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Forward Rebels? Race and Remembering the University of Mississippi's Integration, 1962-2008

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Forward Rebels?
Race and Remembering the University of Mississippi’s Integration, 1962-2008

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

Jillian E. McClure

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ABSTRACT

Memories and commemorations of the University of Mississippi’s integration demonstrate that, throughout the past forty-six years, the administration used pragmatic strategies to portray integration and racial progress in a way that benefitted those with power at the time, while minimizing the realities of racial problems. At various commemorative events, school officials attempted to reconcile the school with the violent events of 1962, yet simultaneously create a narrative of progress. The integration’s twentieth anniversary in 1982 provided the school an opportunity to commemorate the event and create a favorable public image, but criticisms from prominent African-American faculty and alumni threatened the public relations campaign. The administration pushed the message of progress instead of genuinely addressing the issues. A conflict over the creation of a civil rights memorial between 1995 and 2006 revealed that the integration's legacy remained contested and that the school’s power structure had an impact on the memorial’s message, because the chancellor ultimately created the monument he desired. Racial moderation became apparent during the first presidential debate in 2008 at the university. School officials attempted to reshape the school’s public memory by emphasizing progress through a public relations campaign, just as 1960s racial troubleshooters used public relations to demonstrate the state’s positive changes. The debate shows the power of civil rights movement memory, as well as the triumphs and shortcomings of an attempt to alter cultural memory about the university. The twentieth anniversary celebration, the creation of the James Meredith statue, and the 2008 presidential debate illustrate the continuities between the racial troubleshooting methods of the 1960s and how the university’s administration discussed the issue of race at later commemorative events.
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INTRODUCTION

Nestled in the rolling hills between Mississippi’s Delta and the hill country, the University of Mississippi’s campus features shady oaks, elms, magnolias, and luscious grass. In the spring, azaleas and dogwoods brighten the campus with vivid colors. The summer brings large, white magnolia blossoms. Autumn’s hues of reds, oranges, and yellows paint the campus and the surrounding town of Oxford, while occasional winter snowfalls blanket the town in white. The natural beauty rivals the university’s stately architecture. As the first structure constructed on campus in 1848, the Lyceum’s Greek revival design set the tone for the school’s architectural style. The tall, white, Ionic columns on the front and back porticos contrast with the bright, red brick walls. In front of the Lyceum lies the Circle, a grassy area sprinkled with trees. Nearby, the Grove’s nearly ten acres provide shade to students studying, chatting, or simply passing through. The University of Mississippi gained national recognition for the gorgeous campus. *Newsweek* ranked the University of Mississippi as the most beautiful college campus with the most attractive students in 2011, and *Princeton Review* placed the school the first for the 2013 “Most Beautiful Campus” list. *Princeton Review* described the school as “a prime example of Southern hospitality combined with the opportunity for greatness… The closeness of the community makes it easy to feel part of the University.” The publication quoted a student who said, “You’ll hear the term the ‘Ole Miss [the school’s nickname] family,’ and it won’t

The beautiful campus draws some to Oxford, a small town situated in northern Mississippi.

Hidden beneath the beauty, however, the scars of the University of Mississippi’s past remain. Though students come and go, the Lyceum still bears the patched bullet holes from the night of September 30, 1962, when a riot erupted in protest of the first African-American student’s admission. A bench on the side of Farley Hall, which houses the School of Journalism and New Media, serves as a memorial for Paul Leslie Guihard, a British reporter for a French news agency, who died from a fatal gunshot to the heart during the riot. A local named Walter Ray Gunter, who came on campus with a friend to observe the riot, also perished from a gunshot wound to the head. National and international media disseminated images of the violence and debris. James Howard Meredith walked into the Lyceum the next morning to register as the University of Mississippi’s first African-American student, despite the violence that occurred throughout most of the previous night. Although tear gas no longer clouds the air and the burned-out vehicles no longer sit in the Circle from the riot, the incident remains an important part of the school’s history. While the campus bears scars and reminders from other unfortunate occurrences since the school opened in


3. Before James Meredith enrolled and officially integrated the University of Mississippi, an alumnus named Harry S. Murphy, Jr. came forward in September of 1962 and stated that he was African-American. He passed as white while he attended the University of Mississippi during the 1945-1946 academic year, because his naval and university records wrongly listed him as white and Caucasian. He considered correcting the mistake but decided to avoid controversy. It is possible other African Americans passed and attended the school before Meredith, but Meredith represented the first student registered and known as African American. See Charles W. Eagles, The Price of Defiance: James Meredith and the Integration of Ole Miss (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 20-1.


1848, the riot and integration mark the most memorable event for the University of Mississippi in the twentieth century.

The integration occupies an important place in the university’s history not solely for what occurred on September 30 and October 1, 1962, but also because the events fit into a broader history of racial dynamics that extended before and after Meredith enrolled. The riot did not happen spontaneously, nor did racial problems cease after the school admitted a single African-American student. Numerous scholarly works and memoirs examine the historical circumstances leading up to the integration, the events of the riot, and Meredith’s year on campus. Charles W. Eagles and David G. Sansing provided important assessments of the integration’s historical context and significance. Authors Nadine Cohodas and William Doyle also contribute to a better understanding of the school’s culture and the riot in their books. Memoirs by Meredith, Henry T. Gallagher, Frank Lambert, and others inform readers with firsthand accounts and reflections upon the events. The ways that the University of Mississippi community remembered, portrayed, commemorated, and used the integration story in the decades after 1962 remains underexplored. Before delving into the post-integration years, however, it is important to understand the events leading up to the riot and the reasons why Meredith wanted to enroll at the University of Mississippi. The integration and the school’s reactions to the riot built the foundation for the way the school remembered the integration and discussed racial issues at later commemorative events.


INTEGRATING THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI

Meredith never viewed his application to the University of Mississippi as simply about obtaining an education, because he also aimed to destroy white supremacy both in the state and in the country. On January 21, 1961, he wrote a letter to the University of Mississippi requesting admission for the upcoming spring semester.\(^{10}\) Seven years after the United States Supreme Court ruled segregated schools unconstitutional in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, Mississippi’s flagship institution remained without a single African American student enrolled.\(^{11}\) Meredith aimed to become the first by transferring from the historically African-American Jackson State College to the University of Mississippi. In various interviews and in his memoirs, Meredith explained that he wanted to attend the University of Mississippi to uplift the African-American race and end segregation. In March of 1961, he circulated a letter among students at Jackson State College that explained his goal to obtain “social, economic, and political advancement of the Negro in Mississippi.”\(^{12}\) He also wrote “Why I Plan to Go to the University of Mississippi” to gain support among the African-American community. The essay explained that he hoped to provide African Americans with access to a better education and to help the community overcome the “fears and inferior feelings that prevail among our people.”\(^{13}\) The *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years* documentary series featured an interview with Meredith before he entered the university. He said that he aimed to get the best education in his home state, but he also explained that he wanted to overcome the barrier of “the so-called place for the Negro.”\(^{14}\) In addition to earning a degree,

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10. Meredith, 54.


Meredith sought the broader goals of ending segregation and improving the lives of African Americans.

Written in the years following his time at the University of Mississippi, Meredith’s memoirs echo the same concept of racial uplift but more boldly describe his goals of breaking the system of white supremacy. In describing racial uplift, historian Kevin K. Gaines stated, “Believing that the improvement of African Americans’ material and moral condition through self-help would diminish white racism, they [educated African Americans] sought to rehabilitate the race’s image by embodying respectability, enacted through an ethos of service to the masses.”15 When Meredith wrote *Three Years in Mississippi* in 1966, he claimed the opportunity for economic advancement also spurred his decision. He said, “When I investigated all areas of business possibilities, I learned that there were limitations inherent in the system of ‘White Supremacy’ that would always keep the Negro from going beyond a certain arbitrary level in the economic structure that paralleled the system. Before I could engage in business at the level that I desired, the system would have to be broken.”16 His reflections in his 2012 memoir, *A Mission from God*, spoke of wider goals. He stated, “My mission was not to ‘integrate’ the university, which I saw as a minor and relatively timid objective. My mission was to physically and psychologically shatter the system of white supremacy in Mississippi and eventually all of America, with the awesome physical force of the United States military machine.”17 Meredith’s words denote a critical difference between the act of integrating one institution and the process of overcoming the larger systemic inequalities created by white supremacy. With the value of hindsight after successfully receiving his diploma, the first African-American alumnus incorporated a broader vision for the destruction of white supremacy in the state.


17. Meredith with Doyle, 16.
and country. The federal government backed his cause in 1962 and 1963 with thousands of National Guardsmen, military police, army soldiers, and marshals. While he never viewed enrolling at the University of Mississippi as solely about obtaining a degree, the massive federal support he received and the widespread media attention allowed the integration’s significance to reach beyond the borders of Mississippi. Meredith’s memoirs emphasized the importance of destroying white supremacy both in the state and in the country, and he viewed integrating the University of Mississippi as an important step toward his goal. Integrating the school represented a landmark occurrence in the state and country’s civil rights history, but the event alone did not unravel the entrenched system of white supremacy.

Meredith specifically wanted to attend the University of Mississippi for the school’s cultural influence in the state and long history of perpetuating white supremacy. In A Mission from God, Meredith said that around the age of twelve a white doctor told him of the institution’s “rich history and exalted position in Mississippi culture,” and explained that he increasingly understood the university’s role in maintaining social and racial hierarchies throughout its history. In Price of Defiance, Eagles explored the goals of the school’s founders and described the control that wealthy planters and lawyers had through the Board of Trustees. He concluded, “The university’s founders and early supporters believed, therefore, that it ought to inculcate and perpetuate the political and cultural values of the dominant slave-owning whites.”

The school continued to celebrate and venerate the antebellum South and the Confederacy after the Civil War. The school’s nickname, “Ole Miss,” began as the title of the school yearbook in 1897 and eventually became the common name for the university. While some say that the term originated from a shortened version of Ole Mississippi, most historians argue that the name came...
from slaves’ colloquial expression for the white mistress of antebellum plantations.\textsuperscript{20} Funded by alumni and members of the Delta Gamma sorority, a three-panel, Tiffany stained-glass window in Ventress Hall honored the students who fought and died in the Civil War, called the University Greys.\textsuperscript{21} In 1906, the United Daughters of the Confederacy’s local chapter erected a monument to “Our Confederate Dead” in the center of campus. That same year, a Confederate veteran started a campus-wide contest for the best student speech or essay defending the South’s right to secede or Confederate leaders’ actions.\textsuperscript{22} In the first half of the twentieth century, sports teams took the name “Rebels” and the Confederate battle flag and the song “Dixie” became common at football games.\textsuperscript{23} The fight song, “Forward Rebels” called the team the “Southland’s pride” and encouraged athletes to “fight for [their] Ole Miss.”\textsuperscript{24} The Confederate battle flag, a medley called “From Dixie with Love,” and a mascot resembling a cartoon plantation master called Colonel Reb also became official parts of school athletics. The university perpetuated and celebrated the state’s role in southern and Confederate history, and Meredith aimed to integrate the school for symbolic and practical reasons. By maintaining segregation on campus and in the school’s culture, Meredith believed the university acted as a linchpin in preservation of white supremacy across the South and in the United States. His application and potential enrollment at the school threatened the culture of white supremacy that the university perpetuated.

\begin{itemize}
    \item \textsuperscript{20} Eagles, \textit{The Price of Defiance.}, 17; Cohodas, 20-1.
    \item \textsuperscript{21} Cohodas, 11-12; Eagles, \textit{The Price of Defiance}, 17.
    \item \textsuperscript{22} Eagles, \textit{The Price of Defiance}, 17. For more on Lost Cause mythology at the University of Mississippi, see Cohodas, 12-14.
    \item \textsuperscript{23} Chosen in a 1936 contest sponsored by the school newspaper, \textit{The Mississippian}, the nickname “Rebels” drew from Mississippi’s Southern and Confederate heritage. According to Cohodas, the \textit{Mississippian} said the nickname was “suggestive of a spirit native to the old south and particularly to Mississippi.” See Cohodas, 161.
\end{itemize}
Scholarship about the University of Mississippi’s culture indicates the centrality of race in the school’s history and culture, as well as the influence that Old South- and Confederate-filled customs had upon the university community. Author Nadine Cohodas explained, “Education was more than learning and refinement. It was survival: ‘the process by which a culture transmits itself across the generations.’” Eagles tied the nickname, history, and culture to the racial dynamics of segregation. He stated,

The commitment of white Mississipians to Ole Miss had many implications and meanings. Whites ironically employed the language of black slaves, whom they considered their inferiors, to identify their beloved, all-white institution. Based on the plantation mistress, the name ‘Ole Miss’ reinforced the university’s aristocratic image and worked against greater popular support for the school in some parts of the state. The term’s connotations also suggested the institution’s commitment to upholding the reigning racial status quo of black inferiority, racial segregation, and disfranchisement. By giving their university a female image, whites also proposed that they had to protect and defend it just as they did southern white women: the main threat to the school’s virtue came from blacks, especially black men.

Cohodas asserted that, by the 1940s, the university had “infus[ed] generations of young white Mississipians with an immutable pride in their heritage and a belief in a social order accepted as divinely ordained.” Meredith and others saw the University of Mississippi as an institution central to preserving white superiority, and Meredith’s desire to enroll directly challenged the school’s cultural values.

Meredith also chose to apply to the University of Mississippi due to the school’s position and power within the state. In A Mission from God, Meredith related the school’s nickname to its place in Mississippi. Meredith believed that, just as the plantation’s Ole Mistress kept affairs in order, the University of Mississippi controlled the educational, political, and social environment in Mississippi. He wrote that the university “was truly the Ole Miss of the plantation state. It is a fitting

25. Cohodas, 5.
27. Cohodas, 5.
nickname, for Ole Miss was and is the most dominant, most powerful institution in the state. It was the Ivy League of the state, the place where the state’s white leaders were groomed.”

Meredith viewed the school as the central institution through which he could fight the system of white supremacy, due to the power that the university wielded in the state’s political and educational system. Evidence supported Meredith’s claim, as more state governors, judges, and representatives graduated from the University of Mississippi than the state’s land-grant school, Mississippi State University, in the twentieth century.

Meredith continued in his 2012 memoir, “Mississippi, you see, is the center of America’s racial universe, and the University of Mississippi runs Mississippi.” As a flagship university, the University of Mississippi held the role of educating the state’s best students, but the education emphasized social connections and leadership more than intelligence.

A Time magazine writer observed the school’s importance for individuals who sought to attain social and political power in Mississippi. The 1962 article stated, “More social than academic, Ole Miss is in essence an avenue to status in the state.” The foundation for the school’s importance within the state rested upon social and political influence, not research or intellectual achievements.

Eagles reached the same conclusion in his monograph, The Price of Defiance. He wrote, “For the children of the elite, the campus provided a home where they formed powerful loyalties to each other and to the

28. Meredith with Doyle, 44.


30. Meredith with Doyle, 44.

31. The idea of achieving prominent social status on campus pervaded the school’s yearbooks. As one of the best examples, the 1971 annual published a poem called “Climbing the Social Ladder,” based on the lyrics of the Christian spiritual, “We are Climbing Jacob’s Ladder.” One verse stated, “Don’t think about the moral-social revolution / The war in southeast Asia, Women’s Lib. and pollution. / Somewhere someone else is thinking of a solution! / People of Ole Miss [sic].” See The University of Mississippi, The Ole Miss, Class of 1971, Oxford, Mississippi, 214.

institution and its values. As a result, Ole Miss played a persistent and prominent role in the state, in the lives of all Mississippians. Meredith explained that he wanted to attend the University of Mississippi, because the school influenced state politics by producing alumni who became prominent figures in the state’s political, social, and legal systems.

With the initial application, Meredith did not work with any civil rights groups, but he decided to request legal help from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Legal Defense and Educational Fund at the suggestion of Medgar Evers, Mississippi’s NAACP field secretary. Due to the school’s refusal to admit Evers in 1954, Meredith anticipated that the university would deny his application. Meredith wrote to the Defense Fund on January 29, 1961, only eight days after his initial application. After the University of Mississippi denied his application on February 4, 1961, the NAACP assigned a lawyer named Constance Baker Motley to the case. She advised Meredith to continue applying for each subsequent semester.

The school denied Meredith’s application on grounds unrelated to his race, because race as the cause for refusing admission would not hold up in federal courts after Brown v. Board of Education. A few months after the 1954 Brown decision, the University of Mississippi adopted a requirement that each applicant needed five alumni recommendation letters. The requirement prevented African Americans from meeting the criteria without using overtly racial or discriminatory language. African-American applicants found it impossible to acquire the five necessary letters,

34. Meredith, 55.
35. Eagles, The Price of Defiance, 72-9; Meredith with Doyle, 63.
36. Meredith, 58, 62-3.
37. For a more detailed description of Meredith’s application process and the ways the school attempted to deny his enrollment, see Eagles, The Price of Defiance, 221-240.
38. Meredith, 58, 66, 135.
because no African-American alumnus of the University of Mississippi existed. A later Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals decision aptly explained, “The fact that there are no Negro alumni of the University of Mississippi, the manifest unlikelihood of there being more than a handful of alumni, if any, who would recommend a Negro for the University, the traditional social barriers making it unlikely, if not impossible, for a Negro to approach alumni with a request for such a recommendation, the possibility of reprisals if alumni should recommend a Negro for admission, are barriers only to qualified Negro applicants.”\(^{39}\) In lieu of the alumni letters, Meredith submitted “certificates regarding [his] moral character from Negro citizens of [his] state.”\(^{40}\) Robert B. Ellis of the Office of the Registrar said that the recommendation letters were “not sufficient.”\(^{41}\) Based on the timing that the university implemented the policy and the strict stipulations, the alumni recommendation requirement aimed to create a means to prevent African Americans from enrolling without mentioning race. The timing of the alumni recommendation policy raises the likelihood that the school implemented the requirement chiefly as a means to prevent African Americans from enrolling without mentioning race.

The University of Mississippi used other means to block Meredith’s admission. Only six days after the school received Meredith’s initial application, the school’s Board of Trustees disallowed transfer students or credits from southern schools that did not belong to the region’s accrediting association, the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools.\(^{42}\) No historically black colleges or universities held full membership in the association when Meredith applied.\(^{43}\) An

\(^{39}\) Meredith, 135.

\(^{40}\) Ibid., 58.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., 77.

investment by an all-white, joint committee of Mississippi legislators explained that the University of Mississippi “would have subjected itself to disciplinary action and possible expulsion from the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary schools by virtue of the fact that the institution would be violating its own standards of admission by admitting a student from a non-member school.” The committee concluded, “James H. Meredith was not denied admission because of his race or color, as a matter of fact.” Due to the university’s policies, the school denied Meredith based on reasons not explicitly related to race, but the admission requirements nonetheless aimed to prevent African Americans from enrolling.

On May 30, 1961, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund filed a suit in the United States District Court under the argument that Meredith’s denial occurred solely because of his race. The Legal Defense fund sought to challenge the school’s admission requirements as an undue burden upon African Americans. Judge Sidney Carr Mize ruled on February 3, 1962, that the school did not reject Meredith due to his race and that the school had no policy of segregation. Meredith and Motley immediately appealed the decision to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. In a split decision, the majority opinion argued that the alumni certificate requirement acted as “a denial of equal protection of the laws in its application to Negro candidates. It is a heavy burden on qualified Negro students, because of their race. It is no burden on qualified white students.”

43. The association admitted Jackson State College to membership on December 16, 1961. See Meredith, 148, 153.

44. Released on September 30, 1962, the report by an all-white, joint committee also concluded that an investigation unearthed no wrongdoing on the part of the university. See “Report on Meredith: Lack of Qualifications Cited,” Mississippian, October 1, 1962, Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries.


46. Meredith, 105-7.

decision stated, “A full review of the record leads the Court inescapably to the conclusion that from the moment the defendants discovered Meredith was a Negro they engaged in a carefully calculated campaign of delay, harassment, and masterly inactivity.” The decision found no reason to reject Meredith’s application and ordered the University of Mississippi to register him as a student.

Despite the court ruling, Governor Ross Barnett remained defiant and took measures to prevent the school’s integration. Throughout the month of September, the state of Mississippi and various arms of the federal government worked against each other in ways that eventually led to a showdown of federal versus state power. On September 4, 1962, the Board of Trustees rescinded university officials’ powers in determining Meredith’s enrollment and transferred the powers to state officials, namely Governor Ross Barnett. The Department of Justice led the efforts to enforce federal court orders and decided to provide protection for Meredith when he tried to enroll. Students’ reactions during the first attempt provide an example of the heated atmosphere and opposition to integration that permeated much of the student body. On September 21, Meredith attempted to register and Barnett greeted him with a crowd of state troopers and students who chanted “Hotty Toddy,” a school chant, and slogans like “Glory, glory segregation. The South shall rise again.” For an entire month, the university and the state managed to resist the court orders and prevent four direct attempts to register Meredith as a student.

With Mississippi’s officials directly challenging federal authorities and the threat of violence growing, the federal government needed to enforce the integration to maintain its own authority over the state. Knowing that Barnett faced contempt of court fines if Meredith did not enroll by

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48. Located in New Orleans, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals covered Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas. See *James H. Meredith v. Charles Dickson Fair*, 305 F.2d 343, June 25, 1962; Meredith, 135.
49. Meredith, 143-4.
50. Ibid., 178.
October 2, President John F. Kennedy attempted to negotiate a solution with the governor. Kennedy and the Justice Department arranged for Meredith to arrive on campus the evening of September 30. The evening before, Barnett entered a cheering stadium for the University of Mississippi’s football game in Jackson and declared, “My fellow Mississippians, I love Mississippi. I love her people, our customs. I love and respect our heritage.” The simple statement affirmed his commitment to white supremacy and state sovereignty, as well as fostered the atmosphere of resistance and tension. In *An American Insurrection*, Doyle quoted a student who attended the game that night and felt the emotional power of Ross’ words. The student stated, “That night… people would have been glad to die for Ross.” Barnett backed out of his agreement with Kennedy, and reports alerted the Federal Bureau of Investigation about citizens from across the country mobilizing to prevent Meredith’s enrollment. The president federalized the National Guard and called in marshals, military police, the army, and the Air Force to escort Meredith. According to Eagles, “By the wee hours of September 30, a major battle between federal and state power was imminent.”

Mounting tensions exploded into violence on the night of Sunday, September 30. Over the weekend, word of possible plans to enroll Meredith drew the attention of students, faculty, locals, and nonresidents. Doyle stated that over three hundred reporters from across the nation came to Oxford that day. Students returned from Saturday night’s football game on Sunday to see

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54. Doyle, 113. Also see Eagles, *The Price of Defiance*, 336; Meredith with Doyle, 115.


57. Doyle, 118.
roadblocks at the campus entrances and marshals wearing riot gear in front of the Lyceum.\textsuperscript{58} At five o’clock, two hundred ninety marshals stood on campus.\textsuperscript{59} By sunset, the number increased to over four hundred forty, and a crowd of several hundred gathered while Meredith spent the night in Baxter Hall, a men’s dormitory on the edge of campus. The crowd remained mostly students into the evening, but the roadblocks eased after sunset and more reporters and others came on campus. As the number of marshals grew and the crowd swelled in size, the protesters became a mob. Eagles described, “The crowd shifted from primarily Ole Miss students to mostly older strangers [within a few hours after sunset]. With the outsiders, the level and volume of violence mounted.”\textsuperscript{60} Gerald Walton, an English professor at the time who later became an administrator, walked around the edge of campus late that night and saw automobiles with license plates from other counties in Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, and Arkansas. He said people emerging from parked vehicles had weapons such as baseball bats and guns.\textsuperscript{61} United Press International reported “a barrage of rocks, timbers and pop bottles” flying toward the marshals.\textsuperscript{62} Others burned out cars. Witnesses later recalled seeing a large, flying object hitting a marshal.\textsuperscript{63} Chief United States Marshal James J. P. McShane ordered the first round of teargas in response, just before eight o’clock.\textsuperscript{64}

The riot continued throughout the night in a pattern of the crowd advancing toward the marshals, followed by the marshals shooting teargas and forcing the crowd to retreat until the smoke

\textsuperscript{58} Doyle, 142; Eagles, \textit{The Price of Defiance}, 344, 348.

