting the veil of ignorance from that Negro’s brow or hiding him from the white folks!”⁴⁰ Ironically, Black institutions did both. Black educators and parents hid their most precious commodity away from the violent social and political storms that could have battered and bruised them. This shelter, however, was never meant to be permanent. Indeed its protective covering lasted long enough to produce young men and women who believed in themselves and who accepted their mission to uplift the race.

The role that these “conservative” enclaves played in developing a generation of insurgency has been largely ignored by scholars or defined in ways that fail to yield a full

³⁹ Several scholars have identified Black educational institutions as reservoirs of complacency and conservatism. Their interpretation presents a narrow understanding of the role of these enclaves. Existing studies of Black education in the state of Mississippi present little evidence of student activism prior to the dawn of the modern civil rights movement during the 1950’s and 60’s. These studies are exceptionally thorough in presenting the logistical and administrative challenges confronting Black colleges but offer little insight on the seeds of activism planted in Black college students or their alumnus. For additional reading on the history of Black education in Mississippi see: Ernest B. Allen, *A Vision of the South* (New York: American Missionary Association, 18??); Stuart Noble, *Forty Years of the Public Schools in Mississippi* (New York: Teachers College, 1918); Hortense Powdermaker, *After Freedom: A Cultural Study in the Deep South* (New York: The Viking Press, 1939); Vernon Wharton, *The Negro in Mississippi 1865-1890* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1947); Charles Wilson Sr., *Education for Negroes in Mississippi Since 1910* (Newton, MA: Meador Publishing Company, 1947); James Silver, *Mississippi: The Closed Society* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1963); David Sansing, *Making Haste Slowly: The Troubled History of Higher Education in Mississippi* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1990)

⁴⁰ Horace Cayton, *Long Old Road* (New York: Trident Press, 1965) 206.

interpretation of these crucial yet complex institutions. Our understanding of these institutions should not stop at this limited surmise but should also embrace their diverse nature. Were they masterpieces or caricatures? The answer is quite simple: they were neither. Formed in the likeness of their white equivalents and charged with the mission to uplift but not agitate, Black colleges could have easily become burial grounds for any semblance of radical thought or deed. But they were not. What the “white architects” intended as political death, Black students and the faculty that nurtured them resurrected as political life. What the “white architects” and many scholars have failed to understand is that the gathering of young Black minds, oppressed but bound together, has always yielded the fruit of activism and agitation. Though this activism ebbed and flowed like any other political and social movement, it was the presence of the enclave at the right place and right time that offered hope. In Mississippi, it was only a matter of time before Black students from Tougaloo, Jackson State, and even local high schools, translated their self-esteem into political and social strivings that would challenge the southern social structure. These shelters in a time of storm gave purpose and direction, but perhaps most importantly, they gave life; and gave it more abundantly.

CHAPTER 3

SILENCE OF THE OPPRESSED: EXPECTATIONS OF BLACK COLLEGE STUDENTS AND ALUMNUS DURING THE NADIR

“Our intelligentsia does not effectually grasp the actualities of racial life and uplift as the founders of our colleges hoped they would do. How to reinvigorate our collegians with the sense of racial responsibility and the quickening power of racial motive is the great task that devolves upon us. There is no problem that is more practical and pressing than this.”

**- Kelly Miller
Howard University Dean
1923**

“I laughed in the way I knew he expected me to laugh, but I resolved to be more conscious of myself, to watch every act, to guard and hide the new knowledge that was dawning within me.”

**- Richard Wright
Black Boy, 1937**

Race hatred and white supremacy reached unprecedented levels in early twentieth century America. In industry rich northern cities, the new immigrant work force from southern Europe drew the ire of those Progressive Era politicians who sought to cleanse America of its ethnic impurities. This sentiment was further entrenched during the first Red Scare as the lords of industry and anti-union supporters used suppressive anti-immigrant legislation in the name of patriotism to further advance industrial capitalism. In the west, America's dependence on the Asian labor force came in to question as competition for employment and the propaganda of zealous racists developed a strong anti-Asian sentiment that successfully disenfranchised Asian Americans and disturbed diplomatic relations between the two continents well into the twentieth century. Yet

these disturbances were but a ripple in the violent and blood filled stream of America's fixation with race. The "color line" that W.E.B. Dubois had so prophetically declared would be America's greatest problem of the twentieth century, continued to be most lucidly illustrated through the marred and often violent relationship between African-Americans and whites.

As the marginalization of Black rights became engrained in public policy and popular culture, Black political activists turned to what Dubois had characterized as the "talented tenth", those whose intellectual capabilities and institutional training had afforded them a "higher" station in life. It was this talented ten percent of the Black populace, educated mostly in Black colleges and institutions that he charged with carrying on the agitation for full emancipation to an unyielding and unresponsive America. As the educators of the talented tenth, Black institutions served as the primary depositories of hope, and with growing racial tension and worsening social conditions, more and more Black Americans began to look for an immediate return on their investments. The faith and hope placed in these institutions made it mandatory that they quickly produce generations of students who would lead the assault against white supremacy. Thus the fight for liberation was closely tied to the evolution and early development of Black colleges, as students and alumnus of these institutions found their assumed positions within the struggle.

The political strivings of Black America during a period of great indifference towards their cause created significant agency that would embolden and empower a new generation of activists. Following World War I, the spirit of the "new Negro" and the achievements of a cultural movement known as the Harlem Renaissance breathed life

into beleaguered Black communities. African Americans seeking refuge and renewal migrated to northern cities such as Chicago, Detroit, and New York with the hope that the nightmares and injustices they left behind in Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia would finally cease. Organizations such as the African Blood Brotherhood, The Urban League, The National Association of Colored Women, The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, The Universal Negro Improvement Association, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, all contributed mightily to the cause of uplift and equality in the early twentieth century. The struggles of the downtrodden and disenfranchised Black masses created a sense of urgency for those speaking on the behalf of the voiceless. The protest agenda called for the abolishment of Jim Crow laws, equal pay and equal work, securing the right to vote, ending the peonage and debt slavery embodied within share cropping, and access to equal educational opportunities.

Yet there was one crime against blackness and humanity that entombed communities in fear and sparked outrage among civil rights organizations. The lynching of Blacks became a routine affair and seldom was there little remorse or concern in the hearts of white America. Ears did not want to hear, nor did eyes care to see, the horrors and injustices that frequently characterized and defined Black life. In lamenting the state of Black America in the early twentieth century, Dubois declared, “what have we not seen, right here in America, of orgy, cruelty, barbarism, and murder done to men and women of Negro descent.”¹ Nowhere were these horrendous crimes against African Americans more profane than in the South. When political intimidation by terrorist

¹ W.E.B Dubois, *Darkwater: Voices From Within the Veil* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 1999) 19.

organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan did not succeed in subduing “out of place” African Americans, southern whites enforced their traditions and customs through lynch law. Lynch mobs preyed upon southern Blacks with a vigilante form of street justice whose end result often produced mangled and scorched black bodies to the delight of hundreds upon thousands of bloodthirsty onlookers. America did not flinch. The response from non-southerners was both eerily acquiescent and commending in nature. America proved that there was no form of terror or torture that could be practiced upon Black men, women, or children, that would cause the nation to publicly condemn the gruesome tragedies that helped to define the Black southern experience. The nation’s conscious would remain unmoved in all matters pertaining to injustices enacted upon Blacks, even when that silence openly contradicted the fight for liberty and democracy abroad during wartime America.

In the sweltering heat of the Mississippi sun, the wickedness and evil that threatened the lives of local Blacks reached mythical proportions. Mississippi’s reputation in race relations bordered on lawlessness and state sanctioned mobocracy. No other state in the union so successfully and unapologetically upheld what they viewed as good southern traditions. Historian Julius Thompson noted:

For at least one hundred and fifty years, Mississippi has held a special place within the consciousness of Black people in America...Mississippi represented America’s Siberia for Black people. In fact, the collective life experiences of Black Mississippians, over time have come to symbolize for the entire world community-the general plight of African-Americans in this nation...over the course of the last century, the state has become, in the consciousness of many people-a land of unyielding oppression; with its history of serfdom, peonage and lynching.²

² Julius Thompson, *Black Life in Mississippi: Essays on Political, Social, and Cultural Studies in a Deep South State* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2001) xxi

White Mississippians would use various forms of terrorism and torture to create a climate of fear and silence in the Magnolia state. The shadow of death was never far away from those who dared to challenge their assigned status. It would be years before Blacks in Mississippi developed the collective courage to break free from the culture of hate and horror that continuously threatened their lives. Civil Rights activist Unita Blackwell would eventually become one of the leaders of that movement against the Jim Crow system. In recounting her memories of Mississippi's blood stained past, Blackwell noted:

All your life was tiptoeing around white people. You had to watch what you said or what you did, or where you could stand, or when you could speak. Black men had to take their hats off and hold their head down and speak. "How you doin' boss?" You know that kind of thing....And we know what the alternative was. Some was beaten. "Did you talk back to me nigger?" And just walk up, hit 'em with anything they had. Sometimes with a pistol or whatever they had, in the mouth. You know it was horrible. But we come through hell.³

This era of open race hatred in Mississippi would have a lasting impact on the psyche of those charged with uplifting the race. Sociologist Charles S. Johnson, who would later go on to become president of Fisk University, noted that lynchings effect on Black youth would "leave deep scars of horror, fear, and dismay."⁴ If Dubois's theory of the "talented tenth" held true in Mississippi, then what plan of action would college students and alumnus of Black institutions construct while in the midst of such unspeakable horrors? Did a Second Curriculum that instilled self-confidence and purpose in the mind and souls of Mississippi's Black students make any difference in a state that openly raped, torched, and castrated those who violated the laws of whiteness?

³ Interview with Unita Blackwell 8/7/2004

⁴ Charles S. Johnson, *Growing Up in the Blackbelt: Negro Youth in the Rural South* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1941) 316.

In their earliest and most critical stage of development, Mississippi's Black colleges and the administrators responsible for their survival made a decision that surely tortured their conscious in an era that boasted of the proud "race man" and the promise of the "new Negro". Confronted with the state's infamous record on civil rights and with the fiscal and physical threats that awaited any overt forms of protest against local customs, Mississippi's Black institutions remained silent during the state's most violent years.

Mississippi outnumbered all states in lynching victims, a reality that would steadily increase in the early 20th century. Ironically these were the same years that the local Black institutions in Jackson, Mississippi, Tougaloo and Jackson College, expanded their curriculum, strengthened their financial standing, and increased their enrollment. Indeed most historically Black colleges experienced a period of relative expansion during the 1920's and 30's. Scholar Robert Brisbane documented this growth during the early 20th century as he noted that "a national survey indicated that enrollments in thirty-one Negro colleges and universities had increased from 2,132 in 1917 to 13,680 in 1927, representing an increase of 550 percent."⁵ The temperament of young Black America also experienced an evolution during the 1920's. Numerous campus uprisings took place at several Black colleges during the decade. The nation's foremost Black institutions of higher education were transformed into cradles of insurgency as students, parents, and alumni of schools such as Tuskegee, Hampton, Howard, and Fisk, demonstrated against white paternalism, the lack of Black faculty, limited curriculum, unsatisfactory cuisine,

⁵ Robert Brisbane, *The Black Vanguard: Origins of the Negro Social Revolution, 1900-1960*, (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1969) 102.

and what they viewed as an overly rigid set of rules.⁶ This new Black intelligentsia fashioned themselves as the new avant-garde in an emerging social movement. It was their poems, their speeches, their art, and their patient work, that would help mold the political consciousness of Black America. The Harlem Renaissance poet Countee Cullen christened their arrival when he noted:

Youth the world over is undergoing a spiritual and an intellectual awakening, is looking with new eyes at old customs and institutions and is finding for them interpretations which its parents passed over...The young American Negro is going in strong for education; but realizes its potentialities for combating bigotry and blindness...the main point to be considered here is that it is working a powerful group effect....Then the New Negro is changing somewhat in his attitude toward the Deity....There is such a thing as working out one's own soul's salvation. And that is what the New Negro intends to do.⁷

As Black college students were anointed into a pool of Black protest, they emerged to face the political culture that defined their immediate surroundings. Perhaps more importantly, the measure of their protest was often dictated by the political climate and space afforded to them by their environment. In Mississippi, Black youth who were molded and shaped by a Second Curriculum that instilled confidence in their own capabilities, graduated from Black enclaves, and departed to serve in the most hostile environments known to African Americans. There was no “ebony tower” or Black comfort zone in Mississippi during the Nadir. No cosmopolitan elite that actively promoted the free exchange of ideas that openly questioned their surroundings. Most

⁶ The campus protests of the 1920's was certainly reflective of the era of the “new Negro”, yet protests were focused chiefly on internal struggles and rarely produced a critique of the larger society. For more on Black college protests of the 1920's see Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus: Black College Rebellions of the 1920's*, and Herbert Aptheker, “The Negro College Student in the 1920s — Years of Preparation and Protest: An Introduction.” Paper presented at the meeting of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, New York City, New York. October, 1968.

⁷ Aptheker, “The Negro College Student in the 1920's,” p. 164

importantly, there was no refuge in Mississippi where the purveyors of white terrorism could not penetrate, extract, and execute, those believed to threaten its longevity or unequivocal message of white supremacy. Black administrators, faculty, and students understood this fact all too well and knew that those who dared to explicitly challenge the southern caste system in Mississippi, did so at the risk of losing what is most precious in the moment of struggle: life itself.

It is difficult to imagine the mental strain that must have accompanied decisions to remain silent in the face of such oppression. It was more than concern over position, or community status, or even employment. Life hung in the balance and the dense woods and deep rivers of Mississippi offered bloody testimonies of those who put that life on the line by openly confronting the white power structure. Lynchings occurred most frequently in rural areas, which had profound implications for a state like Mississippi that lacked any serious industrial capacity for most of the twentieth century.⁸ As teachers and ministers trained at Jackson State College and Tougaloo ventured into this rural countryside to begin their work, they did well to remember the social code that governed their environments, lest they pay the ultimate price. In this environment the Second Curriculum meant the most. An unwritten yet implied pedagogy of hope privately planted seeds that would one day spring forth in its due season. Mississippi in the early 20th century was not that season. Positive messages could be instilled and a charge to keep could be given, but students as well as teachers understood the limits they faced. They took what opportunity they had and continued in the patient yet determined

⁸ Julius E. Thompson, *Black Life in Mississippi*, p. 62.

objective of building dignity and making progress, with the faith that the fruit of their labor was going to make a difference someday.

The position adopted by Black educational institutions in Mississippi and their alumni who remained to labor within the state was the same buoyant message that carried the voices of Black dissent for generations. Confronting what appeared as insurmountable odds, they pulled together the resources available to them and transformed their isle of despair into an oasis of hope and clung tightly to a vision of liberation that would manifest itself one day if they could continue to “fight the good fight”. This faith and quiet determination did not eliminate the struggle, but it provided a foundation upon which to build a future; a fact that consoled those caught in the crossfire of Jim Crow in Mississippi.

There were however those who lodged critiques against Black colleges during this era. These critics suggested that these institutions did not meet the standards of an emerging militant movement and fight openly for the full citizenship for African Americans. The detractors of Black institutions described their environments as repressive, the administrations as totalitarian, and the students as less than stellar.⁹ Writing in 1924, the famed sociologist E. Franklin Frazier, a graduate of Howard University and long time instructor at Morehouse College, noted that Black students “heard inspiring speeches daily from his leaders who bubble over with platitudes...his teachers have quite often led him from one emotional debauch to another. Surfeited with

⁹ See James Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South; 1860-1935*, 277, Cayton, *Long Old Road*

emotional appeals never resulting in action, the product of Negro education has become a spectator of civilization incapable of participation.”¹⁰

Franklin’s critique of Black education reflects the sense of urgency that permeated activists and intellectual circles, but it is devoid of historical context and insensitive to the political and social conditions that shaped the lives of young Black Americans and the educators charged with their instruction. The “platitudes” that Frazier spoke of were meant to be more than just mundane expressions or twice told tales of potential and greatness. The message within the message was an essential component of the Second Curriculum. Black educators operated within a society that debased and devalued Black life. Early twentieth century America was rife with popular music, film, and art that portrayed Blacks as ignorant and told the exaggerated and fabricated story of a people without a meaningful past who could make little contributions to society except in the role of domestic servants, and agrarian laborers, and perhaps the occasional “darkie” who portrayed dominant stereotypes of African Americans through music and film. The faculty working from within the “shelter” of Black colleges understood that positive messages and praise was an indispensable component of their pedagogy. Indeed their work could not even begin nor would it produce any positive results without it.

The roster of those who benefited from such a nurturing environment constitutes a “who’s who” of notable Black scholars and activists, including Frazier himself. W.E.B. Dubois’s experience as a student at Fisk influenced his compassion and concern for his people and heightened his political consciousness. In recounting his college education,

¹⁰ E. Franklin Frazier, A Note on Negro Education,” *The Opportunity Reader*, 462.

Dubois often commented, “he had embraced his racial identity only at Fisk.”¹¹ Frazier and other critics of the Black college environment, failed to contextualize the importance of place and space. Frazier himself benefited from such an environment that did not seek to tear him down but instead attempted to construct confidence and self-esteem in the face of boundless negativity. The famous writer Zora Neal Hurston beamed with this confidence and optimism as she entered Howard University. “The thrill Hannibal got when he finally crossed the Alps” she recalled, “the feeling of Napoleon when he finally placed upon his head the iron crown of Constantine, were nothing to the ecstasy I felt when I realized I was actually a Howardite.”¹² Various activists acknowledged the seeds of confidence and purpose that was planted within them as students attending Black colleges. Ella Baker, an alumnus of Shaw University and the “rock” that anchored the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, noted that, “Where I went to school...you went there to give...the best of yourself to other people, rather than to extract from other people for your own benefit.”¹³

While various alumni and students had negative experiences or were critical of their respective colleges, (a common experience for students regardless of race or institution) the collective goal of Black institutions was the formation of a gifted and educated class of people whose purpose was to engage in work that would uplift the masses and not just themselves. This message was of high priority in the deep southern

¹¹ David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Dubois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1993) 72.

¹² Zora Neal Hurston, “The Hue and Cry About Howard University,” *The Messenger Reader*, 384.

¹³ Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker & the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003) 50.

states where the value placed on Black life was at an all time low. Black college graduates, who did not flee the horrid southern landscape during the Great Migration, remained to labor in a region of the country that became synonymous with racial oppression. During the first half of the twentieth century, their work would be clandestine in nature in order to escape the unforgiving wrath of southern whites. This wrath was more pronounced in the states and counties that made up a region known as “the Black belt”. Even southern Blacks acknowledged these subtle yet important regional differences. Historian Barbara Ransby noted that as students attending Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina ventured out into the surrounding community, they did so with the knowledge that “the environment was less hostile than in other cities in the Jim Crow South.”¹⁴ To be outspoken on issues concerning race and to openly denounce the social policies of Mississippi meant certain hostile consequences that ranged from public repudiation and isolation if you were white, to unemployment, intimidation, and death if you were Black. These circumstances led Historian Rayford Logan to write in his diary “Mississippi is probably worse than Georgia.”¹⁵ As Black college students departed to serve in the rural counties of Mississippi, one wonders what plan of attack would Frazier and other critics have proposed they engage in? In addition to this, one can also only imagine how bold and militant their own message would have

¹⁴ Ibid. 54

¹⁵ Professor Logan noted his experience at a meeting of the American Historical Association on January 13, 1941. He commented that he “ran into Wharton” who told Logan that there were attempts to stop him from attending the conference. The “Wharton” that Logan refers to is Vernon Lane Wharton, professor of sociology and history at Millsaps College in Jackson, Mississippi. Logan does not explain why there were attempts to bar Wharton from attending the conference or who attempted to stop him, but Wharton’s track record of being outspoken on behalf of racial equality is more than likely the reason. See the Rayford Logan Papers, diary entry Jan. 13, 1941

been had they composed their thoughts in a closed society whose weapon of choice against Black insolence was rope and blowtorches.¹⁶

In the early 20th century, the definition of Black life in Mississippi translated into living in constant fear of white people. Much of the violence that occurred against Blacks was without motivation or provocation. Rumors of missing loved ones and alien wayfarers being indicted solely on the color of their skin ran rampant through the Black communities.¹⁷ Struggle was inescapable and the promises of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” was seriously impaired. Such an environment further escalated the challenges that awaited young African Americans educated within the Black enclaves of the south. Famed author Richard Wright, a “native son” of Mississippi documented the damaging psychological effect that accompanied life in the Magnolia State. Both his anger and his fear of this environment were exhibited in his highly celebrated novel, *Black Boy*. Wright noted:

I could fight the southern whites by organizing with other Negroes, as my grandfather had done. But I knew that I could never win that way; there were many whites and there were but few blacks. They were strong and we were weak. Outright black rebellion could never win. If I fought openly I would die and I did not want to die. News of lynchings were frequent...My days and nights were one long, quiet, continuously contained dream of terror, tension, and anxiety. I wondered how long I could bear it.¹⁸

¹⁶ The “blow torch” reference speaks directly to the lynching of two Black men accused of murder in Duck Hill, Mississippi in 1937. The two victims were accosted by a mob of over 200 men, tied to trees and tortured to death by blow torches while a third associate was forced to watch the gruesome crime. See NAACP Papers. Subject file – Lynching – Mississippi, 1914-1941.

¹⁷ The records on lynching clearly show that numerous African Americans were subjugated to violence because they happened to be in the vicinity of purported crimes. See Ida B. Wells, *Southern Horrors and Other Writings: The Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892-1900* (Boston: Bedford Books, 1997) and Julius E. Thompson, *Blacks in Mississippi*

¹⁸ Richard Wright, *Black Boy: A Record of Childhood and Youth* (New York: Harpers & Row, 1937) 276-77.

The Second Curriculum that was taught within the “shelter” of Black colleges thrived in the hostile surroundings of Mississippi. Although this hidden curriculum bore no resemblance to the unveiled and public protests that became associated with the new era of insurgency, it proved to be a necessity in the psychological development of young African Americans being educated in the unforgiving and oppressive environment of the Deep South. The militant tone and tenor of Black activists and organizers who made their homes in less threatening atmospheres were afforded a safer space that provided them the opportunity and platform to make unyielding and candid critiques against the horrors of Jim Crow. Ironically, their critiques were often lodged against those African Americans who remained in an environment that many had understandably escaped.¹⁹ The famous Harlem Renaissance writer Langston Hughes was incensed at the culture of Black colleges that often encouraged and in some cases demanded silence in the face of race hatred. Hughes himself had been a student at the historically Black college Lincoln University in Pennsylvania. As an older and well-traveled student, Hughes hardly considered his classmates his peers and was highly critical of what he considered to be un-stimulating environment at Lincoln. In a later visit to Alabama during the infamous Scottsboro Boys trial, Hughes composed a biting commentary against Black institutions that was published in the *Crisis*. In the article that was entitled “Cowards from the Colleges,” Hughes was dismayed that no Tuskegee students claimed knowledge of the event and that none had attended the trial considering Tuskegee’s relative short distance

¹⁹ For a detailed study on African Americans and the Great Migration see, Daniel M. Johnson, *Black Migration in America: A Social Demographic History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1981)

from Scottsboro. Hughes suggested that “American Negroes in the future had best look to the unlettered for their leaders, and expect only cowards from the “colleges.”²⁰

African Americans living in the rural south understood that bold and undisguised protest often ended in bloodshed and extermination, which lent even more credence for the Second Curriculum which offered Black educational enclaves the opportunity to covertly advance the causes of the race in institutions that were perceived as acceptable and non-threatening. But what does this say about their mission? Did they fail in their efforts to effectively “uplift” the masses or did their silence while confronting the injustices that surround them make them complicit in their own suffering and thus open to criticism from leading Black activists? The system in which Black Mississippians were born into was effectively designed to disenfranchise, weaken, and destroy any semblance of Black pride or protests that threatened white supremacy. One reporter noted, “There are 1,009,487 Negroes in the state of Mississippi. They constitute 26.2 percent of the entire population of that state, and yet a bunch of uncivilized, blood thirsty whites can have a lynching party whenever they desire to do so.”²¹

In Jackson, Mississippi, institutions such as Jackson State would eventually depend upon the financial assistance of a state whose infamous governor and future senator, Theodore Bilbo had once publicly told the NAACP to “go to hell” in response to

²⁰ It is conceivable that a considerable amount of these students may have feigned ignorance to the Scottsboro Case because Hughes may have been considered an outsider whose on campus agitation may have led to some physical harm coming upon the students. In lieu of the fact that numerous Black colleges carried the leading African American newspapers in their libraries and students had access to this information, it is highly unlikely that the students at Tuskegee had no knowledge of such a visible case that occurred practically “in their own backyard.” For more on this see Langston Hughes, “Coward from the Colleges”, *The Crisis*, 41 (August 1934): 226-28.

²¹ “Mississippi Proud of Lynching,” *New Orleans Vindicator*, March 29, 1919.

the organization's demand for a thorough investigation following a lynching of four African Americans, two of whom were sixteen and fifteen year old girls.²² In such an environment, what reaction were activists and scholars looking for from Black students? What form of protests did they expect from students and college administrators who lived in a state where the governor himself unashamedly embraced the murder of young Black men and women? Perhaps the silence of this younger generation reflected a persecuted and voiceless community that was subjugated to state sanctioned violence with little or no political recourse in the early 20th century.

To label the administrators and students of Black colleges as "cowards" was revealing of the high expectations that were placed upon these institutions. The collective perception of many Black scholars and activists was if Black veterans returning from fighting abroad could represent bravery and valor on the fields of battle in Europe, then why couldn't African Americans being bombarded with the shells of hatred and ignorance take up arms against their assailers in the same manner? This expectation was even more portentous for the legions of young African Americans being educated in America's Black institutions. Black America would be forced to wait a few generations more before Black college students were prepared to serve as active foot soldiers in a new and bolder civil rights movement.

Yet the culture of Black colleges was not beyond reproach. If there was any merit to be found in the negative assessments lodged against these institutions, it could be found in the rigid social codes and puritan like values that were forced upon the students who enrolled in various Black colleges. Indeed this environment became the source of

²²"Governor of Mississippi Tells N.A.A.C.P To Go To Hell," *Baltimore Daily Herald*, December 31, 1919

numerous campus protests during the early 20th century.²³ Both Black and white educational institutions operated under the auspices of *loco parenti* during much of the twentieth century. Students entered into controlled environments where they were expected to observe the laws that governed their campus and to respect the faculty and administrators whose job description loosely included the role of guardian. In the era of the “New Negro”, the hegemonic forces that regulated the college environment came under heavy criticism from Black students, parents, and alumni. The detractors of these institutions suggested that it was white paternalism that sought to discipline and restrain the social mobility of Black students in accordance with the racist stereotypes that African Americans were licentious, immoral, and prone to lawlessness. This same perception excluded Blacks as the leading administrators within their own institutions, a fact that angered those who called for more Black control. Responding to the Fisk student’s strike of 1924, Dubois added:

I resent, therefore, with every ounce of my energy, the sneer that the graduates of Fisk University are beggars with no right to rule this institution simply because they are for the most part men who have struggled and toiled and done their duty for low wages and little incomes, amid mob law and prejudice:

If blood be the price of admiralty-
If blood be the price of admiralty-
If blood be the price of admiralty-
Lord God, we have paid in full!²⁴

The effort to discourage Black control and advancement was not limited to administrators. Black faculty increased as students and parents launched protests for an

²³ See Raymond Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus: Black College Rebellions of the 1920's* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975) and Herbert Aptheker, “The Negro College Student in the 1920's-Years of Preparation and Protest: An Introduction,” *Science and Society*, 33 (Spring 1969) 150-67.

²⁴ W.E.B. Dubois, *The Education of Black People: Ten Critiques 1906-1960* (Amherst, MA: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1973) 58.

increased Black presence among the faculty. This was assisted by the fact that more students were earning advanced degrees from northern white schools. As they returned to teach at Black institutions in the south, many of them found promotion a difficult task due to the racist stereotypes that existed even in the midst of the Black college environment. This occurred particularly in the private church affiliated institutions whose boards were not immune to the racist trends of the early twentieth century. Historian James McPherson noted that “In AMA schools with interracial faculties, young Negro teachers were often impatient with the continued presence of white veterans who blocked their promotions. One black male teacher wrote in a private letter: ‘If that old bitch from Massachusetts would ever die or get through here, I could begin to live.’²⁵ The promotion of Black faculty was a pivotal issue in the acceptance of the Second Curriculum. If African American students were going to accept the theory that they could accomplish what they will, then it was important that they see positive examples of Black manhood and womanhood in their midst. These teachers provided a foundation upon which to build positive self-identity and an opportunity to create a free exchange that was not hindered by the awkwardness of race.

While racist undertones influenced the strict atmosphere of Black colleges, many parents approved of the controlled environment. While chaos and race hatred reigned supreme in states like Mississippi, parents gained some satisfaction in knowing that their sons and daughters were mentally elevating themselves in a space that was far less hostile than what awaited them beyond the college gates. Although students had some order in

²⁵ James M. McPherson, “White Liberals and Black Power in Negro Education, 1865-1915,” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 75, No.5 (June, 1970) 1375.

their lives, the story was quite different for their parents and loved ones who worked and survived in the rural south. The lack of order and often times peace in their own lives, led many parents of students to give college administrators a vote of confidence despite the harsh, unyielding rules of college. Those who supported the stern posture of Black faculty and administrators were perhaps influenced by their convictions that the pursuit of education would ultimately lead to a better life for the individual student who ultimately returned to labor and engage in “uplift” in besieged Black communities. Historian Stephanie Shaw noted:

Parents often shared these traditions and chose these schools precisely because of the discipline enforced there. Finding programs as structured as these gave them and their daughters a kind of insurance against exposure to some of the dangers that black girls faced in less controllable public environments. At these schools, the girls would be substantially insulated from hostile encounters with whites, potential sexual abuse, too early experiments in (hetero)sexuality, and whatever, “bad examples” might exist in the communities from which they came.²⁶

Jackson State and Tougaloo College were no different than other Black institutions. The tempest that produced unspeakable suffering in Mississippi demanded the bitter consent of those who toiled silently while praying fervently for change. Even within educational enclaves, the lessons of life and survival were draped in elusion and conservatism. During the developmental stages of Tougaloo College, campus organizations such as the “White Cross” for men and the “White Shield” for women promoted temperance and morality in an attempt to carve out space for survival. Clarice Campbell documented this attempt to outlast southern tyranny when she added, “Knowing that if a black man attempted to defend a Negro woman by word or weapon he

²⁶ Stephanie Shaw, *What a Woman Ought To Be and To Do: Black Professional Women Workers During the Jim Crow Era* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996) 83.

courted death or something worse, the White Cross taught that the best defense of the Negro woman was in the Negro man's virtue."²⁷ The accepted role of Black institutions during the early 20th century was in part to train "responsible" individuals who would not fall prey to mob terror. The stringent atmosphere of the Black college campus must then be looked at from a dual perspective. Social codes were undoubtedly an effort to eschew stereotypes of Black men and women as shiftless and immoral, a falsehood that many of their white founders actually embraced. Yet it is also conceivable that the codes were rooted in the hope that these "responsible" young men and women could never be accused of "miscreant" behavior that would jeopardize their lives.

In the early 20th century Jackson State and Tougaloo produced enlightened albeit "responsible" students. The outspoken Black radical was considered an "educated fool" in Black and white communities alike. To survive and advance the causes of the race in Mississippi, alumnus working in conditions not favorable to protests were convinced that "responsible" young men and women could achieve survival at the very least and racial uplift at the very most. In most cases this "responsibility" appeared to be acquiescence to their second-class conditions but the alternative was to live a life dangerously near death's door. In 1927 for instance, a white southerner commenting on this precarious state of affairs noted that, "The Southerner would regard a Negro attempting to enter the same school white persons as a good candidate for the noose. And Southern Negroes would have nothing to do with him."²⁸ Yet there were a few "irresponsible" young men and women who bravely protested their conditions without any boundaries on their words

²⁷ Campbell, *The View From Tougaloo*, 95.

²⁸ "A Southern Exposure," *The New Student*, Vol. 7, No. 9, November 23, 1927

or actions. According to sociologist Charles Johnson, the concept of the “bad nigger” was one who consistently flirted with these dangers by standing up to the imposing rules of Jim Crow. This behavior was simultaneously attractive yet unthinkable among those Mississippi youth who cherished their lives. Johnson concluded that those who pursued such aggressiveness “are likely to be punished on the smallest provocation or suspicion by the police or self-deputized white adults.”²⁹ Consequently many students followed the advice a young man received from his father that suggested, “Don’t raise your voice but talk quiet like. Don’t talk too much. Let them talk. Let them have their way. If I wanted to do my way they might get angry and start trouble.”³⁰

Although Black colleges would continue to have strict codes that oversaw life on campus, they did not restrain the confidence of those who benefited from the space afforded to them by Black colleges. Yet there was hardly room for the “bad nigger” in the Black college environment. To be outspoken and bold not only endangered yourself, but subjected those around you to the possibilities of harm as well. An NAACP officer sent to investigate the lynching of Joe Rodgers and Claude Banks in Canton, Mississippi, just a few miles outside of Jackson, reported that:

While I tried to discover all pertinent data in connection with the Joe Rodgers case I fear that I failed to do so. As I wrote you I believe I found considerable difficulty in getting people to talk. When I sought assistance from one or two professors in a nearby Negro college the President turned perfectly pale and stated that it would be extremely dangerous for anyone connected with his institution to be in any way associated with what I was attempting and added that if anyone discovered I had been on campus that his buildings might be burned.³¹

²⁹ Charles Johnson, *Growing Up in the Black Belt*, 299.

³⁰ Charles Johnson, *Growing Up in the Black Belt*, 319.

³¹ It is difficult to know what school the investigator is referring to but one could possibly conclude that he is mentioning Tougaloo College considering the geographical proximity of Tougaloo to Canton as compared

There existed then a paradox in the Second Curriculum. As African Americans increased their demands to govern the “controlled” space embodied in their institutions, the charge of uplift and the spirit of service to the Black community increasingly thrived despite whatever threats awaited for them in the hostile south. Yet this call to service did not include overt challenges to the customs and traditions of rural Mississippi. No faculty or teacher knowingly provoked their pupils to action that endangered their lives. Stands of defiance consisted of challenging the idea of white supremacy, not the actions of it. Despite the conservative nature of Black institutions, the spirit of public service would be profitable to Black communities in need of hope and young hands that would hold fast to the concept of uplift and renewal.

The spirit of conservatism that dominated the Black college environment was in direct contrast to a growing national movement to enfranchise African Americans. The leaders of a more aggressive campaign to enfranchise millions of African Americans used every opportunity to argue for the advancement of the race. Wartime America was the moment that convinced many leaders that a breakthrough in race relations was drawing near. During World War I, scholars like W.E.B. Dubois urged Black America to “close ranks” and to briefly lay aside their concerns for Black liberation on the home front. His stance received major criticism from Black organizations and activists who fought in the trenches of America instead of Europe. Black colleges did not hesitate to contribute to the war effort by encouraging its best and brightest young men to volunteer service to their country despite its denial of their basic human rights. Historian Clarice Campbell

to that of Jackson State. See, “Committee on Economic and Racial Justice”, October, 10, 1939, reel 14, part 7, NAACP Papers.

noted that, “Tougaloo assumed its share of the war effort. Of the fifty-four stars on its service flag four turned to gold.”³² Dubois realized his folly when Black veterans returned from war in Europe only to find themselves engaged in open warfare in their own country. Authors Henry Drewry and Humphrey Doermann noted for example, “Several veterans in uniform were among the more than seventy Blacks lynched in 1919.”³³ Black veterans played a critical role as militant leaders unafraid to back down to the constraints of Jim Crow and white supremacy. This development led to an increase in lynching and race riots but it strengthened the determination of African Americans to create positive change with whatever weapon available to them. In rural Mississippi and throughout the voiceless south, many Blacks would continue to value education as the weapon of choice.

In the dangerous environment of the south, Black educators gathered whatever tools available to them to impart wisdom, knowledge, and confidence into the next generation of youth whose responsibilities included discovering new ways to advance the struggle for liberation. The intensification of race hatred that followed the “great war” warranted unwritten yet deliberate methods of elevating pride and consciousness among Black youth. Because Black educational institutions remained largely engaged in training teachers and to a lesser extent ministers, these professions became the vehicles for liberation, even if that liberation focused primarily on mental and spiritual

³²The fifty-four stars on Tougaloo’s service flag represents the number of young men who served in the armed forces during World War I. The gold stars represent servicemen killed in action. See Campbell, *The View From Tougaloo*, 120.

³³ Henry Drewry and Humphrey Doermann, *Stand and Prosper: Private Black Colleges and Their Students* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) 82.

deliverance.³⁴ Black teachers encountered severe challenges as they worked through the demanding conditions associated with Black colleges. A 1927 report on the condition of Jackson College noted for instance that, “Five members of the faculty are compelled to spend between 23 and 47 hours a week in classroom instruction, and in the case of two from 39 to 47 hours.”³⁵ The arduous task that lay before Black teachers was twofold; succeed in institutions that struggled to merely keep their doors open, and reach students whose color of skin deemed them inferior to white society and in some cases to themselves as well. Despite their unbearable workload, it was imperative that they become the springboard upon which young Black students could launch confidently into the demanding and dangerous world around them. Zachary Hubert, president of Jackson College from 1911 to 1927 and the college’s first Black president noted that in the midst of a period of great struggle and travail experienced by African Americans, “there was a tremendous lift in the ideals and the aspirations of the youth of the state. The bringing into the state of cultural, well educated men and women as teachers inspired local teachers as well as students in large numbers.”³⁶

Black educational enclaves became the way station that trained the teachers, who departed to instruct and invest in the students, who in turn enrolled in Black colleges and

³⁴ Though this study focuses primarily on Black institutions in the Jackson, Mississippi area, it must be noted that other Black colleges in the state of Mississippi played critical roles in producing teachers to educate the masses. By 1927, ninety-five percent of the graduates from Rust College, located in Holly Springs, MS, taught school. Alcorn State University, the only Black institution funded by the state of Mississippi until Jackson College was acquired in 1940, also produced mostly teachers to serve the state of Mississippi; a trend that began from its founding in 1871. For more information on these institutions see, Thompson, *Black Life in Mississippi*, pp. 75-90 and “Survey of Negro Colleges and Universities” Department of the Interior, Bureau of Education, Bulletin No. 7, 1928, pp. 418-28.

³⁵ “Survey of Negro Colleges and Universities” Department of the Interior, Bureau of Education, Bulletin, No. 7, 1928, 437.

³⁶ Lelia Gaston Rhodes, *Jackson State University: The First Hundred Years, 1877-1977*, p. 74.

received their commission to engage in constructive enterprise as they emerged from the “shelter”. This was the cycle that challenged the dominant and pernicious ideology of white supremacy. In white culture the dreams of Black youth were disregarded or limited to aspirations befitting of an “inferior” people. The Second Curriculum however allowed for more. In this space, Black youth could dream of grand futures without boundaries or limitations. Even if that dream meant challenging what appeared to be immutable realities, the significance was the dream itself and its freedom to exist. Without the Second Curriculum it was certain that Black colleges would have been incapable of producing students or alumni who could make positive contributions to the struggle for liberation.

Black institutions served as sources of pride within their surrounding communities since their inception. This relationship did not exist without a return investment from Black schools. Administrators and faculty created numerous programs for local residents to learn more about farming, business, and general means of self-improvement. This relationship with the community resulted in Jackson State hosting its first Farmers’ Conference in 1942. The conference was attended by “forty-five farmers and their wives from eight communities representing Hinds, Rankin, Sharkey, Warren, Claiborne, Chickasaw and Marshall counties”³⁷ Likewise, Black colleges not only trained the teachers, but they created outreach programs that assisted the instruction of teachers already in the field. The campus newspaper of Jackson State, *The Blue and White Flash*, reported in 1942 that:

³⁷ “Jackson College Host to Farmers Conference,” *The Blue and White Flash*, Vol. 2, No. 2, March, 1942.

One of the biggest educational events of the state of Mississippi was witnessed at Jackson College on the 30th and 31st of January, 1942. A group of college educators, Jeanes Agents and principals assembled here to discuss in panel form “Community Rehabilitation Through Teacher Education.” Several vital questions pertaining to the education of Rural Negro Youth were discussed.³⁸

For Black colleges in Mississippi to contribute to the cause of liberation, their *modus operandi* had to incorporate a means of educating without intentionally agitating local whites. During Jim Crow this fine line was navigated by Black college faculty and administrators who painfully served two masters; the city fathers and white trustees who could not foresee the eventual impact the Second Curriculum would play in launching a generation of insurgency, and the students and Black community who depended upon these institutions for education and upliftment. The faculty and administrator’s primary allegiance lay with the communities they served, yet their positions demanded a conservative tone. B. Baldwin Dansby, president at Jackson College from 1927 to 1940 insured that outreach to the Black community was a key component of his agenda.

Author Lelia Rhodes notes that:

As an officer of the Department of Education, Dansby had had an opportunity to assess, firsthand the needs of the blacks in the state, their low economic status, and their relationship with Jackson College in terms of how the school could help them get ahead in every facet of personal and social life. His first act of service to local teachers was to initiate extension programs for them. Black teachers were in desperate need of upgrading themselves and reorienting their experiences to fit the times. Following the lead of neighboring Alcorn College, he initiated for them a program that hopefully would ground them in their profession.³⁹

The attempts to improve themselves clearly indicated the fact that Black teachers understood the demands of their position. The future of Black America in many ways

³⁸ “Summary of January Conference,” *The Blue and White Flash*, Vol. 2, No. 2, March, 1942.

³⁹ Lelia Rhodes, *Jackson State University: The First Hundred Years, 1877-1977*, p. 76.

rested upon their shoulders. Their time spent in the Black colleges of the south prepared them in more ways than one. In such an environment they observed and absorbed the importance of investing in Black education and they also observed the fact that their teachers were forced to make do with what they had. Inadequate resources, poor facilities, and in many cases the lack of intense academic training that their counterparts received from better equipped white institutions, could not come between them and their responsibility to shape and mold the youth who were charged with carrying the struggle to higher heights. If these challenges won out, then the prayers of millions would go unanswered and prospects of a brighter future would fold. Black teachers therefore leaned upon the resources made available to them and when that source proved barren, they often dug deeper until they found the life affirming properties they needed to sustain impoverished yet deserving Black youth. Historian Stephanie Shaw commented that:

...they were bound to find facilities, supplies, and salaries that were grossly inferior to those provided in comparable white communities. Consequently, the reports of making nothing into something (wood planks into blackboards), of plying a trade as if nothing mattered except finishing the job one undertook (even if one did not get paid), and of performing work for which one was not hired (because someone had to do it) were arrestingly prophetic.⁴⁰

Black education became the doorway which millions of youth passed through on their way to their various stations in life. Black teachers therefore became the gatekeepers that touched young men and women, giving them discipline, knowledge, advice, and “tough love”. In the silence that fell upon Black Mississippi during the era of Jim Crow, this was the private relationship that could be shielded from all observers. Neither college administrators, nor principals, nor white trustees could be privy to the

⁴⁰ Stephanie Shaw, *What a Women Ought To Be and To Do*, pg. 99.

private conversations or intimate confessions that occurred between teacher and student.⁴¹ This is the relationship that was formed when class was dismissed, when young men and women stayed behind for extra help, when students visited during office hours or needed a ride home. Even when the institution itself resembled a conservative fortress, teachers possessed a certain *savoir-faire* that allowed them to navigate those lines and reach students at their needs. If the Black institution represented the workshop in which students entered for future preparation, then the teacher/pupil relationship symbolized the anvil in which young men and women were shaped and molded.

