

TEARING AT THE SEAMS: WHITE SUPREMACY, CIVIL RIGHTS, AND  
MISSISSIPPI'S SECESSION DAY, MARCH 1961

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On the morning of March 27, 1961, nine black college students walked into the main branch of the Jackson Municipal Library to stage a “read-in.” Located on a main thoroughfare downtown, the library was in the heart of the South’s white power stronghold. Nine black students from Tougaloo College, a private, historically black institution, were more than out of place. Walking in, much less going through the card catalog, was a direct challenge to segregation and white supremacy. When librarians and, later, police, demanded they go to the “colored library” across town, they politely declined. Police charged the Tougaloo Nine, as they would soon be called, with refusal to disburse before taking them to the nearby jail. Authorities held them for almost two days, despite their attorney’s attempts to post bond. With the Nine’s “invasion” Mississippi’s leadership had its formal introduction to the sit-in movement.<sup>1</sup> On March 28, over three thousand Confederate Colonels descended on the state’s capitol city.

The Colonels formed the state’s “Centennial Military Force in Memoriam,” or the Mississippi Grays.<sup>2</sup> Planned a year in advance, Secession Day was not intended as response to the Tougaloo Nine. Instead, it was white supremacy’s latest attempt to go on the offensive. Governor Ross Barnett, in the part of General, led the Grays as they paraded through downtown Jackson in the company of marching bands, hoop-skirted women, and the largest Confederate battle flag in existence. An all-day event

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<sup>1</sup> “Refusal to disburse” refers to a 1960 state law written especially for sit-ins: “An Act making it a misdemeanor for any person to disturb the public peace, or the peace of others, by violent, profane, or other conduct or language herein described, and prescribing punishment for violation hereof; and for related purposes.” House Bill No. 560, Box 1, Folder 5, T/031: Tougaloo Nine Collection, Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH). W. F. Minor, “Students Stage Read-In in Miss.: Police Arrest Nine in Jackson Library,” *Times-Picayune*, March 28, 1961, 44. America’s Historical Newspapers (12D196F7123DD563).

<sup>2</sup> Mississippi Commission on the War Between the States (MCWBS), “Mississippi Grays,” Minutes, Box 734, Series 648, Records of the MCWBS, MDAH, 12; MCWBS, “Report of the Mississippi Commission on the War Between the States,” (Jackson: MCWBS, 1962), 11-12. MDAH (973.76/M69r/1962).

commemorating Mississippi's secession from the Union, Secession Day drew a crowd of 100,000 spectators to kick off the state's four-year long Civil War Centennial. The three-hour, six-mile parade ended where Secession began: at the Old Capital building, home to the new state museum. There, a group of college students and highway patrolman re-enacted their ancestor's act of "divine wisdom" at the Secession Convention of 1861.<sup>3</sup> Across town, a group of students at Jackson State University (JSU), a public HBCU, began a march to the city jail in support of the Tougaloo Nine. They did not get far before police blocked the street and attacked them with dogs and tear gas. In this twenty-four hour window, two Mississippi's are apparent: white leaders staged the biggest celebration of white supremacy in its history and Jackson's black activists refocused the Civil Rights movement on bringing "the United States Constitution to the State of Mississippi."<sup>4</sup>

Instead of presenting a strong, united white supremacy, those who participated in the Mississippi Commission on the War Between the States (MCWBS), the protests surrounding Secession Day, and the Day itself revealed cracks in Mississippi's white power structure. Despite the Nine's careful preparation, there is no evidence to suggest that they planned the sit-in to interfere with Secession Day, and most historians have written off the two events overlapping as a poetic coincidence.<sup>5</sup> However, the contrast between events places the contours of white power and civil rights into greater relief.

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<sup>3</sup> Louis Dollarhide, "The Outset: a One-Act Play Depicting the Secession Convention of Mississippi," General Collection, MDAH, 2; "Program of Events," Subject File (SF) Civil War Centennial Secession Day, MDAH.

<sup>4</sup> Roy Wilkins, "Operation Mississippi," April 1961, 2. Box 1, Folder 7, T/031: Tougaloo Nine Collection, MDAH.

<sup>5</sup> James Bradford to Marian A. Allen, in Allen, "Tougaloo College Involvement During the Civil Rights Movement: Emphasis: Tougaloo Nine," (Student Research Paper, Tougaloo College, 1989) 5. Box 1, Folder 9, T/031: Tougaloo Nine Collection, MDAH; Geraldine Edwards Hollis, *Back to Mississippi: Sidewalks Represent A Journey to the Paths of My Success, Follow My Steps and Take the Journey!*, (Xlibris Corporation, 2011), 109-124.

While Jackson may not have been the heart of the Confederacy, it was an anchor of the segregationist agenda. In the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, Mississippi led the charge to defend "state's rights."<sup>6</sup> The founding chapter of the White Citizen's Council, which would soon become the South's largest and most outspoken proponent of segregation, formed in the Mississippi Delta a month before the Court's decision.<sup>7</sup> Just a few years later, in 1956, Mississippi established its now infamous watchdog bureau, the State Sovereignty Commission.<sup>8</sup> The National Civil War Centennial Commission was born into these tensions in 1958. As an event intended to cultivate patriotism during the Cold War, the Centennial began around elements the National Commission believed would unite Americans. This approach meant cutting back references to slavery and emancipation. Doing so gave Southern Centennial Commissions a window to infuse their commemorations with their own apocryphal version of history: the Lost Cause.<sup>9</sup> Portraying slavery as a soft, loving relationship, the

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<sup>6</sup> This leadership goes back even further, to before the 1948 National Democratic Convention, when leading southern Democrats met in Jackson in February and May at the invitation of leading Mississippi politicians to discuss President Truman's proposed Civil Rights reform. They agreed to meet again afterwards should the Convention endorse Truman's proposals that July (which they of course did). The States' Rights Democratic Party, or the Dixiecrat Party, was born in Birmingham just a few days after the Philadelphia convention closed. See: Yasuhiro Katagiri, *The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission: Civil Rights and States' Rights* (Oxford, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), xxii-xxv.

<sup>7</sup> While other chapters did not form until after the decision, the organization grew past the state's borders within weeks of *Brown*. See: Neil R. McMillen, *The Citizens' Council: Organized Resistance to the Second Reconstruction, 1954-64* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), 16-23.

<sup>8</sup> John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 60-61; See also: Katagiri, *The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission*, 8-10.

<sup>9</sup> In *The Southern Past*, Brundage points out that southern organizations "acknowledged [the black past] only when it seemed to validate the preferred white narrative." W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 33, 6-10, 65; see also: David W. Blight, *American Oracle: The Civil War in the Civil Rights Era* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 11-12; Many historians have analyzed southerner's use of the Centennial. Robert Cook argues that southern Civil War Centennial commemorations reasserted the white historical memory that propped up segregation. Robert Cook, "(Un)Furl That Banner: The Response of White Southerners to the Civil War Centennial of 1961-1965," *The Journal of Southern History* 68, no. 4 (November 1, 2002): 879-912; Alyssa D. Warrick's analysis of the Centennial suggests that older southern white men, of the generation most conditioned by "Lost Cause" rhetoric, used the anniversary to pass on those values to younger generations. Alyssa Warrick,

Lost Cause established Confederate soldiers' participation in the Civil War as a moral obligation. An ideology, a civil religion, a marketing technique; the Lost Cause has had many iterations.<sup>10</sup> To the Southern Centennial Commissions, the perspective their audience had on the Lost Cause did not matter so much as its familiarity. A keen sense of heritage's power, especially when disguised as history, has been and remains the South's weapon of choice.

Through "invading" a white dominated space, the Tougaloo Nine challenged white supremacy and, more specifically, a white collective memory that silenced black voices. The South's collective memory was a deliberate production, one that white leadership spent a hundred years imprinting on the southern landscape. Their construction of white identity required a series of fictions: filling in what black meant, what yankee meant, and deciding what "white southerner" meant from what was left behind. The result was a definition of whiteness that could expand and unite past class and gender lines, but also required the assistance, or at least the compliance, of a majority of southerners in order to work. White supremacy had always required constant maintenance, the cost of which fell disproportionately on African-American communities. By 1961 white supremacy had

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"Mississippi's Greatest Hour': The Mississippi Civil War Centennial and Southern Resistance," *Southern Cultures* 19, no. 3 (2013); for more on the Mississippi Centennial, see Matthew Reonas, "Served Up on a Silver Platter: Ross Barnett, the Tourism Industry, and Mississippi's Civil War Centennial," *The Journal of Mississippi History* Volume LXXII no. 2 (2010); and Sally McWhite, "Echoes of the Lost Cause: Civil War Reverberations in Mississippi from 1865 to 2001," PhD diss., University of Mississippi, 2002; For analyses of the Centennial in other states that links Civil Rights resistance to the Centennial, see: Kristopher A. Teters, "Albert Burton Moore and Alabama's Centennial Commemoration of the Civil War," *Alabama Review* 66, no. 2 (April 2013): 122-152; James B. Williams, "The Tennessee Civil War Centennial Commission: Looking to the Past as Tennessee Plans for the Future," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 67, no. 4 (2008): 270-345.

<sup>10</sup> For the Lost Cause's role in establishing a moral legacy for the Confederate narrative, see: Gary W. Gallagher, "Jubal A. Early, the Lost Cause, and Civil War History: A Persistent Legacy," in *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History* ed. Gary W. Gallagher and Alan T. Nolan (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); for more on the power of "heritage" when replaced with "history" see David Lowenthal, *Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), especially pages 59, 74, 78, & 121-9.

become a large and clumsy contraption that whites were scrambling to maintain. Planners hoped to reinvigorate it by infusing Secession Day with collective memory traditions: memorialization, parade, and pageantry.<sup>11</sup> MCWBS intended to send a message to activists as well as tourists: Mississippi's public institutions were a white space, for white memory. All other voices were illegitimate.

The MCWBS and other southern Centennial activities were an extension of a larger regional project to defend segregation in the 1950s. Mississippi's infamous segregationist Governor, Ross Barnett, made this clear when he declared that the MCWBS was "designed to uphold the constitution of the nation and the southern traditions."<sup>12</sup> Historians often ignore the largely unsuccessful Civil War Centennial when they outline both the regional fight to preserve segregation and the national fight to end it. There were, however, substantial intersections of both with the Centennial, as Robert Cook has

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<sup>11</sup> For southern white identity construction and its purpose, see: Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998) 9-10; Michael V. Williams, *Medgar Evers: Mississippi Martyr* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2011), 197-98; For more on the maintenance of white supremacy, see: J. Douglas Smith, *Managing White Supremacy: Race, Politics, and Citizenship in Jim Crow Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); and Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920*, *Gender & American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); For an analysis of American memory traditions, see: John E. Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); For a useful historiography of "memory," see: Kerwin Lee Klein, "On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse," in *From History to Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 112-37; On ritual and collective memory: Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972); James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory* (London: Blackwell, 1992); David Middleton and Derek Edwards, *Collective Remembering* (Newberry Park, Calif.: Sage Productions, 1990); David Cannadine, "The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the 'Invention of Tradition', c. 1820-1977," *The Invention of Tradition* ed. Eric Hobsbawm & Terence Ranger (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight," *Daedalus* 134, no. 4 (2005): 56-86; and Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (New York: Free Press, 1965).