\textsuperscript{59} Eagles, \textit{The Price of Defiance}, 347, 350.

\textsuperscript{60} Eagles, \textit{The Price of Defiance}, 364.


\textsuperscript{64} Doyle, 146.
dispersed enough for the rioters to advance again. In addition to the two deaths, about one third of the marshals and forty soldiers and National guardsmen received injuries, as well as dozens of rioters and observers. After two in the morning, reinforcements began arriving and started pushing the rioters off the campus. At 6:15 in the morning, Army General Charles Billingslea declared the campus secure.65

With the riot over, Meredith emerged out of Baxter Hall prepared to make history. Dressed in a suit, he walked into the Lyceum a little after eight o’clock on the morning of October 1, 1962. Smoke from the teargas still lingered in the air and debris from the violence remained scattered in the Circle. The United Press International described the morning’s scene: “The campus itself looked like a battleground. It was littered with burned-out automobiles, tear gas canisters and broken glass and echoed to the cadence of marching troops.”66 Elvin Hilyer, an undergraduate student at the time, recalled vomit on the ground from those who inhaled too much teargas smoke.67 A local high school student who lived next to the university, Robert A. Herring III, also remembered objects that rioters used as projectiles sprinkled around the Lyceum and the Circle.68 Meredith successfully registered for classes and officially became the first African-American student enrolled. Just minutes later, one reporter asked, “Now that you are finally registered, are you happy?” Meredith wrote in *Three Years in Mississippi* that he responded with his genuine feelings about the situation at that time.69 He simply told the journalist, “It is not a happy occasion.”70 Although the University of Mississippi


69. Meredith, 213.
integrated, Meredith’s matriculation came at a high cost for the federal government, the state, and the school.

Part of the damage occurred to the school’s reputation and public image after national and international media disseminated images, stories, and videos of the events. *Time* magazine called the event “the gravest conflict between federal and state authority since the Civil War” and *U.S. News and World Report* said, “Oxford came close to being a small-scale Civil War.”\(^\text{71}\) With the death of a French reporter for a London news agency, the riot held special interest for international press. Major London newspapers provided reports, and London’s *Daily Herald* referred to the riot as a “race-hate showdown.”\(^\text{72}\) Newspapers in England, Egypt, Ghana, Spain, Italy, Germany, Morocco, Japan, France, and elsewhere provided accounts and commentary about the integration.\(^\text{73}\) The United Press International reported, “The world press Monday played up the Meredith case as the worst United States constitutional crisis since the Civil War. There were banner headlines from London to Tokyo…. The Oxford riots overshadowed all other news in Latin American newspapers.”\(^\text{74}\) The press release continued to detail that most western European countries, the Soviet Union, and China condemned the racism displayed through the riot, while many other countries’ newspapers avoided providing commentary with the headlines. For many across the


\(^\text{73}\). Meredith with Doyle, 150.

globe, an association between the University of Mississippi, racism, and violence formed or cemented due to the riot, as media outlets provided tangible images and records of the events.

Anthropologist Roger Bastide argued that group memories formed more quickly and effectively if physical material preserved an individual or event’s memory. He stated, “Since memories are psychic by nature, if they are to survive they must survive in something durable; they must be attached to a permanent material base of some kind.” Memories fossilized quickly and remained a part of the school’s culture, because physical elements preserved and spread information about the integration. The widespread coverage brought the University of Mississippi’s riot and Mississippi’s racial problems to households around the world.

The indicting news articles continued throughout Meredith’s time on campus, as newspapers documented the harassment Meredith received from other students. Students threw bottles and other objects, exploded cherry bombs and firecrackers, banged doors in Baxter Hall, yelled racial epithets, and hanged Meredith in effigy. Some interactions with students resulted in positive encounters, but other students attempted to isolate Meredith by harassing and threatening any who spoke or ate with him. He had federal protection throughout his time at the school due to such


78. Eagles, The Price of Defiance, 386-7; Meredith with Doyle, 161-71.
harassment from students, as well as death threats in letters from people outside the university community.

RACIAL MODERATION & THE EMERGENCE OF RACIAL TROUBLESHOOTING

The concept of racial troubleshooting grew in the 1960s out of a longer history of southern strategic compliance to federal demands. Historian William Blair demonstrates that “pragmatic” southerners in the Civil War’s aftermath attempted to cooperate with northerners for two reasons: “to attract resources that could help the South economically and… to limit the extent of social change.” Such pragmatists sought “well-positioned, moderate white men of good character” to help rejuvenate the South while maintaining social hierarchies. After the collapse of Reconstruction, white Mississippi politicians attempted to follow the letter of the law while simultaneously denying African Americans their constitutional rights. White political leaders who wrote the Mississippi Constitution of 1890 conformed to the Fifteenth Amendment prohibition from denying suffrage based on race, color, or previous condition of servitude. Instead, the writers utilized careful language to add requirements that would prevent African Americans from voting without specifically referring to race. Requirements such as the poll tax and the literacy test blocked most African Americans and lower-class whites, but legislators gave poor, illiterate whites the ability to vote through loopholes like the “grandfather clause.” The clause guaranteed a man the right to vote if he had a relative who voted before 1867, and during that time no African American in Mississippi held


that right.\textsuperscript{81} White Mississippi segregationists employed similar strategies to cooperate with other civil rights legislation and court orders in the following decades.

Growing from the practice of calculated compliance, “practical segregation” emerged to hinder school integration after the 1954 \textit{Brown v. Board of Education} decision and the 1955 \textit{Brown II} verdict that required desegregation “with all deliberate speed.”\textsuperscript{82} In reaction to the Supreme Court cases, many southern politicians, educators, and white supremacists attempted to prevent school integration. Rather than defying the court orders outright, as many white supremacists suggested, practical segregationists sought to preserve segregation through strategic accommodation, compromise, and discretion. According to historian Joseph Crespino, they “advocated realistic approaches that tried to maintain good relations with local African Americans and minimize outside attention and federal interference.”\textsuperscript{83} Such individuals aimed to maintain white superiority and segregation by complying with the letter of the law and making small, gradual concessions with African Americans’ demands to avoid civil rights demonstrations and boycotts that would hurt the local economy and draw outside attention. Some practical segregationists like Mississippi governors Fielding Wright and Hugh L. White encouraged upgrading African-American schools to maintain separate schools under the law. Historian John Dittmer described the governor and other officials who “came to believe that the only way to maintain their dual school system was to make separate-but-equal more of a reality, even though the economic costs would be substantial.”\textsuperscript{84} As an example of practical segregationist tactics employed at the University of Mississippi, the school changed the

\begin{itemize}
  
  
  \item \textsuperscript{83} Crespino, 19.
  
  \item \textsuperscript{84} Dittmer explained that improvements occurred slowly due to resistance from state and local politicians and district school boards. See John Dittmer, \textit{Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi} (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 36.
\end{itemize}
admission requirements after Brown v. Board of Education to disqualify African American applicants without doing so solely because of race or skin color. Policies at the university did not specifically restrict students of any particular race, but the alumni recommendation letter requirement placed an undue burden upon African American applicants. In the 1950s, practical segregationists acknowledged that small compromises provided the best means to preserve white supremacy, and their methods emulated the creative ways that white supremacists wrote Jim Crow laws to adhere to federal law yet simultaneously discriminate against African Americans.

Another goal of practical segregationists was improving and maintaining the state’s public image. By appeasing the local African-American community through strategic accommodation, practical segregationists hoped to avoid the negative publicity that civil rights demonstrations created in the national press. One of the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission’s goals sought to manage Mississippi’s reputation through public relations.\(^{85}\) That same year, the commission paid for eighteen New England journalists, who largely worked at small weeklies, to visit Mississippi and comment on race relations. According to Crespino, “The idea was to build a positive image of Mississippi outside the South, but the journalists’ reactions were mixed.”\(^{86}\) National Editorial Association President and New York’s Woodhaven Observer publisher Alfred Ball seemed to believe that Mississippi’s problems could and would be solved within “a period of years.” He stated, “I am convinced Mississippi is doing everything possible under the circumstances to solve the problem, not only to educate the


\(^{86}\) Crespino, 28.
Negro but to make him happy.” While Ball and two others asserted that Mississippi’s racial issues presented minimal problems, the other fifteen journalists expressed concerns over the severity of the state’s racial division. Journalists described the “segregation of thought,” “tenseness,” and “spontaneous flare of emotion” after asking various white and African American individuals their views on segregation. Richard P. Lewis, editor of the Franklin, New Hampshire, *Journal-Transcript* concluded, “The whole problem is a problem of human communication. Somebody has got to make the discovery that Negroes are human beings, which does not seem to be too well known here.”

The Sovereignty Commission likely hoped that the public relations efforts would have a more positive outcome, because the majority of reporters critiqued Mississippi’s racial laws and norms. In any event, practical segregationists realized the importance of public perception and the necessity to prevent violence or federal intervention.

Racial troubleshooting represented an evolution of practical segregation to more effectively stifle civil rights activism and reforms in the 1960s. Racial troubleshooters used positive public relations to preserve white political, social, and economic power during a period when African Americans and the federal government increasingly demanded changes to existing power structures. Earl Johnston, the director of the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, first used the phrase “racial troubleshooting” in 1964 to describe how his organization would move away from acting as a watchdog agency or covert intelligence bureau and instead handle racial problems with moderation. He and other political and business leaders who advocated racial troubleshooting encouraged calculated compliance to federal mandates, rather than outright resistance.

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88. Ibid.
Crespino’s exploration of racial troubleshooting in *In Search of Another Country: Mississippi and the Conservative Counterrevolution* contributed to the ways historians understood and interpreted reactions to the civil rights movement of the 1960s. In contrast to the “hard-line segregationists” who refused to budge on civil rights issues and advocated massive resistance, racial troubleshooters held a different approach.\(^9\) Crespino explained,

For the first time [in 1962 and increasingly throughout the 1960s], elected officials in Mississippi made strong public statements in favor of law and order, advocated token acceptance of desegregation, denounced white racial extremism, and started public relations efforts that emphasized positive changes in Mississippi race relations… Public statements were carefully worded to deflect blame onto the federal government. White leaders knew that tokenism was the best way to end boycotts and deflate protest marches. It sent national reporters back home and comforted potential industrial investors. Most important, reports of the new moderation in Mississippi obscured continuities in the approach of white elites, including subtle campaigns of subterfuge, harassment, and physical violence against civil rights activists.\(^9\)

Although some Mississippians defied the federal government through massive resistance in the 1960s, racial troubleshooters strategically accommodated federal orders and used public relations campaigns to advertise racial harmony and progress, while simultaneously preserving many aspects of the status quo and allowing for calculated, moderate changes. Increasingly, white Mississippi leaders utilized such tactics to maintain the community’s calm on the surface and minimize outside attention and interference, because they wanted to avoid violence like the University of Mississippi’s riot.\(^9\)

While hard-line segregationists had the most influence over state policies before Meredith’s matriculation, racial troubleshooters increasingly supported pragmatism after the riot harmed the school and state’s reputations, as well as the potential for growth. Crespino argued that the University of Mississippi riot marked a turning point from massive resistance to racial

\(^{89}\) Crespino, 73.

\(^{90}\) Ibid., 109.

\(^{91}\) Ibid., 19, 41, 48.
Mississippi leaders feared that the riot would harm the state economically, because businesses hesitated to invest in an area prone to violence or unrest, and university officials faced a drop in enrollment and the possibility of losing accreditation. Those who advocated racial troubleshooting began speaking out and taking steps to encourage pragmatism throughout the state. Less than two days after the riot, one hundred twenty seven white business leaders from across the state gathered in Jackson and released an announcement calling for law and order. As Eagles described, “Aware of the riot’s potentially disastrous effects on attracting industry to Mississippi, they called for ‘binding up our present wounds’ so the state could ‘continue to march forward.” Only weeks after the riot, the Sovereignty Commission cut and eventually stopped monthly payments to the White Citizens’ Council, an anti-integration organization that used strong intimidation tactics. The funding cut reflected the Sovereignty Commission’s changed belief that outright intimidation, violence, and defiance of federal mandates did not effectively protect white supremacy. Former Associate Vice Chancellor Charles Noyes told The Clarion-Ledger, “The university decided to take the offensive, to go out and prove to other educators that Ole Miss was going to remain a strong institution. Faculty members were encouraged to go to professional meetings, to present papers, to ask questions and identify themselves as being from Ole Miss.” Mississippi Economic Council President Bob Pittman explained, “In the early 1960s, Mississippi enjoyed strong economic growth… But the tragedy of that era was the Ole Miss situation involving James Meredith, which set us back for decades and interrupted the state’s economic growth.”

92. Ibid., 41.
93. Ibid., 44-5.
95. Crespino, 41.
97. Ibid.
also stated that the council hired a public relations consulting firm from New York and spent five years “on a nationwide campaign to improve Mississippi’s image” that included bringing distinguished residents back into the state. Businessmen, politicians, and University of Mississippi administrators who encouraged racial troubleshooting began to speak out and utilize such tactics in the wake of the riot. Such leaders realized the importance of the state’s reputation, and the Battle of Oxford provided an impetus for the transition to racial troubleshooting.

Evidence that some of the state’s most important political leaders adopted the racial troubleshooting strategies became apparent during Meredith’s March Against Fear in 1966. Governor Paul Johnson, who played a prominent role in physically blocking Meredith’s enrollment while the lieutenant governor and who won the governorship on a staunchly segregationist platform in 1963, provided protection for Meredith and other civil rights marchers in 1966. Meredith explained, “Johnson was a ‘new-breed segregationist,’ smart enough to know that the best national image for Mississippi was a tactic of nonviolent response to Martin Luther King’s nonviolent strategy. He was absolutely determined not to further damage Mississippi’s image by fighting the marchers with state power.”

Although political and business leaders received criticisms from staunch segregationists for being soft on the issue, racial troubleshooting slowly gained traction as segregationists observed the federal government’s commitment to enforcing civil rights legislation, because strategic accommodation allowed the appearance of progress.

For the purposes of the present study, the meaning of racial moderation holds a slightly different meaning than the definition of racial troubleshooting used by Crespino in *In Search of Another Country*. While racial troubleshooters aimed to preserve white supremacy in the 1960s, the University of Mississippi’s racial moderates in the 1980s and afterward usually did not possess

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98. Ibid.

malicious intentions. Those utilizing racially moderate tactics had a variety of motives but often acted in ways they perceived as best for the school or their own interests, rather than seeking to maintain white supremacy. Administrators needed to balance the desires of the white donors, alumni, and students with the need to achieve minority enrollment requirements for federal funding, in addition to portraying the campus atmosphere as welcoming to potential students. While university officials usually had differing intentions from 1960s racial troubleshooters, their tactics for handling the integration’s memory and contemporary race relations remained similar. Administrators, the public relations office, and other school officials chose moderate, calculated responses to racial progressives’ demands, rather than squarely addressing the riot or contemporary issues. Racial moderation manifested through public relations campaigns, just as Mississippi’s racial troubleshooters attempted to create positive public relations in the 1960s. The school aimed to communicate two central messages, especially during commemorative anniversaries and events. First, university officials hoped to convince audiences that the public should not blame the school entirely for racial problems. Similar to 1960s racial troubleshooting, administrators attempted to demonstrate that racial conflict occurred as an aberration to the normal racial harmony in Oxford and on campus. When university officials spoke about or chose to respond to criticisms of the school’s race relations, they often made justifications for the continued problems. Second, the University of Mississippi wanted the public to see that the school made progress after the riot. Racial moderation from the 1960s through the 2000s emphasized the positive changes that occurred at the University of Mississippi and in the state. The school’s post-1962 public relations messages attempted to create an association between the integration and the institution’s growth beyond serious racial issues. Often, speaking about the positive changes masked opportunities to discuss ways to improve perpetuating inequalities.
While moderates’ goals in the 1980s and afterward differed from the segregationists of the 1960s, the corresponding tactics produced a similar effect. Rather than resolving racial disparities and conflicts through extensive policy changes or other measures, administrators often chose limited, calculated changes to the demands of racial progressives. When school leaders talked about change and progress made without addressing ways to improve problems, they actually revealed more consistencies than differences in the ways that they handled race relations over time. Crespino argued, “Strategic accommodation exposes important continuities in white racial authority in Mississippi… Whites lost many high-profile battles, but they were often successful in preserving key aspects of the racial status quo at the local level. They did this by granting token concessions to black demands and by isolating more radical voices in the black community. They projected an image of moderation and emphasized to outside observers how much things had changed.”

School officials held different motives but used similar techniques that had many of the same effects. The present study uses same terminology of “racial moderation,” because the University of Mississippi did not proactively address racial issues but instead managed problems when the media brought attention to them.

REMEMBERING THE INTEGRATION THROUGH RACIAL MODERATION

Meredith graduated on August 18, 1963, but the saga of race and civil rights at the University of Mississippi continued. Memories of the riot remained an important part of public perceptions of the school. The media continued to associate the university with the riot for decades, especially when racial incidents occurred on integration anniversaries. Curtis Wilkie, who attended the university during the riot and worked for the Boston Globe before returning to teach at the University of Mississippi in 2002, reflected in 2011 that the riot “put us [the University of Mississippi] in a hole...”

100. Ibid., 12.
that we’ve been digging ourselves out of ever since, in terms of national image.”101 In the forty-six years after 1962, race and the collective memory of the integration played an important role at the school.

Collective memory, an interdisciplinary term largely rooted in sociological studies, describes “society’s retention and loss of information about its past in the familiar terms of individual remembering and forgetting,” in the language of sociologist Barry Schwartz.102 Collective memory differs from memory in that social groups share similar ideas, beliefs, myths, and truths about a particular event in the past. Also referred to as cultural, social, historical, or public memory in different disciplines, the term encapsulates a growing field of study that demonstrates how the remembered past influences the present.103 Schwartz further explained, “Commemoration lifts from an ordinary historical sequence those extraordinary events which embody our deepest and most fundamental values” and acts as “a register of sacred history.”104 The ways that a population remembers and represents an event both reflects and influences the politics, culture, and behaviors of that society. Cultural memory does not remain static, however, because contemporary events shape the way that communities perceive an event in the past.

Three ideas discussed by sociologists Larry J. Griffin and Kenneth A. Bollen in “What Do These Memories Do? Civil Rights Remembrance and Racial Attitudes” provide a foundation for this thesis. The sociologists built upon scholarship that explored the relationship between elites who


influence group memories and ordinary people. First, they argued that society’s “cultural gatekeepers” produce and institutionalize memories through their positions of power. Elites often hold jobs that give them intellectual and cultural authority, as they often are scholars, museum curators, journalists, politicians, well-known activists, and other prominent figures. As communications scholar Barbie Zelizer asserted, “Everyone participates in the production of memory, though not equally.” Second, Griffin and Bollen claimed, “Elites’ or cultural gatekeepers’ ‘facts of representation’ of the past need not coincide with rank-and-file memory users’ ‘facts of reception’ of the past.” Ordinary people may have cultural memories that compete with or challenge the ideas of the gatekeepers. Finally, “memory projects can fail” because individuals do not always completely internalize cultural memory, especially when their own interpretations differ from the memory project’s ideas.

The three themes highlight the complexity of cultural memory, the enormous effort required to reshape public memory, and the successes and limitations of memory projects.

Since the university’s integration in 1962, a number of commemorations, memorials, and events recognized the importance of James Meredith, the civil rights movement, and other minorities’ contributions to the University of Mississippi. In addition to providing physical reminders through events and memorials, commemorations also illuminate varying conceptions of tradition, change, progress, racial harmony, and reconciliation. To discover how the commemorative


activities attempted to shape the public memory of the integration in different ways and what the commemorations reveal about the university’s culture, this thesis blends historical, archival research with qualitative interviews, as well as some documentary and media sources. Primary source material came from newspapers, magazines, correspondence like letters and emails, school yearbooks, press releases, and the University of Mississippi’s archives and special collections. Twenty-one interviews with individuals associated with the University of Mississippi also provided primary source material. To obtain a well-rounded knowledge base, I tried to glean other views of the integration and commemorative events from documentary interviews, opinion pieces, newspaper articles, letters to the editor, and elsewhere. I aimed to recognize and balance individuals’ opinions regarding commemorative events so I could draw out important trends and themes.

In the years following integration, the University of Mississippi’s administration and important spokespeople often employed tactics similar to the 1960s racial troubleshooters, especially through commemorative events and anniversaries, due to the media attention gained at such times. The school created two-pronged public relations campaigns to communicate to a wide audience a particular narrative about the integration and the school. To remedy the school’s public image problem, school officials tied the integration to a narrative of progress to demonstrate that changes occurred on campus. First, the school attempted to shift blame away from the university community by assigning guilt upon the federal government, the state government, and outsiders who rioted. Second, the university used a variety of methods to demonstrate that the school moved forward after the riot. In demonstrating the progress since 1962, the school cited specific facts and statistics that reflected well upon the school, while it simultaneously minimized perpetuating racial problems. While the tactics shifted and developed over time, many aspects remained the same and reappeared at each commemorative event.
In the school’s recent history, various groups and community members attempted to promote alternative images of the school and campus race relations when their ideas did not align with the administration’s narrative. Some journalists probed beyond statistics like minority enrollment percentages to seek information about the school’s culture and found continued racial troubles. Some students, faculty, and staff spoke out about problems. Some individuals and groups emphasized the progress that needed to occur, rather than the progress already made by the school. Such individuals competed with the university’s public relations campaigns and messages of progress at commemorations to have their concerns and ideas heard by a wider audience.

When the university faced criticisms, university spokespeople responded in varying ways. To the media, the administration often ignored the critiques, provided excuses, or gave justifications of perpetuating racial problems. The school relied on myths that emerged in the riot’s aftermath and blamed the federal government, the Mississippi state government, or outsiders for the racial violence. When differing ideas resulted in a significant conflict, such as with the civil rights memorial unveiled in 2006, administrators often acted with their own interests in mind. Not every administrator or university spokesperson deflected criticisms, but the practice became a pattern followed by many.

Memories and commemorations of the University of Mississippi’s integration demonstrate that, throughout the past forty-six years, the administration used racially pragmatic strategies to portray integration and racial progress in a way that benefitted those with power at the time, while minimizing the realities of racial problems. At various commemorative events, school officials attempted to reconcile the school with the violent events of 1962, yet simultaneously control the integration and racial progress narrative. This thesis will discuss some of the most significant years and events that illuminate varying ways that the school relied upon racial moderation. First, the integration’s twentieth anniversary commemoration in 1982 highlights how the administration
utilized racially moderate tactics to tout changes on campus. The twentieth anniversary provided the University of Mississippi an opportunity to commemorate the event and create a more favorable public image, but attention to lingering racial problems and criticisms from prominent African-American faculty and alumni threatened the school’s public relations campaign. The administration largely ignored the criticisms and continued to push the message of progress, instead of genuinely addressing the issues.

Second, the creation of the civil rights memorial and Meredith statue between 1995 and 2006 highlights the administration’s continued reliance upon racial moderation, particularly the importance of emphasizing the progress beyond past racial problems. A conflict over the monument’s message revealed that the integration’s legacy remained contested and that the school’s power structure had an impact on the memorial’s message, because the chancellor ultimately created the monument he desired. The James Meredith statue also provides an opportunity to examine the benefits and limitations of commemorating a single individual’s accomplishments.