The role of Black colleges in the early 20th century can best be understood in two phases; the affect that these institutions played upon its students and the impact that those students in turn made on the larger society. Within the “shelter” of Black enclaves, teachers and administrators anointed their students to carry on the struggle. Scholar/activist Rayford Logan noted that his former students taught at schools such as Florida A & M University, Shaw University, Talladega College, Virginia Union University, Albany State College, Southern University, Morris College, and at Howard.⁴² Inspired by faculty members like Logan and enriched by the Second Curriculum, what seeds of enlightenment did these former students plant at their new places of

⁴¹ The Rayford Logan papers provide excellent examples of the special relationship that he shared with students. In a diary entry from June 4, 1940, the famous historian noted an invitation he extended to his students to attend dinner with M. Dantes Bellegarde, the famous Haitian activist and historian, dignitaries from the State Department, and himself. In a diary entry from February 6, 1941, Logan notes a conference with one of his “best” students to discuss the reorganization of the Howard student council. On an entry from May 12, 1941, Logan notes students who personally confide in him during his office hours concerning grievances they had with the Howard administration. For more information see The Rayford Logan Papers, Collections of the Manuscript Division, Library of Congress

⁴² Rayford Logan to J. St. Clair Price, October 10, 1947, Rayford Logan Papers, Collections of the Manuscript Division, Library of Congress

employment? A former Tuskegee student and aspiring poet wrote back to Robert Russa Moton, president of that institution from 1915 to 1930:

Under the leadership of its founder, Dr. Washington, your own administration, and that of our present Dr. Patterson, (Tuskegee) has accomplished much in the field of education and good will to the world. Having been a student at Tuskegee, I feel it is my duty to help keep alive the spirit of this great institution...Here's hoping you may get as much enjoyment from reading my work as the enjoyment and inspiration I received from your chapel addresses while a student at Tuskegee.⁴³

If indeed the detractors of Black institutions were correct, then the alleged lifeless and repressive environments should have produced products that represented the “listless” environments from which they were fashioned. What the record clearly shows however, is that graduates of these institutions succeeded at every level and fought vigorously and sometimes secretly for change.

Success in Mississippi at the height of Jim Crow was defined in different terms than in most places. If change was to be carried out, then it must occur in the most subtle and non-contentious manner to avoid backlash or bloodshed. Since there was little political recourse that was sympathetic or available to African Americans in Mississippi, there existed a need to petition for assistance those who could not be immediately harassed by local officials. Black teachers needed a source that they could depend on to deliver the necessary materials that could be used to carefully nurture Black youth. African American teachers found the necessary provisions they were looking for from an unlikely source; the federal government.

⁴³ George Henderson to Robert R. Moton, Sr., July 15, 1938, Robert Moton Papers, Box 3, Folder 10, Collections of the Manuscript Division, Library of Congress

The political trends in Washington D.C. turned increasingly repressive in the early 20th century. African Americans found few friends in the nation's capital, a fact that had rung true since the end of Reconstruction. Most African Americans felt betrayed by a federal government that had failed to enact legislation that would reverse Jim Crow. The center of self-proclaimed democracy made it a habitual policy to disregard African American interests despite the fact that Black soldiers had fought bravely in the American West, Mexico, Cuba, the Philippines, and Europe. Anti-lynching legislation was ignored and the First Red Scare targeted Black organizations accused of being subversive and threats to national interest. This reality caused traditionally conservative organizations such as the NAACP and the Urban League to further embrace a moderate tone that promoted Blacks as full-fledged Americans who should be protected under the arc of liberty and democracy; a position that was considerably different from such separatist organizations as the UNIA, and communist influenced organizations such as the National Negro Congress (NNC), and the Student National Youth Congress (SNYC).⁴⁴ Yet the labor of the NAACP, mostly through their aggressive campaigns within the judicial system, led to some steady but quiet victories for Blacks. With the election of progressive Franklin Delano Roosevelt, African Americans were prepared to believe in the political process once again; particularly the idea that there were supporters in Washington who were sympathetic to their needs.

⁴⁴ For more information on SNYC and the NNC see Johnetta Richard, "The Southern Negro Youth Congress: A History," (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Cincinnati, 1987); "Report of the Youth Section of the National Negro Congress," February 14-16, 1937, Reel 2, Part I, Papers of the National Negro Congress, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; "Report of Committee on Permanent Organization," Papers of the National Negro Congress, Reel 2, Part I, 29 Collections of the Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

As the country fell victim to the Great Depression, Roosevelt looked for new and imaginative ways to stimulate the economy and perhaps more importantly the nation's confidence. Through new legislation and government programs, Roosevelt attempted to jumpstart America's economy. Part of his plans included providing a greater voice for African Americans within his administration. Roosevelt made significant appointments to what the president referred to as his "Black Cabinet." Black's serving in various capacities exposed the plethora of issues that plagued their community and gave the president advice on remedies that could reshape the political and economic destiny of Black America. Through the actions of the recently formed Works Progress Administration (WPA), a progressive social action agenda was set. As part of Roosevelt's "Alphabet Soup" campaign, the WPA sought to employ millions of Americans through special projects that tapped into the cultural and social pulse of the nation. For African Americans, the WPA brought opportunities to highlight and address concerns ranging from the effects of slavery to the future of Black education. For states like Mississippi, where illiteracy and the need for adult education was still one of the most pressing issues, appointments to the Department of Education proved to be critical to the academic future of the state. During the decades in which the WPA operated, three men, Ambrose Caliver, James A. Atkins, and Walter G. Daniel, emerged to shoulder the concerns of Black educators and attempted to supply them with the necessary tools to promote Black achievement and turn the tide against white supremacy.

Serving as the Senior Specialist in the Education of Negroes under the Department of Education, Ambrose Caliver became a stalwart of Black learning and instruction. His influence in shaping the teaching philosophy of Black instructors was

paramount during an era in which these teachers served as the nursemaids to the future civil rights generation. Caliver was a graduate of two Black institutions before he received his graduate training at Harvard; Tuskegee College and Knoxville College, a small Black school in Knoxville, Tennessee. Through his office and his assistants, Dr. Caliver produced massive amounts of literature and teacher training aides that sought to reinforce and strengthen the role of the Black educator. Black teachers in Mississippi, at both the college and secondary levels, learned to depend upon these resources and used them effectively to encourage and uplift their respective students. Caliver, and also Atkins, and Daniels, were cognizant of the Second Curriculum and thus proceeded to adequately prepare those teachers to serve as more compassionate stewards over Black America's greatest treasure.

Caliver moved quickly to meet the needs of Black educators working in the rural and impoverished South. Caliver's "Sources of Instructional Materials on Negroes" listed books and sources for every age group ranging from elementary to adult education. With over a 107 listings, Caliver's reading suggestions became a valuable instructional tool to teachers in Mississippi..⁴⁵ Caliver was especially impressed with the role that Black colleges could play in the training and educating of adults, a problem that truly plagued Mississippi. He was particularly concerned that in states such as Mississippi, youth between the ages of 18 to 20 were bound to their agrarian responsibilities, which often meant that the responsibilities of the workplace often won out over the "luxuries" of education. Of this age group, Caliver estimated that six million of them represented the

⁴⁵ Ambrose Caliver, "Sources of Instructional Materials on Negroes," Federal Security Agency, U.S. Office of Education, Washington D.C., National Archives, Box No. 4

100 million adults in the American population in 1950. Half of them were working and not in school. Caliver noted that “If we should add to the 18-20 age group the 16 and 17 year olds – who are also the concern of adult educators – we have a huge population group that presents a real challenge to adult education”.⁴⁶

But where Caliver observed a “huge” challenge, he also saw a “huge” opportunity for Black colleges to expand their purpose and function by assuming the responsibility of educating adults. Caliver understood that by making a case for adult education, African Americans were broadening the terms in which they could advocate for full participation in American society. Caliver along with Theresa Wilkins wrote, “The importance of making this provision is indicated by the extent, seriousness and chronic nature of the conditions; and by the desirability of hastening the preparation of Negroes for a fuller integration into our democratic social order.”⁴⁷ Couched within this political language, Caliver and Wilkins prophetically declared that Black educational enclaves would play a critical role in preparing the Civil Rights generation not only through the tools of academia, but equally through the spirit of the Second Curriculum that dwelled within them.

Caliver and Wilkins noted the role that Jackson College was playing in educating adults in Mississippi. In documenting teacher preparation and training at the college, they stated, “In addition to these contacts in the field, seminars, and workshops, the college provides for in-service training of its faculty in the work of the community school

⁴⁶ Ambrose Caliver, address to the Annual Meeting of the National Conference on Adult Education, Atlanta, Georgia, April 28, 1950, National Archives, Box No. 4

⁴⁷ Ambrose Caliver and Theresa Wilkins, “Neglected Area of Adult Education Among Negroes: Teacher Training Programs,” *The Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 14, No. 3, p. 467.

by a system of faculty as well as student living and teaching for a short period in one of the rural communities and its school.”⁴⁸ Jackson College became a hub of adult education, extending the borders of the enclave and exposing mature Black adults to the Second Curriculum as well. Fannie Nichols, a former employee of the college and former president of The Mississippi Association of Teachers in Colored Schools from 1942-1944, sent out a bulletin on adult education to teachers that “contained various suggestions that the teachers should do in order to acquaint themselves and their students about Negro History, as well as a list of outstanding Negroes in Mississippi and the United States.”⁴⁹ Caliver must have understood that despite the overt threat of white supremacy that existed in the state, Black Mississippians possessed enclaves that “sheltered” them just enough to disperse messages of uplift without severe interference from local whites.

As a graduate of Tuskegee and Knoxville College, one can imagine that Caliver was uplifted as a student and nurtured in an environment that prepared him to be the champion of Black education that he eventually became. His work reflected his endearing passion for these “shelters.” On the critical role that Black teachers held in positing the Second Curriculum, Caliver added:

And finally, while Negro students are being given the principles and techniques for success in present-day American life, and being taught to accept the values in American culture, they must also be taught to admire the worthwhile values in their own race and to appreciate the contribution which these values may make to the general culture and welfare. And, above all, they must be helped to understand that the problems which have resulted from their minority group status cannot be solved overnight, nor by some fictitious remedy; and that unrealistic

⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 472

⁴⁹ Charles H. Wilson, Sr., *Education for Negroes in Mississippi Since 1910*, 558.

escape from the problems is impossible, and if possible, just as injurious as the artificial barriers that created the problems.⁵⁰

Caliver's assistants were just as prominent in their efforts to educate the masses. James Atkins, a former professor at Tennessee State University, a historically Black college located in Nashville, worked under Caliver as the Specialist in Negro Education and eventually became a part of Roosevelt's "Black Cabinet". As an employee of the Works Progress Administration, Atkins established a working relationship with Black people across the country. He personally ensured that Black educators received the necessary materials they needed to create a culture of positivity in the classroom. As students from historically Black colleges commenced their work in the city and rural schools of Mississippi, it was imperative that they establish a rapport with a partner that would support their efforts to uplift children through positive self-identity. They understood that white Mississippians staunchly opposed uplifting Black children, particularly if that upliftment meant the development of an "uppity" Negro who dared to challenge their place in society. Black educators had been taught at their respective institutions to "find a way or make one" and discovered in James Atkins a way-maker who heard their cry and responded.

Mississippi's Black educators corresponded with Atkins quite frequently; seeking materials that displayed African American history in a positive light. These educators understood the impact that this type of material would make upon children who perhaps doubted their self-worth in accordance with society's overriding message of white supremacy. They sent Atkins money from their own pockets to ensure that their students

⁵⁰ Ambrose Caliver, "Certain Significant Developments in the Education of Negroes During the Past Generation" *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 35, No. 2, April, 1950. pp. 133-4.

received a counter message that spoke of the accomplishments of African Americans. Mrs. Nancy Harvey, a school teacher in Ludlow, Mississippi, a town just northeast of Jackson, wrote to Atkins asking to be sent “at once”, *Education of Negroes: A Five Year Bibliography*, *Glimpses of Negro Americans*, *An Anthology of Negro Poetry*, and *National Negro Health News*, among other things.⁵¹ Ms. Hattie Kelley, a young schoolteacher from Harperville, Mississippi, a town just east of Jackson, wrote Atkins seeking, *Material on Negro Education*, *Pictures of Distinguished Negroes*, and *American Negro*.⁵²

Atkins was always prompt with his responses, ensuring that the respective teachers received the materials they requested. He undoubtedly found it humorous and perhaps somewhat distracting that he personally received so many requests for materials considering that his office was not directly responsible for disbursement; their only responsibility was to make educators aware that the resources existed. In many of his letters, he was forced to respond, “I wish to advise that this office is not a distributing agency for the various publications included in this bibliography. We have tried to be explicit in the matter of directions so that orders would be sent directly to the publishers.”⁵³ Nevertheless, he always interceded; sending personal notes to the publishers requesting the resources along with the money that teachers would send for the materials. Perhaps the more plausible interpretation of this mishap is not that Black educators failed to follow instructions, but rather they entrusted Atkins to deliver the

⁵¹ Nancy Harvey to James Atkins, January 30, 1939, WPA Files, National Archives

⁵² Hattie Kelley to James Atkins, February 1, 1939, WPA Files, National Archives

⁵³ James Atkins to Hattie Kelley, February 3, 1939, WPA Files, National Archives

products that both they and he understood would be necessary for the upliftment of young Black children. He would not fail them in their efforts the way that others who were not sensitive to the struggle may. The need for this was not only great, but there was also a sense of urgency exhibited by many Black teachers. Bertha Mae Butler, also from Harpersville and more than likely a coworker of Ms. Hattie Kelley, ended her written request for teaching materials with, “be sure to send them at your early please.”⁵⁴

Atkins got to see Mississippi up close during a visit to Jackson State College in 1941. As the special guest at a WPA Adult Education Workshop Session, Atkins sat in on discussion sessions that analyzed community needs and studied effective methods and techniques in teaching illiterate adults.⁵⁵ As Atkins mingled with teachers across the state, one can only imagine their view of him as a keeper of the flame of hope in the nation’s capital. His efforts made it directly possible for them to do the work in which Black colleges had prepared them to do. To the Black educators of Mississippi, Caliver and Atkins resembled the merchants of freedom, whose hard work made them “race men” of good standing in the Magnolia State. These teachers effectively used the materials and resources provided through the offices of Caliver and Atkins and found solace and comfort in the fact that Black men of seemingly high rank expressed concern for the education of Black youth. Mrs. Ruby Davis, a schoolteacher from Meridian, Mississippi, wrote:

I haven’t words to express the inspiration I gained after seeing your exhibit and attending the Adult Teachers Association in Jackson, Miss. Too much praise cannot be given you for the work you are doing for the advancement of the

⁵⁴ Bertha Mae Butler to James Atkins, February 1, 1939, WPA Files, National Archives

⁵⁵ Wilson, *Education for Negroes in Mississippi Since 1910*, p. 557

Negro race in the United States. I can see clear the veil of ignorance being raised through your special efforts...I shall pray for you and that this work will be permanent on our national program. May God bless you and your assistants.⁵⁶

Black teachers in Mississippi formed extensive networks with each other and shared knowledge in teaching and pedagogy that assisted them in perfecting their craft. What is more, Black educators understood that this exchange of information was vital in advancing their shared responsibility of preparing the generation that would eventually lead them towards liberation. Miss Maggie Little taught at Lanier High School in Jackson, Mississippi (a school that would eventually become prominent in the civil rights movement in Jackson). Miss Little used the teaching aids suggested to her by Atkins and wrote to him saying, "I have indeed been very much impressed by the pictures and I know of several others whom I think have been equally impressed."⁵⁷ As teachers departed conferences and meetings with each other, they took back with them a sense of inspiration that was transferred to eager and impressionable young minds. Mrs. Ella Jackson, a schoolteacher in Meridian, Mississippi adequately expressed this enthusiasm when she noted, "I saw the beautiful exhibit that you sent Mrs. F.L Nichols during our State Teachers Association in Jackson, Miss. I haven't words to express how I was inspired in seeing your work...I trust you will live long and have this department in charge for the advancement of the Negro race."⁵⁸

What is apparent in these records is an enduring relationship. Mississippi's Black educators understood that within their local government agencies there existed a latent

⁵⁶ Ruby B. Davis to James Atkins, March 31, 1939, WPA Files, National Archives

⁵⁷ Maggie Little to James Atkins, March 30, 1939, WPA Files, National Archives

⁵⁸ Ella Jackson to James Atkins, April 2, 1939, WPA Files, National Archives

and sometimes overt desire to suppress education for African American youth, particularly if the end result of that education uplifted those whose destinies should have been tinged with the spirit of defeatism. This reality created the need to establish partnerships with those who respected their work and those who understood the importance of Black educational enclaves. In a letter to Emma L. Crowther, a schoolteacher in Forest, Mississippi, James Atkins recognized the importance of her work when he noted, “You will find enclosed a copy of National Negro Health News...and some other pamphlets showing sources of material bearing on Negro life and history which may be of service to you in the work in which you are engaged.”⁵⁹

Walter G. Daniel, former editor of the *Journal of Negro Education* and a 1926 graduate of Virginia Union University, carried on the tradition established by Caliver and Atkins. Daniel established correspondence with several historically Black colleges promoting the work of the Office of Education on Black history and quite often lectured and consulted at numerous institutions. His reputation from his work in the field suggested that Daniel also held similar influence and sway amongst educators seeking to make an impact on Black youth. A letter addressed to Daniel from a war veteran noted:

I am writing for information as to the possibilities of getting a job in a rural area, particularly in the south...I am a Negro and a graduate of Bethune Cookman College with a B.S. in social science. I am very interested in working with the Negro of the south, and if you can help me in getting placed I will accept any position that is open or available. I have spent seven and a half years in the armed service and I believe it will be of an immense help to me.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ James Atkins to Emma Crowther, February 13, 1939, WPA Files, National Archives

⁶⁰ Lafayette Harris to Walter G. Daniel, July 11, 1952, Records of the Office of Education, RG12, Federal Security Agency, Assistant Commissioner for Higher Education, Division of Higher Education, Correspondence of Walter G. Daniel, National Archives

This correspondence demonstrates two essential factors that would shape the future of Black education in the south. Those familiar with the social codes of the south understood the importance that trust would play in determining who one confided in. Walter Daniel surely was not responsible for the hiring of teachers in Daytona, Florida, but Black educators and those who aspired to be Black educators, knew exactly who to turn to in expressing their desire to contribute to the cause of uplift. The second factor was the contribution that Black veterans made to a burgeoning Black freedom struggle.

As the New Deal Era gave way to a country embroiled in the new war effort, “Black Cabinet” officials were ensured that their legacy of compassion and service to Black educators in the rural south would leave an indelible impact on Black youth. However, streams of hope ebbed more than they flowed in rural Mississippi. The assistance of Caliver, Atkins, and Daniels was a sign that there was help from on high through people who sympathized with their plight and heeded their call for help. As America geared up for war against their foreign enemies, African Americans throughout the south did not lose sight of their own personal struggles at home. Yet identifying those who could alleviate their pressing needs was a struggle in itself. Local Blacks worked endlessly to find voices that would pierce the devastating silence surrounding their predicament.

The Sisyphean dilemma that confronted African Americans in Mississippi created a culture that appeared to have few “silver linings”.⁶¹ Black colleges and the teachers that they produced to uplift the masses needed positive reinforcement whenever and

⁶¹ Sisyphus was a character in Greek mythology that was condemned to roll a boulder up a hill in Hades, only to have it roll down the hill once it appeared to reach the top.

however they could obtain it. To maintain hope during their darkest days, Black educators held fast to the faith that better days lay ahead. They put their faith to work by supporting their schools through whatever means they could. Joe Brown, principal of the Taylor Colored School in Taylor, Mississippi, wrote that, "Beginning January 1937, we launched a building program for a new school. October, 1937 a five room model school was completed at a cost of \$3,000 without any aid from the county nor state."⁶² Though they possessed both the inherent and learned skills to build up the spirit of their students, they lacked the needed manpower and wealth to become totally independent of the racist Mississippi school boards that directly controlled their economic futures. In a drastically impoverished state like Mississippi, economic shortfalls were a common theme for both Blacks and whites. But to be Black and poor and a resident of Mississippi was a desolate and dangerous combination that was unparalleled in most regions of the country. With few outlets of hope existing in the state, Black Mississippians turned to those who were able to raise awareness about their dismal position without confronting looming threats at every turn.

The NAACP functioned as one of the primary advocates of African Americans during the early 20th century. In the court and in others public arenas, the NAACP continued to embrace the struggle of African Americans, even though they faced great criticism for their relative conservative tactics in dealing with racism. At the height of Jim Crow however, there were few organizations found on the frontline as often as the NAACP. This fact resonated with Black Mississippians who held the organization in high esteem. African Americans in the Magnolia state succeeded in waging war on Jim

⁶² Joe C. Brown to Walter White, November 29, 1937, reel 5, part 3, NAACP Papers.

Crow through their own modest means. They achieved this through highly organized institutions, fraternal and sororal organizations, and civic groups that stood adamantly opposed to their own persecution. In a letter to Thurgood Marshall, a local mason member in Jackson requested of the NAACP, “We want equal terms for schools in Mississippi. Please write me a petition to that effect...The Mississippi State Teachers Association is meeting here on the 22nd and I want to see if we could sell the idea to them.”⁶³ White Mississippians were just as organized and resolved to maintain white supremacy at all cost. This seemingly impregnable truth created a reason for Black Mississippians to seek a clarion voice that rung on their behalf without the obvious pressures and fears that they confronted locally on a daily basis.

Yet affiliation or support for the NAACP was something that most Blacks purposefully failed to publicize. Membership held few privileges in the eyes of southern whites. As scholar Akinyele Umoja noted:

While the NAACP was the main human rights organization in the state, prior to World War II, it operated in a virtually clandestine way, in most places in the state. Those who were economically dependent on whites could not represent or be associated with the NAACP without fearing reprisal.”⁶⁴

Even as African Americans petitioned organizations like the NAACP for assistance, they could not escape the potential for serious retribution and often asked for anonymity with their request. J.R. Otis, the director of the Department of Agriculture at Tuskegee, wrote to J.E. Spingarn of the NAACP:

I will not be hasty in my conclusion, but it appears that local influence in the counties mentioned above is playing a part in dispossessing Negro farm owners of

⁶³ A.W. Wells to Thurgood Marshall, March 6, 1939, reel 5, part 3, NAACP Papers.

⁶⁴ Akinyele Umoja, “Eye for an Eye: The Role of Armed Resistance in the Mississippi Freedom Movement” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Emory University, 1996) 71.

land, which is advantageously located in desirable sections on improved highways. It appears to me that this is something worthy of undertaking for some other agent whom you might refer the matter to for the proper action. This information is given you confidentially and in recognition of the service, which you have rendered in the interest of under-privileged people. I should appreciate your treating it confidentially...⁶⁵

Correspondences like these reflect the fact that Blacks living in openly hostile environments were compelled to seek justice under the cover of secrecy and silence lest they face intense reprisals. Those who chose to speak out faced serious repercussions, isolation, or worse. Speaking to a gathering in Alabama, historian Rayford Logan noted, “My speech was well received Friday night but the audience was distinctly afraid of my (speech entitled) “White Mans Distress is the Black Mans Gain”. I talked freely because McGee [a white member of the Alabama State Board of Education] got up and walked out just before I was introduced.”⁶⁶ Even the most outspoken Black activists and scholars were forced to acknowledge the adverse surroundings that characterized the Deep South when they traveled and worked within its borders. Lamenting this state of affairs, Logan noted, “I spoke on “Needs of Minorities” summarized in a Howard University release. Professor Bryson of Columbia who followed me gave us a “warning” that minorities had to be careful about what they say because there is already a spirit of intolerance growing in the country. A few of my friends were quite incensed and regretted that there was no

⁶⁵ J.R. Otis to J.E. Spingarn, June 15, 1938, reel 5, part 3, NAACP Papers.

⁶⁶ See Rayford Logan Papers, diary entry from March 17, 1941, Collections of the Manuscript Division, Library of Congress

opportunity for discussion.”⁶⁷ Black Mississippians were painfully familiar with the few opportunities to openly discuss and lobby for change.

As one examines the human face of oppression in Mississippi, it is quite clear that millions of tortured souls sought a remedy to their pain at whatever cost. They depended upon the resources that were available to them and if those appeared to falter they did not hesitate to blaze new pathways to deliverance. Their suffering was legendary, and the noble cause in which they fought for was symbolic of the blood stained freedom struggles being waged across the world. On the world stage, however, their cause garnered little attention as the global society focused on the expansion of communism, Nazism, and fascism. The sanctimonious nature of America’s foreign and domestic policies created a paradox that simultaneously trapped Black Americans in a vicious cycle of racism while successfully promoting the image of America as the champion of liberty and democracy. Nowhere were these injustices and hypocrisies better illustrated than in Mississippi. In the midst of such oppression, Black Mississippians held fast to their unwavering belief in education and the upliftment of youth as a sacred stairway to liberation. If indeed their “accursed lot” was destined to be punctuated by institutionalized ignorance, then their own Black institutions would be charged with the task of raising a generation to deconstruct the oppressive system of Jim Crow. Joe Brown, Principal of the Taylor Colored School in Mississippi adequately summarized the hope that his people placed in future generations when he wrote to NAACP President Walter White:

As a leader in my community, and as a debtor to my profession, I feel that if God helps those who helps themselves, some one should come to the rescue of my

⁶⁷ See Rayford Logan Papers, diary entry from February 6, 1941, Collections of the Manuscript Division, Library of Congress

people. I am appealing to you in behalf of my people to see if the NAACP can appeal to the state educators and state authorities to support us in our efforts, or if there is someone in your midst deeply interested in the education of Negro youth that will aid us towards doing a greater work of self help and improvement...For the great cause of Negro youth in the deep south.⁶⁸

Although southern living has been consistently romanticized as laid back and stress free, Black life in the south during the era of Jim Crow was characterized by the frenetic pace of racism. African Americans were constantly in search of peace for their weary and harassed souls. They formed various outlets for their pain, including but certainly not limited to the church, the exploration and pioneering of musical genres such as jazz and the blues, migration to a pseudo Northern paradise, and the establishment of organizations charged to confront their everlasting foe, white supremacy. Yet through it all, their figurative messiah remained education. Black educators and the relationships that they formed with their student's became the crucible upon which Black liberation manifested itself. It is quite understandable that the critics of Black education formed disparaging comments on what they perceived as the failure of Black youth. This was their Black knight in shining armor that would ultimately champion their causes and help vanquish their foes. The "talented-tenth" in training, however, were merely college students whose dreams and fascinations of life away from home were not necessarily inclusive of mounting a radical campaign against Jim Crow.

But where in the annals of the Black struggle does it illustrate a social movement born in a day and change made over night? Why were the critics of Black colleges during wartime America so hard on institutions that faced such difficult economic and political hurdles? The faith placed in these enclaves and the desire and need for

⁶⁸ Joe C. Brown to Walter White, November 29, 1937, reel 5, part 3, NAACP Papers.

immediate relief from the wrenching pain of segregation and white supremacy perhaps offers answers. Transformation did not occur over night and radical change emanating from the halls of Black America's educational enclaves was still a generation away. The freedom struggle would have to be carried on steadily yet patiently if it was contingent upon the actions of educated Black youth. As author John Egerton stated, "Using whatever tools they could get their hands on, the black pragmatists chipped away at the might rock of segregation...Only the Southerners seemed to have the patience, the stubborn persistence, to measure out success in teaspoons."⁶⁹

As World War II dawned upon America, however, patience and persistence began to wear thin for many African Americans caught within the exhausting web of Jim Crow. Black activists and scholars heightened their criticisms of white supremacy and continued to point out the hypocrisy of America's claim as the defenders of liberty throughout the world. With the nation's entrance into WWII, Black journalists and activists called for a Double V campaign that urged Black Americans to fight bravely against enemies abroad and at home. The enemy at home, of course, was a formidable opponent that had plagued the lives of Black people for years. It would take a new spirit and a new energy to mount a successful crusade against Jim Crow. The educators who taught in Black institutions would play a critical role in preparing this new generation of students. Jackson State College professor and celebrated poet Margaret Walker posed the question that her future students would have to answer themselves. In her 1942 poem entitled "Sorrow Home"

⁶⁹ John Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in the South* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1995) pp. 286-7.

she wrote, “O Southland, sorrow home, melody beating in my bone and blood! How long will the Klan of hate, the hounds and the chain gangs keep me from my own?”

There would come a point where life itself was worthy of sacrifice for the causes of liberation in the South. The fear that had paralyzed and silenced generations of Blacks in Mississippi, soon gave way to a new and courageous spirit. Young African Americans eventually took those steps that simultaneously brought them closer to eminent physical harm and emancipation from Jim Crow. They became bolder in their cause and those who helped to lead the new charge were experienced in warfare abroad and now stood poised to carry out war at home for a cause much nearer to their own personal freedom. One can imagine that as students attended Black institutions, they were influenced and inspired by emboldened veterans that returned to enroll in school. Half way across the world, students began to hear about new anti-colonial movements that ultimately would free the oppressed continents of Africa, India, and Asia from the direct rule of their white captors. Yet for a seed to flower, its environment is most critical. The immediate environment that surrounded, embraced, and nurtured Black students was perhaps the most important of all factors that produced the new generation. Within this space and place, they made contact with their fellow peers and professors that directly and indirectly encouraged them to be bold in their assertion of their Blackness. Susie Baughns, a Jackson State student noted:

This is the time for plain speaking. The Negro's vital stake in victory, his unexcelled record of patriotism gives him the right to be concerned about his civil liberties. In an hour of crisis, broad social problems come into sharp focus. The status of relationship between our white majority and the Negro, our greatest minority, can be classified as one of them. Therefore, all of us can see the need for mutual understanding and respect on the part of both racial groups. But can this ideal be accomplished? Here on campus we have an organization, the Youth

Council, which uses psychological and constitutional procedures to help Negroes in their struggle for full emancipation and to secure this ideal...Help solve the problem of segregation and racial discrimination.⁷⁰

The Second Curriculum became the driving force of Black institutions during wartime America. This pedagogy of hope uplifted and encouraged young Black students to hold on to their undying belief in themselves and the unrealized American dream of freedom for all. While confronting race riots, lynchings, and state sanctioned terror; Black students were socialized and nurtured within enclaves that attempted to physically shelter them from it all. Yet the urgencies of the present struggle required their immediate contributions to an emerging civil rights movement. At the First Conference of Negro Land Grant Colleges, the indefatigable scholar and activists Dubois challenged a new generation of college administrators and the students they served when he noted, “What program now can these people put before themselves through their own thinking and through the education of their leaders in institutions such as this body represents? There is no profit here in returning to programs of the past or re-arguing old controversies. It is new facts and new problems that confront us and demand new solutions.”⁷¹

If Black institutions were going to serve as a valuable tool of liberation, then it was essential that those entrusted with stewardship be willing partners and advocates for student activism; a fact that would soon heavily influence the levels of activism in Jackson, Mississippi. Since their inception, Black colleges and their students were

⁷⁰ “Join the Youth Council,” *The Blue and White Flash*, Vol. 3, No. 1, November 1942.

⁷¹ “Report of the First Conference of Negro Land-Grant Colleges for Coordinating a Program of Cooperative Social Studies,” ed. W.E.B. Dubois, The Atlanta University Publications, No. 22, Atlanta, Georgia, 1943, p. 11

embraced as the fulfilled dream of enslaved Africans. Their futures rested on the yet unrealized hopes that one day they would be destined to liberate the masses of African Americans suffering at the hands of racism. “Facing the rising sun, of a new day begun,” Black youth marched on towards their ever-closing destiny.

CHAPTER 4

“HOW TO SAIL AND WHERE TO ANCHOR:” BLACK COLLEGES AND THE EMERGING CIVIL RIGHTS GENERATION IN POST WAR MISSISSIPPI. 1945-1960

“Grant us O’ God the ability as prospective teachers to inspire instead of discourage, to give light, where there is darkness. To help where it is needed, and to fight for justice for all. Unless O’ God we are able to do these things there will be so few leaders and great men and women of tomorrow that the progress of our race will be impeded. Today we launch, O’ God, teach us how to sail and where to anchor.”¹

- Onezima Clark

A tall and handsome Marine sergeant stepped off the bus as it pulled into the Jackson, Mississippi terminal in September of 1947, reentering the relentless and harsh world that service to his country had momentarily allowed him to escape. The dangers of military service abroad were no more perilous to a young man who was raised in a society where assertive Blacks who strayed from the accepted norms faced penalties and violence that was perhaps more certain than any Nazi or Japanese attacks could ever be. Yet the sergeant’s military experiences convinced him and countless other Black veterans returning from World War II that things could never be the same again. Their growing courage and convictions did not make them fearless, for there was still much to fear for those who risked their lives by protesting the pernicious system of Jim Crow. However, many Black veterans were steadfast in their determination to return to a world that they were destined to be in, yet not of. Although it would be almost twenty years before

¹ “A Prayer for the Class of ‘45,” *The Blue and White Flash*, May 1945, Jackson State University Archives.

Sergeant John Peoples would assume the presidency of Jackson State University, his story is the story of change; subtle change. Raised in Starkville, Mississippi and the only son of working class parents, Peoples returned from fighting abroad and enrolled at Jackson State College, never once imagining the role he would later assume in the destiny and direction of his alma mater. The administration of John Peoples became the axis upon which change presented itself to the students, faculty and staff of Jackson State in the late 1960's. He was a man of his time, influenced by war, by his military training, and through the nurturing and leadership opportunities presented to him as a student of the very school that he would later oversee.¹ He immediately demonstrated his internal commitment towards justice by taking bold steps in claiming the democracy that he had fought for abroad. Peoples recalled:

I decided when I came back to Mississippi that I was going to have a certain conduct. That I was not going to accept any old discrimination or racism. In the city of Jackson, there was no movement necessarily for civil rights, but we veterans took advantage of the fact that Mississippi had passed a law which said that veterans would be exempted from the poll tax...So those of us went down to challenge that and we did register to vote. I registered to vote in 1948.²

Dr. John Peoples inherited the responsibility of managing the affairs of Jackson State University firstly from the all white Board of Trustees of Institutions of Higher Learning. But secondly and perhaps most importantly Peoples was the hand picked successor of Jacob L. Reddix, a distinguished educator who served as president of Jackson State University from 1940 to 1967, the longest tenure of any Jackson State president. A native of Jackson County, Mississippi, Reddix received his college training

¹ Dr. John Peoples is a 1950 graduate of Jackson State College and served as Student Government President and captain of the football team.

² Interview with Dr. John Peoples 7/21/2004

at the Illinois Institute of Technology and completed his graduate work at the University of Chicago. As a young man, Reddix's professional work reflected the words and sounds of Black resistance and uplift that defined the 20's and 30's. Reddix was fascinated with the concepts of self-dependency and collective economics, the very doctrines that served as the ideological foundations for leaders such as Booker T. Washington and Marcus Garvey. Shortly after the completion of his graduate work, Reddix published numerous publications on the merit and worth of cooperatives for African Americans. These publications were well received in devitalized communities seeking to pull together their limited economic resources and won Reddix numerous supporters, most noticeably W.E.B Dubois and John Hope II, past president of Morehouse College and former professor of economics at Atlanta University. Dubois touted of Reddix's accomplishments in the field of cooperatives in the renowned Black newspaper, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, causing Reddix to receive numerous written inquiries about his work.³ Writing in 1939, Hope conveyed to Reddix that "the story of your courageous trail-blazing effort and that of others like you in pointing the way to economic and social betterment through mutual self-help needs to be told to our youth who will shortly step forward to be a liability or an asset to the group."⁴

As a young educator, Reddix's message of self-sufficiency and determination did not fail to resonate with youth inspired by his work. One can envision that Reddix made this doctrine central to his teachings within the classroom as well. As a fifteen-year veteran of teaching in the public school systems of Birmingham, Alabama and Gary,

³ Jacob L. Reddix Papers, Jackson State University Archives

⁴ Jacob L. Reddix Papers , Jackson State University Archives

Indiana, Reddix developed a passion for the instruction and guidance of youth. Those inspired by his research on cooperatives did not hesitate to reach out to the young educator, often writing to him in their efforts to attain his advice and direction. A student from Tougaloo College wrote to Reddix while he was teaching in Gary and queried of available resources, stating, “I’ve read your pamphlet, ‘The Negro Seeks Economic Freedom Through Cooperation,’ and I am asking you to send me the latest statistics or reports of your cooperative store.”⁵ The fact that students sought out information on economic franchisement and the possibilities of cooperatives further suggests that Black college students were not totally self-indulged or adrift in narcissistic ideas. An intrigued student from Hampton seeking the help of Reddix noted, “I am interested in the Cooperative movement among the Negro, and have selected “Cooperation, The Hope of the Negro” as a topic for a thesis which I am about to write. I am also preparing an address for Negro History Week on the same subject.”⁶ As Reddix’s message of empowerment and economic resourcefulness spread, his opportunities for advancement increased. He was awarded the position of “Advisor on Cooperatives” with the Farm Security Administration, but stayed briefly whereas ninety days later he was selected as the fifth president of Jackson State.⁷

⁵ Jacob L. Reddix Papers, Jackson State University Archives

⁶ Jacob L. Reddix Papers, Jackson State University Archives

⁷ Jacob Reddix was the first president to preside over Jackson College after the state assumed control of the institution in 1940, ending sixty-three years of control by the American Baptist Home Mission Society. The ABHMS noted that Tougaloo College was adequately meeting the educational needs of African Americans in the area, therefore relinquishing their financial support for Jackson College. For more on the transition of Jackson College to state control see Jacob L. Reddix, *A Voice Crying in the Wilderness: The Memoirs of Jacob L. Reddix* (Jackson: The University Press of Mississippi, 1974) and Lelia Rhodes, *Jackson State University: The First Hundred Years* (Jackson: The University Press of Mississippi, 1979).

It is difficult to imagine what thoughts entered into Reddix's mind as he returned south to begin his work. Surely he understood that he was treading into familiar territory where southern whites were unsympathetic and unwilling to endure polemics on race. There was little room to continue promotion of research that may unsettle white supporters or deliberately embolden African Americans. An all white board selected him with the understanding that his teachings and guidance of Jackson State would be consistent with Mississippi's long-standing traditions and culture. That culture had zero tolerance for educated Blacks who sought to break stride with the expectations of local custom or law. To this end, Reddix embraced the conservative nature that defined Mississippi's Black leadership. He later noted, "I have never personally participated in an organized protest. Undoubtedly, I have been criticized for not doing so. For more than fifty years, I have devoted my life to the education and enlightenment of young people...I believe this contribution is as important as participating in organized protests."⁸

Reddix became the prototypical Black college administrator during an era where the policies of Jim Crow came under an increasingly bolder critique by the Black left. The influences of determined WWII veterans and the conservative yet steadfast labor of organizations such as the NAACP and the Congress of Racial Equality was not the agenda that most Black college presidents were prepared to adopt. Caught between the vices of economic survival and political posturing to please state legislators or white benefactors, many Black college presidents displayed a vainglorious machismo that was implicitly and often forthrightly wielded on their respective campuses in an effort to ensure that faculty, staff, and students towed the line that was expected by the white

⁸ Reddix, *A Voice Crying in the Wilderness*, 222.

power structure. While several Black college presidents chose to skillfully navigate that line in an effort to give faculty and students the latitude and space needed to construct life affirming relationships, others refused to risk their jobs, or as many saw it, the longevities of institutions that served Black communities since their humble beginnings.

As prominent and respected leaders in the Black community, college presidents represented the supreme custodians of college bound Black youth and were often venerated as such. Yet many presidents struggled connecting the idea of subservience to expectant white “supporters” with the charge of uplift, a concept that had driven Black institutions and their students since their inception. Black educators of the Deep South operated within an environment that expected devotion to time honored traditions that had effectively disenfranchised African Americans for generations. As products of this generation, the older cohort of Black educators wrestled with the theory of openly challenging a system that demanded loyalty for job and life’s sake. This personal battle with the power structure took its toll on Mississippi’s Black educators who relinquished the challenge of openly confronting white supremacy over to the next generation. In regards to a confrontation that would not take place until 1965, Peoples recalled of Reddix:

He got a call from the governor’s office, wanting him to check the roll of all his teachers and workers, and they wanted to know if there were any of them in that march [Selma Right to Vote March]. If they are not present, they want to know where they are. He covered and said they’re all here...but he was so angry that they would do that you know. So I saw what he had to go through. I sat there by his desk and he was angry that they were going to call and tell him to check the roll of his teachers and make sure that nobody was in that march with Martin Luther King and if they were he wanted them fired right now. He didn’t even check, but he said he did. He would say things like “things are going to change, and you’re the young man who can probably do it.” He said, “these people, they’re all racists but it’s going to change. It’s going to take time; it’s going to

take somebody you know who's young like you, that can go anywhere if you need to. See, I'm at the end of my career, I can't go anywhere I want to go.”⁹

Yet this incident took place during the twilight years of Reddix's administration. During the twenty-five years that preceded it, Reddix guided Jackson State with little or no compromise for those who were not on board with his agenda. Students were expelled and faculty was quickly dismissed if they openly presented an image that was off script with the accepted norm. Indeed Reddix presided over Jackson State in such a way that lead the former and infamous Governor Ross Barnett to thank Reddix for cooperating in “every way” upon Reddix's retirement in 1967.¹⁰ A man cannot serve two masters. Reddix, like numerous other Black college presidents, resented the pull and tug of the puppet strings as those who have no personal control or voice so often do. Their emasculation resulted in a professional atmosphere that was aggressive and domineering in fashion and college campuses that befell increasingly tighter control. As Jackson State's emerging civil rights generation reflected upon the budding social movements and political change taking place before them, they were forced to seek validation for their beliefs and political direction from sources other than those responsible for maintaining the “shelter.”

If Black colleges were to remain beholden to those who expected much, while permitting little, then their collective destinies as catalysts for change would be sidelined and seriously impaired. The emerging civil rights generation in Mississippi confronted numerous challenges in their efforts to effectively organize a campaign of resistance and

⁹ Interview with Dr. John Peoples 7/21/2004

¹⁰ Jacob L. Reddix Papers, Jackson State University Archives

agitation, namely their most immediate obstacle; unyielding Black college administrators. If state controlled institutions like Jackson State were unprepared to offer their full support for those seeking change and retribution, then the emerging civil rights generation would have to find another anchor that would hold in the midst of the brewing tempest that lay ahead.

Though the rolling hills, plantation styled architecture, and Spanish moss lined trees that adorned Tougaloo's campus harkened to its feudalistic past, the emerging civil rights generation at Mississippi's leading private institution for Blacks, conveyed anything but a sense of enslavement in the years leading up to social upheaval. The tone and tenor about Tougaloo College in post World War II Mississippi suggested a spirit of racial liberalism that was unique for an institution in the Deep South. At the heart of Tougaloo's fragile relationship with the local white power structure, was the continued integration of its administration and faculty. Tougaloo maintained an interracial workforce long after most historically Black colleges began to shift to predominantly Black staffs. Much of this was attributed to its founding within the AMA and the steady stream of white administrators and faculty members either sent directly by the controlling board or highly recommended by AMA affiliates.

