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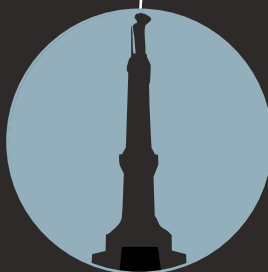
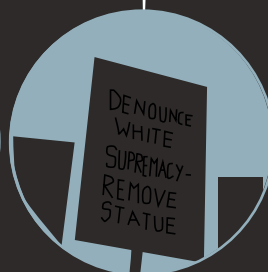
The Daily Mississippian

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The Ole Miss Pendulum

Something feels different on campus. Our chancellor resigned, protesters marched, basketball players knelt, and students led an initiative to relocate the Confederate monument. It all came after our journalism school's name changed. The momentum has been building.

Devna Bose

dmmanaging@gmail.com

It is an undeniable fact of the universe and all of the forces and principles that stitch it together that Newton's cradle would keep passing energy back and forth, oscillating until the end of the time, if it weren't for external forces acting upon the steel balls, friction slowing its swaying.

It's just its nature.

Our campus is no different — in the midst of its daily seas, the flagship university's tides are forever cresting toward opposite extremes, and this year, its waves have rolled toward change — deeply real, tangible, student-led change.

That's not to say this change hasn't been bubbling under the surface for years — it has, but the waves have crested this year, the energy has crescendoed, and it came after a notoriously offensive Facebook post from September that received national attention.

Following former journalism school namesake Ed Meek's post in which he singled out two university students for their existence as black women, the university hosted a forum on Sept. 20, 2018, one day after Meek's post was published.

In the post, Meek called for community leaders to "protect the values that we hold dear that have made Oxford and Ole Miss known nationally," and attached photos of Mahoghany Jordan and Ki'Yona Crawford in bar attire on the Square.

The following night, Nutt Auditorium buzzed with palpable energy as university community members and students definitively spoke out in support of the women and in support of change on campus.

The packed room was at times so quiet that the walls echoed with the silence and gravity of the unsaid words and at times so loud with affirmations and murmurs of the audience that whoever had the microphone could not be heard.

"I didn't read that Ole Miss has a crime problem," sophomore Seyna Clark said at the forum, referring to the language of Meek's post. "I read that Ole Miss has a black problem."

Since that night, conversations have shifted and gained a sort of urgency that former Daily Mississippian and Ole Miss Yearbook editor-in-chief Alex McDaniel, a 2010 graduate, said she has never seen before on the Ole Miss campus.

SEE **PENDULUM** PAGE 4

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EDITORIAL

IS THIS A TURNING POINT?

“In the months since the letters of Meek’s name were pried off the Grove-facing wall of Farley, the university community has participated in a similarly rapid chain of events.”

Megan Swartzfager
 thedmopinion@gmail.com



ILLUSTRATION: MADISON MAYFIELD

Just over six months ago, Ed Meek made a racist, sexist Facebook post that implied a relationship between the images of two young black women, both Ole Miss students, and a threat to “the values we hold dear that have made Oxford and Ole Miss known nationally.” Hours later, then-Chancellor Jeffrey Vitter condemned the “unjustified racial overtone” of the post. Three days later, amidst public outcry that included forums for students in the School of Journalism and New Media, Meek asked that his name be removed from the school. The decision was approved by the state college board, and the name was removed from the building in December.

The proceedings from the time of the post to the time of tangible action advanced with a speed that far outpaced what then seemed to

be the usual plod of social progress at the University of Mississippi.

Consider the fact that our university needed three other Mississippi universities to remove the state flag from their campuses before our administration followed suit in 2015. Consider that the 2014 Action Plan, which urged no greater change in our university’s veneration of Civil War and Jim Crow-era white supremacists than to “offer more history, putting the past into context,” took four years to produce a milquetoast set of contextualization plaques.

Like the removal of Meek’s name from Farley Hall, these are real, physical changes in the way the university presents its values, and while the changes can feel underwhelming, their tangibility is something to be proud of. However, it is undeniable that, compared

to the speed with which the university handled the Meek controversy, those changes occurred at a snail’s pace.

In the months since the letters of Meek’s name were pried off the Grove-facing wall of Farley, the university community has participated in a similarly rapid chain of events. This chain began with February’s protests and has already resulted in the university administration notifying the Mississippi Department of Archives and History of its intent to relocate the Confederate monument at the heart of our campus to the “more suitable location” of the campus’s Confederate cemetery.

Before Meek, the common argument against the relocation of the monument or the changing of names of buildings that honor white supremacists like James K. Vardaman, L.Q.C. Lamar,

James Longstreet and James Zachariah George was that these things are part of history and that history can only be harmful when it is hidden from view.

We, as a community, learned from Meek’s Facebook post that there is a difference between acknowledging history and honoring it. We learned that symbolism can be harmful even when it is not maliciously deployed. We learned from a contemporary expression of racism that monuments to racist ideology validate and sustain that ideology, and this newly widespread sentiment is driving a change in rhetoric that corresponds to a shift toward progressive values.

Megan Swartzfager is a junior English major from Shelby.

THE DAILY MISSISSIPPIAN

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The Daily Mississippian welcomes letters to the editor. Letters should be e-mailed to dmletters@olemiss.edu.

Letters should be typed, double-spaced and no longer than 300 words. Letters may be edited for clarity, space or libel. Third-party letters and those bearing pseudonyms, pen names or “name withheld” will not be published. Publication is limited to one letter per individual per calendar month.

Letters should include phone and email contact information so that editors can verify authenticity. Letters from students should include grade classification and major; letters from faculty and staff should include title and the college, school or department where the person is employed.



MISSISSIPPI
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MEMBER NEWSPAPER

COLUMN

THE SUBURB OF OXFORD

How language, race and property values shape our city

Jacob Gambrell
thedmopinion@gmail.com

crime, blackness, latinidad and above all, that I, the speaker, am not part of that community.

Instead of asking why the black neighborhood around our school experienced such different material and social conditions than the neighborhoods we grew up in, my classmates and I accepted it as a given. Even worse, we would turn into racist apologetics, citing black-on-black crime, single motherhood and even rap music to show that black and Latinx cultures were somehow lazy, violent and lacking in self-control.

When confronted with the massive wealth, health and educational disparities between black people and white people, we pointed to what we saw as their problems instead of looking inward at our own complicity in the creation and continuation of those disparities.

Ta-Nehisi Coates’s article, “A Case for Reparations,” shows the ways in which redlining and blockbusting have destroyed black wealth. Racist housing policies have operated to segregate black people in the worst parts of town. In fact, in 2006, black families earning more than \$200,000 were more likely, on average, to be given a subprime loan than white families only making

\$30,000 — even when controlled for credit score.

Whenever black people sought to move into better neighborhoods, they first had to find a realtor who would even show them a home and then a bank that would give them a loan. Those who triumphed against the racist institutions were still viewed as lazy, poor criminals by their new white neighbors. They believed the arrival of the new black family lowered their property values, and because racist institutions determined the property value, it probably did. So they fled to the suburbs to start new gated neighborhoods that were wealthier, whiter and had higher property values. Because property taxes fund school districts, this affected not only the creation of black wealth but also disparities between black and white school districts.

We can see from Ed Meek’s Facebook post from six months ago that he is influenced by the same forces. He posted a picture of two black students, Mahoghany Jordan and Ki’yona Crawford, enjoying their night out on the Square, and he commented that if we allow this to continue “real estate values will plummet as will tax revenue.”

His comment provides an insight into the minds of the upper class in Oxford. As Oxford continues to experience economic growth and attracts new people from all over Mississippi, keeping property values artificially high will help to control the types of people who move here.

It’s not that African-Americans will lower property values, but lowering our property values will allow for a more diverse group of Mississippians to move here. One simply has to visit affordable housing like the Links and Campus Creek or expensive housing like Hooper Hollow to see how property value influences where different people live. The majority of our city represents a suburban gated community for the elite of Mississippi and their children, maintained by its high property values. Meek and other power brokers of Oxford are influenced by the racist fear of Oxford becoming “ghetto,” and until that changes, we will live in a place where students of color are the “other.”