<sup>12</sup> *Clarion-Ledger*, "Governor Barnett Speaks at Memphis Seminar," Jackson, MS: October 2, 1960, 20. Accessed March 1, 2017: [https://www.newspapers.com/clip/9267758/evidence\\_of\\_slaydens\\_political\\_acumen/](https://www.newspapers.com/clip/9267758/evidence_of_slaydens_political_acumen/).

pointed out.<sup>13</sup> Secession Day, when viewed in context with ongoing Civil Rights activism, becomes far more significant to the 1960s white power structure. White men and women established these organizations in the 1950s with the intention of protecting and promoting white supremacy. To this end, segregationists like Governor Barnett used violent and nonviolent strategies. Upon announcing his intention to “reactivate” Mississippi’s Confederate units for the upcoming Centennial, of which he was to serve as General, a reporter asked if the men would carry real guns during the reenactment. Barnett replied, “We might restage the whole thing.”<sup>14</sup>

### **MCWBS: White Supremacy Legislation**

The origins and construction of the MCWBS reveals the inner mechanics of regional white power. Governor James P. Coleman organized the state’s original centennial committee in 1958, the same year he ordered the Sovereignty Commission to surveil Medgar Evers, who was then serving as Jackson’s NAACP Field Secretary.<sup>15</sup> An amateur historian, Coleman sought to use the Centennial to reaffirm a white “heritage.” His committee reflected that interest: its members included the state’s premier amateur and professional historians and representatives from almost every state memorial

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<sup>13</sup> Robert Cook has spent a majority of his career researching the Civil War Centennial. His article on Civil Rights during the Centennial: Robert Cook, “From Shiloh to Selma: The Impact of the Civil War Centennial on the Black Freedom Struggle in the United States, 1961-65,” in *The Making of Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement*, ed. Brian Ward and Tony Badger (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 131–46; Other publications from Cook on the Centennial: Robert Cook, “(Un)Furl That Banner: The Response of White Southerners to the Civil War Centennial of 1961-1965,” *The Journal of Southern History* 68, no. 4 (2002): 879–912; Robert J. Cook, *Troubled Commemoration: The American Civil War Centennial, 1961-1965* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007); Robert Cook, “Red Termites and Rebel Yells: The Civil War Centennial in Strife-Torn Alabama, 1961-1965,” *Alabama Review* 64, no. 2 (2011): 143–167.

<sup>14</sup> “Miss. 'Rebels' Set Centennial.” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)*, June 4, 1960, 9. ProQuest Historical Newspapers (492964255);

<sup>15</sup> Michael V. Williams, *Medgar Evers: Mississippi Martyr*, 87; Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff, *The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006) 201.



association.<sup>16</sup> His successor also sought to use the Centennial as an opportunity to remind citizens of their heritage, but Ross Barnett was not known for using anything appropriately, heritage or otherwise. Bill Minor, Jackson correspondent for the New Orleans-based *Times-Picayune*, believed the Governor was unpredictable: he “surrounded himself with confusion which not only keeps his foes guessing but his friends as well.” Barnett’s successful 1959 campaign built off a white supremacist platform. His win secured state power for hardline segregationists, bringing the White Citizen’s Council and the State Sovereignty Commission far more public power than they had enjoyed before.<sup>17</sup> The MCWBS soon shifted in values and membership to reflect these new values.

In his inaugural address, Barnett pledged loyalty to segregation and economic improvement. He also encouraged the legislature to pass the Centennial Bill to establish a Commission on the War Between the States.<sup>18</sup> Less than a month later, the sit-in movement spread across the South. Beginning with four black college students in Greensboro, North Carolina, young activists across the nation joined direct action protests of segregated spaces such as restaurants, swimming pools, and public transportation. Medgar Evers watched all of this with a mixture of excitement and frustration. His superiors in the NAACP resisted direct action in Mississippi for fear of white violence and political setbacks. Undeterred, Evers continued to advocate for the

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<sup>16</sup> Matthew Reonas, “Served Up On a Silver Platter,” (2010): 125-127.

<sup>17</sup> His 1987 *New York Times* obituary remembered his large stature, booming voice, and virulent white supremacy, especially in his campaign tactics: “Touring rural Mississippi, he would tell farmers that God had made the black man different in order to punish him.” “Ross Barnett, Segregationist, Dies.” *New York Times* Nov 7, 1987, p. 35; W. F. Minor, “Eyes on Mississippi: Extra Session Seen for This Year,” *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans, LA) Jan. 1, 1961; Jonathan Gray, *Civil Rights in the White Literary Imagination: Innocence by Association* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi), 76.

<sup>18</sup> *Clarion-Ledger*, “Barnett Sets Tone For Term in Thoughtful Initial Word,” January 20, 1960.

method and to encourage youth participation.<sup>19</sup> Barnett's reaction was to push his proposals even more fervently.

Each choice in Barnett's commission reflects an interest in making the Centennial a prop of white supremacy. A son and grandson of Confederate soldiers, he was raised with a Lost Cause heritage that glorified rebellion.<sup>20</sup> He squeezed that heritage for every ounce of political acumen it could provide and sought to shape the Centennial into an ideological weapon. First, he dumped all moderates except Charlotte Capers, the first woman director of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH), in his 1960 appointments. She was retained as an ex-officio member.<sup>21</sup> He appointed Sidney Roebuck, Mississippi's former Highway Commissioner and foremost PR expert, as executive director. Roebuck's pro-segregation stance was less obvious than other MCWBS members, who included some of the state's proudest anti-integrationists.<sup>22</sup> He had every intention of selling the state as a stable society with peaceful, welcoming people, an ideal investment and tourist destination. With Ross Barnett in the Governor's office and Civil Rights gaining traction, Roebuck had a difficult task ahead of him.

Barnett's choice to include high-ranking women on the MCWBS was an acknowledgement of the importance of white women in maintaining white supremacy. It was a woman, freshman state Representative Gladys Slayden, who drew up the bill to

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<sup>19</sup> Williams, *Medgar Evers*, 177-178.

<sup>20</sup> Matthew Reonas, "Served Up On a Silver Platter: Ross Barnett, the Tourism Industry, and Mississippi's Civil War Centennial," *Journal of Mississippi History* 72, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 127; Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff, *The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006) 277-278.

<sup>21</sup> The original group could claim William Winter, future governor of Mississippi, and other elite moderates. It was also composed of members from the United Daughters of the Confederacy, Sons of the Confederacy, Jackson Civil War Round Table, and MDAH. Warrick, "Mississippi's Greatest Hour," 97; Matthew Reonas, "Served Up On A Silver Platter," 125-6.

<sup>22</sup> For instance, the list includes George Godwin, Mississippi's advertising mogul, a founding member of both the Dixiecrat party and Jackson's White Citizen's Council. Matthew Reonas, "Served Up On A Silver Platter," 135-139; For more on Sidney Roebuck, see Cook, *Troubled Commemoration*, 71.

fund MCWBS and pushed it through the house. While both Slayden and Roebuck had been on Governor Coleman's 1958 committee, under Barnett they had a more focused cohort.<sup>23</sup> The women on the MCWBS, with the exception of Charlotte Capers, supported the state's white supremacy structure: Slayden, who served as Vice-Chairman, her fellow Representative, Kathleen O'Fallon, and Florence Sillers Ogden. Ogden, who was an advisor to the National Civil War Centennial Commission, planter, and a vicious newspaper columnist, infused white supremacy into all her activities.<sup>24</sup> As elite white women who served as leaders in state and local clubs, all four women operated in similar social circles and had likely run into each other in the past. Even if they were not friendly, they understood their power as inherently connected with and founded upon white supremacy. Their primary source of traditional cultural authority came from their organizational life, within which their grandmothers built up the Lost Cause tradition.<sup>25</sup> Through memory work and expressions of a white, female identity, these women were central to the maintenance of white supremacy.

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<sup>23</sup> Matthew Reonas, "Served Up On a Silver Platter," 127; *Clarion-Ledger*, "Commission for War Centennial Asked in House," Feb. 12, 1960, 5. Accessed December 11, 2016:

[https://www.newspapers.com/clip/7817430/commission\\_for\\_war\\_centennial\\_asked\\_in/](https://www.newspapers.com/clip/7817430/commission_for_war_centennial_asked_in/); Slayden came to the State Legislature in 1960 and served four terms. She retired from the office in 1976 to care for her sister, who had fallen ill. Joanne V. Hawks, M. Carolyn Ellis, and J. Byron Morris, "Women in the Mississippi Legislature (1924-1981)," *Journal of Mississippi History* 43, no. 4 (November 1981): 270.

<sup>24</sup> Matthew Reonas, "Served Up On A Silver Platter," 135-139; For more on Florence Sillers Ogden and her support of white supremacy, see Elizabeth Gillespie McRae, "White Womanhood, White Supremacy, and the Rise of Massive Resistance," in *Massive Resistance: Southern Opposition to the Second Reconstruction*, ed. Clive Webb (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>25</sup> McRae, "White Womanhood, White Supremacy, and the Rise of Massive Resistance," 197; W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past*, 15-16; Florence Sillers Ogden, "Dis An' Dat: Civil War Centennial Opens With Friendly Ceremonies," *Clarion-Ledger* (January 15, 1961) D11. Accessed March 1, 2017: [https://www.newspapers.com/clip/9267827/florence\\_ogdens\\_reaction\\_to\\_the\\_old/](https://www.newspapers.com/clip/9267827/florence_ogdens_reaction_to_the_old/).

As one of three women serving in the state legislature in 1961, Representative Slayden was a prototypical “Southern Lady” politician.<sup>26</sup> Meticulous and confident, she wore white gloves and fashionable hats like armor, with her hair and lipstick never out of place. A childless widow, Slayden was free from making up excuses for her place on the public stage. Yet she pursued goals that a white supremacist power structure deemed appropriate to her gender, whether that be in the state legislature, at “The Magnolias,” her renovated plantation home, or in her many positions in regional associations and clubs.<sup>27</sup>

As a Garden Club member and state leader, she brought to the Commission practical knowledge about how to commodify the Lost Cause. Women’s organizations throughout the region made their towns into tourist destinations through carefully constructed pageants, guided tours, and ceremonies infused with “heritage” designed to attract America’s expanding white middle class during the interwar period. While Slayden was just as much a leader of state tourism as Roebuck, her experiences with women’s clubs gave her an intimate knowledge of the relationship between place and memory and significant cultural authority in her own right. Barnett and Roebuck

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<sup>26</sup> From 1924 to 1981, forty-four women served in the state legislature; during that time, a woman served every year. The numbers went up and down, with seven serving at one time in the 1950s and only one in 1980. Joanne V. Hawks, “Women in the Mississippi Legislature (1924-1981),” 266; Charles M. Hills, “Affairs of State,” *Clarion-Ledger* (Jackson, MS) November 17, 1959, 6. Accessed December 12, 2016: [https://www.newspapers.com/clip/7828352/the\\_one\\_where\\_mrs\\_gladys\\_slayden\\_is\\_a/](https://www.newspapers.com/clip/7828352/the_one_where_mrs_gladys_slayden_is_a/).

<sup>27</sup> Slayden served as First Vice President of the Garden Clubs of Mississippi in 1960, and she had been president of the Holly Springs Garden Club and Restoration Committee in years past. Charles M. Hills, “Affairs of State,” November 17, 1959; *Clarion-Ledger*, “Lady Legislators,” Jackson, MS: January 7, 1960, 5. Accessed March 1, 2017: [https://www.newspapers.com/clip/9267482/lady\\_legislators\\_picture/](https://www.newspapers.com/clip/9267482/lady_legislators_picture/); Ruth Jacquemine, “Trends in Living: ‘The Magnolias’: Rich in Civil War History, Love and Pride,” *The Commercial Appeal* (Memphis, TN): April 20, 1962, 15. SF/Gladys Slayden, MDAH; Elizabeth Gillespie McRae, “White Womanhood, White Supremacy, and the Rise of Massive Resistance,” in *Massive Resistance: Southern Opposition to the Second Reconstruction*, ed. Clive Webb (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) 196-7; See: *Clarion-Ledger*, “Commission for War Centennial Asked in House,” Feb. 12, 1960, 5. Accessed December 11, 2016: [https://www.newspapers.com/clip/7817430/commission\\_for\\_war\\_centennial\\_asked\\_in/](https://www.newspapers.com/clip/7817430/commission_for_war_centennial_asked_in/).

understood that including elite white women like Ogden and Slayden was essential to the MCWBS's ideological and economic success.<sup>28</sup> They did not respect the women as fellow politicians or at least did not say as much publicly. Working with the women in an appropriate context, like the Centennial Commission, was acceptable and perhaps even encouraged because of their end goal: supporting and maintaining a patriarchal, white supremacist structure.