The intermingling of Blacks and whites in the public eye set off racial tension in the Magnolia State. Although the concept of paternalism was inadvertently, and in some case, deliberately acted out in faculty/student relationships, the contact amongst Blacks and whites on campus were noticeably absent of the racist venom, which characterized similar interactions away from the "shelter" of Tougaloo. The mere thought that whites

employed by Tougaloo took their positions with no thought of upholding the time honored traditions of white supremacy was enough to incense many local whites and caused Tougaloo to operate under the leery and watchful eye of white Mississippians. The former governor and senator of Mississippi, Theodore Bilbo, served as the political mouthpiece for Jim Crow for much of the 20th century and upheld the tenets of white supremacy even on the floor of the United States Senate. In 1944 he professed:

With separate facilities and separate accommodations for the white people and for the Negroes, the color line was drawn in every walk of life below Mason and Dixon's line. Accepted by the members of both races just as they accepted the air that they breathed, the policy of segregation has remained in the Southland, and the attacks which, down through the years, have been made on it from the outside have met with complete failure. However, it has become necessary for us to consider and to openly discuss the forces which are today attempting to destroy the color line.¹¹

Bilbo need not look far to find a credible culprit in his fear of integration. Right within his own backyard, Tougaloo's day-to-day operations defied his notion of a pure and un-amalgamated Mississippi.

The fact that integration existed on Tougaloo's campus without any fanfare or complication for much of its existence proved not to be the most significant detail of their new and unwanted attention from Bilbo and others. Indeed the state began to focus more distinctly on the growing nuisance that was embodied in Tougaloo. However, it is very plausible to suggest that Tougaloo's detractors were right. It is no surprise that the evils of segregation became the hallmark and focus of student protest in the early sixties; the seeds of protest had been planted as early as the late 1930's. Black students attending this controversial institution were made very comfortable about the possibilities of Blacks

¹¹ Theodore G. Bilbo, *The War; Constitutional Government; and the Race Issue - America's Greatest Unsolved Domestic Problem*, (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1944) 10.

and whites coexisting in a harmonious fashion; they did it everyday.¹² The concept of integration was not foreign to them nor was the advocacy of desegregation. Tougaloo made it a habitual practice to invite speakers who promoted dialogue and interaction between the two races. One such speaker, Reverend Ritchie Low of Vermont was, “well known for his Vermont Experiment for the development of interracial friendship,” and the record showed that “the students and faculty of Tougaloo were happy to have Mr. Low as guest speaker at one of the assembly periods.”¹³ Perhaps the best illustration of Tougaloo’s experimentation with integration was the low-key gatherings taking place between Tougaloo and a small liberal arts institution in Jackson, Millsaps College.

Started in the mid 1930’s and initiated primarily by like-minded faculty from both institutions, the Intercollegiate Council was founded with the express purpose to open lines of communication and contact between students from Tougaloo and Millsaps. The council brought students together under the auspices of the YWCA and YMCA’s on both campuses and allowed students to hold joint programs focusing mostly on religion but also implicitly suggesting that integration in Mississippi could work. After one such program, a Tougaloo student noted, “the program was a well organized and enjoyable one, to which the Tougaloo faculty and student body responded heartily. After the assembly the Tougaloo young women accompanied the visitors about the campus and

¹² The “harmony” that characterized interracial relationships at Tougaloo was a tenuous one. Black faculty members were often critical of the paternalistic nature of white administrators and professors and this caused some measure of tension on campus. Generally speaking however, this was never a major disturbance on campus and the integration of faculty and the presence of white scholars would not become a serious factor until the late 1960’s with the emergence of the Black Power Movement. For more on the legacy of paternalism and the relationship between Black and white faculty at Tougaloo, see August Meier, *A White Scholar and the Black Community, 1945-1965* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1992)

¹³ “Tougaloo Has Noted Visitor,” *The Tougaloo News*, October 1946, Folder 6, Tougaloo College Archives

they seemed to enjoy seeing the Tougaloo buildings and the rustic beauty of the campus.”¹⁴ The meetings between Tougaloo and Millsaps students never invoked overt protest against Jim Crow policies. Indeed most local whites were generally unconcerned by the gatherings. However, the Cold War conformity of the 1950’s coupled with an emerging civil rights generation, helped to consolidate and unify threatened white southerners. The champions of white supremacy were in full swing to expose any and all perceived dangers to the longevity of Jim Crow. The liberal policies of Millsaps did not fail to make their agenda. Bilbo suggested that students at Millsaps were, “being misled and misguided by their instructors, and he called for a complete overhaul of the teaching force of any college that would persist in the spread of Communist doctrine among the student body.”¹⁵ By 1954, the meetings between Millsaps and Tougaloo waned significantly as white southerners prepared to do battle with the growing tide of Black activists.¹⁶ Abhorred for its deliberate practice of integration and rechristened by many as “Cancer College”, Tougaloo found its unpopular niche in an increasingly hostile, post World War II society.¹⁷

¹⁴ “Tougaloo College and Millsaps College Exchange Visits,” *The Tougaloo News*, January 1936, Folder 15, Tougaloo College Archives

¹⁵ “*Millsaps and the Civil Rights Movement: Institutional and Individual Responses*,” Panel with Dr. T.W. Lewis, Dr. Richard Bergmark, Dr. Charles Sallis, and Dr. Jeanne Middleton. Millsaps College Archives, Fall, 1995.

¹⁶ Although the two schools created opportunities for Millsaps faculty to teach at Tougaloo, the relationship was never fully reciprocal. Faculty members of Tougaloo were never permitted to lecture at Millsaps and Tougaloo students always constituted the bulk of the participants in their interracial meetings. Millsaps failed to test the racial waters by admitting any Black students and receded in their support for integration with the Brown vs. Board decision in 1954. For more on the Millsaps/Tougaloo relationship see Campbell, *Mississippi: The View From Tougaloo*, 170-174, and Ashley Bass, *A Search for Common Ground: A History of the Relationship Between Millsaps and Tougaloo*, Honors Thesis, Millsaps College.

¹⁷ See reference to Tougaloo as “Cancer College” in James Silver’s, *Mississippi: The Closed Society* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963) 33.

During the Cold War era, special visiting lecturers and new faculty hires of Tougaloo aided in stoking the fires of activism amongst students. Tougaloo students were exposed to a litany of artists, scholars, and activists, whose presence on campus worked to further animate their political consciousness. Guest of Tougaloo included artist Hale Woodruff, singer Marion Anderson, poet Countee Cullen, activists Ralph Bunche and the young, newly elected, Executive Secretary of the NAACP in Jackson, Medgar Evers, who in the summer of 1955 delivered the “Report on the National Meeting of the NAACP in Atlantic City” on Tougaloo’s campus in a social science forum.¹⁸ Tougaloo continued to expand their faculty by bringing in new talent that was eager to work. One of their most notable hires during this period was historian August Meier. Meier had a keen interest in the Black struggle and his work and research contributed to this mightily later in his career, but his professional path began at Tougaloo where he secured his first teaching position in the fall of 1945. The Tougaloo newspaper announced Meier’s arrival by noting that he had “a profound interest in racial and minority problems.”¹⁹ Meier’s commitment to the Black liberation did not end in his professional life, but extended far into his personal life as well. Later in his career, Meier became an active participant in the Civil Rights Movement and held memberships in all of the big three organizations, SNCC, CORE, and even served as the secretary for a local NAACP chapter in Maryland. The presence of scholars with such broad sympathy helped to further buttress the emerging civil rights generation at Tougaloo. With the dawning of the Cold War, the addition of faculty who were generous of heart and

¹⁸ “Summer Social Science Fourms,” *The Tougaloo News*, October 1955, Tougaloo College Archives.

¹⁹ “Tougaloo College Opens Seventy-Seventh Session,” *The Tougaloo News*, October 1945, Tougaloo College Archives.

progressive in thinking, expanded the political consciousness of Tougaloo students while simultaneously fueling the fire of Tougaloo's growing enemies. No scholar personified this development more than Ernst Borinski.

During World War II, America experienced an influx of refugee scholars from Europe. Fleeing persecution by the Nazi's, many of them found their way to southern Black colleges and continued their work in their respective fields. It was in the fall of 1947 that perhaps Tougaloo's most influential scholar, Ernst Borinski, began his trailblazing career at the small southern school destined to rewrite Mississippi's history. Diminutive in stature yet bold in spirit, Borinski made a personal commitment to wage intellectual warfare against intolerance and segregation. As a victim of persecution himself, Borinski sympathized with the struggle of southern Blacks. His distaste for ignorance and racism inspired him to transform Tougaloo's classrooms into wellsprings of idealism. Borinski did not hesitate to enlist his students in this cause and lay before them this daunting yet noble task, the deconstruction of Jim Crow. It was his *raison d'être* and for the next two decades, he carried it out distinctly and deliberately. The arrival of Ernst Borinski marked a new era for Tougaloo. As head of the Social Science Division at Tougaloo, Borinski made the questioning of white supremacy apart of the first curriculum not the Second. Students enrolled in his classes and seminars intellectually dissected the policies of Jim Crow. They intensely debated and studied the dilemma, holding discussion groups and factoring themselves in as the solution.

Borinski's liberal agenda and position on Jim Crow found him on the wrong side of the aisle during the Cold War era. Monumental political changes such as Executive

Order 9981, enacted in 1948, and the landmark decision of *Brown v. the Board of Education*, handed down in 1954, succeeded in emboldening African Americans but enraged and consolidated conservative southern whites. Subsequently, conservative politicians with dubious intentions aggressively pursued those representing “Un-American” ideals. In the heart of Dixie, there was nothing more “Un-American” than questioning the segregation laws of the south. Vilified in the media and demonized by Mississippi’s leading politicians, Borinski was a constant target yet managed to stay unscathed and unharmed during his professional career. Scholar Gabrielle Edgcomb noted:

Borinski wrote letters to the editors of the local paper and was heavily attacked as a foreigner and a communist; on 5 December 1955, the Jackson *Clarion Ledger*, whose Mississippi Notebook column by Tom Ethridge featured the Stars and Bars at the head, Borinski was chastised for invoking the law and the Constitution on behalf of integration...In 1957 he was also denounced as “that white radical professor at Tougaloo College” by the Mississippi Legislature.²⁰

Despite his detractors, Borinski remained steadfast in his criticism of Jim Crow.

Responding to his political foes, Borinski accepted their challenge as he noted that Tougaloo “assumes the role of leadership in educational integration in our state. We may, however, add, that this role has fallen upon us as a result of our tradition to take the lead in adjustment to the new...We cannot escape this destiny, we have to accept it as Mississippi’s challenge to our college.”²¹ Borinski was most successful in converting what had been laboratories of hope into launching points of activism. However, as students opened their sails and navigated through the unforgiving and hostile climate that

²⁰ Gabrielle Edgcomb, *From Swastika to Jim Crow: Refugee Scholars at Black Colleges* (Malabar, Florida: Krieger Publishing Company, 1993) 124.

²¹ William Bender, “Desegregation in the Public Schools of Mississippi,” *The Journal of Negro Education*, XXIV, 1955

was post World War II Mississippi, it was essential that they receive direction, and above all leadership, from someone cut from the same cultural cloth.

Tougaloo's Black faculty steadily increased during post World War II Mississippi. As more educational opportunities opened up for Black students, many of them received graduate training at northern schools and returned to the south to teach at historically Black colleges. Their presence was invaluable because they most concretely represented what was possible for Black students. As the civil right generation emerged from the "shelter" of Black colleges to take on Jim Crow, the support and leadership of Black faculty reinforced their decisions and served as shining examples of Black adulthood. During the Cold War era, the cultivation of overt political protest was still years away, however, seeds were being planted in the symbolic garden that was Tougaloo College. It was the nurturing care of William Bender, Tougaloo's chief "gardener," that quickened the maturation of many Tougaloo students.

A native of Jasper County, Mississippi, William Bender returned to his alma mater in 1934 to serve as the chaplain and assistant to the President. As a member of the class of 1914, Bender departed Tougaloo to spread the gospel as an ordained minister. However, as he reunited with Tougaloo there was much more to Bender's message than biblical tidings. Embedded within his preaching and teaching were clarion calls for justice and Black liberation that resonated within the students he "tended" to. Appointed chaplain after Benders death in 1957, Rev. John Mangram reflected upon the "gardeners" care for the students he nurtured when he noted. "He liked to see things growing. He

liked to see young people grow and enjoyed being in their presence.”²² As students gathered in the company of a man many viewed as a surrogate father, they were spiritually and psychologically moved by his courage to do what most Black men dared not do in Mississippi, voice contempt for Jim Crow. Mangram eulogized him in this way:

We are on safe grounds when we affirm that he was not afraid of death. Mr. Bender was one of the men who was always out in the front ranks in the fight for civil rights. Because there were such a few in the state of Mississippi and because the atmosphere in this state was never really conducive to the person who challenged the status quo...This meant that he was a marked man, and the children of darkness could have destroyed him as they have others. He knew this. His friends told him, his family reminded him, and even though he possessed the knowledge of the stark possibilities, he never ceased riding the buses, walking the highways at night as well as in the day, hitchhiking a ride with whomsoever would give him a ride. He walked in the very “shadow of death” and feared no evil.²³

To most students, Bender was a rock of courage and his actions cast a long shadow across the campus of Tougaloo. Most young Black Americans were still attempting to find their voice during an era that shunned radical activity. For the most part, Black college students still rested under a blanket of silence in regards to public protests. However, they were becoming restless and the presence of influential men like William Bender was enough to stir some students to action. The election of 1946 proved to be a watershed event for Black Mississippians and an orientation in public protest for Tougaloo students. Their longtime political foe Theodore Bilbo ran a campaign of scandal and intimidation in his attempt to regain his Senate seat in Washington.

However, two years prior to the election, the Supreme Court ruled against the white

²² John D. Mangram, “The Death of the Righteous,” William A. Bender Papers, Tougaloo College Archives.

²³ Ibid.

primary in *Smith v. Allwright*, paving the way for African Americans to try their hand at participating in the political process. Voting for Blacks in the south was still a hazardous affair. Political intimidation and violence were standard tactics that had proven effective over the years in keeping African Americans away from the polls. Disregarding this history, thousands of Blacks turned out to vote and among them were Bender and several of Tougaloo's students and alumni.

Two students, Napoleon and Earl Lewis accompanied Bender to the polls that day but they were met with the barrel of a gun as they attempted to vote.²⁴ Retreating from their standoff, Bender immediately filed a complaint along with others who experienced southern tyranny during the elections. They alleged that Bilbo had succeeded in disenfranchising thousands of African American through intimidation and they were prepared to bear witness to that fact in a court of law. Historian Clarice Campbell noted that, "Napoleon Lewis, Bender, and other Tougaloo alumni were among those who testified against the seating of Sen. Theodore Bilbo in 1946."²⁵ A chorus of testimony made no difference in this matter whereas Bilbo was diagnosed with Cancer and died shortly thereafter. Nonetheless, a new day had dawned for Black Mississippians. Expecting less than 25 to show up for testimony, local whites were shocked to discover more than 200. They were bolder and brimming with courage and confidence that change was imminent. Historian John Dittmer surmised that, "in that crowded federal

²⁴ Earl Lewis was a noted leader on the campus of Tougaloo. He served as the president of the Y.M.C.A and represented Tougaloo at the Southern Negro Youth Conference (SNYC) in 1940. See "Tougaloo Represented at Southern Negro Youth Conference," *Tougaloo News*, May 1940, Tougaloo College Archives.

²⁵ Clarice Campbell and Oscar Rogers, Jr., *Mississippi: The View From Tougaloo* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1979) 186.

courtroom in Jackson the shock troops of the modern civil rights movement had fired their opening salvo.”²⁶

Bender’s leadership on campus played a significant role in the spiritual and political awakening of students. Yet some of his most inspiring work was conducted beyond the sheltering walls of Tougaloo. From 1943 to 1953, Bender served as the president of the Jackson, Mississippi’s branch of the NAACP. So respected was Bender that in 1951, the national offices appointed him president of the State Conference of Branches, a responsibility that included organizing branches across the state. Bender’s selection was not unanimous however. The NAACP’s brass, “regarded Bender as something of a loose cannon. Bender was his own man and possessed an explosive temper.”²⁷ The fiery nature of Bender was an asset to him in the Magnolia State. His line of work, both on and off campus, made him an easy target and a pacifist spirit could have possibly conveyed weakness, to his friends and his foes. Benders larger than life personality gained him the admiration of those who knew him and the love of those who leaned upon him for guidance. Bender was not alone in his support of the NAACP. Other Tougaloo faculty members paid dues to the NAACP as well. Although not as visible or publicly vocal as Bender, their ideological beliefs and ideals were transmitted to their students through other means.

Tougaloo’s expanding role in the emerging civil rights generation garnered them the negative attention that they had managed to evade during their previous years of existence. The public eye was hardly a welcoming place for African Americans or the

²⁶ John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995) 9.

²⁷ Dittmer, *Local People*, 31.

institutions that served them in Mississippi, especially when the circumstances surrounding that arrival dealt in the agitation of white people. The fact that Tougaloo's faculty, students, and alumnus, played significant roles in leading the charge against white supremacy during the 1940's and 50's, was enough for local whites to declare the controversial institution as public enemy number one in Jackson. As the enemies of Tougaloo gathered to plot the college's demise, they continued to focus on their major point of contention, integration.

In post World War II America, segregation was indeed under attack. From the courtrooms of America to the desk of the President, the policies of Jim Crow that served as the greatest purveyor of white supremacy were being called into question. Inequities that were visibly laid out across the color line were so far reaching that they had been woven into the very fabric of American society. The steady agitation by civil rights organizations was just enough to vaguely remind white America that these injustices existed at all. The greatest illustration of racial discrimination was embodied in the severe disparities found within the separate educational systems, a fact that lead civil rights organizations to call for the integration of public schools. The evils of segregation were authenticated by the damaging psychological affect it played on Black school children. Despite the efforts of Black educators to contain the adverse affects of segregation, there was no denying the stark contrasts that defined the realities of Black and white school children. Black community leader Reverend H.H. Humes accurately surmised that, "the real trouble is that for too long you have given us schools in which we could study the earth through the floor and the stars through the roof."²⁸ However,

²⁸ Dittmer, *Local People*, 40.

during the Cold War era, the paradox embodied in America's public schools was becoming more evident to children coming of age in the midst of an emerging civil rights movement. This factor proved critical for the future of student protests. Activists Hollis Watkins recalled:

It was puzzling to me as to all the books and different stuff that they had in their school and we didn't have anything like that in ours, so it was real puzzling to me. But, you know, you're basically told this is the way it is, white folks are in charge they make the rules, they make the laws so we have to live by them. And I think it was not having satisfactory answers to many of these questions, is what ultimately led me to get involved with the Civil Rights Movement, because I was in search of answers.²⁹

Thus, education became the major front in the struggle over civil rights and Tougaloo found itself squarely in the crosshairs of white supremacists in Mississippi.

Tougaloo's legacy of anti-segregation was a source of great antipathy for local whites. However Tougaloo appeared to be just beyond the reach of white politicians who could not manipulate the institutions leadership or controlling board due to their affiliation with the AMA, and not the state. In 1951, local whites attempted to undermine Tougaloo's academic reputation by revoking the accreditation of the school.³⁰ Local members of the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, the accrediting body for southern schools, conveniently refrained to instruct Tougaloo of changes in accrediting standards. When inquiring about the reasoning behind the loss of accreditation, the secretary of the organization quipped, "Well that's the college that has

²⁹ Interview with Hollis Watkins, 8/9/2004

³⁰ Prior to 1951, colleges were given ratings of A or B and the majority of Black colleges were rated B, including Tougaloo. However, it was decided during meetings of the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools that all colleges would be accredited based on the same criteria. See Campbell and Rogers, *Mississippi: The View From Tougaloo*, 177-181.

both Nigras and whites on the faculty.”³¹ The President of Tougaloo at the time, Harold C. Warren, was informed that the college had lost its accreditation for four reasons:

1. College has both Negro’s and Whites on the faculty
2. Not enough endowment funding sufficiently spent on its library
3. The problem of low faculty salaries
4. The problem of college’s faculty degrees.³²

With exception to the first detail, (which was obviously levied with a racist agenda) Tougaloo was guilty as charged and moved immediately to improve its financial backing, low payroll, and academic background of its faculty. The regional accrediting agency was forced to look past Tougaloo’s mixed faculty due to the longstanding tradition the institution held in regards to an interracial staff. However, as Tougaloo amended the other legitimate deficiencies, many administrators and alumni were angered by the source of this assault. Moreover, the attacks against the institution may have further entrenched its belief in interracial ideals and commitment to the burgeoning struggle for Black liberation.

President Warren had dealt coolly with the situation. Historian Clarice Campbell noted that upon regaining accreditation, Warren, “insisted on a dignified acceptance, saying the school had only regained something of which it had been robbed. He personally found satisfaction in foiling the efforts of whites who had always been antagonistic toward Tougaloo.”³³ As President of Tougaloo, it was Warren’s official job to see the institution through the difficult days ahead and keep alumni abreast of the

³¹ Campbell and Rogers, *Mississippi: The View From Tougaloo*, 177.

³² Morris and Mary S. Covington, *A Historical Calendar of Tougaloo College*, California State University, Dominguez Hills, Masters Thesis, Spring 1987 Pg. 11

³³ Campbell and Rogers, *Mississippi: The View From Tougaloo*, 181.

circumstances surrounding Tougaloo's latest troubles. Warren exhibited egalitarian like qualities as an administrator and his leadership through this turbulent period proved critical in Tougaloo's future as an enclave for student activists. Had Warren folded in the face of overt pressure, alumnus and students alike may have taken it as a sign that their beloved institution was not immune to the forces of white supremacy that had proven successful in the oppression of countless others. The doors of Tougaloo remained open however, for the pursuit of noble ideas. In a letter to the Washington D.C. Alumni Club, Warren bluntly stated, "I felt that those who sought to harm the college were clearly destined for defeat, not only because they were wrong, but because they were stupid...This same sort of stupidity in an unworthy cause, I am sure, will soon defeat the opponents of integration in Mississippi."³⁴

Throughout the 1950's, Tougaloo was a target of Mississippi's white supremacists. Their seemingly untouchable position frustrated the local white power structure that tried to be creative and sly in discrediting the institution. Escaping the incident unscathed and with a stronger infrastructure than before the ordeal, administrators made sure that the Tougaloo extended family was made acutely aware of the forces that sought the institutions demise. Bender reached out to his constituents and fellow alums, condemning the state for taking wrongful actions against the embattled institution. In a letter to a former student he noted:

You are aware of the fact that prejudice Mississippi through the Department of Education undertook to give Tougaloo a hard way to go by taking away its rating for no valued reason at all. The school was without rating for the 1952-1953 school year, but it answered this ugly deal with such a strong faculty, money, improvements and everything else, which made Tougaloo so efficient that, the

³⁴ "Letter to the Alumni," *The Tougaloo News*, October 1955, Tougaloo College Archives

Southern Association at its last December meeting gave Tougaloo the new rating.³⁵

It was highly uncharacteristic for African Americans to not withdraw in the face of such unmitigated oppression that defined Black life in the “Magnolia State”. It had worked time and time again in year’s prior. From the Delta to the Piney Woods, Black Mississippians were politically and economically intimidated in order to make way for white demands. Although scare tactics had proven successful in the past, things were slowly beginning to change. Tougaloo’s situation afforded them some autonomy from the state and it was just enough space to develop the fortitude and tenacity to stand up to the defenders of white supremacy. Bender noted, “That you may understand fully the basis of the whole adverse action, some of us were quite active in the NAACP. President Warren refused White Mississippians request for an apology and refrain from this activity. So false representations were made to the rating bureau.”³⁶

As the political climate slowly shifted in Mississippi, the sons and daughters of Tougaloo bore the responsibility of inducing change in their surroundings. After all, this is what the Second Curriculum had prepared them for. Their work outside the “shelter” served as either a testimony or an indictment against their educational training. The failure to adequately measure these activities has led to a premature and fragmented understanding of Black college alumnus and students during the emerging civil rights generation. Scholars and history buffs have often found value in the drama and sensationalism of the civil rights movement, paying only a cursory glance to the rank and

³⁵ William Bender to Dr. Emiel Nash, February 24, 1954, William Bender Papers, Tougaloo College Archives

³⁶ William Bender to Ruth Mueller, January 15, 1954, William Bender Papers, Tougaloo College Archives

file stories of everyday life. In what ways did the Black school teacher, trained in the nurturing environment of Black colleges, replicate tough love and compassion in their own classrooms? Did soldiers or blue-collar workers live out the ideals of their favorite instructors or administrators as they journeyed through the market place of life? And most importantly, what, affect, if any, did their silent toil and labor make in the shaping of the emerging civil rights generation. Of course these were not universally shared experiences by all Black college alumnus, but those who chose to “fight the good fight,” could trace their molding to time spent within the “shelter” of Black colleges.

World War II veterans perhaps played one the most significant roles in launching attacks against Jim Crow. Many of them reenlisted in college with renewed vigor and determination that their wartime courage could take them right to the frontlines of the battle against white supremacy. Tougaloo had a multitude of students and alumni serve in battle overseas. An incomplete list of 34 Tougaloo students was published in the student newspaper in 1944.³⁷ Although thousands of miles away and in foreign lands across the world, the students were never far from Tougaloo. It was a special place for the alumnus and students who understood the significance of the “shelter”. Recalling his fond memories of Tougaloo, Lieutenant Johnnie Hamilton, a member of the famous Tuskegee Airmen, and a Purple Heart recipient, noted, “For in the midst of this there yet are times when there are quiet moments. It’s that time we devote the hour to thinking of all of you. And I never forget Tougaloo, or any of you. Wherever I go the spirit, which I attained there, goes with me. I, too, have that as one of the factors which keep me

³⁷ “Tougalooians in Overseas Service,” *Tougaloo News*, May 1944, Tougaloo College Archives.

inspired.”³⁸ Returning from perils abroad to growing hostility at home, their leadership was a powerful instrument in the emergence of the civil rights generation.

Alumnus outside of the “Magnolia State” did their part to carry proud the banner of Tougaloo. Commencement from Tougaloo represented physical separation from the institution, but never disassociation from the Tougaloo ideal. When burdened by their worldly struggles, or celebrating personal milestones and achievements, many of them never failed to turn to the source of their inspiration. Joyce Ladner, a future student activist at Tougaloo, recalled that, “the first person I called when I got my doctorate was Dr. Borinski. Not my mom, not my dad, not my sisters or brothers, but Dr. Borinski.”³⁹ Whether visiting in person or corresponding via letters, alumnus leaned heavily upon those who possessed the ability to remind them of their purpose and mission. Alumnus Mary Cleaves wrote from Los Angeles, notifying William Bender of struggles that reminded her of her higher calling. She wrote:

It was a situation that challenged my Tougaloo training. A group of prejudiced white mothers had carefully kept any minority group mothers from holding offices of any kind. Then, last summer, this white bunch waited until school closed, then resigned en masse, and sat back to see the P.T.A. fold up. Well, I really wasn’t strong enough to do it, but when they all sat around with their smug looks and said, ‘Who can we get for President? Mrs. Cleaves, what about you?’ I said, I’ll be glad to!”⁴⁰

Cleaves’ reaction to her skeptics illustrates the leadership qualities she learned as a student. Moreover, her desire to stamp out racism through her own personal actions,

³⁸ “Tougaloo Student Awarded the Purple Heart,” *Tougaloo News*, May 1944, Tougaloo College Archives.

³⁹ Edgcomb, *From Swastika to Jim Crow*, 121.

⁴⁰ Mary Cleaves to William Bender, August 10, 1955, William Bender Papers, Tougaloo College Archives.

further demonstrates that many Tougalooians embraced their charge through unpublicized deeds.

Black solidarity and righteousness were guiding principles at Tougaloo. Their fellowship and discussion of world affairs prompted administrators to channel their convictions in a positive direction. In a letter to a Tougaloo supporter, Bender noted, “A campus youth chapter of the NAACP has been in the picture for some time.”⁴¹ The institution’s alumnus reflected their indoctrination in these standards as they encountered white supremacy outside of Tougaloo’s gates. Gladys Noel Bates, a 1942 graduate of Tougaloo, and a science teacher in the local “colored” schools, took on the state of Mississippi in 1948 when she challenged for the equalization of pay for the state’s teachers. Bates registered her complaints in a U.S. District court of law and was defended by Constance Baker Motley. She faced immediate reprisal from the state. Bates lost her job as the Jackson School Board, “argued that the case was moot since the plaintiff was no longer employed in the system.”⁴² The presiding judge did not veer from the expectations of the local white power structure, handing down a decision in favor of the school board. Nevertheless, she received support from her alma mater and local Black courageous enough to speak out on her behalf. The NAACP subsidized her pay and allowed for Bender to oversee her financial assistance.⁴³

⁴¹ William Bender to Ruth Mueller, January 15, 1954, William Bender Papers, Tougaloo College Archives.

⁴² Dittmer, *Local People*, 35.

⁴³ Campbell and Rogers note that Bates was later employed by the African American controlled Mississippi Teachers Association as the executive secretary. See Campbell and Rogers, *The View From Tougaloo*, 165.

Students at Tougaloo were made aware of the case and were encouraged to follow suit in Bates pursuit of justice. Administrators and faculty members understood that if the vision of an integrated society was going to take hold, then the actions of alums like Bates must be celebrated. Time was of the essence. White Mississippians were gathering their forces in an effort to hold on to the policies of Jim Crow. If students were to understand their role in the growing freedom movement then it was essential that the call for foot soldiers go out early and often. The duties of chief recruiter had passed on to John Mangram, who inherited the role of campus chaplain after the passing of William Bender. Mangram was a native southerner and educated within the “shelter” of Black institutions. He received his undergraduate training at Jarvis Christian College in Texas and enrolled in divinity school at Howard University. Mangram sounded the call for action in a sermon delivered at the Tougaloo chapel where he shared the courageous actions of their fellow Tougaloo alumnus. Rising to the pulpit, Mangram declared:

She and her husband were fired on trumped up charges. They were black-balled in every county in the state. They were forsaken, denied, and criticized even by some Negro citizens throughout the state. Salaries of all the teachers increased as a result of her effort. This alumna of your Alma Mater is a plum tree. She “sent forth her blossoms while the snow was still on the ground.” She preferred to fail in a cause which will ultimately succeed. The city succeeded in a cause which is doomed for failure. Right does ultimately triumph!⁴⁴

The message was undeniably clear. Mangram was mentally preparing the Tougaloo student body for their impending engagement with the allies of Jim Crow. To do so, students needed assurance that their struggle was a noble one and that one of their

⁴⁴ A fellow minister introduced Mangram to Anne Morrow Lindbergh’s book, *North to The Orient*, where the author considers the courage of the plum tree as it blossoms while there is still snow. Mangram used this illustration to convince students that the time was quickly approaching where they would have to step out on courage. See, “The Plum Tree: A Sermon by Chaplain John Mangram,” *Tougaloo News*, October 1954, Tougaloo College Archives

own had come through the fires of white supremacy and survived. It was their distinguished mission, expected of them by past generations and now presented to them for actualization. Mangram assured them that the price was heavy but the prize surely worth their struggle. He noted:

Real courage is demonstrated not when a person leaps blindly into the dark without counting the cost...It is courage when you know that friends may leave you, but you speak out against wrong or stand up for right...The powers that be may persecute you, despitefully use you – crucify you. Act anyhow!”⁴⁵

Mangram’s preparation of Black youth did not end with his responsibilities at Tougaloo. The Tougaloo chaplain was also active among the local Hi-Y and Tri-Hi-Y associations that were sponsored by the YMCA and YWCA. These vital groups served as statewide leadership training and character building organizations for young men and women.⁴⁶ While dispensing lessons of citizenship and democracy, Mangram used every opportunity to reach out to those destined to deconstruct the policies of Jim Crow. Future activists such as Joyce and Dorie Ladner, Leslie McLemore, and countless others, took advantage of the Hi-Y and Tri-Hi-Y programs and honed the leadership skills they utilized as future activists.⁴⁷ The socialization and politicization of Black college and secondary youth, was a critical factor for the emerging civil rights generation.

Teasing out the complexities of how and why social movements begin is never an exact science. Shifting paradigms and political agendas, rage and response to tragedy and misfortune, the continued agitation and pressure of activists, and the presence of highly organized networks and institutions, are all equally important when dissecting the

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ See “Faculty Items,” *Tougaloo News*, May 1956, Tougaloo College Archives.

⁴⁷ Interview with Leslie McLemore, 7/8/04

ebb and flow of revolution.⁴⁸ The conservative 1950's were the crucible in which a multitude of factors produced evidence that suggested a full-scale movement was imminent. No factor was as significant to this development as the premium placed on Black education and the presence of the Second Curriculum. There was a nexus that existed between Black colleges, primary and secondary schools, and the community itself. Education had long been viewed as one of Black America's most esteemed professions and the fruits of this labor were beginning to manifest itself within the growing Black insurgency. Black churches, civic organizations, schools, and students all pulled together to form a cooperative learning environment where these seeds could be planted. There was irony to be found in the fact that out of the same segregated and dilapidated schools and institutions that served as the source of Black angst and protest in the 1950's, a movement was preparing to take flight.

The surging political consciousness of Black youth was not what the white power structure was expecting. For years white tactics of intimidation were focused specifically on grown men and women within the African American community. The general assumption was that Black youth were being indoctrinated by docile and broken adults who knew better than to plant seeds of protest in the hearts and minds of their students. P.H. Easom, the longtime white overseer of Black education in Mississippi and the State Superintendent of Schools, spoke to these goals when he stated, "Colleges should earnestly concern themselves with the task of turning out leaders and teachers who will

⁴⁸ There are several useful studies that discuss and apply models that attempt to measure the rise and fall of political insurgency in the Civil Rights Movement. See Aldon Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York: The Free Press, 1984), and Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982).

be able to inspire and to teach the race how to care for their bodies, how to rear their children, how to make a living, how to live with their fellow men, and for what ends to live.”⁴⁹ Easom was the typical cordial southern racist. As a superintendent, he sustained his professional respect for Black educators as long as they were not in mixed company.⁵⁰ Yet his actions in times of controversy enacted old-fashioned Jim Crow politics. Easom was an active commentator during Tougaloo’s accreditation troubles. While mailing a copy of the latest student newspaper to an alumnus, William Bender noted, “We are sending the one you want most – the one containing President Warrens scorching arraignment of the enemies of Tougaloo College. It is plain to everyone that he was talking to none other than Dr. P.H. Easom in the State Department of Education.”⁵¹

While it is certain that numerous faculty of Black colleges and scores of Black educators in the public school systems adhered to the advice of Easom by failing to steer students towards direct confrontation with white supremacy, there were others who had a radically different interpretation of “what ends” Black youth should be living for. The general assumption that Black schools were “controlled” environments did not take into consideration the space afforded to faculty of Black colleges and Black teachers working in under resourced primary and secondary schools. Nor did they consider the long-term affect of the Second Curriculum. Teachers in their own private classrooms with their own private office hours and after school moments, had more latitude and liberty to engage in instruction as they saw fit, often with minimal supervision by presidents and

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⁵⁰ See Campbell and Rogers, *The View From Tougaloo*, 168.

⁵¹ William Bender to Edmund Cooke, February 4, 1954, William Bender Papers, Tougaloo College Archives.

principals. Therefore, Black uplift and the preparation for full citizenship conveniently and often deliberately was inserted into the daily pedagogy. This was a universal message, found wherever the Second Curriculum was being espoused. Ezell Blair Jr., known now as Jibreel Khazan and one of the Greensboro Four, recalled that, “Our teachers in the segregated school system told us they were preparing us for the day that we would be free and that we were going to be the leaders of that freedom. This is before Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks came along.”⁵² Slowly but surely this doctrine of self-assurance worked its way into the psyche of Black youth, producing responsible citizens, industrious laborers, and effective leaders. By the time the Civil Rights Movement began to emerge in the 1950’s, Black youth were beginning to assume their position as leaders of a growing struggle for Black liberation.

Regardless of the expectations of racist whites and acquiescent Blacks, students emerging from the “shelter” of Black colleges in the 1950’s appeared determined to make their own destiny and not the ones that white overseer’s or their political pawns desired for them. A Second Curriculum put wind in their sails and strengthened their resolve. Yet the world was changing at a rapid pace around them, convincing many students to drop their anchors in the growing civil rights movement. For many, the urgency of this mission far exceeded the restraints or repercussions they faced from those who supervised their actions. Caught within this predicament were Black college students attending state supported colleges in Mississippi. Historians such as John Dittmer have noted the fact that state controlled Black institutions were stringently controlled

⁵² Jelani Favors, “Shaking Up the World: North Carolina A&T and the Black Student Movement” (MA thesis, The Ohio State University, 1999) 63.

atmospheres devoid of overt protests or voices of dissent.⁵³ Even former activists have echoed this sentiment. There is compelling evidence however that suggests that dissent was indeed present on these campuses, even during the conformity of the 1950's. Marching, singing, and the occasional swinging, have often defined our measurement of movement activity. However, this formula fails to look at the more subtle, less glamorous forms of dissent that did indeed exist on these campuses.

Jackson State, under the helm of president Jacob Reddix, was under great pressure to yield to the expectations of the state. Despite the repressive forces surrounding them, Jackson State students gained a greater sense of purpose in post World War II Mississippi. This unsurprisingly coincided with a more militant tone amongst African Americans who called for victory at home and abroad. The student newspaper, *The Blue and White Flash*, touted to be "the true voice of Jackson College." Regardless of the legitimacy of their claim, the newspaper carried blurbs and stories that measured the pulse of student consciousness and reflected the fact that there indeed existed on campus a "voice" that was concerned and connected with the emerging civil rights movement. In 1942, a call for membership went out for a new campus organization. The article written by student Susie Baughns read:

This is the time for plain speaking. The Negro's vital stake in victory, his unexcelled record of patriotism give him the right to be concerned about his civil liberties. In an hour of crisis, broad social problems come into sharp focus...Here on campus we have an organization, the Youth Council, which uses psychological and constitutional procedures to help Negroes in their struggle for full emancipation and to secure this ideal...Help solve the problem of segregation and racial discrimination.⁵⁴

⁵³ Dittmer, *Local People*, 225.

⁵⁴ "Join the Youth Council," *The Blue and White Flash*, November 1942, Jackson State University Archives.

In that same year, student representatives attended the NAACP's fourth annual student conference, which was held at Clark College in Atlanta. The conference's theme that year was "War and Post War Problems for Negro Youth."⁵⁵

What these articles may suggest is Reddix acted aggressively against the "enemies of the state" only when he believed their actions to be severely noticeable. This included all forms of unveiled protest but did not pertain to more secluded forms of dissent. Campus organizations, students attending conferences, and articles written in a campus paper (it is not certain if the paper was under any surveillance by white authorities during this time) were all forms of protest that could be shielded from the state in some reasonable way. What is undoubtedly clear is that students at Jackson State did not sit idly by as more radical and militant forms of protest were emerging. Furthermore, no one appeared to prevent them from joining in the struggle. In the winter of 1946, students traveled to South Carolina as student representatives to The Southern Youth Congress. The news story, written by student George Swan, who also attended the conference, stated, "The Southern Youth met in solemn session – Militant, courageous Negro Youth of the South. Youth – which must and will be served. Youth – dedicated to the struggle for freedom. Youth – determined to achieve that freedom in its lifetime."⁵⁶

The stories of Black students taking on roles in the growing movement were not buried in the back pages of *The Blue and White Flash*. It was front-page material often serving as the lead story. This suggests that the report of these events were of

⁵⁵ "Jackson College Represented at NAACP Conference," *The Blue and White Flash*, November 1942, Jackson State University Archives.

⁵⁶ "College Represented at Youth Congress," *The Blue and White Flash*, December 1946, Jackson State University Archives.

considerable significance and most certainly deemed news worthy. It also suggests that those responsible for editing or even censoring, were not hindered in their support for these dispatches from around campus. What is more, these stories reflect the presence of a Second Curriculum that molded the social strivings and desires of these students. In a cold and repressive environment, the likelihood of students displaying any semblance of political consciousness or connection with a movement that spoke beyond their own personal concerns would have been highly unlikely. Such was not the case at Jackson State. The voices of students, found within their own newspaper, show students who were served by a Second Curriculum,” and taught to think of themselves as forces of agency. In his article entitled “Moving Forward to Serve Humanity,” student Johnny Edwards wrote:

We are moving forward to serve humanity and we have been thoroughly oriented in how to solve our own problems; for our teacher training has been directed toward social ends, that is, toward the perpetuation, progress and welfare of all men...We realize that the educational objectives that we now possess should become consciously integrated with all social organization to the end that the educational objectives may determine the direction of social change, whereby all men would reap the benefits of our democratic society.⁵⁷

It is plausible to believe that Jacob Reddix may have enacted his own “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy in matters pertaining to radical student voice. Surely Reddix read the student newspaper. If he did not, then it is almost certain that one of his close staff members was responsible for reporting to him the contents of the paper. Had he felt the need or pressure to deal with the growing radical interests of students as conveyed through the student newspaper then he was at liberty to do so. But these were student

⁵⁷ “Moving Forward to Serve Humanity,” *The Blue and White Flash*, May 1949, Jackson State University Archives.

leaders, not obscure students taking a brief moment to express unpopular rants. They were editors of the newspapers, presidents of fraternities, sororities, and campus organizations and officers in the student government association. Reddix did not silence their voices, a telling sign that the dreams and desires of an emerging civil rights generation were permitted to run free, to an extent. Although he is not thought of as an outstanding proponent of civil rights, President Harry Truman forecasted what was to come in a letter to Reddix celebrating the seventy-fifth anniversary of the school in 1952. Truman noted, “In the years to come we shall need the wisest leadership and the deepest understanding. As we rise to the challenge of our time we look above all to our country’s educational institutions.”⁵⁸

There were greater challenges that lay on the horizon for Black college students. One can imagine how many students possessed deep dubieties about the promises of American democracy and freedom in an age that found little voice or compassion for Blacks in mainstream America. The pendulum between hope and doubt swung freely in the 1950’s. The shared experiences and concerns of students bound them together as more difficult days rapidly approached. The significance of the Second Curriculum is magnified in closed societies such as Mississippi. Jackson State College, to a lesser extent, represented a closed society to thousands of students who were not free to engage in the “above ground” protests that defined the 1960’s. However, the establishment of spaces for intellectual freedom was essential in the mental liberation of politically

⁵⁸ Letter reprinted from Harry Truman, *The Blue and White Flash*, September 1952, Jackson State University Archives.

conscious students. Utilizing this space, students like Earl Gooden were able to compose messages of hope to his fellow students. He noted:

To find self-contentment one must be satisfied with his or her responses to the forces encountered; the most successful way that this may be achieved is to set up a definite set of values and on these to stand at all times, not succumbing to doubt, peril, or any subduing forces. On these I stand: democracy, self realization, faith, and love of and respect for all mankind.⁵⁹

Navigating their way through the conservative climate of Jackson State, students found friends and supporters of such messages, wherever they could. In January of 1951, a valuable ally in the pursuit of student advocacy arrived in the person of Dr. Jane McAllister.