Third, racial moderation became apparent through the first presidential debate in 2008, which the University of Mississippi hosted and included the first African-American candidate of a major party. University officials used the debate to attempt to reshape the school’s public memory by emphasizing progress through a public relations campaign, just as 1960s racial troubleshooters used public relations to demonstrate the state’s positive changes. The event became a symbol of the country’s progress and the school aimed to demonstrate its own progress to the world as well. The debate shows the power of civil rights movement memory, as well as the triumphs and shortcomings of an attempt to alter cultural memory about the university. The three events shaped the conversations surrounding the integration, race, and progress at the university in ways that had a significant impact upon the collective memory of the integration and the school’s culture. The twentieth anniversary celebration, the creation of the James Meredith statue, and the 2008
presidential debate illustrate how the university’s administration discussed the issue of race at later commemorative events. Though the strategies shifted and changes occurred at the school, many continuities exist between the racial troubleshooting methods of the 1960s and racial moderation in the 1980s through the 2000s.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

A number of other scholars explored the collective memory of the civil rights movement and contributed important theoretical and historiographical concepts that pertain to the present study.109 The first historians to study cultural memory of the civil rights movement published journal articles in the late 1980s after Martin Luther King, Jr. Day became a recognized national holiday, but most examinations did not appear until the 2000s.110 By the early 2000s, fortieth anniversary commemorations of civil rights events began, many street names and monuments bore the names

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109. Sociologist Larry J. Griffin wrote extensively about civil rights movement memory. His sociological study, “‘Generations and Collective Memory’ Revisited: Race, Region, and Memory of Civil Rights” modeled and drew data from Howard Schuman and Jacqueline Scott’s 1989 article, “Generations and Collective Memories.” Like Schuman and Scott, Griffin analyzed the relationship between age and memories that individuals consider important. His study differed from “Generations and Collective Memories,” because he incorporated contemporary events that occurred through 2001 and assessed the South and the civil rights movement. He argued, “Region, along with race, gender, age, and other social factors, matter[ed] in the construction of collective memories.” Griffin found that youth who lived in the South during the 1960s more likely recalled the civil rights movement as an important historical event. The same individuals were also more likely to rank the civil rights movement as the most important event of the twentieth century. Griffin co-authors an updated study with Peggy G. Hargis to expand the focus beyond the South and the civil rights movement. The 2008 article concludes that racial and regional differences continue to exist in responses about important events in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The two studies demonstrated that the civil rights movement remains a significant part of the memories of individuals who witnessed the events as a child or adolescent. As one of leading sociologists of civil rights movement memory, Griffin provides important contributions to the field through his analysis of the connection between location, age, and memory. See Larry J. Griffin, “‘Generations and Collective Memory’ Revisited: Race, Region, and Memory of Civil Rights,” American Sociological Review 69, no. 4 (August 2004): 556; Howard Schuman and Jacqueline Scott, "Generations and Collective Memories," American Sociological Review 54 (1989): 359–81 and Larry J. Griffin and Kenneth A. Bollen, "What Do These Memories Do? Civil Rights Remembrance and Racial Attitudes," American Sociological Review 74 (August 2009): 594-614; Larry J. Griffin and Peggy G. Hargis, "South Polls: Still Distinctive After All These Years: Trends in Racial Attitudes In and Out of the South," Southern Cultures (University of North Carolina Press), Fall 2008: 117-41.

and likenesses of civil rights leaders, and at least fifteen civil rights museums opened after 1990.\footnote{111} Historian Vincent Gordon Harding pioneered the field when he examined the legacy of King in his 1987 article, “Beyond Amnesia: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Future of America.”\footnote{112} Harding concludes that America reshaped King into a hero after 1968. His book, \textit{Martin Luther King: The Inconvenient Hero}, exists as one of the only historical monographs of civil rights movement memory. Harding details King’s divisive political, religious, and racial views that led the leader to critique both American policy and capitalism. The scholar argued that public speakers, the media, public historians, and contemporary activists selectively quoted King’s speeches and chose to ignore the activist’s statements about economic equality. The historian states, “In most of the celebrations of King’s life… the dominant image has been that of the great orator at the Mall, the dreamer of interracial harmony, the stirring and mildly challenging preacher.”\footnote{113} Harding argues that America manipulated King’s image to fit various modern agendas, but never portrayed him as advocating, in King’s own words, “a radical redistribution of economic and political power.”\footnote{114} Harding’s exploration of King and society’s manipulation of his image applies on a smaller scale to Meredith’s image in the University of Mississippi community. Chapter two includes an assessment of the benefits and drawbacks of honoring a single individual’s accomplishments. The historiography of civil rights memory began with a top-down analysis of the most widely known civil rights leader. Harding’s particular emphasis on King provides a better understanding of the ways that cultural

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\item \footnote{112} Vincent Gordon Harding, “Beyond Amnesia: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Future of America,” \textit{Journal of American History} 74, no. 2 (September 1987): 468-76.
\item \footnote{113} Vincent Harding, \textit{Martin Luther King: The Inconvenient Hero} (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 2.
\item \footnote{114} Harding, “Beyond Amnesia,” 473.
\end{itemize}
gatekeepers shape historical memory. His work opened the door for other historians to ask similar questions and analyze different angles about civil rights memories.

Other scholars assessed the process of creating civil rights museums, as well as the museums’ messages and significance. Historian Glenn Eskew examined trends of creating and commercializing museums, memorials, and heritage tourism in a number of journal articles and essays. In “Memorializing the Movement: The Struggle to Build Civil Rights Museums in the South,” Eskew concluded that civil rights museums actually reduce discussions about race relations by portraying the movement as successful and completed.115 Renee C. Romano’s journal article, “Moving Beyond ‘The Movement that Changed the World’: Bringing the History of the Cold War into Civil Rights Museums,” explained that public historians employ a “celebratory narrative” in civil rights museums. The narrative spread an incomplete understanding of the movement, the leaders, and the lack of economic equality that persisted when she published the article in 2009.116 Similarly, the University of Mississippi’s progress narrative focused time, attention, and funds away from conversations regarding steps to resolve racial problems and to achieve meaningful integration. The public relations campaigns emphasized changes that already occurred, not changes that needed to happen.


In addition to historical and sociological studies about civil rights movement memory, the scholarship extends into other academic disciplines like geography, anthropology, museum studies, and media studies. Geographical studies utilized the physical location and the design of memorials to analyze how society views and interprets the movement. Owen J. Dwyer and Derek H. Alderman’s *Civil Rights Memorials and the Geography of Memory* concluded that “while Dr. King challenged segregation, his memory is often fixed at a scale that reinforces contemporary racial divisions and inequalities,” because most memorials exist outside the prominent areas of town.117 Dwyer’s essay “Interpreting the Civil Rights Movement: Contradiction, Confirmation, and the Cultural Landscape” explored the various physical battlegrounds for civil rights memory, from memorials to street names, and the “narratives they re-present [original emphasis].” Though most memorials honored King, a grassroots movement slowly emerged to recognize the “‘foot soldiers’ of the movement.”

Alderman’s “Street Names As Memorial Arenas: The Reputational Politics of Commemorating Martin Luther King Jr. in a Georgia County” claimed that street naming “is an important part of modern political culture” because they “naturalize or legitimize a selective vision of the past.”119 The three articles highlight the contested nature of civil rights movement memory. A monument, street name, or other kind of memorial, including the James Meredith statue at the University of Mississippi, only preserves one interpretation of the movement’s history and relevance. The process of installing the permanent memorial brought various ideas about the movement’s meaning to the


surface. During other commemorative events, conflicting ideas highlighted that individuals interpreted the school’s integration differently. Race, class, gender, age, and other group identities factored into the way a person viewed the riot, desegregation, and the commemoration.

Media studies also provide an example of how the civil rights movement’s collective memory extends into many disciplines. Edward P. Morgan’s “The Good, the Bad, and the Forgotten: Media Culture and Public Memory of the Civil Rights Movement” investigated the role of the media in the manipulation and glorification of King. He contends, “The media produce entertainment that teaches a safe political lesson.” The process explains why King has been “ideologically sanitized” and juxtaposed against leaders like Malcolm X. In a similar manner, the University of Mississippi’s administration attempts to “ideologically sanitize” Meredith, whose belief that white supremacy continued after the school’s desegregation and other civil rights advances clashed with the progress narrative many university administrators sought to promulgate. He also unabashedly criticized the school when he felt necessary, due to his outspoken nature. Chapter two includes a more detailed analysis of the relationship between Meredith and his alma mater. Sociological, historical, geographical and media studies provide important contributions to an understanding of the collective memory of the civil rights movement.

“Forward Rebels?” attempts to fill gaps in civil rights memory studies through a number of means. This study acknowledges the role of civil rights movement memory at an institution of higher learning. Most civil rights memory studies observe the influence of museums, monuments, street names, and other physical markers, but schools and universities create communities of students, faculty, staff, administrators, and alumni in ways that museums do not. Since collective

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memory can greatly influence political, ethical, and social norms and universities act as centers of research, education, and training for the next generation, historical memory has great consequences at places like the University of Mississippi. Second, the thesis focuses on the relationship between local civil rights movement events, memory, and commemorations in a community. Many civil rights memory studies largely focus on Martin Luther King, Jr. and the national movement’s impact upon society and culture, whether in the United States or in a limited geographic location. While national leaders and events hold much importance, local civil rights histories and legacies possess equal significance. Third, my work spans a chronological period from 1962 through 2008 to provide a better understanding of how civil rights memory shapes over time. Continuities and changes become more visible when a study examines multiple commemorative events over time, instead of within a small time frame. Finally, rather than focusing on one type of commemorative medium, I attempt to blend many different facets of commemoration into a single analysis of civil rights movement memory. From anniversary celebrations to a memorial to a public relations campaign during the first presidential debate in 2008, the different types of commemorations reveal varying aspects and uses of memory.

The present investigation provides a greater understanding of the University of Mississippi’s history but also illuminates important trends that may occur in other locales tied to civil rights history. The University of Mississippi’s riot had a lasting impact on the public perception that the

121. For example, Renee C. Romano and Leigh Raiford edited and contributed to The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory, the most comprehensive, interdisciplinary anthology of essays related to civil rights movement memory. A number of articles quoted in the previous paragraphs came from the edited collection. In one chapter, Romano analyzes the effects of museums and modern civil rights trials on current understandings of the movement. Her essay, “Narratives of Redemption: The Birmingham Church Bombing Trials and the Construction of Civil Rights Memory,” argues that recent trials of white supremacists “are actively constructing a particular narrative about the past that may well influence both how people remember the movement and what they think about race relations in the present.” The articles and anthology by Romano and Raiford provide a better understanding of interdisciplinary memory studies, although the lack of a comprehensive assessment of civil rights memories remains. See Renee C. Romano, “Narratives of Redemption: The Birmingham Church Bombing Trials and the Construction of Civil Rights Memory,” in The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory, ed. Renee C. Romano and Leigh Raiford (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 99.
school existed as a racist institution. While this thesis does not address every decade or commemoration, “Forward Rebels” provides a long-term evaluation of the school’s post-1962 history. As one of the few interdisciplinary studies of the University of Mississippi, this thesis analyses how the 1962 riot influenced race relations at various commemorative milestones in the school’s history. Commemorative occasions provided an opportune time for the school, the media, and the public to reassess the university’s history and progress. During each event, different groups attempted to shape the narratives and public relations messages at commemorations based on their interpretations of the past and their present. The integration’s legacy influenced the ways various groups in the university community addressed, ignored, or managed the racial issues in the decades after 1962. Rather than proactively resolving or attempting to prevent further racial problems, many university officials drew from the techniques of racial troubleshooters, who effectively used moderation and strategic compliance to prevent the social changes demanded by civil rights activists. In tying the 1960s racial troubleshooters to the University of Mississippi’s racial moderates in later years, my thesis emphasizes the political, social, and collective memory continuities from the 1960s through the 2000s. Changes on campus occurred over time with broader political and social shifts, but similar narratives and themes persisted through the years, largely due to the extension and modification of racial troubleshooting after the 1960s that coincided with the rise of the New Right in the 1980s. As a flagship institution in the Deep South, the University of Mississippi holds importance, because the school’s racial issues amplify comparable trends that occurred across the nation as other cities, states, and regions remembered the civil rights movement and handled post-1960s race relations.
CHAPTER ONE

“INSPIRATION TO ACHIEVE”
THE TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF INTEGRATION IN 1982

On the twentieth anniversary of the University of Mississippi’s integration, about one thousand students and members of the public attended James Meredith’s speech in Fulton Chapel as part of a commemoration titled “Inspiration to Achieve.” The event’s organizers did not predict Meredith’s statements for the night of September 30, 1982. He called the events a public relations gimmick because the administration canceled African-American history and leadership events, even though a grant proposal written for the Mississippi Arts Commission called for a five-month long observation. Meredith criticized the school for cutting events important to African-American students, yet still funding the Greek system. Meredith said the programs could occur “at a cost less than 1 percent of a white Greek sorority party.” Although a minority of students participated in fraternities or sororities on campus, the ability to become a student leader or to receive an honorary

122. Lucy Hovious, “100 Whites Briefly Interrupt Meredith Observance,” *Jackson Daily News*, James Howard Meredith, box 136, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi. Also see Lucy Hovious, “20 Years Later, Fight For Integration Not Over, Speakers Say,” *Jackson Daily News*, James Howard Meredith, box 136, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

123. Ibid.; Letter, John Horhn to James Howard Meredith, August 20, 1982, James Howard Meredith, box 50, folder 1, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi; The University of Mississippi and The Chancellor's Committee for the James Meredith Anniversary, “Anniversary of Change: James Meredith and 20 Years of Racial Integration at the University of Mississippi, A Grant Proposal,” May 12, 1982, James Howard Meredith, box 50, folder 1, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

124. Lucy Hovious, “100 Whites Briefly Interrupt Meredith Observance,” *Jackson Daily News*, James Howard Meredith, box 136, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.
position like homecoming queen relied upon a student’s involvement in the Greek system. In the 1970s and 1980s, African-Americans’ participation in organizations largely remained restricted to separate groups like the Black Student Union, the Miss Ebony beauty pageant, the Ebony and Elegance modeling club, or African-American Greek organizations. The school’s first African American alumnus also critiqued the school for perpetuating racial segregation through the Confederate flag, the song “Dixie,” and Colonel Reb as official symbols for school spirit. The school officially endorsed symbols of white supremacy and made them a part of the dominant culture. Meredith said, “There’s no difference in these symbols and the segregation signs of [twenty] years ago.” If the university did not remove the Confederate symbols, he said he planned to ask the NAACP to file a class action suit. After Meredith finished speaking, about one hundred white students stood up and chanted “Hotty Toddy,” the school’s cheer, before leaving the event early. Called a “brief outburst” by the Daily Jackson News, the short protest of Meredith’s critiques interrupted the event and demonstrated that the hundred or so white students disliked his views of the school and the commemoration.

Protests of Meredith’s speech brought media attention to the community’s divisions over racial matters, yet school administrators hoped the twentieth anniversary events would perform the opposite function by highlighting themes of progress and racial harmony. The current chapter will


126. The University of Mississippi, The Ole Miss, Class of 1979, Oxford, Mississippi, 77; The University of Mississippi, The Ole Miss, Class of 1982, Oxford, Mississippi, 199; Connie Green and Kitty Dumas, “Black Attitudes at Ole Miss,” The Ole Miss Magazine: The Meredith Crisis in Retrospect, September 30, 1982, Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries.

127. Lucy Hovious, “100 Whites Briefly Interrupt Meredith Observance,” Jackson Daily News, James Howard Meredith, box 136, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.
show how the way that University of Mississippi officials planned the commemoration and handled the criticisms reveals that the administration utilized racial moderation to tout changes on campus. Through the 1960s and 1970s, the University of Mississippi's administrators developed the tactics that became apparent during the twentieth anniversary celebration. During the period, Porter Lee Fortune, Jr. led the school as chancellor, but he remained largely out of the media spotlight in the twentieth anniversary events. African-American professor Lucius Williams, who helped plan “Inspiration to Achieve,” often spoke to the press and acted as the university’s mouthpiece. Being an African American, his voice gave credibility to the school’s claims of progress. Importantly, the school utilized the event as a public relations opportunity to convey a number of messages of change to both the local community and larger society. The school stressed the progress and growth that the university made since 1962. By highlighting positive changes, the university hoped to demonstrate that racial harmony existed on campus. Through public relations efforts, the school promoted changes in the increased minority enrollment and growing opportunities for African-American students in clubs and academic programs. Yet racial and social hierarchies remained largely unchanged, because most African-American students remained separate from the institution’s dominant, white culture. The University of Mississippi retained many Old South and Confederate traditions as well. Although the University of Mississippi recruited minority students more aggressively in 1982 than in 1962, African Americans comprised only 8 percent of enrolled students, while the state’s African-American population hovered near 40 percent. 128 While the twentieth anniversary gave the school an opportunity to create a more favorable public image through a commemoration, African-American students, faculty, and alumni including Meredith called attention to lingering racial problems in various interviews and newspaper articles. The scrutiny threatened the school’s public relations campaign. In response, the administration largely deflected the criticisms,

128 J. J. Yore, “Black Recruiting at University Falls Short of Projections,” Clarion-Ledger, September 26, 1982, James Howard Meredith, box 136, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.
instead of genuinely addressing the issues. Through racial moderation, the University of Mississippi used the twentieth anniversary as an opportunity to tout changes on campus, despite lingering problems. The 1982 commemoration created long-term effects, because almost every subsequent commemoration event continued the same racial moderation strategies of emphasizing progress and change, avoiding complete responsibility for the 1962 riot, excusing perpetuating problems, and using positive public relations to change perceptions of the school.

PLANS FOR THE TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY COMMEMORATION

The University of Mississippi’s process for planning “Inspiration to Achieve” highlights a continuation of racial moderation tactics from the 1960s, especially an emphasis on progress, growth, and change in spite of evidence suggesting otherwise. Administrators hoped to turn the twentieth anniversary’s public attention in the school’s favor by associating the integration with the changes that occurred in the two decades after. The commemoration’s stated goals proclaim the school’s commitment to addressing remaining problems, but the initial plans changed due to a funding shortage. The school’s solution to the limited funds showed a greater dedication to racial moderation than to mending the racial divide on campus, because the commemoration’s planners cut important student leadership development and educational events. Instead of a public relations boost, the event resulted in Meredith and others publicly criticizing the University of Mississippi for the lack of racial progress and genuine change.

The Center for the Study of Southern Culture, directed by William R. Ferris, wrote a grant proposal for the Mississippi Arts Commission with helpful information about the school’s goals for the commemoration. The document praised the university for its accomplishments, established the celebration’s objectives, and described the planned events for the course of the 1982-83 academic year. The proposal explained, “The purpose of these activities will be to provide a comprehensive
examination of the impact of Meredith’s enrollment from an institutional, regional and national perspective. Such an examination will point out the significant progress in race relations that has been made… It will also focus on the remaining problems that must be resolved in order to achieve full racial equality at the University, and provide a basis for discussion of similar problems faced by other institutions of higher education across the country.” The interpretation of the integration argued that Meredith’s matriculation “effectively brought an end to segregated higher education in the South.” The proposal referred to 1982 as a “crossroads” for American higher education, because the Ford Foundation’s Commission on the Higher Education of Minorities reported that many gains made in higher education during the 1960s and early 1970s became lost or significantly compromised by 1982. The document claimed that the events would balance celebrating racial progress and examining the areas that needed improvement. The proposal continued, “As one of the last institutions to accept the principle of integrated higher education, the University feels that it is fitting – indeed, morally imperative – that it be one of the first institutions to speak out during this period of apparent retrenchment, to reassess its progress in educating minorities and reaffirm its commitment to that goal.” The center, with the university’s approval, portrayed the commemoration’s aims as beneficial to minorities in higher education, not as primarily for the school’s welfare.

Initially, the university planned to have a ten-day program beginning at the end of September, in addition to events throughout that academic year. The ten-day slate of events included speeches and various panels about race, media, the law, and gender. Organizers invited

129. Letter, John Horhn to James Howard Meredith, August 20, 1982, James Howard Meredith, box 50, folder 1, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi; The University of Mississippi and The Chancellor’s Committee for the James Meredith Anniversary, “Anniversary of Change: James Meredith and 20 Years of Racial Integration at the University of Mississippi, A Grant Proposal,” May 12, 1982, James Howard Meredith, box 50, folder 1, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

130. Ibid.

131. Ibid.
Meredith to speak on the night of September 30 and novelist Margaret Walker Alexander gave the keynote address. A “Black Student Life at Ole Miss” symposium featured African-American students, faculty, staff, and alumni. The event aimed “to engage members of the University community in a dialogue about the experiences of blacks at the University, with emphasis on ways to improve the quality of black students’ experiences at Ole Miss.”

The university held the first Black Alumni Reunion during that week with the hope that more African Americans would attend. The School of Law organized a three-day symposium to explore the legal circumstances of Meredith’s case and other higher education racial issues. The University of Mississippi also planned events for the remainder of the academic year, including a Black Student Leadership Conference, a Black History Symposium, and a symposium on integration and the South. The year’s lecturers included the second African-American alumnus Cleveland Donald, Roots author Alex Haley, former chancellor John Davis Williams, and scholars such as John Hope Franklin, Lerone Bennett, Vincent Harding, John Blassingame, and Winthrop Jordan. Meredith stated his approval to the organizers, “because the program proposed could very well become the most important undertaking of this century resulting in the shaping of relationships between Blacks and whites in Mississippi.”

Many seemed pleased with the initial plans, but not all remained optimistic about the university’s commitment to racial reconciliation throughout the planning process.

When a funding shortage for the events became apparent, the university condensed the “Inspiration to Achieve” commemoration into three days by canceling events, an action that indicated that the school cared more about the event’s publicity than improving campus culture. Instead of providing events and opportunities throughout the year for students to learn about,

132. Ibid.
133. Ibid.
134. Letter, James Howard Meredith to John Horhn, September 18, 1982, James Howard Meredith, box 50, folder 2, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.
discuss, and collaborate on racial or other campus problems, the school mimicked the 1960s racial troubleshooting by prioritizing the chance for three days of favorable public relations. The university called off the Black Student Leadership Conference and Black History Symposium, but the School of Law kept plans for its symposium from October 7 through 9, 1982.\textsuperscript{135} The decision showed that the school aimed to influence public opinion through the commemoration, rather than provide students the opportunity to hear prominent African-American scholars or encourage African-American student leadership development. The cancellation drew criticisms from the first two African-American alumni, Meredith and Donald. Despite Meredith’s initial support in letters to event organizers, he argued that the cancelation indicated a larger problem existed where African-American students received inferior treatment at the university and remained unwelcome in campus society.\textsuperscript{136} Meredith and Donald both accused the university of using the events to improve the school’s image, rather than create meaningful changes. Meredith told \textit{The Commercial Appeal}, “I have a public relations problem with that program. It seems obvious that the university is saying, ‘Let’s celebrate our progress.’ Well, to celebrate breaking the system of white supremacy is one thing. But to celebrate meaningful integration at Ole Miss is something else. It ain’t time to celebrate that. Seven or eight faculty don’t sound like much to me. Yet they brag about it like it was 50 per cent.”\textsuperscript{137} Donald called the commemoration “a public relations ploy, an attempt by school officials to capitalize on inevitable national news coverage to clean up an image still tarnished by memories of

\textsuperscript{135} Letter, James Howard Meredith to the Office of the Vice-Chancellor at The University of Mississippi, September 18, 1982, James Howard Meredith, box 50, folder 8, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi; “Integration Anniversary: Ole Miss Program Sparks Controversy,” \textit{Clarion-Ledger}, September 26, 1982, James Howard Meredith, box 136, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi; Bob Dart, “James Meredith Will Return to Ole Miss,” \textit{Atlanta Constitution}, September 24, 1982, James Howard Meredith, box 50, folder 8, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

\textsuperscript{136} “Integration Anniversary: Ole Miss Program Sparks Controversy,” \textit{Clarion-Ledger}, September 26, 1982, James Howard Meredith, box 136, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

\textsuperscript{137} “Views Differ on Progress Since the Riot,” \textit{Commercial Appeal}, September 12, 1982, James Howard Meredith, box 136, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.
riot and rebellion.” He also blamed the school for failing to foster meaningful integration on campus. African-American professor Lucius Williams, who helped plan the events, countered that the commemoration aimed to change the university’s image and obtain more minority faculty and staff. Meredith and Donald contended that the university’s decision to cancel the programs of “real substance of the commemoration” indicated the administration’s true values. Dropping the leadership development and educational events suggested a greater commitment to racial moderation than racial reconciliation.

Apart from the canceled events, further evidence emerged that suggested the administration’s true goals for the commemoration involved positive public relations. In contrast to the university’s displays of enthusiasm in the grant proposal and for the public eye, administrators admitted that they felt that the school had no choice but to celebrate the event. A Clarion-Ledger article noted, “University officials see it as an idea more or less forced upon them by an insatiable national media which seemed determined to probe the psyche of the most visible symbol of the South’s segregated past, regardless of whether or not Ole Miss wanted to let the anniversary pass without official notice.” The administration felt caught by the local and national media’s desire to evaluate the commemoration and the university’s progress and wanted to use the anniversary to spread a message of amicable race relations and change, a goal similar to the public relations tactics of racial troubleshooters after the 1962 riot.

