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BLACK SPACE ON A WHITE CAMPUS: EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS AND THE PHYSICAL STRUCTURE OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI

A Thesis
Presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
For the degree of Master of Arts
In the Department of Southern Studies
The University of Mississippi

by
DREW FORD
May 2017

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ABSTRACT

At the University of Mississippi, despite institutional efforts to distance the present from the past, issues of race continue to influence the campus and the experiences of African-American students. This thesis examines the relationship between the physical structure of the University of Mississippi campus and African American students, and investigates the creation of “counter-publics.” This thesis analyzes works in critical race theory, higher education, and social geography to argue that the “whiteness” of the University of Mississippi campus creates social and educational barriers for African American students. Furthermore, along with being surrounded by “whiteness,” African American students lack any physical representation of their own. As a result, these students must create their own safe spaces, or “counter-publics.”

With this theory as the framework, this thesis uses a qualitative method, conducting 11 interviews with African American students and alumni to explore the phenomenon of “counter-publics” at the University of Mississippi. Collectively, these interviews speak to the black student experience at the University of Mississippi; from awareness to the racial climate to experiencing the racial prejudices to finding and creating “black spaces” for themselves. Ultimately, this thesis argues these black “counter-places” prove problematic for while they do support the needs of African American students they are disconnected from the rest of the university, and therefore, black students remain visitors on their own campuses.

KEYWORDS: Counter-publics, counter-spaces, black space, higher education, African American students, University of Mississippi.

DEDICATION

My road to graduate school began with a church marquee in Bastrop, LA that read “Have a little faith and keep the pace, even Moses was a basket case.” In so many ways writing a thesis requires both persistence and pure, blind, faith. I dedicate this thesis to all who have helped me on my journey to keep both, but a few members of the tribe deserve special attention. To my favorite professor in life, Dr. Curt Kinard, also known as “Grandy,” your wisdom and guidance has been a constant for years, but even more so during the time of this writing. Words can never express how grateful I am for your continual reminders to “hunker down,” or to “just get the damn thing done!” To Mom, thank you for being an incredible cheerleader who champions all I throw my heart into. Thank you for taking every long-winded phone call and for agreeing to read every chapter of this work. You are my rock, my inspiration, and still, the coolest woman I know. To the rest of the Fleming/Ford/ Kinard family, thank you for your patience and kindness. Thank you for refueling my spirit when most needed and reminding me that everything, in due time, will work itself out.

The University of Mississippi Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life also deserves my gratitude. First, and foremost, thank you for allowing me to spend two years with you growing as both a professional and as an individual. You became true friends and much relied upon companions. Without you, this project may never have come to light. Thank you for providing endless resources, ideas, and moments of clarity. Lastly, I thank you for the bottomless coffee, free meals, endless use of office supplies, and general understanding of a graduate student’s needs.

To my dearest friends, in Oxford and afar, thank you for reminding me that life is a balance, both work and play. As a graduate student, it is so easy to get lost in the work and I am forever grateful for the moments that you brought me back to life. To John, who walked this path with me, thank you for selflessly sharing me with this work and this place. To my Southern Studies peers, oh how I will miss chats at City Grocery with you. You pushed me to work harder, think smarter, and become the student that I never thought possible.

Finally, I dedicate this thesis to the 11 individuals who let me share their stories. Thank you for your honesty and vulnerability. I hope you find honor in this work. Each one of you is beautiful and strong beyond measure, and I am eternally grateful that you trusted me with your words and experiences. Without you this thesis simply could not exist.

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Lastly, I must again thank those individuals who lent their voices to this thesis. They brought this thesis to life and led me down paths I never before would have walked. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BGLO	Black Greek Life Organization
BSU	Black Student Union
HBCU	Historically Black College and University
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NPHC	National Pan-hellenic Conference
PWI	Predominately White Institution

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INTRODUCTION

At the University of Mississippi, the campus's physical structures and symbols serve as a barrier to equal opportunity for African-American students. The University of Mississippi struggles to operate in a twenty-first century world with a physical structure that honors nineteenth century, Old South imagery. Recent controversies surrounding the flying of the Mississippi state flag or the argument over a plaque intent on contextualizing a Confederate monument only further highlight the ongoing debates over race and place on campus. As American Studies professor George Lipsitz notes, this tension between race and place is to be expected since "The lived experience of race has a spatial dimension and the lived experience of place has a racial dimension."¹

But what about the lived experience when the spatial dimension is missing from the equation? At the University of Mississippi, African-American students are surrounded by physical structures and symbols ascribed as "white," from the famed tailgating spot known as The Grove to the Lyceum building, to stickers worn by students saying "Let Our Flag Fly" or "Let the Band Play Dixie." African-American students are surrounded by southern Lost Cause symbols, such as the (now retired, yet still present) school mascot Colonel Reb, Confederate statues, and a Confederate graveyard. Furthermore, African-American students must navigate "white" campus spaces without having any physical place of their own. Effectively, African-American students are surrounded by physical structures that promote "whiteness" and lack

¹ Lipsitz, George. "The Radicalization of Place and Spacialization of Race: Theorizing the Hidden Architecture of Landscape" *Landscape Journal*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2007, pp. 10-23.

structures promoting “blackness.” Diversity scholar Susan Iverson notes, “the university’s narrative, disseminated through institutional policy... is the dominant story; it can appear to be the only story.”² As a result, physical place— or lack thereof— has had a direct impact on the experience and identity of African-American students at the University of Mississippi.

While most scholars who study the racialization of place focus on urban settings, this thesis focuses on an institution of higher education. In higher education scholarship, discussions of race and place tend to be viewed through the lens of academic performance, departmental structure, or diversity studies. In places such as universities, African-American students are required to undergo a series of social negations in order to be successful. Indeed, the University of Mississippi is not alone in its lack of equal physical representation for African-American students. Many predominately white institutions (PWI’s) lack equal physical representation for minority students. And yet, while the University of Mississippi may not be exceptional in this regard, the campus’s ongoing struggle to define its racial history makes the university an exemplary case of the relationship between race and space on southern college campuses.

Often in reaction to racialized places and symbols and the series of ongoing social negotiations, African-American students at the University of Mississippi create their personal and community identities in “counter publics.” Urban planning scholar Kurt Iveson notes that “counter-publics, whose interests are not represented by the dominant public, take shape... to promote their own interests in the wider public sphere.”³ For anyone who is, or feels marginalized from the dominant public, the formation of counter-publics allows for a zone where

² Iverson, Susan. “Camouflaging Power and Privilege: A Critical Race Analysis of University Diversity Policies.” *Educational Administration Quarterly*, vol.43.5, 2007, pp. 586-611.

³ Iveson, Kurt. “Putting the Public Back in Public Spaces.” *The People, Place, and Space Reader*, edited by Jen Jack Gieseking, Mangold, Katz, Low, and Saegert. Routledge (2014), pp.187-192.

they can establish their own cultural norms and collectively define their interests.⁴ At the University of Mississippi, the relationship between place, African-American students, and counter publics is exemplary because of the lack of place which African-Americans have to call their own. Similar in geography and history, institutions such as the University of Alabama or Louisiana State University have Black Greek Life Organizations (BGLO's) present on a predominately all-white fraternity and sorority row. Unlike at those schools, African-American students at the University of Mississippi have been forced to create space for themselves. Yet, even with the creation of a counter public, African-American students still remain without representation in terms of physical space.

For African-American students, counter publics exist in the abstract. The formation of BGLO's or social groups allow students to become members of the campus community, although only partially, for while they “become part of the college communit[y]— through friendships, clubs sports, [or] romances” they still live on a campus where they are not represented.⁵ Geography scholar Don Mitchell notes that, on campuses such as the University of Mississippi, a lack of representation can be problematic for subordinate groups. Mitchell argues that, for groups “whose interests aren't otherwise protected by a right to access a... property, [the group] simply cannot be, because they... have no place to be.”⁶

Following Mitchell's argument, this thesis seeks to understand the relationship between the physical spaces of the University of Mississippi and the creation of counter publics by African-American students in attendance. How did such counter publics come to be? What impact has the

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Lee, Elizabeth. Introduction. *College Student's Experiences of Power and Marginality: Sharing and Negotiating Differences*, edited by Elizabeth Lee and Chaise LaDousa, (New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 1-9.

⁶ Mitchell, Don. *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space*, (Guilford Press, 2003), pp. 192.

change in narrative and policy regarding the university and its history had on counter publics? And most importantly, how does the physical space of the university and the existence of counter publics affect the personal identity of African-American students?

For the purpose of this thesis, the University of Mississippi will be referred to as a *place* and not as a *space*. Space is an abstract geometry with no apparent or attributed social meaning, while “place is space filled up by people, practices, objects, and representations.”⁷ Such considerations are drawn from Caroline Knowles, who argues “Place and space are not the same... space is the general category from which places are made... place is like identity. In identifying a particular space, we get place.”⁸

This thesis will also rely on critical race theory, although it should be noted that, while certain theories may pertain to various races, I will focus on interactions between African-Americans and whites. Furthermore, the same parameters will exist when utilizing diversity scholarship in education. While I recognize that other minority students attend the University of Mississippi, due to the space constraints of this thesis as well as the racial history of the university, only African-American and white students will receive attention.

Chapter One analyzes the relevant literature on race and place vis a vis critical race theory, scholarship on diversity in higher education, and the work of urban and social geographers. Chapter Two explores the historical relationship between race and place at the University of Mississippi, specifically exploring the role of “white spaces” and “black spaces” on campus. In order to understand the series of social negotiations between students as well as the evolution of counter publics, this chapter will also explore recent and historical accounts of campus culture as they pertain to African-American students. Chapter Three describes the

⁷ Gieryn, Thomas. “A Space for Place in Sociology.” *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 26, 2000, pp. 463-496.

⁸ Knowles, Caroline. *Race and Social Analysis*. (Thousand Oaks, 2003), pp. 80.

methodological design of this thesis. Chapter Four summarizes the formation of counter publics on the University of Mississippi campus. It also identifies key themes and findings in interviews conducted with African-American students and alumni. And lastly, Chapter Five pulls from scholarly literature, historical context, and key findings from interviews to summarize the impact and role of the African-American counter public at the University of Mississippi.

CHAPTER I

LITERATURE REVIEW

At the University of Mississippi, despite institutional efforts to distance the present from the past, issues of race continue to influence the campus and the experiences of African-American students. This literature review will address three areas of research related to the racialization of place and the people who operate within racialized places. The first section, pulling from critical race theory, analyzes two works which focus on the social formation of race and the role of race in personal identity-making. The second section focuses on three sociological works which concentrate on the creation of place and counter spaces. The arguments in section two address research regarding the power and meaning imbued into physical structures. Finally, in the third section, four works of education scholarship consider the racialization of college campuses as well as the role of diversity efforts by institutions of higher education. Taken together, all three sections present the following arguments: meaning attached to a place is the result of ongoing, ever-changing social interactions; place allows the dominant racial group to gain power, particularly social power; place is imbued with racial memory; and, personal and racial identity is shaped within the context of a place.

Part One: Critical Race Theory Literature

According to the National Research Council's two volume work on race and ethnicity in the United States, "the concepts of race and ethnicity are social realities because they are deeply rooted in the consciousness of individuals and groups, and because they are firmly fixed in our

society's institutional life.”⁹ Today, the arguments of many scholars studying race in America stand in alignment with the National Research Council, considering race as a construct of society. The study of such social interactions is a dominant theme in race studies, with scholars arguing the way in which an individual views their own race, as well as the race of others, and the manifestation of such an opinion, stems from the individual's social environment. For this section of the literature review, Omi and Winant's (2015), Tatum's (2003), and Bonilla-Silva's (2006) prove most salient. Each yield two dominant themes: feelings and thoughts regarding race are produced through a series of social processes and are influenced by pre-existing social power structures; and, how and where an individual is exposed to race shapes their personal identity.

Michael Omi and Howard Winant's (2015) *Racial Formation in the United States*, now in its third edition, elaborates on their previous understanding of the ways in which race and racial identity have both shaped, and been shaped by, the historical and social forces of the American political system. The third edition, utilizing empirical research, expands on racial formation theory, arguing that “race [is] a fundamental organizing principle of social life ... [and remains] constantly in formation” (vi).

According to Omi and Winant (2015), race is defined as “a concept, a representation or signification of identity that refers to different types of human bodies, to the perceived corporeal and phenotypic markers of difference and the meanings and social practices that are ascribed to those differences” (111). Similar to other scholars in the field, Omi and Winant (2015) view the concept of race as a social construction, a vehicle by which “social beings... categorize people so as to be able to ‘navigate’ in the world—to discern quickly who may be friend or foe, to position and situate ourselves within prevailing social hierarchies, and to provide clues that guide our

⁹ Smelser, Neil, The National Research Council. *America Becoming: Racial Trends and Their Consequences, Volume 2*, (National Academic Press, 2001), pp.3.

social interactions with the individuals and groups we encounter” (105). In this sense, the formation of race is completely man-made. Race proves not to be a biological difference between humans, but rather the result of social interactions in which we, as humans, “make up people” and create “others” (105). These man-made social categories based on visual appearances is defined by Omi and Winant (2015) as racial formation. “The process of race making,” they argue, “and its reverberations throughout the social order, is what we call *racial formation*..., the sociohistorical process by which racial identities are created, lived out, transformed, and destroyed” (109).

Although Omi and Winant (2015) agree that race is a social construct, they are quick to argue that race should not be cast off as an imaginary concept. While race itself may not be a tactile entity, the implications of race on society and individuals are all too real. The pair notes, “it is important to emphasize that once specific concepts of race are widely circulated and accepted as a social reality, racial difference is not dependent on visual observation alone” (111). If racial difference is not solely dependent on visual observation, then what are other contributing factors to race formation? According to Omi and Winant, at the root of racial formation is society’s need to differentiate between subordinate and dominant groups. Through a brief account of racial history in Western civilization, Omi and Winant argue that categorizing race for the benefit of dominant social groups has been a part of Western society since the days of colonization. In the United States, racialization began with the Native Americans, whom white European settlers viewed as inferior. Today, it is African-Americans or other people “of color” who are categorized as “other.” As race is an ascribed entity, the dominant group is able to label any group it sees fit as “other”; in casting these individuals as “others,” the dominant group is able to remain in power, further marginalizing other groups.

While Omi and Winant (2015) address racial formation on the macro-level of American society, Beverly Daniel Tatum's *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria: And Other Conversations About Race*, addresses racial formation on the micro-level, analyzing the impact of race on identity development in individuals throughout the stages of their life. Utilizing her experience as an educator and a clinical psychologist, Tatum (2003) draws from interviews and interactions with students and peers. Defining racial identity as "the meaning each of us has constructed or is constructing about what it means to be a white person or a person of color in a race-conscious society" (xviii), Tatum notes the "impact [of race on identity-making] begins early," arguing that children participate in racial identity formation from a young age. Individuals continue to form a racial identity throughout their lifetime as they encounter the world around them. Interactions with others as well as interactions with the dominant group described by Omi and Winant (2015), all shape the way individuals view themselves, their race, and the race of others.