Charlotte Capers, the fourth woman on the Committee, was considered by her contemporaries to be the most moderate MCWBS member. Officially appointed in 1955, Capers had also served as the MDAH's director during World War II. She was a well-known local personality, with regular newspaper columns, leadership in the Junior League of Jackson, and a close friendship with author Eudora Welty.<sup>29</sup> The Centennial would characterize the first years of her MDAH appointment.

While history, not heritage, was her primary occupation, Capers embraced the Lost Cause. She rode in the Secession Day parade dressed in full antebellum garb, complete with a bonnet and matching gloves, in a convertible adorned with a banner that read "Mississippi Commission on the War Between the States."<sup>30</sup> Capers had lobbied for years to renovate the Old Capitol as it grew into greater and greater disrepair. The Mississippi

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<sup>28</sup> The Garden Clubs of Mississippi grew out of Natchez in the 1930s. While their husbands sought industry to stave off economic ruin in the face of falling cotton prices, elite and middle class white women came up with a different plan. By the end of the Depression, the Garden Clubs had created out of their antebellum homes a romantic tourist destination. Steven Hoelscher, "The White-Pillared Past: Landscapes of Memory and Race in the American South," in *Landscape and Race in the United States* ed. Richard H. Schein (New York: Routledge, 2006), 48; Robert Cook, *Troubled Commemoration*, 70-71; "Commission for War Centennial Asked in House," *Clarion-Ledger*, Feb. 12, 1960.

<sup>29</sup> "Annual Report of the Magazine Chairman," *Junior League of Jackson Annual Report 1943-44*, MDAH, Call Number 367/J95/1943-44, 33; Charlotte Capers, *The Capers Papers* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1982), 10-12; John R. Skates, *Mississippi's Old Capitol: Biography of a Building* (Jackson, MS: MDAH, 1990), 148-9.

<sup>30</sup> *Clarion-Ledger*, "Archives Director," Jackson, MS: March 29, 1961, 8. Accessed December 11, 2016: <https://www.newspapers.com/clip/7822023/>.

legislature's decision to make the Old Capitol the state's history museum was part of the same wave of white supremacist legislation as MCWBS; MDAH intended the museum to be as positive a portrayal of the state's "heritage" as possible. Because Capers had no museum experience and little staff, she hired and questioned architects, engineers, and federal museum experts. Restoration began in 1959, with the intent to open on Secession Day. Consequently, she developed the award-winning museum, with thirty exhibits covering centuries, in less than five weeks. The total cost for renovation and exhibits would amount to two million dollars.<sup>31</sup>

The Mississippi legislature endorsed Barnett's more propagandistic white supremacist measures when it approved the establishment of the Mississippi Commission on the War Between the States (MCWBS). The bill establishing the MCWBS as "an official agency" granted it \$200,000 for 1960-62. This was a significant investment — only Virginia's appropriation was larger.<sup>32</sup> Upon returning from the regional meeting in Atlanta, Slayden and Roebuck commented on how little other southern commissions had to work with.<sup>33</sup> The large appropriation was due, in part, to Representative Slayden and Roebuck's political maneuvering, but Mississippi legislators could see the sit-in movement gaining steam. During the same legislative session, the Mississippi Sovereignty Commission got a new appropriation of \$350,000 dollars.<sup>34</sup> The stakes were only getting higher, and the white power structure wanted a win and an all day

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<sup>31</sup> John R. Skates, *Mississippi's Old Capitol: Biography of a Building* (Jackson, MS: MDAH, 1990), 145-166; Berry Reece, "State to 'Secede' Monday," *State Times*, Jackson, MS (January 4, 1961). Scrapbooks, 1960-1961, Series 318, Box 18075, Records of the Mississippi Commission on the War Between the States, MDAH.

<sup>32</sup> Matthew Reonas, "Served Up On A Silver Platter," 133.

<sup>33</sup> MCWBS, "Meeting of July 25, 1960," Minutes, 2.

<sup>34</sup> Matthew Reonas, "Served Up On A Silver Platter," 134.

celebration, packed with reminders of their glorious “heritage,” seemed like just what they needed.

### **The Tougaloo Nine**

Civil Rights activists and Centennial planners both understood the power of place. This first battle was fought inside of a two mile radius, within which sat the Mississippi Capitol building, all of historic Jackson, JSU, and the train tracks that separated West Jackson, where most of the city’s black population lived, from the white business district. Host to any culture’s most memorable episodes, public spaces play a significant role in shaping the South’s collective memory.<sup>35</sup> Representation in the public sphere signals membership and prestige. Every monument erected to men who swore to protect slavery was a statement to African-Americans and white children alike: black southerners were outsiders, with no claim to public identity.<sup>36</sup> Resistance to this message, and white’s defense of it, is an ongoing aspect of southern life. Rituals, reenactments, and memorials held importance to white southerners partly because they perceived them as defenses against a black “countermemory.”<sup>37</sup>

The roots of black countermemory can be found in public festivities commemorating emancipation dating back to almost immediately after the Civil War.<sup>38</sup> Beginning in the early 20th century however, black schools took a larger role in this process. Through programs like black history week and eventually black history month,

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<sup>35</sup> W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past*, 6, 10.

<sup>36</sup> For organizational leaders building monuments with children in mind, see: Fred Arthur Bailey, "Free speech and the 'Lost Cause' in Texas: A Study of Social Control in the New South"; and Karen L. Cox, "Mississippi's United Daughters of the Confederacy."

<sup>37</sup> Brundage, *The Southern Past*, 10.

<sup>38</sup> Historian William H. Wiggins estimates there are at least fifteen different holidays commemorating emancipations. While the days themselves vary from region to region, most of the symbols and devices remain the same. William H. Wiggins, Jr, *O Freedom!: Afro-American Emancipation Celebrations* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), xviii–xix.

African-Americans began celebrating what Paula Giddings called “our ‘contributions to civilization,’ or, in other words, our ability to land on our feet after being thrown from great heights.”<sup>39</sup> Schools became the center for civil rights activity, especially the historically black colleges and universities that dotted the south. One such school was Tougaloo College.

Located outside of the city, the privately run and funded Tougaloo College had the space and resources to provide their students with a more liberal education than most other Mississippi institutions at the time. Its president, A. D. Beittel, supported Medgar Evers and campus chaplain John Mangum in their efforts to found an NAACP chapter on campus and would later visit the Nine in prison.<sup>40</sup> Dr. Beittel had issued a statement, days before the Tougaloo Nine’s “read-in” on March 27, celebrating the college’s 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary. He emphasized Tougaloo’s reputation amongst Mississippians as a safe haven, calling his school “an oasis of freedom and understanding” that encouraged its members to be “honest and courageous in their search for truth.”<sup>41</sup> The Nine’s activism would put Tougaloo College at the center of the Mississippi Sovereignty Commission’s frustrations.<sup>42</sup> Tougaloo’s adherence to the truth was dangerous before, but that danger only intensified after they threatened to bring black resistance to the public sphere.

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<sup>39</sup> Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*, 2nd ed. (New York: Amistad, 2006), 5.

<sup>40</sup> Yasuhiro Katagiri, *The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission*, 152-153; Charles W. Eagles, *Civil Rights, Culture Wars: The Fight over a Mississippi Textbook* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 65-67.

<sup>41</sup> *Afro-American*, “Tougaloo Is ‘an Oasis of Freedom,’” Baltimore, MD: March 25, 1961, A22. Box 3, Folder 22, T/031: Tougaloo Nine Collection, MDAH; for more on Tougaloo during the Civil Rights movement, see John Gregory Speed, “A Beacon of Light: Tougaloo during the Presidency of Dr. Adam Daniel Beittel (1960-1964),” Order No. 3584538, The University of Southern Mississippi, 2014. PhD. ProQuest.

<sup>42</sup> Tougaloo gained a reputation as a hotbed of subversive thought, a sort of haven for integrationists and breachers of the peace, throughout the country. With the likes of Joan Baez and Bob Dylan visiting, white supremacists in state government would only focus more and more on Tougaloo as a



Several black organizations mocked the Centennial's obvious exclusion of African American's part in the Civil War. One group in Memphis posted an advertisement in a local newspaper petitioning the city to re-join the United States, a government that was rumored to give its citizens "inalienable rights." For its part, the *Negro History Bulletin* regularly published a list of significant dates relevant to African-American history. Each list is essentially a protest piece. For example, beside January 26, 1961, editors quoted Mississippi's Declaration of Secession: "Our position is thoroughly identified with the institution of slavery, the greatest material interest in the world!"<sup>43</sup> The African-American community was well aware it was being left out and the reasons for doing so were perfectly clear to them.

National Centennial organizers believed that including African-American memories of the war would open the nation's wounds instead of heal them. If unity was the goal, then slavery could not be mentioned. This was nearly impossible and more harmful than helpful, especially as the political climate became increasingly heated. On a national level, the NAACP called for a protest of the Centennial only a week and a half before the Tougaloo Nine's activism and after the New Jersey delegation to the 1961 national Centennial conference realized that an African-American member of their unit would not be allowed to stay at the same hotel in Charleston. NAACP President Roy Wilkins called the prepared commemorations "a betrayal of everything the Civil War was

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breeding ground for resistance and subversion. See: Katagiri, *The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission*, 152-153; and Charles Hughes, "Allowed to Be Free: Bob Dylan and the Civil Rights Movement," in *Highway 61 Revisited: Bob Dylan's Road from Minnesota to the World*, ed. Colleen J. Sheehy and Thomas Swiss (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 51.

<sup>43</sup> Anthony Howard, "The South's Last Stand," *The Guardian*, April 8, 1961, 6. ProQuest Historical Newspapers (184786721); "Significant Dates for the Civil War Centennial" *Negro History Bulletin* 24, no. 3 (December 1960): 70. ProQuest: Periodicals Archive Online (1296730208).

fought for.”<sup>44</sup> Indeed, the Civil War Centennial was cozier with the Lost Cause’s version of events than a triumphant Union narrative.

The Centennial leadership’s rhetoric, from local to national commissioners, made it very clear that most planners had no intention of willingly including African American’s experiences in Centennial activities. Indeed, most white Americans romanticized the Lost Cause.<sup>45</sup> A black Los Angeles newspaper quoted Karl S. Betts, executive director of the national commission, explaining in 1960 that stories of black southerners’ “devotion and loyalty... is one of the outstanding things of the Civil War.”<sup>46</sup> He was referring, of course, to stories like the one Ross Barnett would sometimes tell of when his father and grandfather went to join the Confederacy. An older slave, Josh, went with them. The Union captured him during the war and took him to Mobile, Alabama. According to Barnett, Josh “escaped and walked all the way back home to Leake County.”<sup>47</sup> There was no mention of Josh’s family or his life after the war. In this iteration, at least, Barnett highlighted Josh’s loyalty. The Governor’s story reflects the Lost Cause’s most disturbing mythology: that most slave owners enjoyed benevolent, loving relationships with their slaves. However, the white collective memory of the Civil War has never existed in a vacuum. African-American communities and leaders have

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<sup>44</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, “NAACP Sees Betrayal of Civil War Ideals,” March 19, 1961, 3. America’s Historical Newspapers (10034EA1E30E7588).