Jane McAllister was born in 1899 in Vicksburg, Mississippi. She was a 1919 graduate of Talladega College, a small Black college in Alabama. McAllister received her graduate training at the University of Michigan and in 1929 she became the first Black woman to earn a Ph.D. in Education as a student at Columbia University. She returned to Mississippi in 1951 to serve first as a consultant and later as full time faculty in the Department of Education at Jackson State. Her tour of duty as an educator had taken her to Black colleges throughout the south but she returned to Mississippi to be closer to her mother in Vicksburg. McAllister was well respected in her field and brought her sterling reputation with her to Jackson State. Her arrival on campus earned the lead story in the campus newspaper, as students were excited to have someone with such credibility joining the faculty in Jackson. When asked about her feelings of arriving at Jackson State, McAllister displayed the sensitivity and compassion that made her well loved among her students. She noted:

⁵⁹ "This I Believe," *The Blue and White Flash*, March 1956, Jackson State University Archives.

At present time Jackson College to me is young men and women who demand leadership training given not by a verbal theory-level type of performance but by direct experience in living and working with groups. It is a faculty with each individual aware of the tragedy of wasting the human resources of the college by not understanding (1) the cultural patterns of the students and (2) the rural scene from which they come.⁶⁰

McAllister was an idealist. She loved the promotion of free thought and encouraged her students to engage in it often. Moreover, Jane McAllister never hesitated to promote the ideals of freedom and equality to her students at Jackson State regardless of political or campus climate. McAllister stated that “In my own opinion, and I am a native Mississippian, nothing can do more for the South than breaking down its isolation of ideas.”⁶¹ Professor McAllister understood that the free exchange of uncensored ideas was enough to stimulate and produce change in the hearts and minds of her students. If she could convince her students to focus not on who they were, but on who they were about to become, then Black Mississippians could take a step closer to experiencing a freedom movement. To expand ones horizons, to experience dreams of grandeur, and to pursue noble ideals, should be the privilege of any college student. What is clear from the work the work and research of Jane McAllister is that her life was dedicated to ensuring this right for her students.

McAllister’s arrival at Jackson State coincided with the celebration of the college’s seventy-fifth anniversary. The theme that year was “Education for a Free Nation.” The use of the words “free” in describing America in the 1950’s was a rather

⁶⁰ “Columbia’s First Negro Woman Ph.D. Joins Faculty Here,” *The Blue and White Flash*, January 1951, Jackson State College Archives.

⁶¹ Jane McAllister to Mark Starr, December 14, 1951, Jane McAllister Collection, Box 2, Jackson State University Archives.

intriguing concept. On the one hand, Black students, faculty, and even administrators, clearly understood the hypocrisy behind the notion of American freedom and democracy, especially in Mississippi. However, what McAllister and others on the organizing committee may have focused on was the continued preparation of their students as instruments of social and political change. In discussing the purpose of the seventy-fifth anniversary celebration, complete with lectures and symposiums, McAllister hinted toward the promotion of the Second Curriculum. She noted that the forums grew, “out of the regular daily college curriculum experiences and return to enrich these experiences. Second, they point the regular college curriculum experiences more directly toward the goal of making students effective citizens in the free nation.”⁶²

The efforts of Black educators to impress upon their students the ideas and responsibilities of full citizenship further promotes the idea that students were being drilled and trained as if they were an army preparing for battle. African Americans in the early stages of the second half of the twentieth century were still treated as second-class citizens. If they challenged this idea, white supremacists had ways and tactics that suggested they were even less than that. What Black America needed was the surge of an army that was unafraid to challenge the concept of second class citizenship and demand their full and entitled rights as Americans. Jane McAllister took a leadership role in preparing that army and was more than qualified in doing so. Her former student Rita Kinard recalled, “she spoke her mind about everything. She was not afraid and she talked about the people here in Mississippi. About how they were so prejudiced and

⁶²Jane McAllister to Charles Hunt, January 15, 1952, Jane McAllister Collection, Box 1, Jackson State University Archives.

all.”⁶³ At Jackson State she spent valuable class time attempting to convince her students that Black America would not and could not achieve full citizenship until they themselves made those brave strides toward freedom. Activist and former student Dorie Ladner remembered that Dr. McAllister used to say, “only evil will triumph if the good do nothing...She told us that we had to take a stand and to sit and do nothing we wouldn’t triumph.”⁶⁴

McAllister’s portrait of freedom was painted with broad strokes as well. She had sincere interest in the reclamation of Africa, whereas independence movements were swiftly moving across the continent during the 1950’s. In her work outside of Jackson State, McAllister served on several boards, most noticeably the Board of Trustees of her alma mater, Talladega College. Dr. McAllister was very influential in the initiation of the Teacher Training Program at Talladega, which proposed an exchange program between Ghana and Talladega in 1958. The purpose of this program was not to recreate the old missionary relationships that viewed Africa as heathenish and uncivilized. McAllister and the board envision Talladega students becoming active builders in a new Ghana by serving as civil servants and teachers. In a letter to the president of Talladega, McAllister wrote, “I know you and Dean Simpson will laugh at the wildness of my dreams but it seems to me that Talladega is well fitted to take the lead in seizing this opportunity to help in African education.”⁶⁵ It was quite clear that when it came to the principles of freedom and justice, Jane McAllister could dream no small dreams.

⁶³ Interview with Rita Kinard, 7/31/2005.

⁶⁴ Interview with Dorie Ladner, 6/23/2004.

⁶⁵ Jane McAllister to Arthur Gray, March 15, 1957, Talladega College file, Jane McAllister Collection, Jackson State University Archives.

The vision and idealism of Jane McAllister kept afloat the promise of dissent on Jackson State's campus in the 1950's. Amazingly, her constant acts of student advocacy and promotion of activism never brought her in harms way of either the administration or the state. It is not clear how McAllister managed to stay under the radar but her papers clearly show that she was well respected and admired for her work on campus and in the larger academic community. In her time spent at Jackson State, McAllister left a legacy that was larger than life. This was consistent with how she carried out her work. The constraints and pressures of Mississippi were not large enough to hold her. She simply refused to be instructed on how she should live her life or control her classroom. Her courage in spite of overwhelming odds and racism made her an extraordinary instructor, role model, mentor, and friend.

Dr. McAllister apparently possessed a *savoir-faire* that many of her colleagues did not. Her outward support of political insurgency made her an anomaly among professors at Jackson State. Most Black faculty members at Jackson State either felt bridled in their desire to support student activism, or were not inclined to support radical thought at all. McAllister was one of a handful of instructors who were openly supportive of students engaging white supremacy head on. Most instructors at Jackson State College were native southerners and like much of the Black adult population of the south, were somewhat hesitant to take those extra steps necessary to confront the policies of Jim Crow. Economic reprisal and physical harm were still looming threats for those bold enough to publicly voice their displeasure with white society. Most of Jackson State's all Black faculty wrestled with the ideas of livelihood versus liberation. This internal

struggle made them more than hesitant to endorse rebellious student behavior. No Jackson State professor represented the conflicted scholar more than the legendary literary giant Margaret Walker Alexander.

Margaret Walker Alexander was born in Birmingham, Alabama in 1915 and was the daughter of a Jamaican born Methodist minister and a mother who worked as a musician and teacher. At the age of ten, her family moved to the colorful town of New Orleans where Margaret developed a love of poetry. Her affinity for the written word propelled her to great heights in the literary world, as she became one the most celebrated poets during the Harlem Renaissance and befriended the likes of Richard Wright, Arna Bontemps, Langston Hughes, and Elizabeth Catlett. In 1937 she published her most recognizable poem, *For My People*. As a young woman, she became indoctrinated with Marxism and was intrigued by many idealistic philosophies, a fact that broadened her worldview and apprised her of her social obligations. She married Firnist Alexander in 1943 and accepted a teaching position at Jackson State in 1949.

Margaret Alexander was a mystic who possessed deep fears of God that compelled her to include her religious beliefs as an essential part of her teaching and writing. She wrote, “as a Negro woman, my religion is necessary to my integrity, to help me build a ground, moral and spiritualistic life, and I find it necessary often in order to maintain anything like emotional stability and equilibrium.”⁶⁶ Her personal chronicles reflect an individual who was haunted by the desire and drive to do what was right before the eyes of God. At times she was often quite consumed by these fears and was

⁶⁶ Margaret Walker Alexander, journal entry, July 22, 1949, Box 5, Folder #34, Margaret Walker Alexander Research Center.

overtaken by depression and failing health. As an outlet for her mental anguish, Alexander often composed in her journals what can best be described as psalms of praise and contrition. She was fascinated with astrology and the signs of the zodiac and quite frequently practiced the art of prophesy. Yet despite her spiritual outlets and intense relationship with God, Margaret Alexander was deeply conflicted. Her tenure in Mississippi undoubtedly was of great assistance to her warring consciousness as Alexander directed her anger towards the repressive climate of Mississippi and her disappointment with the harsh and stringent work environment of Jackson State. However, the greatest of all these frustrations, was that one of the greatest writers of the twentieth century felt voiceless and confined to the margins of her journals as the Civil Rights Movement emerged before her eyes.

The journal entries of Margaret Walker reflect a scholar and a mystic that was very astute about the rapidly changing world. Like countless other African Americans in Mississippi, Alexander observed the world events with a hopeful heart. If the freedom struggle continued to grow, then sooner than later it would have to make its way to Mississippi. In 1949, Alexander foresaw future events that soon consumed the “Magnolia State.” She prophetically declared:

Prejudice, segregation and Jim Crow are in for a death struggle and I hope they will die. Our schools will no longer be separated, neither our churches and acts of prejudice in the commercial place like stores and hotels, places of amusement, etc. will be punished as crimes against the people. I think it will take only a mere ten years for that change to take place.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Margaret Walker Alexander, journal entry, September 27, 1949, Box 5, Folder #36, Margaret Walker Alexander Research Center.

These changes could not come soon enough for those yearning to breathe free in the stifling atmosphere of Mississippi. How frustrating it must have been for someone to possess the clairvoyant powers of Alexander yet be unable to physically aid in freedom's swift arrival. Her prophetic and mystic powers could not transform men like Jacob Reddix nor could it eradicate fear and repression from Mississippi. But perhaps it provided her some internal hope that the impending struggle was rapidly approaching. In January of 1950, she recorded these prophetic words:

Eisenhower will station troops in the south because of serious trouble and unrest over Jim Crow law in Dixie. All of this is due to happen while Uranus is in Cancer and it does not leave for good until 1956...and a great new era for art and religion and all forms of culture will be ushered in.”⁶⁸

Alexander's visions of Little Rock and perhaps the ascension of rock and roll and the transforming of pop culture indicate how in tune she was with the mystical world. Yet her esoteric abilities could not prepare her for the disappointment she was about to endure as a professor at Jackson State.

The professional work world of Jackson State was not a comforting place for those wishing to endorse the emerging civil rights generation. Professors like Jane McAllister were few in number. Many of them surely shared the private thoughts that Margaret Alexander did about the gathering storm. They feared both the known and the unknown. African Americans in the Deep South knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that bloodshed was sure to accompany overt protest against Jim Crow. What they did not know however, was when, where, and who would suffer. These fears froze many of them in silence as their thoughts turned towards protection of their families and loved

⁶⁸ Margaret Walker Alexander, journal entry, January 12, 1950, Box 5, Folder #38, Margaret Walker Alexander Research Center.

ones and towards self-preservation. Alexander wrote that ever since the *Brown vs. Board* decision, “Mississippi has been in a worse state than the world had been over the atomic bomb. I came back to tension and fear which has steadily increased; incidents of violence, intimidation, reprisal, indignity and gross injustices fill a huge volume.”⁶⁹ Cutting through the fear of reprisal was a Herculean task for Black Mississippians. They were all too familiar with the capabilities of white supremacy and the war against Jim Crow was growing tenser by the day. This was not comparable to Red Scare or McCarthyism where individuals were unfairly targeted and persecuted for their beliefs. This was much more serious. Black folks had threatened the longevity of white supremacy and whites were more than prepared to enact terrorist tactics to defend their way of life. Alexander wrote, “The war of nerves and harassments have included real bullets to back up threats. We on our job at Jackson College have been told that if we make any frontal attack on segregation we will not get our checks. Very few of the faculty members dare belong to the NAACP.”⁷⁰

As a politically aware and racially conscious writer, Alexander mulled her options. Her poetry was still well celebrated and obtaining a job outside of Mississippi was not a problem. Her husband and family wanted out of Mississippi, but that ultimate decision rested with her as the breadwinner for the household. Alexander made the decision to stay in Mississippi although it was one that she questioned quite frequently in her writings. Her conclusion to stay in the south was not unlike millions of other African

⁶⁹ Margaret Walker Alexander, journal entry, October 9, 1955, Box 9, Folder #51, Margaret Walker Alexander Research Center

⁷⁰ Margaret Walker Alexander, journal entry, October 9, 1955, Box 9, Folder #51, Margaret Walker Alexander Research Center.

Americans who felt a vested interest in the land of their mothers and fathers.⁷¹

Alexander's decision to not flee the injustices that prevailed in Mississippi left her continuously debating with herself over the direction of the struggle. Perhaps she understood however, that her destiny was somehow intrinsically linked with the future of this movement. Nonetheless, Alexander sat flustered and temporarily neutralized on the sidelines of the war against Jim Crow, impatiently waiting for her proper time to act. In 1957, she angrily wrote:

Why don't we challenge them? Why don't we speak out? Why are we so cowardly? No one wants to admit that we are living under a blanket of fear, with constant threats and undertones of violence. What if we open our mouths? We are threatened with our jobs, our homes, our lives, we cannot stay here and speak out. We must be silent or leave Mississippi. A revolution is surely taking place, will we win the peace or lose as always in the past to the reactionaries.⁷²

If Professor Alexander could not make an immediate impact on the movement, perhaps she could mold the lives of students who could. As a young professor at Jackson State, Margaret Alexander shared close relationships with her students. She was an arduous taskmaster who demanded much from her young scholars, a reality that many of her students found hard to adjust to. Yet her toughness as an instructor did not prevent her from exploring the intellectual parameters of her classroom. Alexander used various teaching methods and was creative in her use of imagery that fascinated her students. She was after all a celebrity in the literary world, a fact that did not escape her students. During the school's Diamond Jubilee Year celebration, Alexander was responsible for

⁷¹ Alexander's own life may have had some bearing on the main character Vyry, in her acclaimed novel, *Jubilee*. In the novel, Vyry makes the conscious decision to not escape the horrors of slavery in order to remain with her family. See, Margaret Walker Alexander, *Jubilee* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966).

⁷² Margaret Walker Alexander, journal entry, August 12, 1957, Box 9, Folder #53, Margaret Walker Alexander Research Center

bringing a litany of profound writers to Jackson State to participate in forums and give presentations of their work. Among those writers presenting were Langston Hughes, Robert Hayden, Arna Bontemps, and of course Alexander herself. Professor Alexander worked continuously on what would become her signature work, *Jubilee*. Published in 1966, *Jubilee* was a novel that weaved together the horrors of slavery and gave literary voice from the perspective and experiences of slaves rather than the slave masters.

Alexander apparently found some mobility in her classroom. Former students recalled that she was passionate about teaching and was capable of entrancing her students with vivid images of slavery from the pages of her work. Gloria Douglass recalled that, “There were so many memories about her book *Jubilee* that she told in her class. Her expressions and how she told the story were very inspirational.”⁷³

Alexander’s teaching style suggest that she was able to communicate inspirational messages to her students without being in direct conflict with the schools unwritten policy against speaking out against Jim Crow. Her classes often intertwined discussions of literature with innuendos of racial liberation as a clever way to circumvent the problem. One class in particular, “Bible as Literature,” presented professor Alexander the opportunity to combine her profound knowledge of the Bible with her understanding of Black liberation theology; a staple of the Black church. A former student in that class recalled, “She knew that Bible and she could just make it come alive, you would just sit there in awe. She would discuss the Bible as literature...If she was really talking about the Bible she would somehow inject that [race] into her discussion of the Bible.”⁷⁴

⁷³ Interview with Gloria Douglas, 7/31/05

⁷⁴ Interview with Rita Kinard, 7/31/05

Jackson State in the 1950's was clearly not the idealistic working environment for those who openly supported the spirit of rebellion that was gradually sweeping across Black America. Nevertheless, it was still a credible "shelter" for young Black minds that were in need of education, opportunity, and inspiration. Professors such as Margaret Walker Alexander, Jane McAllister, Lee Williams, and Willie Dobbs Blackburn, touched the lives of their students in very real and significant ways. Former student Gloria Douglass noted, "I knew I wanted to be a teacher or a nurse. And then at Jackson State I learned that you could be a writer if you wanted to or do other things besides become a teacher or nurse. And I remember that Margaret [Alexander] was a college professor and she was a writer."⁷⁵ A likely explanation of what occurred at Jackson State was that Black professors represented what was possible for their students while students coincidentally represented what was possible for the future of Black America. Margaret Alexander had one final prophetic vision before the close of the decade that foreshadowed what was to come. She wrote, "There are going to be cataclysmic changes in my job in the next three calendar years, 1959, 1960, 1961. Only God knows what those years will be bring. Change is inevitable and the greatest change obviously is going to take place in 1960."⁷⁶

Students not only learned "how to sail and where to anchor" from Black colleges, but they also were increasingly inspired and motivated by the world which was changing around them. Through their interactions at school and through their campus newspapers, Black college students were kept abreast of various independence movements across the

⁷⁵ Interview with Gloria Douglas 7/31/05

⁷⁶ Margaret Walker Alexander, journal entry, June 24, 1958, Box 9, Folder #54, Margaret Walker Alexander Research Center.

world. In 1949, students at Jackson State were introduced to V. Horatio Henry, a lecturer from Liberia who among his many books, published, *Colonial Unrest: A Sociological Investigation of the Colonial Movement in the Island of Jamaica, British West Indies* in 1949. It appears the Mr. Henry was somewhat of a playwright as well, whereas the Dunbar Dramatics Club at Jackson State considered putting on his play entitled “Retribution” for the spring quarter play.⁷⁷ Students followed up their interest on Africa by offering a celebration of African dance in their “Symphonie Africainique” during Negro History Week. A newspaper article read, “It is hoped that all persons interested in the achievements of the Negro throughout the world will use this splendid opportunity to add to or refresh their memory.”⁷⁸

Faculty of Black colleges were certainly aware of the changing political current and independence movements throughout the world. In observing the successful independence movement of Ghana and the rise of President Kwame Nkrumah, Jackson State professor Margaret Alexander commented, “His story is truly wonderful and inspiring. He is all we have ever hoped for in a Negro leader.”⁷⁹ The events and programs being carried out on Black college campuses challenges the claims of historian Ellen Schrecker who commented that few African Americans in the 1950’s, “either knew or cared about Africa.”⁸⁰ Indeed the presence of on campus African influences, the

⁷⁷ “Educator From Abroad,” *The Blue and White Flash*, December 1949, Jackson State University Archives.

⁷⁸ “Africana Celebration,” *The Blue and White Flash*, January 1951, Jackson State University Archives.

⁷⁹ Margaret Walker Alexander, journal entry, August 12, 1957, Box 9, Folder #53, Margaret Walker Alexander Research Center.

⁸⁰ Ellen Schrecker, *Many are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998) 376.

political musings of students and faculty, and the aforementioned Teacher Training Program at Talladega College, all suggests that students enrolled at Black colleges were well informed of their African ancestry and were aware of de-colonization movements and rising insurgencies across the world. If there is any truth to be extrapolated from the comments of Schrecker, it may lie in the fact that African Americans themselves were consumed with a domestic struggle for equality that teetered endlessly between staggering defeats and the promises of liberation.

The 1950's spawned civil rights protests that were isolated but inspiring nonetheless. Bus boycotts in cities such as Baton Rouge, Montgomery, and Tallahassee, lifted the hopes of African Americans throughout the United States. In both Baton Rouge and Tallahassee, Black college students assumed active roles as students from Southern University and Florida A&M University participated in the local movements. However it was the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott that captivated audiences around the globe. It was during this successful struggle that Martin Luther King Jr. made his triumphant debut as the movement found a charismatic leader that was capable of eloquently capturing the attention of the nation and indeed the world. Two years following the Montgomery incident, Margaret Alexander's prophetic visions came true as President Eisenhower was forced to send federal troops into Little Rock, Arkansas in order to uphold the *Brown v. Board* decision. Although these victories appeared fruitful in the bolstering of Black confidence and the illumination of America's deep racial divides, it was a Mississippi tragedy that in many ways helped to galvanize the movement from the start.

The murder of Emmett Till has received considerable scholarly attention by civil

rights historians, and rightfully so. His lynching in the summer of 1955 was the source of a national outcry as his mother made the fateful decision to publish his grisly postmortem photos in Jet magazine. It sent a shockwave around Black America as Till became the “sacrificial lamb” of the modern Black freedom struggle. Myrlie Evers, the wife of civil rights leader Medgar Evers, noted that the lynching shook, “the foundations of Mississippi, both Black and white – with the white community because it had become nationally publicized, with us Blacks, because it said even a child was not safe from racism and bigotry and death.”⁸¹ His murder reached out to a very important segment of the Black community, black youth. White supremacy had now reached into the Black community and snatched the life of someone from their very own generation and for young Blacks who were becoming more and more receptive to the militant tones of the 1950’s, it was perhaps a clarion call for them to assume their roles as leaders of the new movement.

Students both in and on their way to the enclaves of Black colleges could not escape the meaning of Till’s lynching. Even in Mississippi, a state where discussions of such occurrences were often deliberately muted, Black youth were stunned by the news. Future student activist Leslie Mclemore recalled that:

Emmett Till’s death clearly nationalized the civil rights movement in a way that it had not been nationalized before. From every corner of America, if you had a radio, or newspaper, or magazine, you knew and heard about the lynching of Emmett Till in Mississippi...His death was a rallying cry for Black people all across America. So it really nationalized the civil rights movement. And then three months later Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat in Montgomery. So you had these two events; two major national events, that became international events, occurring in Mississippi and Alabama. So if you are breathing and have some

⁸¹ Stephen Whitfield, *A Death in the Delta: The Story of Emmett Till* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1988) 60.

sense of pride and consciousness you are apart of that. You are apart of that drift, that flow, that conversation.⁸²

Black college newspapers in Mississippi had never printed stories on lynchings and Emmett Till's was no different. However, it was certain that his vicious murder made an indelible impact on the psyche of young Black Americans everywhere. Future student activist, author, and Tougaloo alum, Anne Moody recalled that, "Before Emmett Till's murder, I had known fear of hunger, hell, and the Devil. But now there was a new fear known to me – the fear of being killed just because I was black."⁸³

Over the years, Black youth of Mississippi were familiar with racial violence as it was a natural bi-product of the state. However the emerging civil rights generation was finding it more difficult to stomach such incidents. The Mississippi Delta, where Till had been slain, was the most infamous region for lynching in Mississippi, if not all the United States. Deloris Stamps, resident of the Delta and a future student at Tougaloo recalled the infamous murder of Delta activist Rev. George Lee, killed a few months before Till in the spring of 1955. After viewing the mortician's futile attempt to reconstruct Lee's face after a shot gun blast all but dismantled it, Stamps noted that, "I had nightmares, for years and years. And I just hated the Delta. Even though atrocities happened everywhere that was my association. And all I wanted to ever do was just get away. So you can imagine that when I got to Tougaloo...this was my opportunity to avenge his death."⁸⁴

Although the mounting civil rights protests were significant, the impact of such incidents remained localized. There was no marked chain reaction that immediately set

⁸² Interview with Leslie Mclemore, 7/8/04

⁸³ Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi* (New York: Dell, 1968) 121.

⁸⁴ Interview with Deloris Stamps, 8/8/04.

off protests from state to state. Most Black Americans observed but never emulated the boycotts they saw in Louisiana, Florida, and Alabama. Emmett Tills death had angered African Americans, but had not quite generated full strides toward freedom. And even the anointed leader of the new movement, Dr. King, was concerned that the struggle for civil rights had sputtered before it could completely get out the gate. Infighting within King's new organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) had significantly weakened its status as a viable organization. In addition, a feud over ideological platforms existed between SCLC and the nations leading civil rights organization, the NAACP, limiting both organizations effectiveness as agents for social and political change.⁸⁵ The mass movement that both organizations sought and Black America needed had not yet begun.

Meanwhile, white supremacists circled the wagons and prepared to fight tooth and nail to defend the policies of Jim Crow. The desegregation of public schools became the final boiling point for southern whites. Consolidated in their efforts and goals, white Mississippians began to organize themselves into Citizens Council's with the first being formed in 1954 in Indianola. Citizens Council's brought a moderate tone to white supremacy. These were not hooded Klansmen enacting terror in the night. They were middle and upper class whites, educated and resolved in their desires to maintain the status quo, no matter what the costs. These organizations proved effective in their public intimidation of African Americans who sought voter registration, desegregated schools, and those who played active rolls in local civil rights organizations. To strengthen their

⁸⁵ For more on the early struggles of SCLC and their feud with the NAACP, See Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America During the King Years, 1954-1963* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988).

hand, the Citizens Council helped to give birth to the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, an organization likened to the Federal Bureau of Investigation and designed to censor and survey any entity that proved detrimental to the social and political traditions of the state. Together with the Sovereignty Commission, the Citizens Council had strengthened the white regime and declared war against the enemies of Jim Crow.

With their position securely fortified, southern white supremacists seemingly had the upper hand. The Black freedom struggle that bolted out the gates during post World War II America began to founder by the late 1950's. However, the tactics of the Citizens Council's targeted the social, economic and political affairs of adults. They had not intended on factoring in protests from Black youth who were largely immune from their tactics. From the piers of Black colleges throughout the south, Black youths full of hope and idealism launched their ships, hoping to one day strike the shores of freedom. As the 1960's dawned, an armada of Black college students appeared on the horizon and proved a force to be reckoned with. Their collective efforts forever altered the destiny of the Civil Rights Movement in America.

CHAPTER 5

CEASE TO LIVE, BEGIN TO BE: WRATH AND RADICALISM ON CAMPUS, 1960-1963

“It was their way of saying, ‘All my life I have resented the kind of treatment I have received. Now that someone has been brave enough to step out, I will identify with them.’”¹

**- John Mangram
Tougaloo College Chaplain**

“I still was not sure of my mission, but mission I knew I had...When shall I cease merely to live and begin to BE?”²

**- Margaret Walker Alexander
May 1, 1960**

Maurice Thompson hastily shuffled through his notes and questions in the moments before the show. As the moderator of the scheduled telecast and the Program Director at WLBT in Jackson, Thompson was responsible for gathering the finest newsmen in the region together to dissect the biggest news story to hit Jackson, Mississippi in years. The esteemed panelist included a who's-who of the local and regional news industry. Kenneth Toler, Chief of the Jackson bureau of the Memphis *Commercial Appeal*; John Herbers, Chief of the United Press International news bureau of Jackson; Paul Tiblier, executive editor of the *State Times*; and Dick Sanders, news editor-in-chief of television station WLBT and radio station WJDX were all present for

¹ John Dittmer, *Local People*, 89.

² Margaret Walker Alexander, journal entry, May 1, 1960, Box 10, Folder #58, Margaret Walker Alexander Research Center

the program. In reality, the assembly of newsmen represented more of a tribunal than they did a panel of journalists. They gathered in the fall of 1961 with the express purpose to swiftly indict and condemn the guilty party who had been summoned before them. As the studio lights glared onto the set, tension ran high as Adam Beittel, President of Tougaloo College entered into his lion's den. The chief administrator of the embattled institution was asked to appear on the forum, "for the sole purpose of clarifying the racial and social position of the College at the present time and in the future."¹ Although Beittel deflected the questions of his accusers by proclaiming Tougaloo's sole purpose was the higher education "of all Mississippi's citizens," it was quite clear to both the disenfranchised masses and to local whites that the institution had become more than an educational "shelter" in the midst of a political firestorm. Tougaloo became the headquarters of social activism in Mississippi during the 1960's and its students led the charge against white supremacy in Jackson, a fact that made it public enemy number one.

The Civil Rights Movement underwent a serious transformation with the dawning of a new decade. Two generations had passed since Black America placed its optimism and investments in the promises of Black education. Black college students had been simultaneously venerated for the hope that they embodied and chastised for their failure to mount an unconcealed attack against the forces of white supremacy. The prodding of the growing struggle for Black liberation and the lessons gained from the Second Curriculum triggered an unprecedented display of activism on February 1, 1960. Four students from North Carolina A&T College staged a sit-in at the local Woolworth's store

¹ "Dr. Beittel Clarifies the Position of the College," *Tougaloo Southern News*, October 1961, Tougaloo College Archives.

in downtown Greensboro. However, February 1st was not the crowning moment or date of Black student activism. On February 2nd the four students were joined by their fellow classmates and during the following weeks, throngs of Black students across the South initiated their own sit-ins at local lunchcounters. Through the spirit of determinism, the conviction of justice, and the nerves of steel, Black student activism instantly became the spring board that transformed the struggle for Black liberation from the rustle of isolated protest to a windfall of collective insurgency. For the first time in Civil Rights Movement history, activism had expanded beyond isolated protests linked to one city or state and formed a network of insurgency across state lines.

The most important factor of student activism was not lost upon Black America. Black students had crossed the deep psychological river of fear and engaged in direct action protest. Their actions were much different than a boycott where protesters could simply avoid the services or establishments of known racists. Boldly and defiantly students entered into places that all their lives they had been instructed not to go and uttered words they had been told not to say, lest they bring harm to themselves or their families. It undoubtedly caught white America off guard, as the “silent generation” was silent no more. Their collective voices were tinged with the confidence they sustained through the Second Curriculum, and their efforts lifted a once dormant movement into a new frontal attack against Jim Crow. Noting the effect that their actions had on Dr. King and the leadership of Black America, historian Taylor Branch suggested that:

With a simple, schoolboyish deed, the students cut through all the complex knots he had been trying to untie at the erudite Institutes on Non-violence. His generosity of spirit made it easy to for him to give the students credit for their inspiration, and his own lingering fears no doubt added to his admiration of their

courage. Even now, King himself, was not ready to join them at a lunch counter or otherwise force a test of the segregation laws with his person.²

Black college students throughout the South had ceased to merely live out their existence, as they knew it. Shedding the doubt that had momentarily paralyzed them in a state of fear, Black students became the foot soldiers the liberation struggle so desperately needed.

In the Magnolia State, any concept of “all deliberate speed” that was accepted by an older generation, was rejected by young Black Mississippians who eagerly sought to join the new struggle for liberation being carried out by students attending Black colleges throughout the South. Yet the hand of bureaucracy sought to deter Black youths from joining in the struggle. When a group of students approached the Pike County branch president of the NAACP to seek his approval of initiating student sit-ins at the local Woolworth’s, he discouraged them by stating, “they needed Roy Wilkins’s permission before doing so.”³ Indeed the NAACP was leery of direct action protests (they initially declined their support for the Greensboro sit-ins as well) and represented a generational divide that would plague the movement for years to come. However, Mississippi’s Black youth had reached a point of no return and were firmly committed to carrying out their mission of direct action. As was the case for numerous Black students across the country, the hope for a better *tomorrow* that the older generation had fervently prayed for became the *today* filled with purpose and an immutable destiny.

² Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years; 1954-63* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988) 276.

³ John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1995) 85.

But the stakes were much higher in Mississippi. The dashing efforts of overt activism carried a heavy price in the South's most notorious state, a factor Black students were all too aware of. This was the state where violence and terror enacted against those who sought to alter the traditions of white supremacy was carried out bluntly and without shame. On the issue of extending rights and privileges to African Americans, there were very few white liberals or moderates in the state. Historian David Halberstam noted that, "Mississippi had in every real sense become a totalitarian state."⁴ Therefore, the violent enforcement of Jim Crow policies became a natural expectation of society in Mississippi, a fact that tempered the protest objectives of both local activists and those who resided outside of Mississippi's borders. However, Civil Rights Movement leaders were emboldened by the actions of student activism. Those daring enough to join the growing tide of freedom fighters in the early 60's understood that if ever the struggle for Black liberation was to flower in Mississippi then the time for action was now.

In the same week that Black college students were descending upon the campus of Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina to form the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Mississippi began to experience the first aftershocks of the newest form of protests in the Civil Rights Movement. Segregation permeated every aspect of life in the South. Even moments of leisure could not escape the pernicious system of Jim Crow. It was along the segregated shorelines of Mississippi's coast, that the state experienced the first collective effort at direct action protest since the

⁴ Halberstam notes the vast difference between Tennessee and Mississippi in documenting the experience of Will Campbell, a former chaplain at the University of Mississippi who was forced out of his position at Ole Miss because of his positive views on integration. Campbell relocated to Nashville and immediately recognized the dissimilarities in the political and social climates of the two states, a factor that undoubtedly assisted Nashville in becoming a center of Black student activism during the early stages of the Civil Rights Movement. See, David Halberstam, *The Children* (New York: Random House, 1998) 22-24.

inception of the student led sit-ins. On April 17, 1960, the beaches of the Gulf Coast were troubled when a group of Black protesters, led by a Biloxi physician named Dr. Gilbert Mason, took significant strides towards justice as they waded into the warm coastal waters previously reserved for whites only. Mason clearly understood that their presence was sure to bring the wrath of local whites. Yet the group of Black insurgents, who perhaps were strengthened in their resolve with the emergence of student protests throughout the South, was unafraid of the possible physical harm that could accompany their actions. Violence ensued throughout the night and coming days as many of Biloxi's white citizens viewed the wade-ins as the opening round in Mississippi's own struggle with the growing Civil Rights Movement. As police officers were brought in to control the racially charged disturbance, Blacks across the state watched and waited to view the outcome.

Bold and defiant protest against the stewards of white supremacy was all but absent within Mississippi's history. This deficiency within overt Black leadership had been effectively driven from the state over the years while simultaneously draining the morale and fortitude of those Blacks courageous enough to engage in the struggle for liberation. It was the leadership of men like Mason however that announced the arrival of a new day in the Magnolia State. One can imagine that Mason's ultimate desire had little to do with simply enjoying the subtle breezes and magenta sunsets of the Gulf Coast. Mason set his sights on a much larger goal that included the eradication of Jim Crow and the elevation of Black people across the state. The new controversial leader organized a new chapter of the NAACP in Biloxi and served as its president. Black and white beachgoers soon unofficially integrated the beaches without incident, however it

was not until a court ruling in 1968 that the dispute over Biloxi's beaches was officially resolved.⁵ Although quite measured in comparison to activists in their neighboring states, Black Mississippians began actively seeking out new frontiers in their challenge against white supremacy.

Historians have grown accustomed to using various indicators to calculate movement activity. Much of this evidence has illustrated protest of a grander scheme such as widespread canvassing across communities, the creation of outspoken committees and organizations, the development of charismatic leadership, and the presence of some form of visible, collective protest. The legacy of dissent in Mississippi however presents greater challenges for historians who are interested in measuring the forms of protests carried out by those who suffered mental and physical anguish of legendary proportions. It is under this veil that it becomes necessary to examine the day to day task of survival that defined the limited albeit critical framework for challenging the hardships faced by Black Mississippians. While it is easy to make assertions that suggest that Blacks within the state were voiceless and timid in the face of white aggression, a much more compelling argument is the suggestion that despite prodigious obstacles and the constant shadow of intimidation and death that followed those inclined to seek retribution, seeds of courage flowered nevertheless. Under the guise of education and the Second Curriculum, the Black citizens of Mississippi forged a vessel of hope that set sail in the midst of the storm that lay ahead.

⁵ For more on the Biloxi beach riots see Erle Johnston, *Mississippi's Defiant Years* (Lake Harbor Publishers: Forest, Mississippi, 1990) 105-111, James Loewen and Charles Sallis, *Mississippi, Conflict and Change* (New York: Random House, 1974), and Dittmer, *Local People*, 86.

The Black college environment proved a worthy launching dock for activism. Students within the enclave of Black colleges were afforded a shelter that most of Mississippi's Black citizens were not privileged to. These students did not have to answer directly to white landowners nor did they have to face intimidation tactics by white employers. Perhaps most importantly, Black college students were not forced to confront the same physical threats that awaited activists and organizers outside of the shelter. The likelihood of White Citizen Council or Klan members knocking on their dorm room doors or dragging them out in the middle of the night or physically destroying an entire school was an unlikely possibility that may have threatened residents of rural areas but certainly not Black college students within the shelter. Therefore, this insular environment presented an opportunity for free intellectual exchange from teacher to student or from peer to peer. Moreover, the Second Curriculum gave Black college students a certain confidence and a sense of mission that directed some towards ideas of uplift and instilled in many others the spirit of protest.

The influence of the Black college environment was made manifest in many ways during the early stages of the Civil Rights Movement. Black college students played significant roles in boycotts throughout the south and protested other local issues affecting their communities. In many cases, that community meant more specifically dealing with conditions and concerns in their immediate environment, the college campus. On the campus of Alcorn State College, located 80 miles southwest of Jackson, students seized the opportunity to voice their opposition to a controversial history professor that had been recently hired. In 1957, Professor Clennon King came to teach at

Alcorn.⁶ A native of Georgia and an ordained minister, King was previously a member of the NAACP but due to a difference in opinions with the organizations leadership, King converted into a critic of the organization and a promoter of segregation. The controversial minister and faculty member at Alcorn wrote several articles condemning the growing Civil Rights Movement that were published in Jackson's local newspapers. King's disparaging comments concerning the NAACP and his support for the policies of Jim Crow won him several opponents, most noticeably his students who in the spring of 1957 boycotted his class due to his mistreatment of female students and his negative views of an organization that his students held in high esteem.

The students of Alcorn were steadfast in their demand that King be removed. The boycott spread from class to class until it thoroughly disrupted the functioning of the institution. In response to the students, a board committee threatened students with the possibility of closing the college. One female student defiantly rejected the threat by stating, "We don't give a damn if you burn it down."⁷ The board held good on their promise as Alcorn temporarily shut down only to reopen after both parties were satisfied. The students brought the boycott to an end and King's contract was immediately terminated. Black college students who rallied to this cause clearly displayed a sense of confidence in themselves and an unwavering belief that their protest was justified.

⁶ The life of Clennon King is a rather interesting story. In 1958, King became the first Black person to attempt to enroll in the University of Mississippi. In an effort to divert national and federal attention it was decided the King should be allowed to enter with as little fanfare as possible. This apparently caught King off guard and it is said that during his attempt, King displayed characteristics that suggested mental instability. He was taken off campus and admitted into a mental hospital where he stayed for several weeks. Upon his release he relocated to California. For more information on Clennon King see Johnston, *Mississippi's Defiant Years*, 52-53 and David Sansing, *Making Haste Slowly: The Troubled History of Higher Education in Mississippi* (Jackson: The University Press of Mississippi, 1990) 144-146.

⁷ Sansing, *Making Haste Slowly*, 144.

Perhaps most importantly, the 1957 Alcorn boycott foreshadowed what was to come in Mississippi as Black students stood firmly upon the principles embedded within them by the Second Curriculum. Historian David Sansing noted that the Alcorn boycott was “an announcement that a new era in race relations had dawned in Mississippi – an announcement that virtually went unheard because the white people of Mississippi were not listening.”⁸ If the actions of students at Alcorn failed to gain the interest of Mississippi’s white citizens, Black college students soon sent a shockwave of rage and concern throughout the state that surely captured their attention. The epicenter was found in the states capitol and was caused by the students of Tougaloo.

At the dawning of the decade, Tougaloo College had already done enough to gain the suspicion of the white power structure in Jackson. Throughout the 1950’s, the institution had developed a dubious reputation for promoting integration. As racial tension mounted with each passing story of movement activity outside of the state, white Mississippians stood vigilantly armed, both politically and literally. Month after month students at Tougaloo received new reports of students becoming engaged in various direct action protests. This new intelligence became even more arousing as the wave of student protests began to descend upon the Deep South. At Black institutions such as Alabama State in Montgomery and Southern University in Baton Rouge, students joined the thousands of youthful protesters throughout the region that defiantly called upon the end of Jim Crow. With the movement rapidly expanding, Black leaders and activists across the country nervously placed Mississippi in their sights. In discussing SNCC’s decision to take on the most notorious state in the South, Andrew Young recalled, “We

⁸ Ibid.

were all Southerners and we knew the depth of the depravity of southern racism. We knew better than to try to take on Mississippi.”⁹ Whether it was naiveté or valor beyond their years, there existed on the campus of Tougaloo, a group of students who were of southern heritage and who were also familiar with the treachery associated with Jim Crow. The blood stained past of Mississippi made no difference to them however. On March 27, 1961, nine Tougaloo students joined the tide of Black college students across the country when they initiated their own sit-in at the Jackson Public Library downtown.

The NAACP was by far the most conservative of all Civil Rights Movement organizations. Yet in Mississippi, mention of the association’s name or affiliation with the controversial organization offered severe reprimand from whites within the state. Ironically, it was perhaps the conservative nature of the organization that convinced Tougaloo’s administrators to allow for the founding of a chapter of the NAACP on campus. It is not without coincidence however that perhaps one of their most beloved former faculty members, William Bender, had bravely championed the causes of the NAACP by serving as the state president before his death in 1955. His effort to inspire and rally students around the principles of justice and equality was a light way upon their path to freedom. A few years after his death, Tougaloo chartered their own chapter that was guided by the steady leadership of the new chaplain, John Mangram. Mangram, along with students who were clearly influenced by the biting realities of Jim Crow and the actions Black college students who had engaged in sit-ins across the South, began

⁹ Charles Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) 103.

mapping out a strategy that could bring the Black struggle for liberation to the heart of the Magnolia State.

Students demonstrated both their political savvy and their healthy fear of Southern violence in determining their point of attack. The public library in downtown Jackson was as segregated as any facility in the city. By choosing a public setting over a private establishment, students circumvented the classic segregationist argument over the right to regulate their own private property. Students also understood that the patrons of the library were more than likely less inclined to roughhouse tactics than the clientele known to frequent the local five and dime. As downtown Jackson came alive with the dawning of a new day, nine sharply dressed young men and women entered into the main branch of the city's library, located on State Street. Meredith Anding Jr., James Bradford, Alfred Cook, Jeraldine Edwards, Janice Jackson, Joseph Jackson, Elbert Lassiter, Evelyn Pierce, and Ethel Sawyer, were all enrolled at Tougaloo. They had notified the local press before their arrival and were prepared to face whatever hardships awaited them. As the local law enforcement arrived to remove the students, it was clear that the seemingly impenetrable veil of injustice had been irrevocably torn. Neither Mississippi nor Tougaloo remained the same.

The spirit of collective protest had been successfully bound in the years prior to the "Tougaloo Nine." With the advent of direct action protest in Mississippi, Tougaloo positioned itself to nurture and receive freedom fighters across the state. Freedom fighting however was still a risky and dangerous business. Not only did students risk their seemingly bright futures as gainfully employed citizens and members of the Black middle class, but they also jeopardized their lives. However the unsettling questioned

that lingered for many students was what good was the promise of citizenship to those who sat permanently and forcefully marginalized upon the fringes of society? As members of the “privileged” class, Black college students could have easily settled for a less contentious future, and indeed there were those who resigned to that fact. Yet for the scores of Black students who became engaged in the movement, the paradox of an American dream extended only to those of a lighter hue gnawed at their souls and their conscious. This new generation demanded more. Their training and environment equipped them with the confidence to boldly claim their God-given birthrights of liberty and justice. Dr. Beittel adequately summed up the goal of a new generation when he simply noted, “I don’t think the students came to the Jackson city library primarily for books.”¹⁰ Beittel’s understatement on the objective of his students captured the essence of a man who had begun to settle in for a long fight with the city fathers. As he wittingly sparred with the local white power structure his cross-city counterpart encountered the challenge of his lifetime.