In her discussion of racial identity development, Tatum (2003) notes that the formation of self-identity often occurs via a phenomenon known as "the looking glass self... [in which] other people [serve as] the mirror in which we see ourselves" (18). The "looking glass self" phenomenon is particularly significant during childhood and early adolescence when many become exposed to life outside their own homes. For many, this experience with "the looking glass self" is the first-time differences between themselves and those around them may be realized. Echoing Omi and Winant's (2015) discussion of "othering," Tatum (2003) notes "the parts of our identity that *do* capture our attention are those that other people notice, and that reflect back to us. The aspect of identity that is the target of others' attention, and subsequently of our own, often is that which sets us apart as exceptional or 'other' "(22). As Tatum breaks

down the role of racial identity development in each section of maturity (childhood, adolescence, adulthood), she marks that this feeling of “other” can lead to the creation of an “oppositional identity.” For African-Americans, “oppositional identity” often exists as a reasserting of blackness.

In *Racism Without Racist: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*, sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva focuses on the social interactions of race relations in the United States. Utilizing data collected from hundreds of college students, Bonilla-Silvia (2006) explores the role of racism in a post-Civil Rights America, ultimately arguing that racism continues to exist, but has been forced to adopt new ways of presentation. Similar to the arguments of Omi and Winant (2015) and Tatum (2003), Bonilla-Silvia (2006) argues that personal racial identity results from social interactions and influence from a dominant social group. Where Bonilla-Silvia (2006) differs from the others is his focus on whites; Omi and Winant (2015) and Tatum (2003) concentrate on the racial identity formation of African-Americans, while Bonilla-Silvia gives attention to the racial identity formation of the “white man.”

Arguing that whites in America are still desperate to remain the dominant social group, yet aware that society frowns on overt racism, Bonilla-Silvia (2006) notes that whites have created a new type of racism. In his discussion of New Racism, Bonilla-Silvia poses the question, “If Jim Crow’s racial structure has been replaced by a ‘new racism,’ what happened to Jim Crow racism?” (25). Ultimately the author answers his own question by stating that Jim Crow has been replaced with “color blind racism,” described as a “new powerful ideology that has emerged to defend the contemporary racial order” (25). Through the analysis of student interviews, Bonilla-Silvia (2006) is able to demonstrate mannerisms of color blind racism.

Unlike overt racist acts of the Jim Crow era, color blind racism allows whites to utilize techniques which reassure them that racism is gone but still ensures white privilege in the social hierarchy. Such techniques also allow whites to absolve themselves from the guilt of racism. While Tatum (2003) argues that African-American students are constantly surrounded by the very thought of race, which has a great impact on personal development, Bonilla-Silvia (2006) argues that whites are oblivious to the thought of race, truly believing racism to be a thing of the past.

Tatum (2003) argues in her work that African-Americans often self-segregate as a way to create a safe space; Bonilla-Silvia (2006) argues that whites “abhor what they regard as blacks’ ‘self-segregation,’ [yet] they do not have a problem with their own racial segregation because they do not see it as a racial phenomenon” (131). Such blindness to racial issues adds another complication to the relationship between minorities and their white counterparts since “whites believe discrimination is a thing of the past, minorities’ protestations about... experiencing discrimination... are interpreted as ‘excuses’”(131). As a result, racism, from its impact to the actions required to fix it, becomes the burden of the minority community.

This literature indicates that race is a fluid, social construction, ascribed to individuals through their interactions with others and society as a whole. Omni and Winant (2015), Tatum (2003), and Bonilla-Silvia (2006) all speak to the existing social power structure in the United States, in which whites reign supreme over minority counterparts. It is for this reason, that whites seek to maintain a racial order that allows them the privileges which only those at the top of hierarchy can access. In her work, Tatum (2003) argues that the way an individual is exposed to the concept of race affects the way one views themselves, as well as those around them. For the purpose of this thesis, such revelations prove important for, in the case of the University

of Mississippi, white students have long been the dominant social group on campus. As a result of this existing social power structure, African-American students must create their personal identities in relationship to their white peers. However, concerning this thesis, a weakness of the above arguments is their failure to include *place* as an active agent in the production of personal and racial identity making. Such arguments will be considered in the following section.

Part Two: Place Studies

At the University of Mississippi, on the third floor of the Student Union, a sign reads: “The University is respected, but Ole Miss is loved. The University gives a diploma and regretfully terminates tenure, but one never graduates from Ole Miss.”¹⁰ The essence of this quote demonstrates that the University of Mississippi is two schools, not one. The University of Mississippi serves as the physical campus, the formal educational process, and the curriculum, while the term Ole Miss encapsulates “the spirit” or memory that certain students often have of their experiences on campus. Sociologists and geographers alike agree that place can assume racial qualities and therefore, it has value in the study of personal and racial identity making. Of the scholarly works analyzed for this thesis, the following themes emerge: the meaning attached to a place is the result of on-going, ever-changing, social interactions; place allows the dominant group to have power, particularly social power; the relationship between place and race is fluid; and place is imbued with racial memory. Although none of these works focus on the physical places of college campuses, taken together, they argue that physical places are active agents in shaping the identity of individuals and communities.

In *Race and Social Analysis*, sociologist Caroline Knowles (2003) defines the creation of race in a place as the “spatial dimensions of race making,” meaning that a place is both defined

¹⁰ Frank E. Everett Jr.

by the social constructs of race, and it also “defines [the social] jurisdiction” where social interactions construct race (43). Utilizing empirical research as well as anecdotes from her time as a teacher, Knowles (2003) argues place allows for personal interactions in which “racial orders are... composed of myriad and ordinary everyday social processes and mechanisms with which people interface” (25). Geographer Doreen Massey (1994) supports Knowles’s (2003) claim, stating “so-called spatial relations and spatial process [are] actually social relations taking a particular geographical form... place is constituted through social relations and material social practices” (141). Thus, the relationship between a place and race is also a result of social constructions.

In her discussion of the creation of race in a place, Knowles (2003) argues that the image of “self is made ‘in the momentary relational spaces occurring between ourselves and another or otherness in our surroundings’” (36). This statement echoes the language of Tatum’s (2003) work on racial identity formation in that she notes that much of self-identity depends on the outside world (18). Claiming that identity formation remains fluid, Brooke Neely and Michelle Samura (2011) note that “spaces are always changing and contested, and they are largely created and maintained through performative, embodied experience” (1935). In looking at Tatum’s (2003), and Neely and Samura’s (2001) theories, it is reasonable to conclude that one’s personal identity, a combination of both social interactions and interactions with a place, must be fluid. The identity a place assumes is in a constant state of flux as “social actors... create, disrupt and recreate spatial meanings through interaction with one another” (Nelly, Samura, p.1939). As spaces change and social actors enter or exit a place, the self changes. Sociologist Thomas Gieryn (2000) attributes this fluidity to the meaning social actors ascribe to place, noting “places are made as people ascribe qualities to the material and social stuff gathered there: ours to theirs;

safe or dangerous; public or private; unfamiliar or known; rich or poor; black or white; beautiful or ugly; old or new; accessible or not” (472).

Geographer Robert Sack (1993) poses the question “What does it mean to say that geographic... place ha[s] [social] powers?” (327) Sack (1993) answers his own question by arguing that, though power and identity result from social interactions, such social interactions must occur in a geographical location. Thus, place provides physical boundaries for social actors to exert dominance over others. Gieryn (2000) agrees with Sack’s (1993) analysis, noting “places are doubly constructed; most are built or in some way physically carved out. They are also interpreted, narrated, perceived, felt, understood, and imagined” (473).

George Lipsitz (2007) departs from Sack (1993) and Gieryn (2000), arguing that, for the African-American community, the fight over physical place extends beyond social interactions, thereby representing a desire to gain both access to certain rights and access to a physical place. For example, many of the Civil Rights Movement’s battles occurred in public, racialized spaces. As Lipsitz (2007) notes, “this long legacy has produced a powerful black spatial imaginary, a socially shared understanding of the importance of public place and its power to shape opportunities and life chances” (17). The notion of place as a political power source which is capable of either providing or denying a group certain liberties is echoed by sociologist Henri Lefebvre (1991) who remarks, “one of the consistent ways to limit the economic and political rights of groups has been to contain social reproduction by limiting access to space” (22). In the discussion of the University of Mississippi, Lefebvre’s (1991) comments of restricting a group’s power by denying access to certain places is particularly relevant; African-American students do not feel ownership of any physical structure on campus and, thus, are often interacting in places deemed white.

In viewing place as an establishment that holds power, one must look to those who regulate such power, or in this case, who are in charge of the place. Nelly and Sumara (2001) argue that power in a place is not static but rather exists as “changing existing power structures” (1946). In studying the relationship between power structures and fluidity, scholars are able to question the legitimacy of the existing power structure, and assess the stability of such power. Furthermore, understanding the fluid power of place allows researchers to look at resistance movements in relation to power structures. For example, in the University of Mississippi’s case, resistance movements, such as in 2015 when a group of protestors surrounded the flag pole which flew the Mississippi state flag or in 1982 when an African-American cheerleader refused to carry the Confederate flag, demonstrate challenges to dominant power structures.¹¹ Thus, it is important to understand the relationship between space, social interactions, and fluidity, for rarely are resistance movements merely combatting a physical place. Rather, resistance movements are typically combatting the social actors who have the primary control of a physical place.

Knowles (2003) complicates the argument of social relations in a physical place by introducing the concept of a place’s racial memory. Knowles (2003) writes, place “is evidently etched by time, so that (selected elements of) a racialized past and a racialized present confront each other” (79). Place has both a sacred and profane memory. Social actors who interact with the place either memorialize its racial past or, at the very least, feel uneasy in its presence. This “politics of the past” causes a “built environment [to contain] the monuments and marking of a past that celebrates some lives and by implication, sidelines others” (Knowles, 97). For Knowles

¹¹ For more information on these two incidents reference: Rawls, Wendell “Black Cheerleader Balks at Waving the ‘Rebel’ Flag” *New York Times*. September 4, 1982 and Svriuga, Susan “Ole Miss Takes Down its State Flag with Confederate Emblem,” *The Washington Post*. October 26, 2015.

(2003), the culmination of these social interactions with the “politics of the past” result in what she defines as the “active archive.” The “active archive” theory argues that a combination of historical and social interactions infuse a place. Knowles (2003) writes, “place is an active archive of the social processes and social relationships composing racial orders. Active because it is not just a monument, accumulated through a racial past and present— although it is also that— it is active in the sense that it interacts with people and their activists as an ongoing set of possibilities in which race is fabricated” (80).

In defining place as an “active archive,” Knowles’s (2003) work aligns with Sack’s (1993) argument that place has social capital which can affect and frame social interactions. Knowles’s (2003) work differs from Sack’s by asking a question: she asks how do people interact with a place, instead of asking, how does place interact with people. Thus, a social actor’s self-identity is based on the way they interact with the “active archive” of a place. Perceiving the structures of the University of Mississippi as an “active archive” is important. In recent controversies surrounding the campus, arguments have been made that monuments and structures are just that, monuments and structures, with no influence on current social interactions. Knowles’s (2003) argument disproves this claim, instead arguing that historical and political meanings are imbued into the structure, thereby framing social relations in the structure’s presence.

At the University of Mississippi, theories of place are significant because they contend that any power possessed by a physical place is the result of social interactions and the ascribed identities created between social actors and the place itself. Furthermore, it is essential to acknowledge the fluidity of such power with regards to a physical place. In theory, power structures at the University of Mississippi could change every year as new students enroll and

come to campus. However, as students interact with the University of Mississippi and the historical images linking the campus to whiteness, they continue to respond to the “active archive” and do so in a manner which affects the identity of themselves, their peers, and the university. For African-American students, the relationship between place and identity-making is particularly important; as African-American students do not currently have any physical representation on campus, other than their own bodies, their identity forms through their interaction with social actors who understand the University of Mississippi as a white place.

Part Three: Higher Education Scholarship

A decade after *Brown vs. the Board of Education Topeka*, a developing national mythos led many to believe that the days of segregated education in America were coming to an end. Today, despite institutions of higher learning becoming more diverse than ever, universities struggle to instill attitudes of inclusion and diversity on their campuses. Education scholars, acknowledging the deep divisions between ethnic and racial groups, are asking fundamental questions of how social integration, power, and marginality exhibit themselves within the confines of college campuses (Lee 2015; Epenshade & Radford 2013). In the literature reviewed for this section, three dominant discourses appear: first, institutions of higher education are racialized spaces, with built-in power structures that rarely favor African-American students; second, racism on college campuses often presents itself through microaggressions, rather than through overt racist acts; and lastly, universities are aware of the inequality on their campuses and often, instead of implementing true institutional change, utilize the language of diversity and inclusion as a way to quiet critiques (McKinley and Brayboy 2003, 72). Although the following works do not exclusively look at the role of place and its impact on African-American students, collectively these works suggest that the relationship between African-American students and

most college campuses is hostile for students of color.

In *The Agony of Education*, sociologists Joe Feagin, Hernan Vera and Nikita Imani (1997) argue that American universities have remained white places, both demographically and in terms of student and institutional culture. (xi). Furthermore, they suggest notes that racism remains prominent on campuses and enforces invisible barriers that hinder the academic performance and social life of African-American students. Feagin, Vera, and Imani interviewed thirty-six, randomly selected, African-American students from a school identified as “State University,” as well as 41 parents. Students and parents alike were asked questions regarding their experiences and any identifiable barriers while attending “State University.”

Those interviewed “repeatedly described the physical spaces [of campus] as ‘white,’ ‘hostile,’ ‘alien,’ and the like” (16). African-American students perceived such structures to be white and those present in such places to be “white” (17). As a result, African-American students found themselves surrounded by whiteness. A strength of Feagin, Vera, and Imani’s (1997) work is their decision to interview parents as well as students. In speaking with parents, the authors uncovered the dilemma that African-American students face when choosing a college. Knowing that “racialized spaces are part of the daily worlds of African-Americans at all predominately white colleges,” students and their families must choose between navigating institutional racism at predominately white institutions (PWI’s) or attending other institutions such as a historically black colleges and universities (HBCU) (81).

Feagin, Vera, and Imani (1997) conclude their work with a plea for change in higher education. Their interviews indeed elaborate on the racism that African-American students face on a daily basis; African-American students must navigate the world of higher education in a way that is not comparable to their white counterparts, whether in terms of the physical

structures of campus, interactions with their fellow peers, or relationships with faculty. In the final chapter, the authors note that universities are aware of instances of racism on campus yet rarely take action. Instead, institutions avoid issues of racism by hiding behind diversity plans and the language and logic of “inclusion.” In doing so, institutions are able to present themselves as active agents of change, willing to combat issues of campus racism, regardless of whether or not they intend to change institutional culture.

Similar to Feagin, Vera, and Imani (1997), Ross’s (2016) *Blackballed: The Black and White Politics of Race on America’s Campus* analyzes recent accounts of campus racism. Based on interviews with dozens of students across a variety of campuses, Ross discusses the rise of racist incidents in higher education, arguing that “predominately white campuses, despite the pretty pictures, are now hostile places for black students” (10). While Feagin, Vera, and Imani (1997) provide anonymity for the university they analyze, Ross (2016) lambasts institutions for the actions on their campuses. He notes “This book makes certain that colleges and universities can never say they didn’t know or understand past and present campus racism, making it as real for the university as it is for the African-American students who live this repeated history year after year” (17).