<sup>45</sup> Hale suggests that northern cities embraced a whiteness built on romanticizing like this primarily because it helped them deal with an influx of African-Americans during the Great Migration. Grace Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 9.

<sup>46</sup> Robert J. Cook, *Troubled Commemoration*, 73; *Los Angeles Tribune*, “There’s Something Vaguely Familiar About All This,” April 8, 1960, 10. America’s Historical Newspapers (12B891BD608B2570); For more on Karl S. Betts, see Cook, *Troubled Commemoration*, 22-23, 36-38.

<sup>47</sup> *The Delta-Democrat Times* “‘May Restage Whole Thing,’” Greenville, MS: May 24, 1960, 1. Accessed December 15, 2016: [https://www.newspapers.com/clip/9267661/barnett\\_says\\_they\\_would\\_reactivate/](https://www.newspapers.com/clip/9267661/barnett_says_they_would_reactivate/).

resisted it since Reconstruction through their own memory traditions.<sup>48</sup> Where Lost Cause ideology emphasized confederate enlistment, white supremacy, and patriarchy as moral obligation, the black counter memory of the Civil War emphasized African-Americans' independence, education, and respectability as moral obligations. In Jackson, the two came eye to eye in the spring of 1961.

Medgar Evers, Jackson's NAACP Field Secretary, had been waiting impatiently for an opportunity to introduce Mississippi to the sit-in movement. With a more supportive state president recently elected, Evers jumped at the chance to help Tougaloo College's NAACP chapter plan a library sit-in. He worked closely with their leadership, helping to choose and train the Nine. Evers and Chaplain Mangum called national media to make them aware of the protest, found legal aid, and helped organize volunteers willing to mortgage their houses to pay for bond. Popular with local youth activists, Evers was a congenial, open-minded, and passionate mentor. With his offices located at the Masonic Temple across the street from JSU, students frequently visited him. One student described Evers as a "teacher" who "wanted us to know about our civil rights, and was happy to tell us about our rights."<sup>49</sup> Evers's willingness to talk openly about segregation's flaws made him refreshing to students and dangerous to segregationists.

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<sup>48</sup> For the practice of assuming that slaves were happy with their masters, see: Alan T. Nolan, "The Anatomy of the Myth," in *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History*, ed. Gary W. Gallagher and Alan T. Nolan (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 19-22; Understanding that abolition was the result of sectional strife, turn of the century black communities watched the battlefield reunions of north and south with unease. Some leaders, like abolitionist and statesman Frederick Douglass, unsuccessfully fought to preserve a collective memory that honored the Union and equated the Confederacy with immorality and treason. Cook, *Troubled Commemoration*, 9-11; see also, David W. Blight, *Frederick Douglass' Civil War: Keeping Faith in Jubilee* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989); ---, *Race and Reunion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Patricia G. Davis, *Laying Claim: African American Cultural Memory and Southern Identity* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016), 11.

<sup>49</sup> In April 1960, activists in Biloxi waged a series of "wade-ins" on Mississippi's Gulf Coast. These protests ended violently, with ten people injured (including two white vigilantes). By September, the

Evers, Mangum, and the Tougaloo NAACP chapter thought carefully about where to stage Mississippi's first sit-in. They agreed on the Jackson Public Library for its central location and ease of access. Library de-segregation was not a top priority for the Civil Rights movement, but urban libraries' downtown locations gave them significant symbolic power. It also didn't hurt that violence seemed less likely to erupt over a library sit-in than at a restaurant or a school, where social interaction seemed more likely.<sup>50</sup> In addition, the underfunded black branches of the city's library system provided an easy excuse for their presence in the white library. Each student found books they needed that were unavailable in black libraries nearby. On March 27, they even drove to the black libraries before going downtown, just so every side of their story could be checked.<sup>51</sup>

When Ethel Sawyer, Geraldine Edwards, Meredith Coleman Anding, Jr., James Cleo Bradford, Alfred Lee Cook, Joseph Jackson, Jr., Albert Lassiter, Evelyn Pierce, and Janice Jackson walked into the main branch of the Jackson Public Library, they understood how the white power structure would perceive their actions.<sup>52</sup> In addition to having a lifetime of experience, months of planning with their college NAACP chapter under Medgar Evers's mentorship prepared them for what would happen next. They

state's NAACP was ready for change, and Aaron Henry took over as state president. Unlike his predecessor, Henry was a militant activist who strongly supported direct action. See Raymond Arsenault, *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 333-4; Michael V. Williams, *Medgar Evers: Mississippi Martyr*, 197-98; James Bradford to Marian A. Allen, in Allen, "Tougaloo College Involvement During the Civil Rights Movement: Emphasis: Tougaloo Nine," (Student Research Paper, Tougaloo College, 1989) Box 1, Folder 9, Tougaloo Nine Collection, MDAH, 3-6; Emilye Crosby, "'I Just Had a Fire!': An Interview with Dorie Ann Ladner," *The Southern Quarterly* 52, no. 1 (Fall 2014): 87.

<sup>50</sup> Michael Fultz, "Black Public Libraries in the South in the Era of De Jure Segregation," *Libraries & The Cultural Record* 41, no. 3 (2006): 348-49.

<sup>51</sup> James Bradford to Marian A. Allen, in Allen, "Tougaloo College Involvement During the Civil Rights Movement," 5: Tougaloo Nine Collection, MDAH; Hollis, *Back to Mississippi*, 109-124; W. C. Shoemaker, "Tougaloo Students Arrested for Entering White Library," *Jackson Daily News*, March 27, 1961, A1. Box 3, Folder 22, T/031: Tougaloo Nine Collection, MDAH.

<sup>52</sup> These names are written here as recorded in 1961. Several of the women have since married, taking her husband's last name. Only Evelyn Pierce has since changed her first and last name: Ameenah Omar. Untitled List, Box 1, Folder 1, T/031: Tougaloo Nine Collection, MDAH.

would walk in as young black students and leave as transgressors. Dressed respectfully, with police flanking them, each man and woman calmly walked to the police cars waiting outside as reporters captured every moment.<sup>53</sup> What they could not have guessed and did not know until after the NAACP lawyer finally succeeded in bailing them out days later, was just how big of an impression they would leave on Jackson's white citizenry.

Following their arrest, the white power structure and the civil rights activists of Mississippi jumped into action. Chief M. B. Pierce kept the city's police on high alert for the rest of the day, with two officers stationed at the library and several units patrolling possible sit-in areas. According to one report, "carloads" of Tougaloo students roamed through downtown after their peers' arrest. They walked through stores, emboldened to act more confident in the whites-only areas than normal. Police, tense from the unexpected breach that morning, were especially sensitive to the black students' attitudes. Attorney Jack H. Young was also downtown, trying to arrange bond for the arrested students. At \$500 each, their release would not be cheap.<sup>54</sup>

That night, students at JSU staged a demonstration with approximately 300 students.<sup>55</sup> Student activists had been organizing prior to the Nine's actions, but around smaller, campus-based issues. James Meredith, the black veteran who would go on to integrate the Ole Miss law school, provided strategy tips and Medgar Evers was just across the street at the NAACP Field Office. Doris Ann Ladner remembers that by March 27 their activities "had escalated": "we wanted to be a part of it."<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> W. C. Shoemaker, "Tougaloo Students Arrested for Entering White Library."

<sup>54</sup> W. F. Minor, "Students Stage Read-In in Miss," *Times-Picayune*.

<sup>55</sup> John Clark, "Demonstrations Halted: Jackson Police Alert to 'Threats,'" *State Times*, March 28, 1961, Box 3, Folder 22, T/031: Tougaloo Nine Collection, MDAH..

<sup>56</sup> Emilye Crosby, "An Interview with Dorie Ann Ladner," 88.

Dorie Ann and Joyce Ladner of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, were freshmen at JSU in spring 1961. With a no-nonsense, determined approach to life, the sisters were natural leaders. Barely teenagers when the organized Civil Rights movement regained traction in Mississippi, Dorie Ann remembered meeting Medgar Evers at fourteen when she and her sister accompanied family friends to Jackson NAACP meetings. The Tougaloo Nine's activism spurred both of them out of their comfort zones. While both would go on to become prominent organizers, Dorie Ann would become especially involved in the Mississippi movement.<sup>57</sup>

Evers had informed the JSU group of the Tougaloo Nine's plans, but Jackson State's strict policies prevented him from encouraging their participation, for fear the administration would expel them. Their advisors suggested organizing a prayer meeting instead. That night, after the requisite dinner and library hours, students met at the reflecting pool. JSU president Jacob Reddix got wind of their demonstration and made a show of reprimanding the group as police arrived. Students scattered, retreating to their dorm rooms.<sup>58</sup> This show of solidarity, so close to the next day's Centennial festivities, must have made white officials uneasy. Police brought trained dogs, borrowed from the Vicksburg Police Department, with them to campus the next day. Dorie Ann had never seen a police dog before but her experiences with them on March 28 and throughout the Civil Rights movement traumatized her.<sup>59</sup>

Under normal circumstances, their intrusion into a segregated public building would have made the Tougaloo Nine's infraction dangerous to Mississippi's white leadership.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid: 79, 81, 83, 86.

<sup>58</sup> Emilye Crosby, "An Interview with Dorie Ann Ladner," 89.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 89; John Clark, "Demonstrations Halted: Jackson Police Alert to 'Threats,'" *State Times*.

But Secession Day was about laying claim to public space, to public identity, and segregationists could not Tougaloo and JSU students' activism. The old, stiff version of white supremacy lashed out, paranoid and desperate to regain control. African-Americans understood this arrogance from generations of intimate experience with it.

Segregationists, on the other hand, had spent generations pretending to not see black communities while simultaneously shaping their entire existence around them.<sup>60</sup> This may explain the surprise they felt when the Tougaloo Nine walked into the library on March 27, 1961. The threat Mississippians had spent years, and a substantial amount of money, preparing to defend themselves against had finally arrived. And it still shocked everyone. Tougaloo Nine member James Bradford would later admit "frankly I think the surprise of it all... helped us all around."<sup>61</sup> The city's subsequent decision to hold the students for over thirty hours reveals a lack of foresight rivaling that of their secessionist ancestors. Had their white supremacy been a bit more flexible, had they released the students instead of holding them, it is far less likely that the JSU students would have marched on March 28. But that is not what happened. This brand of white supremacy refused to budge, and revealed the fatal flaw African-American's knew so well: inflexibility.

The next day, despite the presence of the police dogs, a group of JSU students "determined to march in solidarity with the Tougaloo Nine" left campus, walking towards downtown on Lynch Street. Only a few blocks away from campus, a hastily constructed

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<sup>60</sup> Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 9.