Jacob Gambrell is a senior international studies major from Chattanooga, Tennessee.

I grew up in the suburbs of Chattanooga, Tennessee. My childhood memory is imperfect, but I can only remember one black family out of all three neighborhoods that I grew up in. I attended a private school that was located in the white suburbs when it was founded in the ‘50s. However, by the time I attended, the neighborhood had become a working-class, majority-black neighborhood.

While some students from the local neighborhood attended my school, a large majority of us lived in the white suburbs. We flippantly used words like “ghetto” and “the hood” to describe the area around my school and never really considered the impacts of that language. When I came to the University of Mississippi, I noticed how the phrase “other side of the tracks” in small, rural towns serves the same linguistic purpose that “ghetto” does in larger cities. This language is a way of “othering” members of our community who live in the “bad parts of town.” These words signify poverty, low property values,

COLUMN

HYPERSEXUALIZATION OF BLACK BODIES

Ethel Mwedziwendira
thedmopinion@gmail.com

Black women’s bodies have always been a focal point of conversation among white men who have no right to discuss them. Through a historical lens, commodification of the black body allowed for black female bodies especially to be objectified. Continuing beyond the era of American slavery, white men saw that it was OK to sexually assault black women without consequences. White women’s bodies were considered superior, physically, to black women’s bodies, and that perception hasn’t considerably shifted today.

Then, there is the history of hypersexualization of black women, and it has nothing to do with clothing. It has to do, rather, with curvy body types being deemed inappropriate regardless of what black women wear.

Of all things scrutinized about Ed Meek’s comments — the racial tone and property values decreasing — a portion rarely mentioned is the most vile in the blunder. The night Meek hit send on that post, he didn’t take into account what the aftermath of his unwanted and unwarranted comment would be like for Mahoghany Jordan and Ki’yona Crawford — the toll it would take on their mental health, the type of discourse it would provoke or, most importantly, the backlash the two women would receive, instead of Meek.

In the comment section of the post, Jordan and Crawford were slut-shamed and called “whores,” “skimpy,” “indecent,” and representing a “decline of humanity.”

Though black women like myself have complete control over our black bodies, we are hypersexualized to the point that we have to re-

work the way we dress, how much skin we show, when we choose to go out — all to avoid the male gaze. It plays a major factor in how we are treated — we are unjustly policed, sexualized and objectified for our curves. These two women should not have been blamed for what they wore that night. The world feels entitled to demean black women’s bodies, and this fact carries more weight when you aren’t a size 0. That was proven more than 200 years ago when Sarah Baartman, also known as the “Hottentot Venus,” was visited, undressed and coerced to display herself to satisfy the needs of Europeans’ curiosities. The South African woman was objectified.

There is also the double standard of hypersexualization, and history is littered with it. Black women aren’t given the same freedom to express themselves as

other groups of women are. This falls in the circle of anti-blackness, sexism and racism, and we see this in the fashion industry, in the entertainment industry and in our daily lives.

America has never treated black women equally in its history. That mistreatment showed in the resentment that Meek expressed toward Jordan and Crawford that day and the hate-spewing comments from his followers who over-sexualized and invalidated them.

Like Malcolm X said, “The most disrespected person in America is the black woman. The most unprotected person in America is the black woman. The most neglected person in America is the black woman.”

Ethel Mwedziwendira is a senior journalism and political science major from McKinney, Texas.

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His name was removed, but with Hotty Toddy and the Center for Graphene Research and Innovation, his connections still remain.

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Ed Meek hasn’t spoken publicly since a 145-word Facebook post tarnished his life’s work. In an attempt to put the pieces together, his friends and colleagues speak out.

PENDULUM

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“Especially as somebody who was directly involved with a lot of similar movements years ago that were just in their beginnings, it’s amazing to see the fruition of that 10 years later,” she said. “I think this year has been the culmination.”

Katrina Caldwell, who joined university administration in 2017 as the first vice chancellor for diversity and community engagement, thinks it’s too early to draw conclusions from past events.

“I’m sure as we look back next year and in future years, we are able to reflect on the experiences of this year because it could have been things that happened five years ago that planted the seed,” she said.

McDaniel thinks we’re witnessing those seeds sprout this year. She said that national momentum has added to the newfound sense of urgency on campus, in a time where “there is a lot of division in this country.”

“If the Ed Meek thing had happened 10 years ago, I don’t think he would have been out. I really don’t,” she said. “I could be wrong, and that’s not me saying (former chancellor) Dan Jones wouldn’t have done anything about it. I just think it wouldn’t have happened the way it happened.”

When asked, Jones declined to comment on contemporary campus issues.

McDaniel said the university’s push to relocate the Confederate statue on the Circle to the Con-

federate cemetery on campus was something she thought she was never going to see in her lifetime.

“It seems like students and faculty and a strong alumni base are coming together to push the university forward in a way that isn’t just symbolic, because it’s not just about the statue and it’s not about a name on a building,” she said.

Allen Coon, a 2018 UM Hall of Fame inductee, propelled social change during his time on campus as well and said that he sees more urgency behind the movement to relocate the statue this year.

“For some reason it seemed like (the movement) had a lot more strength, like there was a lot more possibility for it, which is surprising because, frankly, I didn’t think that something like this would happen within the next five or 10 years,” he said.

However, Coon said he doesn’t necessarily think that pressure to relocate the statue was dependent upon a counter presence.

“We were just ready,” he said.

Makala McNeil, a 2019 UM Hall of Fame inductee who graduated in December, advocated for change while on campus, spearheading the 2016 “Occupy the Lyceum” protest and the movement to take down the state flag, which culminated in the flag’s removal in 2015.

“While I do support symbolic change, it reshapes the culture of university, I hope students will organize around structural issues that prevail at the university,” McNeil said.

Outgo Black Student Union President and senior Jarvis

Benson was a part of the effort to relocate the Confederate statue; he helped draft the resolution that was passed by the Associated Student Body Senate weeks ago. Benson feels that, during his time at the university, students have broken “away from complacency.”

“It opens the conversation for more systemic, long-term issues to be discussed,” Benson said. “At the base of these conversations lie many issues that affect campus day to day.”

Benson called McNeil’s and Coon’s work on the state flag movement influential but said that the years after, most students “were not speaking up.”

“This year, I think the Ed Meek conversation really made a spark. I think it opened a door for a lot of important conversations to be had on campus. What’s inspiring is that these conversations are not over,” Benson said. “I know this momentum will continue.”

Outgoing ASB president Elam Miller said that, in his four years at the university, he hasn’t seen campus groups working together toward compromise to the degree that they have been recently. Miller said he’s been most inspired by student engagement in the past few months.

“There is momentum and students on campus wanting to push for positive change. I think that’s a growing group for sure,” he said. “It’s a group that I hope continues to grow.”

Benson spoke to the power of student organizing, specifically on this campus.

“Activism and organizing is in the bloodline of this university,”

he said. “I hope that (students) will continue to do (organize) in a productive way. While it is inevitable, activism is exhausting. ‘No’s are exhausting. Administration is exhausting. I hope they find fuel from this year to keep the spark alive.”

Donald Cole, former assistant provost and longtime member of the university community, doesn’t necessarily think that the Ed Meek incident was a “spark,” but he thinks it certainly held some “weight.” Cole protested for civil rights as a student in the late ‘60s and called student protests “the most powerful movement a campus can have.”

“I’ve seen (students) become more active... in a very positive way,” he said. “It’s positive in the sense of making sure that the University of Mississippi is not left behind and is a leader amongst other institutions. That has caused a tremendous change over the last few years.”

However, Cole said that the urgency of recent campus movements to shed Confederate symbolism has made those who oppose those movements uncomfortable.

“Not that (the university) wouldn’t have moved there eventually anyway, but the ‘time’ factor was probably the uncomfortable thing for them because students only have a short time here at the university, and to make an impact, they have to make it fairly quick,” he said.

Cole, who worked at the university for more than 25 years in many roles as a mathematics professor, dean of the Graduate School, and later, assistant provost, has seen the university

evolve since he was admitted as a freshman in 1968.