For Ross (2016), racist actions on college campuses today are a direct result of the racist history of education, citing “the tradition of predominately white colleges and universities being actively hostile spaces for African-American students not only goes back decades but can be traced nearly to the presence of the first African-American college students” (112). In the case of Deep South universities, such as the University of Mississippi, slaves were often the first African-Americans on a campus, used for labor to build campus infrastructure. Ross draws a connection between this history and more recent racist incidents, noting that a history of racism

has caused universities to become desensitized to blatant campus racism. Like Feagin, Vera, and Imani (1997), Ross (2016) chastises university leadership, asserting that universities and their board of directors “are reactive and not proactive to the racism on their campuses, with a ready-made, pro form statement designed to reassure the public that they are indeed just as shocked...about what just happened on their campus” (113).

While Feagin, Vera, and Imani (1997) attribute campus racism to the whiteness of university places, Ross (2016) contends it is the continual use of controversial white symbols which are the most problematic. By refusing to remove such controversial entities from campus, “colleges and universities... speak to the idea that African-American college students aren’t really important members of the campus community, but mere visitors. Transitory members of a college community who come and go without having ownership of the place where they get their education” (Ross 2016, 170). Such existence in a transient state leaves African-American students, like those who attend the University of Mississippi, “to feel like interlopers on their own campus” (Ross 2016, 219). Incidents such as perpetual use of controversial campus symbols are just one example of the subtlety of campus racism, known as “microaggressions” (Solorzano, Ceja, Yosso 2001, 60). Utilizing the same term as Solorzano, Ceja and Yosso (2000), Ross (2016) concludes that, while blatant racist acts may make headlines, African-American students are more likely to suffer from microaggressions, often acts so subtle that they lack reprimand from universities.

In a study of African-American students and their experience with microaggressions, Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) define a microaggression as “subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously” (60). Conducting interviews with thirty-four African-American students attending three different

PWI's, Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso study the role of microaggressions on college campuses. The findings are three-fold: first, they argue that microaggressions occur in both academic spaces and social spaces on campus; second, "racial microaggressions in both academic and social spaces have real consequences, the most obvious of which are the resulting negative racial climate and African-American student's struggles with feelings of self-doubt and frustration as well as isolation" (69); and finally, the endurance of such microaggressions leads African-American students to create "counter spaces" for themselves (70).

For the purpose of this thesis, it is the findings regarding microaggressions in social spaces as well as the creation of counter spaces that prove the most helpful. For students constantly faced with microaggressions, "counter spaces serve as sites where deficit notions of people of color can be challenged and where positive collegiate racial climate can be established and maintained" (70). Counter spaces serve as a safe place for minority students on otherwise all white campuses. Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) highlight interviews where students speak to the notion that such spaces are often student led and student created, commonly existing as social groups or black Greek Life organizations. Furthermore, those interviewed argue that counter spaces are not simply an act of rebellion in response to feeling like an outsider but rather are necessary for African-American students to function. Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) echo the voice of those interviewed claiming "social counter spaces [are] important because they [afford] African-American students with space... to vent their frustrations and to get to know others who shared their experiences of micro aggressions and/ or overt discrimination" (70).

Although Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso's (2000) work is important in understanding the challenges African-American students face when attending PWI's, such work is not without weaknesses. Their study does not acknowledge universities as active participants in creating

hostile, racialized places for African-American students, choosing instead to place emphasis on social interactions. Feagin, Vera, and Imani (1997) and Ross (2016) both identify the role of the administration in campus racism and conclude their works with a call to action to address such matters. While Feagin, Vera, and Imani (1997) remain optimistic of change, Ross (2016) argues that administrative promises are hollow at best, and lasting change must come from African-American students themselves. In her study of diversity plans from 20 land-grant universities, Iverson (2007) stands in agreement with Ross (2016), arguing that universities trade in the language of “diversity” but rarely implement effective change. Utilizing a critical race theory lens, the purpose of Iverson’s (2007) study is to demonstrate “how discourses of diversity, circulating in educational policies, reflect and reproduce particular realities of people of color on university campuses” (586). In conducting a line-by-line comparison of institutional diversity plans, Iverson (2007) found “four predominant discourses chasing images of people of color: access, disadvantage, marketplace, and democracy.” Taken together, each diversity plan “construct[ed] images of people of color as outsiders, at-risk victims, commodities, and change agents” (586).

According to Iverson (2007), the discourse of access in diversity plans portrays students of color as outsiders. Usage of “outsider” discourse begins with the admissions process and follows students of color throughout their college career. Iverson contends that universities draft initiatives aimed at increasing numerical diversity on campus, even utilizing resources to ensure the recruitment and retention of students of color. However, once these targeted students are on campus, little support is provided from the institution to ensure true inclusion. Such outsider status is only further exacerbated by institutions barometer of achievement. Iverson’s analysis found “diversity policies use a majority (white and male) as the standard against which to

measure minority progress and success” (594). Such language choices result in Iverson’s (2007) Discourse of Disadvantages, in which students of color are deemed “as at risk before entering institutions of higher education and remain at risk once a member of the university” (596). Ultimately, Iverson suggests that, in utilizing this language, universities are painting students of color as needing to conform to university standards and, subsequently, are able to absolve themselves of responsibility from any racial incidents which may occur on campus.

If diversity plans receive any disputation from the communities they serve, Iverson (2007) believes it is through counter-storytelling. As noted above, universities typically utilize the white male as a barometer of success, and similarly, tend to tell the history of the university from the white male perspective. As a result, “the university’s narrative, disseminated through institutional policy (and the university newswire), is the dominant story; it can appear to be the only story” (604). Such a camouflaging of university history silences the very voices that diversity plans are intended to highlight. The result of such actions often leads third parties, in the forms of student groups or sympathetic faculty, to interrupt the “whitewashed version [of university history]” (604). At the University of Mississippi, this role of third party counter-storytelling has often fallen to the students of the Black Student Union or members of NPHC fraternity and sorority groups.

Collectively, the available literature indicates that African-American students on PWI campuses remain at a disadvantage. PWI’s such as the University of Mississippi promote an image of inclusion and diversity, yet, in reality, such campuses remain racialized places. African-American students who choose to attend a PWI are consistently surrounded by racially charged interactions. Institutions promote diversity through plans and initiatives, yet, more often than not, such inclusive initiatives fail to have true effect on the student body. As a result, African-

American students feel isolated from their peers and college community, and seek inclusivity through self-created counter spaces.

The existing literature allows for a broad general understanding of the ways in which race and racism occur on a college campus. However, these studies are not without their weaknesses.

With the exception of Ross (2016), little to no focus is given to the role physical place and campus symbols have on students of color; other studies choose instead to focus on racial issues as they appear through social interactions. While social interactions are important in the shaping of identity, it is *place* that provides the physical confines for such interactions to occur.

Therefore, this thesis explores the role that place plays in African-American student identity-making.

Summary

According to the University of Mississippi's Office of Institutional Research, Effectiveness, and Planning, in the 2014-2015 school year, the university enrolled 2,880 African-American students. Despite best efforts by the administration to alleviate racial tensions through the implementation of diversity plans and campus-wide programming, race continues to shape social interactions and space at the University of Mississippi campus. The studies reviewed in this chapter demonstrate that African-American students who choose to attend a PWI undergo a series of social negotiations and implications unlike those of their white counterparts. As section one of the chapter argues, race is a social construction that is created and ascribed through social interactions. Section two discusses the role of place in identity making, establishing that place is far more than physical barriers, but rather is filled with meanings and memories. Lastly, the literature reviewed in section three claims that PWI's are hostile places for students of color. For African-American students at the University of Mississippi, this literature proves imperative.

Identity creation by African-American students is not solely a result of the physical structures of the campus nor the social interactions with their peers, but rather is the result of the dynamics of race-making and place-making *combined*. This thesis therefore contributes to the existing research by placing such dynamics together in conversation and ultimately arguing that race, place, and politics shape the experiences and struggles of African-American students with whiteness, the true “spirit” of the state’s flagship university.

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the historical relationship between white and black places at the University of Mississippi; how such places came to be and how they continue to affect students and student culture. The university's symbols are controversial and contribute to its "active archive." Hence, a section regarding symbols has also been included. The University of Mississippi has a long and troubled past regarding race relations. This chapter does not tell the whole story; rather it highlights a few incidents to provide historical context for the campus's physical structure, showing how it became a racialized place and a barrier of equal experience and opportunity for minority students.

Introduction

In 1868, during Reconstruction, Congress amended the U.S. Constitution to include language regarding equality for American citizens. The Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment states:

All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.¹²

Twenty-eight years after the ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment the Supreme Court heard

¹² *U.S. Constitution. Amend. XIV*

Plessy v. Ferguson (1896). In a 7-1 vote, the court declared segregation was not in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment. Noting that “‘absolute equality’ is limited to the realm of the ballot box and the courtroom, not touching anything in the sphere of so-called social rights,” the majority opinion argued that “separate but equal” facilities for whites and blacks remained within constitutional boundaries.¹³ Following the *Plessy* verdict, civil rights cases challenged the notion of “separate but equal,” while employing the language of the Equal Protection Clause to fight for minority rights. Despite valiant efforts, it was not until *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka* in 1954 that the Supreme Court ruled “separate but equal” unconstitutional.

Although the landmark decision of *Brown vs. Board of Education* mandated schools to desegregate, few changes happened on the local level, particularly in the Deep South. The *Brown* decision required schools to desegregate but gave no guidelines for implementation strategies or timelines. Similar to their K-12 counterparts, institutions of higher education grappled with when to implement integration, often waiting until the courts forced a state flagship to open its doors to people of color. As a result, schools in southern states ranged in their dates of integration. The University of Arkansas integrated its law school in 1948; Louisiana State University in 1953; the University of Georgia in 1961; the University of Mississippi in 1962; and the University of Alabama in 1963.¹⁴

While southern universities took their time deciding when and how to integrate their campuses, the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 ensured that not only would all universities integrate, but if they failed to do so, federal funding could be revoked. In particular,

¹³ Fireside, Harvey. *Separate And Unequal: Homer Plessy And the Supreme Court Decision that Legalized Racism*. (Carroll & Graff, 2004). 205.

¹⁴ Artherine Lucy was admitted to the University of Alabama in 1956. However, the university expelled her soon after classes began. In 1963, the federal government mandated desegregation. Vivian Malone and James Hood were the first African-American students to successfully enroll at the University of Alabama on June 11, 1963.

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act pertained to education: “No person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.”¹⁵ The significance of Title VI and the Fourteenth Amendment on institutions of higher education lay in the federal financial assistance. Any institution, private or public, with students who accept federal financial aid, such as grants or loans, falls under the jurisdiction of Title VI, and by extension, the Equal Protection Clause. If universities which received federal funding failed to comply with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, then they risked losing all federal funding. The effect of the Civil Rights Act, and by extension Title VI, on institutes of higher education was profound, yet the legislation did not cure American academia of all discrimination. A study conducted in 2008 on diversity at colleges and universities found that while “the Civil Rights Act of 1964 effectively removed explicitly discriminatory policies in admissions to institutions of higher education , ... the removal of explicit barriers... did not remove all barriers to equal opportunity for underrepresented ethnic minorities.”¹⁶

At the University of Mississippi, barriers preventing equal opportunity fell when, in 1962, James Meredith integrated the university. Yet, it was not until the 1990s that African-American students enrolled in large numbers. As recently as the 2000s, African-American students still made up a disproportionate number of the student population, despite the fact that the state of Mississippi was roughly 30 percent African-American.¹⁷ For instance, in the 2009-2010 school year, the University of Mississippi’s undergraduate enrollment reached 11,948

¹⁵ *Civil Rights Act of 1964*. Title VI.

¹⁶ Sidanius, Levin, Van Laar, and Sears. *The Diversity Challenge: Social Identity and Intergroup Relations on the College Campus*. (Russell Sage Foundation, 2010). 3-4.

¹⁷ United Census Bureau. Quick Facts. State of Mississippi. <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/>

students.¹⁸ Only 1,675, or roughly 14 percent, of the students were African-American.¹⁹ By 2012-2013, enrollment increased to 14,620 and 15 percent of students were African-American.²⁰ While university enrollment increased by nearly 3,000 students overall, African-American enrollment increased by only a few hundred. As of the 2014-2015 academic school year, total undergraduate enrollment had increased to 16,517. Of the total student body population, only 2,311 students, or 14 percent, identified as African-American, while 12,751 students identified as white.²¹ Such statistics illustrate that, while university enrollment increased, the number of African-American students increased only minimally. The African-American student body remains a minority population at the University of Mississippi.

By contrast, consider the numbers of the University of Mississippi's African-American student body with those of neighboring schools, the University of Alabama and Louisiana State University: in 2015, the University of Alabama had an African-American student body of 4,452, or roughly 12 percent of the student body;²² at Louisiana State University, which enrolled 30,000 students, 11.7 percent were African-American.²³ In terms of "black space," Louisiana State University is the only university of the three to have a university-operated space specifically intended for African-American students. While the existence of "black space" does not impact the overall African-American population at Louisiana State University, what is important to note is the mere existence of the space. At the University of Alabama, perhaps the institution most

¹⁸ The following statistical information will focus on undergraduate students who attend the Oxford campus of the University of Mississippi.

¹⁹ University of Mississippi. Office of Institutional Research, Effectiveness and Planning: Fall 2009-2010. Application, Admission, and Enrollment Data Trends Report.

²⁰ University of Mississippi. Office of Institutional Research, Effectiveness and Planning: Fall 20012-2013. Application, Admission, and Enrollment Data Trends Report.

²¹ University of Mississippi. Office of Institutional Research, Effectiveness and Planning: Fall 2014-2015. Application, Admission, and Enrollment Data Trends Report.

²² The University of Alabama: Quick Facts. <https://www.ua.edu/about/quickfacts>

²³ Crisp, Elizabeth. "LSU Boasts Most Diverse Student Body Ever, Highest GPA, ACT Scores." *The Advocate*. October 8, 2014. <http://theadvocate.com/news/10466583-123/lsu-boasts-most-diverse-student>

similar to the University of Mississippi, two black Greek Life organizations are represented on Fraternity and Sorority Row. Furthermore, in 2004, following the discovery that the university both owned and rented slaves, the University of Alabama formally apologized for “its role as a promoter of proslavery thought.”²⁴ The relationship between the University of Mississippi and black space on campus differs; for a brief period, the university provided physical places for African-American students. When such places disappeared, African-American students were left to attend a university without any place to call their own and revert to interacting in places predominately marked as “white.”

Ole Miss: A White Place

On November 6, 1848, eighty young white men became the inaugural class of the University of Mississippi. As tensions began to fester between the northern and southern states, the agricultural elite believed that education outside of the South could prove dangerous, exposing young minds to northern, presumably abolitionist, sympathies. As one educator noted, “Send your sons to other states and you estrange them from their native land [and] our institutions are endangered.”²⁵ Thus, for sons of Mississippi’s gentry, a new university “had been created— not to challenge the status quo but to preserve it.”²⁶

Joining the eighty students in the university’s first class on the newly founded campus were slaves. Although little documentation exists as to the lives of slaves on the University of Mississippi campus, archival records do acknowledge their existence. By all accounts, it appears that the roles of slaves on campus varied: some students chose to bring their slaves from home,

²⁴ Smith, Jamon. “Slavery Marks University’s Past.” *Tuscaloosa News*. April 7, 2006. <http://www.tuscaloosaneews.com/news/20060407/slavery-marks-universitys-past>

²⁵ Cohodas, Nadine. *The Band Played Dixie: Race and the Liberal Conscience at Ole Miss*. (Iconoclastic, 2012). 10

²⁶ Ibid.

using them for everyday chores; other slaves, leased by the university, were used for manual labor in the construction of the campus. The University of Mississippi has only a few photos of slaves on campus; one pictures a man building the university's most recognizable structure, the Lyceum. The Lyceum, a building which resembled a grand plantation home, would later become the site of the university's integration.