<sup>61</sup> James Bradford to Marian A. Allen, in Allen, "Tougaloo College Involvement During the Civil Rights Movement: Emphasis: Tougaloo Nine," (Student Research Paper, Tougaloo College, 1989) 5, found in Box 1, Folder 9, Tougaloo Nine Collection, MDAH; Geraldine Edwards Hollis, *Back to Mississippi: Sidewalks Represent A Journey to the Paths of My Success, Follow My Steps and Take the Journey!*, (Xlibris Corporation, 2011), 109-124; W. C. Shoemaker, "Tougaloo Students Arrested for Entering White Library," *Jackson Daily News* (Jackson, MS) March 27, 1961; For more on the Tougaloo Nine and the Mississippi sit-in movement, see: John Dittmer, *Local People*, 87-90.

barricade and a group of Jackson police officers confronted them. The JSU students turned off Rose Street, running from the officers through the residential area. The policeman did not hold back. "Boy," Ladner remarked, "they threw the tear gas." Local women opened their homes to provide the JSU students shelter.<sup>62</sup> Ladner washed tear gas off her face and back before following her hostess out onto the porch, where she hid in plain sight as "the police with these dogs were running down the alley behind these little shotgun houses." The students retreated to campus at dusk. President Reddix called an early spring break. Expelled, ostensibly for leading the dorm in a prayer for world peace, Dorie Ladner transferred to Tougaloo College with her sister the following semester.<sup>63</sup> Some reports indicate that one student – a young man named Randy Parker – was hauled away but not charged. Upon his arrest, Parker was carrying a small American flag.<sup>64</sup>

### Secession Day

Secession Day organizers embraced the Lost Cause at every opportunity. The University of Mississippi "Rebel Band" kicked off the festivities at around 10:30 a.m., followed closely by the 124 year old carriage carrying Governor Ross Barnett dressed as a Confederate General. Besides the dozens of Gray Units, approximately 38 bands also marched or rode along the route alongside women in hoop skirts and girls throwing batons. The parade itself took over three hours, ending with a staged reenactment around 1 p.m.<sup>65</sup> The ROTC unit from Jackson Central High School, dressed in Confederate Gray

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<sup>62</sup> Ladner stated that while black women actually opened their homes to the students, some students reported that white women let them hide under their homes while police ran by. See: Emilye Crosby, "An Interview with Dorie Ann Ladner," 89-90.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 89-90.

<sup>64</sup> *Chicago Daily Defender*, "Cops Break Up Student March," Chicago, IL: March 29, 1961, 6. ProQuest Historical Newspapers (493879261).

<sup>65</sup> Pat Flynn, "Reb Yells Enliven Mammoth Parade: Colorful Cavalcade Entertains 150,000," *Jackson Daily News* (Jackson, MS: March 28, 1961), SF Secession Day, MDAH; "Program of Events,"



uniforms, carried the University of Mississippi's enormous Confederate Flag. A picture taken from the top of a nearby building is haunting. It shows the flag as it approaches the final stop of the parade, the Old Capitol building. The blurry, black and white photograph makes the site of secession look more like a mausoleum than a sacred site. This would not be the flag's final destination. It would return to the University where it would accompany the school's band in halftime performances until it fell apart a year later.<sup>66</sup> Like the flag, the Lost Cause was fraying. It could not act as a working support system for white supremacy much longer. While the MCWBS may have intended for Secession Day to be white supremacy on the offensive, it did not turn out that way. A tense police force, on high alert after the Civil Rights demonstrations the day before, reminded citizens of the impending "invasion."<sup>67</sup> White Mississippians came together that day seeking to cover their wounds with the glory of their past. Instead, they exposed their insecurities.

MCWBS had intended to celebrate white supremacy by asserting – physically, culturally, and symbolically - the white southern identity their ancestors had spent years building.<sup>68</sup> MCWBS members carefully selected elements of Lost Cause symbolism that would prompt a connection to Civil War ancestors while also comforting whites with a sense of continuity. Making public rituals appear as familiar as possible is an old tactic

ibid; *Franklin Advocate*, "History Repeats It's Self – The Secession a Hundred Years Ago, Here, We Saw It, March 28, 1961," Meadville, MS: April 13, 1961. Scrapbooks, 1960-1961, Series 318, Box 735, Records of the Mississippi Commission on the War Between the States (MCWBS), MDAH.

<sup>66</sup> AP Wirephoto, "A Huge Confederate Flag," *Times-Picayune*: New Orleans, March 29, 1961, 1. America's Historical Newspapers (12D196F779BD4C26); John M. Coski, *The Confederate Battle Flag: America's Most Embattled Emblem* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 107.

<sup>67</sup> Cliff Sessions, "Jackson Ready for Anti-Segregation Moves as 5,000 Confederates March," *The Times*, Natchez, MS (March 28, 1961). Scrapbooks, 1960-1961, Series 318, Box 18075, Records of the Mississippi Commission on the War Between the States, MDAH.

<sup>68</sup> Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 9.

that governments have used to give the illusion of stability even in the presence of, as one scholar put it, “overwhelming contextual evidence to the contrary.”<sup>69</sup> The Lost Cause had at one time provided Mississippians with a sense of community and strength based on their support of white supremacy. Memorial Day ceremonies and monument dedications were public rituals through which participants could affirm their own position within the white power structure. MCWBS intended Secession Day to reaffirm a white collective memory through calling on the pageantry and ritual of the Lost Cause. While whiteness had since expanded and changed in the post World War II economy, the Centennial seemed the perfect place to revive familiar rites: the pageantry and ritual of the Lost Cause.<sup>70</sup>

MCWBS members sought to include as many citizens as possible in the Centennial commemorations. In June 1960, the Centennial Commission sent letters from the Governor to Mayors of every city in the state, inviting them to participate in the centennial through organizing a local Centennial Board. MCWBS included information on forming Gray units in each letter, as well as forms to register their local board with the

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<sup>69</sup> David Cannadine, “The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the ‘Invention of Tradition’, c. 1820-1977,” *The Invention of Tradition* ed. Eric Hobsbawm & Terence Ranger (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 105.

<sup>70</sup> MCWBS included Lost Cause rituals like Memorial Day parades and rededication ceremonies at Confederate cemeteries and memorials in a list of suggested activities they sent to local boards. See: Reonas, “Served Up On a Silver Platter,” 140. For Lost Cause rituals, see: Charles R. Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1980); On collective memory: Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972); James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory* (London: Blackwell, 1992); David Middleton and Derek Edwards, *Collective Remembering* (Newberry Park, Calif.: Sage Productions, 1990); David Cannadine, “The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the ‘Invention of Tradition’, c. 1820-1977,” *The Invention of Tradition* ed. Eric Hobsbawm & Terence Ranger (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), On public rituals and ceremonies: Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (New York: Free Press, 1965).

state Centennial.<sup>71</sup> Commission member George Godwin, public relations expert, Dixiecrat, and Citizens' Council member, expressed hope that local commissions would become permanent community associations, supplementing other memorial groups like the Garden Club in the ongoing commodification of Lost Cause mythology.<sup>72</sup> Centennial leaders understood that white supremacy required the assistance, or at least the compliance, of a majority of southerners in order to work. Their outreach efforts are indicative of subtle goals: gathering together as many whites as possible to stage a show of strength. Through encouraging contribution through as many channels as possible, MCWBS hoped that participants would feel a greater loyalty to a single heritage.<sup>73</sup> Using easily accessible, shared imagery was a critical first step in this plan.

MCWBS revealed the official flag and emblem of the Mississippi Centennial Commemoration events in June of 1960. The emblem was a shield emblazoned with the "stars and bars" of the rebel flag and topped with a magnolia flower.<sup>74</sup> White citizens from all corners of the state could recognize and unify around such symbols; moreover, both choices confirmed that Mississippi's Civil War Centennial would prioritize the white memory of the war. While the Confederate Battle Flag regained regional popularity with the States Rights "Dixiecrat" Party in 1948, it was in the years after *Brown v. Board*

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<sup>71</sup> MCWBS, "Meeting of July 25, 1960," Minutes, 2.; The National Commission suggested this for funding purposes – allowing every city and state to plan and fund their Centennial substantially cut the cost of their national plans. Cook, *Troubled Commemoration*, 44.

<sup>72</sup> While he served mostly in an advisory capacity, Godwin still showed up to almost every meeting the commission had for the first two years. Reonas, "Served Up On a Silver Platter," 146, 135-139; Also see Reonas for an interpretation of the MCWBS's plans as primarily economically motivated.

<sup>73</sup> Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 9; Clifford Geertz argued that participation in community events was a matter of prestige and that as beneficiaries of the prestige participants would "affirm it, defend it, celebrate it, justify it, and just plain bask in it." Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight," *Daedalus* 134, no. 4 (2005): 74.

<sup>74</sup> *State Times*, "State to Commemorate Famed Secession Act," Jackson, MS (June 21, 1960). Scrapbooks, 1960-1961, Series 318, Box 18075, Records of the Mississippi Commission on the War Between the States, MDAH.

of *Education* that the flag's white supremacist reputation became cemented in national culture. Georgia adopted the Confederate battle flag to replace its red-white-red bars in 1956, as a not so subtle protest against *Brown v. Board*. The Confederate Flag rose atop South Carolina's capitol building in 1962. It would remain planted in the dome until 2000, and then in front of the state house until 2015.<sup>75</sup>

This is not to say that MCWBS members were only thinking about how to associate the Centennial with the growing fight against Civil Rights. Indeed, the decision could have occurred as a matter of course to some members like Sillers or Slayden, who sought easily recognized symbols of regional pride. But to dismiss such choices as simple to Centennial leaders is to dismiss important pieces of the puzzle. The Battle Flag was not an innate choice, at least not as a matter of historical continuity. It enjoyed little prominence amongst a large number of Confederates – rather, it was the construction of their grandparents' generation, a symbol to which they attached meaning for the explicit purpose of generating loyalty.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, as indicated by South Carolina's use of the Confederate Flag, MCWBS's choices were not isolated events.

MCWBS members were in contact with other Centennial Commission groups, trading ideas on potential activities and tourism. In fact, the centennial commissions went so far as to involve the leaders of other states in their local commemorations and

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<sup>75</sup> Alexander J. Azarian and Eden Feshhazion, "The State Flag of Georgia: The 1956 Change in Its Historical Context" (Atlanta, GA: Georgia Senate Research Office, 2000), 8, <http://www.senate.ga.gov/sro/Documents/StudyCommRpts/00StateFlag.pdf>. ; Rebecca B. Watts, *Contemporary Southern Identity: Community Through Controversy* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 88–89; Jason Hanna and Ralph Ellis, "Confederate Flag's Half-Century at S.C. Capitol Ends," *CNN*, July 10, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/07/10/us/south-carolina-confederate-battle-flag/>.

<sup>76</sup> David Cannadine was among the first to suggest that some movements and ideological systems are so new or unstable that entire origin stories, complete with rhetorical and physical symbols, had to be literally invented to construct historical continuity. See Cannadine, "The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual," 1,7.

rededications. During Alabama's opening parade for their Centennial in February 1961, Governor Ross Barnett rode in his own carriage in their opening parade, as did the governors of Alabama and Virginia. All three wore Confederate regalia.<sup>77</sup> Gladys Slayden and Sidney Roebuck regularly reported back to the state commission on regional activities. To make their goals as clear as possible, regional commission leaders changed its name to the Confederate States Centennial Conference in 1960. At the same meeting, Slayden became the Conference's Vice-Chairman; by the end of the year, she would take over as permanent chairman.<sup>78</sup> Mississippi, as in other parts of the regional program to protect segregation, was a ringleader.

Secession Day's pageantry is representative of regional trends, with one exception: the Confederate Grays, formally known as the "Centennial Military Force in Memoriam."<sup>79</sup> Men and women from across the state reenacted roles they had prized for generations. White women as innocent damsels; white "soldiers", strong and tall protectors; and white political leaders drawing as many connections as possible between themselves and the Confederate generals of old. The key difference between Secession Day and all the events of times past was scale. The number of people participating and observing was far above what people were used to experiencing in Lost Cause rituals. The pageantry of Secession Day is rooted in traditional modes of racial unification, and, thus, tools of racial separation. For instance, civic clubs' theatrical pageants had been uniting groups according to race in the south for decades. Theatrical portrayals of Confederate life, like reenactments, depicted the morals and actions of a "good

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<sup>77</sup> Cook, *Troubled Commemoration*, 79–82.