RACIAL MODERATION IN PUBLIC RELATIONS AND MEDIA ATTENTION

138. “Integration Anniversary: Ole Miss Program Sparks Controversy,” Clarion-Ledger, September 26, 1982, James Howard Meredith, box 136, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

139. Ibid.

140. Ibid.

141. Ibid.
One 1960s racial troubleshooting technique that became an important part of the public relations surrounding the event involved using the media attention to portray campus race relations as amicable and the University of Mississippi as a changed institution. As cultural gatekeepers who had the ability to influence others’ opinions, university press releases and various faculty and student leaders at the school spoke about the changes on campus. Other cultural gatekeepers, such as political leaders, public figures, and journalists, contributed to the school’s messages of racial reconciliation as well. The public statements and editorials created a collections of voices who encouraged others to see the University of Mississippi’s progress and growth.

The anniversary organizers recognized that racial problems remained on campus in the grant proposal, but the way the university portrayed itself to the public and to the media depicted an image of amicable race relations without significant problems. Press releases hailed the school’s “tremendous progress” since 1962 by pointing to the approximately 8 percent African-American enrollment and the academic programs and extra-curricular activities available to them. Lucius Williams told the *Commercial Appeal*, “We want to accentuate the positive.” As one of the individuals central to planning the event and speaking to the public, Williams described the importance of focusing on the changes at the University of Mississippi. Willie Morris, an author, former *Harper* magazine editor, and writer-in-residence at the university, wrote an article in *Time* about the event. He explained, “There will be an anniversary observance at Ole Miss this week and

142. “Views Differ on Progress Since the Riot,” *Commercial Appeal*, September 12, 1982, James Howard Meredith, box 136, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi. Also see Letter, John Horn to James Howard Meredith, August 20, 1982, James Howard Meredith, box 50, folder 1, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi; The University of Mississippi and The Chancellor’s Committee for the James Meredith Anniversary, “Anniversary of Change: James Meredith and 20 Years of Racial Integration at the University of Mississippi, A Grant Proposal,” May 12, 1982, James Howard Meredith, box 50, folder 1, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

this suggests much about the transfigurations here.”  

For Morris, the fact that the school commemorated the event demonstrated a change in thinking among the administrators. The Ole Miss Magazine student editor reflected, “Even at Ole Miss, where tradition hangs on until the very last thread, much progress has been made.” History professor David Sansing, among others, warned against thinking that the school completely reshaped after the integration, but still acknowledged that advancements occurred. He explained, “I think Ole Miss claims too much change has come about. But at the same time, there are a lot of people who won’t give the university credit for all the change that has occurred.” The messages of progress, especially at the official university level, reflect the school’s desire to communicate to a wider audience that a different University of Mississippi, one that discouraged racial violence, existed in 1982. The emphasis on progress in the media echoes the tactics that racial troubleshooters used in the 1960s to portray amicable race relations to hide problems existing beneath a surface of calm.

Some state leaders aided in spreading a message of progress by reflecting upon and speaking about the changes over twenty years. Such praises the University of Mississippi’s transformation contributed to the legitimacy of the school’s claims that the place moved beyond racial conflicts. Reverend Duncan M. Gray, Jr., the Episcopalian bishop who risked his life to calm down rioters in 1962, also contributed to the magazine. In his reflection, he questioned whether change occurred and decided to compare newspaper articles from 1962 and 1982. He concluded, “Yes, things have changed in the last 20 years; maybe not as much as we might have hoped and prayed, but significantly, nonetheless. And that violent event of September 30, 1962, with all of its tragedy and


145. Allison Brown, “Reflections from the Editor,” The Ole Miss Magazine: The Meredith Crisis in Retrospect, September 30, 1982, Archives and Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries.

146. “Views Differ on Progress Since the Riot,” Commercial Appeal, September 12, 1982, James Howard Meredith, box 136, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.
pain, may have been the point at which these changes really began."\textsuperscript{147} Mississippi politician and former United States Representative Frank Smith stated, “Ole Miss has played a major role in lifting the massive burden of race from the lives of Mississippians. We have reached no millennium, but we have made progress beyond the fondest dreams of any of us twenty years ago.”\textsuperscript{148} He condemned the 1954 school desegregation case, \textit{Brown v. Board of Education}, and signed the Southern Manifesto, but afterward began to advocate for calm, moderate reactions to the civil rights movement as a moderate Democrat. According to Crespino, he epitomized the racial moderate who disagreed with integration but also worked to minimize racial problems in the state to avoid violence.\textsuperscript{149} Smith’s statement about the school in 1982 described Mississippi as a society without racial burdens twenty years after integration. Some of Mississippi’s cultural, religious, and political leaders spoke about progress in the same manner as school officials.

Journalists represented another group of cultural gatekeepers who often aided the university’s interpretation of the school’s history of progress. By choosing to incorporate quotes about progress in their articles, reporters spread the university’s messages to a wider audience. The possibility exists that some journalists purposely included statements about progress to advance their own or their editors’ opinions about the university and state. For example, Jackson \textit{Clarion Ledger} journalists Kenneth W. Andrew and Charles L. Overby said the event represented “one state’s entry into the modern world.”\textsuperscript{150} The article continued, “We have learned, for the second time in 120 years, not to pursue Lost Causes. Public segregation, we have learned, is a Lost Cause, just as much

\textsuperscript{147} Duncan M. Gray, “Bishop Duncan Gray,” \textit{The Ole Miss Magazine: The Meredith Crisis in Retrospect}, September 30, 1982, Archives and Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries.

\textsuperscript{148} Frank Smith, “Frank Smith,” \textit{The Ole Miss Magazine: The Meredith Crisis in Retrospect}, September 30, 1982, Archives and Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries.

\textsuperscript{149} Crespino, 22, 47-8.

\textsuperscript{150} Kenneth W. Andrew and Charles L. Overby, “Finally, We’re Moving Beyond Our Lost Causes,” \textit{Clarion-Ledger}, September 26, 1982, James Howard Meredith, box 136, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.
as slavery was a Lost Cause in 1862. The tragedy of Lost Causes is that they consume our people, our minds, our resources, our energies. Twenty years later, we are through frittering away Mississippi’s intellectual energies on the Lost Cause of public segregation. Hopefully, we have learned enough from the Meredith Crisis to figure out for ourselves in advance what constitutes a Lost Cause.”

By reappropriating Lost Cause mythology, the article attempted to prove a certain amount of changes occurred in the years since 1962.\textsuperscript{151} One of the article’s authors, Overby, attended the University of Mississippi and in later years became the founder and chairman of the Overby Center for Southern Journalism and Politics.\textsuperscript{153} The possibility exists that his associations with the school influenced his opinions about the changes after integration. Other journalists who held no affiliations with the University of Mississippi captured the campus changes in the twenty years after integration. African-American \textit{New York Times} correspondent Reginald Stewart compared

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\item \textsuperscript{151} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{152} Through Lost Cause mythology, the South attempted to reconcile the region’s defeat by romanticizing the Old South, the Confederacy, and white southern society. The myths portrayed a righteous, valiant South waging an admirable struggle against the immoral, powerful Union. Historian Gary W. Gallagher explained, “The architects of the Lost Cause acted from various motives. They collectively sought to justify their own actions and allow themselves and other former Confederates to find something positive in all-encompassing failure. They also wanted to provide their children and future generations of white Southerners with a ‘correct’ narrative of the war.” As described by historian Charles Reagan Wilson, Lost Cause theology explained the reasons for the Confederacy’s defeat and provided hope for future vindication. Southerners argued that the South obtained a moral and cultural victory through their superior spirituality. The most significant account for southern loss claimed that God allowed the South to experience “apparent defeat” because suffering led to greater faith. Although they acknowledged the Confederacy’s defeat, southerners used the Lost Cause to claim the title of God’s chosen people. The mythology allowed the region to ignore the moral depravity of white supremacy, because the Lost Cause shifted attention away from the issue of slavery. Southern leaders developed regional education systems to ensure that Old and New South virtues passed to the next generation. Wilson contends that the Lost Cause diminished in prominence after World War I, because the South reunited culturally and economically with the rest of the nation, but the Lost Cause’s mechanisms to cope with loss and justify southern actions continued into the social turmoil of the civil rights movement. See Gary W. Gallagher and Alan T. Nolan, eds., \textit{The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History}, (Indiana University Press, 2000), 1; Charles Reagan Wilson, \textit{Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920} (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980), 76.
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\end{footnotesize}
an “old Ole Miss” and a “new Ole Miss.” He described, “The new Ole Miss, the school symbolically founded with the enrollment of Mr. Meredith, is a university where blacks and whites routinely meet as they traverse the 1,800-acre campus, casually gathering for chats on the steps of Lyceum Hall, the focal point of violence when Mr. Meredith enrolled… The old Ole Miss, with a lineage that predates the Civil War, remains nearly intact, except for the integration.”

Although Stewart discussed areas where the school needed to improve, his juxtaposition of old versus new conveys to the reader that enough demonstrable progress transpired to call the school a new university since 1962. While changes occurred, the fact that the university still troubleshooted racial problems and prioritized positive public relations over actively seeking to change campus culture highlights more continuity than metamorphosis. Some reporters wrote about the school’s changes in similar ways to the press releases and university officials’ public statements. In doing so, the journalists contributed to the ideas of racial moderates who tried to avoid open conversations about the state of race relations.

White Mississippians responses to the “Inspiration to Achieve” events varied, and the Clarion-Ledger printed a full page of letters to the editor where most criticized the newspaper’s coverage and emphasized the progress made since 1962. The opinions revealed different views regarding both the commemoration and contemporary race relations across the state. A number of white residents noted that the violence centered on integration, not a fight for federal versus state power. While acknowledging racial problems in 1962, the letters to the editor downplayed the genuine problems in 1982 and expressed a desire to leave history in the past. Some viewed the commemoration as the “dredging up of an unhappy past, a refocusing of the national conscience on


155. Ibid.
an incident they would just as soon forget.”\textsuperscript{156} Whites often focused on the university and state’s “tremendous progress” and said that critical news reports presented an unfair analysis.\textsuperscript{157} Some newspaper readers criticized \textit{The Clarion-Ledger} for devoting too much space to such a “controversial and embarrassing subject” and “stirring up” problems by talking about the integration.\textsuperscript{158} One Jackson resident said greed and the desire to sell papers motivated the editors to publish the story “at the further expense of harmony within our great state.”\textsuperscript{159} Such comments suggested that many white residents believed racial troubles no longer plagued their communities, unless the media created animosity by bringing up past events like the riot. An African-American woman named A.J. Jackson disagreed with that interpretation. Instead of “stirring up” trouble, the media coverage of “Inspiration to Achieve” gave Jackson the opportunity to voice her opinion about contemporary race relations. She wrote that Mississippi’s racial problems not only prevailed but also prevented the state from advancing economically. She praised the newspaper and said, “To this day whites do not understand how much anguish a black person experiences because he has been treated like less than a human being.”\textsuperscript{160} Of the ten letters to the editor printed on October 2, 1982, in \textit{The Clarion-Ledger}, seven criticized the newspaper’s critical coverage of the riots, three supported it, and one spoke about continued segregation on the University of Mississippi’s campus.

\textsuperscript{156} Integration Anniversary: Ole Miss Program Sparks Controversy,” \textit{Clarion-Ledger}, September 26, 1982, James Howard Meredith, box 136, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

\textsuperscript{157} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{159} Letter to the editor, C.J. Clark, “Greed Seen as Motivation” in “Your Turn: Readers Scorn, Praise Meredith Special Report,” \textit{Clarion-Ledger}, October 2, 1982, James Howard Meredith, box 136, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

\textsuperscript{160} Letter to the editor, A. J. Jackson, “Superior Attitude Hurts All” in “Your Turn: Readers Scorn, Praise Meredith Special Report,” \textit{Clarion-Ledger}, October 2, 1982, James Howard Meredith, box 136, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.
RACIAL REALITIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI

Although the university emphasized progress and harmonious race relations through racially moderate tactics, evidence indicates that only minimal desegregation occurred by 1982 and that many African Americans felt detached from the school community. The racial realities in 1982 reveal that the school did not progress as much as university officials claimed. For example, the twentieth anniversary grant proposal described the integration as “an historic turning point for the University, the state and the region. It affirmed the rights of minorities and opened the doors of higher education for thousands of blacks across the South.”[161] Yet only around seven hundred African Americans attended the University of Mississippi in 1982. The students comprised approximately 8 percent of the student body, below the school’s projected goal of 11 percent by 1980. Exploring statistics regarding African-American student and faculty rates and recruitment strategies of the 1970s and early 1980s reveal the administration’s inability or unwillingness to provide a desirable environment for minority students and faculty.

In addition, comments made by African-American university community members and journalists about the campus atmosphere highlighted the lingering racial problems and inequalities, because many students expressed concerns over the campus culture in 1982. Symbols related to the Old South and the Confederacy hindered many African-American students from feeling like a welcome part of school society. Lucius Williams described increased hostility from white students toward African-American students since Reagan’s election, and his statement provides a window to explore the relationship between the New Right and racial politics in 1982. When minority students

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[161] Letter, John Horhn to James Howard Meredith, August 20, 1982, James Howard Meredith, box 50, folder 1, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi; The University of Mississippi and The Chancellor's Committee for the James Meredith Anniversary, “Anniversary of Change: James Meredith and 20 Years of Racial Integration at the University of Mississippi, A Grant Proposal,” May 12, 1982, James Howard Meredith, box 50, folder 1, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.
spoke about their concerns or when newspapers discussed racial problems, the administration avoided handling the issues in an open, useful way. Instead, many school officials remained silent and expected specific departments, such as minority affairs or Black Studies, to remedy the situation. Statistical and anecdotal evidence showed that the University of Mississippi’s emphasis on progress during the twentieth anniversary did not reflect the campus’ true dynamics and instead demonstrated a reliance on racial moderation.

By examining the university’s failure to meet African American enrollment goals and comments by faculty, staff, and students about the campus’ racial atmosphere, as well as the school’s responses to critiques, the current section highlights the importance of probing beyond the school’s public messages of racial reconciliation. The anniversary celebration provided an opportunity for the school to proclaim through various media outlets and events that progress occurred, but the commemoration also supplied a platform for individuals to express alternative ideas to the media. By emphasizing the school’s changes since 1962, administrators hoped to highlight the positive changes in race relations while simultaneously downplaying low minority enrollment, continued self-segregation, and white students’ control over the campus’ social hierarchy. The disconnect between university officials’ statements and the racial realities on campus highlight that positive public relations held a higher priority for school officials than solving racial problems and indicates that the administration chose racial moderation over racial resolutions.

Before discussing the African-American faculty and student percentages during the twentieth anniversary events, it is important to understand that minority enrollment in the early 1970s resembled the percentages at other southern universities. In 1970, the faculty senate created a
committee to compare racial statistics between the University of Mississippi and other southern institutions to determine how the school ranked and what steps administrators needed to take to increase African-American enrollment. According to the report, the school's 1971 minority percentages “compared favorably” to other schools in the region (see fig. 1).\textsuperscript{163} The university lagged far behind in minority athletic participation, student leadership, and faculty and administration percentages. The University of Arkansas at Little Rock stands out among the data collected by the committee for having 20 percent African-American student enrollment. For the 1969-70 school year, the private Little Rock University became public and merged with the University of Arkansas. Once public, the needed to meet minority requirements for federal funding and the school “began a period of rapid growth,” according to the school’s website.\textsuperscript{164} The faculty senate report continued, “The most significant difference that we can detect in race relations at the University of Mississippi and at the majority of institutions responding to our inquiry is that of policy. Several of the schools, notably the University of Arkansas, Florida State, and Virginia, appear to have a systematic policy of recruiting blacks and in aiding their participation in campus life.”\textsuperscript{165} The University of Mississippi desegregated on a level comparable to other southern universities, but some other schools actively sought to improve minority percentages and their experiences once on campus. Such schools implemented policies by 1970 to recruit and support African Americans.

\textsuperscript{163} Report, “Race Relations at Southern Universities,” no date, John Crews Collection, Archives and Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries.


\textsuperscript{165} Report, “Race Relations at Southern Universities,” no date, John Crews Collection, Archives and Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries.
The administration’s failure to actively recruit African Americans, provide many minority students with resources and mentors, and encourage African-American student leadership contributed to a stall in African-American growth. In addition, the university’s reputation for racial intolerance and Oxford’s few extracurricular opportunities for minorities discouraged many African-American faculty, staff, and students from choosing the school. Despite the senate committee’s recommendation that the university form policies to enroll more African Americans and create a biracial group to handle racial issues, administrator Gerald Walton recalled no official strategy to do so in the late 1960s or early 1970s. He and a few other faculty and administrators personally recruited African-American students in an unofficial capacity during that time, however.\textsuperscript{166} The state College Board did not adopt a minority recruitment plan until 1974, after the United States Department of Justice threatened to sue the state for failing to desegregate.\textsuperscript{167}


\textsuperscript{167} J. J. Yore, “Black Recruiting at University Falls Short of Projections,” \textit{Clarion-Ledger}, September 26, 1982, James Howard Meredith, box 136, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.
of Mississippi projected to have African Americans comprise 11 percent of faculty and student numbers by fall of 1980. In September of 1982, black students made up about 8 percent of the student body. Only nine African-American professors taught at the university and comprised 1.7 percent of all full- and part-time faculty (see fig. 2 and fig. 3). The University of Mississippi had lower minority percentages than most other southern universities, as reported by the Clarion-Ledger. Journalist J. J. Yore explained that low salaries, the University’s reputation of racial intolerance, and Oxford’s lack of amenities all hindered the school’s ability to recruit what few qualified minorities applied for jobs. During the 1970s and early 1980s, the University of Mississippi dropped below other southern schools in African-American student enrollment but lagged far behind in African-American faculty members. By 1982, the school still had not achieved the goals set for 1980, so claims of racial progress and successful integration did not reflect the reality of a university that had difficulties recruiting and providing for the needs of minority students.

168. Ibid.
169. Ibid.
### African-American Students at the University of Mississippi

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>African-American Students</th>
<th>Other Students*</th>
<th>African-American Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4,769</td>
<td>0.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4,733</td>
<td>0.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6,240</td>
<td>0.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>6,602</td>
<td>0.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>7,185</td>
<td>2.59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>7,679</td>
<td>3.95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>7,422</td>
<td>4.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>594</td>
<td>8,395</td>
<td>6.61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>664</td>
<td>8,991</td>
<td>6.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>688</td>
<td>8,919</td>
<td>7.16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>680</td>
<td>8,828</td>
<td>7.15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Figures from 1962-1967 are estimates.

*Others include Caucasians, American Indians, Asians, Pacific Islanders, Latinos & Hispanics

### African-American Faculty at the University of Mississippi

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>African-American Faculty</th>
<th>Total Faculty</th>
<th>African-American Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>0.37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>0.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>0.92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>389</td>
<td>1.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>415</td>
<td>1.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>1.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>452</td>
<td>1.77%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. African-American Students and Faculty at the University of Mississippi, 1962-1981
Statements by students, alumni, and faculty provided firsthand accounts of the genuine racial problems existing at the school in 1982, and some journalists described racial troubles in articles about the twentieth anniversary events. African-American students faced harassment in dormitory buildings and often found that their white counterparts refused to room with them. Roommate policies allowed students to change rooms for any reason, and students and officials acknowledged that many white students requested roommate changes when paired with an African American.\textsuperscript{170} One head resident said some white students preferred “to live with a degenerate white in a rundown residence hall than live with a black roommate” and some African Americans claimed their white roommates requested a transfer immediately after meeting them.\textsuperscript{171} Roommate and dormitory problems sometimes continued long after move-in day. Donald R. Cole, an African American who enrolled as an undergraduate in 1968 and participated in a civil rights demonstration that led to his arrest and expulsion in 1970, returned in the 1980s to receive a graduate degree, taught mathematics, and...
and eventually rose to the positions of assistant provost and assistant to the chancellor for multicultural affairs. His experiences in the dormitories revealed overt attempts to intimidate and denigrate African-American students. He stated, “When I was an undergraduate, I felt when someone waved a Rebel flag it was speaking to me personally, because sometimes I would find flags in my room with ‘go home nigger’ written on the flag.”

African-American student W. Ralph Eubanks, who matriculated in 1974, wrote about a different experience with his roommate in his memoir, *Ever is a Long Time: A Journey into Mississippi’s Dark Past*. Before he arrived, his white roommate named Mark Crain decorated the room with a Confederate flag above the bed. After meeting Eubanks, Crain removed the flag without being asked and said, “I didn’t want to offend you with the flag.” Cole’s and Eubanks’ contrasting dormitory experiences demonstrate that not all African Americans received harassment from their roommates or neighbors, but students’ statements in 1982 highlight that policy allowed students to self-segregate and did not protect minorities from some whites’ intimidation tactics.

Racial problems extended to other areas of campus life as well, and various African Americans’ statements described the difficulties that minority students faced in participating in campus activities, finding faculty and staff mentors, and feeling like a part of the university culture. Gloria Robinson, assistant director of student activities for minority affairs, stated that she did not feel blacks were wanted except “for affirmative action counts and federal funds.” Minority students’ small representation among many clubs, student government, and school publications left...


174. Ibid., 146-7.

“many blacks feeling as if they have no voice in major campus organizations.” Members of white Greek organizations usually occupied the highest place on the campus’ social ladder, because they often voted their brothers and sisters into the important leadership positions in the Associated Student Body and the school newspaper, *The Daily Mississippian*’s editorial board and usually did the same for elected honorary titles like homecoming queen. As evidence of African Americans’ difficulty in gaining endorsements in social circles on campus, an African American did not win the student-elected Miss Ole Miss title until Kimsey O’Neal Cooper in 1989 or the beauty pageant title, Miss University, until Carissa Alana Wells in 1997. Minority students faced significant challenges in the school’s cultural hierarchy if they wanted to attain leadership roles in traditionally white-dominated organizations. African-American students held leadership roles and participated in campus life mostly through separate groups like the Black Student Union, the Miss Ebony beauty pageant, or the seven African-American fraternity and sorority chapters. While Meredith supported the separate groups that gave African Americans autonomy, he believed that white and African-American students should intermingle with other student organizations and societies. In a September 1982 letter to the vice chancellor’s office, he stated that specific minority-only groups and

176. Ibid.


departments sent the message that the institution did “not plan to treat each equally.” An article titled “Black Attitudes at Ole Miss” concluded, “Blacks concede that positive changes have taken place, but they are concerned that those changes have been slow in coming. Most are not optimistic about the future.” African Americans’ observations and less-than-optimistic view of campus race relations reveal the troubles that minority students faced at the University of Mississippi. The evidence suggests that the lack of social integration gave the white Greek students the ability to hold and keep the most power in campus life, while many African Americans had feelings of disassociation from the school’s culture.

Many African-American students also expressed the inability to relate to the pervasive campus culture due to the school’s celebration of the antebellum era and the Confederacy. “Black Attitudes at Ole Miss” called the Confederate symbols “reminders of a past they [African-American students] believe whites would like to relive and one they do not want blacks to forget.” The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press conducted a survey for the Civil War's sesquicentennial in 2011. The results explained that African Americans held more negative views

180. Letter, James Meredith to Office of the Vice Chancellor at the University of Mississippi, September 18, 1982, James Howard Meredith, box 50, folder 8, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

181. Ibid.

182. Some white students in 1982 expressed confusion as to why African-American students felt uncomfortable on campus. In the Ole Miss Magazine, the editor’s reflection described a conversation that provided some clarity amongst her fellow magazine classmates. Allison Brown, a white student, noted, “Problems seemed to stem from misunderstandings. Black students were saying that they felt like perhaps they didn’t belong at Ole Miss. They couldn’t make themselves feel quite at home. White students in the class could not understand this.” The Ole Miss Magazine and students’ experiences highlighted the gap between African Americans’ and whites’ understandings of race relations at the University of Mississippi. See Suzie Baker, Sherry Lucas, and Wendy Shumake, “White Attitudes at Ole Miss,” The Ole Miss Magazine: The Meredith Crisis in Retrospect, September 30, 1982, Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries.


