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Courage: Lifting Her Voice

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Courage: Lifting Her Voice

Sophomore encourages tough conversations about racial injustice

OCTOBER 31, 2022 BY ERIN GARRETT

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Janelle Minor, a sophomore public policy leadership major, uses her life experiences to champion others and fight for change. Photo by Kevin Bain/Ole Miss Digital Imaging Services

As part of the 60th anniversary of integration at the University of Mississippi, this is the second of a four-part series based on the themes that are inscribed on the Civil Rights Monument on campus: perseverance, courage, knowledge and opportunity. These student stories reflect the characteristics that James Meredith embodied six decades ago when he enrolled as the university's first Black student.

OXFORD, Miss. – When Oxford native Janelle Minor says that the **University of Mississippi** feels like “home,” she means it literally.

“Attending the university was a natural fit because I grew up on campus,” said Minor, a sophomore public policy leadership major. “I went to football games as a kid. My mom works here, and my dad worked here before he passed away.”

As a child, Minor lived in the Luckyday Residential College while her mother, Ethel Young Scurlock, worked as its senior fellow.



“Growing up on campus allowed Janelle to be around diverse people who love learning at a very early age,” Scurlock said. “While she was still in grade school, she would sit in the dining hall with students debating issues and try to learn from her conversations.”

“She easily befriends people who do not share her belief systems, because she has always connected with people based on the values of care and concern for others. I also think that she understands the importance of studying and striving for knowledge, because she grew up living with 300 high-achieving college students.”

Minor’s early experience with discourse and debate undoubtedly came in handy when she was the victim of a discriminatory act during her freshman year. While sitting at an intersection, a truck occupied by a few white males pulled alongside her and the driver blew its horn.

“I realized that it wasn’t just any horn,” Minor said. “It was the first few notes of ‘Dixie,’ the unofficial anthem of the Confederacy.”

She looked over at the truck and noticed that a passenger was pointing his cellphone at her – a

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Campus Briefs

Donations Sought for 25th Annual Books and Bears Program

OXFORD, Miss. – The University of Mississippi is asking the community to help spread a little joy this holiday season by donating to the 25th annual Books and Bears program. Donations such as toys, books, dolls, bicycles and other children’s play items are being accepted through Dec. 14. All donations will be collected and sorted

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Thank You To Our Donors

Mississippi Excellence in Coaching Fellowship Aims to Build Leaders

OXFORD, Miss. – Twenty-five inaugural recipients of the Mississippi Excellence in Coaching Fellowship – a program hosted by the University of Mississippi School of Education in partnership with the Mississippi Association of Coaches and the Mississippi High School Activities Association – are expected to increase their impact on student-athletes and their communities. The coaching fellowship

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Ole Miss In the News

Clarion-Ledger: New Essay Collection Tells the Story of Meredith’s Enrollment

Essays celebrate 60th anniversary of James Meredith’s enrollment at University of Mississippi By Lauren Rhoades Oct. 1 marks the 60th anniversary of James Meredith’s 1962 enrollment at the University of Mississippi as the school’s first African-American student.

deliberate attempt to get her reaction on film.

The easiest response might have been to try to forget the experience, and perhaps dismiss it as an isolated incident of ignorance. Minor, however, didn't write it off. She wrote an article for The Daily Mississippian instead.

"I had a message for those individuals," she said. "As I said in my article, it is an insult to the university's civil rights trailblazers, like James Meredith, for us to not share our voice about incidents like this."

In the opinion piece, she encouraged members of the university community to file a report with the **Bias Education and Response Team** if they witness or are subjected to incidents of bias.

BERT reports are submitted anonymously and provide an opportunity to bring forward allegations of bias. The review team is a nonjudicial group of faculty, staff and administrators that connects those who have been affected by bias with education, resources and support.

EJ Edney, assistant vice chancellor for diversity and inclusion, is co-chair of the Bias Education and Response Team.

"It is critically important that our faculty, staff and students have the tools to work through bias," Edney said. "Our response team's top priority is to ensure that any university member who has been affected by bias is supported and given the resources they need to move forward."

Informing her peers comes relatively easy to Minor; her family has a long history of teaching. Two of her grandparents were teachers, and her mother was recently named dean of the **Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College**.



Janelle Minor (right) grew up on the Ole Miss campus with her sister, Jasmine Minor. Submitted photo

"James Meredith: Breaking the Barrier," a collection of essays edited by UM professor of journalism Kathleen Wickham, honors this historic milestone with

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Working for Camp Lake Stephens in the summer 'recentered' Janelle Minor (front row, fifth from left) after the death of her father. Submitted photo

While Minor has experienced many defining moments in her life, the most challenging was coping with the death of her father.

"Her father died of a massive heart attack a few weeks after she turned 9," Scurlock said. "They had a very close relationship, and she had a tough time managing grief.

"Attending Camp Lake Stephens for summer camp helped recenter her and created space for her to celebrate the values that make her unique."

Minor grew to take risks rather than shy away from challenges. She participated in the Scholastic Institute at Oxford High School, which allowed her to earn an associate degree while she completed high school.

She also participated in the Oxford Children's Chorus, which paved the way for her to join **Women's Glee** at Ole Miss.

"Choral music gave her a way of understanding different cultures and helped her learn to work with a team of people to create beautiful art," Scurlock said. "She also sings a lot at church, and our church families have been loving and supportive of Janelle at every stage of development."

Minor has flourished during her first few semesters on campus. She credits her mother for encouraging her to pursue a degree in **public policy leadership**.

"My mom always told me that she thought I'd be a public policy major," Minor said. "After attending the MOST Conference, I learned more about it and decided to apply to the **Leadership Institute**. I got accepted, and I feel it's my civic duty to give back to the state of Mississippi."

Melissa Bass, associate professor of public policy leadership, has taught Minor in multiple courses.

"Janelle is just the kind of student we love to have in PPL – she's excited to learn, works hard and is dedicated to making a difference," Bass said. "I fervently wish she hadn't been put in a position to have to address racism in her first weeks on campus, but she more than rose to the challenge.



UM sophomore Janelle Minor tries her luck on a mechanical shark at the Ole Miss Student Union during Homecoming week in September. Photo by Thomas Graning/Ole Miss Digital Imaging Services

"I often learn a lot from my students, but typically over the course of their four years; I learned a lot about – and from – Janelle in her first month."

Minor received a Stamps scholarship, which covers full tuition and includes a stipend for study abroad and other academic activities. She's used this opportunity to focus on making changes to the educational system.



Janelle Minor (right) poses with her mom, Ethel Scurlock, in her residence hall room on campus. Submitted photo

"Right now, I'm working on a school supply drive with other Stamps scholars," she said. "I'll be delivering supplies to the Oxford School District. I want to continue to advocate for better education in Mississippi."

Senora Miller Logan, assistant director for Luckyday Programs, has known Minor since she was 5 years old.

"I have watched Janelle grow even through the various life circumstances that she's dealt with," Logan said. "She is not afraid to take the necessary steps to see things evolve from where they are."

"Even in her own quest for all of that, she seeks to champion others. She keeps others in mind as she pushes through and fights for change."

After Minor's article in the DM was published, the university community rallied around her.

"I received a lot of positive feedback," she said. "I think most understood where I was coming from and why I felt the need to get my story out. It was out of concern; nothing I do is ever going to be done out of hate."

"I wanted to encourage people to speak out and stand up to their peers when they witness injustice and oppression."

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