While the university maintained white supremacy from its inception, it was not until the Civil War that Confederate imagery infiltrated campus culture. Following Mississippi's ratification of secession, students drawn to the call of the Confederacy formed the University Greys. Although most members died in combat, the group "made an indelible mark on the school with their youthful but fatal enthusiasm, serving as an inspiration to later generations of white university men."²⁷ The influence of the Greys is undeniable, but they were not the university's only interaction with the Confederacy. The Civil War created a crisis for the university. As students continued to withdraw to join the military action, faculty struggled to keep the doors open. Despite best efforts, the war took a toll, leaving the administration no choice but to close the campus for academic purposes. In 1861, they converted university buildings into a hospital for the Confederate Army. Although it is unknown how many patients were treated at the university, the number was likely to be significant. Soldiers who did not survive remain buried on university grounds.

Following the end of the Civil War, Oxford and the university witnessed a return of men battered, broken, and lacking a sense of identity. In response, "defeated but unrepentant southern whites memorialized 'the cause that could never be lost.'"²⁸ Women of the South proved to be

²⁷ Cohodas, *The Band Played Dixie*, 16.

²⁸ Hoelscher, Steven. "Making Place, Making Race: Performance of Whiteness in the Jim Crow South." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol.93, no. 3, 2003 pp. 657-686.

some of the primary defenders of the Lost Cause, forming groups such as the Daughters of the Confederacy and erecting monuments in subsequent years to honor Confederate soldiers and leaders.²⁹ At the University of Mississippi, women erected several memorials, including markers for soldiers buried on campus, a statue honoring all men from the city of Oxford who fought for the Confederacy, and a stained-glass window honoring the University Greys.

During and after Reconstruction, a general fear that African-Americans would attempt to integrate the University of Mississippi existed among university administration and supporters. The university, built on the “twin ingredients of cultural cohesion: white supremacy and black slavery,” was a white dominated place.³⁰ Only 114 years after the founding of the institution would integration become a reality. Yet, this thesis argues, integration did not abolish white supremacy on the University of Mississippi campus. Whites founded the university on whiteness; therefore, whiteness and the university remain intrinsically linked. The pervasive ghosts and symbols of the Confederacy, and by extension, white supremacy, continue to haunt the campus and create active barriers for minority students who do not fit the racial criteria of the university’s founders. Indeed, in the years following integration, African-Americans who have attended the university have often fought for a place of their own. On a campus built by slaves, with symbols that honor the Confederacy, creating black space has been no easy feat.

The History of Black Space at the University of Mississippi

The struggle over “black space” on the University of Mississippi campus began with the integration of James Meredith in 1962. While Meredith’s acceptance desegregated the school,

²⁹ For more information regarding the United Daughters of the Confederacy look to Karen Cox’s *Dixie Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of the Confederate Culture*.

³⁰ Cohodas, *The Band Played Dixie*, 12.

actual integration of the university occurred slowly. By 1968, the University of Mississippi had only a hundred African-American students. Given their small numbers, African-American students realized “they needed to be better organized if they were going to improve their lives at Ole Miss.”³¹ Furthermore, soon after Meredith’s integration, flyers circulated between fraternity and sorority houses urging chapter members to force Meredith to move to “a yankee college which would eulogize him and make him ‘tar baby’ of the campus.”³² It was clear that black students would not be welcome to established social life of the university.

In the years following integration, African-American students, some from the University of Mississippi and some from nearby historically black colleges and universities, began to resist the existing power structures of the campus, which deemed African-American students as secondary citizens. *The Rebel Underground*, a secret, segregationist, student-run newsletter reported two incidents it found to be particularly egregious. In 1964, the paper reported a sit-in at Fulton Chapel which protested the treatment of African-American students on campus.³³ In 1965, a group of bi-racial couples attempted to have lunch in the Student Union. Denied, the group promptly took to the plaza in front of the Student Union and began to kiss and show affection. The events mentioned in *The Rebel Underground* were the beginning of black activism on campus. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, as a Black Power student movement swept across the United States, African-American students at the University of Mississippi began to organize. The Black Student Union and members of the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC), the umbrella organization for the nine historically black fraternities and sororities, were among the most active groups in fighting racial discrimination on campus.

³¹ Cohodas, *The Band Played Dixie*, 250.

³² *Rebel Underground* Vol. 1, Issue 2. Race Relations Collection: Box 1, Folder 1. The University of Mississippi Archives.

³³ *Rebel Underground*. Race Relations Box 1, Folder 11. The University of Mississippi Archives.

i. The Black Student Union

While incidents such as the student sit-in or the demonstration by bi-racial couples certainly caused a stir, it was not until 1968 that a student organization challenged the “whiteness” of the campus through policy. Following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King in Memphis, the Black Student Union (BSU), “was created to provide African-American students with opportunities for interaction to establish black awareness and to unify and maintain black identity.”³⁴ By the 1970s the BSU, undoubtedly influenced by America’s changing political climate, openly expressed concerns at the university. In 1970, an unnamed pamphlet circulated on campus with the symbolic image of the black power fist atop a Confederate Rebel flag. The flyer read, “blacks refuse to be associated with a bunch of rednecks who wave rebel flags.”³⁵ The most notable protest by the BSU came in 1970 during a concert at Fulton Chapel. During a highly publicized Up With People concert, one hundred BSU members interrupted the concert, and took the stage to read a list of demands. Although the protest remained non-violent, the participating students were arrested and sent to Parchman prison.³⁶

Over the years, the BSU has continued to make demands of the university. Beginning in 1983, they fought for “the removal of all racist symbols [and] for the banning and use of these symbols.”³⁷ Now serving as the “umbrella organization of many of the African-American student organizations,” the BSU sprung into action following various controversies regarding the Mississippi state flag or racism.³⁸ Most recently, following remarks a white student made regarding lynching, the BSU staged a sit-in, #OccupytheLyceum, demanding the university take

³⁴ Gerald Walton Collection: Box 1, Folder 4. The University of Mississippi Archives.

³⁵ Unnamed flyer. Race Relations Collection: Box, Folder 18. The University of Mississippi Archives.

³⁶ Cohodas, *The Band Played Dixie*, 281.

³⁷ “The Monday Report” 1983. Race Relations Collection: Box 1, Folder 22. The University of Mississippi Archives.

³⁸ The University of Mississippi Black Student Union. Mission Statement. <http://bsu.olemiss.edu/about-us/>

a formal stand against acts of racism with a published statement. Such demonstrations prove that the BSU was, and continues to be, a resistant organization, fighting against the “active archive” of the University of Mississippi.

ii. Black Greek Life Organizations

Like the founding of the BSU, the founders of the University of Mississippi’s first Black Greek Life Organizations, also referred to as the National Pan-hellenic Council, “formed because of the hostility blacks felt from white college students at the time *and* the desire to create Greek-lettered organizations that reflected their own African-American history and culture. Black spaces on white campuses.”³⁹ In 1973, Omega Psi Phi became the first black fraternity at the University of Mississippi. The following year, the university gained its first African-American sorority, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc. As one alum remarked, “I want it to be known that when we started these organizations we did so in order to promote blackness at this university.”⁴⁰ In the immediate years following the formation of black Greek organizations at the University of Mississippi, the presence of such groups, and by extension their blackness, was witnessed by the student body when such groups performed in front of the Student Union. Today, these organizations continue the tradition of occupying the space in front of the Student Union as they participate in Union Unplugged. Hosted by the Students Activity Association, Union Unplugged is a 45- minute talent showcase, held every Tuesday and Thursday, during the lunch hour. For members of NPHC organizations, Union Unplugged is a time to get together, make their presence known on campus, and often step or stroll. For NPHC groups, stepping and strolling

³⁹ Ross, Lawrence. *Blackballed: The Black and White Politics of Race on America’s Campuses*. (New York: St. Martin’s) 75.

⁴⁰ *Fly in the Buttermilk* Screening. April 25, 2016. Overby Center, University of Mississippi.

holds deep, traditional meaning; not only are certain dance moves reserved for certain groups, but it is also a form of public, black expression.

While the presence of black Greeks in front of the Student Union allows African-American students to have a known presence on campus, it has not occurred without backlash. In 2013, a story appeared in the *DM Online*, The University of Mississippi's online newspaper, which read: "Ghetto Tuesday is Back." The title referred to two tweets which were posted following a viewing of a step show during Union Unplugged. The first tweet read: "I love it when the Union gets all ghetto." The other read: "#ghettoTuesday is back!"⁴¹ Other social media posts referred to African-American students in front of the Union as "hood rat" or as performing "tribal dancing."⁴²

Union Unplugged is a mixed blessing for NPHC members. On the one hand, it allows for black visibility on campus. However, it also opens NPHC groups up to negative, and often hurtful, comments. Furthermore, it creates misconceptions and plays into stereotypes about NPHC groups. At the recent screening of *A Fly in the Buttermilk*, a student-made documentary exploring the history of NPHC on campus, a white female student responded to a question asking for suggestions on how to get white and black Greeks more united. She suggested a step show. Although the young woman believed her comment innocent and sincere, it elicited a strong reaction from NPHC members in the room. In response to the suggestion, one alumna proclaimed, "It is not our job to shake and shimmy for you! We are more than that!"⁴³

⁴¹ Russell, Lacey. "Ghetto Tuesday is back." *The DM Online*. Feb. 12, 2003.

<http://thedmonline.com/%E2%80%8Bghetto-tuesday-is-back/>

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ *Fly in the Buttermilk* Screening. April 25, 2016. Overby Center, University of Mississippi.

iii. The Elusive Physical Place

African-American students who attend the University of Mississippi today do so without having any physical place on campus to call their own. However, physical “black space” has not always been so elusive. In 1984, following his acceptance of the position, Chancellor Gerald Turner, recognizing the social power of the university’s Greek system, “ordered [all white] fraternities and sororities to send him their bylaws. If any had whites-only clauses, they would have to be stricken.”⁴⁴ The hope was that such action would spur white fraternities and sororities to consider accepting non-white members. However, despite the Chancellor’s and the Office of the Dean of Student’s best efforts, little headway was made in the way of integrating Fraternity Row. Not satisfied, Turner decided that “if [he] was unable to get individual white fraternities to integrate, he could at least integrate the row by getting a black group there.”⁴⁵

The first attempt for NPHC housing came in 1988, when Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity Inc. moved onto the otherwise white Fraternity Row. With assistance from the university, the group made plans to move onto the row and initially faced little resistance. However, as the house was nearing completion that August, it was mysteriously burned. To date, no culprit has been identified, and the police believe the fire was an act of arson. A flyer circulating the campus in the days after the fire demonstrate some students’ outrage; it read “Ole Miss Gets Black Fraternity House but System is Still Segregated” and demanded “the University should facilitate the purchase/ rental/ renovation of a house for EVERY fraternity and sorority on campus”⁴⁶ Funds were raised in order to help Phi Beta Sigma rebuild, but the initial burning served as a reminder of how entrenched the University of Mississippi was in its racist past. As one white

⁴⁴ Cohodas, *The Band Played Dixie*, 428.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 446.

⁴⁶ Race Relations Collections: Box 1 Folder 23. The University of Mississippi Archives.

fraternity member noted, “It was all right to cheer [blacks] on at football games, rebel flag in hand, but quite another to party with them on Fraternity Row.”⁴⁷ In 2000, Phi Beta Sigma left their home on campus.

In 1992, the university granted two black sororities old faculty housing, adjacent to Sorority Row, for use as chapter homes. Unlike their male counterparts, the women did not face any controversies but rather, by all accounts, seem to have co-existed with their white sorority counterparts. One alumna recalls her first impression of the Alpha Kappa Alpha home, noting the mixed emotions of disappointment and pride:

I walked up and down Sorority Row and never saw the house and then just happened to look up and see this really small white house, and I went “Oh... no. That’s not...no.” At a loss for words. I went in and it was definitely the AKA house, pink and green everywhere. And ya know, I guess, disappointment. But then I got the history, that they had the first black house on Sorority Row. That kind of changed how I looked at the houses.... Just like the Tri-Delta house they had the huge pictures hung up where the members joined. It was decorated just like the Tri-Delta house, definitely smaller, but it became a little source of pride for me instead of just being this little white house on Sorority Row where I saw a bunch of mansions.⁴⁸

Yet the pride was short lived. In 2007, the university sold the homes to LOU Homes, a branch of the United Way. Where the NPHC sorority houses once stood, across from Sorority Row, now stands a parking lot and a pond. The pond was subsequently named after University of Mississippi history professor James Silver. Silver, who was critical of segregation and outspoken about the ways in which the university and the state of Mississippi handled the James Meredith integration, was ultimately fired from his post at the university. In *The Rebel Underground*,

⁴⁷ Cohodas, *The Band Played Dixie*. 453

⁴⁸ Interviewee identified as Dorothy. Conducted by the Author.

Silver is referred to as “an honorary nigger... who would be happier teaching at Tugaloo or Tuskegee.”⁴⁹ In another issue, *The Rebel Underground* accuses Silver of meeting with African-American students from nearby Rusk College and helping these students stage a sit-in at Fulton Chapel. Through these readings it is apparent that Silver’s actions at the university were controversial at the time. And, it is likely that, today, most are unaware of the name of the pond sitting on the far edge of campus. However, it is worth noting that where physical representation for the University of Mississippi’s African-American students once stood, now stands a pond dedicated to a man who likely would have criticized such a re-segregation of the university and the elimination of black on-campus spaces.

On April 23, 2016, the University of Mississippi broke ground on a Greek Garden. The garden, which is located near freshman dorm rooms, consists of nine stone monuments, representing the nine fraternities and sororities of NPHC. The garden is the result of Chancellor Dan Jones’s 2015 Diversity Report. The NPHC community was both hopeful and skeptical in response to the garden. In an official press release, the university quoted an alumna and advisor as saying, “We’re excited to have a visible presence at the University of Mississippi... It makes me happy to know that the university understands the need of having a visible presence for the divine nine organizations and how it impacts the university.”⁵⁰ Students, meanwhile, responded to the groundbreaking ceremony with ambivalence. “Initially I had some wishy-washy feelings about it, because I felt like it wasn’t going to be an adequate enough of a representation for us. But being there, it meant that we’ll actually have a physical representation on this campus.”⁵¹

⁴⁹ Race Relations Collection: Box 1 Folder 11. The University of Mississippi Archives.