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toward the Confederate flag and Confederate leaders than whites in South or in the United States.

The report stated,

Whites who consider themselves Southerners are the only group in which substantially more view public officials’ praise for Confederate leaders as appropriate rather than inappropriate (52% to 32%). A plurality of all whites (49%) – and a clear majority of African Americans (60%) – say it is inappropriate for public officials to praise Confederate leaders… Far more African Americans than whites have a negative reaction to the Confederate flag (41% to 29%)… Whites who consider themselves Southerners have a more positive reaction to the Confederate flag than do other whites: 22% say they react positively when they see the Confederate flag displayed, compared with 8% of all whites and just 4% of whites who do not consider themselves Southerners.  

The 2011 research demonstrated that white southerners saw Confederate imagery more positively than non-southerners or the general United States population, while African Americans held more negative views toward Confederate symbols and figures than the other groups. African Americans’ unfavorable opinions of the Confederacy explained why some African-American students viewed the University of Mississippi as an unfriendly place and felt detached from the school’s culture. Reginald Stuart, the African American reporter who compared the new and old Universities of Mississippi described how the “old Ole Miss” did not vanish with the birth of the “new Ole Miss.”

The old, racist ways of the University of Mississippi continued in the campus’ society. Stuart claimed, “And it [the old Ole Miss] has prevailed in keeping the Rebel image of the school intact, despite much debate, as younger Ole Miss enthusiasts insist that there is no racism in their hearts when they express the Rebel spirit… “Dixie,” a song some blacks consider offensive, is still sung. And Colonel Rebel, the school symbol that looks like an old Confederate colonel, is still plastered everywhere, from the cups in the student union to a small statue in the office of Porter Fortune, the school's chancellor.”

Stuart disagreed with the notion that the school symbols held no racist connotations and pointed to them as evidence that the “old Ole Miss” continued into the 1980s.

185. Ibid.
186. Ibid.
The campus culture that venerated the Old South helped perpetuate the university’s unfriendly image toward African Americans.

In 1982, African-American professor Lucius Williams said that open hostility became less prevalent after the 1960s, but noted increased racial problems since 1980. He related the incidents to the rise of the conservative Republican Party in the South. He explained, “Since Reagan took office I've noticed more public rhetoric by whites directed toward blacks, more boldness against blacks, more hostility... This can be seen in The Daily Mistake (the April Fool's edition of the campus paper, The Daily Mississippian) getting kicks and laughs at the expense of black folks. These things are only funny to racist white folks.”

As many historians noted, reactions against the mid-twentieth century civil rights movement provided a broad base for the conservative resurgence among whites in the South and elsewhere. Although the process did not occur quickly or smoothly, conservative political leaders who sought to protect white privilege culled southern voters through racial and religious language away from a Democratic Party that increasingly advocated civil rights legislation. The rise of the New Right incorporated other ideologies as well. Personal and property rights became a central pillar for the party, and the seemingly colorblind language that the party articulated allowed individuals to apply such concepts to a variety of issues, including race. Ronald Reagan’s

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presidential election marked an important milestone in the reemergence of the Republican Party, because he championed the New Right’s ideologies. In 1980, he launched his campaign in Philadelphia, Mississippi, the town where the Klan murdered three civil rights workers in 1964. He proclaimed, “I believe in states’ rights” and promised to “restore to states and local governments the power that properly belong[ed] to them.”  

The New Right coalition transitioned white Mississippians from “a derided minority” to “central participants in a conservative counterrevolution that reshaped American politics.” As a carefully courted political constituency by 1982, some conservative white Mississippians felt an increased ability to maliciously criticize African-American culture and liberal policies aimed to aid African Americans, other minorities, and the working class.

Journalists in and out of the state examined the social environment and determined that self-segregation in housing, Greek life, campus activities, and off-campus interactions existed on a large scale. As Crespino argued, “In looking back over the half century since the civil rights movement, white Americans have hardly repudiated the vision of social organization advocated by Mississippi segregationists, at least if the measurement is not words but rather the actual


190. Crespino, 1.

191. Ibid., 3, 4.

192. Some white students’ views in the *Ole Miss Magazine* align with the political shifts in Mississippi between 1962 and 1982, as some connected the progress to affirmative action and reverse discrimination. Instead of focusing primarily on Mississippians as victims to invading federal troops and an oppressive government, some descriptions of campus race relations in 1982 portrayed whites as victims to unjust affirmative action policies. An integral part of 1980s Republican Party ideologies, anti-affirmative action sentiment resonated with those who believed civil rights legislation in the 1960s eliminated discriminatory laws and gave minorities equal opportunities. Politicians gained widespread support by claiming that programs like busing and college admission requirements created unnecessary burdens for families, businesses, and the government and gave minorities an unfair advantage that created reverse discrimination against whites. The anniversary edition of *Ole Miss Magazine* stated that white students “were the most vocal on the subject of possible reverse discrimination.” 192 A female senior from Memphis explained, “Blacks would really raise a ruckus if we didn't give them the same opportunities.” 192 Despite evidence of African Americans’ gains regressing in the 1980s, many white, conservative Mississippians expressed discontent with the commemoration and civil rights policies. See Suzie Baker, Sherry Lucas, and Wendy Shumake, “White Attitudes at Ole Miss,” *The Ole Miss Magazine: The Meredith Crisis in Retrospect*, September 30, 1982, Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries.
composition of American neighborhoods and schools.” Other cities, states, and universities certainly experienced student self-segregation, but during the twentieth anniversary of integration Mississippi became the focal point for continued racial problems. The increase of African-American students at the University of Mississippi did not represent meaningful integration, but instead coexistence. The New York Times stated, “The Greek letter clubs, whose fraternity and sorority houses put many Mississippi school buildings to shame, continue to be the most powerful groups of students and are still closed clubs. They have inducted no blacks in the 20 years of desegregation on the campus, but they hastily note that they remain decidedly discriminating in choosing whites.”

The approximately seven hundred African Americans on campus among over eight thousand other students meant little chance for meaningful interracial interactions in places where white students so heavily outnumbered African-American students, unless students specifically sought to cross the color line with friendships. Steve Earnest, a student from Tupelo, Mississippi, described, “There are only four or five [African Americans] here I can call by name. I average one black a semester in my classes.” The student authors of “White Attitudes at Ole Miss” called the University of Mississippi “primarily a white man’s school.” When speaking to the student journalists about campus race relations, one white student shrugged and said, “It’s entirely possible to walk around campus all day without running into a black. Face it, it’s just not something you have to think about every day.”

One reporter likened it to a separate black campus within a predominately white university.

196. Ibid.
197. Ibid.
During the twentieth anniversary commemoration, the media most commonly critiqued the visible lack of integration amongst students, a detail that revealed that meaningful progress at the University of Mississippi remained unachieved.

The university handled evaluations about the racial problems on campus through ways that resembled the racial troubleshooting of the 1960s and 1970s, most often by deflecting blame for problems and focusing on positive public relations. The administration avoided acknowledging guilt by arguing that racism and racial problems existed in places outside Mississippi and that the university fought hard to overcome the issues. Lucius Williams portrayed “Inspiration to Achieve” as an example of how the school combated such tensions. He argued, “There is racism all over this country, but Ole Miss and Mississippi are inclined to improve their images.” Administrators also explained that they were unable to change the self-segregation on campus and that students preferred campus life that way. Instead of accepting fault for the lack of racial progress and addressing the issues squarely, the university responded to criticisms with excuses. The concern over the “insatiable national media’s” desire to examine the university’s racial climate suggests that the administration planned the compact, ten-day program to appease media outlets and alter the university’s image. The importance of public relations campaigns and the emphasis on racial progress and harmony, despite the evidence, began as civil rights troubleshooting tactics and continued through moderate tactics into the 1980s.

The University of Mississippi’s 1983 yearbook reflects the ways that the school tried to shape the narrative, not only regarding the integration but also the 1982 commemoration, even after reporters left town. The annual contained an “Issues” section for the first time. The editor wrote,

198. Raad Cathon, “Progress Still Comes Slowly, But It Comes,” Clarion-Ledger, September 26, 1982, James Howard Meredith, box 136, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

199. Raad Cathon, “Progress Still Comes Slowly, But It Comes,” Clarion-Ledger, September 26, 1982, James Howard Meredith, box 136, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

200. “Integration Anniversary: Ole Miss Program Sparks Controversy,” Clarion-Ledger, September 26, 1982, James Howard Meredith, box 136, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.
“1983 has been a year of change. Traditions have been challenged this year more than ever. For this reason, we have created an entirely new section for the OLE MISS.”\textsuperscript{201} The segment discussed some racial problems, but the overall theme emphasized progress. The text stated, “The fact that the university announced a week of commemorative activities in itself indicated a great change from the University of the early 1960’s [\textit{sic}].”\textsuperscript{202} The pages reprinted newspaper articles that praised, “Ole Miss has to be given high marks for wanting to commemorate an occasion which many want to forget. In drawing attention to the anniversary, the school has invited inspection. It must have realized some of it would be harsh. And it has also invited the question, Have things \textit{really} changed at Ole Miss?”\textsuperscript{203} The yearbook excluded the article’s second page that incorporated minority enrollment statistics and emphasized persisting segregation on campus. The omitted portion said:

Ole Miss students, both black and white, who have talked with candor to the horde of reporters that has descended on Ole Miss in recent weeks, paint a picture of a world which is socially and emotionally segregated by race... In every other aspect of university life, according to students and faculty, segregation, more voluntary than imposed, is still the way of life. Housing is largely segregated. Off-campus social life is segregated... Change is something that has never been a high priority at Ole Miss – it is something that has seemed anathema to the tradition of the school and a vocal and powerful segment of its alumni... And while the University of Mississippi has, by all indications, done less than it could to speed racial normalization, the future was preordained on Oct. 1, 1962, when James Meredith found his place in history and Ole Miss began its long trip into the 20th century.\textsuperscript{204}

The yearbook described the 1982 through 1983 academic year as one where the University of Mississippi faced a number of challenges, but emerged triumphant. The annual eliminated less-than-positive descriptions of the campus to portray only a progressive, growing institution.

In an attempt to overcome low minority enrollment and negative public opinions, university administrators relied on racially moderate methods when recounting the integration, advertising the

\textsuperscript{201} The University of Mississippi, \textit{The Ole Miss}, Class of 1983, Oxford, Mississippi, 6-7.
\textsuperscript{202} Ibid., 38-9.
\textsuperscript{203} Ibid., 38; Raad Cathon, “Progress Still Comes Slowly, But It Comes,” \textit{Clarion-Ledger}, September 26, 1982, James Howard Meredith, box 136, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.
\textsuperscript{204} Ibid.
events, and discussing race relations on campus. By proclaiming that the school made much progress since 1962, administrators hoped to highlight the positive changes in race relations while simultaneously downplaying low minority enrollment, continued self-segregation, and white students’ control over the campus’ social hierarchy. The narrative that the university broadcast, a story of forward progress and triumph over racial problems, also drew criticisms from prominent alumni like Meredith and Donald. Students, faculty, staff, community members, and outsiders criticized the university for a wide range of matters, from unnecessarily reopening old wounds to not being proactive enough about racial reconciliation. The vastly different opinions demonstrate that no consensus existed regarding the civil rights movement’s meaning in 1982. Many journalists noted that the socially and emotionally divided campus culture hindered genuine integration. The school’s use of moderation, drawn from racial troubleshooting tactics of the 1960s, also prevented open conversations about racial problems and potential steps for the community to resolve the issues.

The same racial moderation themes of progress, positive public relations, and avoiding acknowledgements of guilt that appeared during the twentieth anniversary also occurred in subsequent commemorative events, including the civil rights memorial built on campus in 2006 and the first 2008 presidential debate, held at the University of Mississippi. What began as a student-led effort to create a civil rights memorial on campus in 1995 resulted in a monument and statue of Meredith erected by the chancellor that sent a very different message than the original plans. The administration’s desire to control the memorial’s message revealed that racial moderation continued into the twenty-first century.
CHAPTER TWO

JAMES MEREDITH OR “FOREVERMORE”
THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI’S CIVIL RIGHTS MEMORIAL, 1995-2006

On a sunny October 1, 2006, the University of Mississippi dedicated a civil rights monument on campus. The unveiling of a memorial with a statue of Meredith established a symbol of the progress the university made since 1962. By honoring a civil rights pioneer, the university acknowledged Meredith’s role in bringing integration to the school. The memorial, based on the theme of “open doors,” aimed to signify that the school provided equal access to education and no longer privileged certain people over others due to differences like race.\(^\text{205}\) Speakers, attendees, and journalists hailed the day as an important moment in the University of Mississippi’s history.\(^\text{206}\) Georgia Representative and civil rights leader John Lewis gave the keynote remarks for the event. He proclaimed, “This is a day to rejoice… With the unveiling of this monument, we free ourselves from the chains of a difficult past. Today we can celebrate a new day, a new beginning, the birth of a new South and a new America that is more free, more fair and more just than ever before.”\(^\text{207}\) Actor

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\(^\text{205}\) Letter, Robert C. Khayat to John T. Edge, 4 October 2005, Civil Rights Commemoration Initiative Collection, box 4, folder 32, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.


Morgan Freeman, former Mississippi Governor William Winter, Mississippi Representative Roger Wicker, Chancellor Robert C. Khayat, and James Meredith’s son Joseph also gave remarks in the same vein. Winter told the press, “Ole Miss is a place where racial reconciliation has found a home.” The speakers, aware of the day’s importance and the journalists present, spoke about the university in a positive manner and emphasized progress and rebirth. Michelle Bright, an undergraduate student at the time, remembered the event in 2011 with positive memories. She said, “[It was] very strange, but great to be in a place and think 45, 44 years prior to that, this many people or more, thousands and thousands more, were on campus trying to scare this man, kill this man, stop him, to stop what he represented, to stop the changes that were coming to Mississippi at that time.”

The monument unveiling represented an important day in the school’s history. While the memorial projected such messages about the University of Mississippi, the history behind the creation of the James Meredith memorial highlights how the administration’s reliance upon racial moderation clashed with another group’s concept of the meaning of the civil rights movement. The process of creating the statue between 1995 and 2006 demonstrates that the integration’s legacy remained contested on campus. The memorial provides an example of how cultural gatekeepers and ordinary individuals competed to define the movement through a monument. The following chapter describes the undertaking of creating the memorial on campus, an effort that began as the idea of students and involved democratic decision-making processes. When the initial monument did not advance the ideas of progress and racial reconciliation in a manner that the administration desired, Khayat decided to replace the original plans. The process of determining the monument’s appearance revealed that vastly different understandings of Mississippi’s civil rights movement existed on campus, and placing a memorial did not establish a

208. Meredith with Doyle, 237.

single interpretation of the integration’s meaning for all. As geographer Owen J. Dwyer claimed, “Civil rights memorials do not – indeed, cannot – authoritatively pronounce the movement’s legacy. Rather, they instigate a new dialogue about the movement’s history, meanings, and legacies.”\(^\text{210}\) The conflict over the monument highlights the administration’s continued reliance upon racial moderation, particularly the importance of emphasizing the progress beyond past racial problems, and demonstrates that the school’s power structure allowed the chancellor, as a cultural gatekeeper, to determine how to memorialize the movement. The administration ultimately decided to commemorate the integration with a stronger message of victory, instead of allowing abstract interpretations of the movement and the progress yet to occur. In addition, the Meredith statue provides an opportunity to examine the advantages and drawbacks of honoring a single person in a memorial.

CREATING THE CIVIL RIGHTS MONUMENT

From 1995 through 2005, the task of creating a civil rights memorial belonged to a coalition of students, community members, and faculty board advisors. In November of 1995, a Southern Studies graduate class discussion about the existing symbols on campus birthed the idea for a memorial to commemorate the civil rights movement. John T. Edge and Susan M. Glisson, who were students in the Southern Studies master’s program before joining the school’s staff, became the two central figures of the efforts to create a monument. In an interview in 2011, Glisson reflected that she and some other students were “concerned about the Confederate-laden landscape of memory on the campus, in terms of the symbols on campus.”\(^\text{211}\) Glisson referred to physical


\(^{211}\) Susan M. Glisson, telephone interview by Jillian E. McClure, Oxford, Mississippi, November 22, 2011.
markers like the Confederate memorial, as well as official and unofficial school symbols that originated from Old South and Civil War mythology. Many Confederate symbols became associated with school sports and spirit. Although banned from waving Confederate flags in the stands by 1995, the Rebel flag sprinkled tailgaters’ decorations in the Grove on football game days. The on-field mascot, Colonel Reb, resembled an old plantation master. The band played “From Dixie with Love” at football games, and students chanted, “The South will rise again!” at the song’s conclusion. Glisson and Edge gathered a group of students who “wanted to expand the cultural landscape to include references to other important events in the life of the university,” particularly the civil rights movement. The group cooperated with the Black Graduate Student and Professional Association, and at the first meeting both groups decided to focus on the desegregation of Mississippi schools. Leaders met with Khayat to gain support. In a letter to Edge on February 16, 1996, Khayat called the efforts an “important project.” He wrote, “The University supports your project and would like to assure its quality and aesthetic control by inviting competitive bids that reflect a variety of architectural ideas.” The group formed the Civil Rights Commemoration Fund, which later changed to the Civil Rights Commemoration Initiative (CRCI), and began the process of creating goals, garnering support, and obtaining funds. Edge served as the organization’s president. According to the University of Mississippi’s newspaper, The Daily Mississippian, the planning efforts held historical significance for the school and state. Student writer Linda Chen stated, “The significant milestone not only provides the first sculptural commemoration of the civil rights


movement in the state, but also commemorates the struggle for equal access to education.”

Those involved expressed excitement in the prospect of creating the first memorial to the movement in Mississippi.

During the initial six months of the memorial project, four important elements became the central factors controlling the nature of the undertaking, some of which later became points of contention with university officials. First, students led the efforts, with the administration providing a smaller role of support. Khayat decided to give the students control over the creation of the memorial. The Clarion-Ledger in Jackson, Mississippi, reported, “Chancellor Robert Khayat supports the idea, but wants to keep it student-driven.” The paper quoted Khayat, who said, “This idea began with the students. They took the lead and went to work on it.”

Next, the CRCI raised funds independently from a broad base of supporters and planned to donate the memorial to the university. The CRCI’s non-profit status prevented the institution from using public money to provide funding, although the school allowed CRCI to meet on campus, processed donations, and paid $2000 to hire an arts consultant, Lyn Kartiganer. All other funds came from donations, grants, and fundraisers. The organization worked with the school on physical specifications but remained responsible for all other aspects of fundraising and design.

Third, the CRCI wanted an inclusive memorial that did not focus on a single person, but instead would encourage reflection about the struggle for equal access to education. The Daily Mississippian reported in April of 1996 that the memorial “will be placed at a focal point on campus,

215. Linda Chen, “Civil Rights Memorial Gets Boost,” The Daily Mississippian, no date, Civil Rights Commemoration Initiative Collection, box 5, folder 22, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

216. Melanie Simpson, “UM Students Raising Funds for Sculpture to Civil Rights,” Clarion-Ledger, no date, Civil Rights Commemoration Initiative Collection, box 5, folder 22, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi;

217. Email, Gloria Kellum to Lyn Kartiganer, 5 April 2002, Civil Rights Commemoration Initiative Collection, box 4, folder 4, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.
will not address a specific ethnic group, but will instead challenge viewers to examine their role in bettering race relations and progress in the future of civil rights.”\textsuperscript{218} The organization specifically did not want a statue of a single person. Shawn Clark, president of the Black Graduate Student and Professional Association, said in \textit{Oxford Town}, “We don’t know exactly what the sculpture will be but we know what it won’t be… It won’t be a statue of James Meredith or any one person because it is about the struggle of all people for equality.”\textsuperscript{219} Newspapers across Mississippi and Louisiana, as well as the \textit{Atlanta Journal-Constitution}, discussed the memorial’s plans and supported the initiative’s goals. Many newspapers pointed out the broad commemorative goals of the committee as a strength of the project. The CRCI wanted to the memorial to function as a recognition of other groups’ and individuals’ struggles for access to equal education and hoped the civil rights memorial would acknowledge the legitimacy of those struggles.

Finally, the student leaders specifically decided that they wanted to prevent a single person or small group of people from having the ability to make powerful decisions about the memorial. In interviews between 1996 and 2011, the members of the CRCI emphasized an “open and participatory” method for the artwork’s selection.\textsuperscript{220} The \textit{Atlanta Journal-Constitution}'s Rheta Grimsley Johnson wrote, “The ‘process,’ as the students call their detailed plan of action, is democratic every step of the way.”\textsuperscript{221} The group’s meetings had students, faculty, staff, administrators, members of the

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\textsuperscript{218} “Group Wants to Honor Civil Rights Struggle,” \textit{The Daily Mississippian}, 9 April 1996, Civil Rights Commemoration Initiative Collection, box 5, folder 1, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

\textsuperscript{219} Jill Freeman, “The History of Our Heritage,” \textit{Oxford Town}, 19 February 1997, Civil Rights Commemoration Initiative Collection, box 5, folder 18, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

\textsuperscript{220} Laura Houston, “Monument: UM Employees' Donations Help,” \textit{The Daily Mississippian}, 4 October 2004, Civil Rights Commemoration Initiative Collection, box 5, folder 1, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

\textsuperscript{221} Rheta Grimsley Johnson, “Civil Rights Statue Worth Effort of Ole Miss Students,” \textit{Atlanta Journal-Constitution}, 17 November 1996, Civil Rights Commemoration Initiative Collection, box 2, folder 3, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.
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public, and civil rights veterans in attendance. After a series of public meetings to form goals, the group held an international competition for art designs and chose five finalists from over 400 entries. The finalists exhibited their artwork in Oxford and answered questions at a public forum, where community members provided input on the models. Five public art and history experts from across the country, with the input of Khayat, some faculty members, and some administrators, selected a design as the winning piece.²²² The experts received instruction to take the CRCI’s goals and the feedback received at the public forum into account. In 2011, Glisson reflected, “We believed that it was important to create an art selection process that was open and transparent, that respected art experts so that no one person’s biases could frame what was selected. We also wanted the process to respect the best of the civil rights movement in terms of its transparency and open decision-making processes and its challenging of structures.”²²³ The funds came from a broad base of supporters in the university and local community, many people had a voice in the decision-making process, and the memorial aimed to commemorate a wider struggle for equality and appeal to all people. The process emphasized transparency in the selection process and encouraged contributions from university and community members, but did not give the administration complete authority.

The selection panel, with the input of the Chancellor and a number of administrative advisors, unanimously chose Terry Adkins’ artwork for the memorial (see fig. 4).²²⁴ Adkins, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania, had artwork displayed in the Museum of Modern Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, and the Studio

²²². Ibid.


²²⁴. Terry Adkins, “Forevermore,” artist submission binder, Civil Rights Commemoration Initiative Collection, box 1, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.
Museum in Harlem. He carefully created a memorial that the CRCI selection committee found powerful and fitting.

Figure 4. “Forevermore” design by Terry Adkins.

The artist drew inspiration from Old South and African architecture, Southern Baptist repetitive rhetorical devices, Mississippi geography, Meredith’s March Against Fear, and the chosen location between the Lyceum and the library. The *Daily Mississippian* reported, “Adkins said the Lyceum represents power, and power used wisely produces justice. The library represents education, and education ensures freedom.”225 The design, entitled “Forevermore,” depicted two sets of pillars with

225. Terry Adkins, “Artist Biography,” Civil Rights Commemoration Initiative Collection, box 2, folder 1, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi; Ciara Walker, “Students React to
two sets of hurricane-proof glass doors facing each other. At the bottom of each door, an engraving of the state of Mississippi outlined all eighty-two counties. Every door had a different inscription: “TEACH IN FEAR NO MORE,” “LEARN IN FEAR NO MORE,” “UNITE IN FEAR NO MORE,” or “INSIST IN FEAR NO MORE.” On the entablature above the doors, were the words “JUSTICE HENCEFORTH” and “FREEDOM FOREVERMORE” etched in stone. An arch hung a working bell above the doors and pillars, reminding of the importance of schools and churches in the civil rights movement (see fig. 5). The memorial created an interactive space between the Lyceum and Library where people could walk, reflect, and ponder.

Figure 5. Adapted from “Forevermore” design by Terry Adkins.