As word of the “Tougaloo Nine,” arrived on the campus of Jackson State College, students were immediately invigorated by the idea that open demonstrations had finally occurred in Mississippi. However, the president of Jackson State, Jacob Reddix was not as enthusiastic. As a pawn of the state, Reddix was in no position to provide shelter to students openly engaged in a struggle to dismantle Jim Crow. Mississippi’s great contempt for Tougaloo was exacerbated by the fact that they had no direct control over the institution’s daily operations or the spirit of liberalism that ran throughout the

¹⁰ Clarice Campbell and Oscar Rogers Jr., *Mississippi: The View From Tougaloo* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1979) 198.

campus. But Jackson State was a different story. Not only did the state possess control over the college, but their hired man was a trusted steward who vigilantly guarded against actions that could bring swift reprisal. Reddix must have watched with great concern as the events of March 27th unfolded. It became quite clear that his students had no intentions of letting their fellow students from Tougaloo stand alone in their struggle.

Dorie and Joyce Ladner were enrolled as freshmen at Jackson State when the student movement first arrived in Mississippi. The two sisters shared a close relationship all of their lives. Growing up in the small community of Palmers Court located in Hattiesburg both sisters were exposed to the ravaging effects of white supremacy. Like most Black youth during the Cold War era, they became increasingly inquisitive about the stark inequities that defined life all around them. A spirit of determinism and defiance was planted in the hearts of the young girls by the steady and strong hand of their mother who was resolved to not allow the corrosive nature of white supremacy to eat away at the spirits of her children. “Growing up in my home,” Dorie Ladner recalled, “mother always told us to look at white people in the eyes when you are talking to them, never look down.”¹¹ During their formative years, Dorie and Joyce were mentored by legendary Hattiesburg activists Vernon Dahmer and Clyde Kennard.¹² Commenting on

¹¹ Interview with Dorie Ladner, June 23, 2004

¹²Hattiesburg’s most famous freedom fighters were local NAACP leader Vernon Dahmer and activist turned political prisoner Clyde Kennard, both of whom worked vigorously for change in Mississippi. Dahmer fought tirelessly for change in Hattiesburg until his assassination in 1966. Kennard’s demise was equally upsetting to Black Mississippians. Kennard attempted to become the first Black to enroll in Mississippi Southern College (now the University of Southern Mississippi). Kennard attempts were unsuccessful as he was continually harassed by local and state law officials and was finally arrested and sentenced to a seven-year prison term at the state penitentiary on trumped up charges of theft. During his incarceration it was discovered that Kennard was suffering from cancer. Kennard was eventually released but succumbed to cancer shortly after his release. Both men played critical roles in shaping the political conscious of numerous young men and women, namely Dorie and Joyce Ladner. For more on both Vernon

their relationship with Kennard and Dahmer, Dorie Ladner added, “He (Kennard) also helped to develop the NAACP youth chapter, which we were members and we were also exposed to Vernon Dahmer and his sister Ilene Beard. They would take us to NAACP meetings here in Jackson. Mother would let us go because she respected him and his sister did belong to our church.”¹³

The Ladner sisters carried the advice of their mother by never looking down. Nor did they ever look back once they arrived on Jackson State’s campus in the fall of 1960. Dorie and Joyce were well informed about the local struggles of Black Mississippians. They, like many other new college students arriving that fall, were of the same age as the movement’s “sacrificial lamb” Emmett Till. As the Civil Rights Movement expanded into Mississippi, very few failed to recall the bitter anger that brewed within them that fateful summer of 1955 when the brutalities of Southern life were uncovered to the world. For a brief moment, students at Jackson State allowed their thoughts to drift away from their pursuit of careers and entered into a state of protest and anger as word of the “Tougaloo Nine” arrived on campus. Hundreds of students, along with the Ladner sisters, moved quickly to show their solidarity and support for their cross-town companions.

The daily interests and normal concerns of Jackson State students were similar to most other college students. Their typical anxieties included crushes on the handsome star athlete or beautiful campus queen, aspiring to pledge the popular fraternity or sorority, what to wear to the big game, or last minute cramming for the exam that any of

Dahmer and Clyde Kennard see Dittmer, *Local People*, Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom*, Sansing, *Making Haste Slowly*, 148-154.

¹³ Interview with Dorie Ladner, June 23, 2004.

the aforementioned concerns had successfully distracted them from. Yet March 27th marked the beginning of a whole new set of concerns. Their opportunity to become the next Black college student body to voice their collective frustrations with years of state sanctioned terror and contradictions embodied in America's acquiescence with Jim Crow had suddenly arrived. Students immediately bolted from their dormitories in an effort to seize the moment of urgency that descended upon campus. Later that afternoon, throngs of students began to gather in front of the campus library, "where they sang hymns, prayed, and chanted, "We Want Freedom."'¹⁴

As Jacob Reddix prepared to conclude yet another day as president of the only state controlled institution in the city of Jackson, he was abruptly disturbed as reports of student protests reached his home which was located on campus. Visions of harsh reprimands from state officials and perhaps even a decision to close the school must have nervously entered into his mind. Reddix moved quickly to intercept the student protests before his position as school overseer could come into question. He later explained to the media, "I don't know what happened. This is more trouble than we have had here in 20 years."¹⁵ Those twenty years of course marked the arrival of Jacob Reddix as President of Jackson State in 1940. His tenure had been predicated upon building an institution that did all it could to stay in the good graces of a state government that was wedded to the idea of white supremacy. In order to insure this, Reddix understood that actions such as the overt student protests occurring right outside his door were wholly impossible. Gripped with fear and rage, Reddix lashed out at students who jeopardized his status as

¹⁴ "Jackson State College Students Stage Protest," *Clarion Ledger*, March 28, 1961

¹⁵ *ibid*

president and the longevity of the college. Dorie Ladner recalled that, “Emmett Burns was President of the student government and he was attacked by the President. The President came running out from his home...like a wild man. He was just flailing his arms, and just trying to strike me out too. Because I guess he saw his whole world crumbling being a state employee.”¹⁶

By the time Reddix emerged from his campus home to confront the protesters the Jackson police department was on the scene. Reddix linked forces with local authorities in order to cease and desist the “illegal” rally-taking place. Students soon disbanded upon facing threats of expulsion but still gathered in smaller groups along the edge of Lynch Street, the busy thoroughfare that ran through the middle of campus. Protesters could be heard proclaiming, “They haven’t seen anything yet. This will go on until we have freedom.”¹⁷ It was later reported that Reddix had assaulted two students, striking one female in addition to pushing another student to the ground. Reddix’s roughhouse tactics were befitting of the time, his position, and his personality. As a Black Mississippian who began his tenure at Jackson State during the rise of the Cold War era, Reddix belonged to a generation that looked unfavorably upon rowdy youth who broke all notions of conformity. Keeping Black students prostrate and prone in the face of Jim Crow was implicit in his job description and his arrogance and indifference to student concerns accommodated this assignment. Jackson State students knew they were taking a gamble by challenging Reddix’s authority, yet hundreds of students consciously

¹⁶ Interview with Dorie Ladner, June 23, 2004.

¹⁷ “Jackson State College Students Stage Protest,” *Clarion Ledger*, March 28, 1961

decided to “roll the dice” and join the burgeoning Black student movement that swept across the nation.

Oddly enough, it appears that the Jackson State students may have not been as reactionary as we have been led to believe. Even before the “Tougaloo Nine” initiated the library read-in on March 27th, the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission (MSSC) identified at least forty-five Jackson State students as possible threats to the status quo. The director of the MSSC at the time was Albert Jones, a former sheriff of Hinds County. In a written communication between Jones and Reddix, the director specifically requested the names, class ranks, and home addresses of the students “whose name appears on the propaganda list.”¹⁸ The list was generated on March 23rd, four days before the Tougaloo protest at the Jackson Main Library. The purpose of the MSSC’s propaganda list is not quite clear, however, the names of Dorie and Joyce Ladner were recorded on the list. Both sisters were eventually expelled from Jackson State and enrolled at Tougaloo. Dorie Ladner noted, “We had been told we weren’t going to be allowed to come back, plus we didn’t want to come back. So it was a mutual agreement that we wouldn’t come back and we didn’t want to come back.”¹⁹ Reddix did not fail to provide the information that was requested of him, relinquishing all names and home addresses, a move that could have possibly brought harm to the students and their families.

The day following the Tougaloo and Jackson State protests presented yet another opportunity for Jackson State’s students to demonstrate their solidarity with their courageous Tougaloo comrades. The nine protestors that led the demonstration against

¹⁸ Jacob L. Reddix to Albert Jones, April 1, 1961, Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission Files, Mississippi Department of Archives

¹⁹ Interview with Dorie Ladner, June 23, 2004

the public library's Jim Crow policies spent the night in the city jail, drawing even more national and international attention to their cause. On Jackson State's campus the student body was buzzing with excitement. From dorm room to dorm room students discussed the events that had transpired on March 27th. Surely many of them had serious reservations about staging protests and standing up to authority figures that acted in *loco parenti*. For those students, it was enough fear and reservation to prevent many of them from donning the cloak of insurgency. But hundreds more decided that the definitive moment of the struggle had arrived. Perhaps it was their youthful exuberance and innocence that convinced many of them to participate. Maybe many of them harbored deep resentment toward their parents for not adequately answering their random questions about Jim Crow policies that confused them as children and now as young adults they claimed the dignity that had escaped generations of their kinfolk. Still more were perhaps scarred by the painful memories of lynchings, rape, and other forms of physical abuse that they had either witnessed or endured themselves. It is not quite clear why students "acted out" against the establishment when they did, however, it is very evident that it was something about the shelter of Black colleges that made them the universal launching point for the Black student movement in America. On March 28th, Jackson State students continued their defiance of authority and their show of solidarity with Tougaloo by staging a boycott of classes.

Students rose the next morning to learn that the campus uprising was not done. Students briefly abandoned their roles as focused young scholars and jumped headfirst into a movement that was sweeping the nation. Word of an impromptu rally spread quickly as students gathered on the campus lawn to decide their next move. A small

band of students thought it prudent to march downtown to the city jail where the Tougaloo students were being held. This was an enormous step. Tougaloo students had been quietly and steadily primed for their act of civil disobedience. Campus leaders such as William Bender, John Mangram, and Ernst Borinski urged their students embrace the struggle and to never stop questioning the pernicious ideologies of white supremacy that defined local custom and law. Even President Beittel arrived at Tougaloo and fostered the type of environment that made it much easier for the “Tougaloo Nine” to make their weighty decision to tackle Jim Crow. Jackson State did not offer a similar environment. The atmosphere about campus proffered no rewards for overt protest and actions such as advancing upon the local white power structure was sure to bring the wrath of campus administration. A suggestion to march downtown into the jaws of white authority was undoubtedly enough to cause even the boldest of campus rabble rousers to pause and rethink their position. As a call for marchers went out, only fifty students joined the ranks of those willing to make strides toward freedom.

Among those group of students was Dorie Ladner. Both Ladner sisters were struggling in their adjustment to college life. Chief among their dislikes at Jackson State were the numerous social restrictions placed upon the student body by the administration. Students were expected to observe curfews and attend mandatory vespers on campus. When students did gain free time, it was allotted in small doses and was under the sharp observation of dorm mothers and chaperones. Like any young college student, the Ladner sisters expected the excitement of freedom from home and the relinquishing, if not relaxing, of strict rules that stifled young men and women ready to discover themselves and each other. Most students coped with the social limitations found at

Jackson State. If not, they most certainly found sly ways to get around the rules in order to make their environment more socially stimulating. However, social stimulation was not the only thing important to the Ladner sisters and if Jackson State offered anything to them, it was the close proximity of the local NAACP headquarters located on Lynch Street. It was there that the two sisters formed a close relationship with a man who inspired many of Jackson State's socially frustrated students. In his small second story office, Medgar Evers spent numerous hours counseling Mississippi's Black youth and speaking to them about a freedom that he envisioned for the future and the distinct role they would play in helping to usher in that new era.

Perhaps it was those moments conversing freedom with Medgar Evers that convinced the Ladner sisters and others to march into downtown Jackson in support of the Tougaloo students. Regardless of their newfound convictions, the local power structure of Jackson was equally convicted in their attempt to send a clear message to Jackson State and Tougaloo students that Mississippi would not become the next stage in the growing student movement. The day before the decision to march downtown, Jackson's local law enforcement invaded Jackson State's campus, bringing with them police attack dogs to dissuade students from promoting future campus rallies. "Within two hours they brought dogs in," recalled Dorie Ladner. They had dogs running up and down the dorm on Jackson State's campus."²⁰ As students entered into downtown Jackson they were greeted with the same attack dogs that they confronted during the first campus rally. In addition, police were armed with clubs and tear gas that they dispersed among the students when they refused to turn back.

²⁰ Interview with Dorie Ladner, June 23, 2004

Madness ensued as students scattered to escape the vicious canines biting at their heels and the searing agony brought about by the virulent fumes of the tear gas. The small band of foot soldiers had only gathered to condemn the injustices of Jim Crow and to call for the release of their brothers and sisters in arms. Most of them were natives of the Magnolia State so the reaction of the city's police did not surprised most. However, the Gestapo like tactics utilized by local law authorities was no less bitter to swallow for young idealistic youth who had been taught to think the best of their country and state. As students became disoriented by the toxic fumes and the constant yelp of the canines, they were enveloped and protected by those who were most invested in their success; the Black community. The histories of Black colleges bear out the fact that any separation between town and gown was superficial at best. Black colleges were beacons of hope to the impoverished communities that often surrounded them. No matter how far removed the academy seemed from those who could never muster the time or money to attend, they realized that within the "shelter" of Black colleges, the future of the race was being formed and fashioned. That idea alone was enough to float the hope of those battered and bruised by the effects of white supremacy. As the Black student movement descended upon Jackson, even conservative critics and the Black working class were unprepared to turn back the needs of "rowdy" Black students. Soon, many of them would possess the same courage to step out in defiance of Jim Crow and the legacy of racial violence in Mississippi.

But in the early stages of the movement, many could only afford to offer advice or temporary shelter from white terrorism. As Black youth ran throughout the streets of Jackson seeking shelter and reprieve from their tormentors, kind and familiar voices

began to call out to them. Dorie Ladner noted, “And I now know how strange people felt, because we were running and trying to hide, and one Black woman said, “Come into my house,” and she cleaned my face off and she said “Come out and sit on the porch.” As if she intended to scorch the memories of the day’s events into her mind, Dorie’s compassionate savior opened her home to her like she was one of her own and invited her to observe the terror and absurdity that unfolded before them. Few words were exchanged but discussion was of no real necessity. As evening fell, both Dorie and her rescuer realized they had witnessed the dawning of the Civil Rights Movement in Jackson. “I sat on the porch and saw folks running up and down the alley and all around with the dogs,” Dorie recalled. “I sat there like I lived there and by nightfall I went back to campus.”²¹

As the smoke literally settled in the streets of Jackson, those who witnessed the events of the last few days realized that the collision of different worlds and interests had set in motion an irreversible chain of events. The “Tougaloo Nine” were given suspended jail sentences and the case was later thrown out on appeal. They returned to campus as heroes of the movement. Local whites frustration with Tougaloo and their seemingly renegade students was rapidly increasing. The actions that unfolded in days past were simply not supposed to happen in the Magnolia State. Without methods to directly control the teachings of people such as Mangram and Borinski and the leadership of Beittel, the white power structure had no inroads to squashing the spirit of protests that was building on campus.

²¹ Interview with Dorie Ladner, June 23, 2004

However, in an ironic twist that later weakened the political platform of future Black activists, leaders of the movement fought quite openly for access to student protesters. In an attempt to harness the power of student insurgency and lay claim to the role of preeminent civil rights organization, leaders vied for seats of influence among Black youth. Sectional divisions and ideological differences presented looming challenges for a unified front in Mississippi. Even in the midst of Tougaloo Nine incident, Medgar Evers looked boastfully upon the student protest that seemingly made inroads for the NAACP. Whereas all of the Tougaloo Nine were members of the NAACP's campus chapter, leaders attempted to place a political spin on the potential outcome of the protest that extended far beyond the altering of public accommodation laws in downtown Jackson. Evers noted, "This act of bravery and concern on the part of these nine young people has seemed to electrify Negroes desire for freedom here in Mississippi, which will doubtless be shown in an increase in memberships and funds for 1961."²²

Evers was indeed inspired by the efforts of students and found within them an inspiration that he had failed to find in either his organization or the Black communities he scoured looking for some semblance of resistance to Jim Crow. However, in many ways Evers was a "company man." Despite his frustrations with the conservative nature of the NAACP and their hesitancy in embracing the direct action carried out by Black youth across the country, Evers stayed loyal to the programs and policies of the nations oldest civil rights organization. Evers was after all the sole face of Black protest in the

²² Adam Nossiter, *Of Long Memory: Mississippi and the Murder of Medgar Evers*, (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1994) 49.

state of Mississippi when all other organizations and activists shied away from the dangerous work that accompanied political organizing in the state. This fact gave Evers a credible mark of courage with the young student activists who eagerly sought his advice and encouragement. But it also bolstered his ego and foreshadowed the bitter competition that was later associated with civil rights organizations. Historian Adam Nossiter noted, “A week later he compiled a “Special Report on Activities of Other Civil Rights Organizations,” noting with satisfaction that SNCC’s efforts to organize on the Tougaloo College campus had not been successful because of the “strong” NAACP chapter there.”²³ In spite of the organizational tug-of-war, the actions of the students inspired their peers and future activists who would dare to breach the boundaries of the Magnolia State.

Letters of support poured in from across the country as supporters of Tougaloo rushed to show their endorsement of the “Tougaloo Nine.” Famed activists Anne Braden, who along with her husband in 1954 attempted to desegregate an all white Louisville, Kentucky neighborhood by selling their home to a Black couple, wrote to Mangram saying, “Truly what you are doing is not for the Negroes alone. You are offering to the white South an opportunity to save its soul.”²⁴

As the principle organizer of the “Tougaloo Nine” and adviser to the NAACP chapter on campus, Mangram faced what was perhaps an unwanted and dangerous spotlight. His mentor William Bender had walked a lonely and courageous road as a tireless organizer and agitator for change. But the stakes were much higher now. Through Mangram’s

²³ Adam Nossiter, *Of Long Memory*, 50.

²⁴ Anne Braden to John Mangram, April 20, 1961, John Mangram Papers, Box 1, Folder #5, Tougaloo College Archives

efforts and the steel will of nine determined students, the gauntlet was tossed and there was no turning back. Mangram noted to a concerned supporter:

We pray that the college does not suffer unduly and that no one will suffer too much because of our actions. We are convinced that what we do is God's will for us and so we act...These are times, which bring out the worst in people, but they also elicit the finest and the best too. We pray that we shall be able to live creatively in these tensions and that Mississippi and the South will be better because we lived in this period of history.²⁵

Bearing witness to their difficult predicament yet unashamedly laying claim to their roles as pioneers for justice went hand in hand for the embattled activists. Mangram and his determined band of student foot soldiers struck first without direction or prodding from outside forces as many supporters of Jim Crow contended. Theirs was a struggle that was shouldered by the millions of voiceless Mississippians who day after day experienced the bitter realities of Jim Crow. Yet in an instant they had ceased to merely live and became the grand futures that their forefathers had dreamed they would one day become. Janice Jackson, one of the nine protesters, boldly declared, "We do not hate those who oppose us; we blame it on ignorance. We grew up in Mississippi and we know these people, but we think they must soon realize that things can't go on as they have been in the past."²⁶

Mangram soon received sobering reminders of the fate that he chose upon taking freedoms trail. Serving as chaplain at Tougaloo was a prominent position considering the institutions influence within the state. Mangram was an effective speaker and further honed his skill through inspirational messages delivered to his students during chapel

²⁵ John Mangram to Florence Brumback, April 22, 1961, John Mangram Papers, Box 1, Folder #5, Tougaloo College Archives

²⁶ Janice Jackson, "Sprit Has Caught Fire," John Mangram Papers, Box 1, Folder #10, Tougaloo College Archives

sessions on Sundays. However, request for outside speaking engagements quickly dissipated as his profile soon included the title civil rights activists. Mangram acknowledged the request of D.M. Smith, Principal of East Side High School in Cleveland, Mississippi by including in his post script, "Sir, I think I should remind you that I am regarded as a "controversial figure" in Mississippi. Now if you feel that you don't want me to come to you, please be frank and let me know immediately."²⁷ It took Smith less than a week to respond as he noted in a return letter to Mangram, "Because of reasons as stated in the post script of your letter, it is necessary that we withdraw the invitation."²⁸ Mangram received a similar response the following day from George Washington Carver High School where he had been asked to deliver the commencement address. Principal S.L. Ratliff stated, "I am very sorry to say that because of circumstances beyond our control, we will not be able to use you to preach the Annual Commencement Sermon as we had planned."²⁹ Perhaps it was the growing pressure of the movement or the natural desire for personal achievement that drove Mangram to accept a grant offer by the Danforth Foundation that sent him to study at the Pacific School of Religion at Berkeley, California. Regardless of his intentions, Mangram's departure from Tougaloo after the summer of 1961 foreshadowed future dilemmas and setbacks that were destined to siphon off those most passionate and connected with the growing struggle for liberation.

²⁷ John Mangram to D.M. Smith, March 29, 1961, John Mangram Papers, Box 1, Folder #4, Tougaloo College Archives

²⁸ D.M. Smith to John Mangram, April 3, 1961, John Mangram Papers, Box 1, Folder #4, Tougaloo College Archives

²⁹ S.L. Ratliff to John Mangram, April 4, 1961, John Mangram Papers, Box 1, Folder #4, Tougaloo College Archives

The proponents of white supremacy scrambled quickly to enact new control mechanisms or revive older methods of intimidation in an effort get a handle on the newest and most unexpected threat of student activism. The MSSC, White Citizens Council's, and Ku Klux Klan were bound in an unholy fellowship of terror that reinforced a spirit of tyranny over Mississippi. Although restraining the impulse of protests at Tougaloo required more imaginative and clandestine approaches, suppression at Jackson State proved much easier. President Reddix's ego, which was constructed and controlled by the state, was severely bruised by the defiant actions of his students, a fact that led to even tighter demands upon his faculty and created an even harsher working environment. Reddix hired faculty and promoted administrators with the strict warning to prevent at all cost the proliferation of ideas that inspired students to engage in civil disobedience. The buck stopped with him, a fact that he was all too aware of. If the state came calling or raised a questionable brow to whether Jackson State was "biting the hand that fed them", then it was he who was subject to immediate reprisal, a pressure that some say caused him to lash out in fits of madness and rage. Jackson State English professor Margaret Walker noted:

He cracks the whip and rattles his saber and struts across the stage a pompous and tyrannical jackass. The faculty meetings at Jackson College have deteriorated into ludicrous puppet shows where the president performs in a ridiculous manner. The trustee board downtown calls him in to lay down the law of how to keep his Negras "in line." And he comes down the freight elevator with the garbage and slips out at the back door for fear some of us have seen that he has been to see the governor and that he swells up on the campus and knocks the student to the ground. And then intimidates the mother of the girl, with the threat of expulsion so that she will deny he struck her down, despite the obvious accounts of students, teachers and of average citizens in town.³⁰

³⁰ Margaret Walker Alexander, journal entry, July 9, 1961, Box 10, Folder #61, Margaret Walker Alexander Research Center

For a brief moment, Jackson State students broke away from their conservative bonds and the expectations of their enraged President and allowed the Second Curriculum to breathe free. It is absolutely certain that these students, who as Mississippi natives were raised in a culture of fear, helped to set the tone of activism in the state by rallying to Tougaloo's side. After all, Tougaloo's cause was theirs also. With the sultry Mississippi summer quickly approaching, the citizens of the nation's most totalitarian state prepared themselves for a movement that was assured to make life in Mississippi hotter than normal.

In the summer of 1946 civil rights attorneys William Hastie and Thurgood Marshall stood triumphantly before the Supreme Court as they ruled that segregation aboard buses conducting interstate travel was unconstitutional. Like most Supreme Court rulings, the direct impact of this ruling was delayed and would largely depend upon the persistent agitation on behalf of Blacks to draw attention to the continued inequities. When the high court again struck a blow against discrimination by denying segregation in the public waiting rooms and restrooms in the landmark case of *Boynton vs. Virginia* in December of 1960, several activists sought an opportunity to further illustrate the depths of southern racism. The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) was somewhat successful in helping to organize the sit-in movements that had dominated the civil rights headlines up until that point. With the first year of the turbulent decade drawing to a close, and student activists like the Tougaloo Nine and others continuing their attempts to challenge public accommodation laws across the south during the spring of 1961, CORE initiated one of the most daring feats yet; the Freedom Rides.

Beginning in the summer of 1961, CORE arranged for a fleet of buses to descend upon the south, challenging the system of Jim Crow, which had failed to buckle or fold despite the direct action of Black college students. Until the summer of 1961, CORE maintained a low profile among the more prominent civil rights organizations such as the NAACP, SCLC, and even SNCC, which was still comparatively new on the scene. Student activist made a key discovery during the staging of the sit-ins however. Efforts to draw attention to the plight of African Americans were dependent upon tactics and strategies with a flair for the dramatic. The country remained relatively unmoved by white hostility against Southern Blacks, a fact that would later anger and frustrate student activists. CORE's Freedom Rides capitalized on America's fixation with unfolding dramatic events, an attraction that had only grown with the introduction of television and the country's love affair with cinema. Above all else, CORE activists counted on the fact that Southern white bigotry was incapable of resisting an opportunity to showcase its persistence to utilize violence to break the will of insurgent Blacks. With the characters and plot laid out to perfection, the stage was set to open a new frontal attack against Jim Crow.

White southerners did not disappoint. As the buses traveled through the Upper South, they encountered few obstacles. However, as the Freedom Riders finally penetrated the Deep South, the frenzied violence that they expected unfolded in a series of attacks in cities such as Anniston, Alabama. As the activists were pulled from their buses and beaten almost to death, they became the victims of the mob violence that was characteristic with southern life. Media outlets across the world captured the events, a fact that greatly angered the young newly elected president from Massachusetts, John F.

Kennedy. Kennedy, still confronting the spread of communism, something he perceived as more important and perhaps more interesting to the majority of Americans, retorted to his White House aide, “Tell them to call it off! Stop them!”³¹ But the pressures of Jim Crow and the ravaging effects of white supremacy had taken its toll on scores of African Americans who were unwilling to turn back in their quest for justice. The hollow promises of democracy and the mirage of justice offered by the Kennedy administration were no longer enough to placate those Blacks in leadership positions who sensed a groundswell of support from the masses who were “sick and tired of being sick and tired.” However, as the Freedom Rides pushed beyond their extreme encounter in Alabama, an unprecedented shadow of fear and concern covered the bus as they headed toward the Mississippi border.

Many Black activists were resigned to the fact that Mississippi was the wrong state to pick a fight with. This healthy apprehension and fear was informed by the constant discovery of unidentified bodies floating through the state’s creeks and rivers, the long list of those who were shot in cold blood, and perhaps more frighteningly by those who vanished into the Mississippi night, destined never to be seen again. Sadly, these crimes had little effect in stirring the conscious of a country. Conversely, they were directly responsible for composing the deepest fears and most terrifying nightmares among Blacks. Indeed unmitigated violence and state sanctioned terrorism had become the states most noticeable trademark and custom among Blacks and whites alike. The Freedom Riders, who now passed into Mississippi, experienced a weighted conscious and abiding unease that they had not previously experienced. It was the same cautiousness

³¹ John Dittmer, *Local People*, 92.

that kept Jacob Reddix faithful to his “providers” and caused William Bender to constantly arm himself as he traveled Mississippi’s red dirt roads and highways. It was the same fear that paralyzed millions into a state of inaction and distanced campus and community organizers from their would-be protesters. Historian David Halberstam’s account of Freedom Riders John Lewis’s mind state perhaps best captures the feeling of most participants that day. “In Mississippi, he had decided, even before they crossed the state line, the great victory would be simply going there, staying alive, and leaving.”³²

Efficient in their planning and strategic in their desire to deny the dramatic flare that protesters were looking for; Mississippi’s legal authorities and law enforcement received the Freedom Riders with little fanfare. Rev. C.T. Vivian, a principle organizer in the Nashville sit-ins, received a vicious beating from the hands of authorities once the Freedom Riders were arrested and processed into the Jackson city jail. Vivian’s wife, still bitter thirty-five years after the Freedom Rides about the perilous situation her husband had enlisted into, recalled “that my husband never dared tell me he was going to Mississippi. Alabama yes. Mississippi no!”³³ Many of the Freedom Ride participants were sent off to the state’s infamous Parchman State Penitentiary where they received the full “treatment” most often reserved for the unfortunate Black citizens of the state. For Black Mississippians and movement activists, Parchman was synonymous with the sheer brutality and degradation embodied in the customs and traditions of the Magnolia State. If Parchman was viewed as the most inhumane and treacherous place for African Americans, then by contrast, Tougaloo was an oasis of security and tranquility for those

³² David Halberstam, *The Children* (New York: Fawcett Books, 1998) 335.

³³ Ibid. 335.

seeking to make sense of the absolute madness that was Mississippi. As a young teenager viewing the Freedom Riders entrance into his home state, Hollis Watkins understood that there was only one place in Jackson that was capable of providing the type of comfort and solace that it had given to generations of students. Watkins recalled:

Tougaloo provided I guess you could say a haven for those that were working to be able to meet, plan, come, get in touch with, inform, educate, and instill a certain degree of thinking and attitude in to the students. In many cases, it was students from Tougaloo that gave fuel to the fire for the movement. And so any and everybody that was participating in the Civil Rights Movement that came into Mississippi especially during those early days came through Tougaloo, either for a meeting, for a rally, or to meet with professors or to meet with students.³⁴

As the Freedom Rides brought Southern racism into full view, supporters gathered at Tougaloo to disseminate information and rally in support of this new tactic that achieved a certain degree of success. Many more simply wished to rest their weary souls underneath the cooling branches of the Spanish moss lined trees about campus and for a brief moment, imagine the country's most violent state as hospitable and welcoming as the reception they received at Tougaloo. But there was little time to rest. It was indeed time to build and work towards the construction of a new society founded upon the principles of full democracy and justice for all citizens regardless of color. Keeping their hands to the plow, activist continued their push and were rejuvenated by the welcoming leadership of Tougaloo and the infectious positive spirit of its students. In one of his final speeches to the local NAACP before his departure for graduate studies in California, John Mangram, the man who stepped into the larger than life shoes left empty by William Bender and assisted in bringing the movement to Jackson through the organization of the Tougaloo Nine, stepped to the podium and delivered one of his most

³⁴ Interview with Hollis Watkins, August 9, 2004

fiery speeches that admonished the leadership of the Kennedy administration that urged Blacks to maintain patience in the midst of abject brutality. Mangram noted:

Everybody has continued to tell us to wait. White people told us to wait until we become educated and then we would be ready. We went to elementary, secondary, school, college, professional school, and received graduate and postgraduate degrees. It seems that we ought o be ready now. They told us to become self-respecting. We think as much of ourselves as anybody in the world. We ought to be ready now. We'd like to "breathe awhile" too. We would like to stop spending so much of our time and money and energy trying to impress upon you that we are ready to take a hand in making America...We would like to quit spending so much time trying to get you to see that we Americans too, that our blood is as red as yours, that our feelings are just as real as yours, that our aspirations are as high as yours.³⁵

In the years that preceded 1961, very few Black Mississippians had dared to stand so boldly in the heart of Dixie and denounce the South's social codes and customs. Perhaps they engaged in such provocative rhetoric in other Southern states, but certainly not in Mississippi. Mangram's words declared a new day. What the Tougaloo chaplain fully realized and what others were soon discovering, was that life itself was not worth living if it called for the day to day routine of observing laws and traditions that denied Blacks the same democracy and justice that they had fought so hard to preserve on foreign soil. Though Mangram's spirit and bravado was not enough to convince all of his students or citizens of Mississippi to become engaged in the deconstruction of white supremacy, his words adequately captured the spirit of a growing number of individuals who refused to accept the paradox any longer, and were even willing to pay the ultimate price for it. In recognizing the contradiction that was America, Mangram concluded by declaring, "You white Americans, Southerners, and Mississippians should begin to

³⁵ John Mangram, "Address Before Jackson Branch NAACP Protesting Arrest of Freedom Riders," John Mangram Papers, Box 1, Folder #9, Tougaloo College Archives

realize that in order to preserve your own freedom, you will have to recognize and respect the deep longing and desire of all people for dignity.”³⁶

Dignity was chief among the concerns for Black Mississippians. In a state where men could be shot down like dogs in broad day light, or women could be violated in every way possible with little to no recourse, the strong desire to simply recognize the humanity that had been consistently denied was a paramount objective for struggling Black folk. It was rare for Black Mississippians to encounter whites that were sensitive to their cause and more importantly, those who were willing to risk the privilege of whiteness to speak out on their behalf. Whether it was providence or excellent timing, Tougaloo hired Dr. Adam Beittel to serve as their sixth president on September 1, 1960. Beittel entered into his post as Black college campuses across the south were on fire with the spirit of protest. Beittel was certainly no stranger to Black college campuses. He had previously served as president of Talladega College in Alabama. Whether he too fully recognized the subtle differences between the political culture of Alabama and Mississippi like the Freedom Riders did is unclear. But what is certain is that he was firmly resolved to support the growing movement. Beittel not only opened up Tougaloo’s campus to civil rights activists, but he engaged in dialogue with city officials in a rather futile attempt to bridge the gap between Blacks and whites in Jackson.

To say that local whites resented Beittel would be an understatement. Since the end of the Civil War, there were very few situations that left as bitter a taste in the mouth of Southern whites as those of their own race that were sympathetic to the concerns of Black people. It was somewhat easier for them to rationalize this fact if those “traitors”

³⁶ Ibid.

were northerners. The South's fascination with the "outside agitator" theory and their promotion of "states rights" were both consistently employed to explain and justify their positions against civil rights. Beittel fit nicely into their equation. Nevertheless, Beittel worked tirelessly to provide "shelter in a time of storm" for the activists who were born and raised in Mississippi, native southerners, or those who came from across the country and globe to bring justice to the Magnolia State. This fact alone enraged local government officials. Rejecting Beittel's request for a meeting to discuss the treatment of the Freedom Riders, the mayor of Jackson, Allen Thompson, responded in a condescending manner that questioned the objectives of Beittel, Dr. King (who was to be included in the meeting with Mayor Thompson) and the Freedom Riders. According to Thompson, the protesters were engaged in actions that were "inflammatory, divisive, and destructive." Thompson further questioned Beittel's leadership role as president of Tougaloo. He noted:

Now may I suggest to you, that you might well consider what you are doing to the cause of education when you permit the institution which you head to become the training ground and the staging area for alien agitators whose questionable motives can result only in division and disunity at a time when the very existence of America is being challenged.³⁷

What Thompson refused to recognize, was that Jim Crow had done more to divide and disunite than the protesters engaged in civil disobedience could ever do. Throughout the years, Black Mississippians were disenfranchised and routinely denied both their civil rights that were their American birthright, and their human rights that were inherently given to them by their Creator. The Civil Rights Movement, not the Cold War, would be

³⁷ Allen C. Thompson to Adam Beittel, July 19, 1961, President Beittel Files, Box 1, Folder #11, Tougaloo College Archives

the true test of America's existence, a fact that the young Tougaloo students were taught by the Second Curriculum and the arrival of the Freedom Riders. Neither Khrushchev nor Castro terrorized local Blacks, as did the white citizens of Mississippi who successfully placed a social, political, and economic stranglehold on the Black community. On July 28, 1961, as the summer of Freedom Rides was drawing to a conclusion, "the very existence" of America as the beacon of liberty and democracy was being challenged on the campus of Tougaloo. In a conference entitled "Mission to Mississippi" leaders such as Rev. Ralph Abernathy, Rev. Wyatt T. Walker, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and Rev. John Mangram, articulated a vision of what America could and should be as participants were captivated and infused with their collective messages of liberation. In all, 28 speakers representing different races, faiths, regions, and walks of life immersed themselves in discussion and dialogue centered on the actualization of freedom for all Americans. By the end of the conference, Tougaloo had securely adorned the title of headquarters for movement activity in the state of Mississippi.

Tougaloo's serene campus welcomed new additions during the fall of 1961. The Ladner sisters enrolled at Tougaloo after being informed that they were no longer welcome at Jackson State due to their participation in the spring uprising. Tougaloo offered them a much different social environment. Not only were their new surroundings more welcoming to the struggle that they had become embroiled in, but it was also much more relaxed in the social restrictions that most young vivacious college students disdain. Their experience at Jackson State and their growing bond with NAACP leader Medgar Evers factored greatly in their firm commitment to the movement. But they were also

impressed by the sacrifices made by the Freedom Riders who risked their lives by bringing their message of justice to Mississippi. Dorie Ladner recalled:

I should never forget there were all these young Freedom Riders there and I am just in awe of them. Hank Thomas, Diane Nash, James Bevel, Marion Barry, Tom Gaither...they were young college students and I'm standing there, I said, "Oh my God!" These are the same people who think like I do and I've been looking for, for a long time.³⁸

Two other students arrived on campus whose invaluable contributions helped continue the liberation struggle in Mississippi, Anne Moody, a transfer from Natchez College, and Joan Trumpauer, a transfer from Duke University who was one of the first white students to enroll at Tougaloo. Trumpauer enrolled at Tougaloo with the express interest to become involved in the movement. She had worked in the SNCC offices in Atlanta and saw Mississippi as the next front in the fight against Jim Crow. Her dorm mate, Anne Moody transferred from Natchez College to Tougaloo simply because her desire was to attend the best liberal arts school in the state available for Blacks. As a native of Centreville, Mississippi, located in the infamously hostile southwest region of the state, Moody was more than familiar with the racial injustices that defined southern living. Her gritty disposition and courageous spirit proved invaluable, as she later became one of the principle organizers and activists in the small yet notorious township of Canton, located just a few miles outside of Tougaloo. As students such as the Ladner sisters, Moody, and Trumpauer, became deep admirers of the leaders who graced their campus, they soon would come to realize that their greatest admiration lay in the courage of grassroots followers who would later summon the courage to follow the students towards their date with both danger and destiny.

³⁸ Interview with Dorie Ladner, June 23, 2004

The political consciousness of Black college students in Jackson was at an all time high in the fall of 1961. Even those students, faculty, and administrators that chose to remain on the sidelines could no longer deny the sweeping spirit of liberation that enveloped the south. Yearning to break free from her intellectual chains at Jackson State, Margaret Walker noted, “I know that I have something to say. After forty years in the wilderness of preparation it is time I made my advent and became articulate in the hallways of the world.”³⁹ Jackson State administrators hoped that the development of student insurgency would remain confined to Tougaloo’s campus, and perhaps had Reddix and others had the courage to create open dialogue with the students it would have done so. However, in the totalitarian manner that defined his administration, Reddix dissolved the Student Government Association on campus as students returned that fall, a move that re-ignited the anger and wrath of students still smoldering from the incidents that occurred in the spring.

Students at Jackson State had very little room for openly articulating their concerns on campus. The young Black men and women who attended there had in many ways accepted that as part of the campus culture. There was however the presence of various campus organizations, fraternities and sororities, and athletic teams, that helped to create a sense of bond and identity amongst students. When Reddix made the decision to dissolve the SGA as payback for the spring uprising, it struck a blow at one of the few outlets that students had for self-expression. Reddix noted that he had arrived at his conclusion because the actions of the students had “embarrassed” the school. He went

³⁹ Margaret Walker Alexander, journal entry, June 27, 1961, Box 10, Folder #61, Margaret Walker Alexander Research Center

on to say that, “I just had to put my foot down.” A more likely scenario is that Reddix was acting upon pressures placed upon him by local government officials. This development, coupled with the Civil Rights Movement that caused many students to question their surroundings and perceived points of authority, was enough to cause a backlash amongst the student body of Jackson State. Four hundred students boycotted classes in protest of Reddix’s decision. Later that afternoon, the students gathered at the college stadium and “paraded around the campus.”⁴⁰

Despite the outcry and decision to boycott classes, the atmosphere at Jackson State was far from that of Tougaloo, a fact that continued to frustrate would be organizers and activists. The environment was simply not conducive for sustaining overt protest against the state that ultimately decided whether the doors of the institution should remain open. The background of many Jackson State students was much different from their counterparts at Tougaloo as well. Many of Tougaloo’s students came from a long tradition of college educated families and the student body was comprised of students who represented in many cases the aspirations and expectations of the Black middle class. The typical Jackson State student was more than often the first of his/her family to attend college. They represented the hopes of sharecroppers, and domestic laborers who saved all that they could just to enable their son or daughter to have an opportunity to attend college. Abandoning that dream and risking expulsion was a sacrifice that many of Jackson State’s students were not yet willing to place in jeopardy.⁴¹ In fact, discarding

⁴⁰ “Report Classes Boycotted at Jackson State,” *Jackson Daily News*, October 7, 1961

⁴¹ One can easily conclude that environmental factors played a large role in both Tougaloo and Jackson State students deciding not to become involved in the movement. The class factor represents a somewhat plausible theory in comparing Jackson State and Tougaloo but does not hold up in comparison to other institutions involved in the Black Student Movement, most notably North Carolina A&T State University

the dream of college was an aspiration that many Tougaloo students were not willing to risk either. Those daring enough to become engaged in student activity took heavy tolls upon themselves and in some cases their families. As the boycott of classes at JSU quickly dissipated, Reddix eventually reinstated the SGA. Although Reddix later suggested that his major contribution to the Black struggle was the granting of over 5,000 degrees during his tenure as president, there were many students and faculty in his midst who wondered to what extent did those degrees matter if his alumnus could not become full participants in the democracy he claimed he prepared them for. Unknown to Reddix, one of his best and brightest students had already begun in motion a series of events that would serve as a litmus test for democracy and rock the very foundation of the state.

James Howard Meredith was in his first year as a student at Jackson State when he first wrote to the University of Mississippi to inquire about admission. A native of Kosciusko, Mississippi, Meredith clearly understood the rules and boundaries of Jim Crow. Clyde Kennard, dying from cancer in Parchman Penitentiary after his attempt to integrate the University of Southern Mississippi, offered a solemn reminder of just how far previous struggles to break the racial educational barrier had gone. However, by January of 1961 when Meredith made his first contact with Ole Miss, the dawning of a Black Student Movement was in full swing and Black youth across the country increasingly questioned the limitations placed upon them by the pernicious ideology of

where the movement started. As a state institution, students involved in the movement there where comprised of the same working class background as many Jackson State students yet they became the pioneers of Black student activism. The less threatening political and social climate can perhaps be attributed to the boldness on behalf of the students from Greensboro. For more on the student movement in Greensboro, see William Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980) and Miles Wolff, *Lunch at the 5 & 10* (Chicago: Elephant Press, 1970).

white supremacy. Fewer Black students were ignoring the statements of men like Jimmy Ward, columnist and editor of the *Jackson Daily News* who noted, “It would appear by now that prudent people will not wantonly toy with traditions or tamper with the soul of a civilized society.”⁴² Quite oppositely, Black youth across the south were now pledging themselves to redeeming the soul of a society awash with the sin of prejudice and racism. Although Meredith’s attempt to finally desegregate the campus of Ole Miss was lacking the massive frontal attack that defined the direct action tactics of other activists, his lone struggle caused one of the most fierce and hateful backlashes that Mississippi had ever seen.