<sup>78</sup> MCWBS, "Meeting of November 9, 1960," Minutes, 1; "Meeting of May 27, 1960," *ibid.*, 2.

<sup>79</sup> Teters, "Alabama's Centennial Commemoration of the Civil War," 122-123; Cook, *Troubled Commemoration*, 79-86.

southerner.”<sup>80</sup> Pageantry of some sort was expected at most events commemorating the Civil War in the South. The parade itself, with the overwhelming amount of volunteer “soldiers,” was a large and extravagant example of a reenactment. The force of the moment was intentional. Planners of the event wanted to overwhelm citizens with images emphasizing the importance of their “glorious past” and to comfort them with the strength of their army.<sup>81</sup>

Public rituals celebrating the Lost Cause had been most popular around the turn of the twentieth century. Schoolteachers molded tales of confederate bravery and Union atrocity into parables about right and wrong. Ladies Memorial Associations and the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) built monuments where they felt children would be most likely to see them. Neo-Confederate groups like the UDC and the Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV) organized annual ceremonies, built monuments, and promoted literature to remind white citizens, especially younger generations, of the glorious heritage they had inherited. The Confederate past was invoked at Memorial Days, where children in white dresses placed flowers on gravestones.<sup>82</sup> The popularity of neo-confederate events and organizations had, by the early 1950s, begun fading; after

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<sup>80</sup> Warrick, “‘Mississippi’s Greatest Hour,’” 98-100.

<sup>81</sup> David Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 1.

<sup>82</sup> The Southern Poverty Law Center defines “Neo-Confederate” as a term “to describe twentieth and twenty-first century revivals of pro-Confederate sentiment in the United States” See “Neo-Confederate,” *Southern Poverty Law Center*, accessed August 9, 2016, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/neo-confederate>; Grace E. Hale, “The Lost Cause and the Meaning of History,” *OAH Magazine Of History* 27, no. 1 (January 2013): 14-15; Fred Arthur Bailey, “Free speech and the ‘Lost Cause’ in Texas: A Study of Social Control in the New South,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 97, no. 3 (January 1994); Karen L. Cox, “Mississippi’s United Daughters of the Confederacy; Benevolence, Beauvoir, and the Transmission of Confederate Culture, 1897-1919,” in *Mississippi Women: Their Histories, Their Lives – Volume 2*, ed. Elizabeth Payne, Martha Swain, and Majorie J. Spruill (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2010); Steven E. Sodergren, “The Great Weight of Responsibility,” *Southern Cultures*, 19, no. 3 (Fall 2013): 26-45.

*Brown v. Board*, however, southerners returned to these white supremacist symbols in droves.

With the Centennial approaching, many neo-confederate organizations experienced a resurgence. The Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV), for instance, struggled to keep an active membership until the *Brown* decision. National numbers had doubled by 1962, and the Jackson, MS headquarters group swelled to 332 members. In 1953, the local chapter could only claim ninety-three members. The man responsible for this intense jump in numbers was a Mississippi native and member of MCWBS: William D. McCain. With the Civil War Centennial looming and Civil Rights threatening their place in the social hierarchy, many southern men felt that liberal radicals were sweeping in to destroy the glorious heritage their ancestors left them. In response, many white men sought new ways to signal loyalty to their “heritage.”<sup>83</sup> The Confederate Grays proved to be one such opportunity.

The origins of the “Centennial Military Force in Memoriam” are unclear, but the idea to organize a memorial army composed of local units predated the MCWBS’s first meeting. The *Jackson Daily News* issued its support of such a venture as early as April 1959 through an editorial in which the author credited a local advertising firm with suggesting matching uniforms. The original plan called for mobilizing units throughout the south, not just within the state. A follow up piece on the proposal was titled “Confederacy May March Again” and contained enthusiastic interviews from several citizens, all white men in leadership positions in various neo-confederate groups

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<sup>83</sup> Alyssa Warrick, “Mississippi’s Greatest Hour,” 105-106.

throughout Mississippi.<sup>84</sup> There was some opposition, mostly from outside the state, such as in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, whose editors objected to the costliness of outfitting and organizing so many men. In Mississippi, the plans quickly moved forward. Barnett sold the Centennial to the state's business interests as a tourist attraction and thousands of men in Confederate uniform was the sort of spectacle that attracted national attention.<sup>85</sup>

Governor Barnett and the MCWBS formulated the Confederate Grays to create an air of responsibility within men for Mississippi's white power structure. Groups had to request to organize units and Barnett commissioned all participants as colonels. In September 1960, the MCWBS sent forms to civic and fraternal organizations throughout the state as well as to the local centennial commemoration committees.<sup>86</sup> Local leadership enthusiastically responded to the Commission's request that they encourage participation. Mayor Thompson of Jackson answered this call by holding a meeting with 88 prominent businessmen and lawyers. Fifteen groups promised to form units of Mississippi Greys.<sup>87</sup>

By bringing together groups and communities from different class backgrounds, the MCWBS formed a unification experience. The original pamphlet on the Centennial states that "one of the primary and specific aims" was to acquire representatives from every Mississippi community.<sup>88</sup> This aim reached across class in order to include white citizens who would ordinarily be left out of local commemoration groups due to a lack of

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<sup>84</sup> *Jackson Daily News*, "Daily News' Suggestion: Confederacy May March Again; Idea Taking Hold," (Jackson, MS: April 11, 1959), MDAH, SF/Civil War Centennial Secession Day MS.

<sup>85</sup> *Jackson Daily News*, "Dramatic Salute to Wearers of the Gray; An Idea In Action," (Jackson, MS: March 29, 1961), MDAH, SF/Civil War Centennial Secession Day MS; Reonas, "Served Up On a Silver Platter," 146-147.

<sup>86</sup> MCWBS, "Meeting of September 14, 1960," Minutes, 1.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, "Meeting of November 9, 1960," 2.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, "The Mississippi Grays," 12.



educational or professional performance.<sup>89</sup> The group also effectively created an area of investment in white supremacy for not only the younger generations but also for adults that had not joined neo-confederate organizations. Local units made the Lost Cause's importance especially evident through their names, which ranged from traditional town names to the names of actual Civil War Units. Clarksdale had the "Delta Devils," Biloxi the "Biloxi Rifles," Itawamba the "Yankee Hunters," and Mississippi State named their unit after Stephen D. Lee, the first college president and a confederate general.<sup>90</sup>

In order to appear as united as possible, the MCWBS required all Mississippi Greys to purchase \$21.50 confederate uniforms that they designed and manufactured. They hoped men would wear the uniform at all formal occasions relating to the Centennial.<sup>91</sup> Newspapers like the *Clarion-Ledger* described the uniforms as "replicas of the genuine articles," with caps, stars, and colored tabs on the collars to indicate different branches of service.<sup>92</sup> Confederate uniforms, like other symbols entrenched in southern "heritage," popped up in Mississippi years before the Centennial, around the time of the first Dixiecrat Convention in 1948. That year, the University of Mississippi's home economics department sewed and painted the school's enormous Confederate flag and their ROTC started wearing Confederate Uniforms to commemorate the University's Confederate dead. The college's unit of Confederate Grays named their group the

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<sup>89</sup> Warrick, "Mississippi's Greatest Hour," 101-102.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 102; MCWBS, "Report of the Mississippi Commission on the War Between the States," (Jackson: MCWBS, 1962), 11-12. MDAH (973.76/M69r/1962).

<sup>91</sup> "Meeting of July 25, 1960," Minutes, 3-4; Robert Cook, "(Un)Furl That Banner: The Response of White Southerners to the Civil War Centennial of 1961-1965," 900.

<sup>92</sup> Jerry DeLaughter, "Requiem for a War: State's Proud Past to Be Relived," *Clarion-Ledger* (Jackson, MS: March 26, 1961), MDAH, SF/Civil War Centennial Secession Day MS.

University Grays to commemorate the 1861 student body, the entirety of which enrolled in a single unit.<sup>93</sup>

The MCWBS prioritized reaching new audiences, including children. This was another tactic borrowed from the Lost Cause playbook; neo-confederate groups like the United Daughters of the Confederacy had, for decades, reached children through public schools.<sup>94</sup> Approximately forty schools from around the state, both colleges and high schools, participated in the parade on Secession Day. School children could be excused from school to attend the ceremonies with a note from their parents, and many schools simply suspended classes for the day.<sup>95</sup> Through including schools in the day's proceedings, the MCWBS created a sense of unity and future responsibility to all participants.

When March 28 finally arrived, onlookers flooded into Jackson. Sidewalks overflowed with people and soon even the windows and rooftops filled with eager observers. The MCWBS's final count of Confederate Gray units was 87, with around 3,200 men in uniform. Some newspaper reports put the total number at 5,000 for Secession Day. That number might not be too far from the truth; MCWBS counted the total registered Grays. That number did not take into account marching bands dressed in Confederate uniform or other groups who did not officially register as Grays and wore their own uniforms. Officially, the Confederate Grays marched to commemorate the long march of ancestors "to the battlefields of the Civil War." If that was the idea, only one

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<sup>93</sup> John M. Coski, *The Confederate Battle Flag: America's Most Embattled Emblem* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 107; Warrick, "'Mississippi's Greatest Hour,'" 102.

<sup>94</sup> For Mississippi, specifically, see: Karen Cox, "Mississippi's United Daughters of the Confederacy," 155–73.

<sup>95</sup> Jerry DeLaughter, "Parade Recalls Historic March of Forefathers," *Starkville Daily News*, Starkville, MS: March 29, 1961. Scrapbooks, 1960-1961, Series 318, Box 18075, Records of the MCWBS, MDAH; *Winston County Journal*, "Students Attend Centennial," (Louisville, MS: April 6, 1961), *ibid.*

group successfully acted like men walking to their deaths. The Burt Rifles from Decatur dressed as wounded, depressed soldiers. Upon arriving at the Old Capitol, they turned back, walking away instead of joining the reenactment of Secession. The other 86 units enthusiastically embraced an aggressive, fantastical version of war. Groups brought their own props, including bayonets, horses, and paddy wagons. Several units would stop every so often to fire their cannons or attempt a “Johnny Reb.” Even Mayor Thompson left his carriage at one point to perform the dance step along the parade line.<sup>96</sup> While everyone may have appeared jubilant, this ceremony was a collective deep breath before plunging into another battle against integration.