Monument,” The Daily Mississippian, 10 October 2005, Civil Rights Commemoration Initiative Collection, box 5, folder 2, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

226. Terry Adkins, “Forevermore,” artist submission binder, Civil Rights Commemoration Initiative Collection, box 1, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.
Adkins had a clear vision for the memorial, its symbolism, and its meaning. In his contest submission, he wrote, “The ellipse should be a site of pilgrimage for generations to come, a spiritual epicenter that calls to assembly those of us who continue to reap the benefits of ancestral sacrifice. It should be a nourishing retreat where one and all contemplate a renewed dedication to the everlasting ideals that fuel the ongoing struggle for justice.” Adkins received inspiration from the Vietnam Memorial’s abstract, but powerful, design. He hoped that the site would be an important stop for civil rights tourists in Mississippi. The selection panel emphatically agreed that Adkins’ design fit the CRCI’s goals. A recommendation letter the selection committee wrote to the organization in May of 2002 reveals the power of the winning artwork:

The proposed artwork perfectly captures the dignity of the memorial. The work is universal. It does not specifically address the admission of James Meredith to the University of Mississippi. Therefore, it opens this experience to other peoples who may have felt disenfranchised in other contexts… The way the artist framed and juxtaposed words against the Lyceum and Library buildings and their meanings is profound and timeless… The artwork creates a third spiritual, abstract, philosophical building between the two existing buildings… Ole Miss would become the most visible representative of full access to higher education throughout Mississippi.

The CRCI chose Adkins’ work for its universal accessibility to all students, faculty, staff, and visitors. Although a civil rights memorial usually commemorates the African-American efforts for equality during the 1960s, the organization hoped to encourage reflection upon the struggle for equality for others as well.

In many ways, the CRCI’s efforts challenged the racially moderate decisions that previous university administrations used and complicated the progress narrative of triumph over racial problems at the school. Rather than emphasizing the 1960s civil rights movement, the organization wanted the space to focus on a wider struggle for Mississippians’ access to equal education.

227. Ibid.

228. Letter, CRCI Selection Panel to Civil Rights Commemoration Initiative, 6 May 2002, Civil Rights Commemoration Initiative Collection, box 4, folder 5, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.
opportunities, not just Meredith’s experience. With a definition of the civil rights movement incorporating the struggles of all minority groups, the monument would not celebrate integration as a completed event in the past, unlike the public relations messages that university officials employed in previous commemorations like the twentieth anniversary. Instead, the group hoped the space would encourage individuals to contemplate further steps needed in the “ongoing struggle for justice.”

The repeated phrases like “teach in fear no more” and “unite in fear no more” acknowledged white supremacists’ use of fear and intimidation to maintain marginalized position of minorities. In the past, university administrators often used racial moderation to shift blame away from the school’s community, but the phrases, located above Mississippi state maps, indicated that fear existed within the state as individuals fought for equality. The monument challenged the idea that outside agitators or the federal government created problems and acknowledged that genuine racial problems and oppression occurred in Mississippi. The CRCI aimed to provide different interpretations of the movement’s meaning and history, and their goals differed from the objectives of racial moderates.

From 2002 to 2005, the CRCI focused on obtaining funds for the project. Correspondence among board members and with school administrators reveal a number of frustrations about gaining the $100,000 needed to break ground. In addition, contractors could not build the memorial for the proposed budget, so the CRCI needed more funding. In 2004, the administration expressed impatience at the lack of progress made. Gloria Kellum, the university’s vice chancellor for university relations, told the Daily Mississippian, “We’re at the point now (wondering) do we raise more money or do we modify designs ourselves?”

229. Terry Adkins, “Forevermore,” artist submission binder, Civil Rights Commemoration Initiative Collection, box 1, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

230. Until 2005, the university continued to leave
the memorial plans and funds in the hands of the CRCI. The school did not provide any funds to the organization, which continued to run autonomously.

CHANCELLOR KHAYAT REPLACES THE MEMORIAL PLANS

Despite setbacks, the memorial as designed by Adkins appeared likely to become a reality until 2005. Chancellor Khayat emerged as the most significant barrier to the installment a full three years after the committee selected the art. His decision to change the CRCI’s memorial plans reveals the administration’s hesitancy to project a message other than one of racial progress and demonstrates Khayat’s choice of racial moderation over the more challenging, more abstract, and less triumphant message that the CRCI desired. The present section highlights important debates surrounding Khayat’s decision, because the varying ideas about the purpose and message of the memorial reflect broader ideas in the community about different ways to remember the civil rights movement. The University of Mississippi’s public relations after the monument’s plans changed shows that the school tried to depict the debates in a positive light as well. University officials’ aim to maintain the narrative of progress and develop a more favorable public image has roots in the ways that racial moderates handled racial issues in previous decades.

Although Khayat advised the jury in their choice, he expressed a number of problems with the design in 2005. Adkins and the CRCI board worked with the administration on a number of modifications, especially regarding concerns for safety. They agreed to decrease the scale of the design, shift the entire memorial closer to the library, and lower the height of the doors and pillars. Khayat wanted the memorial to have more interactive elements and optimistic messages, so Adkins included handles on the doors and added two benches with the phrases “Opportunity” and

230. Laura Houston, “UM Civil Rights Monument Behind Schedule,” The Daily Mississippian, 4 October 2004, Civil Rights Commemoration Initiative Collection, box 5, folder 1, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.
“Equality” on them. The chancellor disliked the negative connotation of the repeated use of “fear,” but Adkins firmly refused to change the words. According to Glisson and Edge, Adkins countered that “the echoing phrases ‘teach, learn, unite, and insist in fear no more’ actually depict the victorious triumph of freedom effected on the UM campus.”\textsuperscript{231} By asking to add positive messages and remove language that demonstrated genuine past problems, Khayat showed that he thought commemorations should broadcast optimism. Just as racial troubleshooters aimed to move forward after the violence in 1962 without addressing the root causes, the chancellor wanted to focus on a narrative of progress. The CRCI seemed willing to find solutions and compromises with the school, but Adkins saw changes as an encroachment on his artistic expression and design. After a series of negotiations, Edge and Glisson believed they “ha[d] adequately addressed the concerns enumerated to [them].”\textsuperscript{232} The organization proceeded with plans to break ground and begin construction.

The CRCI expressed shock, anger, and disappointment when, on October 4, 2005, a letter from the chancellor informed Edge that the CRCI’s plans for a memorial were no longer suitable. Khayat wrote, “Despite our best efforts, we could not resolve the issues…. The process has dragged on for too long and it is time for the memorial to be built. Therefore, we have asked an architect to provide a design that preserves the themes of open doors and that can be completed within this academic year.”\textsuperscript{233} In a second letter, the chancellor outlined four problems he saw in Adkins’ design, but the reasons seemed weak to the CRCI and Adkins. Khayat did not want a memorial placed on the walkway, which Edge claimed had never been a problem in the eight years of planning. The chancellor said the archways were “not compatible with the architecture of the campus,” but Adkins said he specifically designed the memorial to fit the Old South and Greek revival style of the school

\textsuperscript{231} Email, John T. Edge to Susan Glisson, 29 July 2005, Civil Rights Commemoration Initiative Collection, box 4, folder 29, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

\textsuperscript{232} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{233} Letter, Khayat to Edge, 4 October 2005, Civil Rights Commemoration Initiative Collection, box 4, folder 32.
Khayat’s letter said he found the memorial’s message inappropriate and believed that the words “should be strong and positive,” instead of including the word “fear.” In 2011, Glisson explained, “I think he’s of a generation that would prefer not to think so much about how bad the Mississippi past was and would rather just move forward and look to the future, but it’s impossible to do that without being honest about the past and how those legacies of racism affect and shape us today.” The chancellor’s dislike of the word “fear” demonstrates his belief that the memorial should portray the civil rights movement in a positive manner. Just as racial troubleshooters highlighted progress in Mississippi in the 1960s, Khayat preferred the monument to emphasize racial reconciliation, rather than the troubled past or the problems persisting in the 2000s. Conflicting ideologies led to irreconcilable differences, and Khayat used his power as chancellor to undo the nearly ten years of efforts done by the CRCI, Adkins, and a large group of supporters in the university and local community.

Two discussions surrounded the controversy over the monument. First, people debated whether Khayat had the right to change the memorial plans and whether he made the correct decision. Those involved with the CRCI disagreed with Khayat, because they believed his choice overruled their open and democratic undertaking, which was an integral part of the organization’s vision. Although the art experts made the final vote, the CRCI believed that the group incorporated the ideas and desires of a large group into the monument’s goals and selection process. In an open letter to Khayat published in the *Daily Mississippian*, Edge challenged the chancellor’s decision. The organization’s president wrote, “I strongly disagree with your rationale. I think it’s deeply flawed. If I were still a student… I would tell you that it does a disservice to James Meredith and a host of

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234. Letter, Robert C. Khayat to John T. Edge, 11 October 2005, Civil Rights Commemoration Initiative Collection, box 4, folder 32, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi. Also, Edge, telephone interview by McClure, 2011.

235. Ibid.

others who first stepped on this campus with trepidation. I would tell you that it denies the students of today – black and white – their history.” Adkins’ outspoken character became apparent in a number of public letters he published to voice his anger and resentment. He said,

> Your recent public admission that you should have rejected the proposal outright long ago reveals these negotiations to be nothing more than a preconceived stall of smoke and mirrors, designed to push me to the point of no further compromise... You have single handedly committed a great disservice to the legacy of the civil rights movement and to the University of Mississippi’s place within it. You have violated the democratic process... You have betrayed public promise. You have recoiled from fear... I believe that this atypical decision will surely blemish your otherwise impressive legacy of growth and progressive thought.  

In an interview in 2011, Edge reflected on “how inclusive and democratic and representative of the civil rights movement itself that process was and how perverted that process became in what we ended up with.” Also in 2011, Glisson stated, “I remember being told by an administrator that in a hundred years, nobody would know how the monument, what the process was... We were trying to challenge the processes of how decisions are made in the state that privilege one group over another and using an art process to ask those kinds of questions. And the fact that you’re saying nobody will remember this conversation is indicative of how we privilege certain people and not listen to all voices.” The CRCI made their criticisms of Khayat public and asked him to reconsider his decision, but the chancellor refused. Although the CRCI hoped the memorial would symbolize equality and democratic decision-making, the history of the memorial highlights the opposite.

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237. John T. Edge, “Khayat’s Rationale in Rejecting Civil Rights Memorial Design a ‘Disservice to James Meredith’ and Others,” The Daily Mississippian, 7 October 2005, Civil Rights Commemoration Initiative Collection, box 4, folder 32, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

238. Terry Atkins [sic], “Artist Defends Memorial,” The Daily Mississippian, 10 October 2005, Civil Rights Commemoration Initiative Collection, box 5, folder 2, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

239. Edge, telephone interview by McClure, 2011.

Newspapers across the country discussed the change in Khayat’s attitude and the contradictions with his previous statements, with some journalists giving harsher criticism than others. The event received the most attention and commentary in southern newspapers like the *Clarion-Ledger*, but the Associated Press wrote a press release that various print and online news agencies published. Most articles that editorialized on the issue stated that Khayat was incorrect to change the monument and suggested that more discussions could have resolved his concerns. The most outspoken critics agreed wholeheartedly with the CRCI’s response. Two days after the announcement, the *Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal* expressed shock at the chancellor’s decision to change the memorial. Patsy Brumfield emphasized, “After promising four years ago, to great media fanfare across continents, he has decided Ole Miss will not erect the civil rights memorial it announced it would. He says he has another vision for some other kind of campus symbol.”

The *Daily Mississippian* editorial board wrote, “The university administration has proven itself to be, once again, above the democratic process… Instead of the promised student voice, it was crushed when the results weren’t turning out the way others in power willed, allowing the university to be ruled like a third-world authoritarian government.” Some supported his concern with the glass doors, but none believed that scrapping the first design was the best decision. Instead, newspapers encouraged the administration to work with the CRCI and seek a compromise, because the journalists hoped that Khayat’s decision was not final. As outsiders separate from the negotiation process, reporters

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had limited knowledge informing their opinions, but journalists’ universal shock at the announcement is indicative of the drastic change in the chancellor’s public opinion. Journalists’ responses corroborated that Khayat overruled the CRCI’s process that all agreed to in 1995.

The second conversation after Khayat’s announcement centered on the design of the new memorial. Khayat worked with Jackson architect Jim Eley and sculptor Rod Moorhead to create a memorial that preserved the open doors theme of the original plans, but with an added statue of Meredith. The result incorporated a stone portal with a bronze statue of Meredith walking toward the entrance. On the inside of the portal, plaques preserved four quotes about the university and the state to emphasize civil rights progress. On the four sides of the portal’s entablature, the words read “COURAGE,” “PERSERVERANCE,” “OPPORTUNITY,” and “KNOWLEDGE.” A circular wall of brick and limestone for students and others to sit made the new memorial more functional than the first design (see fig. 6).²⁴⁴

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²⁴⁴ Jim Eley and Rod Moorhead, “Civil Rights Memorial: University of Mississippi,” memorial design sketch, no date, Civil Rights Commemoration Initiative Collection, box 4, folder 32, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.
The new plans had a more finite message and focused on the bravery and triumph of Meredith. Rather than acting as a place for inward reflection and for drawing strength, the memorial honored the school’s newest hero, Meredith. The memorial’s positive words removed language that evoked feelings about past struggles to emphasize a triumphant completion of the school’s integration instead. Khayat’s views about the best way to portray the civil rights movement resembled racial moderates’ commitment to minimize racial problems of the past and present. Creating a memorial with a positive tone benefitted the administration, because the school could heroize Meredith without addressing racial issues, past or present. Yet, the location of Meredith puzzled some. Instead of being in the portal or past the portal, Meredith’s location indicated he had not reached the doorway yet. Glisson called Meredith’s position “ironic” and questioned if Khayat aimed to indicate that changes had not occurred on campus.245 One element that bothered Glisson, Edge, and a

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number of others was the memorial’s shift from the ellipsis’ center to the side, away from the main walkway.246 Eley and Moorhead’s design performed the opposite functions of what the CRCI wanted, because the CRCI hoped to install a memorial that reflected the struggles of all people, not just African Americans or a single individual. The group also hoped to encourage people to contemplate simultaneously about past progress and future changes.

Readied by October 27, the new memorial plans received mixed reviews from students, faculty, and alumni. At least two individuals, an alumnus and a professor emeritus named Larry S. Bush, requested reimbursements for their donations to the memorial. The former faculty member, Executive Director of the Clarke Center for International and Comparative Legal Studies at Cornell Law School in 2005, wrote to Khayat asking for a repayment. Bush expressed, “They [CRCI] did it in a way that brought credit to the university. [No one] attempted to dominate the process or impose their views. The result was a true collaboration of many voices and a shining example of the kind of open, transparent decision-making process to which universities, especially public ones, should aspire.”247 Senior Accountant Deborah Smith of the Bursar Office stated that she and her siblings integrated the Drew, Mississippi, schools and that her motto was “resist in fear no more.” She said, “We need to stop looking at things through rose colored glasses. We need to wake up and see things as they really are. Things will never get better if we refuse to see the problems. The administration has missed the opportunity to show this university in a positive light.”248 Most


248. Deborah Smith, “Monument’s Rejection Brings Back Memories of Integration Efforts,” The Daily Mississippian, 10 October 2005, Civil Rights Commemoration Initiative Collection, box 5, folder 2, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.
student, faculty, staff, and alumni voices supported the CRCI or encouraged the administration to reopen discussions with the organization.

In October 2005, a new group of students organized a meeting to gain support and discuss ideas for the new memorial. An outspoken supporter of the new design, African-American Studies Professor Charles K. Ross, argued that the school should not deal with the civil rights movement as a whole without first honoring Meredith. In 2011, he explained, “To not give him [Meredith] credit for this extremely dangerous thing that he did, I felt, would have been even a more egregious kind of error on the behalf of the University and would open ourselves up to more scrutiny and criticism in terms of whether or not we really have changed.”

Kellum represented Khayat at the meeting and defended the chancellor’s decision. The Daily Mississippian reported, “[Student Twuan] Samuel closed the meeting after posing a single question to the audience: How many of them are in favor of the new plans for the Civil Rights monument? No one raised a hand.” The description of the meeting shows that no consensus existed on campus about the monument and demonstrates that the way that the institution tried to celebrate progress was fraught with differences of opinion.

Despite the public and campus outcry at the changed memorial, the administration continued with plans for Khayat’s new monument and called the result a compromise. Administrators explained to a national audience that the addition of the statue acted as a settlement between two rifts on campus. The Associated Press stated, “The University of Mississippi has added a statute of James Meredith, the first African-American to attend the school, to a planned civil rights memorial. University officials agreed to the change last month as a compromise with student leaders. Chancellor Robert Conrad Khayat came under criticism when he earlier rejected a previous design


250. Alexis Lognion, “Panel Addresses Student Concerns” The Daily Mississippian, 18 October 2005, Civil Rights Commemoration Initiative Collection, box 5, folder 2, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.
by students, civil rights veterans and artists after nearly a decade of planning… ‘It looks like maybe we have come up with a solution and everybody will be happy,’ [Journalism Professor Joe] Atkins says.”

As a public institution with a reputation to improve and uphold, the school distorted the truth by portraying the events as a “compromise,” not an executive decision. The administration prioritized the school’s public image over coming to a suitable resolution with the CRCI, a move that demonstrates the importance of racial moderation over the processes of negotiation, compromise, and conflict resolution.

JAMES MEREDITH AND THE MEMORIAL

To understand the memorial’s meanings for the University of Mississippi’s campus, it is important to examine the University of Mississippi’s strained relationship with Meredith in the 2000s, because Meredith visited Oxford periodically but rarely spoke at university events or civil rights commemorations. Meredith gained a reputation for his controversial statements and actions in his years after graduating from the University of Mississippi. The memorial features Meredith’s likeness, but he became an outspoken opponent of the statue in the years following the unveiling. An exploration of Meredith’s political views and reputation help create a better understanding of why Meredith critiques the statue’s existence and why the University of Mississippi does not always include Meredith as a speaker at commemorative events. The school hesitates to include Meredith due to his history of making contentious statements and accusations, because he offended individuals on the campus in the past and his criticisms of the school received attention in the media.

At the memorial unveiling on October 1, 2006, Meredith did not speak, because event planners knew he gained a reputation in the 1980s and 1990s for making controversial statements,

for supporting former segregationist politicians, and for criticizing the university.\textsuperscript{252} The \textit{Athens Banner-Herald} described some of Meredith’s controversial behaviors. An article stated, “His actions since then [the integration] have left many puzzled. He endorsed then-[Governor] Ross Barnett in his re-election bid in 1967, five years after Barnett physically blocked him from registering at Ole Miss. In 1989, he joined the staff of conservative North Carolina Republican and one-time segregationist [Senator] Jesse Helms for 18 months.”\textsuperscript{253} At various events, Meredith blamed the nation’s liberal elite for ineffective social programs. Ann Abadie and Gerald Walton, longtime faculty and staff members at the University of Mississippi, recalled being appalled at Meredith’s criticisms of their liberal beliefs in a number of speeches.\textsuperscript{254} Meredith’s beliefs and transition to the Republican Party stemmed from a deep sense of personal, familial, and communal responsibility, as well as African-American manhood and Christianity. In \textit{A Mission from God}, he explained that University of Memphis historian Aram Goudsouzian “came close to capturing the essence of my message.” Goudsouzian stated, “His [Meredith’s] conception of manhood shaped his politics of self-determination: to exercise their citizenship rights, black men needed to exhibit courage, shape their own destiny, defend themselves and their families, and assert patriarchal authority.”\textsuperscript{255} In March of 1990, Meredith told a Suffolk University crowd, “The fact that blacks were slaves is no big deal. The

\begin{footnotes}
\item[252] Interestingly, none of the interviewees in 2011 mentioned that Meredith did not speak at the unveiling, although some commented that he was there with his family. Most reflected on the celebratory mood, the sunny weather, and the positive implications that the day had for the school. Wilkie recalled, “The nice thing was that despite all the quarrels that had gone on, that both Susan and John T. came to the event.”\textsuperscript{252} Glisson and Edge said the day was very painful for them, but wrote a letter to Khayat afterward to congratulate him on the “stirring Sunday afternoon program.” They said, “We’re proud of what our initial efforts, more than a decade ago, have yielded. Although we have differed with you on the methodology by which the monument was chosen and the message communicated by its design, we celebrate the recommitment that gatherings like the one on Sunday can bring.”\textsuperscript{252} Despite Meredith’s absence as an official speaker at an event honoring him, those planning the event and speaking at the unveiling did a wonderful job, according to attendees.


\item[255] Meredith with Doyle, 20-1.
\end{footnotes}
breakdown of civilization is a big deal.” He stated that integration and passiveness deteriorated the responsibility that each family and community member felt for others. 

As another example of Meredith’s controversial assertions, he gave a speech at the University of Mississippi in 1998 to raise awareness about African-American illiteracy. He told the crowd of mostly college students that teachers needed to instruct African-American students on English as a second language. Meredith claimed, “The black students here do not know the basic rules of the language.” Just as some students left his 1982 speech on campus, students left early in 1998. An African-American freshman named Crystal Bland shouted, in tears, “I will honor what you did in 1962, and I will honor you for taking that bullet for your cause… I came here expecting to hear what you went through, but today you have disgraced me and made me feel ignorant.” 

Meredith told student journalist Chris Thompson that he aimed to cause a ruckus and get students to think. Numerous accounts exist of Meredith’s statements and actions that offended individuals of different races, political ideologies, and backgrounds. His beliefs and statements influence his public persona and his access to speaking engagements.

The statue dedication’s planning committee consciously decided not to ask Meredith to speak at the 2006 event in order to avoid any controversial remarks. He participated in the unveiling by walking through the monument’s portal in front of the crowd. According to Ross, who volunteered as a member of the committee, Meredith did not speak because he had been “too

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257. Ibid.


259. Ibid.

260. Ibid.
unpredictable” in the past. Ross summarized that the university tried to incorporate Meredith into activities, but the school became cautious about the settings in which he spoke because he had a history of saying things that upset students, faculty, and others, regardless of race. Regarding the statue unveiling, Ross said, “Although there probably was some criticism… I think that that [excluding Meredith as an official speaker] was the correct way to do it… It was a powerful moment with him walking through the doors and maybe in some ways it was better that he necessarily didn't say anything. When he walked through those doors… it was a powerful moment. It was a powerful moment for a lot of people that were there.”

According to reports and interviewees’ reflections, the event went so well that excluding Meredith from the guest speakers did not damage the event’s success. By preventing the first African-American alumnus from speaking, the administration continued to choose racial moderation by proclaiming progress and racial reconciliation without fear of Meredith’s critiques.

Meredith later wrote in *A Mission from God* that he only attended the event reluctantly, because he disapproved of the way the school used his image. He claimed, “Chancellor Khayat apparently saw great public relations potential in my statue.” Similar to his criticisms in 1982, Meredith criticized the school’s use of his story for public relations opportunities and argued that administrators’ assertions of progress did not reflect actual changes on campus. He also disliked being prevented from speaking on a day when his alma mater unveiled a statue of him. In 2012, he wrote, “I was the man of the hour, all right. But they wouldn’t let me say a word. Before the ceremony started, as I held my speech in my hand, Ole Miss officials told me I couldn’t speak at the dedication ceremony of a statue of myself. Not enough time, they said… I held my tongue out of

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262. Ibid., 2011.
263. Meredith with Doyle, 238.
courtesy that day, and I’ve held it for the past six years as the statue stood on the campus of my university. That was a mistake.”

In his memoir, he called for the statue’s removal before the fiftieth anniversary of his registration on the grounds that it was a “false idol.”

He explained, “I have become a piece of art, a tourist attraction, a public relations tool for the powers that be at Ole Miss, and a feel-good icon of brotherly love and racial reconciliation, frozen in gentle docility.”

Meredith recognized that many school officials aimed to use his story and the memorial to project images of racial progress, inclusivity, and reconciliation.