James Meredith’s decision to transfer from Jackson State to Ole Miss created a political chess match between the Kennedy administration and one of Mississippi’s most colorfully racist politicians, Governor Ross Barnett. Barnett’s inauguration as governor in 1960 coincided with both Kennedy’s installation as president and the dawning of student activism throughout the south. These developments were equally destined to inform and direct Barnett’s pro-segregationist stance and his torrent rise as a white supremacist demagogue. Following his election, Barnett quickly warmed up to his racist constituents by canvassing the state in support of Mississippi’s traditions and customs. Foremost of those customs was segregation. In 1961, Barnett appeared in a movie production produced by the Sovereignty Commission entitled, *Message from Mississippi*, where he declared, “No student can get a better education than is offered the Negro children in Mississippi.”⁴³ Both Meredith and Barnett knew this to be false.

⁴² James Silver, *Mississippi: The Closed Society* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, Inc., 1963) 34

⁴³ *Ibid*, 8.

After numerous creative attempts on behalf of the Ole Miss Board of Trustees to bar Meredith from enrolling, the federal courts finally upheld Meredith's constitutional right to become the first African American student at the state's most elite institution of higher learning. Madness ensued. State legislators scrambled to find ways to stop Meredith's enrollment. On September 25, 1962, Governor Barnett's absurdity reached an all time high when he "issued an executive order calling for the arrest of any federal official attempting to prevent any state official from carrying out his "official duties."⁴⁴ For a brief moment, it appeared as if Meredith's attempt to gain entrance into the University of Mississippi would resurrect the spirit of those Confederate dead who bore arms against their country. The uprising was complete with its own theme song printed in the *Jackson Daily News* entitled the "Never, No Never" song. The lyrics stated:

Never, never, never, never, No-o-o Never Never Never
We will not yield an inch of any field
Fix us another toddy, ain't yieldin' to nobody
Ross's standin' like Gibraltar, he shall never falter
Ask us what we say, it's to hell with Bobby K
Never shall our emblem go from Colonel Reb to Old Black Joe.⁴⁵

He was only one man. But for white Mississippians, Meredith's quiet and unassuming profile was not at question. The color of his skin was. That eternal and burning question sent Ole Miss down the path of violence and destruction, as riots broke out in protest of Meredith's arrival on campus. University of Mississippi students were whipped into a frenzy by the thought that integration, long the goal of activists across the south, was achieved on their campus. Students hurled rocks, bricks and incendiary

⁴⁴ Erle Johnston, *Mississippi's Defiant Years*, 152.

⁴⁵ Townsend Davis, *Weary Feet, Rested Souls: A Guided History of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1998) 245.

devices towards U.S. Marshals who were called in to protect Meredith. After one Marshal was wounded, U.S. Attorney General Robert Kennedy gave word to send in troops to restore order. By the end of the night, two people, French journalist Paul Guihard and a local white repairman Ray Gunter, were left dead. Hundreds more were arrested and injured. Meredith's remaining tenure at Ole Miss was relatively uneventful. He, much like his personality, graduated quietly from the University of Mississippi during the summer of 1963.

While it is true that Meredith's personality was one that often kept him in solitude, his tormented nights as a student at Ole Miss were not without the constant reassurance and encouragement of a familiar voice he knew all too well at Jackson State, Dr. Jane McAllister. McAllister remained in contact with Meredith during his ordeal and gave him the tutoring, advice, and nurturing that he was accustomed to as a student at Jackson State. Indeed McAllister kept in contact with most of her former students in this way, constantly signing her correspondence with her students as their, "teacher and friend." More than anything, Meredith needed a friend in the moments where he felt the most abandoned. In his most desolate and darkest hours as a student at Ole Miss he reached out to his "teacher and friend," Dr. McAllister. McAllister wrote to a colleague, "Your letter came soon after I had a telephone conversation with James Meredith who was one of our students. He asked me if I could hear the noises of the cherry bombs as he was trying to study. When students act in mobs, I almost lose my faith in the power of education."⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Jane McAllister to Miss. Briffault, November 12, 1962, Dr. Jane McAllister Papers, Jackson State University Archives

At Jackson State, Dr. McAllister never lost faith in education. Moreover, her style of education was informed by the power of a Second Curriculum that helped to construct her student's self-esteem in a society that was quickly becoming remolded and shaped by youthful idealism. Perhaps she more than anyone understood that even the constraints placed upon her by Jackson State could not prevent her from building up her students who sought after her counsel, wisdom, and love. Behind the closed doors of her classroom, or in her private office hours or through her correspondences with current and former students, she, like other faculty informed by the curriculum, never stopped investing in a commodity they believed capable of changing the world. In a letter to a troubled former student she noted:

You are still one of my girls even though you were not in my class last quarter...From now on, you and I shall test your ability to correct your mistake and make a new woman of yourself. I have confidence that you will. Do you have that confidence in yourself? If not, may this note help give it to you!"⁴⁷

To one wayward student she wrote, "keep in mind that only when a man's fight begins with himself is he worth anything. Begin your fight with yourself and begin now."⁴⁸

As the turbulent decade raged on, numerous Black students went to war with their own conscious. As the battle for America's soul spilled over into Jackson, young men and women were forced to come face to face with demons that had perplexed the souls and consciousness of generations before them. What risk would they have to take? Would they be willing to sacrifice their places of comfort as members of the talented tenth and confront the foe that waged war against the rights and dignities of their parents

⁴⁷ Jane McAllister to Mary Ann, March 4, 1963, Dr. Jane McAllister Papers, Jackson State University Archives

⁴⁸ Jane McAllister to Rosalie, March 4, 1963, Dr. Jane McAllister Papers, Jackson State University Archives

and grandparents? They knew that those who preceded them had risked life and limb to take up such endeavors. Were they prepared to do the same? Perhaps Dr. McAllister's former student James Meredith began this fight within himself and arrived at the conclusion that his self worth and dignity was worth the noble sacrifice he faced at Ole Miss. As the smoke settled in Oxford and the long road to healing began, McAllister wrote to J.D. Williams, the president of the University of Mississippi in order to convey her support for Williams who attempted to literally rebuild Ole Miss in the wake of the riot. McAllister lent her creed to Williams when she wrote:

In the 42 years of my teaching in Mississippi and Louisiana colleges and in travel in various countries; students, faculty and I, regardless of race, color, or creed have met on the common ground of ideas and ideals...May I congratulate those students to whom you pay tribute, for it is upon such as they---and again I say regardless of race, creed, or color---on whom will depend the salvation of our state.⁴⁹

The state of Mississippi was not as optimistic as McAllister. Not since the Civil War had the Magnolia State felt so invaded. Many of Mississippi's white politicians were prepared to deal with a few unruly Negroes who dared challenge the customs and traditions of Jim Crow. In the past, they openly and violently dealt with such offenders. But things were changing. As the spotlight shined brightly on the Civil Rights Movement, politicians were forced to demonstrate civility toward Blacks in ways they were not accustomed to. Even though Freedom Riders who entered into the state the year prior to the Ole Miss riot were beaten at the hands of both angry citizens and law enforcement, their handling was done much more efficiently than the state sanctioned mobocracy that Mississippi was previously known for. Now, at least from the

⁴⁹ Jane McAllister to J.D. Williams, November 8, 1962, Dr. Jane McAllister Papers, Jackson State University Archives

perspective of white Mississippians, they gained a new enemy in the form of the Kennedy administration. Although most civil rights leaders and activists were quickly viewing the administration with disdain for their hesitancy in endorsing movement activity or protecting demonstrators from the blatant threat of violence, Governor Barnett and the white media of Mississippi branded the Kennedy administration as public enemy number one in their fight to maintain Jim Crow. After Kennedy's failure to meet the desires of most white citizens of the state, which included the denial of James Meredith's admission to Ole Miss, white politicians vilified the Kennedy administration on the floor of the state senate. A resolution was drafted that read, "be it resolved that this Legislature call upon its sister states to join in ridding, by all appropriate means, this once great nation of ours of the Kennedy family dynasty and accompanying evils, and to join our state in its defiance of all who would destroy our freedoms, heritage, and Constitutional rights."⁵⁰ In Mississippi, the conservative backlash against the Democratic Party was now in full swing.

In January of 1963, just a few short months after the Meredith riots, Tougaloo attempted to fill the void left by John Mangram, by bringing in Rev. Ed King, a young white minister born and raised in Mississippi and a graduate of Millsaps College. King understood the pressure that accompanied filling the position that for the last decade had been the most critical in the development of political and social consciousness among Tougaloo students. The hiring of King was not without some controversy. Many

⁵⁰ The resolution was intended to be sent to Kennedy, members of his cabinet, and members of congress. It was sent to a committee in the State House where it failed to pass. Former Sovereignty Commission Director Erle Johnston contends that Governor Barnett escaped prosecution from the federal government for his role in the Meredith debacle, largely because Kennedy did not desire further confrontation with Barnett or his southern constituents. See, Johnston, *Mississippi's Defiant Years*, 164.

students balked at the idea of a white southerner inheriting the legacy left behind by men like Bender and Mangram. Anne Moody later recalled that, “I think because he was a white native Mississippian almost every student at Tougaloo doubted him at the time.”⁵¹ King was not the average white Mississippian. As a young man, King rejected the roots of racism that permeated every facet of life in the South. He left his southern roots and attended seminary in Boston, an equal if not more hostile environment to the idea of civil rights. But as a young student at Boston University, the same institution where Dr. Martin Luther King had received his graduate training, Ed King was convicted by the spirit of nonviolence that Black activists throughout the South had employed in their efforts to make a mockery of Jim Crow.

Yet even King possessed deep reservations about his return to Mississippi. He recalled, “I had assumed I could never return to the Deep South. And then after the Meredith riots, I was trying to say is there still any way to come back?”⁵² The young minister soon found the strength to return to a state where he knew his destiny was intertwined with the struggle of Black folks striving to break free from the bondage of Jim Crow. During his contemplation he found a confidant in Medgar Evers, who he had met as a young college student while at Millsaps. King never forgot Evers advice to him about returning home. “Everybody’s always running away,” Evers said. “I’m staying here. You have to find a way to come back.”⁵³ King entered into his position as chaplain at Tougaloo during a period when SNCC had begun its infiltration into the most infamous

⁵¹ Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1968) 379.

⁵² Interview with Ed King, June 30, 2004.

⁵³ Ibid.

regions of the state, Southwestern Mississippi and the Delta. Much of his new job description included making Tougaloo a place of refuge where students who desired reprieve from their college studies, could become engaged as volunteers and return to a place of mental and spiritual rejuvenation. King noted:

Dr. Beittel had worked out programs where students were encouraged to join the movement, and to drop out of school if they got overly involved in the movement and to never use the movement as an excuse for not taking a test...Students could get the equivalent of leaves of absence and Beittel wanted them to come back to the college campus as a sanctuary, as a quiet place from the trenches, the battlefields. And so Tougaloo was the place of safety, people would come often for strategy meetings and this kind of thing.⁵⁴

As student activists moved into the state and interacted with college students who were native to Mississippi, visions of the daunting task that lay in front of them surely created great anxieties for all involved. The advice that Evers had given King about his return to Mississippi rang true. No organization had previously dared to sojourn in the state too long. The NAACP had a sprinkling of chapters that created small pockets of resistance, but membership was something that most still not dare publicize, even to their loved ones. Student activists Hollis Watkins recalled an encounter with his father when, “his wallet fell out of his top overall pocket, and papers fell out and one of the things that landed on top was his NAACP membership card. So I looked at it, and looked at him, he looked at me, I never said nothing, he never said nothing, he just picked it up.”⁵⁵ However, with the arrival of SNCC, who immediately tapped into the networks and resources provided by local Black colleges, the day arrived where student activists were

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Interview with Hollis Watkins, August 9, 2004

able to slowly bridge the gap of fear that defined life in Mississippi. To achieve this goal, SNCC organizers knew that they would have to remain in Mississippi for the long haul.

Mississippi was being reborn through the vitality and idealism of Black youth. This gradual development was generations in the making, but had been born out of the shelter provided by Black colleges. Though fearful of the danger that loomed at even the thought of penetrating into Mississippi's more remote and perilous areas, student activists knew that this was where they must go to win the trust and confidence of the people. Armed with a plan to mount a large scale voting registration campaign, they preceded into cities such as McComb, Ruleville, and Philadelphia, and counties such as Greenwood and Issaquena. In places such as these they met resistance from both hostile whites and frightened Blacks. But their message resonated with many "local people" such as Fannie Lou Hamer and Unita Blackwell. Upon meeting the students, Blackwell recalled, "They were absolutely wonderful. You know, and that's my first glimpse of freedom, was in the eyes of them young folks...That's what the movement was, it's just so refreshing and it also was very dangerous. And to see the fear in the young people's eyes, yet they didn't let the fear stop 'em."⁵⁶

Registering the millions of Black folk who remained without a political voice became the pillar of organizing activity for SNCC activist who were now entering the state. Much of their work took them into the impoverished rural communities of Mississippi. However, by 1963 access to public accommodations was still unthinkable for Black Mississippians. In more progressive and politically moderate Southern cities such as Greensboro, Nashville, and even Montgomery, public accommodation laws had

⁵⁶ Interview with Unita Blackwell, August 7, 2004.

either changed or were in the process of being altered. Mississippi again represented one of the last frontiers. Because most direct action protests had occurred at downtown lunch counters, Jackson represented a logical target being Mississippi's only viable urban setting. Tougaloo again figured prominently in the plans to desegregate downtown Jackson. Both high school and Tougaloo students were active participants in a boycott of downtown stores during 1962. However the more passive protest embodied within boycotts no longer interested many student activists who were convicted by the power of direct action that was the tactic of Black college students throughout the South.

One of the key organizers for a proposed plan to launch a sit-in demonstration at downtown stores was John Salter, a young sociology professor at Tougaloo. Salter, a former labor organizer from Arizona, was drawn to Mississippi by the passion of the Freedom Riders and became immediately involved with the NAACP youth chapter upon his arrival at Tougaloo. However, the shadow of competition once again loomed over attempts to organize students. In a letter to historian John Dittmer, Salter admitted that Bob Moses, the central organizer for SNCC, "did everything he could do to pull our student activists into his projects in the spring of '63."⁵⁷ Nevertheless, a select group of Tougaloo students prepared themselves to take on Jim Crow. They had read the newspapers and had heard accounts of sit-in protests before. Any danger associated with the sit-ins had to be multiplied in the hostile climate of Mississippi. Students could count on the presence of a throng of white supremacists prepared to violently defend their way of life. Conquering any fear that lingered in their hearts and minds, the students proceeded to the downtown Woolworth's on May 28th.

⁵⁷ Dittmer, *Local People*, 159.

That Tuesday morning at precisely 11:15, students systematically filed into the downtown Woolworth's and took seats at the lunch counter. Anne Moody and Joan Trumpauer were among the courageous group who sat patiently and waited on either service from the wait staff or the regular lunchtime crowd of white high school students that frequented the lunch counter. The students arrived first. The local media was on hand to capture the events as they unfolded. When Memphis Norman, a student at Tougaloo who was apart of the protest, was assaulted by a former police officer, pandemonium ensued. Students were doused with condiments from the lunch counter and physically pulled from their seats. The students bravely retook their places and were joined by more Tougaloo students. John Salter, one of the primary organizers of the event, was also present at the lunch counter. He was struck so hard by a blow from the crowd that it opened up a gash in his jaw to which salt was applied by the violent hecklers. Dr. Beittel, who was also on hand to ensure that things did not go too far, finally brought some reprieve for the protesters. He intervened by escorting the students through a throng of hostile whites who hurled foreign objects at the protesters as they made their way from the lunch counter to the waiting station wagon of Rev. Ed King.

For Anne Moody it was her first physical confrontation with white supremacy. All of her life she had observed its workings and had even seen its effects, but now she like many other protesters were getting a first hand taste of how venomous the hate could be. She wrote:

After the sit-in, all I could think of was how sick Mississippi whites were. They believed so much in the segregated way of life, they would kill to preserve it. I sat there in the NAACP office and thought of how many times they had killed when this way of life was threatened. I knew that the killing had just begun.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, 267.

Perhaps the more ominous question that lingered for Black student activists was how many Blacks would be killed or physically harmed before white America became enraged over the brutality and oppression that defined the South? Just how long would this struggle take and were students willing to continue risking and enduring so much with so little to show for it? The answers to these penetrating questions were destined to seriously impair the longevity and collective goals of the movement.

Outside of the Woolworth's, the students greatest local supporter was at work. Medgar Evers was the silent orchestrator behind it all. As the protest unveiled, Rev. King, who was located inside, was calling Evers from a pay phone and updating him on the events that were taking place inside. In both theory and reality, Evers was closer than ever before to the students. Evers was a part of the older generation, but he never ceased to support the endeavors of the students, even when he knew those actions were contrary to non-confrontational style of the NAACP. He encouraged them at every turn and his office doors were never closed to students who sought advice and direction. In many ways, the students were the ones who were doing the leading. Through their transformation of merely living out their day to day struggles into becoming living agents for justice and change, they had jumpstarted the movement and informed the objectives of both Evers and the NAACP's company brass. King recalled, "Medgar went up there to the SNCC rallies and spoke and praised what they were doing...His presence was endorsing what they were doing, and his speeches praised them and said you are an inspiration to us in Jackson."⁵⁹ In less than two weeks after the sit-in, Anne Moody's

⁵⁹ Interview with Ed King, June 30, 2004

premonition of looming death would prove to be painfully true, a fact that would tip the scales of the movement.

CHAPTER 6

THE SCALES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS: DETERMINATION AND CO-OPTATION ON BLACK COLLEGE CAMPUSES, 1963-1966

“Since I had been part of the Movement, I had witnessed killing, stealing, and adultery committed against Negroes by whites throughout the South. God didn’t seem to be punishing anyone for these acts. On the other hand, most of the Negroes in the South were humble, peace-loving, religious people. Yet they were the ones doing all the suffering, as if they themselves were responsible for the killing and other acts committed against them. It seemed to me now that there must be two gods, many gods, or no god at all.”¹

- Anne Moody
Coming of Age in Mississippi

By 1963 Black student activism had clearly proven itself as the catalyzing force of the Civil Rights Movement. While most white southerners were astonished and appalled by the audacity of Black youth who swarmed lunch counters, crammed into southern jails, and defied customs and traditions that usually resulted in severe retribution, many others worked vigorously to patch any holes that student activism may have caused in their fortress of intolerance. Southern apartheid was far from dead. Organizations such as the White Citizens’ Council and the Ku Klux Klan hashed out schemes and tactics aimed at intimidating and strong-arming activists and organizers. But activists’ most visible foe was federal, state, and local authorities that governed without visible compassion or sympathy for movement participants who were viewed as nothing more than political troublemakers. The movement was further exposing the dubious nature of the American political system. Politicians who engaged in shady deals,

¹ Anne Moody, *Coming of Age In Mississippi*, 338

backroom compromises, and disingenuous unions devised new ways to hold fast to the threads of white supremacy. As activists observed their rapidly changing world, many began to question, both openly and deep within their subconscious, how committed was white America to the principles of justice and righteousness.

Those who committed themselves to the struggle did so with great sacrifice to their own personal lives. Resistance to calls for racial equality became even more sinister in nature. Previous detection of individual or collective insurgency resulted in blunt and swift violence. However, movement participants were now being followed in unmarked cars, viewing their names on Klan hit lists, and receiving anonymous calls that banished sleep for the night in fear that physical violence was imminent. They received hard, penetrating stares from strangers that they had never met before and they were chased for miles by roving gangs of young white ruffians who sometimes did it for sport and other times did it with more unbridled intentions. The sheer physical and psychological toll that was wreaked upon the lives of student activists is immeasurable. Former student activist Eugene Young noted, “in retrospect, a lot of people became alcoholics, a lot of people resorted to drugs, a lot of people had emotional and nervous breakdowns because of the constant fear and tension of working in the Civil Rights Movement.”¹ In the struggle for liberation, nothing would be given, everything would be earned, and often at a heavy price. In Mississippi, the State Sovereignty Commission was stepping up its surveillance of suspected subversives, a move that targeted both the innocent and those who were guilty in plotting the destruction of the racist customs and traditions of the state.

¹ Interview with Eugene Young. July 15, 2004.

During the fall of 1962, Jackson State made an unexpected hire. That autumn, George Lee Robinson joined the faculty, and he, along with his young wife Delores and their newborn infant moved to Jackson from Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The professor packed up his belongings and moved, however it is not certain if Jackson State and more specifically if President Jacob Reddix knew that he was coming with personal baggage of a different sort. The Black student movement had swept across the South and many Black youth became entangled in either local civil rights protests or struggles with campus authorities. George Robinson was fired from the faculty of Southern University for vehemently objecting to the way in which President Felton Clark handled student protestors on his campus.² His new place of employment was even more inhospitable to student activism than his former. As Robinson settled into his new home and got acclimated to his new position, neither he nor Jackson State administrators, including Reddix, knew that he was under the watchful eye of the Sovereignty Commission.

When the phone rang at the Robinson residence on the morning of April 16, 1963, Delores Robinson had no idea that a hostile interrogation was waiting on the other end. She and the baby were at home by themselves and a menacing caller was sure to unsettle a young wife tending to her newborn. The director of the Sovereignty Commission, Erle

² It is not clear why George Robinson left Southern University for Jackson State if his intentions included support of student insurgency. Both of these institutions resembled each other in the sense that they were both state institutions that were under the thumb of hard line presidents who served at the behest of a white governing board. Perhaps Robinson recognized that the influence of the Second Curriculum could not be bound by institutional guidelines but could instead breathe free given the proper space and place. At Southern University it had caused over 3,500 members of the student body to march to the state capitol and another 140 members of the Southern faculty to sign a statement of support for their students. Such support ultimately cost Robinson his job, but Southern University became a hotbed of student protest throughout the decade, producing famous student activists such as Major Johns, Ronnie Moore, Eddie Brown, and his younger outspoken brother H. "Rap" Brown (Jamil Amin). For more on Southern University and the rise of student activism in Baton Rouge, see August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, *CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942-1968* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); and Major Johns and Ronnie Moore, *It Happened in Baton Rouge* (New York: CORE, 1962).

Johnston, Jr., instructed Investigator Andy Hopkins to place a call to the Robinson home to inquire more about their intentions as employees of Jackson State. Major W.R. Jones, Chief of the Investigative and Identification Division, “especially requested that the President of Jackson State College not be informed that their department has requested an investigation into the background of these subjects.”³ At approximately 10:30 a.m., Hopkins spoke with Delores and questioned her about her place of employment and her decision to apply for her driver’s license under her maiden name instead of Robinson. Ironically, in the report Hopkins noted that Mrs. Robinson was rude, despite the fact that *he* was the stranger calling her home and asking personal questions, which under normal circumstances should not have concerned him. But to the lead investigators of the MSSC, nothing (outside of white supremacy) was normal in Mississippi anymore and the Robinson’s activist past, including their decision to apply for voter registration in Jackson, stirred their deepest concerns and suspicions. What if they attempted to support or even instigate student activism on Jackson State’s campus? Would Professor Robinson encourage young men and women to claim their American birthright by registering to vote as he and his wife had? Perhaps most unsettling to the MSSC, they were employed in a venue that was proving to be a breeding ground for insurgency throughout the South, historically Black colleges.

State authorities were justified in their vigilance over the activities of Black youth and those who came in closest contact with them. The enclaves that they had least

³ The fact that the MSSC refused to inform Reddix that two of his employees were being interrogated, despite the fact that they had a working relationship with him, corroborates with the testimony of Dr. John Peoples. In an interview with John Peoples, he informed the author that Reddix often was angered by the state’s request and sometimes falsified information to MSSC investigators. See, “Investigation of George Lee Robinson, Colored Male and Delores Catherine Toms Robinson, Colored Female,” April 16, 1963, Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission Files, Mississippi Department of Archives and History

expected to produce streams of agitation were now turning out a steady flow of students who were undaunted in their objectives to take the steps that their parents had yet to take. However, student activism was not produced within an impervious vacuum where the generation of George and Delores Robinson could have no influence upon the direction and development of rebellious Black youth. It is far too easy to suggest that Black student activists suffered from a complete disconnect with the older generation. Perhaps a more accurate assessment is that the older generation was molded by a spirit of conservatism, informed by decades of violence and hostility. Indeed fear was a factor for Black Mississippians; perhaps more so there than in any other place in the country. Assigned to compile a study on what both high school and college students thought of the unfolding civil rights struggle, Jackson State professor Jane McAllister wrote, "Some of the principals were afraid for me to ask students some very simple questions. Fear is something you can touch here in Jackson."⁴ Hesitation was noticeable among most of Mississippi's older Black generation. They hesitated out of concern for their jobs. They hesitated because many were the sole providers for their families. They hesitated for fear that some injury or death may come to the children they were placed in charge of. And perhaps most importantly, they hesitated because they like most others were not yet ready to die.

Physical violence against African Americans was a part of Mississippi's culture. Movement participants understood this as did the parents of Black students who were actively involved in the struggle. Repair of bullet riddled homes, hospital visitations, and

⁴ Jane McAllister to Mabel Carney, November 3, 1964, Dr. Jane McAllister Papers, Jackson State University Archives

untimely funerals were frequent. The common occurrence of such events made it no less a bitter pill to swallow. It is quite certain that older Black Mississippians longed for better days free of Jim Crow and the violent terrorism that often accompanied it. However, agitating and provoking local whites by deliberately breaking these social codes made many elders of the Black community uncomfortable. They knew what white Mississippians were capable of and were victims of it more times than they cared to remember. They also had painful memories of what happened to those community leaders who did possess the courage to speak out against white supremacy.⁵ Now, it was young students placing their lives on the line and incurring the often fatal wrath of the white community. Black students had ascended to positions of leadership within the movement, and along with that came the anguishing reality that some decisions could result in bloodshed and death. More and more student activists shouldered this physical and psychological burden. Former student activist David Dennis painfully recalled what life on the front lines was like. He noted, “I was very responsible for sending people to go do jobs, and assigning people [to jobs] that didn’t come back. So you don’t forget that, you don’t forget the last time you saw them. You don’t forget the last words they said to you. You don’t forget the expression on their face.”⁶ While it is true that students

⁵ For documentation on the effects of white terrorism on Black communities see, Julius Thompson, *Black Life in Mississippi: Essays on Political, Social, and Cultural Studies in a Deep South State* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2001), Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, Neil McMillen, *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), James Silver, *Mississippi: The Closed Society* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1963), and James Loewen and Charles Sallis, ed., *Mississippi: Conflict and Change* (New York: Random House, 1974).

⁶David Dennis was the CORE field secretary in Mississippi and loaned the car that he had been using to John Chaney, Michael Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman to go to Meridian and then on to Philadelphia, MS to start schools in the area and to investigate recent church bombings. The three young men were among the earliest participants in Freedom Summer. They were abducted, beaten, and murdered, which sent shockwaves throughout the country. Interview with David Dennis, August 11, 2004.

had crossed a deep river of fear by engaging in direct action protest, navigating that blood filled stream and convincing an older Black generation that it was a necessary evil, was a chore unto itself. Dorie Ladner recalled her tragic experience in confronting the parent of a former classmate at Jackson State that was shot in the head after she became involved in voter registration activities in the Delta. She noted, “After being informed about Marylene being shot, I went to visit her at a local hospital in Jackson and her mother started screaming at me and accusing me of her daughter getting shot, saying if it hadn’t been for me, her daughter wouldn’t have gotten shot. I had never been so hurt and I was overcome with grief.”⁷

Despite their hesitation in openly endorsing the direct action that characterized student protests, the older generation contributed much more than they have been credited for in support of emboldened Black youth. Black student activists represented the endearing hope of their elders. This relationship proved valuable as students rallied against Jim Crow laws in the state. The Black Student Movement in America was never without the positive encouragement and support of senior members of the Black community. This is not to say that all of the older generation was totally on board with the assertive direction that students were taking the Civil Rights Movement. In fact, throughout the movement, many older Blacks were persuaded by both their own conscious and by outside forces to attempt to corral young Black idealism that seemed to be moving too fast and too far. This generational divide posed a serious problem for

⁷ Mrs. Ladner continues to say in the interview that although she was hurt by Mrs. Burke’s accusation, she did not take it personal. She contends that it was part of a larger web of ignorance on the part of a few of the older generation that blamed activists and not the culture of intolerance and terrorism in which they lived. Interview with Dorie Ladner. June 23, 2004.

movement organizers seeking a unified front in the struggle against white supremacy.

However in a culture where deference to one's elders still mattered, the relationship between Black youth and the adults that cared for their well being never withered. Dave Dennis noted:

But underground that is, there was really the adult and elders who gave support to the movement, who provided all kinds of stuff. Made everybody food, food came out of nowhere...I mean they [students] were housed in private homes, they were our hotels...You had kids out there because they were trying to keep their jobs...And a lot of the meeting places we had was in churches you see, and even when the ministers couldn't come out front, they would turn their back, because the deacons would take over the church, you know and say you gone meet at the church...So you had this, but none of that could have happened without adult participation.⁸

What is clearly evident in these scenarios is the strong presence of an elder Black community that silently cosigned the actions of Black youth who took up strong measures to protest the bitter realities of Black Mississippians. Many may have cringed at the thought of venturing into the deeper and more hostile waters of direct action. Their fear may have even limited their political foresight and protest agendas. What if their demands were too much? Perhaps adopting a voting rights campaign was more palatable for white Americans than couching their demands in the rhetoric of economic empowerment? Perhaps a more conservative approach as offered by the NAACP and as hoped for by the federal government was the proper step to take?⁹ Regardless of these dilemmas, one thing above all dictated the interaction between local people and passionate Black youth, a spirit of righteousness. Wickedness existed in both high and

⁸ Interview with Dave Dennis, August 11, 2004

⁹ For greater discussion on the development of protest objectives and the tension between conservative Blacks and more radical activists, see Charles Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

low places in Mississippi. The older generation of Black Mississippians who looked to the youthful exuberance of students to lead the way were determined to do what was honorable, good, and just, whenever and however they could. They fed the hungry, they gave guidance to those venturing down dangerous pathways, and they provided shelter in a time of storm. Although the pursuance of what was *right* highlighted movement activity from 1963 to 1966, the questioning of what was *right* became even more prominent during this era, particularly among frustrated student activists who found support among many members of the older generation, but confusion and doubt among the policies, programs, and actions of the conservative establishment.

Although what lay on the horizon for the civil rights struggle in Jackson was still not quite clear, Black student activism formed the avant-garde of the local movement. Like elsewhere in the South, Mississippi's Black students worked with local organizers and national leaders who sought to dethrone Jim Crow in the heart of Dixie. The courage of Black youth made them the prototypical foot soldiers of the movement. It was during this era that students in junior and senior high schools across the South took a more visible role in the student movement. Whereas many Black college students embraced the hope of a promising career or felt the burden of being the first in their families to finish college, the same could not be said of Black youth enrolled in the local secondary schools. In Jackson, students from Lanier, Jim Hill, and Brinkley High Schools rebuked the conservatism and concern of their caretakers and joined in the local movement by the hundreds. On Friday May 31, the Farish Street Baptist Church was the scene of the first mass movement in Jackson. Hundreds of school children marched downtown in protest

of public accommodation laws where state troopers immediately placed the students in garbage trucks and hauled them off to a holding pen constructed at the state fairground.¹⁰

At a mass meeting held at the Masonic Temple two blocks away from Jackson State University, a young 12 year old graced the podium and spoke to a capacity crowd that included such celebrities as singer Lena Horne and comedian Dick Gregory. Eugene Young recalled, “a guy by the name of Jerome Smith asked me would I be willing to go up there and try to urge people to join in the civil rights demonstrations.”¹¹ Needing a chair to stand on just to reach the microphone, Young left the crowd electrified, on their feet, and astonished that such a young child could articulate his people’s desire for freedom and justice. As a student activist with CORE, Jerome Smith hoped that the courage of a child would be enough to spur an older generation to action.¹²

It was during the mass protests of 1963 that two nagging issues were exposed that were destined to pose serious problems for the success of the movement. First was the recalcitrance of government officials and the second was the contentious nature of national civil rights organizations that swooped in to gain positions of influence and prestige. The city fathers of Jackson were prepared to draw their battle lines as student activists placed them in their sights. They had been working just as diligently, if not more than the students and civil rights organizers. Their Herculean efforts to prepare both legal and illegal roadblocks for movement participants created frustration and tension among Black activists, a fact that would soon lead to an ideological shift within

¹⁰ John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1995) 163.

¹¹ Interview with Eugene Young, July 15, 2004

¹² Ibid.

the movement. As movement organizers entered their demands for a restructuring of city policies, government officials made the protestors victims of a political yo-yo, stalling on their requests and making false promises in order to buy more time. These actions further informed the disenchantment of Black youth who were receiving a crash course in political rigmarole. John Garner, a young professor at Tougaloo College noted:

The Negroes had been taking their grievances to the mayor for about nine months before the recent picketing and demonstrations. After the first day of demonstrations, the mayor promised all the Negro demands—at least so the Negro leaders understood from meeting with him. However, he took back all the promises he made within 24 hours. It is an interesting situation. The white community does not believe the Negroes are serious until they demonstrate and picket, and when they do then the Whites say there can be no negotiations under such pressure.¹³

Mayor Allen Thompson was skilled in evading the immediate concerns of local Black activists. In addition to meandering through the demands of movement participants, Thompson was also an expert in manipulating the power struggle embodied in local Black leadership. In the mass meetings that occurred before students took to the streets, Mayor Thompson worked frantically to restructure the movement in his favor. Thompson hoped that he could perhaps cool the temperament of disgruntled activists scheduled to meet with him to discuss local grievances by carefully placing conservative puppets such as Jacob Reddix and Percy Greene, editor of the local Black newspaper *The Jackson Advocate*, on the delegation.¹⁴ Although Thompson's plan fell short of preventing mass demonstrations throughout the city, it did not matter. NAACP leaders

¹³ Open letter, June 30, 1963, Personal Correspondence, John Garner Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives & History

¹⁴ Dittmer, *Local People*, 161.

were already setting in motion ill advised plans that would help decelerate the local movement in Jackson.

The NAACP chapter on Tougaloo's campus was actively involved in the movement in Jackson. The campus chapter received past support from Chaplain John Mangram and prior to his arrival on campus, students observed the tireless work of Chaplain William Bender who served in a leadership capacity with the NAACP. The most important tie however between the NAACP and Tougaloo students and other young Black activists in Jackson was the captivating leadership style of Medgar Evers who served as the Executive Secretary for the association throughout the entire state. Evers was no firebrand. He lacked the commanding oratorical skills that were associated with the clergy based leadership of the SCLC. But regardless of his leadership flaws, students were drawn to the spirit of righteousness that emanated from their local hero. From their perspective, it was his most endearing quality.¹⁵ Although they respected the NAACP, their supreme allegiance and trust lay with the man who for years had been the front man for justice and equality in the state. However, Evers heavy involvement with the conservative leadership of the NAACP proved to be a disservice to local efforts to mount an effective and aggressive campaign for equality in Jackson.¹⁶

As the head of the NAACP, Roy Wilkins was leery of direct action protests. Student activism was far from becoming a staple in the association's protest tactics. Over the years the NAACP watched with sharp interest the increasing role that students were playing in advancing the cause of civil rights throughout the country and particularly in

¹⁵ Interview with Dorie Ladner. June 23, 2004.

¹⁶ Interview with Ed King, June 30, 2004.

the South. It was not without coincidence that as rival organizations such as SCLC and CORE gravitated toward the youthful idealism of students, the nation's oldest civil rights organization also expressed interest, if for nothing more than the idea of keeping up with their competitors. Historian John Dittmer noted that:

In the middle of May the national office changed course abruptly and made Jackson a priority....The reason for this sudden shift in policy was in a word, Birmingham....In a revealing memorandum to regional and field secretaries on May 13, [Gloster] Current called attention to the "apparent success of the Birmingham protest," speculating that "Jackson, Mississippi will be the next scene of attack by the King forces." Such a move would "make it much harder for the NAACP to carry on its work effectively."¹⁷

The "work" of the NAACP was in direct conflict with the work and spirit of the people. Students were prepared and ready to march on the white establishment, demanding justice now. However, the following moments clearly illustrated the NAACP's primary interest was staving off other Black organizations, and not the injustices of Jim Crow. The contentious nature of civil rights organizations deteriorated into turf battles where larger than life leaders exposed both their egos and their limited visions for a movement pregnant with potential. As the NAACP brass arrived in Jackson to stake claim to their territory, they brought with them the same spirit of negotiation and accommodation that had served as their calling card for years.

The struggle for Black liberation in Jackson perfectly illustrates the dilemmas and failures of leadership in the Civil Rights Movement. Long observed as a potential for disaster, grassroots activists and skilled organizers warned against the hegemonic control embodied in various organizations. If organizations such as the NAACP, SCLC, and CORE, were allowed to usurp the ideas and concerns of student activists and local people

¹⁷ Dittmer, *Local People*. 160.

that moved without direct instruction from Roy Wilkins, King, or James Farmer, then power and influence would rest with leaders and not the masses. Many of these same grassroots activists observed the brilliant opportunities presented by student activism. As the principal organizer behind SNCC, Ella Baker, “drew a clear distinction between the ‘old guard’ leadership, which implicitly included the four year old SCLC along with the more established NAACP, and the more militant new leadership represented by the students.”¹⁸ Unlike the “old guard” in Jackson, Black students were ready and willing to engage the forces of white supremacy in the city. They, like the local people of Canton, McComb, and Greenwood did not need any one to instruct them on what their pressing issues were nor did they need outside forces to arbitrate on their behalf. What the Black youth of Jackson desired was someone to assist them with organizing and harnessing the power that already lay within them. That’s not what the visiting leadership of the NAACP or local conservative Black leaders had in mind. Historian John Dittmer notes:

In Jackson, the unbending resistance of local whites had for a time united blacks across lines of class and age, but as the level of violence intensified, the more conservative black ministers and businessmen became willing to settle on terms that stopped far short of the movement’s original goals. These men kept their leadership positions in the years following Ever’s death, but they were not a dynamic force for social change...Several young people active in the direct action campaign remained in Mississippi to work in projects in other areas; others disillusioned by their experience dropped out of the movement.¹⁹

Black student’s vision of a rising insurgency was soon thwarted by the directors of the NAACP who illustrated the very dilemma that Baker warned of. Historian Barbara Ransby noted that, “In a veiled criticism of King, she observed that many had felt

¹⁸ Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker & The Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 245.

¹⁹ Dittmer, 168-9.

‘frustrations and disillusionment that come when the prophetic leader turns out to have heavy feet of clay.’”²⁰ The slow and plodding intentions of Roy Wilkins and the NAACP helped to demobilize the movement in Jackson.

Wilkins arrived in town as the chief intermediary between the Black masses and city officials. He brought with him all the authority and media spotlight that accompanies the leader of such a prominent organization. With his blessings, the students were prepared to overrun the city with their demands until the local authorities complied. But they also revered the association’s legacy of fighting on behalf of African Americans and were not prepared to ignore any direction from Wilkins and the leadership of the NAACP that suggested a different course. Leadership changes were made within the local NAACP chapter that undermined the local and more militant leadership that originally spurred the students to action.²¹ Medgar Evers was distraught. Former Tougaloo Chaplain Ed King recalled, “He was under orders from Wilkins to stop the demonstrations, and we continued small demonstrations, but we should have followed up the mass march of 400 people with huge numbers of adults surrounding the jail, but an order came down from [Wilkins] to do the opposite.”²²

For Black Mississippians, the mass demonstration that took place during the spring of 1963 in Jackson was their Battle of Jericho. However, there was no trumpet blast signaling an advance. The foot soldiers of the Jackson movement were instructed to

²⁰ Ransby. 245.

²¹ John Salter, a professor at Tougaloo, acted as an advisor to the young NAACP students and supported the more aggressive and militant tone of the mass protests. However, he was removed from his position in order to insert more conservative local leadership.

²² Interview with Ed King, June 30, 2004

cease their conflict with city officials, stopping just short of witnessing the walls of segregation and injustice from tumbling down. One can only speculate what the outcome would have been had the student protests been fully endorsed by the NAACP. Had Jackson fallen early, both Black youth and conservative Black elders who had cautiously observed the movement from the sidelines could have been immediately convinced that mass protest was the key in releasing the stranglehold of white supremacy. Instead, a groundswell of Black student activism was suddenly stunted throughout Jackson as the city fathers retreated to deal once again in false promises and prolonged justice.

Historian John Dittmer noted that, “CORE workers [Dave] Dennis and Jerome Smith had left Jackson ‘very disgusted and bitter.’...Members of the north Jackson NAACP youth council, who started it all, felt betrayed as well.”²³ Although the reasoning behind the NAACP’s decision to stand down is still disputed, Rev Ed King posits his own theory based on conversations with Medgar Evers. King recalled:

Medgar told me the pressure was coming from the White House on Wilkins...I would say like “isn’t this obvious to Wilkins that we need to continue this thing?” Well the answer was very obviously no. Medgar pulled me into his office when Wilkins came down here and made it clear. Wilkins damned Martin and said it would not be repeated here. Then went out and held a press conference, and criticized the racist police and all of that...but this was so stunning to me.²⁴

It is quite conceivable that Wilkins decided to call off the protest after contact with both federal and local authorities. In almost all phases of the Black struggle for liberation, the

²³ John Dittmer, *Local People*, 164

²⁴Ed King referred repeatedly to the animosity and competitiveness that existed between leaders such as Roy Wilkins and Martin Luther King Jr. The nation’s focus was turned toward Birmingham in 1963 where King and the SCLC were openly engaged in direct action protests with city officials. This was clearly not the style of Wilkins or the NAACP. Despite their agreement to come to Jackson to assist in the protest already begun by student activists, Wilkins merely performed a “hands off” move to rival civil rights organizations. Outside of individual CORE and SNCC activists participating in isolated protest events, Jackson would remain largely free of influence or control by other major civil rights organizations for the remainder of the decade. Interview with Ed King, June 30, 2004

white establishment engaged in cozy negotiations with Black leadership. Actions such as these continued to disenchant Black student activists seeking signs of righteousness in a den of political iniquity.

Throughout the controversial mass protests of 1963, Medgar Evers remained untainted in the minds of Black students. Although he was affiliated with the NAACP, Evers was just as disappointed at Wilkins decision to stand down to local authorities. He understood that the Black citizens of Jackson stood at the edge of success in their quest to end discriminatory practices in the city. Despite his professional allegiance to the NAACP, symbolically and spiritually he was intrinsically linked with the Black youth of Jackson. Their passions were his passions. He fed off of their energy and bold spirit of determinism, hoping that it would serve as the start of something imaginative and sincere, not the revealing of something fruitless and routine. Although he knew that such dreams set him on collision course with his employers, years of soul searching brought him closer toward the interest of students.²⁵ At a mass meeting in Greenwood, Mississippi, Evers informed a group of student activists and local people that, “You’ve given us inspiration in Jackson.”²⁶ It is clear that in 1963, Evers was drifting ever closer to the goals and tactics of student protesters and local activists. With his consciousness torn and his political outlook shifting towards a more radical and militant form of protest, Evers was constructing a vision that aligned him with the marginalized masses of Black folk, a fact that brought great stress to a man who spent years devoutly and faithfully serving an organization that demanded of him a more conservative and non-

²⁵ Interview with Ed King. June 30, 2004.

²⁶ Adam Nossiter, *Of Long Memory: Mississippi and the Murder of Medgar Evers* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1994) 57.

confrontational course of action. As the movement screeched to a NAACP imposed halt and the mass meetings shriveled to a miniscule few, Evers became “very tired and worn, with sharper lines in his face than before, and he seemed quietly sad.”²⁷ The embattled civil rights hero to countless Black youth was injured by unfulfilled dreams and a warring conscious, but on June 11, 1963, he fell victim to the forces of white supremacy in Mississippi.