⁵⁰ Steube, Christina. “Groundbreaking of NPHC Garden Set for Saturday.” *Ole Miss, University of Mississippi News*. <http://news.olemiss.edu/groundbreaking-nphc-garden-set-saturday/>

⁵¹ VanZile, Madison. “NPHC Greek Garden Ole Miss.” *NewsWatch Ole Miss*. April 27, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T3536vuGU3Y>

The Symbols of Ole Miss

In 1996, after losing a game to rival Mississippi State, football Coach Tommy Tuberville told the university's administration, "We can't recruit against the Confederate flag."⁵² Tuberville's remarks, alongside a shift in national opinion, led many university administrators to ask: "How could a school hope to move to a more enlightened and diverse future while still holding onto these symbols of the past?"⁵³ In having a discussion regarding black and white places at the University of Mississippi, it is imperative to understand the use of pervasive university symbols and the ways in which such symbols created the "active archive" of the campus. As with the creation of personal identity, the identity of symbols change depending on the social actor and the way the actor perceives the historical context of the symbol. For white students, the symbols of "Ole Miss" seem fun or harmless; for African-American students, the symbols of the institution celebrate white supremacy and racial discrimination.

Of all the symbols prevalent at the University of Mississippi, perhaps the most notable is Colonel Reb. The team name, The Rebels, "had been chosen in 1936 in a contest... [because it was] suggestive of a spirit native to the Old South and particularly to Mississippi."⁵⁴ The following year, the university adopted Colonel Reb, a caricature of a southern plantation owner turned Confederate officer, as the official mascot. Of all the origin stories surrounding Colonel Reb, one of the oddest is that which suggests that Colonel Reb was fashioned after the likeness of James "Blind Jim" Ivy, a blind African-American man who attended every home football game. From 1896 to 1955, "Blind Jim" sold boiled peanuts at athletic events and was heralded as

⁵² Khayat, Robert. *The Education of A Lifetime*. (Nautilus, 2013). 153.

⁵³ Herndon, Mike. "Ole Miss, Like South Carolina, Struggled to Shed Symbolism of Confederate Flag." June 22, 2015. http://www.al.com/sports/index.ssf/2015/06/ole_miss_like_south_carolina_s.html

⁵⁴ Cohodas, *The Band Played Dixie*, 376.

being “the grace of the Ole Miss campus.”⁵⁵ Oral history interviews collected from students who knew “Blind Jim” describe him, not Colonel Reb, as “the adopted mascot”⁵⁶ who “would come out with the team and would lead the cheers.”⁵⁷ The story of “Blind Jim” is an example of the fluidity of “active archive” theory. To those who deem the university as a sacred place, “Blind Jim,” is viewed as “the grace” of campus. However, to those who have negative feelings regarding the racial past of the university, “Blind Jim” is a symbol of Old South imagery and the marginalization or racist caricaturing of African-Americans.

Alongside Colonel Reb, other Old South imagery existed on campus. For example, the adoption of the Rebel flag, the playing of “Dixie” at every home football game, and the use of the name “Ole Miss,” a nickname used to refer to the plantation mistress, were all instances of Old South romanticism of whiteness, and white supremacy. It should be noted that the significance of these university symbols was the time when they were adopted. The year 1948 marked the centennial of the university’s birthday as well as the year of the Dixiecrat Revolt, in which a group of southern Democrats left the Democratic Party over resistance to civil rights. Put simply, according to Nadine Cohodas, the adoption of these Confederate symbols as school symbols “was a happy marriage of politics and school spirit, a way to celebrate white southern pride in the safe confines of a stadium.”⁵⁸ This marriage of Confederate symbols and modern politics would occur again in 1962. In an oral history interview, one alumnus remarked that the first time the Rebel Flag was present at a university football game at large, was during Governor Ross Barnett’s now famous speech, which occurred exactly one day before James Meredith’s

⁵⁵Smith, Edwin. “Meet James “Blind Jim” Ivy” *The University of Mississippi News*. March 4, 2014. <http://news.olemiss.edu/meet-james-blind-jim-ivy/>

⁵⁶ Povall, Al. *A Time Remembered: Ole Miss 1945-1970*. (Nautilus, 2016). 36

⁵⁷ Ibid, 20

⁵⁸ Cohodas, *The Band Played Dixie*, 377.

integration.⁵⁹ He notes:

The tension was building when everyone went to the Kentucky game on Saturday night in Jackson. Barnett made an ass of himself with that speech at halftime and of course, that was the first time the cheerleaders handed out Confederate battle flags for everybody to wave. I don't think there had ever been anything like that. There had been big flags that the cheerleaders had and once or twice a year, the Cardinal Club would roll out that big Confederate flag that would cover two-thirds of the football field, but other than that, no one waved the battle flag. They did down there.⁶⁰

As of 2017, arguments surrounding the symbols of the university continue. In 1996, the university placed a ban on the use of the Rebel flag at football games; in 2006 a statue honoring the university's first African-American student James Meredith was placed behind the Lyceum building. The statue's placement, alongside verbal disapproval by Meredith himself has made the statue a controversial piece in the African-American community⁶¹; in 2014, a student hung a noose on the statue of James Meredith; in 2010, a black bear replaced Colonel Reb as the official mascot; in 2015, the Student Body Government voted to take down the Mississippi state flag because of the inclusion of the Confederate flag on it; in 2016, controversy arose surrounding the campus statue which memorializes Confederate soldiers. Arguments over the University of Mississippi's symbols highlight the fluidity of meaning a place can have, depending on who is interacting with it. White students in the late 1960s referred to the University of Mississippi as

⁵⁹ It is important to note that this particular football game occurred in city of Jackson, not Oxford. However, the presence of Confederate flags at this football game is relevant because it speaks to the overall "spirit of Ole Miss."

⁶⁰ Povall, *A Time Remembered*, 300.

⁶¹ Johnson, Patrick. "Before Ole Miss Noose Stunt, James Meredith Wanted Own Statue Destroyed." *The Christian Science Monitor*. March 28, 2015.

“lovely lady.”⁶² Another pamphlet, however, written in 1970 by African-American students declared “To black people, the Ole Miss Rebels mean racism, and we cannot stand for that... blacks refuse to be associated with a bunch of rednecks who wave rebel flags, sing Dixie, and holler ‘nigger’ at opposing black players.”⁶³

Conclusion

In the University of Mississippi Archives, a document proposing restoration of the campus’ structures notes “These buildings emphasize the University of Mississippi— a legacy of achievement with vision for tomorrow.”⁶⁴ White students in the 1960s, intent on preventing integration, referred to these same buildings as “sacred,” and “hallowed.”⁶⁵ For African-American student activists in the 1970s and 1980s, the university and its symbols at most upheld the ideals of white supremacy, and, at least, were offensive. Today, comments such as those made by members of the NPHC community, or controversies such as the removal of the Mississippi state flag, demonstrate that the meanings ascribed to the University of Mississippi are ever evolving. While theories laid forth in Chapter One of this thesis allow for an understanding of the fluid relationship between social actors, place, race, and history, they fall short in understanding the African-American experience at a campus such as the University of Mississippi. Such theories operate under the assumption that social actors are engaging with a place, but fail to address how populations are affected when they have no place.

At the University of Mississippi, African-American students do not have a physical place in which they control the “active archive.” These students are consistently forced to create their personal and group identity, as well as their identity of place, in relation to their white counterparts

⁶² *Rebel Underground*. Race Relations Box 1, Folder 11. The University of Mississippi Archives.

⁶³ Race Relations, Box 1, Folder 18. The University of Mississippi Archives.

⁶⁴ Gerald Walton Collection: Box 1, Folder 11. The University of Mississippi Archives

⁶⁵ *The Rebel Underground*. Race Relations Collection: Box 1, Folder 11. The University of Mississippi Archives.

and in the shadow of physical structures that, in many ways, honor and normalize whiteness. The racist past of the university has left African-American students with no choice but to create counter spaces. As Lawrence Ross notes in his work, “whiteness goes unchallenged”⁶⁶ on college campuses, causing “black students to live in a duality, both in a white dominated society and within a separate racial group with its own culture and traditions.”⁶⁷ As will be detailed in the following chapters, at the University of Mississippi, where whiteness remains dominant, African-American students, affected by the social and racial constructs their white counterparts have ascribed to the university, have found various ways to navigate a campus that, in terms of physical space, offers them no place to belong.

⁶⁶ Ross, *Blackballed*, 121.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 123.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this thesis is to understand the role of counter-publics at the University of Mississippi: how such places came to be, in what fashion they were formed and continue to exist, and, finally, how whiteness shaped these publics and their actors. This chapter presents my research's methodological. I conducted a qualitative study via semi-structured, in-depth interviews with an intentional sample of African-American students and alumni from the University of Mississippi. Following a description of my methodology, I highlight the interviews' key themes.

Methodological Design

To gain an understanding of “black spaces” at The University of Mississippi, it was imperative that I speak to subjects with intimate knowledge of such places. I interviewed 11 African-American students and alumni in a semi-structured manner regarding their experiences and opinions of “black space” at the University of Mississippi campus.

As of the 2016 fall semester, 2,692 African-American students attended the University of Mississippi.⁶⁸ I used a non-random sample because I wanted participants who were active on campus, such as being involved in student organizations or clubs. My aim was that these individuals, whose participation in student organizations might allow for more interaction with,

⁶⁸ The University of Mississippi Office of Institutional Research, Effectiveness and Planning. “2016-2017 Mini-Fact Book.” Date Accessed: February 1, 2017. <http://irep.olemiss.edu/institutional-research/quick-facts/>

and knowledge of the campus, would be able to expound on their experiences in a way that lesser engaged students could not. Although my preference was for actively-engaged participants, I required that participants identify as “African-American” and either be a student at, or alumni from, the University of Mississippi. While most of the participants were female, this thesis focuses on race and not sex. In large part, this decision was made because participants did not see a difference in their experiences based on gender. I began the data collection process by compiling a list of potential participants who I believed could be beneficial to this project. My initial list contained twenty-five names. Of that list, eleven responded to my request, thirteen never responded, and one individual refused.

I recognize that a weakness in this thesis is that my sample is not representative of all or even most African-Americans at the University of Mississippi. However, the voices of the participants interviewed *are* representative of current African-American activism regarding race and space at the university. Those interviewed are active voices in the creation of “black spaces” on campus.

Due to the sensitivity of this subject and the history of the university regarding race relations, it was imperative to ensure anonymity for all participants. Providing such anonymity allowed participants to feel more comfortable speaking about race. Hence, transcripts and audio recordings are not included with this thesis. Furthermore, I believe the visibility of many of these participants on campus could lead them to be easily identified. Therefore, even though I changed each individual’s name, I worried that in attaching the transcripts, individuals could be identified.

The table below demonstrates each interviewee’s sex and status, namely whether they are an alumni or a student. All names have been changed.

Name	Sex	Status: Student or Alumni
Dorothy	Female	Alumna
Anne	Female	Alumna
Antoinette	Female	Student
Phaedra	Female	Student
Darius	Male	Student
James	Male	Alumnus
Raven	Female	Student
Beth	Female	Student
Victor	Male	Student
Ashley	Female	Student
Howard	Male	Student

Figure 1: Interviewee Information

Interviews began in March 2016 and continued until February 2017. Potential interviewees were contacted via email for an interview, either over the phone or in person. If they expressed interest in the project, a time and place for an interview was set. Because the majority of participants were students, most interviews occurred on campus in public areas such as the library or the campus coffee shop. Since this was the first time I was meeting many of the participants, choosing to meet in public seemed to put many at ease. Initially, I was worried that this type of public exposure would hinder the participants' willingness to discuss race, but I never found that to be the case. I made every effort to ensure that each interviewee, even if in

public, maintained their right to privacy. Before starting the interview, I asked each interviewee to review and sign an IRB consent form, asked if they had any questions regarding my work, and then explained the interview/recording process. In my recruitment email, I explained to each participant that our interview would be recorded but their name would never be publicized or published. I reminded each participant of this, explained they were welcome to stop the interview at any time, and placed the recorder between us. In many of the recordings there was notable background noise, but given that the purpose of the recordings was for my own record keeping, it was not distracting.

When recruiting participants, I asked each individual to allow a one-hour time frame for the interview process. Few interviews lasted that long; the majority lasted around 30-35 minutes. Interviews began with basic biographical questions to allow each participant to get used to being interviewed and then we segued towards a set list of questions. In structuring each interview, I designed questions that would help me address the predominant research goal yet would also give each participant the possibility to share their story. Due to this choice, both the questions and the length of each interview varied. While such a method hindered data reliability, allowing for personal anecdotes was imperative to the nature of this thesis. Figure 2 provides an example of questions asked.

Figure 2. Interview Questions

- Why did you choose to attend the University of Mississippi?
- Did you know of the racial history of the campus prior to attending?
- Tell me about your college career—were/ are you involved in any organizations? Who did/do you spend time with?
- Tell me about the campus climate during your time at Ole Miss— what years did you attend? What, if any, big incidents occurred?
- What are your favorite memories from your time at Ole Miss?

- What are your least favorite memories?
- Where did/ do you spend most of your time on campus?
- Where did/do you feel most welcome on campus? Where did/do you feel the least welcome?
- What influences made you feel welcome or unwelcome in that place?
- In your own words, what does it mean to be an African-American student at the University of Mississippi?
- The University of Mississippi has a very storied racial past. Can you talk about the way that story and those incidents influenced your time as a student?
- As an African-American student, did/ do you feel you had the same opportunities as your peers? Why or why not?
- In recent years, the symbols of the campus have become increasingly controversial sparking many conversations. Do you think these symbols or campus structures had an impact on your time as a student? How so?

Risks regarding this research, while few, deserve mentioning. For those interviewed, the primary risk of participating was a general feeling of unease. As noted by Figure 2, some of the questions I asked could elicit anxiety. In fact, several times participants recalled traumatic, painful, experiences that had occurred on campus. Furthermore, I believe that my own race contributed to some of the awkwardness that interviewees may have initially felt. As a white woman interviewing African-Americans about race related issues, I often sensed a general feeling of unease from participants toward the beginning of the interview. However, as the interview progressed, tensions seemed to subside, and I believe each participant opened up. Although I told each interviewee they had the right to stop the interview at any point, no one did so.

Data Analysis and Coding

As the interviews progressed, I began to notice emerging themes. To keep track of these themes, I created a tape log for each interview. With each tape log, I was able to track key responses to my research questions. As stated above, due to the design of this project, no interview was the same. However, in response to certain questions, answers seemed to follow a pattern. As trends appeared, I noted them in the tape log and in my own working journal. The tape logs also included key quotes from participants.

In analyzing the 11 interviews, I believe four dominant themes emerged: an initial realization that the University of Mississippi is a white dominated place; the search for, and creation of, community; the role of, and participation in, resistance movements; and general feelings regarding the roles of African-Americans at the University of Mississippi. As will be detailed in the following chapter, the interviews I conducted demonstrate that at the University of Mississippi, where whiteness remains dominant, African-American students are affected by the social and racial constructs their white counterparts have ascribed to the university. And yet, they have found way to navigate whiteness on campus.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings of the 11 interviews conducted for this thesis. As noted in Figure 2 of Chapter Three (p. 48-49), I asked each participant about his/ her personal interactions with, and general feelings towards, the physical structure of the campus. Although, there is no singular black experience at the University of Mississippi, these interviews speak collectively to the barriers of inequality African-American students must overcome while in attendance.

Part one of this chapter discusses African-American students' decision to attend the university. Specifically, this section looks at the reactions of students' loved ones and community members in response to their choice to attend the University of Mississippi. Part two addresses students' arrival to campus, particularly focusing on initial interactions with the "active archive" of the campus. This section highlights the affects of campus-wide symbols and identifies which places African-American students deem as "white." In part three, I examine the manner by which African-American students find and create counter-spaces for themselves. Part four looks at the role of African-American activism on campus. Lastly, part five addresses how students view themselves and their time as African-American students at the University of Mississippi.