THE MONUMENT’S MEANINGS FOR THE UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY

Students’ and faculty members’ perspectives on the memorial in 2011 varied, but most agreed that the memorial held an important message for the school’s community and visitors. Those who knew about the controversy, including Edge and Glisson, acknowledged that the existing statue was better than no memorial at all. Edge explained, “I think it does focus the attention of outsiders on that event in the past and I think that’s important. And it reminds people of the integration of the university. It does it in a limited way, but I think it’s important that that memorial is there.”

After the initial outcry ceased, Ross said that “there’s been virtually no criticism of its structure” because the statue’s solid construction and lifelike appearance.

Just as each generation after the 1960s knew less about the civil rights movement’s history, each year’s incoming students at the

264. Meredith with Doyle, 238.

265. Ibid., 239.

266. Ibid., 234.


University of Mississippi understood less about the memorial’s controversy. For instance, a twenty-two year-old female undergraduate student who moved to Oxford in 2008 admitted she had only basic knowledge about Meredith and a vague comprehension of the statue’s history, but believed that commemorating the civil rights movement was important.\footnote{Bee, interview by McClure, 2011.} By reminding faculty, staff, students, and visitors that the integration occurred and that Meredith deserves recognition and honor, the statue performs an important function for the school’s community.

The university attempted to change the negative associations between the school and Meredith into a positive bond by elevating him to the status of a hero. The school hesitated to fully embrace the man, however, because of the controversial things he said and did in the past. Meredith’s past critiques of school policies prevented university administrators from having complete control over the progress narrative. Although faculty, staff, and administrators have different opinions of the school’s first African American student, most respect Meredith for his courage and commitment to achieving his goals. The institution’s actions show that many school leaders want to praise Meredith’s heroism and use him as an example, but the university fears that his controversial remarks will reflect poorly upon the school. Ross believed that Meredith could be the hero that the school sought. He said, “I think it would be better, and I can’t force him to say or embrace or portray himself in a particular kind of way, but if he would embrace almost this kind of role model persona and talk about what he did in a very, very positive way and not make kind of off-the-cuff disparaging comments that make people scratch their heads, I think it would be easier for the university to in fact embrace him.”\footnote{Ross, interview by McClure, 2011.} As historian Vincent Harding observed about how various groups used Martin Luther King, Jr.’s image after his death, different groups used Meredith’s story...
and image for their own agendas. Once Meredith can no longer challenge the school’s interpretations, administrators may utilize his image and life as a story of success, progress, inspiration, and triumph as a part of the school’s branding. University officials sought to limit his voice, just as racial troubleshooters attempted to suppress the criticisms of the African American community in the 1960s.

Honoring Meredith alone in the memorial has both beneficial and harmful outcomes for the university. As the first African American to attend the state’s flagship institution, a school rooted in Southern heritage and Confederate imagery, Meredith’s courageous actions initiated changes in the state of Mississippi. Ross explained, “The most important thing in changing this particular institution was James Meredith himself.” The statue acknowledges the wrongs done and attempts to demonstrate that a certain amount of change occurred. Instead of honoring a national hero, the school chose to deal with its specific history and build a monument honoring Meredith. As scholars Dwyer and Derek H. Alderman argued in Civil Rights Memorials and the Geography of Memory, “A focus on the national, general, and otherwise distant past is ‘safe,’ whereas sustained treatment of the local, specific, and contemporary is not.” Meredith deserves praise for the things he accomplished and the role he played in the university’s history, and the school’s acknowledgement of the local, controversial, and painful history provides a more meaningful memorial than would a monument to a figure unrelated to local history.

There are negative aspects of celebrating a single individual as well. No matter how much a person and his or her actions deserve praise, a statue to one person neglects to tell a wider story and downplays the importance of other people involved. Edge elucidated, “It reminds people that one

271. Harding, Martin Luther King.
man did something. In the same way that the valorization of Martin Luther King, Jr. is important, but... the civil rights movement was based a million unsung, unknown people. We at the university have the responsibility to tell a deeper and more nuanced story. And so while I think that memorial does make people more aware, it is a very shallow awareness of very important events.” While Edge exaggerated the number of “unknown people” involved in civil rights activism, his point suggests that leaders, pioneers, and ordinary demonstrators alike deserve recognition for their contributions to society. Establishing a memorial reduces recognition for other stories not incorporated into the narrative, but the Meredith monument on campus performs an invaluable function for the school and its image.

The civil rights movement’s legacy remains contested on the University of Mississippi’s campus and differing ideas between the administration and rank-and-file members of the school’s community resulted in conflict. As a public institution receiving a piece of public art as a donation, the school agreed to give control to the organization. The CRCI hoped the monument would perform the broad function of commemorating Mississippi schools’ integration as a whole, initiating discussion about contemporary race relations on campus, and encouraging all who passed by to renew their commitment to equality. The organization wanted a pilgrimage site like the monuments in Washington, D.C. The group’s methods and goals challenged the way most decisions about commemorations occurred at the University of Mississippi, because the administration largely controlled press releases, public relations, and plans for commemorative events. By encouraging reflection upon a darker past and the ongoing fight for equality, the CRCI differed from the racial moderates’ emphasis on moving forward and progressing. Despite the CRCI’s plans to democratize decision-making processes on campus, a lack of change in the power structure at the University of Mississippi affected the kind of memorial built on campus. After nearly ten years of the CRCI’s

274. Edge, telephone interview by McClure, 2011.
efforts to brainstorm, fundraise, and work toward a memorial, the chancellor decided to use the funds to build a new memorial and statue that suited his own goals and contradicted the goals and processes that the CRCI desired. Glisson explained,

I think that the memorial and the process that led to it actually reflect memorialization processes in general. And they’re conflicted and challenging and full of tension, because there are different agendas that are competing when they memorialize. And it’s about establishing a particular narrative in some ways about a particular event. And so that’s always going to be contested… If nothing, the fact that the conversation happened and it exists is a good thing. I think the fact that it is viewed by some of us as flawed represents the fact that there needs to be more work and more conversation.275

Khayat and the CRCI had differing opinions about the best way for the university to acknowledge the school’s past and could not find a middle ground acceptable to all. Khayat’s position of authority allowed him to renege on his previous statements to give control to the CRCI and to follow their decision-making process. He replaced the plans and chose to primarily honor Meredith through the memorial and message he wished. His goals revealed a continued reliance upon the notion that racial reconciliation should occupy the primary message of integration commemorations. By emphasizing the positive and diminishing the fear and violence that undergirded segregation, Khayat demonstrated a commitment to racial moderation. He sought a functional, symbolic memorial that could alter the school’s place in history as a racist institution. The contention over the memorial’s design and meaning revealed differing beliefs of how to remember the integration best.

The resulting memorial focused on the deeds of a single man and told a narrower story regarding the African-American civil rights movement but also became an important sign of change for many who saw the statue as an important step toward reconciling with the past.

The history of the memorial’s creation demonstrates that racially moderate ideas and tactics occupied a central place in the way administrators handled civil rights commemorations. The CRCI’s attempts to complicate the civil rights movement’s narrative challenged the administration’s

emphasis on racial progress and positive public relations of racial moderation. Disliking the CRCI’s design, Khayat created a new memorial with a more finite, optimistic message. The school’s press releases presented the change as a compromise, rather than an exercise of authoritarian power in an attempt to disguise ideological conflicts and problems on campus. The school used the unveiling event to proclaim a new era of racial reconciliation at the University of Mississippi. The simple fact that the school erected a statue of Meredith demonstrates that the University of Mississippi did not hold the same values as in 1962. Yet the memorial dispute revealed that many administrators relied on the 1960s racial troubleshooters’ belief that moderation and presenting a progressive, racially harmonious community through public relations campaigns provided the best solution to civil rights conflicts.
CHAPTER THREE

“THE DEBATE STARTS HERE…”
THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI AND THE FIRST PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE OF 2008

When a press release announced the University of Mississippi as host to the first presidential debate with an African-American candidate, Meredith believed the event represented an important milestone for the school and the nation. He told The Daily Mississippian, “I think (the debate) is the greatest thing to happen in the history of Western Christian civilization since the discovery of America.” The school’s application to host the debate acknowledged its place in public memory as a location for conservatism and violent racism, but many at the school saw the debate as an opportunity to broadcast a new image of progressivism and equality to the world. Years before Barack Obama received the Democratic Party’s nomination, administrators hoped to use the debate as a way to reshape the school’s public memory, but the first African-American presidential candidate’s nomination provided the school with an unprecedented opportunity to blend messages about racial progress at the university in the context of changes across America. The public relations campaign that emphasized progress resembled racial troubleshooters’ efforts to change the image of Mississippi in public perceptions after the 1962 riot’s negative publicity. The way that university officials and other individuals used the 2008 debate to attempt to reshape the school’s public memory provides a means to observe the power of civil rights movement memory, as well as the triumphs and shortcomings of an attempt to alter cultural memory about the university.

As the first Mississippi school to host a debate, the University of Mississippi carefully constructed a public relations campaign to impress the thousands of visitors who descended upon Oxford and the millions of international television viewers who watched the debate. An exploration of the debate preparations, the public relations campaign, and the media coverage reveals that administrators hoped to improve how some viewed the University of Mississippi. The debate provides a way to analyze how the university attempted to shape public memory and perceptions by displaying its support for democracy, equality, progress, research, and reconciliation to an international audience. The university also used the debate as a chance to foster tolerance and encourage interactions among students from different backgrounds. The debate became a symbol of racial progress for both the country and university. The debate public relations campaign did not achieve complete success nor entirely fail, but instead influenced individuals’ opinions of the school on a range between the two poles. While the debate did not erase the University of Mississippi’s racist history or change every individual’s opinion, the event had a significant impact on the way many, especially Mississippi residents and those who traveled to Oxford for the debate, viewed the school’s present and future. The event highlights the complexity of cultural memory, the enormous effort required to reshape public memory, and the successes and limitations of such events. The school’s attempt to overcome the negative images associated with its public memory highlights continuity in racial moderation. The methods that the University chose to use resembled the ones employed in previous years and trace back to racial troubleshooters’ use of accommodation, claims of progress, and public relations campaigns, alongside continued social segregation and little meaningful changes in social interactions on campus.

PLANS TO HOST THE DEBATE & HOPES TO INFLUENCE PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS
The idea for the University of Mississippi to host a presidential debate spawned from a conversation between retired *Boston Globe* reporter Tom Oliphant and Chair of Journalism Curtis Wilkie in 2003, but after some investigation the school decided to wait until the debate would not involve the security difficulties of hosting a sitting president. The university expressed a number of motives in the earliest stages of planning, but the two central ones involved gaining the school international exposure and changing public perceptions about racial attitudes on campus. According to Chief of Staff to the Chancellor Andrew Mullins, Jr., “We wanted to get our story out to the world… We were an international player on the higher education stage… We also wanted to show the world that we had recovered from the disastrous event of 1962. And that not only we had recovered, we were thriving, that race relations were good and we were a diverse campus.”

Mullins, who acted as the central coordinator of the debate, said the primary goal of hosting the debate consisted of altering public perceptions of the school. The administrators hoped to display to the world that the University of Mississippi survived, progressed, and moved beyond the problems of the past. The administration sought to use the attention gained from the debate to showcase the University of Mississippi as a modern institution of progressivism and racial tolerance, as well as a location for serious study and research. Chancellor Robert C. Khayat also explained that his goals included revitalizing the school, making the University of Mississippi “a source of pride for the state he loves,” enhancing the value of students’ diplomas, and sending graduate students out to become international leaders. Such themes appear throughout interviews, newspaper articles, press releases, and other forms of media in the process of planning, hosting, and analyzing the debate.

277. *The Debate Starts Here: The Presidential Debate Comes to Ole Miss*, directed by Matthew Graves, 2009; Andrew Mullins, interview by Jillian E. McClure, Oxford, Mississippi, April 27, 2012; Email, Curtis Wilkie to Robert Khayat, November 21, 2005, Presidential Debate Collection, box 1, folder 1-3, The Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

To host the event, the university applied in March 2007 to the Commission on Presidential Debates (CPD), a non-profit, nonpartisan organization that orchestrated presidential debates starting in 1988.\textsuperscript{280} The application process required extensive planning of transportation, uses for campus buildings, housing, security, catering, communications, electricity, a protest area, and related events. The CPD visited the school in June 2007, selected the University of Mississippi as one of the finalists, and announced the university as one of the four host sites in spring 2008. When in April the CPD chose the University of Mississippi to host the first presidential debate, Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama remained as the only Democratic candidates. Both the school and the CPD understood the historical implications of having the first female or African American nominee from a major party.\textsuperscript{281} John McCain prevailed as the obvious Republican presidential candidate. Although the CPD did not reveal the reasons why they chose particular locations for the debates, the university’s public relations opportunity factored into the conversations that university officials had with the Commission’s staff, according to a letter from Mullins to Khayat\textsuperscript{282} The CPD chose the University of Mississippi to host the first presidential debate on September 26, 2008, and set the topic as domestic issues. The school had the responsibility to pay $1.35 million to the CPD for production costs and raise any additional funds for preparing and hosting the affair. Initial estimates


\textsuperscript{281} Press release, Khayat, “OpEd: Presidential Debate Provides Opportunity to Tell Mississippi’s Success Stories,” April 8, 2008, Presidential Debate Collection, box 2, folder 2-41, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

\textsuperscript{282} Letter, Andrew Mullins to Khayat, March 20, 2007, Presidential Debate Collection, box 1, folder 1-3, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi; Press release, Tobie Baker, “UM in Running to Host 2008 Presidential Debate, April 2, 2007, Presidential Debate Collection, box 2, folder 2-41, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.
placed total costs around $2.2 million, but actual expenses neared $5 million.\textsuperscript{283} With two thousand or more reporters expected to descend on Oxford, the university began “the most challenging and significant public presentation of Ole Miss in [its] history,” according to Khayat.\textsuperscript{284}

Recognizing the importance of public relations in hosting the debate, the University of Mississippi hired a marketing, public relations, & corporate communications firm called The Cirlot Agency. Headquartered in Jackson, the company also had offices in Washington, D.C. and provided helpful advice about national politics and media. The Cirlot Agency guided the school in demonstrating that the University of Mississippi was a place of progress and research.\textsuperscript{285} In a letter, chief executive officer Liza Cirlot Looser wrote,

The University of Mississippi will be broadcast to millions of households throughout the world this Fall \textsuperscript{sic}. The Cirlot Agency is committed to positioning Ole Miss as one of our nation’s leading institutions of social progress and academic excellence, as well as the epitome of Southern hospitality… The go-to story for media from outside the state of Mississippi will be Ole Miss \textit{then} versus Ole Miss \textit{today}. Without a doubt, the black-and-white film footage of James Meredith will be shown repeatedly as a representation of Ole Miss. The media will inevitably interpret that no matter how times have changed over the years in Mississippi, civil rights issues are still at the forefront of Mississippi culture.\textsuperscript{286}

Looser’s mention of using southern hospitality, a concept based on graciousness and excess, to confront negative perceptions raises a historically important aspect of southern society. Historian Diane Roberts explained, “Hospitality in the South remains a genuine feature of regional friendliness; it is also a function of the desire to present the South – where the populace is accustomed to being represented as stupid, backward, poor, prejudiced, and degenerate – as a place

\textsuperscript{283} Press release, Tobie Baker, “UM in Running to Host 2008 Presidential Debate, April 2, 2007, Presidential Debate Collection, box 2, folder 2-41, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

\textsuperscript{284} Email, Khayat to multiple recipients, September 29, 2008, Presidential Debate Collection, box 1, folder 1-1, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

\textsuperscript{285} Emily Welly, “A Time to Shine,” \textit{Ole Miss Alumni Review} 57, no. 2, Summer 2008: 30, Presidential Debate Collection, box 2, folder 2-43, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

\textsuperscript{286} Letter, Liza Cirlot Looser to Carolyn Ellis Staton, January 11, 2008, Presidential Debate Collection, box 1, folder 1-2, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.
full of tremendously nice people.”287 She continued that the university needed to promote itself “as it is today and how it has overcome its history and past stereotypes.”288 The agency worked with the school to create a public relations plan, an advertisement campaign, community involvement, a logo, press kits, related events, and a slogan, “The Debate Starts Here…” Echoing the racial troubleshooter’s methods in the 1960s, the agency and the university promoted a forward-thinking school that had moved beyond its racial problems. In the press kit, an informational booklet and an “About Ole Miss” brochure featured research projects and programs like the William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation at the beginning to “stress the ‘now and future’ of the University,” while the school’s history appeared at the very end.289 Dozens of press releases beginning in the spring of 2008 sought to educate people about the university by detailing debate-related events and university-sponsored organizations, including the Mississippi Innocence Project that fought wrongful convictions, the Mississippi Teacher Corps, and a medical program that aided poor Delta residents.290 The purpose of the public relations campaign involved not only demonstrating racial progress, but also associating the university with other kinds of progress and replacing negative images with positive ones.


288. Letter, Liza Cirlot Looser to Carolyn Ellis Staton, January 11, 2008, Presidential Debate Collection, box 1, folder 1-2, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

289. “Media and Public Relations Meeting” notes, March 25, 2008, Presidential Debate Collection, box 1, folder 1-2, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi; “Presidential Debate Conference Report,” March 25, 2008, Presidential Debate Collection, box 1, folder 1-2, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

The Cirlot Agency advised that the school train individuals who might interact with reporters in specific ways to help convey the messages of progress. Khayat, as chancellor, became the “face” of the University of Mississippi for the dozens of interviews requested by news agencies. It is possible that the three central public figures for the debate, Khayat, Mullins, and Cole, represented the blending of old and new university images. Mullins and Khayat, two white men, and Cole, an African-American, presented visual and written images of a changing university where diverse individuals represented the school and worked together. The school organized and trained a number of alumni, faculty, and student ambassadors and provided their names and background information to the press as potential interviewees. Volunteers received a training packet with information on how to interact with reporters who might interview them. The ambassadors received instruction on the University of Mississippi Creed:

The University of Mississippi is a community of learning dedicated to nurturing excellence in intellectual inquiry and personal character in an open and diverse environment. As a voluntary member of this community: I believe in respect for the dignity of each person, I believe in fairness and civility, I believe in personal and professional integrity, I believe in academic honesty, I believe in academic freedom, I believe in good stewardship of our resources, I pledge to uphold these values and encourage others to follow my example.

The school also reinforced which points to make and how to emphasize the school’s social progress. Key facts included the university’s research and medical projects, special programs and institutions like the William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation and the Trent Lott Leadership Institute.

291. “Media and Public Relations Meeting” notes, March 25, 2008, Presidential Debate Collection, box 1, folder 1-2, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi; “Presidential Debate Conference Report,” March 25, 2008, Presidential Debate Collection, box 1, folder 1-2, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

292. Letter, Looser to Staton, January 11, 2008, Presidential Debate Collection, box 1, folder 1-2, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi; Debate binder, Presidential Debate Collection, box 1, folder 1-5, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi; Volunteer training packet, Presidential Debate Collection, box 2, folder 2-6, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

and statistics about African American enrollment and racial reconciliation programs. The Cirlot Agency helped the university do everything possible to communicate the school’s modern, progressive qualities to the public. The agency advised the University of Mississippi to streamline and augment the information that the public relations office disseminated through press releases. By including public relations messages in ambassador and volunteer orientation, the university wanted the faculty, staff, students, and locals who assisted with the events to have an education about all of the school’s programs, institutions, and growth. Such individuals had the freedom to use their own words and opinions, but if they chose to respond to the press as the university hoped, then they acted as unofficial public relations representatives.

An assertion of power over other narratives lies at the heart of the University of Mississippi public relations campaign. Derek H. Alderman’s concept of “reputational politics” relates to the university’s public relations method that disseminated a story of change, racial progress, and redemption that drew from 1960s racial troubleshooting techniques. Reputational politics consist of the struggle by which a person or event’s historical legacy becomes defined and redefined. Social actors and groups with specific commemorative agendas seek to undermine the goals and perspectives of other parties. Cultural memory involves the negotiation and possible conflict between different interpretations of an event in the past. The university did not specifically seek to derail other perspectives, discourage dialogue, or shut out opposing voices. Instead, the school

294. Letter, Looser to Staton, January 11, 2008, Presidential Debate Collection, box 1, folder 1-2, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi; Debate binder, Presidential Debate Collection, box 1, folder 1-5, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi; Volunteer training packet, Presidential Debate Collection, box 2, folder 2-6, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

flooded the media with press releases about progress and provided contact information for staff, faculty, and students who would largely support the same narrative. The media chose whether or not to print the press releases and the quotes of interviewees, but the school still aimed to dominate the headlines with a narrative of progress.

Due to his story of reconciling with the university that expelled him for a peaceful civil rights protest, Cole became an important spokesperson for the university. He attended the University of Mississippi from 1968 to 1970 in the first few years of Porter Lee Fortune Jr.’s tenure as chancellor. He disliked the ways the school treated African Americans and joined the Black Student Union. Some of the central issues that bothered Cole and other students at the time included the lack of African-American faculty and athletes. In 2007, Cole reflected, “I think to the bottom of our heart, we believed that if the world could somehow see what we were calling injustices here at the time, then the university would be so ashamed as to change itself…. We looked for opportunities to tell those beyond the institution of the plights within the institution.”

The opportunity came when a popular music group visited campus, and the Black Student Union organized a demonstration. Officers arrested approximately ninety students for protesting, including Cole at gunpoint, and sent to the local jail or state penitentiary. The university expelled Cole and six others, but he returned in 1993 as a faculty member of the Department of Mathematics and eventually rose to the position of assistant provost and assistant to the chancellor for multicultural affairs. His story encapsulated the school’s message for the 2008 debate, because his positive experiences in returning to the university create a narrative of triumph over racism. In 2011, Cole explained, “People may come to Ole Miss with preconceived notions, but they are going to find a progressive university and good

296. The University of Mississippi, The Ole Miss, Class of 2007, Oxford, Mississippi, 83. Also see Sid Salter, “Debate Spotlights Ole Miss, Oxford,” Clarion-Ledger, June 15, 2008, Presidential Debate Collection, box 2, folder 2-56, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

297. Sid Salter, “Debate Spotlights Ole Miss, Oxford,” Clarion-Ledger, June 15, 2008, Presidential Debate Collection, box 2, folder 2-56, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi; The University of Mississippi, The Ole Miss, Class of 2007, Oxford, Mississippi, 83.
community… Because of my experiences here, I'm insistent on my voice being heard. The difference between 1968 and today is that the University of Mississippi is now also insistent that my voice be heard. That's what I hope these 3,000 reporters realize.298 Demonstrating the school’s advancement, Cole’s narrative became an important feature in many articles about the debate. For the University of Mississippi, Cole's experiences highlight the great changes that occurred on the campus between 1962 and 2008 and fit perfectly into the racial moderation narrative of progress.

University officials also controlled the stories presented in another way that resembled the racially moderate technique of focusing on particular facts that supported an image of progressiveness. While the school did not lie about statistics, public relations chose to discuss specific facts in press releases that highlighted the university’s accomplishments, just as the university did during previous commemorations. For example, an entire editorial by Khayat circulated from the public relations department about all of “Mississippi’s Success Stories.”299 Other press releases discussed how minority enrollment steadily increased over the previous decade. Between 1998 and 2008, the percentage of African-American students enrolled climbed from 11 percent to 14 percent of the school’s population. Similarly, the proportion of all minorities rose at the school during the same period from 17.3 percent to 22.7 percent (see fig. 7).300

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The school also emphasized its academic accomplishments, such as the “litany of innovative programs” of study like the Lott Leadership Institute, the Croft Institute for International Studies, the Barksdale Honors College, and the William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation. Many programs and research centers also received their own entire press releases. By selecting statistics about minority enrollment growth and highlighting programs that showed the school’s commitment to inclusivity, the school advertised a community with racial harmony.