Confederate Gray units imbibed lessons of white, masculine aggression, taking on their heritage in ways they never had before. Alyssa Warrick has suggested that aggression and resourcefulness were significant by-products of participation in these units, especially those with mixed generations. Starkville had over 150 Colonels, including “sergeants” made up of young teenagers that had their own “special uniforms of grey pants, red shirts, and red caps.” Confederate Gray units would later stage mock battles against each other and practice “Rebel Yells,” attempting to absorb a sense of pride in a heritage ostensibly under attack. The next year, when James Meredith would attempt to integrate the University of Mississippi men in Confederate uniforms would

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<sup>96</sup> Florence Sillers Ogden, “Dis An’ Dat: Spring, Earth Resurrection Make Obeisance to Easter,” *Clarion-Ledger* April 2, 1961, 4. Accessed December 11, 2016: [https://www.newspapers.com/clip/7817629/florence\\_ogdens\\_colorful\\_description/](https://www.newspapers.com/clip/7817629/florence_ogdens_colorful_description/); MCWBS, “Report of the Mississippi Commission on the War Between the States,” (Jackson: MCWBS, 1962), 10; *Franklin Advocate*, “History Repeats It’s Self – The Secession a Hundred Years Ago, Here, We Saw It March 28, 1961,” Meadville, MS: April 13, 1961, Scrapbooks, 1960-1961, Series 318, Box 735, Records of the MCWBS, MDAH; *Hattiesburg American*, “War Commemoration Officially Begins,” Hattiesburg, MS: March 29, 1961, Scrapbooks, 1960-1961, Series 318, Box 18075, Records of the MCWBS, MDAH; *Starkville Daily News*, “South Rises Again: Starkville Units, MSU Band Play Major Roles,” Starkville, MS. Scrapbooks, 1960-1961, *ibid.*; *Daily Corinthian*, “Corinth High’s Mississippi Grays March in Secession Ceremonies,” Corinth, MS: April 10, 1961, Scrapbooks, 1960-1961, Series 318, Box 735, Records of the MCWBS, MDAH.

come to the capital to rally around Barnett's decision to block integration. These "confederates" were most likely Confederate Grays, to have a complete uniform on hand at such short notice.<sup>97</sup>

While overt masculinity dominated Secession Day, women also arrived on the scene with their own gendered memories of the past. Women in Starkville also participated in the Centennial through a group they called the "Colonels' Ladies." They made a multi-colored balloon out of silk skirts for their husbands to pull behind them in the parade, as they walked on nearby.<sup>98</sup> Women without hoopskirts and silk dresses special ordered them for the occasion, though they would pull them out again before the Centennial was over. Florence Sillers Ogden remarked on how every Gray suddenly had "the courteous manner of the Old South." Men in Confederate uniforms went out of their way to help women in and out of cars, theatrically bowing to "ladies" as they went. As Ogden put it, when she recounted her wonderful experience with all the "courteous" Grays, "Maybe the hoopskirts helped... But it was wonderful!"<sup>99</sup> Men and women were thrilled to embrace these roles; the idea of finally living out a moonlight and magnolias life, dressed in attire of the time, was a fantasy many Mississippians had not played out. None of them had done so on this scale.

Governor Ross Barnett strode on to the stage shortly after one p.m. The Mississippi Commission's careful consideration of the play extended to its set. They discussed

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<sup>97</sup> Warrick, "'Mississippi's Greatest Hour,'" 102; DeLaughter, "Requiem for a War: State's Proud Past to Be Relived"; Robert Cook, "(Un)Furl That Banner: The Response of White Southerners to the Civil War Centennial of 1961-1965," 900.

<sup>98</sup> "Mississippi Greys' Balloon Ready," publication unclear, Scrapbooks, 1960-1961, Series 318, Box 18075, Records of the Mississippi Commission on the War Between the States, MDAH.

<sup>99</sup> Florence Sillers Ogden, "Dis An' Dat: Spring, Earth Resurrection Make Obeisance to Easter," *Clarion-Ledger* April 2, 1961; *ibid*, "Dis An' Dat: Civil War Centennial Opens With Friendly Ceremonies," *Clarion-Ledger*: January 15, 1961, D11. Accessed March 1, 2017: [https://www.newspapers.com/clip/9267827/florence\\_ogdens\\_reaction\\_to\\_the\\_old/](https://www.newspapers.com/clip/9267827/florence_ogdens_reaction_to_the_old/).

building the stage on two levels to enable as many people as possible to see the performance and they installed a special sound system capable of projecting the actors' voices for at least two blocks. Over one hundred men made up the cast: a mix of Millsaps and Mississippi College students filled the speaking roles, with members of the Mississippi State Highway Department making up the remaining hundred actors. MCWBS ensured that each of Mississippi's 82 counties had a man representing them on stage.<sup>100</sup> Barnett gave a short address to the crowd, still dressed as a Confederate general, in which he staked a white collective memory to downtown Jackson. He reminded them that they stood at a place of "beginnings" for the "forebears" of the state. He praised the Secession delegate's decision, arguing they "chose the way of hardship because it was the way of honor."<sup>101</sup>

Dr. Louis Dollarhide, professor of English and chair of humanities at Mississippi College, was a strange addition to the anti-integrationist planners. Raised in Kosciusko, MS, he attended Mississippi College as an undergraduate. Graduating in 1942, he went on to earn a masters degree from Harvard and a Ph.D. from the University of North Carolina before returning to his alma mater to teach. He had a regular column for *The Clarion-Ledger* called "Of Art and Artists" with titles like "Step In Divorcing Invention [From] Illusion," and "A Promising Poet; A European Exhibit." Of all the Commission members, he and Charlotte Capers had the most in common.<sup>102</sup> His involvement in the

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<sup>100</sup> MCWBS, "Meeting of November 9, 1960," Minutes, 4; Frank Hains, "On Stage: Now Don't Let This Get Around But There're Damyankees In 'Outset,'" *Clarion-Ledger*, March 26, 1961.

<sup>101</sup> Newspaper Clipping, "State Secession Re-Enacted In Ceremony At Old Capitol," publication unclear, (1961?). in Scrapbook, Mississippi Commission on the War Between the States, Box 18075, Series 318, MDAH, Jackson, MS.

<sup>102</sup> At least one other historian, Warrick, discusses Dollarhide's role in the Centennial. She calls him a staunch segregationist, looping him in with the Centennial's male constructors: Ross Barnett, Sidney T. Roebuck, and the then president of the SCV, William D. McCain. Outside of his work on *The Outset* and

Centennial is far more revealing of white moderate's active participation in the upkeep of a Lost Cause collective memory than it is of his own segregationist attitude.

When he set out to research the Secession Convention for *The Outset*, Dollarhide quickly hit a wall. At the MDAH, the only source he found from the Convention itself was the official journal; a bare bones document, it contains only a few speeches and the motions characteristic of any formal legislative convention. To Dollarhide's frustration, the journal dived off at important moments when a delegate moved to enter a "secret session." The English professor turned to other sources, like biographies of delegates, to build emotion into the structure the journal provided. In an interview with the *Clarion-Ledger*, Dollarhide described *The Outset* as "a fabrication woven into such facts as we have."<sup>103</sup> The play, then, was more fiction than fact. Despite Dollarhide's attempt to make that clear, other journalists took liberties with the professor's modest description of his work. One *Clarion-Ledger* piece informed readers that the audience on Secession Day would "see history recreated before their eyes as it might have been at the outset!"<sup>104</sup> Presenting historical pageantry as fact helped to justify contemporary racism, as it suggested that segregation and white supremacy was the natural result of slavery and the

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one other play for the centennial, *The Gray Halloo*, there is little evidence that he had much of a leadership role in the commemorations. Though he taught at a segregated institution, there is little to suggest that he was involved in White Citizen's Council operations or any political circles. This does not make a man less of segregationist, of course, but it is important to note that Dollarhide was not known for being anything more than an intellectual white moderate. See: Alyssa D. Warrick, "'Mississippi's Greatest Hour': The Mississippi Civil War Centennial and Southern Resistance," *Southern Cultures* Fall 2013, 96-97, 100-101; Jerry DeLaughter, "Jackson's Top Talent Will Take Part in Secession Drama," *Clarion-Ledger*, March 24, 1961; "Humanities Prof to Speak Sunday at 1st Unitarian," *Clarion-Ledger*, January 27, 1962; Dollarhide, "Of Art & Artists: Step In Divorcing Invention Illusion," *Clarion-Ledger*, October 21, 1962; Dollarhide, "Of Art & Artists: A Promising Poet; A European Exhibit," *Clarion-Ledger*, November 5, 1961.

<sup>103</sup> Jerry DeLaughter, "Jackson's Top Talent Will Take Part in Secession Drama," *Clarion-Ledger*, March 24, 1961; For more on the journal and the actual Mississippi State Secession Convention, see: Timothy B. Smith, *The Mississippi Secession Convention: Delegates and Deliberations in Politics and War, 1861-1865* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014), xiii-xiv.

<sup>104</sup> "Tuesday's Stage Show: Writing 'The Outset' Was Research Chore," *Clarion-Ledger*, March 26, 1961.

Civil War. This narrative obscured and distanced the audience from its recent past, in which their grandparents' generation created the legal structures to support Jim Crow.

In describing the play, one reporter stated "that such a program... made the students realize a little of what it means to be a Mississippian and a Southerner."<sup>105</sup> "A little" might be an understatement. In his fictional accounts of the Convention's "secret sessions," Dollarhide provided a playbook of white supremacist excuses for secession. *The Outset* focuses on the struggle between delegates for and against leaving the Union, and Dollarhide's writing seems to favor the anti-secession faction. They acted as a voice of reason, where the pro-secession group seemed easily agitated. Delegates debated issues such as voter rights and unequal distribution of slaves in Mississippi.<sup>106</sup>

Dollarhide's inclusion of slavery, however, did not confront racist doctrine; instead, it served to reinforce Lost Cause mythology emphasizing loyalty and honor. For instance, a delegate from Warren County argued that a majority of Mississippians were against secession and accused the pro-secession faction of privileging slavery's preservation above the well being of their fellow citizens, despite that only three of them stood to lose millions of dollars if slavery was abolished. Another delegate concurred, adding that secession went "deeper than the mere question of slave or free;" he felt that leaving the Union would destroy the entire South.<sup>107</sup> Through these two men, Dollarhide emphasized

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<sup>105</sup> *Winston County Journal*, "Students Attend Centennial," Louisville, MS, April 6, 1961. Scrapbooks, 1960-1961, Series 318, Box 735, Records of the Mississippi Commission on the War Between the States (MCWBS), MDAH.

<sup>106</sup> Louis Dollarhide, "The Outset: a One-Act Play Depicting the Secession Convention of Mississippi," MDAH, Call Number OS/812.5/D69o.

<sup>107</sup> Dollarhide, "The Outset."

a central tenant of southern mythology: that loyalty, not slavery, was the motivation for most people who supported the Confederacy.<sup>108</sup>

Despite anti-secessionist concerns, the Convention moved to secede. The delegates who had, just moments before, begged their colleagues to see reason, gave a pledge of undying loyalty to their homeland as it left the Union. The play's first act ended with a man bursting into the convention gripping a blue flag a local woman sewed for the "young republic."<sup>109</sup> Dollarhide's political moderation did not prevent him from infusing this first act with symbols of honor and decorum, the very elements segregationists would argue Civil Rights leaders lacked – even as white police attacked JSU students with dogs and tear gas. The audience might have been thinking about the previous days' events as they listened to the familiar rhetoric. During a particularly fierce interaction, a delegate yelled out "anyone not for secession is against it!" In front of the Old Capitol building, the crowd roared in approval.<sup>110</sup>

Ceremonies and reenactments are common tools for passing on a sense of the past and present, but they can also direct participants towards future action. Drawing a direct line between a "War of Northern Aggression" in 1861 and a federal "invasion" in 1961 was a common theme in southern Centennial commemorations and an important one, strategically speaking. First, it connected southern audiences' current situation to that of idolized ancestors. This served to reemphasize any lessons or morals passed on through traditional rituals. Second, by identifying southerners as victims of the Civil War, they silence black emancipation narratives that equate northern "intrusion" with freedom.

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<sup>108</sup> Alan T. Nolan, "The Anatomy of the Myth," 26-28.

<sup>109</sup> Dollarhide, "The Outset."

<sup>110</sup> *The Tennessean*, "Parade Halted by Mississippi: Negroes' Protest Broken by Police, Using Dogs, Clubs, Tear Gas," Nashville, TN: March 29, 1961. Accessed December 11, 2016: <https://www.newspapers.com/clip/7818853/>.



Delegitimizing black voices was an important step in protecting segregation. Lastly, this tactic can be used to tie a group's past as well as its present and future to a single location.<sup>111</sup> In tying those strings together, leaders could focus learned moral lessons like "loyalty" into political and cultural power. Tying white historical memory to the present was a key part of protecting white supremacy.