Part One: Concerns Regarding Acceptance to the University

In *The Agony of Education: Black Students Enrolled at White Colleges and Universities*, scholars Joe Feagin, Hernan Vera, and Nikitah Imani interview parents with children enrolled at predominately white institutions. The authors highlight the difficult decisions of black families as parents try to prepare their children for the hostility they may face on campus. As I began to conduct interviews, I realized that the experiences of students at the University of Mississippi mirrored those found by Feagin, Hernana and Vera. Of the 11 individuals interviewed for this thesis, eight spoke of the hesitation their family and community members had regarding their choice to attend the University of Mississippi.

I asked each participant if, before enrolling at the University of Mississippi, they were aware of the university's racist history. Overwhelmingly, each participant responded "yes," noting that their first introduction to the racist affiliations of the university came from anecdotes shared by their loved ones. In one interview James noted: "I was aware of the [racial] history and the things I didn't know a lot of people reminded me of. I had comments that were made from classmates or family members. They would say, 'They're gonna hang you when you get there,' or 'Why would you want to go to a school that doesn't represent you.' Just all kinds of things that reminded me I was going to a school where I might not be welcome." Similar to James, Phaedra spoke of her family's shock at her decision to attend the university. She remarked, "Coming from Jackson, my family they're big Jackson State, HBCU fans. So, I had family members who were like 'You don't need to go up there to that racist school.'" Even for Darius, a student whose entire family attended the university, his acceptance came with a warning. He recalled, "[My family] told me to come here and just keep my head in the books. Have your fun, but know there's always that racism side." Dorothy, who did not attend the university until

graduate school, despite being accepted as an undergraduate, noted, “My dad wasn’t having that. It was all about the school’s reputation. So, he vetoed it.”

Regarding family concerns, one factor that sets the University of Mississippi apart from the work of Feagin, Vera, and Imani, is the tangible fear that loved ones feel toward the university. While Feagin, Vera, and Imani’s respondents worry about harassment or implicit biases, loved ones of African-American students at the University of Mississippi fear physical harm. In her interview, Antoinette discussed her parents’ fear regarding her choice to attend graduate school at the university, noting “ [My parents] called me everyday to see if I was still alive.” Similar to the reaction of Antoinette’s family, Beth remarked that her family was “livid” with her choice to attend the University of Mississippi. The family was so upset, that, when she was a senior, they still refused to set foot on campus.

Why do African American students attend the University of Mississippi if they believe it to be unsafe? Although opportunities to attend other schools were available, the majority of interviewees chose to attend the university due to scholarship incentives or the belief that they would have more access to opportunities at the University of Mississippi. For a few students, such as Raven, there was a belief that the university was not as racist as her family members implied. Raven noted, “Where I’m from if you say you’re going to Ole Miss you get a little backlash. But I didn’t care. I had been here for summer camps, so I never felt any of [the racism].” For students, the benefits of attending Mississippi’s flagship university seemed to outweigh the risks. However, for the loved ones of African-American students, the need to prepare such students for the inevitable barriers that lay ahead of them during their collegiate experience was imperative.

Part Two: Entering a White Place

In his work *Blackballed: The Black and White Politics of Race on America's Campuses*, Lawrence Ross argues, that from the moment African-American students step onto the campus of a predominately white institution, they are confronted with a hostile environment that historically supports whiteness and diminishes blackness.⁶⁹ At the University of Mississippi, a place with physical structures built during an era of explicit white supremacy, such hostility is magnified. For African-American students, it is within the first few months of attending the university and interacting with Confederate symbols and statues that racial hostility and barriers become evident. Although warned by family members and loved ones, it is only through interactions with the campus, their peers, and the city of Oxford, that African-American students come face to face with the whiteness of the University of Mississippi. Through those interactions, black students learn of the prolific white supremacy on campus and quickly identify white places where, knowing they will be uncomfortable and unwelcome, they learn to avoid.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the symbols, statues, and monikers of the University of Mississippi campus foster white supremacy and create an educational and social barrier to African-American students. This section is divided into two sub-sections; exploring interviewees' feelings toward symbols of the campus and places that are deemed "too white" and hostile for black students to enter.

2.1 Symbols and Pervasive White Supremacy

Throughout this work, I discussed Caroline Knowles's theory of the "active archive," or the idea that the meaning of a place is the result of both its history and social interactions.⁷⁰ At the University of Mississippi the "active archive" is one that honors whiteness. The "active

⁶⁹ Ross, *Blackballed*, 117.

⁷⁰ Knowles, *Race and Social Analysis*, 97.

archive,” which is often displayed through the pervasive use of Confederate symbols and statues on campus, creates a hostile environment for black students.

Many participants spoke of their belief that the university remained a stronghold for white supremacy. Citing incidents of racism or remaining racist symbols on campus, interviewees discussed how they first felt the legacy of white supremacy on campus and how it impacted their everyday lives. For James, his first interaction with white supremacy came during his freshman year. He stated: “My first week here I lived in Kincannon Hall. I walked into the bathroom and there was KKK written on the mirror in toothpaste. They also wrote the N word. That was my first week here as a freshman.” Ashley, speaking of her first semester on campus, stated “I just felt shut out.” To her, the whiteness of student organizations coupled with the pervasive use of offensive symbols, such as the Confederate flag, even if no longer university sanctioned, caused the campus to feel like a sanctuary for white supremacy. She noted: “White supremacy flourishes here. This campus is a shrine to white supremacy. Our campus is covered with those symbols.”

Participant opinions varied regarding the symbols of the campus. For students such as Antoinette, the use of Colonel Reb, the Rebel flag, or even the name Ole Miss, were offensive. She commented:

Every time I see someone walking around in a Colonel Reb shirt it makes me cringe... It makes me feel like ‘Do you understand what you’re wearing right now? Do you not understand what the flag means or what the Confederacy was even about?’ I don’t understand how you can sit there with a hate symbol on your chest.

Responding to a similar question regarding the university's symbols, Beth remarked: "Of course you feel them every day but you can get used to anything. I don't own a single thing that says Ole Miss Rebels or I am an Ole Miss Rebel. I am an Ole Miss student but I'm not a Rebel."

The distinction between being a student at the university and being a black student at the university is a reoccurring theme in interviews. Victor spoke to this phenomenon, saying: "[The symbols] put black students in a bind. Because we know there's a greater purpose for us being here, but we're faced with those images every day. We have love for this place, but this place smacks us in the face every day."

Of all the binds black students face while attending the university, perhaps the one most discussed in interviews is the occasional presence of the Ku Klux Klan on campus. James, who was involved with crowd control during the last KKK rally on campus in 2015, spoke of his frustration of their presence:

I felt so frustrated that they felt comfortable enough to come to the University of Mississippi and do those things. That's what brought up so much emotion in me. The fact they came all the way from Georgia. They could have gone to any university, so why did they feel so compelled to come to the University of Mississippi? The only thing I was processing at that time is that they felt like they would have support here. If not from the administration then from the students. Somebody was going to support them. It makes me question the institution as a whole. Why did they skip so many schools? They gassed up. Went to the gas station with the intention of coming to the University of Mississippi. They packed up children. They packed up bags. All to come to the University of Mississippi.

Why? The University of Mississippi is the last hope. The last hope for an institution that stands up for white supremacy.

James's comments speak to the hold that symbols of white supremacy still have on the University of Mississippi campus. From the beginning of their experience, the white, nostalgic "active archive" of the university alienates African-American students. First, family and community members warn them. Then, once they arrive on campus, they find themselves confronted with offensive, racist symbols. Especially in this regard, the experience of African-American students at the University of Mississippi supports Ross's claims that PWI's are hostile spaces for black students. Surrounded by offensive symbols, no space on campus is comfortable. To complicate matters further, African-American students must navigate specific physical spaces on campus that are deemed explicitly "white" and, therefore, especially hostile.

2.2 White Places

Upon entering the university, students begin to look for places to spend their recreational time. At the University of Mississippi, African-American students have no racially safe physical places to spend such recreational time. Yet, two places were repeatedly mentioned as places that made African-American students especially uncomfortable, namely The Grove and Fraternity Row.

The Grove, "10 acres of mature oak and maple trees in the center of campus" becomes a sea of tailgating tents and Ole Miss Rebel fans every Saturday during football season.⁷¹ Drawing more than 10,000 fans per game, the Grove, a place dubbed as "the Holy Grail of tailgating" is

⁷¹ Gentry, James. "Tailgating Goes Above and Beyond at the University of Mississippi." *The New York Times*. Oct. 31, 2014. https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/01/sports/ncaaf/football/tailgating-goes-above-and-beyond-at-the-university-of-mississippi.html?_r=0

famed for its hospitality, atmosphere, and motto “We may lose a game, but we never lose a party.”⁷² Yet despite such accolades, when asked where they felt most uncomfortable on campus, all 11 participants identified the Grove.

Why does a place, heralded for its “hospitable” atmosphere make African-American students feel uncomfortable? For most interviewees, it seems that the feelings are a combination of having no physical tent at which to tailgate, coupled with the alcohol consumption and rambunctious behavior that often surrounds football culture. Furthermore, controversial symbols such as Colonel Reb or the Dixie flag still have a strong presence in the Grove. For example, white students during the 2016 football season wore stickers reading, “Let Our Flag Fly.” The stickers began to appear following the removal of the Mississippi state flag from campus. On Mondays, when the weekend revelry had ended, stickers could still be found, stuck to the ground and sidewalks on campus. If such images were not distressing enough, interviewees reported that the alcohol culture of the Grove often made white students more hostile toward African-American students, especially regarding the use of racial slurs.

In their interviews James and Antoinette both discussed incidents of racism directed towards them by white tailgaters in the Grove. Victor also spoke of uncomfortable feelings in the Grove, remarking:

Everyone tells you ‘Oh come to my tent and eat a piece of chicken.’ But it’s not like that, not really. They’re not gonna say, look at that boy, if he’s black, and call him over to eat chicken and potato salad. It doesn’t work like that. So you really end up wandering around in the wilderness of a whole lot of chaos.

⁷² Ole Miss Tailgating History. *Ole Miss Football*. <http://olemissfb.com/the-grove/history/>

Raven, who admittedly noted that she felt more comfortable on campus than most of her African-American peers, stated that she would go to the Grove because she believed it her right as a student, but she would only spend time on the edge. African-American students differentiate between the “deep Grove” and the edge of the Grove. Deep in the Grove, a maze of people and tents, is viewed as potentially dangerous territory. The edge, which is located closer to academic buildings and is more open in general, feels safer. It is here, on the edge, that African-American groups set up their tents together, effectively building a barrier between them and the “deep Grove.” Beth, a member of a black organization who sponsors a tailgating tent, spoke about this creation of place: “It’s almost like you always have to create your own space. At the Grove, it’s like a little village of the African-American students. We make a conscious effort to put all of our tents together because we can create a little island and safety net.”

African-American students tailgating alongside the edge of the Grove is one of many instances of the black community creating counter-spaces. Faced with a plethora of Confederate symbols, potential acts of racism, and limited physical places to occupy, African-American students must create a barrier between themselves and the rest of the university on game day if they would like to partake in Saturday football rituals.

Similar to the Grove, Fraternity Row is another place that often caused participants to feel uncomfortable. As stated in Chapter Two, since the removal of the Phi Beta Sigma house, Fraternity Row has returned to an almost all white place. Although there are African-American men who have joined an IFC organization, it has not happened in masse. Furthermore, much like the Grove, Fraternity Row is a place most likely to continue to honor racist symbols, such as Colonel Reb or the Confederate Flag. Although the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life banned such items, Confederate flags can often still be seen hanging from fraternity house windows.

Also, as in the Grove, alcohol is in no short supply. Parties thrown at fraternity homes bring in prominent African-American hip-hop groups, such as Three Six Mafia or the Ying Yang Twins; yet, it is rare to see African-American students in attendance. When discussed with interviewees, several noted that the crowd, and by extension the behavior at the fraternity parties, was the same as that of the Grove. Therefore, Fraternity Row was not a welcome place for black students.

For Victor, his choice to stay away from Fraternity Row was not fear, but rather due to a feeling of not belonging. He commented: "I guess the spaces weren't created for me, so I don't find myself over there, because I don't have anything to do over there. They might be safe, but for a black male, that's probably the last place that you'll find me. Unlike Victor, Darius's reasons for avoiding Fraternity Row were more ominous. Recalling an incident in which a group of white fraternity men, seated in the back of a pickup truck, harassed a black woman, he noted that tensions between the community are still too high. Darius commented, "Probably ten o'clock at night I'm not going to be walking down there. Especially with all the tension going on." For Antoinette, the reason to avoid the row was simple, "It's just intimidation."

While places such as the Grove or Fraternity Row get visceral responses from participants in terms of their uncomfortableness, other places were also noted for making African-Americans feel unwelcome. Similar to Fraternity Row, Sorority Row also proves to be an unwelcome place for black students. However, it is important to note that interviewee's feelings of unease regarding Sorority Row were not as strong as those had regarding Fraternity Row. This may be due, in part, to the lack of alcohol culture; unlike white fraternities where parties and alcohol are allowed, campus and organizational rules forbid sororities from hosting parties or having alcohol in their homes. As a result, Sorority Row is often viewed as tamer than Fraternity Row. And yet, even without the rambunctious behavior, Sorority Row can still feel

like an uncomfortable place, especially for black male students. Victor remarked, “Walking down Sorority Row I haven’t always felt comfortable. Walking down there it’s like ‘Oh I hope nothing happens because I’ll probably get blamed.’ It may sound dramatic, but these were things that were going through my head.”

For some participants, the Lyceum is viewed as intimidating, a shrine both to institutional power and the white supremacy from which and for which the university was created. For others, uncomfortable places include certain academic buildings, where they came face-to-face with a professor who exhibited racist tendencies. Regardless, each of the 11 participants made it clear that the University of Mississippi campus is an uncomfortable place for African-American students, and to survive, it is imperative that black students find a community and create a small space of their own.

Part Three: Black Places

In her work, *Why Are All The Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria*, Dr. Beverly Tatum argues that black students often self-segregate as a way to create safe spaces for themselves.⁷³ At the University of Mississippi, Tatum’s argument rings true. After arriving on campus, African-American students seek spaces where they can feel comfortable. This action does not simply serve recreational purposes, but rather is imperative to the emotional survival of black students. As James remarked, “I would tell any African-American at a PWI, find your community, find your space and find it as quick as possible.” In building community for themselves, African-American students are effectively building counter-spaces, or spaces that serve the minority group and stand in opposition to the white, dominant group. From the 11

⁷³ Tatum, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together*, 18.

interviews conducted, two places emerged as integral to the African-American community: the Student Union and student organizations and clubs.

3.1 The Student Union

During each interview, I asked participants to tell me where they felt comfortable spending time on campus. Overwhelmingly, this question was met with a long pause as each interviewee struggled to come up with an answer. Beth noted that the uncomfortableness of being on campus causes African-American students to avoid spending leisure time there. She continued, “For most African-American students, you come to class and you leave. We’re not gonna hang out.” For Ashley, the response was merely that she felt too uncomfortable on campus to be present any more than necessary. Yet, after these initial comments, in almost every interview, participants noted that if they were going to spend time on campus it would be at the Student Union.