“Our campus is kind of like a pendulum that swings one way and another way,” Cole said. “Over the years, I’ve seen our campus change quite a bit and seen it change for the better.”

Though, in actuality, the pendulum ceases to sway and Newton’s cradle eventually comes to a halt, in theory, the steel balls continually trade places from one side to the other, passing energy and momentum back and forth.

This past month, the student body lost the opportunity for the university to elect only its second black woman as ASB president in the school’s history when Leah Davis lost the election. When the Mississippi sun rises and sets, light sprays out of the technicolor Tiffany stained glass window in Ventress Hall that freezes the University Greys in the gory glory of the Civil War battlefield. For now, the Confederate soldier still stands guard at the helm of campus, looming over the heads of passersby.

The futures of some of these symbols are uncertain, and the university is anything but predictable, but it is hard to deny something has changed on campus this year. It can be heard in the halls of the Lyceum, seen in the Grove on game days and felt in the hearts of those who cross campus each day. Physics tells us that all things can come to a shuddering stop when opposing external forces act upon them, so it’s expected the university might follow suit, but for now — at least this year — the momentum continues.

“This year, I think the Ed Meek conversation really made a spark. I think it opened a door for a lot of important conversations to be had on campus. What’s inspiring is that these conversations are not over. I know this momentum will continue.”

Jarvis Benson
Outgoing Black Student Union president



BOTTOM LEFT: Katie Dames signs the resolution to relocate the Confederate monument after it passes ASB Senate. (Photo: Devna Bose). TOP: Members of Students Against Social Injustice march toward the Confederate statue in the rain, holding a sign that reads, “Take the Statue Down” in February. (Photo: Katherine Butler). BOTTOM: Six Ole Miss men’s basketball players take a knee during the national anthem before the game against Georgia on Saturday, Feb. 23. (Photo courtesy: Nathanael Gabler | The Oxford Eagle via AP).

LOST IN THE FALLOUT: THE RACE DIARY'S BURIED MEANING

Ed Meek saw the presence of two black women on the Square as a threat. Administrators saw Meek's post as an interruption. Four sociologists saw moments like these as a bigger problem.

Slade Rand

dmeditor@gmail.com

In the wake of Ed Meek's viral post, a faculty-led attempt to move Ole Miss forward was lost in the tumult. The fallout that came to define the fall semester buried a social study of racism, sexism and exclusion on the Ole Miss campus — 77 pages of evidence that Meek's post was not an isolated incident.

UM sociology professors Willa Johnson, Kirk Johnson, James Thomas and John Green unveiled the "Microaggressions" report from the UM Race Diary Project, a survey nearly five years in the making, on Oct. 10, 2018 — just three weeks after Meek's Facebook post.

The timing of the report's release and the Meek debacle are coincidental, but their implications are not. Neither are their origins.

"Meek's post about these black women can be understood alongside other examples that appear to be discrete, isolated examples but, in actuality, are cut from the same cloth," Thomas said.

Just under 1,400 personal accounts from 621 undergraduate students included in "Microaggressions" show a campus still struggling with an identity rooted in the past. Though 67 of these entries highlighted moments of "empathy" or "concern" for marginalized students, the overwhelming tone of the documented behavior reflects the same bigotry Meek's post was criticized for promoting.

The sociologists met with UM administrators in September 2017 to plan for the release of the study and to organize Provost's Forums in response. But when the time came to publish the "Microaggressions" report in October 2018, those forums never happened. An op-ed attributed to then-Chancellor Vitter criticizing the report, a viral tweet from one of the authors and the negative attention that followed sealed the Race Diary Project's fate as another attempt to change Ole Miss that was lost in the shuffle.

The project's authors have cited the detrimental effects of accusations made by Vitter and the administration's complicity in those accusations as the reasons this study did not lead to increased campus programming.

Vitter submitted a guest column to The Daily Mississippian on Oct. 10, 2018, in which he took exception to a claim made in the report and expressed disappointment that data was presented anonymously. Four days after Vitter submitted that op-ed, he condemned a tweet by Thomas that had gone viral within the university community after the Our State Flag Foundation shared it and criticized it for "calling for outright uncivil

From: Noel E. Wilkin
Sent: **November 30, 2018 3:15 PM CST**
To: **Jeffrey S. Vitter, Amy Whitten, Jim Zook, Erica McKinley**
Cc: **Katherine Sloan**
Subject: **Email on Microaggressions Report**

Hi All,

Here is the final version of the email to be sent to all faculty and staff. Please let me know as soon as possible if you have questions. **If I do not send this by 5:00 today, I am told that a director of a center will resign. I am out of other options and must make a statement about academic freedom and the study.** I plan to send it at about 4:30. Josh [Gladden], Jeff Jackson, Lee Cohen, and I have worked to draft this.

Thanks,
Noel

From: Jeffrey S. Vitter
Sent: **October 10, 2018 12:15 PM**
To: **Jim Zook**
Cc: **Amy Whitten**
Subject: **Re: For Review: Draft editorial to the DM**

Jim, thanks. **Very nice! Please see my revisions using track changes. See what you think.**

Are you adding the positive pieces in the place indicated in yellow?

BTW, please always alert me in person or by phone when there is something urgent to review or respond to. And for consistency on Box, let's use the convention 20181010 for dates. I updated the filename to use that convention.

Thanks,
-- Jeff

From: Jim Zook
Sent: **Wednesday, October 03, 2018; 9:45 AM**
To: **Maney, Jo; Birnbaum, Jeff**
Subject: **Emerging issue**
Attachment(s): **"Microaggression Report Part 1.pdf, "Microaggression Report Part 2.pdf**

....The faculty group is showing some flexibility in terms of their release date to give us an opportunity to prepare a response. We plan to prepare a report of our own focused on the steps that the university has taken in recent years to enhance the campus climate and demonstrate our commitment to promoting and fostering a diverse, inclusive environment. **In addition, a Provost's Forum is being prepared for a campus conversation sometime around Nov. 1.**

We are very concerned about the potential impact of this report on the university and its reputation. Chancellor Vitter is particularly concerned about the characterization of the university on page 4 of the executive summary, which does not accurately reflect the progress made here in recent years to promote a more inclusive environment (starting with the cover photo, which does not appear to be a recent photo). Our team needs to be a little more time this week to process the report and start to frame some thoughts on a response.....

Thanks,
Jim Zook

[In response to a Sept. 30 email from Kirk Johnson]

From: Noel E. Wilkin
Sent: **Thursday, October 12, 2017; 2:26 PM**
To: **Kirk A. Johnson**
Cc: **Katrina Caldwell, Brandi Hephner Labanc, Willa Johnson, Kirsten Dellinger, Jeffrey Jackson, Charles Ross, Lee Cohen, Katherine Sloan**
Subject: **RE: Follow-up suggestion**

Hi Kirk,

....I am very interested in continuing our conversation and, **most importantly, having our interactions lead to effective strategies (like the forum you proposed below) to educate those in our community.** Your observation below is insightful.

"I suspect that some of the incivility in the race diaries was sparked by the white students reacting against what they see as political correctness, then taking their frustration out on others."

This observation should guide how we choose to have these conversations, and help us to determine our educational strategy. In other words, **it must be done in a way that brings people from all backgrounds and view together and puts them in touch with each person's humanity rather than cast the conversation in a right vs. wrong, win vs. lose, or one up vs. one down context.**

Noel

ILLUSTRATION: ETHEL MWEDZIWENDIRA

Information in brackets has been added for clarification

illegal harassment."

"I was livid," Thomas said in an interview with The Daily Mississippian in February. "A chancellor's first responsibility is to the institution and his faculty and his students. It's not to your donors or any people outside of the university who claim they have a stake in it. It's to the people on this campus. Period."

Email correspondence between the authors and upper administration from as far back October 2017 and as recently as October 2018 obtained by The Daily Mississippian indicate that they met and planned to bolster the release of the project with events on campus.

"I am very interested in continuing our conversation and, most importantly, having our interactions lead to effective strategies ... to educate in our community," Provost Noel

Wilkin wrote to Kirk and Willa Johnson on Oct. 12, 2017, following one of those meetings.