Tying the Tougaloo Nine's students to an act of "Northern aggression" happened quickly. The March 27 evening edition of the *Jackson Daily News* had two large photos of the students' protest on it, with descriptions that leave little doubt about the authors' viewpoint. One shows a group of African-American students rising as police arrive to escort them out, with a caption reading "Nine students... are shown as they invaded the main branch of the Jackson Municipal Library." Wednesday, in his regular column in the *Clarion-Ledger*, Charles M. Hills described the Tougaloo Students' demonstration Monday as a "well-coached" move, with press called in before "to get plenty of out-of-state coverage" as they "invaded the white library."<sup>112</sup> Describing the student's actions in aggressive military terms labels the students as outsiders but also demonstrates, again, the importance of place in white supremacy. The white library in urban Jackson was white territory.

The props and actors in the play followed through on the parade's symbolic status. The Old Capitol itself served as a prop during the reenactment as a place of historical importance for the state. A Millsaps student played the part of Jefferson

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<sup>111</sup> W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past*, 6.

<sup>112</sup> Charles M. Hills, "Affairs of State," *Clarion-Ledger*, March 29, 1961, 5. Box 3, Folder 22, T/031: Tougaloo Nine Collection, MDAH.

Davis.<sup>113</sup> Secession and Jefferson Davis loomed large in Mississippian's heritage. Indeed, "the heroic dead" as symbols, icons, or faceless characters, are considered to be necessary elements in creating a "collective heritage."<sup>114</sup> Whether they recognized the characters of secession or not, everyone present would know Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederacy.

Dollarhide brought Davis into *The Outset* through the farewell address he gave to the Mississippi legislature in 1884, in the last years of his life. In the speech, Davis called for southerners to vow loyalty to the United States through sincere patriotism, adding that revenge was "unmanly."<sup>115</sup> Despite that advice, Davis went on to urge his audience to never forget the "deep depression inflicted upon" their ancestors before assuring them that if he could go back to 1861, knowing all the costs, he would make the same decision.<sup>116</sup> The speech insinuated that southern honor was the singular most patriotic and American characteristic. Despite all evidence to the contrary, many Mississippians echoed this sentiment, arguing that their morality was on higher ground than Northern "outsiders." Indeed, even the MCWBS report from 1962 included a short note praising the state's "heritage" which they believed "every American would like to share with us."<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> DeLaughter, "Requiem for a War: State's Proud Past to Be Relived."

<sup>114</sup> Beginning in 1908, the United Daughters of the Confederacy fought for the Old Capitol to be preserved. They argued that the site of Davis's last speech was worthy of protection. see, Karen L. Cox, "Mississippi's United Daughters of the Confederacy," 164; For an example of Davis's speech used in a plea for the Old Capitol, see: Augusta Evans-Inge, "President Davis's Last Public Address," *Confederate Veteran* 20, no. 5, (May 1912), 215; For examples and analysis of women's organizations across the south commemorating Davis as a "hero" see: Karen L. Cox, *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 59, 101; Wilson, *Baptized in Blood*, 57.

<sup>115</sup> Dollarhide, "The Outset."

<sup>116</sup> Louis Dollarhide, "The Outset," MDAH, 20-21.

<sup>117</sup> MCWBS, "Report of the Mississippi Commission on the War Between the States," 26.

At least one African-American newspaper in Norfolk, Virginia, had a response for the drama, describing *The Outset* as “a flood of Confederate oratory extolling the myth of states rights” during a day filled with “disloyalty to the United States Government and to the principles upon which it was founded.”<sup>118</sup> Though many white Mississippians embraced Secession Day, pockets of dissent did exist. Tylertown’s daily paper reprinted an editorial urging the South to put away the “chauvinistic Confederate Blanket” it had hidden under for a century so they could finally progress into modernity. In a less insightful critique, a reporter from Petal, Mississippi, wondered if spending \$200,000 on a Centennial was wise in a state desperate for economic improvement. These were, however, oddities. Many local papers, like the *Monitor Herald* of Calhoun City, printed articles extolling the Centennial as a chance for Southerners to explain to outsiders how defeat “was a victory in itself in regard to love of homeland and pride of our forefathers and heritage.”<sup>119</sup> African-Americans felt differently. At an NAACP rally that night, a reporter asked Chaplain Mangram for his thoughts on Secession Day. He replied “I’m so glad the ‘Damn Yankees’ won, I don’t know what to do.”<sup>120</sup>

### **Aftermath**

Authorities released the Tougaloo Nine after Secession Day ended on March 28 and scheduled their trial for the very next day. Medgar Evers and others who came to offer their support had to wait across the street after police told them the courtroom was too full to accommodate them. When some of the students arrived, a cheer went up from the

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<sup>118</sup> *New Journal and Guide*, “Centennial Controversies,” Norfolk, VA: April 1, 1961, B12. ProQuest Historical Newspapers (568627069).

<sup>119</sup> P.D., “East Side,” *Petal Paper*, Petal, MS: April 20, 1961, Scrapbooks, 1960-1961, Series 318, Box 735, Records of the MCWBS, MDAH; *Tylertown Times*, “Time to put away our great alibi,” Tylertown, MS: April 20, 1961, *ibid.*; *Monitor Herald* “No Title,” Calhoun City, MS: April 6, 1961, *ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> Cliff Sessions, “Jailed Students Touch Off Jackson Outburst,” *Delta-Democrat Times* (Greenville, MS) March 29, 1961.

crowd. Police attacked the unarmed crowd in retaliation, raining nightsticks and loosening dogs onto roughly one hundred men, women, and children. A picture of Reverend S. Leon Whitney attempting to flee as a dog latched its jaws onto his arm spread to newspapers across the world.<sup>121</sup>

In the weeks following the Nine's activism, the national NAACP office would launch its program to fight "Mississippism." In the first "Operation Mississippi" fundraising leaflet, Wilkins assured readers that Mississippi's leadership was dedicated to segregation, referring to Governor Barnett's Secession Day speech to prove his point: "He has declared ... that the Confederacy is 'an undying cause.'"<sup>122</sup> This was the official declaration of war that Barnett and other segregationist leaders had been preparing for. In the coming years, clashes between the two Mississippi's would only intensify.

In June 1963 Medgar Evers was assassinated in his driveway, with his wife and children waiting inside the house for him. Evers's funeral would spark one of the most violent clashes yet. His peers in the Civil Rights movement planned to steer his casket past the Mississippi state capital. Their choice was rooted in the same themes of defiance and resistance that Dorie Ann Ladner and her JSU colleagues marched for that day. They wanted to lay claim, in the most visceral way possible, to their right as citizens to hold elected officials responsible. Just like in 1961, Ladner led the way in 1963. She was arrested for defying police orders, determined to take Evers past the capital building. Marching past the capital with Medgar Evers body would, to Ladner, make Mississippi leaders confront their part in Evers' murder. The police that stopped her understood the

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<sup>121</sup> Thomas Bynum, *NAACP Youth and the Fight for Black Freedom, 1936–1965* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2013) 133-135.

<sup>122</sup> Roy Wilkins, "NAACP Leaflet," April 1961, 3.

power of place and space, too. They comprehended, at some level, that white supremacy's ability to claim democratic ideals was at stake when they refused to allow black men and women to bear their grief across the building's front lawn. In the aftermath of the arrests, protesters began throwing bricks and bottles at police officers before a Justice Department representative stepped between the two groups.<sup>123</sup>

The creation of a mythical, white memory of the Civil War was a key weapon of white supremacy. To acknowledge a resistant black narrative would destroy its ability to unite whites under the moral imperative of their forefathers. And that's exactly what the Tougaloo Nine succeeded in doing. It was not an immediate death, by any means. To this day, politicians still call upon a shared Confederate "heritage" to garner political capital. But its current, diminished form is nothing compared to Secession Day. That was the last time the state and so many of its people joined together to bask in a narrative that, in essence, erased the suffering their ancestors inflicted on black southerners for centuries - and that they, in turn, continued. The Centennial would go on to have many more events, of course, but attendance did not again reach that of Secession Day.

Ross Barnett's brand of white supremacy is most similar to stage lighting. In the rafters, a crewmember might filter white lighting with colored glass, to enhance a scene's emotional affect or to indicate the time of day. Radical white supremacists used only white light. While there are many shades of white lighting, it reflects only white light, contrasting the dark. Barnett chose this lighting, but he had stared at the scene for so long that he could no longer see anything but the white figures. Everything else was dark. In stage lighting, the color white does not exist; at least, not in any pure sense of the word.

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<sup>123</sup> Emilye Crosby, "An Interview with Dorie Ann Ladner," 81, 100-101.

White lighting is traditionally used to represent different temperatures, but it can also be adjusted to create an illusion of specific colors in the object. In other words, when a carefully adjusted light is focused on a set, it will reflect the chosen color. When blue light is shed on a red object, it looks purple. Everyone there knew it was blue - but, it was theater. The trick to enjoying it is to immerse oneself in the illusion.<sup>124</sup>

The white supremacist power structure used a special kind of lighting in their performance of whiteness. It created the illusion of peace and acquiescence, though everyone knew it was a performance. White supremacists controlled the performance through a reign of terror, enacted for generations. African-Americans in the South knew their roles through these lessons, but their part was not always scripted. Improvisation does not capture the method black southerners used to survive; in order to provide the correct response on a dime, black southerners learned every role white southerners could play. They knew the drunk, rich man and the poor white woman as well as they knew the young white men driving slowly through their neighborhoods. They understood the price of not learning and were intimate with moments when such knowledge failed to protect them. Throughout the Civil Rights movement, African-Americans used this knowledge as a weapon. It would be segregation's downfall. The Tougaloo Nine grabbed at the tools of performance to shed their own light on the situation: while no one had any misconceptions when it came to the South's racism, it took experts to reveal how the white south would react to such an action. They knew that surface much better than the white south knew them.

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<sup>124</sup> Mauricio R. Rinaldi, "Concept of White Light in Stage Lighting," (paper presented at the 9th Congress of the International Colour Association, Rochester, New York, June 24-29, 2001), 344.

As with other elements of Southern life, the spirit behind Secession Day remained while the rhetoric and tactics it used fell out of polite society. Thanks to big civil rights demonstrations like the March on Washington, voices arose from around the globe to condemn segregation. But it is thanks to smaller, local demonstrations like JSU's march that local voices began to rebuke the loud, virulent white supremacy of Ross Barnett in greater and greater numbers. But with the death of public celebrations like Secession Day, white supremacy took on a subtle, dignified approach. In the same way that upholding peaceful protest as morally superior to the Black power movement made it easier for whites to label Black Panthers as "terrorists," making all segregationists appear like Barnett made it easier for white moderates to slink a new white supremacy into politics.<sup>125</sup> As activists work to untangle this version of white supremacy, its benefactors are using the same methods to defend itself.

On March 28, 1961, white Mississippians gathered in numbers never seen before for what they believed to be their greatest claim on the public sphere yet. Instead, nine black college students walked into a library and overshadowed the three thousand men in Confederate uniforms. Secession Day was intended to be so large and so loud it would render any resistance silent. When analyzed between the two protests, however, it becomes clear the Centennial did anything but silence such resistance. It amplified it.

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<sup>125</sup> Jacquelyn Dowd Hall discusses the political nature of the popular narrative of Civil Rights in her article "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *The Journal of American History* Vol. 91, No. 4 (March 2005): 1233-1263; For a discussion of moderates' role in segregation and the credibility white moderates gained from radical whites, see John W. Cell, "A Note on Southern Moderates and Segregation," in *The Highest Stage of White Supremacy: The Origins of Segregation in South Africa and the American South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 171-191.

## Biography

Anna Morgan Leonards was born in Jackson, Mississippi. She received a Baccalaureate of Arts in history from Millsaps College in 2015 and is currently a graduate student at Tulane University.