In many regards, the Student Union has been the epicenter of black social life at the University of Mississippi. For most, the introduction to this “black space” of campus begins as a freshman. Unlike their white counterparts, who are often preoccupied with fraternity and sorority recruitment, parties, or weekends in the Grove, black students, many who live in residence halls on campus, are left with limited social options. Hence, as a social activity, freshman African-American students dress up and sit in the Student Union. Phaedra commented:

The black community here, everyone would just settle right in the Union. People would get dressed up, go in the Union and be seen by people. My friends would say ‘Come hang out in the Union.’ [I would ask] ‘Well what’s going on in the Union? I don’t just wanna sit there.’ It was just something to do, they would just sit there. For hours. Just to be seen.

Raven elaborated further on the matter, stating: “There’s a thing in the black community here... you know whose a freshman because they always come with their Sunday best... face full of makeup, dressed to the T. If you wanna be seen, the Union is where you’re gonna be seen.”

As the semester continues, freshman tend to stop dressing up for the everyday, and focus their efforts on Tuesday and Thursday. Tuesday and Thursday are the days which the NPHC organizations perform in front of the Student Union during Union Unplugged. Although Union Unplugged is a Greek event, its significance extends far beyond black Greeks. Victor, who is not a member of an NPHC organization, noted that Tuesdays and Thursdays were when the Union felt most safe. He said, “It gave me a glimpse of what an HBCU was like. I saw more black people there on Tuesdays or Thursdays than I did on any other day going around campus.”

Although it is during their freshman year that many black students find the Student Union, the space is not reserved for freshman only. As students continue their academic career, the Union becomes a meeting place. In interviews, participants spoke of how they would stop by the Union on their way to class, just to see who was there and say hello. Furthermore, members of the NPHC community noted that the Union was a place for them to conduct organizational business. Organizations could meet with one another, trade information, or plan upcoming events. Enhancing the space was the food court housed inside the Union, which enabled students to share meals together, like many of their white counterparts at fraternity or sorority houses. Taken together, such factors made the Student Union, in many regards, the living room of the black community at the university.

In December of 2016, the Student Union was closed for remodeling. If construction goes as planned, the Student Union will reopen in the Fall of 2018. Yet, even such a short closure has had immediate impact on black students. In interviews, participants pondered the future of the

community without the Student Union. For Ashley, a leader in several student organizations, the Student Union “is pivotal.” For Darius, a member of an NPHC organization, the main concern is if, and where, Union Unplugged will be held. As of the spring of 2017, no dates nor places have been set for a Union Unplugged event. For Raven, the closing of the Student Union has altered her day to day social life. She notes, “The Union was that place where everybody was. Now you have to text people I guess, ask them where they are.”

Although an unintended consequence, the closing of the Student Union only further alienates black students from the social structure of the University of Mississippi. When I asked where students have gone in the months following the closure, I was often met with the response that now black students spend even less time on campus than before. A few have attempted to replicate the atmosphere of the Student Union in the basketball arena, known as the Pavilion, or in the Starbucks in the Main Library. They have had little success. Although the closure is not permanent, without the Student Union black students continue to move their lives further off campus.

3.2 Student Organizations

At present, African-American students do not have a physical place to spend time on campus at the University Mississippi. However, in discussions with participants, several student organizations were often referred to as “black spaces.” Although these groups lack a physical location, their ability to foster community creates a metaphysical black space that allows for African-American students to feel comfortable. The four student organizations often mentioned are the Gospel Choir, the Black Student Union (BSU), the university chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the National Pan-Hellenic Conference (NPHC).

a. Gospel Choir

Founded in 1974 as an extension of the Black Student Union, the University of Mississippi Gospel Choir “served as a niche for African-American students who were searching for a sense of belonging.”⁷⁴ Forty-three years after its founding, the Gospel Choir still provides a “space” for African-American students to find “fellowship, support, and inspiration,” at the university.⁷⁵ For James and Victor, the Gospel Choir was imperative to their success as students. James stated:

The university Gospel Choir was the first space I joined to find people that were like minded. They shared some of the feelings I had about this institution. I was able to vent with a lot of people. I was able to advocate for people and feel supported in doing that. I was able to meet a lot of people. It was a sense of community— an opportunity to be true to who I am and not have to assimilate to the culture that is [at the university].

Like James, Victor found community in the Gospel Choir as well as networking opportunities.

Every semester it averages about 90-100 students. You might not know every person in there but you know of every person in there... With 100 people there, you have so many majors and people who are involved and plugged into other things. We can come together and share announcements and opportunities for different positions, whether it's a job, or a volunteer position. We also do community service together such as canned food drives or visiting the nursing home. We also have socials, or Christmas exchanges. It's a family within the Ole Miss family.

⁷⁴ University of Mississippi Gospel Choir. Web. <http://dos.orgsync.com/org/umgc/History>

⁷⁵ Ibid.

The Gospel Choir then, serves as a social space for African-American students. With the exception of attending practices held in the Student Union prior to the current remodeling project, there is no physical space that members can inhabit. And yet, even without physical space, the Gospel Choir has had an immense impact on the lives of black students, creating a “safe space” for social interactions.

b. NPHC

Similar to the Gospel Choir, students who join an NPHC organization speak of the tremendous impact such groups have on their time as students. As noted in Chapter Two, NPHC organizations no longer have housing on campus and are often only in public spaces when performing in front of the Student Union during Union Unplugged. However, this one hour of performance arguably makes the members of NPHC the most visible black students on campus. Many interviewed for this thesis are members of NPHC organizations. Thus, I asked questions regarding their feelings about their role on campus, Union Unplugged, and the building of the Greek Garden.

Raven, a leader in the NPHC community, acknowledged the social capital of NPHC organizations, stating “When it comes to black people on campus, NPHC is definitely the most visible group. So, we have a platform, the opportunity to speak for other people if they feel they don’t have a voice.” As of the 2016-2017 academic school year, the NPHC community’s membership reached an all-time high, totaling nearly 130 members. Currently all nine NPHC organizations are active on campus. Throughout the year, groups hold social events, educational events and programming, and remain emphatic “in demonstrating that there is a home at the University of Mississippi for cultural minority students.”⁷⁶ Yet, despite all the programming, it is

⁷⁶ NPHC History, Greek Garden Proposal. This document was provided by the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life at the University of Mississippi.

during Union Unplugged that the university's majority white student body interacts with NPHC students most visibly.

As noted in Chapter Two, the step shows performed by NPHC members during Union Unplugged occasionally draw offensive remarks from the white community. When asked about Union Unplugged, interviewees had mixed responses. A few acknowledged the hostile comments, while others ignored the matter, noting instead the joy they found in performing with their community. Anne, an alumna who remains involved with her organization, explained her mixed feelings:

We don't have space on campus, so Union Unplugged is a time where we get together as a council and we may stroll or step—it's just our time to come together and make our presence known on this campus. Because when you don't have space it's hard for people to know where to find you. So that's our time to get together and enjoy each other and ourselves. To see that people question your purpose and why you're out there... it's like "This is my campus too. I go to school here too."

In the spring of 2016, the University of Mississippi broke ground on the Greek Garden, a statue installment meant to honor the nine NPHC organizations. In Chapter Two, I wrote briefly of the mixed emotions community members had regarding this space. In my interviews, I learned that those feelings are not mixed at all; rather, students are angry regarding their lack of space and the university's decision to build the garden. When discussing the garden, Raven responded: "Take what you can get. We got tired of talking [to the university] so we just shut up. Take what you can get. I could care less about the garden. It's awkwardly positioned. No one is gonna—well never mind. It's a physical representation true enough." Ashley, also a member of the NPHC community, noted: "The Greek Garden is a pacifier."

In part, the anger of NPHC community members stems from the knowledge that they, unlike other black organizations on campus, once had physical space on campus. Today, in order to hold meetings or events NPHC organizations must book space through the university. If space is unavailable, then the event is cancelled. As a result, NPHC members often host their events off campus. Ashely noted, “We use our personal spaces as our social spaces. That’s what we have to do. That’s what you have to do when you don’t have a space or your spaces get torn down.” Beth, also a NPHC organization member, commented, “We don’t have houses, so we’ve made our own houses. We said, we wanna own something, so we bought us a house. We’ve created our space off campus.” The fact that NPHC organizations feel the need to create space for themselves off campus speaks to the social marginalization African-American students feel regarding the University of Mississippi. If NPHC, the most visible and active black organization does not feel welcome on campus, then it is unlikely other African-American students will.

Part Four: Black Activism at the University of Mississippi

As detailed in Chapter Two, since 1962 there has been a history of black activism at the University of Mississippi. During interviews it became evident that African-American students are continuing the tradition of black activism on campus. As students become involved with the University of Mississippi they begin to notice additional barriers and injustices directed towards African-Americans. It is then, through the connections made in other black student organizations, that they start to organize and challenge the university’s white “active archive.” In this sense, activism, both the act and the organization of such acts, becomes a space all its own.

Two student groups are viewed as the most visible sources of such activism— The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and The Black Student

Union (BSU). In conjunction with these organizations, students are finding ways to be activists in their day-to-day lives. This section will focus on activist moments at the university, whether structured or individual.

4.1 Structured Activism

As of 2017, the NAACP has proven to be the most vocal black activist group on campus. Reformed in 2015 after the killings of AME church members in Charleston, South Carolina, in the last two years the organization “has surged to the forefront of promoting social change on a campus embedded with Old South symbolism.”⁷⁷ Since its founding, the group has staged large protests in response to the Mississippi state flag, the continued use of Confederate symbols on campus, and other university administrative decisions deemed as insensitive by the black community. Perhaps, most notable in recent years is the protest known as Occupy the Lyceum. Occupy Lyceum began following a white male student’s racist comments. The University of Mississippi’s black community pushed Chancellor Vitter to respond to such comments, and, when he did not, more than 100 protestors staged a sit-in in the Lyceum building.

What made the Occupy the Lyceum demonstration so unique was not the event itself; rather, it was how the event was coordinated. As *The Daily Mississippian* reported, “hours before [the event] students were wandering around campus doing homework or talking to friends, planning for game day or attending class.”⁷⁸ Then, seemingly out of nowhere, 100 students organized. How? The answer is GroupMe, a popular cellphone app. In short, GroupMe allows for hundreds of people to be in one text conversation. In the case of African-American students

⁷⁷ Swayze, Royce. “Ole Miss NAACP Chapter Gaining Strength.” *The Clarion Ledger*. April 23, 2016.

⁷⁸ Turnage, Clara. “Students Protest in the Lyceum in Response to Viral Comments.” *The Daily Mississippian*. September 26, 2016. Web. <http://thedmonline.com/students-protest-lyceum-response-viral-comments/>

at the University of Mississippi, each student involved in a student organization, is also in a GroupMe message chain, and, due to the overlap of memberships, some students are in several. For example, interviewees mentioned that they may be a part of their individual Greek organization's messages as well as a message chain with the entire NPHC community. They may also receive messages from the NAACP.

On the morning of September 23, 2016, when Chancellor Vitter released his statement regarding the student's offensive comments, angered African-American students copied the statement and placed it in their GroupMe conversations. Vitter's statement read:

“Some social media comments suggest or condone actions that are inconsistent with our core values, our university Creed, and, in some cases, encourage action in direct violation of university policies. The University of Mississippi condemns the use of language that might encourage or condone violence. Instead, let's be respectful and civil in our discourse, as called for in The Creed.”

It was at that moment, and through group messages, that students organized. As Raven recalled:

I have a million GroupMe's. I have a GroupMe with the entire NPHC, all 100+ of us. I have a GroupMe with NAACP. One with ESTEEM, and MOST, and all these people circulate between all these organizations. There is a lot of overlap. So [the Occupy the Lyceum] started with a screenshot of that guy's comments. Then we started asking when people were done with class.

In her interview, Beth acknowledged the importance of the cyber-organizing noting: “It's kind of like how back in slavery, you met in church. They met in in church to do a lot of their organizing. This is our church. This virtual space is that for us. It's where we meet, where we hang out, where we share.”

As Beth's comments reveal, the virtual space is used for social life as much as it is activism. Unable to occupy a physical space, unless out of protest, black students use the cyber world to connect with each other and create a space of their own.

Despite the number of participants involved in the Occupy the Lyceum protest, there are some in the African-American community who disagree with the NAACP and believe that creating spaces at the University of Mississippi should not occur through protests. The BSU is such a group, and in speaking with members of both the BSU and the NAACP, I learned of the friction between their organizations. Ashley, an active member in the NAACP, spoke to the strained relationship:

We were looking to do work without the ties. or without being institutionalized.

The BSU are wonderful people, but they're heavily institutionalized. Their strings are pulled by the administration in the Lyceum. We [the NAACP] didn't have that. We were looking for places that we could be distinctly ourselves, fighting for things we believed in, without owing people anything.

Howard, an active member of the BSU had a different feeling regarding the tension, claiming:

We [the BSU] call ourselves a programming organization with political tendencies. That's because we don't focus on activism or political factions. We focus on creating a safe space for African-American students here on campus... Unfortunately, the way this campus is set up you can't have more than one black leading organization. That's kind of the mindset of people here. I believe that the biggest issue between the BSU and the NAACP, other than that mindset, is that they focus on activism and we do not. So, when a majority of them look at us,

they feel like we aren't stepping up to the plate.... but, my activism doesn't take place in rallies or occupying the Lyceum.

The differences in the NAACP and BSU's missions is represented in the African-American student population. Of the 11 interviews, the results were evenly divided as to whether they participated in active activism or not. For those who did not, they spoke of "everyday" ways they fight the powers of the university to improve the lives of black students on campus.

4.2 Everyday Activism

In her discussion of the feminist movement, scholar Jenna Stephenson-Abetz defined "everyday activism" as a type of activism that "strays from 'traditional rhetorical options of protest, confrontation, militancy, [and] conflict' ... [and rather] occurs in private settings, such as engaging in daily talk, using the Internet, sharing stories, or using humor."⁷⁹ Stephenson-Abetz's definition of everyday activism certainly applies to the actions of African-American students at the University of Mississippi.

According to interviewee Howard, not all black students at the university believe in the larger scale, public protests held by the NAACP. Yet, it would be wrong to assume that a lack of participation in protests equates to a lack of interest in widespread black activism at the university. Furthermore, it is important to understand that the everyday activism that occurs at the University of Mississippi is every bit as organized and intentional as large scale events such as Occupy the Lyceum. Everyday activism appears in a variety of forms: thus, it affects a variety of students. From a decision to join a white organization to the endorsement of black candidates for campus-wide personality contests, everyday black activism is slowly chipping away at the "active archive" of white supremacy on campus.

⁷⁹ Stephenson-Abetz, Jenna. "Everyday Activism as a Dialogic Practice: Narratives of Feminist Daughters." *Women's Studies in Communication*. Vol. 35. No. 1, 2012, pp. 97-117.

The classroom is an important space for everyday activism. Interviewees noted the anxiety or discomfort they often faced and felt in classrooms or with professors. As James noted: “There is a lot of oppression. Like the ratio of black and white students in classrooms and how they’re fed different resources. [As a black student] you have to find faculty members that are willing to listen to you and understand [your struggles in comparison to your white peers].”