Jim Zook, associate vice chancellor for strategic communications and marketing, wrote on Oct. 3, 2018, that the authors had agreed to be "flexible" with the release date in order to give the university "the opportunity to prepare a response."

"In addition, a Provost's Forum is being prepared for a campus conversation sometime around Nov. 1," Zook wrote in an email to two representatives from BGR Group, a lobbying firm based in Washington, D.C.

Wilkin confirmed that he planned to host Provost's Forums on the researchers' findings but that in the days after the report's official release, the authors decided against it. Thomas said that decision was based on the negative reaction

to the project once it was published.

"Due to the fallout from the Chancellor's op-ed, the planned forum was canceled," Thomas said.

Thomas and the other authors of the report came under scrutiny following the public instances of the chancellor distancing himself from their project and from Thomas's tweet. They received threatening messages from people who claimed to know where their offices were located on campus and where their children went to school. Because of the intimidating and disturbing attention the authors felt in the aftermath of the report's release, Willa Johnson eventually requested that the scheduled Provost's Forum about the report be canceled.

Though it was presented as Vitter's "personal observations,"

email correspondence shows that former IHL board trustee Amy Whitten, Zook and Director of Institutional Research, Effectiveness and Planning Katie Busby helped draft his Oct. 10, 2018, op-ed.

The final product asserted that the UM administration was disturbed by what the report found, but some of the "Microaggressions" authors felt it intentionally stayed clear of offering support and thanks to the faculty researchers.

"The chancellor is the leader of the organization who guides the institution's response in those situations," Wilkin said. "I'm not going to comment on the leadership during that particular period."

Wilkin clarified that he was sent a copy of Vitter's op-ed after it was submitted to The Daily Mississippian. The authors of the "Microaggressions" report were not aware of Vitter's op-ed before it was published, and upon reading it, the sociologists' approach changed.

"As with the way the release went — I'm of course not happy about it because of how it was tainted just one day later by the Chancellor's op-ed," Thomas said.

Former Chancellor Vitter resigned from office on Nov. 9, 2018. Three weeks after Vitter announced his resignation, upper UM administrators released a second letter meant to address the controversial comments made in Vitter's op-ed. They acknowledged that the op-ed "engendered unintended questions about the validity, integrity, and ethical nature" of the UM Race Diary Project.

Email correspondence from Nov. 30, 2018, indicates that Wilkin was attempting to perform damage control by releasing that letter.

"I am told that a director of a center will resign. I am out of other options and must make a statement about academic freedom and the study," Wilkin wrote in an email to Vitter, Whitten, Zook and Ericka McKinley, the university's general counsel, on Nov. 30, 2018.

Wilkin did not confirm the identity of the "director of a center" who threatened resignation or the reasoning behind his or her potential resignation.

"I think, based on various events that had taken place and comments made by administrators over the course of the semester, that our faculty began to question the administration's commitment to academic freedom," Wilkin said. "I believe strongly in the importance of academic freedom and am fully committed to academic freedom on our campus."

That "Affirmation of Academic Freedom" was released that day and signed by Vitter, Wilkin, Vice Chancellor Josh Gladden,

SEE RACE DIARY PAGE 11



In September, Ki'Yona Crawford and Mahoghany Jordan were photographed by Ed Meek, but they are

MORE THAN PHOTOS.

PHOTO: DEVNA BOSE

Devna Bose

dmmanaging@gmail.com

When Mahoghany Jordan opened the door to Ki'Yona Crawford's apartment a few weeks ago, she was greeted with a shriek of approval.

"You look fine!" Ki'Yona exclaimed, praising Mahoghany's outfit, and Mahoghany responded, "You look fine!"

Mahoghany was in a zip up jean dress under a red flannel shirt with black booties on. Ki'Yona was in a black lace bodysuit, high-waisted jeans, black leather jacket and bright red pumps.

"I bet your lil' sister wanna look like me," the City Girls rapped through the speakers as Mahoghany, Ki'Yona and their friends mixed drinks and chatted before their night out. "Act up, you can get snatched up."

Lashes on, hair curled, lipstick on — the women headed to the Square.

"It was a beautiful night," Mahoghany said. "We had a great time. We really did."

That night in March was the first time the women had gone out together on the Square since they were photographed leaving the Cellar in September. Former journalism school namesake Ed Meek published the photographs

to his personal Facebook page and posted a message along with them, as if the two Ole Miss students blemished Meek's perception of his Oxford.

In reality, Mahoghany and Ki'Yona were enjoying a rare night out together, having what Mahoghany said was "the time of their lives" after a week chock-full of classes and work.

"I never knew that I was being photographed," Mahoghany said. "Like, I would've never thought that in a million years."

A few days following, Mahoghany woke up from a nap after her Wednesday morning class to a "bunch of text messages."

Her first reaction after seeing the post, she said, was disbelief — she thought she was being pranked.

When it settled in that the post was real, Mahoghany said, her emotions turned into sadness, and then anger.

"This was something the whole world was seeing," she said. "I have to defend myself, yet again, which I feel I've done my whole life."

Mahoghany said men started looking at her body differently when she was 12.

"I was very curvy growing up, so I got a lot of male attention from kids my age and from older men, as sick as that is," she said. "That was the reality of it."

Growing up, men often commented on her body, and at some point, she said she became immune to it.

"Especially being young, I didn't know how to react to the things being said to me," she said.

When Mahoghany started college, it "just amplified." Already a self-described "recluse" in high school, Mahoghany anxiety heightened on campus.

"I always felt like people were looking at me," she said. "When I came to college, I tried to be more relaxed, but that didn't work because men were still focused on my body."

The first time Mahoghany felt over-sexualized on campus was when she was harassed at a fraternity party. When she reacted, she was told to calm down.

"It was really frustrating," she said. "How can you come at someone for the reaction they give to some who violated them? How dare you come at me instead of the guy who's sexually assaulting me and crossing that boundary?"

So when she saw Meek's post, Mahoghany was frustrated, yes, but she was mostly tired.

"I knew what was about to come. I knew the wave of messages that were about to happen. The friend requests, from people who were, of course, supporting me, but also the people who agreed with (Meek)," she

said. "I have to defend my choices on what I wear. I have to defend my physical body to people. And that was, that is, frustrating."

In the days that followed, Mahoghany received over 1,500 friend requests on Facebook. Many of the messages she received were inappropriately lewd, referring to how beautiful her body was.

"Being a dark-skinned black woman, I feel as if people see me only as an object who is void of emotions, and they can do and say whatever," she said. "It's unfair because, yes, I'm very passionate, but in the same token, I'm very delicate. I'm extremely soft. This whole situation has hurt my feelings on levels that I wasn't aware of in myself."

Though Mahoghany's entire family was supportive of her during this time, she said her grandmother was especially understanding.

"You've got to defend your honor as a black woman and let the whole world know that this is not okay," Edith told Mahoghany, when the news broke. "Wear whatever you want, and demand respect when you do it."

Edith Jordan, Mahoghany's 69-year-old grandmother, told her granddaughter as a high school senior to go to Ole Miss, though she told Mahoghany that she would



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"I believe Mahoghany was destined to be where she was at that particular time for this incident to occur so it can shine a light on the work that needs to be done. We have made progress, yes, but there are more things that need to be addressed."

Edith Jordan
Mahoghany Jordan's grandmother

probably encounter racism here.

"I felt if she could make it there, she could make it anywhere," Edith said.

When Edith, who calls herself a "product of the civil rights movement," found out about the post, she was furious.

"He portrayed her as being someone she totally is not. It was devious to say the least," she said. "I am proud of her — I thought she particularly articulated her feelings well ... but I'm sure she suffers from some anxiety regarding the incident. There should be some restorative justice."

When she heard about Meek's post, Edith thought back to her college days at Rust College.

"I believe Mahoghany was destined to be where she was at that particular time for this incident to occur so it can shine a light on the work that needs to be done," Edith said. "We have made progress, yes, but there are more things that need to be addressed."

Following the incident, Ki'Yona and Mahoghany both met with members of university administration

and the Center for Inclusion and Cross Cultural Engagement.