As Evers arrived home late that night, Byron De La Beckwith, a charter member of the Citizens’ Council and a man with a violent reputation, waited for him in the honeysuckle bushes just a few hundred feet away. With a high powered rifle, Beckwith fired a precise shot that tore through the back of Medgar Evers who was carrying sweatshirts inscribed with “Jim Crow Must Go” logos.²⁸ As Evers lay dying in his own driveway, so too did the local civil rights movement in Jackson. In the days following his assassination, activists experienced a range of emotions that included rage, sadness, and doubt that the hope of building a local insurgency could ever return. Although students served as the majority of protestors involved in the Jackson protests, they received much of their inspiration and encouragement from the man who was cut down by an assassin’s bullet, leaving behind a wife, three children, and a movement that would sputter and stall long after his untimely death. Evers was the first high profile leader to be murdered in the Civil Rights Movement and his young student followers were left in a state of disbelief. Anne Moody recalled, “We didn’t believe what we were hearing. We just sat there staring at the TV screen. It was unbelievable. Just an hour or so earlier we were all

²⁷ Ibid., 61.

²⁸ Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom*. 288.

with him...We didn't know what to say or do. All night we tried to figure out what happened, who did it, who was next, and it still didn't seem real."²⁹

The shock of Medgar Evers assassination reverberated throughout Jackson. No where was news of his death more sadly received than on the campus of Tougaloo. Over the years, Evers had grown close with the students and the campus where the ideals of justice and equality were freely imagined and discussed. As a movement activist who scoured Mississippi registering Black folks to vote and condemning the practices of Jim Crow, Evers understood that a venue such as Tougaloo was a rarity in the state. It was one of the few places that he was received with warmth and could rest with little fear of violent reprisal. And it was within the enclave that he could rub elbows with the youth that had inspired even him. Before his death, Ed King noted Evers position on the tactical approach of the movement:

He was committed to what the students had been doing...He was convinced that what Martin Luther King, Fred Shuttlesworth, and others had done in Birmingham, was what needed to be done in Jackson and other places...He felt the movement should go that direction and I think he died trying to move the movement in that direction.³⁰

The Black youth of Mississippi had tasted bitterness before. This was the same generation that had lost one of its own in Emmett Till. Those memories had fueled their desires to bring about change to the social and political structure of their state. Even after Till's death, there were countless other murders, yet unsolved, which claimed the lives of Black youths and local activists engaged in rebellion against the state. But with the sudden death of Medgar Evers in 1963, a second round of tragic events began slowly

²⁹ Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1968) 276.

³⁰ Interview with Ed King. June 30, 2004.

chipping away at the faith that so many young activists had placed in doing what white and Black conservatives deemed the right thing to do. They prayed like their faith and their elders had instructed them. They marched peacefully as they were told. They sang songs of freedom that gave them hope and unity in the face of unmitigated hatred and terrorism. However a new melody was being composed in the minds and hearts of a few angry youth. With their mentor now dead, several students started quietly humming a tune laced with contempt for a system that could suddenly and unapologetically snatch Medgar Evers from their midst.

The events that unfolded after Evers assassination did little to change those brewing sentiments. A civil rights leader of supreme importance, particularly to the people of Mississippi, lay dead and the white power structure braced itself for a backlash from the Black community. The response was swift and shook up the old conservative base in Jackson. Those who originally had been called in to pacify and settle student activists were now prepared to lead an angry but controlled response to the murder. Weeks prior to Evers assassination, the city placed an injunction on marches, boycotts, and organized protests in an attempt to reduce and deter the downtown demonstrations that students had begun. However, Blacks, old and young, would take to the streets to properly honor their fallen hero even without the city's consent. Tougaloo professor John Garner noted that, "The funeral was a demonstration of Negro unity the likes of which Jackson had never seen. The mayor had almost no choice but to grant the request for the mourning procession, I feel. It would have occurred with or without permission."³¹

³¹ Open letter, June 30, 1963, Personal Correspondence, John Garner Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives & History

Black ministers from community churches organized thousands of people who came out to pay their last respects to a man that articulated their innermost feelings and performed the actions that deep inside they wish they had the courage to do. The hurt and frustration that for so long many had bottled inside came to the surface on the day of the funeral. Historian Charles Payne noted:

Things were supposed to end at the funeral home, but some of the crowd decided to march on the business district. They were met with police dogs and arrests, but the crowd would not be intimidated. Several observers felt that only the intervention of several civil rights workers and the Justice Department's John Doar prevented the anger from boiling over into a full anti-police riot.³²

While the funeral of Medgar Evers and the near melee that occurred after it was one of the largest protests to occur during the Civil Rights Movement, it was the events that transpired afterwards that convinced many Black student activists that the scales of righteousness may never tip in their favor.

The death of Evers left an obvious vacuum to fill. Jackson and indeed Mississippi had grown accustomed to his leadership on controversial issues. His goals and vision of Mississippi were very much in line with those Black students whom he had grown close to. However, other than his professional association with the NAACP, by the time of his assassination he shared little in common with an organization that failed to embrace the path of direct action that the students had set their feet to. But now the leadership of the NAACP was intent on maintaining control over their territory despite the fact that their man had been cut down by an assassin's bullet. Their "pissing on the poles" mentality was intended to keep organizations such as the SCLC and more specifically, people such

³² Charles Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1995) 290.

as Dr. King, out of Jackson. Historian David Garrow described the icy situation that surrounded the issue:

He [King] called Roy Wilkins of the NAACP to suggest that they jointly announce a national day of mourning and establish a memorial fund in Evers name. The ever-prickly Wilkins, perceiving one more supposed effort by King and SCLC to challenge what he thought were the NAACP's unique prerogatives, told King to mind his business. When the two men met at Evers's funeral in Jackson, Wilkins warned King that SCLC should drop any idea of moving in to assist the Jackson protests that Evers's NAACP forces had led. In subsequent days Wilkins complained about King's alleged presumptuousness and self promoting to anyone who would listen.³³

While this failure of Black leadership was a part of the exact same concerns that movement organizer Ella Baker warned against, students faced even greater hurdles down the road. Caught up within a local movement that waxed and waned, the Black youth of Jackson were mostly shielded from what was going on behind closed doors.

The politics of co-optation arrived in Jackson with the death of Medgar Evers. As if they had delivered only a mere knee jerk reaction to the assassination, key local leaders were now prepared to broker a deal with the same white power structure that delivered two hung juries in the murder case of Evers, arrested hundreds of local protestors, and disenfranchised millions of Black Mississippians on a daily basis. Such political maneuvering was poised to cause a severe impact on the longevity of the movement. What would be their demands? What would be their concessions? Who would control the terms of the negotiations? It soon became crystal clear that not only were the desires and goals of students unrepresented, but the federal government had a hand in

³³ David Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: Harper Collins, 1986) 269.

demobilizing the struggle for liberation in Jackson. Former Sovereignty Commission Director Erle Johnston laid out the details of the gathering:

During that meeting, it was learned later, President Kennedy and his brother, Attorney General Bobby Kennedy, were on the telephones to people in Jackson and their representatives, setting up a secret meeting aimed at forever concluding the Jackson Movement...the Jackson Movement was buried at the closed and secret meeting of which no activists had known. It was attended by Mayor Thompson and his aides, several of the strategy committee clergy who supported the national NAACP office. We learned that an agreement was concluded to the effect that two black police would be hired and some blacks would be installed as school crossing guards at a few black schools. One or two black garbage workers would be promoted into driving the garbage trucks. Direct action was to be ended. The mayor made it very clear that the demands of the Jackson movement were *not* being met.³⁴

When the smoke finally settled in Jackson, the movement had been co-opted and bought out for a pair of local cops, a handful of crossing guards, and a few sanitation workers who would be allowed to drive the trucks. Perhaps most shockingly, NAACP officials who agreed to the deal said that they had done so in an effort to pay tribute to Medgar Evers. During their negotiations, the NAACP went to great lengths to remove Tougaloo Chaplain Ed King and Professor John Salter, both of whom were accused of attempting to promote agitation among the Black youth of Jackson.³⁵ With King and Salter shut off from the proceedings, the path was cleared for complete accommodation without interference from political rabble-rousers. King recalled:

The federal government imposed settlement on the Jackson movement and did not even inform the Tougaloo students that there was to be a settlement meeting, nor SNCC. And the NAACP in Washington announced that they had the settlement Medgar wanted. Those of us who knew what Medgar wanted weren't there.³⁶

³⁴ Erle Johnston, *Mississippi's Defiant Years, 1953-1973* (Forest, MS: Lake Harbor Publishers, 1990) 184.

³⁵ Dittmer, 164.

³⁶ Interview with Ed King. June 30, 2004.

The vision of a Mississippi immediately and unequivocally liberated from the hands of white supremacy was compromised. It was Black students who originally had taken to the streets chanting “Freedom Now!” Evers secretly agreed with them. Had his life not been snuffed out, it is conceivable that Evers could have made a complete break with the NAACP and joined the students in their direct action. However, with the movement in Jackson making a complete shift, students in Mississippi experienced a sense of abandonment that was only compounded by their continued frustration with the federal government, the local white power structure and the steady supply of betrayal that they were soon to experience.

Lynch Street formed the hub of the Black community in Jackson. The busy thoroughfare ran through the heart of the Black business district and became home to the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO). Originally organized in 1961 and restarted in 1962, COFO was comprised of activists from the NAACP, CORE, and SNCC, although it was mostly controlled by members from the latter. The desire of COFO was to present a unified front to Black Mississippians. It therefore made perfect sense to place the headquarters in the state capital and to locate their building in the heart of the Black community. Ironically, the small one story building that served as headquarters for the united front was a stone’s throw away from an institution that organizers believed to be a critical linchpin in transforming the struggle for liberation in the city, Jackson State. All across the country, Black students were serving as the wellspring of activism in various cities. If local movements were being catalyzed by the actions of students from several state sponsored Black institutions across the South, then why not Jackson State?

Organizers pondered the possibilities that awaited if they could only crack the conservative façade of the state's largest institution for Black youth. Tougaloo was indeed the preeminent "shelter" for Black activists in Mississippi, but if students who were supported by the state itself could somehow break free from their fetters and rise up against those very agents who controlled their institution, then perhaps their courage could send shockwaves throughout the region and spark a movement in desperate need for new leadership with the murder of Medgar Evers.

On Jackson State's campus, most students were stiffened by the death of Evers. Their reaction, or lack thereof, didn't stop organizers from attempting a coup. Tougaloo students Anne Moody and Dorie Ladner immediately went on campus attempting to rouse the emotions of students but to no avail. The majority of Jackson State's students were not yet prepared to take to the streets in defiance of their campus administration let alone white authorities who could place them even more under the thumb of white supremacy than they already were. Frustrations and tension ran high as Moody and Ladner paced the hallways of Jackson State seeking those who possessed the courage to step out in the spirit of rebellion. Their actions had little effect on students frozen by fear of reprisals from both campus and local authorities. What would their parents think? Would they face expulsion? Could their hopes for respectable careers and their dreams of providing a better life for their families be in jeopardy if they dared to step foot in the hallways and join the agitators that visited their campus? Moody reacted with disgust. She noted, "I felt sick, I got so mad with them. How could Negroes be so pitiful? How could they just sit by and take all this shit without any emotions at all? I just didn't

understand.”³⁷

As they prepared to leave campus, Ladner and Moody encountered President Jacob Reddix. It was only two years ago that the Ladner sisters and other Jackson State students butted heads with campus authorities over the student body’s decision to show support for the Tougaloo Nine. That confrontation led to Dorie and Joyce Ladner’s transfer to Tougaloo later that summer. In that span of two years, both the Ladner’s and Reddix’s world had undergone transformation. The Ladner’s were presented a space at Tougaloo where they could actively participate in movement activity and engage other likeminded activists who longed for liberation and the overthrow of southern apartheid. Conversely, Reddix faced mounting pressure from state authorities following the campus protests of 1961. With the murder of Evers, he knew that his performance in controlling the emotions of his students would again face intense scrutiny from state authorities who controlled his budget and his career. As Reddix ushered the young ladies from the hallway and off campus, a rumor circulated through the school that Reddix struck Dorie who had fallen to the floor in bitter disappointment at Reddix’s unwillingness to even verbally recognize the slaying of Evers. However, their visit was not without some semblance of promise and signs for things to come. At the rallying point for protestors who planned to participate in the march, Ladner and Moody ran into Jackson State students who were there to join in the demonstration. Moody noted, “We noticed a couple of girls from Jackson State...They told us a lot of students planned to demonstrate

³⁷ Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, 277.

because of what Reddix had done. “Good enough,” Dorie said, “Reddix better watch himself, or we’ll turn that school out.”³⁸

Despite the fact that no mass demonstration occurred following Reddix’s run-in with Ladner and Moody, something was indeed brewing on campus. It was impossible for Jackson State students to remain totally removed (either mentally or physically) from the movement. By the spring of 1963, small examples of the shifting political consciousness could be found on campus. That spring, as the mass protests were building throughout the city and Jackson became the center of the largest civil rights movement demonstrations, Jackson State student, Cleve McDowell took out his frustrations with his peers who dared to sit passively on the side as events unfolded around them. After taking a seminar at Jackson State where students were allowed to trace the historical steps of social progression, McDowell wrote an article entitled, “One Hundred Years of Progress?” McDowell juxtaposed the Emancipation Proclamation with the explosion of racial tension that now consumed the South one hundred years later. As the editor of the school newspaper he posed this question to his fellow classmates:

After one hundred years of legal freedom, have we as students done as much as we could have to aid the procession? The answer is obviously no! Our dedication to education, perpetually weak, has perpetuated weak leaders who have impeded the progress of the procession...Education is more than theory, it is application. For example, as a student in political science, I cannot understand

³⁸ Ibid., 278. Reddix did not strike Ladner nor did students mount an organized demonstration after the incident. However what is clear throughout Moody’s book is the fact that during the early stages of the civil rights struggle in Mississippi, Jackson State students participated in movement activities albeit in smaller roles and numbers than their peers at Tougaloo. Moody makes note of Jackson State student Doris Erskine who she served time with in jail and who she also participated in the freedom struggle in Canton with. In an interview with Dorie Ladner, she discussed the shooting of her friend Marylene Burks who was a student at Jackson State. Both sources provide examples of students from Jackson State who overtly or covertly participated in movement activity. What this suggests is though most students attending JSU between the years of 1960-1964 were still reluctant to openly join in the movement, there were others who participated without reprisal from campus authorities, a fact that implies a possible “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy amongst administrators and students.

how students can walk around on campus and call themselves majors in this field and not apply his knowledge of political theory to the campus political situation as well as to an evaluation of the state and national political scene.³⁹

McDowell clearly understood that the essence of the Second Curriculum was failing to resonate with his peers at this most critical and historical juncture. Although Jackson State was the largest Black college in the state, very few of its students seemed to be reacting in a heated moment where their leadership was needed the most. The movement presented them with a perplexing dilemma. Respond and react to the movement that their own generation had helped to bring about, or succumb to the fears and age old traditions that largely went unchallenged out of a state of fear that paralyzed millions of Black Mississippians. Their actions would either serve as a glowing testimony of the influence of the Second Curriculum or condemn educational enclaves that stopped short of supplying critical thinkers and political agitators when the movement needed them most. McDowell found himself among only a handful of Jackson State students who were prepared to approach that threshold.

Despite the conservative nature of the institution, Jackson State was indeed still operating as a shelter. McDowell himself was granted the safe space to ponder such critical questions and even given a public forum to express his views in writing. His reference to “weak leadership” could even be interpreted as an underhand swipe at the administration of President Reddix and the lack of leadership among Jackson State’s adult community. For the handful of JSU students who were taking notice and playing more active roles in the local movement, their abilities to openly engage with students

³⁹ “One Hundred Years of Progress?” *The Blue and White Flash*, April 1963, Jackson State University Archives

and faculty who were pondering the same questions was extremely significant and important in the development of their political consciousness. From the shelter of Black colleges such as Jackson State, they were free to explore and express their doubts, feelings, and pent up frustrations with the political structure that sought to mute their latent hatred of the system. In reference to an incident that took place in her classroom, Jackson State Professor Jane McAllister noted, “Students found the Rebel Antigone quotation which had so intrigued them; only they changed “king” to governor. (I know Barnett would never appreciate that.) The quotation was: “The Rebel Antigone, who defied a king rather than betray her own conscience.”⁴⁰ Such subtle forms of protest suggest students comfortable enough to engage these ideas in the campus setting, but still too hesitant to lay their dissatisfaction with white supremacy at the feet of the king/governor himself.

The constant anguish of Jackson State Professor Margaret Walker Alexander further illustrates the cumbersome dilemma experienced by those caught within the margins. In her journal she wrote, “I have written an article that’s both a tribute to Medgar Evers and an exposé of the whole Mississippi story but I dare not to print it now that I have written it. My family would be in danger, there might be all kinds of reprisals.

⁴⁰Dr. McAllister’s students were referencing a speech that was delivered on campus by Dr. James Colston, President of Knoxville College, a small historically Black college in Tennessee. During his speech, Colston keenly relayed the ancient Greek story of Antigone to students. The classic tale speaks of Polyneices, a rebel who has been killed in battle. Polyneices has been denied proper burial by Creon, ruler of Thebes, and Polyneices’s sister Antigone has decided to defy Creon and bury her brother anyway. The story concludes with the god’s punishing Creon for being on the wrong side of righteousness. Colston’s delivery of such a story in the wake of Medgar Evers assassination and turmoil following his funeral is not lost upon Jackson State students who embrace the metaphors. Jane McAllister to James A. Colston, July 27, 1963, Jane McAllister Collection, Box 1, Jackson State University Archives

I seem to be too vulnerable, too fearful and too cowardly.”⁴¹ As Alexander dealt openly and honestly with her angst, she was not alone. The sidelines were filled with bystanders and onlookers, a fact that debunks the characterization and romanticization of a movement supplied with the steady participation of the masses. With the death of Evers, the political sails of the Jackson movement fell limp. The questions that penetrated the hearts and minds of hopeful but inactive Black folks across Mississippi pressed on.

Alexander noted:

One ask himself daily, where am I? Am I out there in the thick of the struggle? In the middle of the fight? Am I doing something for the call of freedom? Going to jail, demonstrating, boycotting, sitting in, campaigning and lobbying, or what am I doing? Am I standing on the sidelines cheering but still doing nothing? Am I obstructing the movement? Am I fearful and silent? Have more concern with my own security than with the plight of the Negro masses? Am I a traitor to my people, a segregationist and an intellectual Uncle Tom?...How many of us are purged of hate and have strength to love? Strength to be kicked but not kick back. Strength to love and not retaliate, can go to jail, can be able to stand before hate and forgive. Where am I, and where do I stand?⁴²

As many Black Mississippians pondered their position in the ongoing movement, an event was unfolding on the national scene that drew increasing attention toward the civil rights movement. A. Phillip Randolph, a tireless leader in the arena of Black labor, came together with leaders of the SCLC, SNCC, CORE, and the NAACP to plan a March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. The event was to take place on August 28, 1963 and called for thousands of protestors to gather on the Mall in the nation’s capital. Organizers hoped that such a show of unity would place greater pressure on the Kennedy administration and congress to draft and pass a civil rights bill. From the onset however,

⁴¹ Margaret Walker Alexander, journal entry, February 1964, Box 11, Folder #68, Margaret Walker Alexander Research Center

⁴² Margaret Walker Alexander, journal entry, July 28, 1963, Box 11, Folder #69, Margaret Walker Alexander Research Center

the march was filled with great contradictions and behind the scene schisms.⁴³

Organizers were determined to present a well crafted and contrived image that would not irritate or embarrass the White House or display the more radical tones associated with activists who had been on the frontlines and were disgruntled witnesses of a federal government that had failed to act swiftly in response to Black activists being victimized by white hostilities. Speeches were censored and militant voices were kept at bay as civil rights leaders presented a more sanitized and non-threatening demonstration for the world to see. For those activists who were fresh from the trenches of movement, the March on Washington and King's dream of a nonviolent and fully integrated society seemed light years away from the unmitigated violence and white aggression that defined their daily existence. Dorie Ladner, who was present at the march, recalled, "When Dr. King made his speech I was talking to Dick Gregory's children...I'm saying this to say that our minds were elsewhere...I must say that the March on Washington was good, but for us we were thinking about local issues, that were very, very important."⁴⁴

The march was not without its critics. Malcolm X, a political firebrand and radical leader within the Nation of Islam referred to the 1963 gathering as the "farce on Washington." His clairvoyant view of the hypocrisy that was embodied within the march resonated with younger and more militant activists who grew tired of mere Black

⁴³ For more on the development and planning of the March on Washington see, Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-1963*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), David Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1986), David Halberstam, *The Children*, (New York: Fawcett Books, 1998), James Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, (New York: McMillan, 1972), and August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, *CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942-1968*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

⁴⁴ Interview with Dorie Ladner, June 23, 2004

reactionaries and looked increasingly toward Black revolutionaries who concretely and firmly articulated their impenitent demands for Black liberation and immediate justice. The dilemmas of Black leadership were beginning to show during the march. Although younger activists seemed to set the pace of the movement early on, Black leadership attempted to corral the grassroots, as if the grassroots needed to be told where to go, what to do, what to say, and how to say it. Anne Moody retraced those issues as the march began. “Thousands of people just took off,” she noted, “leaving most of their leaders on the podium. It was kind of funny to watch the leaders run to overtake the march. The way some of them had been leading the people in the past, perhaps the people were better off leading themselves, I thought.”⁴⁵ For student activists who developed closer and more genuine bonds with the common Black folk of Mississippi and throughout the South, serious questions loomed about a cadre of older Black leaders who appeared to be out of touch and self serving in their efforts to give the masses what they assumed the masses wanted. A splash of cold reality would soon erase any warm feelings of optimism that may have arisen from the manufactured spectacle that took place that hot August day. Stokely Carmichael, a young Howard University student who became deeply involved with SNCC and the movement in Mississippi, captured the essence of how many Black students felt about the March on Washington. Carmichael noted:

But it is also true that in cold political terms, the march changed nothing. At least in the immediate aftermath. Next day, business as usual. Cops all over the South were back to whupping heads and taking names with a vengeance. In the Congress, the civil rights bill somehow managed to again fade into the

⁴⁵ Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, 307.

background and out of discussion. Once more, apparently, a dead issue. So much for your powerful liberal coalition.⁴⁶

Black student activists and local people caught within the crossfire of white supremacy were in search of righteousness and found none in the aftermath of the March on Washington. What they did find in the rubble of the 16th Street Baptist Church were the mangled bodies of four young girls, the victims of a terrorist bombing in Birmingham, Alabama. Black America was devastated. For the last few years, the Civil Rights Movement resembled a pendulum that swung incessantly between hope and doubt. For every event that boosted the hopes of African Americans (*Brown v. Board*, national boycotts, and sit-ins) there were counter measures in the form of beatings, murders, assassinations, and bombings that triggered frustration, impatience, and anger. The questions that lingered for many Black activists were if white terrorists could be permitted to kill children attending Sunday school, then what exactly could be considered safe space for a people seeking spiritual rejuvenation and moral direction in a constantly tumultuous world? If the federal government welcomed a sea of humanity to its doorstep to call for justice, exactly where did they stand on prosecuting those who constantly deprived its Black citizens of their lives, liberties, and their pursuit of happiness? And if their own government refused to pursue those who stood proudly with the blood of little girls, countless activists, and outspoken crusaders for justice on their hands, then exactly what did the scales of righteousness hold for them? Tired and weary of funerals and hollow promises from local and federal authorities, many Black students and local activists refused to believe that such unrighteous actions could go unnoticed and

⁴⁶ Stokely Carmichael, *Ready for the Revolution: The Life and Struggles of Stokely Carmichael {Kwame Ture}*, (New York: Scribner, 2003) 330.

unpunished in a country that boasted of democracy and freedom. Fissures in the ideological foundations of the movement were becoming highly visible as betrayed activist realized that perhaps they were misguided in believing that justice and righteousness could ever come from a system designed and predicated upon their suppression.

Although things would never be the same in the local struggle, Black students from Tougaloo, Jackson State, and even local high schools, would not cease in their agitation over local injustices. Young idealism was still brewing and taking constant shots at the most infamous and openly hostile state in the union. The MSSC began an aggressive attempt to further pacify students at Jackson State, a school that most believed to be the least threatening. Tougaloo, the school that was openly vilified in area newspapers as “Cancer College” was out of the jurisdiction and control of state authorities. However, not only was Jackson State fair game, but in the coming months the student body would begin its transition to a school no longer characterized by its docile students to an institution on the brink of upheaval. As if they sensed this transformation, state authorities made “suggestions” for Reddix to implement new forms of propaganda. The MSSC identified Rev. Uriah J. Fields, a self discharged member of the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) and author who toured the country renouncing the Civil Rights Movement as a tool of communism, as an excellent choice to speak before the Jackson State student body. Some of Fields topics included: “The Montgomery Story: An American Tragedy” and “Communism Thrives on Racial Unrest.” In a booklet entitled, “Dare Negroes Follow Martin Luther King?” Fields

attempted to tie King to communist supporters in an attempt to undermine his credibility as a leader and the purpose and goals of the Civil Rights Movement. The American Opinion Speakers Bureau short bio of Fields noted that “He’ll speak in defense of America, of American and not socialist or Communist solutions for American problems.”⁴⁷ But there were glaring contradictions in Fields message that most students chose no longer to digest. Speaking in defense of a country that failed to defend its own citizens from the constant terrors of white supremacy was no longer acceptable for students who were becoming disenchanted with the rhetoric of American values.

The fact that Fields possessed genuine concerns about bringing full equality between the races made no difference to the MSCC. Fields own church in Montgomery had been bombed because of his work with the MIA, but his split with the SCLC leadership and his willingness to publicly denounce King and a movement he believed to have communist ties was too attractive for the Sovereignty Commission to pass up. A statement from the MSCC Director Erle Johnston clearly outlined their interest. Johnston noted, “We decided that his type of talk would be most effective before the student body and faculty of the Negro state-supported institutions of higher learning. We also decided that the invitation should originate with the schools without any connection with the Sovereignty Commission.”⁴⁸ Both Fields and Reddix had worked and corresponded with the MSCC before so evidentially the desire to hide any ties with the Commission lay in the fact that they recognized the growing consternation and agitation even among Jackson State students and chose not to seek a direct confrontation with the student body. Reddix

⁴⁷ MSSC Files, 10-105-0-15, Mississippi Department of Archives and History

⁴⁸ MSSC Files, 10-105-0-13, Mississippi Department of Archives and History

however took the bait. MSSC investigators contacted the aging administrator and Reddix accepted their request. As their number one pawn, they asked Reddix to contact the presidents of the other state supported historically Black colleges in Mississippi to inform them of Fields' availability as a speaker. An internal memo at the MSSC noted Reddix's response to this request. "Dr Reddix stated that he was of the opinion that if the Director would request writing to the President of Alcorn College and to the President of Mississippi Vocational College at Itta Bena, Mississippi, Reverend Uriah J. Fields would be better accepted than if he would contact them."⁴⁹ Although professional jealousies existed amongst the college administrators of Mississippi's three state supported institutions for African Americans, Reddix's decision to pass on the responsibility of relaying the message may have suggested his realization that pressure from white authorities on such a controversial speaker would be far more effective.⁵⁰

The fall of 1963 ushered in another school year but it also brought with it scores of Black students who were being informed by much more than their customary concerns and issues. Despite disappointments and setbacks, the Civil Rights Movement moved forward and young Black Mississippians were becoming more intolerant of an older and more hesitant generation who still pleaded with youth to remain patient and faithful. Allowing American justice to run its slow and meandering course had yielded few victories and messages like the ones Uriah Fields were offering was the last thing

⁴⁹ MSSC Files, 10-105-0-14, Mississippi Department of Archives and History

⁵⁰ Both President J. H. White of Mississippi Vocational College and President J.D. Boyd of Alcorn College declined to invite Uriah Fields to speak on campus, citing campus policy not to allow any speakers outside of Mississippi to address students. It is not clear if this can be interpreted as a subtle form of protest against Fields and his anti-movement message or if both Presidents were afraid that Fields's message would incite their students into a state of rebellion. See MSSC Files, 2-45-2-5 & 2-109-0-42, Mississippi Department of Archives and History

students were willing to reckon with. Conversely, more students were slowly beginning to listen to young SNCC and CORE workers discuss the need for action and ways to organize themselves on campus to protest local injustices. It was the very outcome that caused the MSCC to target schools like Jackson State with propaganda in the first place. Twenty eight year old William Ware, an activist with CORE and SNCC, was among those Black youths seeking to channel streams of protests into Jackson State. His younger brother Walter Ware was a student at Jackson State and received numerous visits from his brother who would disseminate literature around the dorms and on campus. Arrested in Natchez, Mississippi for various minor charges, police found pamphlets and notes on the elder Ware brother, detailing movement activity. Natchez Police informed the MSCC, "As you can see on the items we got from him after his arrest, he has been in Jackson planning some of these things because some of the places are in Jackson that is mentioned in his notes."⁵¹

The presence of student activists like William Ware on Black college campuses was yet another advantage presented by Black institutions. As students at schools like Jackson State became more receptive to messages of liberation, they could hide and shield activists who intermingled with them in an environment that for a long time held no place for students with dispatches from the frontlines of the movement. The enclaves of Black colleges were the ideal meeting grounds for the committed activist and the impressionable student. Institutions such as Tougaloo and now Jackson State became hosts to students who were not only thinking deeper about the paradox that was America, but consequently readied themselves to finally answer the question posed by their

⁵¹ MSSC Files, 10-105-0-16, Mississippi Department of Archives and History

professor, Margaret Walker Alexander, “where am I and where do I stand?” Students refused to continue drinking from the cup of state induced propaganda. They were witnesses to too many bombings, arrests, and murders for them to continue turning a blind eye towards a movement that until this point had mostly passed them by. Jackson State was ready for its transformation.

The start of the second semester during the 1963-64 school year offered its usual excitement on Jackson State’s campus. The basketball team was off to a fast start and on its way to a twenty win season and conference championship. The College Park Auditorium that hosted games filled to the rafters night in and night out with not only student body members, but local corner boys, high school youth, and community supporters. In the midst of this general euphoria, student activists slipped in through crowds spreading messages that continued to embolden students. On February 3, 1964, Mamie Ballard, a young female coed at Jackson State was making her way to the auditorium for that evenings game between Jackson State and their conference rival Arkansas A&M when Jessie Aldridge, a white male, drove his automobile through the campus area on Lynch Street and struck Ballard, sending her to the hospital with a broken leg. Lynch Street formed the focal point of student activity and brought heavy pedestrian traffic, a fact that caused campus administrators and community members to call for a traffic light in that area for years.⁵² However, through the course of devaluing Black life and having little concern for the safety and welfare of African Americans, local white authorities routinely backlogged and ignored improvements for the Black community.

⁵² Lelia Rhodes, *Jackson State University: The First Hundred Years, 1877-1977* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1979) 139.

Aldridge's reckless driving and Ballard's misfortune triggered an undercurrent of rage and protests that Jackson State students were yearning to release.

Jackson police officers arrived at the scene to investigate the accident and cited Aldridge for "failing to yield to right of way to a pedestrian." Traffic was beginning to back up on Lynch Street, but that was the least of the officers' concerns. A crowd of over 750 demonstrators gathered around local authorities chanting angrily as they attempted to tend to their official duties. In a matter of minutes, students and community members came together on Jackson State's campus to release all of the tension and anger that for many had been building since the murder of Evers that past summer. As police cleared the accident and cars were allowed to pass through, student protestors took out their frustrations on white motorists, pelting them with rocks and other foreign objects as they passed through.⁵³ The frenzied crowd hardly even noticed the fact that Charles Evers, the brother of Medgar Evers and newly appointed Field Secretary for the NAACP, had arrived on the scene along with James Meredith, a recent graduate of the University of Mississippi. As Evers and Meredith witnessed the crowd finally dispersing, they heard one student defiantly exclaim, "If there is no light tomorrow, we will demonstrate."⁵⁴ Certainly the white citizens who passed by had no connection to the traffic incident that just occurred, but students were no longer gathered there to merely protest an accident. Every white person who passed represented a culture and system that had constantly demeaned, undermined, and brutalized the Black community, both physically and

⁵³ MSSC Files, 10-105-0-17, Mississippi Department of Archives and History

⁵⁴ "Students Protest Accident," *Clarion Ledger*, February 4, 1964.

psychologically. Mamie Ballard's fractured leg was not the source of their anger; the broken promises of America were.

The crowd ultimately made its way into the gymnasium, but there existed a certain electricity in the atmosphere that had nothing to do with the heated contest being played out on the court. Hymns and freedom songs were being sung during the game as their melody lifted the spirits and sharpened the intentions of the protest minded youth. Students had their minds on what took place outside before the game and student activists who were present made sure that it would still be on their mind after the game as well. Among them that night was twenty one year old John Robinson and twenty eight year old William Ware, the older brother of Jackson State student Walter Ware. William's previous visits to Jackson State brought him in intimate contact with students who were becoming more receptive to his rants on the injustices of white supremacy. That night, he and Robinson would finally tap into those latent sentiments of dissatisfaction and bring them to the surface. In a report filed by the MSCC, President Reddix alluded, "that this incident would not have happened if the hand pamphlets had not been passed out by members of SNCC encouraging all colored people attending this basketball game to march in the streets in protest to this automobile accident."⁵⁵ Reddix was clearly not prepared to place blame on city officials who had denied his latest request to place a stoplight at the busy thoroughfare four months prior. Ware and Johnson had quickly mimeographed hundreds of flyers to pass out during the game that read, "We must demonstrate tonight," and "If you are a person of action and are willing to do all that is necessary to protest what has happened, after the game tonight mass on Lynch Street in

⁵⁵ MSCC Files, 10-105-0-20, Mississippi Department of Archives and History

the crosswalk where Mamie was hit and refuse to let traffic pass.”⁵⁶ As the crowd poured out into the streets and headed home following the game, the majority lingered behind.

A crowd of one thousand students now assembled on Lynch Street. The Jackson police force was on the scene in even larger numbers than before the game, armed with shotguns and teargas. Highway patrolmen were standing in the wings prepared to move in if needed. A handful of college faculty and administrators were on hand, attempting to persuade students to disband and return to their dorms. Someone hurled a rock at the officers and a melee ensued. Officers indiscriminately fired warning shots in the air and hurled tear gas into the crowd. Two hours raced by as students exchanged bricks and bottles for shotgun blasts and random scuffles as police rounded up perpetrators.⁵⁷

Charles Evers again pleaded with the crowd to disband as shards of rock and glass flew by. The local newspaper, reported Evers as saying, “You can’t win a war with rocks and bottles. What can you accomplish? He urged student leaders to “tell them to go back, they’ve got to go home.”⁵⁸ When the smoke settled, three people, Paul Ottosin, a Jackson State football player, Gregory Haywood, a high school student, and Herman Frazier, a local resident, were wounded by gunshots. The police made two arrests. The incident would not be the last violent clash between Jackson State students and local law enforcement.

In the aftermath of the riot, Mayor Thompson rebuked SNCC organizers for inciting the insurrection, suggesting that, “The agitators just used that to flare up people,”

⁵⁶ “Non Students Jailed in Disorders at JSC,” *Clarion Ledger*, February 4, 1964.

⁵⁷ MSSC Files, 10-105-0-17, Mississippi Department of Archives and History

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

adding, “They would have used another excuse to agitate and deride.”⁵⁹ While Thompson’s comments accurately captured SNCC and CORE activists desire to light a fire under the student body of Jackson State, they conveniently failed to address the city’s customary practice of constantly ignoring health hazards and public safety concerns of the Black community. In all actuality, the blame game for the conflict was immaterial in the broader picture. Protesting over a car accident and registering demands for the placement of traffic lights were superficial in the grand scheme of things. Throughout Mississippi, millions of Black people could not articulate their political concerns publicly, still faced the continuous threat of unmitigated white violence, and suffered in the grasp of abject poverty. If Black students could not somehow muster the courage and find the voice to speak and act on their behalf, then perhaps their violent exchanges with local police were in vain. Although confronting the white establishment was indeed an important step towards their shedding the emotional cloak of fear, there were yet many steps to take on their path towards righteousness.

If students were destined to proceed down that pathway, they would need the continued guidance of sympathetic faculty. The bulk of the Jackson State faculty were either too fearful or reluctant to openly embrace civil rights protests or they were a part of an old guard of instructors who still believed that the concept of *loco parenti* gave them complete jurisdiction and authority over students. However the veil of apprehension that had separated the concerns and goals of professors and students was slowly being torn. Professors such as Jane McAllister, Margaret Walker Alexander, George Robinson, and Florence Alexander, were sensitive to the struggles being played out on campus and in

⁵⁹ Ibid.

the surrounding communities. Their ranks were growing larger as more Black faculty opened themselves to the idea of serving as agents for racial equality. Dr. Charles Mosley, professor of education and the new director of the Graduate Program at Jackson State was one of those faculty members who risked his status and position for the causes of liberation. In his position at Jackson State, Reddix assigned Mosley the task of making a study of Black high schools in Mississippi and documenting their relationship to Black colleges in the state.⁶⁰ Perhaps it was during this study that Mosley was moved by the vast disparities that existed for Black students attending under funded and under resourced schools in the state. Mosley tossed his hat in the ring for the movement to integrate schools. The Sovereignty Commission took note of Mosley's newest actions, stating in a memo:

We have information that a colored male by the name of Mosley, an instructor at Jackson State College, appeared as a speaker at a meeting at the St. Peter Baptist Church on South Street in Jackson....At this meeting, according to our information, Mosley instructed parents on how to dress the children who were going to white schools and recommended behavior and procedures in gaining acceptance for colored students from the white students and faculty.⁶¹

For many generations prior to the Civil Rights Movement, Black parents and teachers were engulfed in the spirit of preparation. Embracing a hope and a faith that a new day was on the horizon, they lectured their children on democracy and the American creed, even when those principles were not extended to them. Yet if they could prepare Black youth using the vehicle of education and the push given to them by the Second Curriculum then their opportunity to lead the struggle towards freedom would arrive.

⁶⁰ Lelia Rhodes, *Jackson State University: The First Hundred Years*, 122.

⁶¹ MSSC Files, 10-105-0-21, Mississippi Department of Archives and History

This belief guided the interaction between the generations as the elders prayed that their youth would get their chance to prove themselves. Now that the younger generation was leading the charge toward the fulfillment of those rights, it was the elders who sought to catch up with the liberation movement. Long considered a taboo in the Black communities of Mississippi, many Black adults who had constant contact with Black students began showing their support of organizations such as the NAACP. The Sovereignty Commission noted that, “We also have a report that Percy B. Chapman, colored male, is very active in the NAACP and is the current campaign to integrate the schools. He is employed at the [Jackson State] University Hospital.”⁶² Whereas Black college administrators of this era have enjoyed a reputation of dismissing those who were connected with such nefarious organizations, Jacob Reddix, considered one of the most conservative of them all, was attempting to assist those who possessed the boldness that he did not. His successor John Peoples recalled:

You know those guys had to deal with the NAACP on the sly. They couldn't let it be known...I'm a life member. But on my application they said look, 'why don't we scratch this?' They'll never know the difference that you're a life member; they'll never know the difference. Because you've got to get your chance, see. And once you get here then maybe they'll find out but, why don't you scratch it off. So I let them scratch off the NAACP life member, on my application to Jackson State to be its Vice President.⁶³

Opportunity. Courage. Strategy. Conviction. None of these qualities or principles were mutually exclusive. In order for the movement to make significant inroads toward liberation, Black Mississippians would have to experience and embrace

⁶² Percy Chapman eventually assumed a more active role in the local NAACP in Jackson. He, along with Charles Evers, attempted to energize an organization left dormant after the assassination of Medgar Evers. See, MSSC Files, 10-105-0-21, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

⁶³ Interview with John Peoples. July 21, 2004.

them all at once. However, by 1963, significant changes were taking place in the movement that threatened both the ideological direction of the struggle and the epicenters of direct action, historically Black colleges. Not long after the tragic bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, President John F. Kennedy, who was equally a friend and foe to the movement, was assassinated. Superficially he supported civil rights and inspired a generation of youth to ask what they could “do for their country.” In reality however, Kennedy’s administration displayed the unwavering ability of the federal government to withstand pressure applied by African Americans to enforce their constitutional rights. Nevertheless, his deployment of armed forces into Oxford to ensure the enrollment of James Meredith at Ole Miss made him *persona non grata* throughout the South. Tougaloo professor John Garner noted that some white Mississippi children “played a game when he was known dead in which they said, ‘Bang. Bang. I killed Kennedy.’”⁶⁴ However, through his timely speeches, (that failed to produce action) Kennedy falsely convinced many African Americans that if he was so despised by Southern whites that he must be doing something good on behalf of Southern Blacks. His death struck a blow to Black Mississippians who were still reeling from past misfortunes. Garner noted:

The Negro community was in deep grief and because of Kennedy’s death, Evers murder, and the death of the four girls in the Birmingham church bombing, did not have any outside Christmas decorations at all. The mayor tried to set up a contest of Christmas decorations in the Negro community. He tried to work through the Negro ministers but they all refused to have anything to do with it and the project fell flat.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Open letter, June 16, 1964, Personal Correspondence, John Garner Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives & History

⁶⁵ Ibid.

That fall also witnessed students coming together with local activists to carry out the Freedom Vote, a mock election held to demonstrate to white Americans that Blacks were ready and willing to participate in the political process. Thousands of Blacks came out to demonstrate their desires for political voice. The Freedom Vote was a defining moment in the Mississippi movement. For many African Americans, it was the first time that the blanket of fear was pulled back, bringing thousands of Black folks from all walks of life together to collectively demonstrate the potential of a unified front in the state. It also taught Blacks who had never voted in their life more about the political process. The strategy was not without criticism. One older gentleman noted, “I just want to be represented and given the right to vote in all the official elections. If I am asked to vote in an unofficial election, then that right is taken away by my own people.”⁶⁶ The Freedom Vote introduced another unique strategy that was destined to alter the course of the movement. For the first time, groups of white students entered the Magnolia State to assist Blacks in their campaign for justice. The strategy faced immediate concern and condemnation. White paternalism was a way of life in the South. Millions of Southern Blacks had grown accustomed to assuming subservient roles to whites without question. The fact that the young white men and women who entered into the Delta and piney woods of Mississippi were sympathetic college educated liberals made no difference. Historian Charles Payne described the situation thusly:

Tactical issues aside, there were some who just plain didn’t want to be bothered with a bunch of white folks on a daily basis. For that matter, the idea of bringing in outsiders, had that been Black staff from the Atlanta office, didn’t sit well with

⁶⁶ Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, 330.

some veteran staff members, mostly southern Blacks, who had done the most and risked the most to build a viable movement.⁶⁷

Although the Freedom Vote placed not one Black face in a political office, psychological victories were achieved that could perhaps lead to tangible advances in the struggle. The strength of such possibilities convinced many movement organizers that in order to bring greater focus on the notorious social and political issues plaguing the state, the campaign would have to broaden its scope. The lack of concern and empathy for Black life was embedded within the social paradigm and caused thousands of Blacks to suffer at the hands of lynching throughout the years without so much as a tremor in the collective consciousness of white America. The modern civil rights movement proved no different. Post World War II America witnessed the murder of hundreds of Black Americans who worked to raise political and social awareness in disenfranchised communities across America. White America still failed to recoil or shudder in the slightest. Many civil rights organizers truly believed that a dream for a fully integrated America deserved a fully integrated movement to bring that day into fruition. However, many others saw the enlistment of young white youth as a strategy to finally get white Americans interested in the contradictions and injustices that characterized life both below and above the Mason Dixon line. Historian Taylor Branch writes that activist and organizer Allard Lowenstein informed a group of white students, “we’ve come up with a ‘massive assistance campaign from outside Mississippi next summer.’ The second notion developed into the Freedom Summer project of 1964...”⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Charles Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom*, 298.