As a result, black students feel extra pressure in regarding academic performance. Compared to their white counterparts, many feel a sense of racial pride regarding their academic success. As Beth, African-American students feel compelled to use their academic performance as a means to ownership of place on campus:

The protests are great, but the main thing is being in the front row of your classes. Even that is a protest. You [as an African-American student] never come to class without your homework. You’re not late. You always have to work twice as hard to get half of what your white counterparts have. They can wear Nike shorts and T-shirts, but you better come looking spic and span. You have to set the tone that I do deserve to be here.

In this regard, black students at the University of Mississippi are using their academic success as an everyday protest, attempting to prove their place in the university community. From ensuring that they look nice to strategizing where they sit in the classroom, those interviewed were exceedingly aware of the barriers they face academically and the strategies they would deploy to overcome the university’s active archive of racism.

While some African-American students choose to demonstrate everyday activism through their presence in the classroom, others demonstrate it by ensuring the creation of spaces for their peers. Indeed, some black students have therefore joined traditionally white

organizations. As Ashley noted, “the student organizations here tend to be very white. Very whitewashed.” Yet a few black students still choose to join such organizations. Victor, a member of the Student Government, noted: “In the past, that group has been very whitewashed. People either weren't being intentional or it was implicit bias. I tried to be very intentional at creating spaces for black students to be at the table.” In creating such spaces, Victor is referring to the recruitment of other black students into roles of influence. For Beth, the creation of spaces is far less formal, instead a task she incorporates into her everyday routine. She remarked, “There are very few times that I pass another African-American female and I don't speak. Even if I don't know her. We are constantly working to make each other feel like ‘I see you. I celebrate you.’ You have to foster this feeling of love, which at HBCU's is there and imbedded.”

In addition to ensuring that other black students join white organizations or see a friendly face on campus, those who participated in interviews also spoke about why they are fighting one of the university's most honored traditions— personality contests. At the University of Mississippi, the selection of Mister and Miss Ole Miss is a social ritual of public import. Operating as “popularity contests that for the most part features nominees from fraternities and sororities,” the campaign season for Mister and Miss Ole Miss lasts weeks, with each individual creating a campaign team and campaign strategy.⁸⁰ For African-American students, the title of Mister and Miss Ole Miss have often been elusive. In 1975, Ben Williams became the first African-American man to win Mister Ole Miss, at the time named “Colonel Reb.” In 2016, Acacia Santos became the first African-American woman to win Miss Ole Miss.

In discussing the role of Mister and Miss Ole Miss, those interviewed argued that such a win for the African-American community was not something they took lightly. From Mister and

⁸⁰ Cohodas, *The Band Played Dixie*, 356

Miss Ole Miss, to Homecoming King and Queen, to filling seats in the student government, participants acknowledged the intent behind each nomination. For instance, Beth remarked: “You’re beginning to see more black students run for personality contests. That’s not on a whim. That’s a conscious effort. We meet and say ‘Who are we gonna put up?’... You have to make these conscious efforts. There are already so many divides against us that we have to be strategic.”

Howard, a member of the BSU, noted that the support for black candidates extended beyond individual support and included organizational support. As he recounted in his interview, the BSU allows all candidates, whether it be for Mister and Miss Ole Miss or a student senate seat, to introduce themselves to the general body of the BSU. Then, after hearing speeches and compelling arguments, the BSU formally endorses a candidate. Such an endorsement proves critical, especially for African-American candidates. Campaigns for such contests requires one to have access to money and manpower. For white students, particularly Greek students, such costs are often paid by their fraternity or sorority. For African-American students, the cost to campaign comes from individual donors. Thus, endorsements from groups such as the BSU prove helpful, providing political access, public exposure, and votes.

For African-American students, the winning of the Mister or Miss Ole Miss title is a step toward abolishing another white barrier on campus. In promoting black candidates, African-American students are protesting the university’s (nearly) all-white system of fraternal organizations and clique-like favoritism and patronage. Furthermore, their choice in who to promote for a certain title is strategic. As several interviewees expressed, black students do not endorse another black student simply because of their race. Rather, they back a black candidate because their candidate seems to have the best chance at winning. As Beth told me, the decision

of which black student can run for which position is judicious. The black community is not afraid to ask students to step aside, or simply not run for a title, if they believe another black student has better chances of winning. While for white students such elections serve as popularity contests, African-American students, in recognizing that campus elections are a form of protest, must be organized and intentional in their choices.

Part Five: Reflections of Time Spent at the University

Scholars of race and identity argue that one's racial identity is shaped by the world around them. This is an on-going, lifetime process. Keeping this argument in mind, at the end of each interview, I asked all 11 participants: "What does it mean to you to be an African-American student at the University of Mississippi?" By asking this question, I learned that the final phase of the black student experience on campus is that of reflection. As students begin the path towards graduation, they ponder their role on campus, often hoping to have left a legacy. Furthermore, many interviewees spoke to a sense of pride they felt in overcoming the racial barriers at the university.

Raven was one of those participants whose answers spoke to the pride she felt regarding her time spent on campus. She noted:

[Being here] means the world. It means I'm here, but it does depend on the day. On one day it means I'm just a student like everyone else. On one day it means being in college period. I'm somewhere my grandmother couldn't be. I'm sitting somewhere she couldn't sit. It's letting you know, I'm here and there's nothing you can do about it. I'm gonna sit in the seat where you sit. When I get up out of

my seat you can sit in it if you like. There's no way around it. You don't have to fight anymore. It's here. You can embrace it.

For Antoinette, her time as a student served as a reminder of how much African-Americans have endured at the university. She felt pride in being a part of that continuing story:

To me [being an African-American student] means that you're willing to endure and fight for what your ancestors did. I would walk around campus and could feel my ancestors say "Keep pushing." And you could feel those people from 1962 say, "Keep pushing." It's that strong of a feeling. I think you have to be a strong person to be here.

Victor, acknowledging that the physical space of the university was not intended for him, discussed his pride in simply being on campus:

This space was never created for me, but I have come and made it mine. When I look at 1848, on everything, my people weren't here in 1848. My people didn't get here until 1962. This space, even though it wasn't made for me, I have navigated it. I know just by the mere fact that I came to the University of Mississippi, I can pretty much thrive anywhere else in the world.

While participants such as Antoinette, Raven, and Victor felt pride in their ability to overcome the barriers of the campus, other participants felt pride in being examples to other black students who may think of attending the University of Mississippi. For example, Beth remarked:

Leaving a legacy is one of the most essential things you can do as an African-American student. Winning things isn't for you, it's blazing a trail. To be able to say that you can thrive here. Being an African-American student here means

working tirelessly to leave a legacy that was bigger than it was when you got here.

If Ole Miss has taught me anything, it's to be able to thrive in a place where you're a fly in the buttermilk.

James echoed the sentiments of Beth, commenting: "I refer to myself as a light of hope. If I chose to attend another institution, who is gonna do this work as a black male at a PWI? Hopefully I serve as a light that you can survive at the University of Mississippi and be true to who you are." Lastly, Phaedra, a participant who chose to attend the University of Mississippi because of the academic opportunities she believed would be available to her, responded: "I think [being an African-American student] means a lot. I feel like I'm setting my mark here on this campus. I feel like I'm setting an example to other black women and black men that you don't have to go to a community college or attend a school in your hometown. You can branch out and do something better."

While most participants spoke of triumph or hope in leaving a legacy, it is worth noting that one participant's reflections were not as optimistic. As can be inferred from the comments above, being an African-American student at the University of Mississippi requires work, often expressed as "double" that of white students. African-American students must overcome barriers in the classroom as well as socially, and for a participant such as Ashley, sometimes that toll proved too much. In reflecting on her time at the university and what it meant to her to be an African-American student, she responded:

I think it means you'll have to be damn perfect to do well. You have to run yourself and work yourself to the ground to do well here. And not just in terms of graduating—to break those barriers here. It is so much harder than it looks. As an African-American on this campus you are overlooked, extremely overworked,

and extremely undervalued. It's hard living and existing in this space mentally. You have to do a lot of self-care and a lot of patching up what's been undone throughout the day. And that's just to exist, not to thrive. That's what being an African-American student is here— it's resilience. Being able to withstand all the barriers and still prosper.

Conclusion

At the University of Mississippi, the physical campus, its structures and its meaning, serve as a racial, social, and political barrier to African-American students. From the time African-American students are accepted to the university, they are immediately marginalized. Furthermore, once on campus these students are subjugated to live on a campus that honors whiteness. As a result, they are forced to create counter-spaces, often in the abstract or via social networking and technology, such as through groups and organizations, which allow for the existence and growth of black community and identity. Then, having found a community, students begin to fight for a space of their own. Following these phases, near the end of their time at the university, African-American students must come to terms with their experiences. Recognizing the barriers overcome, some students view their time as a badge of honor— proof that they survived and can, thrive anywhere. For others, resentment remains regarding their time at Ole Miss and the barriers they were forced to face. Regardless, the University of Mississippi's campus and conjoining of whiteness and place deeply affects black student identity, leaving a demonstrably different impression than the supposedly romantic, raceless “spirit of Ole Miss” enjoyed by many white students. For black students the “spirit of Ole Miss,” or whiteness itself,

is no mere spirit. It is a structure of spaces that African-American students either navigate or endure from before enrollment to even after graduation.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The physical structure of the University of Mississippi creates a barrier to equal opportunity and experience for African-American students. As a result of such barriers, African-American students create counter-publics, or places in which their own interests are honored and humanity acknowledged. The purpose of this thesis was to examine such counter-publics, asking questions as to how such places came to be, where and in what form they took and continue to take shape, and, ultimately, how do these places affect the personal identity of African-American students at the University of Mississippi.

In analyzing the findings of this thesis, it is important to understand the time period that this study was conducted and the events which may have served as outside influences. This study began shortly after the announcement that the Student Union would be closed for remodeling. At the time, I was unaware of the impact such a place had on the black community on campus. However, it soon became evident that the closing of the Student Union was of utmost importance. It is worth noting that many of the interviews were conducted during the first semester of the Student Union's closing. As a result, participants' feelings regarding the loss of place were quite raw. Had my interviews been conducted a year ago, when the Union was still an available place, participants may not have had such visceral reactions.

Another outside factor which may have affected my findings was the aftershock of the national presidential election. In the months leading up to and following the election, there was

much discussion in the national media regarding the marginalization of minorities. Following the election of President Donald Trump, social justice advocates pledged to fight harder for minority rights. Such sentiments were echoed by those who participated in interviews. In several instances, interviewees noted the results of the election caused an increase in racial tension on campus, leaving many feeling a need to fight harder for black student rights.

Lastly, another important campus project during these interviews was the construction of the Greek Garden. The finalization of the garden led to community-wide conversations regarding “black space” on campus. Again, I believe that, had this thesis been conducted a year ago, participants would have had less to say regarding the garden.

Limitations

First, this thesis is limited because of the number of interviews I was able to conduct. Due to time constraints, I was limited to 11 interviews. As a result, this thesis’s understanding of “black space” may be over generalized. Second, although not intentional, this work does not highlight the voices of underclassman. As stated in Chapter 3, when recruiting participants, I strove to find black students who were actively involved on campus. Freshman and sophomore students tend to be less involved as they have not had as much time to find organizations or fill leadership positions. Furthermore, in regards to voices lent to this thesis, the voices of administration are not included. Lastly, a limitation of this work is the lack of personal observation. As a full time student, I was present on campus. But rarely did I personally observe spaces, such as the Student Union or the edge of the Grove. Such observations would have allowed for a more critical lens of study when discussing these places and their formation.

If this work were to be pursued further, I would recommend that any researcher first look at addressing the limitations of my study. The inclusion of more voices, such as underclassman African-American students or university administration, could help build a better understanding of the formation of “black space” on campus. Also, I believe there is potential in interviewing white students who spend their time in the identified white-dominated spaces, such as the Grove or Fraternity Row. Additional studies regarding whether or not white students are aware of how black students feel in those spaces could prove beneficial. If this thesis were to be expanded, the feelings of other minorities about their place on campus should be taken into account. Although this thesis focuses on African-American and white students only, the sheer notion that the campus is deemed as “white” means that other minority students are marginalized as well. It would be worthwhile to compare the sentiments of other minorities regarding the whiteness of campus with those of African-American students. Lastly, if this thesis was to be adapted and researched further, it could be beneficial to do a comparative study between this thesis and another southern PWI such as Louisiana State University or the University of Alabama.

Conclusion

Keeping such limitations in mind, three conclusions can be drawn from this thesis. First, at the University of Mississippi, African-American students are creating counter-publics in non-physical ways, especially online and through various forms of in-class and on-campus activism. Second, the university’s lack of understanding regarding the black community leads to poor administrative decisions which only further entrenches black students in their counter-places. Finally, the lack of physical place affects African-American students’ personal identity formation, not only during their time in Oxford but afterward.

From GroupMe messages to student organizations such as the Gospel Choir, black students are spending their time in places that know no physical boundaries. As a result, they are becoming invested in the university's community while still not fully represented. On a campus filled with offensive and racist symbols, virtual places provide a home. Yet, these virtual places prove problematic because they speak to the inequality of resources black students have in comparison to their white counterparts regarding use and access to physical space. Hence, despite administrative overtures regarding "diversity" or moving beyond the university's racist past, in terms of black space, place, and power, black students remain second-class university citizens.

The second conclusion is that the university administration's lack of understanding regarding the black community leads to the creation of even more virtual counter-publics. For example, although the remodeling of the Student Union was not intended to displace African-American students, they are now displaced. As a result of this displacement, these students will continue to meet in places that are not on campus. This lack of administrative understanding spurred the Occupy the Lyceum movement, and, when students felt the administration still did not understand their requests, students took to GroupMe to organize other counter-spaces. While virtual spaces such as GroupMe serve African-American students, they should hardly be an acceptable end to the story for the university's administration. The stakes are high but not predetermined. Indeed, without knowledge and understanding of the black community's lack of place on campus, the administration will continue to make harmful decisions that only further cause black students to create counter-publics. At the same time, the fact that black students operate in virtual counter-publics makes it harder for the university to gain proper understanding of the community. In the end, this thesis has identified the problem. It is up to both the student

body—whites and blacks—and the administration to find a solution, and ideally, one written in brick and mortar.

The lack of place for black students at the University of Mississippi affects personal identity at all phases of their collegiate experience and beyond. From the beginning of the admission process, African-American students interact with the university differently than their white peers. Furthermore, once on campus they are confronted with barriers, ones often unseen and certainly not experienced by their white counterparts. The result is a burden for black students. Not only are they college students, intent on completing coursework and graduating, but they must also be constantly aware of racial obstacles around them as well as in their way. Additionally, a lack of physical place, which could allow black students to feel “at home” on campus, robs these students of the collegiate experience that many of their white friends, classmates, and counterparts enjoy. African-American students at the University of Mississippi, unlike their white counterparts, must attend college while also fighting for their sense of humanity and full citizenship.

In my interviews, many spoke of the burden of responsibility they felt as students. Faced with whiteness at every turn, these students feel a constant need to prove their worth and their right to attend the state’s flagship university. To be sure, they have their counter-spaces and publics. Indeed, other organizations, such as the William Winter Institute of Racial Reconciliation and the Cross-Cultural Center of Inclusion, are actively working to foster dialogue surrounding these issues on campus. However, the University of Mississippi, where “Ole Miss” is a structure of buildings and spaces as much as a nostalgic (white) namesake, the university’s “active archive” of whiteness may simply prove too powerful to overcome.

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