A public records request revealed that former Associated Student Body president Nic Lott reached out to university officials to schedule a meeting between the women and Meek after his post. This email was forwarded to Vice Chancellor for Diversity and Community Engagement Katrina Caldwell, but in an interview, she said her office did not coordinate a meeting and she was not aware of any intention or plan to do so.

Mahoghany said she was never encouraged by university officials to meet Meek, but she and Ki'Yona were encouraged seek counseling at the university. Mahoghany tried and failed to do so — work and class made it difficult for her to find time for an appointment.

"I tried three times and couldn't make it," Mahoghany said. "It was also important for me to have a black counselor ... but I didn't know how to ask that question. It was kind of off-putting, so I didn't try to reschedule."

Katie Harrison, staff counselor and outreach coordinator at the university's counseling center, declined to comment on a specific case on account of HIPAA laws.

"I was depressed when (Meek's post) happened, and I was depressed after. It just added on," Ki'Yona said.

Ki'Yona chose not to seek counseling at the university after hearing about Mahoghany's experience.

Though only Mahoghany's face was shown in the photo, Ki'Yona was impacted by the post as well, which Mahoghany feels many people diminished.

"We were both objectified. People were telling Ki'Yona that it was 'really Mahoghany's face,' and to me, that's unfair because she was still posted. That was still Ki'Yona," Mahoghany said. "So she was just as important, and it was just as important for her voice to be heard."

Though Ki'Yona and Mahoghany were close

before this incident, Ki'Yona, who Mahoghany describes as a "star, a golden spirit," acknowledged that it brought them closer together.

"She doesn't know this, but she really inspires me. I love her and her voice. I'm obviously not happy about the experience, but I'm very, very glad it was with Mahoghany. She motivates me, and I feel like I needed that. Mahoghany is very courageous," Ki'Yona said, before adding, "I would consider us both courageous."

The duo wasn't surprised when they learned Meek was, at the time, the namesake of the journalism school, but they felt empowered to be a part of the change when his name was removed.

"I didn't think anything was going to come from it, but that the fact that it did shows when you voice your opinion, you can make a change," Ki'Yona said.

Though Mahoghany agreed that it felt like she had made her mark on the university, she thinks much of the university's response felt like "damage control."

"From my experience, I don't feel like the University of Mississippi really cared about my emotions," she said. "I feel like they just cared about the image."

Mahoghany would like for this experience to continue dialogue on campus that results in women here realizing that they "don't have to accept disrespect."

"You have complete agency over your own body ... and you have every right to call someone out. You have every right to defend yourself," she said. "I feel like it's a trope that's tied with black women, that once we say something, once we stand up, we're being 'too much.' You're an angry black woman, and you have every right to be angry, and you have every right to cry."

Mahoghany still hasn't accepted her 1,500 Facebook friend requests, and Meek has blocked her on the social media platform. But before they graduate in May, she and Ki'Yona are planning to go out together once more.



PHOTOS: DEVNA BOSE

Mahoghany Jordan, whose face was shown in a photo posted by Ed Meek in September 2018, feels proud to be a part of why Meek's name was removed from the journalism school. She believes that, though this is a strong statement from the university, there is still more work to be done.



PHOTO: DEVNA BOSE

The public attention Ki'Yona Crawford received from Ed Meek's viral post added stress to an already difficult time in the Ole Miss senior's daily life. In the days following, she missed a test due to anxiety.



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JOURNALISM SCHOOL STILL SEEKS COMMON GROUND

David Ballowe
 thedmnews@gmail.com

The Common Ground Committee, a group created to make recommendations to the School of Journalism and New Media on how to move forward after the Meek controversy, has yet to release its official recommendations, opting instead to host community events to reinforce the idea that hearing all opinions on sensitive matters is important.

"A part of our mission was to ... identify what the problem was or problems that could arise from (the Meek post) and see what we can do to foster an environment of inclusivity," said Assistant Dean Jennifer Simmons, the committee chairperson.

The committee, which includes faculty and students from all backgrounds, set a goal of releasing a list of

recommendations to the school that would work to change any negative image and foster a discussion about the future.

In an interview with The Daily Mississippian in January, Simmons said Common Ground members planned to draft final recommendations to Will Norton, dean of the School of Journalism and New Media, by April. However, Norton said he has not yet received any written recommendations.

Soon after its formation, the committee posted the Professional Code of Ethics, along with various organizations' codes of ethics, around Farley Hall.

In addition, the committee decided to screen "American Hate," a documentary made by senior journalism major Brittany Brown, in the Overby Center. The committee also held implicit bias training for faculty, and hosted various other events about bias.

The committee is also pushing to add a social media course to the curriculum, most likely as an elective, to help prepare students for the increasing role social media plays in journalism and marketing.

Graham Bodie, a member of the Common Ground Committee and integrated marketing professor, said that the university has struggled with its image in the past and that giving faculty the proper resources to facilitate discussion is a key step toward assuring the community is as healthy as it can be.

"We felt like Common Ground represented, primarily, the fact that when you have an issue as serious as the issue of removing someone's name from a building, you really do need to listen to all the various perspectives," Bodie said.

Journalism professor Michael Fagans, who is also a member of Common Ground, believes that the ability to hold civil discussion across viewpoints is something that seems to have been lost in our society.

"Very rarely do we ever focus on that middle ground, and that's where a lot of us can agree," Fagans said. "Part of the focus of this committee is: Let's talk about the stuff we agree on. Let's talk about the stuff we can all hold up and say, 'Yes, this is stuff we put value in and believe in.'"

Fagans said that if someone sits down with his or her worst enemy and has a real conversation, even they can find something to agree on. This is the mindset Fagans said he thinks people should approach incendiary topics like racism with.

The committee has attempted to open the conversation of racism and bias at Ole Miss through events and awareness.

Samir Husni, a former member of the committee, said the mission of the



PHOTO COURTESY: OLE MISS COMMUNICATIONS

Former member of the Common Ground Committee Samir Husni said that the goal of the committee is to make sure that students' voices are being heard. The Common Ground Committee consists of students and faculty members and was originally formed to make recommendations on how to move forward after the Meek controversy.

committee is to ensure that students feel heard and that the school is seen in a positive light.

Likening the university to a forest, Husni said the School of Journalism and New Media has branched out from its humble beginnings as a department into its own school, and through the creation of committees like this, it can decide through conversation what must change.

"We are no longer a part of that jungle, or forest, but we are a tree by itself," Husni said. "Like every tree, sometimes you need some pruning, sometimes you need some trimming, sometimes you need some cultivating."