⁶⁸ Taylor Branch, *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963-65* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998) 123.

Freedom Summer became the watershed event of the liberation movement in Mississippi. During the summer of 1964, over one thousand young white volunteers from across the country were recruited to the most hostile regions of the state to help register African Americans to vote and to set up “freedom schools” across the state that attempted to provide Black children with the resources that their impoverished, segregated school systems could not. The decision to solicit the participation of young white students continued to eat away at the consciousness of Black student activists who were now veterans of the struggle. Much like the inclusion of whites in the Freedom Vote, the cadre of young students coming from the Northeast and Midwest for Freedom Summer involuntarily brought with them a spirit of white paternalism. In discussing the frustrated reaction of many Black student activists, Doug McAdam noted:

Not only had their efforts in the state intensified their hatred and distrust of whites, but had done so without producing measurable results. Their sacrifices had merely confirmed 300 years of black political powerlessness in Mississippi. Now they were being asked to depend on the importation of 1,000 sons and daughters of white privilege – with all their naiveté and paternalism intact – to break a stalemate these veterans had been powerless to resolve. Thus, they found themselves in the distasteful position of having to exploit the very racism that they had been victims of.⁶⁹

For those young and idealistic white students who were moved by the courage and conviction of Black college students, Mississippi was a surreal baptism into a life that most could have never dreamed of in a country that professed moral and technical superiority over its communist rivals. They were the “baby boomer” generation that had been fed a steady diet of *Ozzie and Harriet* and *Father Knows Best*. They brought with them a nagging sense of discomfort that their perception of a perfect world had been

⁶⁹ Doug McAdam, *Freedom Summer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) 33.

shattered by the images and news stories coming out of the South. And they also brought with them hundreds of journalists and a media frenzy that only intensified when three civil rights workers, two white, one Black, turned up missing in Philadelphia, Mississippi.

On June 23, 1964, FBI investigators approached the home of Mr. Junior Cole and his wife Beatrice Cole to ask them questions about the three missing young men who had come down to assist in the Freedom Summer campaign. Their testimony was significant, considering their home was the last one that the three civil rights workers ever visited, yet their request of investigators revealed the typical apprehension that still haunted African Americans throughout the state. “Mr. Cole asked that extreme care be taken to make sure the statement does not get in the hands of anyone in Mississippi, because he fears for his life.”⁷⁰ James Chaney, Michael Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman, were kidnapped and murdered on June 21 in Neshoba County, Mississippi. The tragedy held the country spellbound as millions awaited word on the whereabouts of the young men. When the remains were recovered they unveiled that even in murder, Southern whites held far more contempt for their Black victims. The autopsies revealed that, “The body of James Chaney was mutilated by a beating so terrible that the pathologist who examined him said he had only seen such damage in high velocity accidents such as airplane crashes.”⁷¹ The media covered every inch of the story, fully exposing the intricate plots of Klansmen and local law authorities who worked in concert to hide the murders of the three civil rights workers. Perhaps the local and international press believed that no one would care about

⁷⁰ “Schwerner, Cheyney, Goodman,” Council of Federated Organization Records, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

⁷¹ Howard Zinn, *SNCC: The New Abolitionists* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965) 244.

the fifteen other bodies found during the search. Movement activist David Dennis recalled:

The tragedy around that was America saying ‘okay well they found two bodies; it might be them,’ waiting anxiously to see, and then saying ‘Oh my God, thank God it wasn’t them.’ Not understanding that they are finding bodies, some being kids at Alcorn, floating in the Mississippi River with the CORE t-shirts on their torso.⁷²

The tragedy failed to stop the progression of Freedom Summer. Young student activists combed cotton fields and dirt roads searching for adults who were willing to take those first steps towards freedom. Absent within their mix however, was a critical mass of Mississippi’s Black college students. Historian John Dittmer described the noticeable void:

Yet it is also true that the Mississippi summer project did not capture the imagination of black students as had the sit-ins three years earlier. The sit-ins and freedom rides had produced the SNCC and CORE cadre in Mississippi, but since 1962 few black students had made the decision to work full-time in the movement. Even at Tougaloo organizers were asking “why so many students are dropping from the movement.” In a candid interview Dave Dennis concluded that “we didn’t have that many Negroes to apply as volunteers because they just didn’t happen to want to do it.” The CORE activist speculated that northern black students were not interested in coming south because “that’s what they want to escape from.” Their parents, many of whom had faced southern racism firsthand, often strongly opposed the idea of their children leaving the relative safety of the North to go to Mississippi.⁷³

For Black students at both Tougaloo and Jackson State, the deciding factor to participate in Freedom Summer was one that was more pragmatic than one that was entrenched in imagination and idealism. Black youth working in the urban settings of Mississippi were much less likely to come into physical harm than working for justice in the rural

⁷² Interview with David Dennis, August 11, 2004.

⁷³ John Dittmer, *Local People*, 245.

countryside. The summer of 1964 presented events that were worlds apart for young Black Mississippians who had led previous charges in Jackson. One event called for creating direct action within the relatively safer confines of the urban setting, the other called for venturing into an area that they knew could bring certain death for Blacks, the rural countryside. As heroic and even righteous as the idea seemed, Black students realized that it was they, and not white students, who would serve as the first and obvious target of white Mississippians. CORE activist Dave Dennis reached a revelation after a trip from Montgomery, Alabama. He noted:

From that point on in my life, I understood that okay you might die. I did not want to die. You know, so, I wasn't ready to lose my life, you know, they'd have to take it. And I was growing ready, really to put myself into a position where my life can be taken. So a lot of people say they gave their lives, but I don't think any of the people gave their lives. I mean, their lives were taken away from them.⁷⁴

The fact that Black life was considered far more expendable in Mississippi was one of the overarching factors that led Black students to choose not to participate in mass. The number of Black students who were willing to have their lives "taken" from them was few. Reports from around the state did not help convince Black youth that violence in the state was receding. Dittmer noted that "the summer of 1964 was the most violent since Reconstruction: thirty-five shooting incidents and sixty five homes and other buildings burned or bombed, including thirty five churches. One thousand movement people were arrested, and eighty activists suffered beatings."⁷⁵ Whites had been beaten and even a few were killed, but those numbers paled in comparison to the thousands of

⁷⁴ Interview with David Dennis, August 11, 2004

⁷⁵ John Dittmer, *Local People*, 251

Blacks who vanished without a trace over the years or were publicly lynched or assassinated without their killers being brought to justice. Even the families of Black students tried to get their sons and daughters to focus on their education rather than return to the Delta and other regions of Mississippi to help with voter registration.

Perhaps most importantly, thousands of students coming from northern colleges could escape into their whiteness whenever they so chose. White students could return home at their own discretion to enjoy all of the privilege and entitlement that awaited them. Even Mississippi's most famous white activist, Rev. Ed King, withdrew into moments of leisure and pleasure during the movement's most critical period, experiencing a reprieve that most Black youth had never experienced. Anne Moody noted that, "When Joan and I got to the Kings', we found Ed and Jeanette packing to go to the Gulf Coast for a week."⁷⁶ King was as dedicated to the freedom struggle as any of the activists in the field, however he and the thousands of other white volunteers who worked with Freedom Summer were afforded a natural barrier from the stress and strife of the movement that Black students simply did not have. Northern white students and southern white liberals had greater means of escaping Mississippi, either temporarily or permanently. The intolerance that permeated throughout Mississippi followed Black folks wherever they went. Throughout the struggle for Black liberation, white supremacy had one intended target; and it was not white liberals who both indirectly and directly benefited from its presence. The realization of this precedence vexed many Black activists who began to seek a shift in movement tactics, a fact that would soon find them isolated from whites who endeared themselves to the civil rights struggle.

⁷⁶ Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, 380

The fluctuation between promise and pessimism caused scores of Black students who were deep in the trenches of the movement to reach their apex of disappointment during the summer of 1964. To make matters worse, COFO's interracial delegation known as the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) was refused seating at the Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey. Seeking to draw attention to voter discrimination and serve as the true voice of millions of disenfranchised African Americans in Mississippi, the group gathered in New Jersey and was immediately hustled into a backroom, ninth hour compromise where only two of their sixty eight delegates would be allowed to sit as at-large delegates on the convention floor. For America's Black youth, who served as trailblazers on the path towards racial harmony and justice, the bitter lessons of 1964 exposed a movement and a country devoid of righteousness. In 1960, they were convinced through the collective actions of a few that the moment to stand up for what was right in America had arrived. However, their quest to bring fulfillment of the American creed was reaching an impasse that challenged their faith of the present and the future. As students became familiar with the chicanery and deceit associated with the politics of the movement, they had no idea that the very institutions that housed the generation of student insurgency and had helped give birth to their idealism and self confidence were being targeted for co-optation.

Movement activity took place throughout Mississippi. Hattiesburg, McComb, Ruleville, and Philadelphia all served as hosts to major civil rights events. But the ideological home and heart of the struggle was found in Tougaloo College. The institution became the lifeline of the struggle and offered activists an oasis in the most

politically barren and hostile landscape in the country. Tougaloo indeed was as one observer described, “a small island of sanity and freedom in the midst of a very large sea of hysteria.”⁷⁷ There was no institution that was more publicly maligned and hated than Tougaloo College. Over the years, the students served as a thorn in the conscious of white Mississippians and dared to push the envelope farther than it had ever been pushed before. The institution did not go without constant harassment. One local white jokingly wrote to the Jackson press, “Did you hear about the new Tougaloo doll? It looks black and white until you shine light on it, and then the thing turns pink.”⁷⁸ If southern whites attempt to tie all civil rights movement activity to communism was not enough, then vandalism and firing random shots onto campus surely signified that the institution was under attack. Professor John Garner recorded one such incident:

On June 8 at about 8:30p.m. a car drove by the end of the campus at which we live and fired about five shots. One went into the corner of a neighbor's house about sixty meters west of us...On the following night at about 9:35p.m. there were more shots from a car that Margrit saw go by several times and slow down each time. This time the shots did not hit anything. The following Monday for about a week we moved to the Beittel's because it was thought that it would be safer.⁷⁹

The enemies of Tougaloo increasingly recognized the one fact that for so long made Black colleges ideal shelters for the Black community's most precious resource. The justification for a wholesale, violent attack on a place of learning proved difficult for purveyors of white terrorism. The very gates of Black colleges offered a physical buffer

⁷⁷ Paul Anthony to Robert O. Wilder, May 2, 1964, Box 1, Folder #10, President Adam Beittel Papers, Tougaloo College Archives

⁷⁸ *Clarion Ledger*, June 8, 1963

⁷⁹ Open Letter, June 30, 1963, Personal Correspondence, John Garner Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History

from the larger white community. The venue of colleges and university's and the assumed civility attached with higher learning kept the most hostile detractor at arms length even at the pinnacle of the civil rights struggle. One report documented one of several close encounters near the gates of Tougaloo. "Jackson COFO workers saw a smoldering cross on the side of Highway 51 (Interstate 55) at about 10:30 pm on the night of April 24. The cross was about 100 yards in front of the road sign indicating the turn to Tougaloo College."⁸⁰ By 1964 however, Tougaloo's adversaries began to devise new points of attack in an effort to undermine the credibility and effectiveness of the institution.

Dr. Adam Beittel's leadership of Tougaloo during this most turbulent period became a focal point for the local white power structure. Mississippi's white politicians were resolved that something had to be done to cure what they referred to as "Cancer College." During a regular session of the Mississippi Legislature in the spring of 1964, a senate bill was drafted which stated that the Commission on College Accreditation "shall have the power and authority, and it shall be its duty to prepare an approved list of junior and senior colleges and universities located in the State of Mississippi."⁸¹ The move was a direct swipe at Tougaloo. Administrators of the embattled college were familiar with the tactic however. The state attempted to revoke the schools accreditation in 1947, forcing college administrators to quickly mount a counter attack to save the schools academic status. But the 1947 attempt was done more so out of spite. With the Civil

⁸⁰ "Cross Burnings," Council of Federated Organization Records, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

⁸¹ "Accreditation Revocation," Box 1, Folder #1, President Adam Beittel Papers, Tougaloo College Archives

Rights Movement in Mississippi at its peak, and with Tougaloo serving as its primary base of operations, the Senate sought to strike a deliberate blow that would cripple the institution. Beittel wrote to Governor Paul Johnson:

I am advised that the House has now passed the bill originally introduced into the Senate as Senate Bill No. 1794 authorizing the State of Mississippi to remove a college from the list of state accredited colleges even though that college may be fully accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. The purpose of the bill is to provide further harassment for Tougaloo College.⁸²

If achieved, revoking the college's accreditation could have severely adjusted the legacy of the institution. For years, Tougaloo graduates became promoters and propagators of the Second Curriculum. With the senate bill looming, the state stood ready to take aim at the school's reputation for training educators. Beittel wrote to Dr. William Fidler of the American Association of University Professors, "If Tougaloo College is not on the state approved list, it may be very difficult for our graduates to procure teaching positions in the state of Mississippi."⁸³ Bill #1794 was enacted, but was altered in such a way that it merely achieved a public censuring, something Tougaloo was more than accustomed to through the news media and daily press.⁸⁴

Tougaloo was familiar with attacks by the white power structure of Mississippi, but by 1963 local politicians were not the only ones frowning upon Tougaloo's track record of civil rights. The institution drew national attention as a refuge for civil rights activists. As the generation of student insurgency became a threat for continued political

⁸² Adam Beittel to Hon. Paul Johnson, June 6, 1964, "Accreditation Revocation," Box 1, Folder #1, President Adam Beittel Papers, Tougaloo College Archives

⁸³ Adam Beittel to William Fidler, June 6, 1964, "Accreditation Revocation," Box 1, Folder #1, President Adam Beittel Papers, Tougaloo College Archives

⁸⁴Clarice Campbell & Oscar Rogers Jr., *Mississippi: The View From Tougaloo* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1979) 215.

activism across the country, decisions were being made to neutralize student militancy by restructuring the environment of the controversial institution. Black colleges such as Tougaloo and Jackson State existed for years with minimal interests from public foundations or the larger academic community. Viewed as inferior in every way, most predominantly white institutions wanted no comparisons or affiliations with historically Black colleges that were doing all they could just to stay afloat financially. Private donors had given their share over the years, but those figures were anemic in comparison to the million dollar budgets and endowments of white institutions that exploded with support from alumni and the addition of private and federal grant monies. With most Black colleges in dire straits and searching for greater credibility in the academic arena, an irrevocable die was cast that would blend the politics of integration, accommodation, and cooptation in a mix that was sure to dilute the desires and mission of Black student activists.

The December 1963 edition of the *Tougaloo News* brimmed with events and issues that were taking place across campus. The Tougaloo Players had just wrapped up their production and performance of “Purlie Victorious,” a comic satire written by actor Ossie Davis; President Beittel and Rev. Ed King’s wife, Jeannette King, had returned from a meeting in Atlanta with the Fellowship of the Concerned where they led a discussion on voter registration; and the campus was still buzzing from the recent visit of esteemed professor and United Nations dignitary Dr. Ralph Bunche. Bunche spoke to an overflow crowd in Woodworth Chapel. Among his many commendations and praise for Tougaloo’s role in the civil rights movement, Bunche told students, “They seem to

believe or perhaps they only wishfully think...that the American communities can get over their racial crises by some token actions and gestures toward equality nicely wrapped in pious words...”⁸⁵ Ironically, tucked away on the very last page of the December 1963 edition of the *Tougaloo News* lay an ominous sign that “American communities” intended to do exactly what Bunche suggested that they could only wish for. The student government sponsored an advertisement for a “Federal Employment Day,” where students could become more, “aware of employment opportunities available during the summer months and after graduation.” The story went on to say that, “Representatives from various federal agencies will speak during the morning Chapel assembly and hold individual discussions with interested students during the afternoon.”⁸⁶ Over the years, the pulpit in Woodworth Chapel was graced with the presence of an array of leaders from Ralph Bunche to Martin Luther King, Jr. The irony that the federal government was now sharing the same space as those who were calling for agitation and not assimilation was but a small sign that a designed and deliberate cooptation of Black universities and their students was underway.

From 1963 until the end of the decade, grant monies began to pour into Tougaloo College.⁸⁷ Prior calls and pleas from Black colleges for more aid and assistance went

⁸⁵ “Tactics are Important,” *Tougaloo News*, December 1963, Tougaloo College Archives

⁸⁶ “Federal Employment Day,” *Tougaloo News*, December 1963, Tougaloo College Archives

⁸⁷ See, “Tougaloo College Receives Grant From National Science Foundation,” *Tougaloo News*, February 1964, “T.C. Receives \$45,500.00 Grant,” and “Gulf Oil Grant,” *Tougaloo News*, April 1964, “T.C. Begins New Period of Development,” *Tougaloo News*, June 1964, “Tougaloo College Receives \$16,250.00 Grant NSF,” “\$75,000 Grant Given for Master Plan,” and “Student Council Sponsors Federal Career Day,” *Tougaloo News*, February 1965, “TC to Receive Sloan Foundation Scholarship Grants,” *Tougaloo News*, April 1965, “Tougaloo Receives NSF Grant for Summer Science Program,” *Tougaloo News*, February 1966, “College Receives \$282,834 in Grants,” *Tougaloo News*, June 1968, “Foundation Announces \$50,000 Grant to Tougaloo,” *Tougaloo News*, February 1969, “Several Grants Announced,” *Tougaloo*

unanswered by both state and federal government officials. However, foundations and various government agencies were now making frequent visitations to Black colleges and offering both the institutions and their students promises of greater funding and employment opportunities, but not without a catch. The latent expectation of Tougaloo's new contributors was that the institution would subscribe to a higher education that solely promoted middle class aspirations. Such encouragement was capable of distracting would be student activists away from enlistment in the liberation struggle and altering the tone and tenor of a campus that had served as an incubator for youthful idealism and student insurgency. The new attention placed Black colleges in a compromising situation. Allow the Second Curriculum to go untainted or become the willing bedfellow of foundations and government agencies that promised greater funds and resources. Ed King described the cooptation thusly:

Tougaloo College was taken over by the federal government through foundations, and destroyed as a center of the movement...Foundations came in to give research grants to places like my university and others but who's responsible for a university? The trustees, the state legislators, who really knows if the core of the money is foundation money for teachers they like, for research projects they like, and the government is putting up loan money to students. But what students are afraid to drop out of Tougaloo College and take off a year and go work in Civil Rights, or poverty, or working for a national healthcare plan?⁸⁸

The temptation proved a difficult one to resist for Black college students whose primary purpose and goal even before they left for college was to do better for themselves than their parents had done. In the early stages of the movement, the generation of student insurgency realized that dream was inconceivable as long as the

News, October 1969, "Additional Grants Received," *Tougaloo News*, December 1969, Tougaloo College Archives

⁸⁸ Interview with Ed King. June 30, 2004.

fetters of white supremacy remained. Their attempts to break those shackles offered significant victories such as the passing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the Voting Rights Act in 1965. However many disgruntled youth of the civil rights generation realized that those victories were hollow as long as white supremacy continued to serve as the ideological core of the American narrative. Nevertheless, the luring of Black college students was conceived out of an effort to distract them from a movement that by 1964 was in a transitional stage. Meanwhile, the attack on Tougaloo continued with the forced removal of President Beittel and a complete shifting of the campus infrastructure through a new experiment known as the Brown-Tougaloo Program.

For years, the heart and soul of Black institutions was found in the promotion of the Second Curriculum. This pedagogy based on principles of hope, character, and uplift, successfully steered the direction of Black college alumni and eventually gave them the courage to challenge the authority of white supremacy in the South. However, new donors and programs were seeking to purchase the soul of Black institutions by redirecting the mission it placed upon its students. At Tougaloo College, President Adam Beittel continued the legacy of white liberals who served as the head of the all Black institution. Unlike his predecessors however, Beittel created a dual function for the institution by openly embracing civil rights activists and further enveloping the college in a spirit of racial tolerance. Yet Beittel never stopped being the chief administrator of his college. He, like all college presidents, was constantly seeking ways to improve the institution and find new sources for profit and revenue to keep the school financially afloat. In 1963 when two members of the Tougaloo Board of Trustees, Irving Fain and

Dr. Lawrence Durgin approached Beittel about a partnership with Brown University in Rhode Island, Beittel raised critical questions of the idea, but never rejected the proposal. Both of the men had Rhode Island connections and direct links with the Ivy League school, and both men knew Dr. Barnaby Keeney, president of Brown University.

Aside from serving as president of Brown, Keeney was also on the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) payroll.⁸⁹ Although it is not quite clear if his connection with the CIA had any bearing on his interest in Tougaloo, two things became certain in the two college's initial discussions on a proposed partnership; Beittel was to be removed as president of Tougaloo College and Tougaloo was to immediately shed its identity as a center for movement activity. Keeney, working under the banner of Brown University, promised an unprecedented amount of grant money from the Ford Foundation and other private and public entities, but it was contingent on a complete Tougaloo makeover. Under the guise of internal improvements and an exchange program between students at Brown and Tougaloo, Keeney and his administration pledged, "a broad effort to assist Tougaloo's faculty and students in their pursuit of higher academic standards." A press release from Brown officials stated, "The way is opening today for the Negro to win for himself the full rights of American citizenship, including the unrestricted opportunity for entrance into professional fields. It is obvious that if he is to take advantage of that opportunity, he must get a better education."⁹⁰ In the eyes of the federal government and its paid operatives, "higher academic standards," and "a better education," could not be achieved through a Second Curriculum that caused students to adhere to the teachings

⁸⁹ John Dittmer, *Local People*, 235.

⁹⁰ "Brown Tougaloo Agreement," President Adam Beittel Papers, Tougaloo College Archives

and provocations of sympathetic professors like Ernst Borinski or Jane McAllister. Nor could it be accomplished by college Presidents who allowed their institutions to be conduits of liberation. The plan to remove Beittel from office was set into motion.

Adam Beittel came to Tougaloo in 1960 after being promised by the Tougaloo Board of Trustees that he would be allowed to continue in that capacity until he reached seventy years old. After turning sixty-five in 1964, that promise was now in jeopardy. Privately, President Keeney expressed his support for Tougaloo, stating in a letter to Beittel, “The more I think about my experiences at Tougaloo, the more interested I am in working with the College. I hope our joint efforts will be fruitful.”⁹¹ Correspondences such as these demonstrated that Beittel was indeed on board with the proposal; however in an effort to remove him as president, a different picture was being drawn that caught Beittel and his supporters off guard. As Beittel critically examined the purpose and plan of the Brown-Tougaloo Program, trustee members surmised that Beittel could impede the pathway toward Tougaloo’s reformation. In addition, Kenney and the federal government’s vision of the pacified and controlled college environment was not inclusive of the political prodding of activist presidents. In a letter addressed to Beittel on April 15, 1964, (almost a month after Keeney’s letter praising Beittel for his support) trustee members suggested that the need for Beittel’s retirement was “the culmination of much discussion of your apparent unwillingness to enter in the Brown University cooperative program.”⁹² Beittel, however, contended that his forced removal was tied into pressures

⁹¹ Barnaby Keeney to Adam Beittel, March 24, 1964, “Brown University Correspondences,” President Adam Beittel Papers, Tougaloo College Archives

⁹² Wesley Hotchkiss to Adam Beittel, April 15, 1964, Board of Trustee Correspondences, President Adam Beittel Papers, Tougaloo College Archives

being placed on the Tougaloo Board of Trustees by Brown University to dismiss the one man who assiduously took the helm of Tougaloo and guided the institution through the treacherous path of southern white hostility.

Brown and the Ford Foundation were not the only ones placing pressure on Tougaloo trustees. If they needed any further incentive to remove Beittel from office, board members were receiving “advice” from the Sovereignty Commission on the proposed future of Tougaloo. Two Commission agents visited the New York office of Board member Wesley Hotchkiss to discuss the administration of Beittel. In a letter to concerned supporters of Beittel, Hotchkiss denied that the Sovereignty Commission visit had any bearing on a decision that he claimed was already in the works.⁹³ Nevertheless, the fact that state officials applauded the removal of the controversial president and promised to drop all forms of state sponsored harassment was surely an added incentive for board members. MSSC Director Erle Johnston noted, “We are in position to guarantee to the trustees that if Dr. Beittel and Rev. King were removed and education takes the place of agitation under a new administration that no punitive action will be taken by the Mississippi Legislature or its officials against the institution.”⁹⁴ Attempts by the Sovereignty Commission to speak on behalf of Black students, rather than their typical position of undermining the collective voice of Black youth, further underscored how important the restructuring of the Black college environment was to state and federal officials. Johnston took the liberty to articulate the concerns of the very group who were

⁹³ Wesley Hotchkiss to Robert Spike, June 24, 1964, Board of Trustee Correspondences, President Adam Beittel Papers, Tougaloo College Archives

⁹⁴ Erle Johnston Jr. to Wesley Hotchkiss, April 17, 1964, Board of Trustee Correspondences, President Adam Beittel Papers, Tougaloo College Archives

under the thumb of his oppressive organization. He noted, “The people of Mississippi, both white and colored, would like to see Tougaloo College restored to its former reputation as a qualified, accredited private school for education only.”⁹⁵

The stark realization that many white officials were coming to was that their perception of Black colleges as part of the solution to student militancy was subverted throughout the years by the presence of the Second Curriculum. Their vision of a proper education did not include the emergence of a generation of student insurgency and it certainly did not conceptualize Black colleges as the center of this radical uprising. However, for millions of African Americans who had invested hope in the idea that a younger and bolder generation would lead the way towards liberation, the student insurgency of the civil rights movement was the fulfillment of long awaited expectations. With word of his “retirement” spreading, supporters of Beittel came out to express support that captured their desire for liberation and their trust in a younger generation.

One supporter wrote:

Three days ago I sat at a meeting on campus and heard an elderly Negro public school teacher, long a fighter, make a motion that your board, “urge Dr. Beittel to stay at least two years longer.” She had traveled six hours to come to one of the few places in the state where people could meet in dignity. As she spoke, outside a new generation of young people walked by.⁹⁶

The devotees of Beittel and Tougaloo had no idea how deep the conspiracy to remove Beittel went. Tougaloo served as the source of Mississippi’s anger as the institution provided a home for both local activists and foreign invaders. The plans to permanently reconstruct the institution from a shelter of inspiration and rejuvenation into a corporate

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Paul Anthony to Robert Wilder, May 2, 1964, Correspondence, President Adam Beittel Papers, Tougaloo College Archives

breeding ground threatened the longevity of the movement. Leaders of the Mississippi Council on Human Relations, an organization that had strong ties with Beittel and Tougaloo, wrote, “Not only the Mississippi Council on Human Relations but a significant number of individuals as well have come to think of Tougaloo as the last best hope of reason and justice.”⁹⁷

The letters of well wishers and supporters were written in vain. Beittel was released from his position as President of Tougaloo in the summer of 1964, once again obstructing the scales of righteousness. The buyout of Tougaloo was a devastating event in the struggle for Black liberation in Mississippi. It combined two aspirations that until that point most movement activists thought were polar opposites; the desire for full integration with the demands of subjugation. The harsh lesson for student activists was that the two worked hand in hand, fulfilling the biblical phrase, “to whom much is given, much is required.” Former Tougaloo Chaplain Ed King summarized it thusly, “when the money came, it was very clear that Tougaloo was to get out of the movement, and to focus on being a quality college. For the people who run education in the world, you could not be a quality college and be involved in politics.”⁹⁸ President Beittel maintained his composure in the midst of his persecution. He was a loyal supporter of the institution and retained high hopes for his students. Above all else, he was a constant fixture on the scene for Black liberation which worked concurrently with his role as President of Tougaloo. In parting he wrote:

⁹⁷ Bernard Law to Tougaloo Board of Trustees, May 4, 1964, President Adam Beittel Papers, Tougaloo College Archives

⁹⁸ Interview with Ed King, June 30, 2004

What shall I say to faculty who hope I will “change my mind and remain with the college,” or students who try to persuade me that I should not retire, or friends of the College who fear that Tougaloo “is finally surrendering to intimidation?” Shall I tell them the unvarnished truth that in spite of an agreement with the Board for a longer term of service, I am being sacrificed with the hope that this will result in larger financial gifts to the College? Shall I say that while Brown University has not demanded a change of administration at Tougaloo, a change of administration is being made with the thought that it will be pleasing to Brown University and perhaps the Ford Foundation?⁹⁹

Adam Beittel said none of the above. Instead he silently removed himself from the institution that he had effectively governed.

Meanwhile, Brown University and Barnaby Keeney moved in to complete the reconstruction of Tougaloo College. For the first time in the history of the college, Tougaloo appointed a Black man as the head of its institution. George Owens, who served as interim president while the reconstruction was taking place, was selected as the next leader of an institution that was beset with enemies on all sides. However, with the new inclusion of foundation and government support, Tougaloo was now surrounded by enemies with covert intentions. Owens, an alumnus of Tougaloo, previously served as the Business Manager for the college. Although Owens did not have a doctorate, he was considered as the best fit for the institution that was embarking on a new direction.¹⁰⁰ Barnaby Keeney arrived on campus April 21, 1966 to present the keynote address at Owens’s inauguration. It soon became clear that Keeney was delivering more than good tidings for the Owens’ administration. He was also conveying the new expectations that came along with the foundation monies that he had helped to secure. Student activism

⁹⁹ Board of Trustee Correspondences, President Adam Beittel Papers, Tougaloo College Archives

¹⁰⁰ It is not quite clear what exactly qualified Owens as the best candidate to lead Tougaloo after the removal of Beittel. During his tenure, he proved to sympathize with student activists and allowed them space for continued protests. However, his input may have been inconsequential considering the takeover’s effect in placating student’s demands.

and political agitation were not found among those expectations. Keeney told the inaugural crowd:

This course of action may be dangerous. Our universities are great because they are free. They are free because society has wanted them to be free and because the men who make them up have steadily labored and often fought to make and keep them free....This is the way knowledge grows, and this is the way it is transmitted, and this is the way people educate themselves to fight for freedom in a thoughtful rather than in an emotional way. Such freedom would be impaired by an institutional commitment to a particular course of action, for it would deprive members of the university of the opportunity to continue to seek the truth as it relates to the particular problem or question....But what should we do if we are invited to manage programs - - for example, the poverty program? This is not education, this not research; it is public management, an activity which, I think, a university should avoid.¹⁰¹

To suggest that Black institutions should somehow eliminate their obligation to their surrounding communities and produce Black students who were unconscious of their mission was to rob them of their very purpose. For years scholars such as Kelly Miller and W.E.B. Dubois had lectured Black students about their social responsibilities and stressed the need for an urgent response to white supremacy. Housed in Black institutions where they could interact with faculty who expressed tough love and presented with an opportunity to fellowship among like minded peers while bolstering their self esteem, a new generation finally emerged with an expanded political conscious. Even in the most hostile state of the Union, institutions like Tougaloo and Jackson State managed to find ways to nurture young Black minds and provide a forum where Black political consciousness could grow. But now these historical enclaves were coming under greater scrutiny for attempting to achieve this mission. Foundation control and

¹⁰¹ "Inauguration of President Owens," Box 3, Folder #8, President George Owens Papers, Tougaloo College Archives

greater surveillance by government authorities became the new point of attack for those concerned about a growing generation of student insurgents.

For students, the possibility of righteousness in a country seemingly devoid of it, was a fleeting idea. With many of their leaders assassinated and their programs for political and social justice abandoned and betrayed, students were becoming increasingly frustrated with their government, with their leaders, and with their institutions. Yet they were also becoming frustrated with themselves. In addition to scores of students still yielding to fear, many Black youth had dreams of material success that was consistent with most college youth. Corporations teamed up with foundations and federal and state officials to present greater opportunities to those youth who may have sat undecided on the fence between individual success and collective revolution. However, a growing tide of Black students were speaking with a new voice. As news of further disappointment and setbacks began to leak through campus outlets, Black students were adopting a more militant tone that shifted the direction of the movement and caused students to challenge their peers to stand up and be counted. The editor of *The Blue and White Flash* noted, “Whether it can be said that Jackson State College is a place where pebbles are polished and diamonds are dimmed will be reflected in the future efforts of its graduates, for it is they who have, in the end... ‘made us stronger or weaker.’”¹⁰² As their frustration turned to anger and anger changed to action, a new channel of protest was born that emphasized their combined self-worth and their growing demands for political and economic power.

¹⁰² “From the Editors Point of View,” *The Blue and White Flash*, May 1965, Jackson State University Archives

CHAPTER 7

EPILOGUE: “FOR THESE ARE ALL OUR CHILDREN:” THE INHERITANCE OF GENERATION X

On a cloudy morning in April of 1967, evidence that Jackson State University had experienced a seismic ideological shift was about to be revealed. That morning, a slender yet imposing young man arrived on campus, bringing with him his confident and courageous presence and a horde of media who sensed a sensational confrontation. Stokely Carmichael had arrived in Jackson and made his customary stop at Tougaloo College. While visiting there, he decided to challenge the typically conservative administration of Jackson State by visiting campus, rallying the students, and perhaps exchanging a few words with the head man in charge. But the new head man in charge was expecting Carmichael. John Peoples became president of Jackson State University on March 2, 1967, and was informed that Carmichael would be making a stop on campus by one of his students. Under Reddix’s administration, the presence of such an outspoken firebrand would have been forbidden and Reddix may have even decided to bring in outside forces to confront Carmichael.¹

¹ Upon hearing of Carmichael’s impending visit to campus, John Peoples notified Governor Paul Johnson of the visit but assured him that it was something he and the university were prepared to handle themselves. Johnson wanted to bring in state troopers and place them on rooftops around the campus but Peoples argued for a compromise that included state troopers blending in as disguised plain clothes news reporters. See, John Peoples, *To Survive and Thrive: The Quest for a True University* (Jackson: Town Square Books, 1995) 56.

Under John Peoples, a new administrative era began and with it came significant changes including the end of mandatory vespers and allowing unsupervised interaction between coeds. But most importantly, Peoples was a man of a different generation who was ready to embrace the struggle for Black liberation on his campus. In his inaugural address, Peoples made it clear that it was his desire for his students, “to experience freedom, not theoretical freedom, but actual freedom as well. Freedom that is tangible, freedom that is relevant, not only to all ethnic groups, but also to all economic and social groups.”¹ Such a man was not the typical Black college administrator whom Carmichael and other student activists were used to dealing with. Peoples arranged a private meeting between the two. As he made his way into Peoples office, Carmichael said, “Where’s that old dude?” He was clearly expecting to encounter President Reddix, nevertheless, Peoples made a connection with the young leader that illustrated a bridging of the generational gap that Carmichael had only witnessed in his interactions with the local people of the Delta. Peoples instructed Carmichael that:

You and I are in the same fight. You just have a different vantage point. And you have your meetings and I have my meetings. These folk want to destroy our colleges like this where we can instill in the kids the idea that they can get out and be leaders. Now you are a Howard University grad I know that. Now what you are doing is important. But you don’t want them to be tearing down our schools. You need to support that. So Stokely and I exchanged pamphlets, he had some pamphlets and I had some stuff I had written you know. And afterwards we shook, and said okay man, you do your thing and I’m going to do my thing.²

It is not clear if the meeting between Peoples and Carmichael made a significant difference in Carmichael’s disdain for the often conservative nature of Black colleges,

¹ Lelia Rhodes, *Jackson State University: The First Hundred Years, 1877-1977* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1979) 142.

² Interview with John Peoples, July 21, 2004

but it is certain that both Peoples and Carmichael were cut from the same cloth, a fact that was not lost on the young and passionate leader of SNCC. In his autobiography, Carmichael recalled his own college days at Howard and remembered that despite his frustration with students who failed to gravitate toward his views on liberation, and for all the struggles he had with the administration, “no one in the Howard administration ever once told us to stop. They never tried to coerce or threaten us with expulsion or other administrative sanction.”³ Moreover, it is quite evident that within the enclave that was Howard University, Stokely Carmichael was becoming Stokely Carmichael. He was able to interact with faculty and peers who helped to fashion a young, articulate, freedom fighter who loved his people with all their faults and idiosyncrasies. They loved him too, because he, like thousands of other Black college students, represented the future of the race. Carmichael added:

Because, in struggling for the mere right to exist and organize on campus, we gained experience, developed political skills, and tested techniques, all of which would prove invaluable in the wider struggle. So, in yet another quite unintended way, Howard was our laboratory, in this case for political education and even more important, political *praxis*.⁴

For decades, Black colleges were turning out men and women like Stokely Carmichael and John Peoples as was their intended mission. The same experiences and opportunities to hone leadership skills and bolster confidence were shared by so many Black youth throughout the years who engaged in constructive enterprise after graduation. What the dawning of the civil rights movement illustrated, was that scores of Black students grew

³ Carmichael, *Ready for Revolution*, 117.

⁴ Ibid, 147.

increasingly prepared to lead campaigns for freedom while still growing and expanding within the shelter of Black institutions.

With the “success” of the Civil Rights Movement however, a new chapter was opened that shifted the mission and goal of Black colleges and other Black educational outlets for that matter. The politics of integration eventually would attempt a restructuring of the Second Curriculum that would temporarily mute the criticism and demands being placed on Black schools to improve their course offerings or achieve structural improvements. With racial barriers in America being slowly lowered, schools and colleges that faithfully and passionately served Black youth were being altered in such a way that community bonds and traditional missions were being dissolved. At the secondary level, Black school teachers were being reassigned and Black administrators were being demoted or dismissed. Suddenly, Black communities across America that depended on the strong presence of a Second Curriculum to administer tough love and reflect community control, found themselves knee deep in a culture war breaking out across the country. In 1968, one of the most noticeable of these conflicts occurred in Brooklyn, New York where Black parents in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville School District became engaged in open demonstrations that protested the lack of Black teachers and administrators in their school system⁵. The desire for Black educators who were empathetic towards the future of Black children demonstrated a historical and

⁵ For more on the Ocean Hill-Brownsville demonstration see, Maurice Berube and Marilyn Gittell, *Confrontation at Ocean Hill-Brownsville; The New York School Strikes of 1968* (New York: Praeger, 1968), Mwlina Abubadika, *The Education of Sonny Carson* (New York: Norton, 1972), Jane Gordon, *Why They Couldn't Wait: A Critique of the Black-Jewish Conflict Over Community Control in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, 1967-1971* (New York: Routledge Falmer, 2001), and Jerald Podair, *The Strike That Changed New York: Blacks, Whites, and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis* (New Haven: Yale Press, 2002),

fundamental link between teacher and pupil that served as a key component in the administering of the Second Curriculum.⁶

The institutions responsible for producing the bulk of these future educators were also in transition. As foundation monies and government grants allocated to Black institutions increased during the late 1960's, a seldom spoken but implied understanding came with it. Greater scrutiny was placed on the laboratories which were responsible for controlling the intellectual development of college bound youth. The demand was quite simple and its manifestation was even more efficient. If Black colleges were to be the benefactors of greater economic resources, it was imperative that future generations of students passing through the halls of erudition be impressed more with personal and material gain devoid of community responsibility. Greater opportunities in private and public sectors and professional avenues that took Black students farther away from the community, virtually insured that the mission of uplift that had driven many Black students into a life of service would erode and vanish as quickly as the dashikis and Afro picks that so many of them adorned.

And what of the original purveyors of the Second Curriculum? Black scholars who once engaged young Black minds in the courtyards and classrooms of Black colleges were given opportunities to escape poorly funded and under-resourced institutions like never before in the late 1960s. The seduction of the Black intellectual

⁶ In the late 1960's students at Tougaloo College began to demand the hiring of more Black faculty on campus. The institution historically had hired an abundance of white administrators and faculty. Even sympathetic white staffers such as Ed King and John Garner were ostracized and questioned about their presence and intent on a Black college campus with the arrival of the Black power era. In the years prior however, the strange mix of paternalism and true compassion for the Black struggle for human rights did not obstruct the administering of the Second Curriculum, a training that many Tougaloo students would take with them into their teaching professions. See John Garner Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

can be equated to a brain drain whose effects perhaps even further cemented the fact that Black colleges would no longer have the advantage of hiring the very best and brightest of young scholars who would interact and inspire Black youth towards a mission of uplift. It is difficult to determine how deliberate this development was or even determine if it was deliberate at all. Indeed numerous Black students on white college campuses were making greater demands for the presence of Black Student Unions or Black Studies Departments, a fact that would lead to the ascension of these programs and courses in higher education. However, this augmentation of the white college curriculum led to definite changes for the Second Curriculum at Black institutions. An interview with a young John Dittmer, who was working as a professor at Tougaloo, illustrates the changes taking place:

So what took place was that the Black schools were being raided by the white schools with their own faculty being offered tenured positions and higher salaries. Younger black scholars who were just coming out of the graduate schools – and there weren't very many of them at the time – would literally have their pick of really good jobs, lots of time for research, light course loads, at predominantly white institutions with usually the promise that their minority recruitment would be stepped up and they would have an active role to play in Black Studies programs. And the movement was at that time pretty much in its final stages in the South, so there wasn't really that much of an idealistic commitment and to come down and to work in the South. So where we had a lot of people, blacks, who were eager to come down and speak on campus, spend a couple of days on campus, it was very difficult to attract black faculty, especially at the wages that we were paying.⁷

The Black liberation movement of the 1960s offered numerous solutions, but its unraveling brought many questions to the table, that we have not yet developed answers for. With the dismantling of Jim Crow and the integration of a polarized society, numerous conservatives, moderates, and even liberals claimed victory over racial

⁷ An Interview with Dr. John Dittmer, Mississippi Department of Archives and History

discrimination. Yet from barber shops to beauty salons, from churches to street corners, a critique of integration is taking place across Black America. Just exactly how far have we come in a span of 40 years? Did the integration of America's schools rob the Black community of their most simple assurance that their children would enter schools where both passionate and compassionate educators awaited their arrival? Did Black institutions sell their souls in an unequal exchange for greater resources but less control over their own vision and mission? And how disconnected has that vision and mission become from the needs of the Black communities that they have historically served?

For African Americans, the road toward equality and access is littered with botched and fallible blueprints for liberation. Yet one indisputable ingredient remains in the struggle to extend opportunity to marginalized and disenfranchised communities. For any people or culture seeking to rise from the mire of discontent, quality and holistic education must not only be attainable, but must be placed before youth as an invaluable treasure. Perhaps the solution to this problem is not found in re-segregation but in the replication of a curriculum virtually abandoned by the demise of segregated schools and the co-optation of Black colleges. In the years prior to integration, Black colleges produced students whose mission was to enter dilapidated and under-funded schools and create the best that they could with what little they had. Thus a long tradition of committed, connected, and concerned educators were developed who were invested in their students who represented the best of tomorrow. As tomorrow dawns and the bitter realities of the present continue to plague battered communities, it is important that we

heed the words of the great author and scholar James Baldwin who warned, “For these are all our children. We all profit by, or pay for, whatever they become.”⁸

⁸ James Baldwin, “Speech to Benefit Wiltwyck School For Boys,”

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