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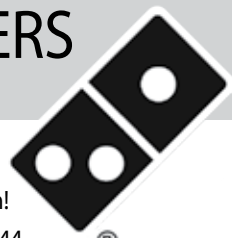
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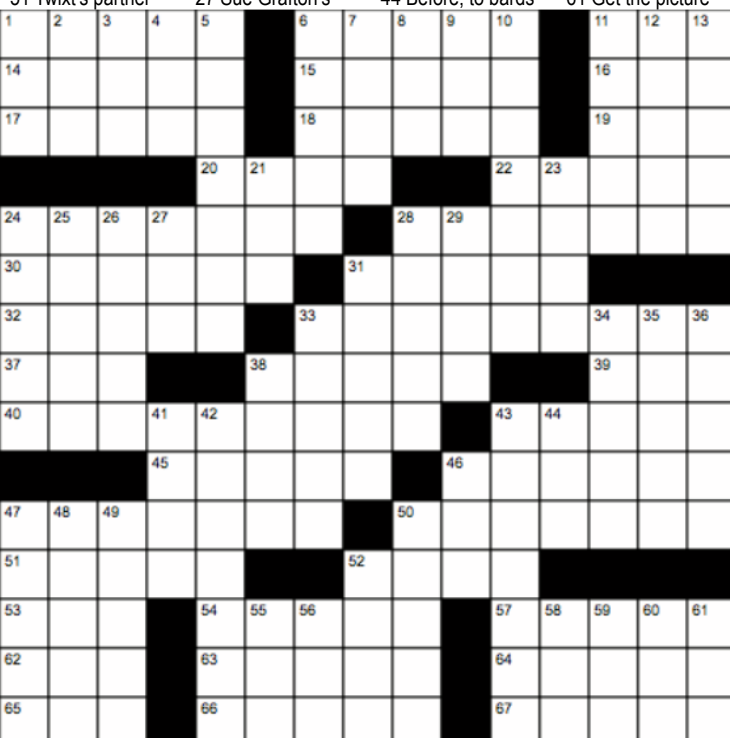
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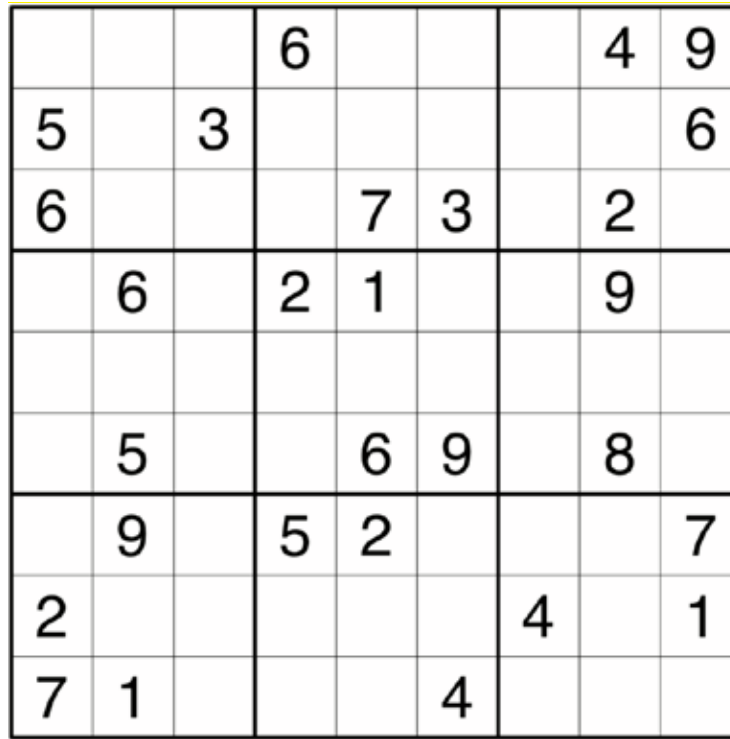
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- 46 That guy
- 47 Stalks
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- 49 Shouts
- 50 Deserve
- 52 Weeps
- 55 Proverb ending?
- 56 Wharton deg.
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MEEK'S LASTING TIES TO THE UNIVERSITY

With connections to HottyToddy.com and the Center for Graphene Research and Innovation, Meek's name and money remain influential on campus.

**Hadley Hitson
Taylor Vance**

thedmnews@gmail.com

Last semester, the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning approved the University of Mississippi's request to remove prominent university donor Ed Meek's name from the School of Journalism and New Media, but Meek still maintains indirect connections to the university through HottyToddy.com and the Center for Graphene Research and Innovation.

Meek founded the news website HottyToddy.com in 2012 with the intention of eventually gifting it to the university and making it a platform for journalism students at Ole Miss to publish their work. The website currently operates under the School of Journalism and New Media, and many journalism professors submit students' classwork to the website.

On September 9, 2018, HottyToddy.com and related assets were placed "into a trust for the benefit of what was then the 'Meek School of Journalism and New Media' to fulfill Dr. Meek's vision," according to the website.

Thus, just 10 days before Meek's infamous Facebook post, Hotty Toddy News, LLC entered into an agreement with the university and created a revocable trust granting the website and related assets to the university for exclusive use by "the Meek School."

However, Ed Meek's company Hotty Toddy News maintains the power to revoke the trust if the university fails to follow the standards set forth in the agreement and in the trust document.

These standards require the university to, among other things, "acknowledge publicly" that HottyToddy.com and its assets were made available to the school by Ed and Becky Meek, to reinvest any revenue generated from the website into "Meek School instructional activities and programs" and to utilize the services of existing Hotty Toddy employees.

Additionally, the university can decide, for any reason, upon 60 days notice, to return HottyToddy.com and the other trust assets to Hotty Toddy News, which would effectively return control of the website to Meek.

Will Norton, the dean of the School of Journalism and New Media, and Rachel West, the website's publisher, both said they are unsure of the nature of this trust and directed all questions to the university's chief legal counsel Erica McKinley, who declined to comment.

Anna Grace Usery, the editor-in-chief of HottyToddy.com, said she has never seen the full contract between the university and Hotty Toddy

News. West also said Meek is no longer directly involved in the operations of HottyToddy.com and has no editorial control over content or profits.

However, Meek does have monetary influence over the National Graphene Association, which often partners with the Center for Graphene Research and Innovation at the university.

Meek is the founder and president of the NGA, an organization based in Oxford that advocates for and promotes the commercialization of graphene, a form of flexible carbon used in a variety of technologies.

While Meek does not have a direct connection to graphene research on campus, the NGA does, working closely with the university's Center for Graphene Research and Innovation by hosting conferences and helping the center monetize its research.

Josh Gladden, the vice chancellor for research and sponsored programs, serves on the advisory board for the NGA. He said the graphene research center has subcontracted the NGA for consulting services on an economic development grant.

In an email obtained through a public records request, Meek wrote Norton on Sept. 22, 2018, three days after his Facebook post, saying he was planning to take a step back from the organization but would continue to fund it.

"I hope the university can look past the current environment, continue to partner with the NGA and take personal advantage of this opportunity to provide leadership so vital to our nation," Meek wrote.

Ahmed Al-Ostaz, the director for the Center for Graphene Research and Innovation, said Meek was involved in the research center

a lot in the early stages of the organization's founding and continues to work with the organization occasionally, but not "on a daily basis."

Gladden said he did not often work with Meek directly but that dealing with Meek's Facebook post was a "challenge."

"Basically, my approach on it has been that's just a separate issue and (Meek and I) will have to agree to disagree on certain things," Gladden said. "But you know, this is a business relationship, and we're moving forward on graphene — with the (National) Graphene Association or not."

Norton was, at one time, a member of the NGA advisory board, but he said he was removed from the board without being informed of the reason.

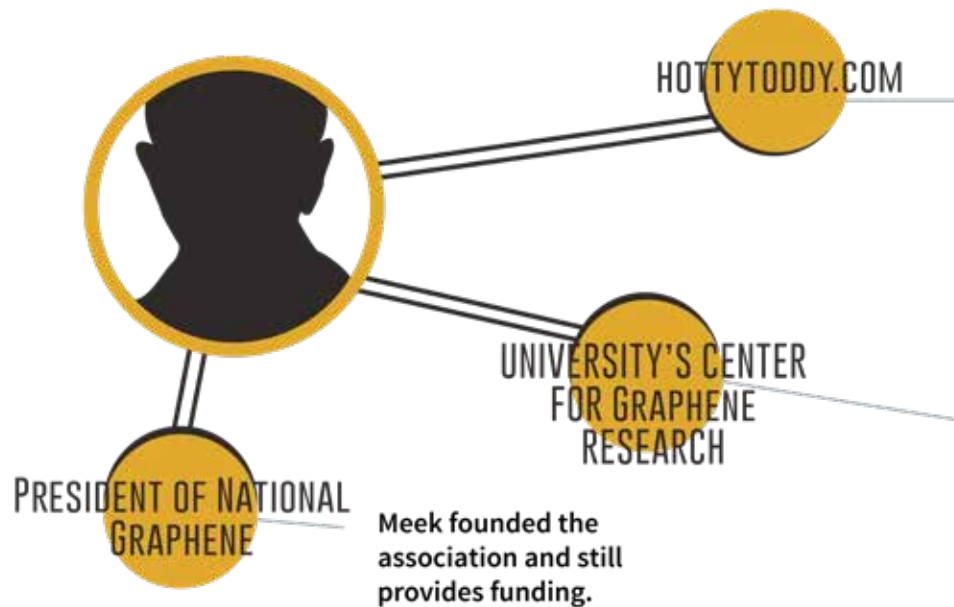
Norton also said the journalism school does not have any current ties to the NGA after his removal from the board, but, in an email obtained through a public records request, Scott Fiene, the assistant dean of curriculum and assessment, said Leslie Westbrook, an adjunct professor for integrated marketing communications for the journalism school, was on the NGA board as well.

In the same email, Fiene said he hoped Westbrook could be a representative and connection for the school.

"She can keep us apprised of aspects that might be of interest to us," Fiene wrote.

Westbrook still serves on the advisory board, according to NGA's website, but she did not respond to requests for an interview.

While Meek's name has been physically removed from the Ole Miss campus, his influence, personal projects and financial involvement remain, albeit thinly veiled.



The website, originally founded by Meek, was placed into a trust for the benefit of the journalism school. Meek still owns Hotty Toddy News, LLC.

The National Graphene Association, of which Meek is the president, partners with the research center on campus.

ILLUSTRATION: HAYDEN BENGE

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STUDENTS WEIGH THE DECISION TO STAY OR LEAVE

Daniel Payne
thedmnews@gmail.com

Thanks to a \$5.3 million gift from Ole Miss alumni Ed and Becky Meek, who received their degrees from the university in the 1960s, the university's journalism department became the Meek School of Journalism and New Media in 2007. Meek's controversial post from last semester led to a speedy response by the School of Journalism and New Media as well as from many students questioning what they should do next.

Some students weighed the decision of whether to stay in or leave the School of Journalism and New Media after Meek's post and the school's response.

Carl Tart, who studied integrated marketing communication at the then-Meek School, considered Meek's online comments when he decided to change his major to exercise science. Though he said the decision had a lot to do with following his passion, he said he attributed about 40% of the decision to Meek's comments.

"I was greatly influenced by the actions of Ed Meek and his inability to see how his words were racially targeting," Tart said. "I cannot believe I was about to get a degree from someone that made comments like this and his name would be on my degree."

Meek made other disparaging comments



PHOTOS: DANIEL PAYNE

Sophomore Janae Hudson considered switching her major after the Meek controversy but decided to stay in the journalism school after she saw the way that the university handled the situation.

on Facebook in 2017, denouncing the university for allowing Wiz Khalifa to perform on campus. At the time, some condemned Meek's comments about the concert for being racially biased.

"Ed Meek's comments the first time did not sit well with me," Tart said, adding that Meek's second post, which led to his disassociation from the school, was much worse. "He was attacking, basically

cyberbullying, two students that are trying to get a degree and make an honest living."

Other students, upon seeing the school's swift reaction to the post, decided to stay in the school.

Janae Hudson, a sophomore journalism and African American studies double major, said it would have been easy to walk to Ventress Hall and change her major.

"I decided to stick with it



Senior Jyeshia Johnson was an ambassador for the Meek School of Journalism and New Media when Ed Meek posted the controversial photo and caption on Facebook. Since she was a senior, she had no choice but to stay at the university, but she said that she probably would not have enrolled at the University of Mississippi if the post had been made before her freshman year.

because I saw how well the university and the school handled the situation," she said. "Plus, plenty of people felt the same way that I did — that the post was disrespectful, sexist, racist and all of those things, and if the university and the school had not handled it as well as they did, I'm pretty sure that I would have changed my major."

Hudson said the most important part of the university's response was that it listened to students first, and she was impressed with the forums offered to students and the general public within days of the post.

There were also conversations in her classes that allowed her to share her experiences and the way she felt about the situation as a black woman.

Hudson was not always so impressed. She had second thoughts when deciding to go to the University of Mississippi and was asked by those around her why she would consider coming to Oxford. She was told that "they don't really care for people like you."

She decided to enroll in the university because she liked the journalism school and was offered scholarships. Coming from a community that was mostly black, she also said that she believed the experience would enrich her and broaden her "appreciation for her culture."

After seeing the school's rapid response to Meek's post — the school distanced itself from Meek almost immediately — she felt justified in her choice, she said.

Jyeshia Johnson had similar doubts before committing to the university. She came from Indianola, which is de facto segregated, especially when it comes to schools, she said. This environment affected the way she saw the posts from Meek and the reactions to it.

"It kind of hit home this time," Johnson said.

She also went out that night and was wearing a black dress, like Jordan. Johnson looked closely at the

post to make sure she wasn't seeing herself on the screen.

"I can only imagine the embarrassment that comes with it," she said.

Because she was a senior at the time, she had no choice but to stay, she said, adding that she probably would not have enrolled at the university if Meek posted the photo of the students before her freshman year.

When the post went up, Johnson was a Meek Ambassador for the Meek School of Journalism and New Media. If the school had not acted swiftly to take the name down, she said "it would have been too much" to continue in the position.

After the post, she and a friend talked about the consequences of leaving. Her friend, who was also from Indianola, thought about going to the University of Southern Mississippi during freshman year, but she never transferred.

Johnson talked to Ki'yona Crawford, who was in one of the photos Meek posted and who is also from Indianola, about leaving the university over the post. They both decided to stay.

Some students hope the removal of Meek's name will continue to motivate more change across campus. Following student protests and ASB Senate, Senate of the Faculty, Staff Council and Graduate Student Council Senate votes to recommend the Confederate monument in the Circle be relocated to the Confederate cemetery, the university has recommended the same proposal to the IHL.

"As a freshman I was like, 'This thing is never going to come down, I'm going to have to walk by it for four years,'" Hudson said of the monument. "I feel like the university is taking this in the right direction. I feel like it will get moved. Hopefully while I'm here — I would love to see that happen — but I don't know."

Tart also maintained an optimistic outlook on the future of the university.

"I feel like there is still much work to be done at the university," he said. "But it's going to get done."

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RACE DIARY

continued from page 5

College of Liberal Arts Dean Lee Cohen and Sociology and Anthropology Chair Jeffrey Jackson.

"To date, I have only ever seen statements declaring our commitment to academic freedom as an institution, but nothing that explains what actual steps our administration takes, or plans to take, to demonstrate their commitment," Thomas said.

The "Microaggressions" report emphasizes that offenses like Meek's post will continue to arise in places that accept and, oftentimes, embrace those derogatory views. Its conclusion calls for "vigorous educational programs and rigorously enforced prosocial policies" to prevent microaggressions.

Two years ago, Katrina Caldwell joined the UM campus in 2017 as its first vice chancellor for diversity and community engagement. She wrote in an email to Wilkin on Oct. 31, 2017, that her office was working on projects similar to the Race Diary Project "to help develop 'a culture of tolerance and civility.'" She asked Wilkin for guidance on how best to "navigate" her involvement with campus programming related to the "Microaggressions" report.

"I am not territorial (there is a lot of work to be done), and I don't believe that every diversity effort needs to be coordinated through my office. I just don't want to duplicate effort or give

the impression that my office is not working," Caldwell wrote.

She arrived on campus after the data collection period for the "Microaggressions" report concluded at the end of the 2014-2015 school year, but her office was notified of the upcoming publication almost immediately at the start of the 2017 fall semester.

"I think it's rare for someone in the role that I have to have faculty committed to this issue enough that they would develop their own time and

scholarship," Caldwell said. "The fact that I came here and it was already done: That was beneficial to the work that we're trying to do."

Caldwell acknowledged the fact that neither her office nor other administrative groups have held forums or programs directly in response to the "Microaggressions" report. She pointed out that Kirk Johnson spoke on a panel sponsored by the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning last week, the only example of such

public events she referenced.

"When you're doing diversity and equity work, it can be tough. It can be exhausting," Caldwell said. "But to encourage people to continue to engage, we have to know some progress is happening and we need to know that there are people out there who care and are willing to put their identities on the line to stand up for other people."

Six months after the study's release, the university has not hosted any events or implemented any programming

based on the findings of the UM Race Diary Project despite a clear intention and a year's worth of planning to do so. Heightened tension on campus brought on by Meek's Facebook post and exacerbated by Vitter's public comments seems to have overshadowed the importance of the "Microaggressions" report. Now that that Meek's name is gone and a new interim Chancellor sits in the Lyceum, the university has a chance to revisit the project. The authors still wonder if this will happen.



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WHAT WAS HE THINKING?

Dickie Scruggs, former Oxford attorney

"I didn't think his judgmental error in publishing that FB post should scuttle a lifetime body of work that has no racial connotation to it. He's been nothing but generous, and he's accomplished and achieved a lot in his life. He's given his fortune, essentially, to the school."

Curtis Wilkie, Overby Fellow & journalism professor

"That's why that post was such a surprise: It was so out of character. The message would have been objectionable if he wouldn't have attached those pictures."

Callie Bryant, former HottyToddy managing editor

"Whatever he says his intention was, he likely knew the message he was trying to get across the second he published pictures of two college students who had no part in declining student enrollment, real estate values and Tax revenue."

Collin Brister, former HottyToddy employee

"Even if you're not trying to be racist, you have to be able to have enough common sense to know that to the outside person, this looks racist."

Andy Knef, former HottyToddy editor-in-chief

"As a person, he's great. He's got a great sense of humor. He's a material person. He's got a temper, but he's also charming and friendly. He can be mad at you in one minute, and the next minute, everything's great."

Nic Lott, first black ASB president

"I actually didn't think his name should be removed. I would have loved to see him sit down with the young ladies as well."

ILLUSTRATION: HAYDEN BENGE

Griffin Neal

thedmnews@gmail.com

Four aging men sit around a booth at the Beacon. It's late afternoon, and the steady drip of a slow Oxford rainstorm is tapping on the tinted windows of the oldest restaurant in town. The rain isn't louder than the hum of the conversation, which drifts from who's really running City Hall to socialism and the conservative movement.

These four men don't need menus. They're only interested in the usual.

The Beacon — with its tattered leather booths and greasy linoleum floor — is the quintessential Southern diner. Frozen in time, the Beacon offers a reprieve from the daily minutia of Oxford. These men come to the Beacon because the coffee's always hot, the kitchen's never empty and the staff knows their names.

But their names don't matter.

They could be Dickie Scruggs or Samuel L. Jackson or Johnny Cash. For all of the Beacon's congeniality, it's anonymous as well. It's where the power brokers of northeast Mississippi, framed by the bars and stars of Confederate flags on the dining room wallpaper, flesh out Oxford's problems over black coffee and ketchup-smothered bites of country fried steak.

Ed Meek sits in one of these booths. Not on this day, but on many days before.

Overby Fellow Curtis Wilkie, a journalist and longtime friend of Meek's, jokes that conversations Meek regularly has at the Beacon were the influence behind the controversial Facebook post Meek shared in September that caused his name to be removed from the journalism school and his life's work to be tarnished.

"The problem is you spend too much damn time at the Beacon," Wilkie said. "I said to Ed, 'Part of the problem is you spend too much of your time listening to a bunch of malcontents who think Ole Miss and Oxford are going to hell in a handbasket.'"

He noted that the Beacon is a sacred Oxford institution, and in no way does he mean to defame the restaurant or its patrons. But his point is salient. Meek is motivated by

commerce. He's a businessman in a journalist's world. Clicks are commerce for Meek, and no story is above reproach — not even a listicle ranking cities by the attractiveness of the women who reside there: a story Meek pushed for.

Wilkie's half-hearted assertion that Ed Meek is impressionable holds true among his acquaintances. Callie Bryant, a former employee of Meek's and one of his loudest detractors last fall, confirms this.

"He is a reactionary, first and foremost, and perhaps the very definition of him," Bryant said. "He liked to be the first to say something. Perhaps he saw that extreme stories got extreme reactions. A click is a click — no matter what."

Following Meek's response to the removal of his name from the journalism school's edifice, Bryant tweeted, "This is right out of his playbook. Every time Ed kicked the hornet's nest he'd play the martyr/victim/unwitting fool after."

However, Bryant declined to say that Meek is a racist. She worked as an editor at HottyToddy.com, a news website Meek created, for more than two years and spoke with him nearly every day. Despite his erratic behavior, both publicly and privately, Bryant contended that Meek was a generous boss.

Several of Bryant's co-workers and Meek's former employees declined to comment in fear of legal retribution.

Meek says he's not a racist, despite the content of his post. His friends agree, and so do his former employees — though they acknowledge his complicity in sharing racist tropes on Facebook. Wilkie, who has known Meek since they were both freshmen at the university in 1958, does as well.

"In all of the years I've known him, I've never heard him use a racial epithet or say anything derogatory or anything at all that went into the Facebook post," Wilkie said. "I think that was kind of an aberration."

Wilkie's an old-school progressive. Hanging in his office are framed covers of the Boston Globe — where he worked for nearly 30 years — a "Hunter S. Thompson for Sheriff" poster and biographies of John F.

Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson: mementos of a foregone time as well as a window into his psyche. His politics are diametrically opposed to those of Ed Meek, but that's never driven a wedge into their friendship. He said that Meek, as a conservative in Mississippi, is not some "old-school segregationist."

"That does not apply to Ed," Wilkie said. "Ed wouldn't be my friend if he were like that."

Nic Lott was one of the first people to voice public support for Ed Meek during the fallout from his Facebook post.

Lott, elected in 2000 as the first black Associated Student Body president in the history of the university, counts Meek as a dear friend. He also doesn't believe Meek is racist.

"I know that he was very disappointed and hurt that he had been labeled that and that his name was removed from the school. It really hurt him," Lott said. "If somebody is really racist, they're not going to be hurt by being labeled a racist. Ed was really hurt by that."

Lott and Meek first met when Lott was a student at the university. Meek helped raise funds for the College Republicans and supported Lott in his campaign for the student body presidency. Lott has since worked as a political commentator on Fox and CNN and is running as a Republican for the office of commissioner of Mississippi Public Service.

Lott is a political ally to Ed Meek. Dickie Scruggs, Oxford's billionaire attorney and the only other living person to have their name removed from an Ole Miss building, is not. Scruggs is a liberal Democrat who was set to have a campaign fundraiser for the Hillary Clinton's presidential candidacy in 2007 before he was indicted on federal bribery charges. Like Lott, Scruggs supported Meek and disagreed with the removal of his name from the journalism school.

"It was more of a generational mistake than a racial mistake," Scruggs said. "I think Ed would have put the same picture if it would have been two white girls dressed like that. But somebody sent him those pictures, he didn't take them. So, he just acted on what he saw, and it pressed a nerve."

However, the narrative that Meek was simply reacting to pictures a friend sent him doesn't line up with the facts.

As revealed by a public records request, 72 hours prior to his Facebook post, Meek repeatedly pressured HottyToddy.com CEO Rachel West to run with a story that women were engaging in prostitution on the Square and that fights were ruining Oxford. West demurred, and Meek's idea ended up in a Facebook post instead of the front page of a university-controlled publication.

Aside from an apology shortly after the post and a Facebook post expressing sadness that his name was removed from the journalism school, Meek has been silent for over six months. He's declined all requests for interviews and has kept a low profile in the town where he was once lionized.

In private conversations, according to friends and colleagues, Meek conveyed astonishment that his Facebook post was perceived as racist.

Those same friends tell stories of Meek requesting funding for a primarily black church in Oxford. They tell stories of Meek assisting young black women in journalism and jobs after graduation. They

tell stories of Meek convincing James Meredith to return to campus 30 years after the deadly riots that took place on campus when he tried to enter. They tell stories of an Ed Meek that is seemingly incapable of producing racist tropes in that fallacious 145-word Facebook post. But the words weren't the problem, the images were. And they are inextricably linked.

In a 2016 interview with Marshall Ramsey broadcast on PBS, Meek discussed the mindset he possessed as a teenager from Charleston, Mississippi, walking onto campus in 1958.

"I brought with me the same prejudices that we all had at that time. For many years, I denied that. It wasn't politically smart to do so, but I admit it now. It was a different era," Meek said. "I spent the rest of my career at Ole Miss dealing with these issues trying to reshape the image of the University of Mississippi."

As a photographer and assistant vice chancellor for public relations at the university for most of his adult life, photographs and image defined Ed Meek. Sixty years and a Facebook post later, images continue to define him.

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