Many across the state saw the debate as the opportunity to display a new, modern Mississippi and to change perceptions that the state remained backward and undeveloped. Governor Haley Barbour and a new state-run website touted Mississippi’s industries and encouraged

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### Enrollment Statistics at the University of Mississippi, 1998-2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fall Semester Year</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percent African American</th>
<th>Percent Minority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>10,919</td>
<td>1,451</td>
<td>829</td>
<td>13,199</td>
<td>10.99%</td>
<td>17.27%</td>
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<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>10,996</td>
<td>1,560</td>
<td>869</td>
<td>13,425</td>
<td>11.62%</td>
<td>18.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>11,272</td>
<td>1,649</td>
<td>891</td>
<td>13,812</td>
<td>11.94%</td>
<td>18.39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>11,617</td>
<td>1,795</td>
<td>872</td>
<td>14,284</td>
<td>12.57%</td>
<td>18.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>11,983</td>
<td>1,865</td>
<td>960</td>
<td>14,808</td>
<td>12.59%</td>
<td>19.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>12,714</td>
<td>2,018</td>
<td>845</td>
<td>15,577</td>
<td>12.95%</td>
<td>18.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>13,312</td>
<td>2,183</td>
<td>1,005</td>
<td>16,500</td>
<td>13.23%</td>
<td>19.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>13,661</td>
<td>2,292</td>
<td>975</td>
<td>16,928</td>
<td>13.54%</td>
<td>19.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>13,738</td>
<td>2,388</td>
<td>1,186</td>
<td>17,312</td>
<td>13.79%</td>
<td>20.64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>13,833</td>
<td>2,331</td>
<td>1,159</td>
<td>17,323</td>
<td>13.46%</td>
<td>20.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>13,607</td>
<td>2,461</td>
<td>1,533</td>
<td>17,601</td>
<td>13.98%</td>
<td>22.69%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7. Enrollment Statistics at the University of Mississippi, 1998-2008.
businesses to invest in the state. Leading up to the debate, coverage in most Mississippi newspapers and by most white Mississippi journalists largely followed the university’s lead in emphasizing the same points of progress in articles. Khayat’s June 2008 press release, which newspapers across the state carried, said the debate “places the entire state in the international spotlight… making this is an [sic] incredible opportunity for sharing Mississippi’s success stories.” Charlie Mitchell’s widely reprinted Vicksburg Post article noted that Mississippians acted “as if it’s the biggest thing to happen since the boll weevil got booted from the state’s cotton crop.” The press coverage in Mississippi papers often suggested that the debate could change widespread perceptions about the entire state, not just the University of Mississippi, and numerous local politicians, journalists, and residents embraced the idea enthusiastically.

While the debate acted as the focal point, the university hosted fifty-nine associated events in the fall semester to encourage activism, awareness, and diversity, with another eleven events planned for the spring. As a comparison, Centre College held seventeen debate-related activities for the 2012 vice presidential debate and Lynn University hosted forty-eight affiliated events. The University of Mississippi created more events than other schools with comparable data available. The school showed great enthusiasm and effort in getting the students involved and making the debate an informative experience, whether or not students chose to attend the events. In addition, professors

303. “State Develops Innovative Website for the First 2008 Presidential Debate,” Courier, September 25, 2008, Presidential Debate Collection, box 6, folder 6-6, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

304. Khayat, “Debate Represents Rare Opportunity for Mississippi,” Clarion-Ledger, June 15, 2008, Presidential Debate Collection, box 6, folder 6-1, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.


offered nineteen related academic courses in the fall related to political history, contemporary political and social issues, presidential politics, writing, and journalism. Students, clubs, and departments organized a vast array of contests, activities, and lectures involving education, women in politics, the environment, healthcare, history, and many other topics. Many of the school’s special programs and institutes hosted events, such as the Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation and the Trent Lott Leadership Institute’s symposium on the transformation of politics in the South. The event discussed race, the rise of the New Right, and the role of the South in national politics. One event in particular embodied ways that the university actively sought to encourage interactions between students from different backgrounds. In September 2008, the school hosted the second annual “OMazing Games,” with the winners receiving much-coveted tickets to attend the debate. Organizers created diverse student teams based on place of birth, ethnicity, political affiliation, sexual orientation, and religion. To win the OMazing Games, students shared a meal together with their team, answered trivia about political history, participated in athletic events, and explored “diversity issues” through conversations. Organizers aimed to give students of different cultures and lifestyles who might not meet otherwise the common experience of competing together. The debate events highlight some of the practical ways that the university of Mississippi created dialogue


between students and educated the community, but no studies assessed the level of success that the games or other debate events had in changing perceptions or creating lasting relationships between students.

THE STATE OF RACE RELATIONS IN 2008

With the carefully constructed public relations campaign, the University of Mississippi conveyed a narrative of racial progress, but it is also important to examine actual race relations on the campus. Journalists provided extensive commentary, in the forms of praises and critiques, about what they observed in Oxford and on the campus. Many noted the self-segregation on campus and the continued use of Confederate symbols as school symbols to suggest that the University of Mississippi’s racial progress was not yet complete. Yet the student newspaper’s reaction to the Ku Klux Klan’s announcement that members would attend the debate events highlights a significant difference in racial views among the students represented in the editorial. Changes and continuities in racial views and interracial interactions demonstrate that racial progress occurs in a process of complex, gradual transformation at the University of Mississippi.

Although many proclaimed that the university had moved largely or completely beyond racial problems, not everyone accepted the concept racial reconciliation so eagerly. Some journalists from non-southern newspapers sought deeper information about the university’s racial advancements and interviewed students around campus. Such journalists highlighted the complex and differing opinions about the university’s attempt to create a narrative of progress. While acknowledging the changes since 1962, *The New York Times*’ Shaila Dewan pointed out “that the university still has far to go.” The journalist noted that many black students did not participate during football games when the band played “Dixie” and the crowd chanted, “The South will rise again.” One white fraternity still held an annual “Old South” party with antebellum dresses and
Confederate uniforms. In addition, African-American students believed they had “virtually no chance of being elected to honorary positions like homecoming queen or Miss Ole Miss.” The Greek system remained largely segregated, and African Americans still experienced more difficulties in obtaining student leadership roles than their white counterparts. Some black journalists and a few residents of Mississippi wrote about the debate with an emphasis on the hurdles that remained. For example, John Ellis Ishmael Briggs of Biloxi, Mississippi, wrote a letter to the editor. He said, “I am amazed that you would have the audacity to promote an Orwellian rendition of Mississippi’s efforts at reconciliation and progress in a pseudo-journalistic attempt to suggest that the selection of Ole Miss… is a ‘recognition of progress in our state.’” As examples, he pointed to voters’ decision to keep the Confederate battle flag in the state flag and continued celebration of Confederate heritage in Mississippi. He also contended that the state’s progress came from federal intervention, court decisions, and the leadership of a few. The conflicting views about race relations did not align racially, although African Americans represented most of the few voices protesting claims of racial progress. The debate highlights the contested nature of the meaning of racial progress and reconciliation, as well as the friction between the cultural gatekeepers’ agendas and those whose ideas did not correlate. It is important to note, however, that opinions divided along more complex and amorphous lines than a simple black-white or Missippian-outsider dichotomy.


310. Ibid.


312. Ibid.
Fears of white hate groups instigating problems plagued officials throughout the planning process, but anxieties intensified in September when the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) announced that members would attend the debate without regalia to hand out pamphlets and recruit new members. The *Daily Mississippian* reported the news on September 15 and responded with “An Open Letter to the KKK” the next day. The newspaper’s board wrote that the school had “utmost respect” for the Klan’s free speech rights, but that “no one will listen.” They noted, “You are not hiding [by wearing plain clothes] because you want to scare us; you are hiding because you are scared of us… With each step this university takes away from intolerance and bigotry, the power of the Klan and all it stands for diminishes.” The article vowed to the Klan that the University of Mississippi would be the “ultimate symbol of [its] failure.” Student journalist Paul P. Quinn noted that the general student reaction “seems laced with cynicism.” The university declined to make any official comments due to the vague nature of the Klan’s announcement, and few Mississippi newspapers carried the story. Leslie Criss of Tupelo’s *Daily Journal* expressed that the *Daily Mississippian’s* editorial replaced the knots in her stomach with “a powerful pride in the younger generations of Mississippians who are far more enlightened and courageous than many members of my own generation.” Perhaps most newspapers did not want to acknowledge the Klan in light of the international attention focused on the state. If that was the goal, it was largely effective, because few national papers carried the story. The Klan’s announcement showed that race remained a real issue.

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in twenty-first century Mississippi, but residents’ reactions and the Klan’s failure to make an appearance at the debate also revealed how much the state changed since the civil rights era.

As journalists from outside the South descended upon Oxford for the September 26 debate, they commented on the state of race relations. Headlines across the country and around the world applauded the university throughout the week of the debate. Wilkie called respected NBC News journalist Tom Brokaw “a friend of Ole Miss” for previously visiting the school for football games. Brokaw returned to the University of Mississippi and spoke to a fully booked Fulton Chapel with two simulcasts in the Grove and another campus auditorium the night before the debate. He told the audience, “I view this institution as an example, as I go around the country, of the great progress we have made.”315 He noted the incoming first black president of the Ole Miss Alumni Association, a woman named Rose Jackson Flenorl who assumed leadership the day after the debate.316 Brokaw said changes continued through young adults who acted “metaphorically [as] the grandchildren of Dr. Martin Luther King” and worked to further equality in America.317 Associated Press writer Emily Wagster Pettus wrote an article that many other news sources carried. She embraced the idea that the school’s racial problems no longer existed. The article stated, “Now, Ole Miss is a diverse university where racial conflict is a topic for history classes rather than a fact of everyday life.”318 She


316. Ibid.; Email, Vickie Roberts to unknown, September 29, 2008, Presidential Debate Collection, box 1, folder 1-1, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.


318. Emily Wagster Pettus, “Debate Can Show Nation How Ole Miss Has Changed,” Greenwood Commonwealth, September 21, 2008, Presidential Debate Collection, box 2, folder 2-59, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi. Also see The Associated Press, "For Ole Miss, Debate Marks School’s Progress,"
quoted history professor David Sansing who said, “I think what we have here is really a confluence of two lines of history, where you have a new Ole Miss, a post-racial Ole Miss, and you have a post-racial black candidate running for president.”  

Press releases highlighted some international journalists who perceived the South differently before they visited. Kenyan reporter Maina Kiai held reservations about visiting Mississippi, but he expressed that he was “pleasantly surprised” at the atmosphere, beautiful campus, and southern hospitality.  

Most of the reporters who visited Oxford focused their stories leading up to September 26 on the progress and reconciliation that occurred in the years since 1962. As the university and the Cirlot Agency anticipated, the school received much media coverage in the days leading up to the event. With little to report about before the candidates arrived and twenty-four hour news cycles to fill, the journalists who visited Oxford shared their impressions on the town and university. As with every other commemorative event, the reporters largely compared the school’s past with the present, thus perpetuating the association between the University of Mississippi and race.

THE DEBATE’S OUTCOME AND INFLUENCE

The Cirlot Agency’s report on October 3, 2008, calculated the number of articles, mentions, and hits that related to the University of Mississippi and the first debate. 

Journalists like Tom


319. Ibid.


Brokaw who came to Oxford for the debate brought the city and university international attention through various forms of media. There were approximately 6,663 mentions in broadcast news, 4,019 articles on the Internet, and 727 print articles written that discussed the university that reached a total audience of over 806,600,000. Nielsen ratings determined that 52.4 million people watched the debate in the United States alone. The event generated over 291,000 debate website hits and over 23,000 Ole Miss NewsDesk website hits between September 22 and 26 alone. In addition, about 11,410 international stories discussed the debate at Oxford. The Cirlot Agency estimated that the total publicity value by October 3 reached $34.5 million, which exceeded initial estimates.322 Vice Chancellor of University Relations Gloria Kellum explained, “When you look at the number of media impressions around the world, this is very significant for our state.”323 The impact statistics show the cost-benefit ratio as a success, especially for a state school in Mississippi. University officials expressed excitement and satisfaction that the debate generated so much positive publicity and happened without any disturbances from the Klan or protestors. Not all the articles and media mentions contained elements of the school’s racial moderation-influenced campaign, but with an estimated 806,000,000 individuals who heard or read mentions of the University of Mississippi debate, the school’s message of progress undoubtedly reached some. The 2008 presidential debate became the most expensive, farthest-reaching public relations campaign that the University of Mississippi undertook, and administrators based the campaign upon tactics that echoed back to the racial troubleshooters of the 1960s.

322. Ibid.

It is difficult to judge the debate’s effect on school enrollment and funding, and it is especially complicated to analyze how the event affected perceptions of the University of Mississippi. In a 2012 interview, Mullins explained that he merely had anecdotal evidence to support the debate’s impact on such intangible things. He said out-of-state enrollment increased since 2008 and that “several parents” told him their children chose the school “because of what they saw.” He also stated that one of the most distinguished donors mentioned that he had never been so proud of his school and possibly made a donation the next day. Mullins said that other than complaints about the limited number of tickets for the debate, he “didn’t hear a negative comment from anybody about the way the event went and the overall perception and what it meant to the university.” Evidence suggests that the University of Mississippi will be able to assess the impacts with time. Centre College, which hosted a presidential debate in 2000, noted that enrollment and donations grew afterward and that “the debate remain[ed] a point of pride” for the school and community. At the very least, the event did not have a harmful effect on the school or its reputation. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the university’s public relations efforts met some success, because some held more positive views of the school and town after the debate.

Many from the university and Oxford communities expressed immense satisfaction and pride in the immediate wake of the affair. Khayat’s email to the school afterward called the event “incredibly successful.” He continued, “Without exception, our visitors from the Presidential Debate Commission, media, and political parties were highly complimentary of the Ole Miss community… Each of you is entitled to feel a great sense of achievement and the assurance that Ole

325. Ibid.
326. LaRaye Brown, “Colleges Score Big in Hosting Debates,” Clarion-Ledger, June 14, 2008, Presidential Debate Collection, box 2, folder 2-56, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi
Miss has reached a milestone in our history." One poignant reaction came from African-American alumna Vickie Roberts, who decided to become a lifetime Ole Miss Alumni Association member after visiting for the events. She said, “Personally, I have not always felt a sense of belonging with the university, however on Friday, September 26, 2008 I finally felt that sense of peace that had escaped me [original emphasis].” Her email highlights feelings of disassociation that accompanied her experiences of being African American at the university, but the debate altered her perceptions. In October 2008, journalism professor Samir A. Husni expressed that the affair occupied a special place for the community and its history, especially since many outside of the state would forget where the first 2008 debate occurred. He concluded, “It may have just been a media event to the rest of the world, but to us at Ole Miss… it was a once in a lifetime event, no matter who won the debate. But in our heart of hearts, we know who won the debate: all of us at Ole Miss and in the city of Oxford.” For many, like graduate student Michelle Bright, who attended as an undergraduate student in 2008, the debate marked an important event in the school’s history that allowed the university to compare the present with the past. Hosting the debate gave many affiliated with the school an opportunity to speak about race relations on campus in positive terms, rather than speaking solely about violence and racism. All the events, media attention, and hype allowed some residents and students to feel like they were a part of a larger, historic event. Those who gave time or money into the debate invested in something they hoped would be a success, and felt pride when

327. Email, Khayat to multiple recipients, September 29, 2008, Presidential Debate Collection, box 1, folder 1-1, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

328. Email, Vickie Roberts to unknown, September 29, 2008, Presidential Debate Collection, box 1, folder 1-1, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.


the events occurred without negative media attention or major problems. Like the Meredith statue, the debate acted as tangible evidence for some in the local community that the school progressed.

Many residents across the state reflected upon the debate with the same sense of accomplishment and pride. They hoped that the event would change opinions about the entire state, not just university. When a reporter asked Ross Fowler if he lived in the area, the Hattiesburg resident responded, “Doesn’t matter… For this, we were all Mississippians and saw ourselves as hosts in Oxford.” Greenville attorney Victor McTeer reflected upon his time at the debate and concluded, “I have always been proud to be a black Mississippian, but today, I am proud to be a Mississippian and maybe… I share the audacity of hope for our future and all of our people.” McTeer’s use of the phrase “audacity of hope,” the title of Obama’s 2006 book, hints at his political leanings. Perhaps his optimistic views about race in Mississippi stemmed from Obama’s nomination and successful performance during the first debate. In 2012, Mullins reflected that he received many letters conveying that “this was not just a University of Mississippi success, this was a success for the state of Mississippi.” Just as people across the state buzzed with excitement at the upcoming debate, many expressed satisfaction and achievement afterward. For many, sentiments of pride transcended county lines in Mississippi due to the successful debate.

Before the debate, some non-southern journalists examined the school and state with a critical eye, especially compared to the optimistic tone of Mississippi newspapers, and many abstained from the outright declarations that the debate hailed a new era for the state. Those who visited Oxford, resoundingly agreed afterward that the city made much progress since 1962. The


332. Victor McTeer, “It’s Enough to Make One Proud to Be a Mississippian,” Delta Democrat-Times, September 28, 2008, Presidential Debate Collection, box 6, folder 6-9, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

Associated Press and dozens of other newspapers produced headlines and cartoons following the same theme: since the debate had no clear winner, the media declared university the victor.334 CBS Washington correspondent and Face the Nation host Bob Schieffer attended the debate, which marked his first time back to Oxford since the 1962 riots. He reflected that his first trip remained “the most terrifying experience” he ever had. He acknowledged that the country still faced challenges, but that his return trip “helped [him] understand that in less than [his] lifetime, we have also come a very long way.”335 Such statements, partnered with calling the university the winner of the debate, suggested that the school reached a place of racial harmony and equality.Naming a winner implied that forward progress was unnecessary because university completed the race. While most discussions in newspapers included caveats against thinking that the nation and university had no racial problems remaining, the rhetoric used by journalists who visited Oxford overwhelmingly indicated that the university and the debate succeeded due to the school’s racial advancement.

The accolades also came from National Public Radio’s Weekend Edition host Scott Simon. He explained, “For years, Mississippi was a state that many considered barely a part of the rest of the country... Today, the Oxford that played host to the Presidential Debate is considered a cultural treasure... You see a visible integration that’s often missing in Georgetown... Manhattan... Santa Monica... and other communities that still mock Mississippi.”336 It is important to consider what

334. The Associated Press, “Winner of the 1st Presidential Debate? The Host, Ole Miss,” October 7, 2008, Presidential Debate Collection, box 2, folder 2-60, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi; George Curry, “Presidential Debate Highlighted Progress Made in Mississippi,” Philadelphia Inquirer, reprinted in Mobile Press Register, October 5, 2008, Presidential Debate Collection, box 6, folder 6-6, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi. Also, see “What They Said About Us,” Oxford Eagle, September 29, 2008, Presidential Debate Collection, box 6, folder 6-8, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

335. Sid Salter, “Debate Winner? Ole Miss,” Clarion-Ledger, no date, Presidential Debate Collection, box 2, folder 2-59, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi. Also, see Jeff Roberson, “A Significant Moment in Our History,” Baldwyn News, October 2, 2008, Presidential Debate Collection, box 6, folder 6-1, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.

constitutes “visible integration,” a subjective term based upon an individual’s personal experiences. In addition, close physical proximity and interracial exchanges does not always translate to true integration and equality. In a geographically small town such as Oxford, interactions between individuals of different races occur, but exchanges do not always happen on equal power levels. There can be different expectations for white and black residents who share the same physical spaces. African-American residents often shop and eat away from the central Square in Oxford, but perhaps the visible integration occurred in the days surrounding the debate because social customs suspended for the out-of-town visitors and international press. The possibility exists that harmonious interracial interactions occurred as a performance, whether consciously or subconsciously, as a result of the continuous media coverage emphasizing the event as a crucial chance to show the city’s metamorphosis. National press carefully observed race relations in Oxford and concluded that much changed in nearly fifty years.

As cultural gatekeepers, journalists had the opportunity to shape the views of the millions of individuals who read, heard, or watched stories about the University of Mississippi and the debate. Nationally known and respected journalists like Tom Brokaw held a great deal of power and influence in society. In addition, the reporters who visited Oxford, observed local race relations during the debate events, and discussed their views provided compelling firsthand accounts to their readers and viewers. When the news discussed changes at the University of Mississippi, the media aided the school’s public relations campaign by disseminating the story of racial progress. University administrators and the event’s planners hoped members of the media would latch onto the message. Not every reporter internalized or spread the school’s public relations operation, but many who visited Oxford did and they had the power to influence others.

Visitors also emailed school officials to convey how the university inspired them to have faith in a new generation of Americans. Non-southerners Kelly Jacobs and Steve O'Dell both
expressed optimism for the future, because the students showed their ability to work respectfully alongside each other and overcome differences to achieve important goals. Jacobs listed why the first debate unfolded as the best of the three presidential debates she attended that year. In particular, she cited southern hospitality and how well the university organized the event. She applauded the students who “cheered Obama and McCain together.” A number of non-southerners noted southern hospitality as an impressive quality that marked their visit to Oxford, an observation that suggests Oxonians recognized the importance of the event and interacted with others as if the nation and world watched. University administrators’ and Mayor Richard Howorth’s mentions of southern hospitality in interviews suggests that locals were conscious of the roles that society expected them to perform during the debate preparations and events. For many visitors, the debate convinced them that common conceptions of the school as a place with backward racial attitudes and conflict were incorrect assessments. The changed attitudes expressed through newspaper articles, editorials, letters, and emails highlight the successes of the university’s public relations campaign, because many who visited Oxford noted the harmonious race relations and progress, instead of the persisting inequalities and social expectations that called for self-segregation.

The school’s efforts did not completely replace the cultural memory of the university and Mississippi. Those who did not visit Oxford for the debate comprised the largest group that expressed an indifferent attitude toward the new image that the university projected. Mark Leonard of Columbus, Mississippi, wrote before the debate that Mississippians placed too much significance on the event, because many people would not remember the location for the first debate. Some other Mississippi writers expressed similar sentiments, including The Daily Mississippian’s Willow Nero, who pointed to the post-2004 growth rate of former host Arizona State University as

337. Email, Kelly Jacobs to Thomas “Sparky” Reardon, October 18, 2008, Presidential Debate Collection, box 1, folder 1-1, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi; Email, Steve O’Dell to Khayat, September 26, 2008, Presidential Debate Collection, box 6, folder 6-1, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.
Leonard watched the event on television and asserted that “the hopes of some that this exposure would somehow magically erase the unfortunate perception that many Americans have of our State” did not translate to reality. Leonard informally polled twenty-two out-of-state friends asking whether the debate coverage changed how they perceived Mississippi. He wrote, “Not a single person said they thought about it one way or another.” While his informal survey did not represent a wider or the general population, Leonard’s findings showed that the school’s public relations campaign did not affect some. As Griffen and Bollen asserted, individuals do not always completely internalize cultural gatekeepers’ efforts to change cultural memory. Oxford’s visitors had firsthand views of race relations on campus and interacted with locals and students, but people who turned on the television just for the debate had limited exposure to the university’s public relations efforts. The debate between McCain and Obama occupied the central concern for most media outlets and individuals who watched the debate on television. The debate demonstrates the variations in public memory and individuals’ receptions of public memory campaigns, because the event produced a wide range of reactions, from indifference to completely revised views of the university.

The first debate with an African American presidential candidate marked an important milestone for the university, the state of Mississippi, and the entire country. Since cultural memory can significantly influence the politics, culture, and behaviors of a society or an individual, the first

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2008 presidential debate provides a window to study an attempt to change longstanding negative public perceptions. The public relations campaign fits Griffin and Bollen's analysis of cultural memory as a contested, negotiated process between the cultural gatekeepers and ordinary people. Known to many as the place where violence was a better option than integration, the University of Mississippi conveyed their commitment to racial reconciliation and progress to an international audience. Relying on the racial moderation public relations tactics to remedy perceptions of racial problems, the university carefully chose the message, statistics, and spokespeople to demonstrate that the school achieved much progress and moved beyond the racially troubled past. In addition, local leaders encouraged all community members to exude southern hospitality to change associations with the town’s racial violence in 1962. School officials and the media held the most power in disseminating the idea of a new university, but other people who pointed to continued problems received attention as well. Faculty, staff, students, visitors, and television viewers expressed a wide variety of reactions to the debate influenced by their location, proximity to the events, and personal stake in the widespread transformation of the state’s public perceptions. For those with greater emotional or physical distance from the events, public memory of Mississippi proved more difficult to change. Those more closely involved, whether as residents of Mississippi or visitors for the debate, expressed more positive, dramatic reactions to the university’s transformation. As graduate student Brian Wilson explained in 2011, “When you mention Ole Miss, James Meredith is usually the next sentence out of someone’s mouth.”

Perhaps with time the following sentence will refer to the 2008 presidential debate with the first African American candidate or the university’s racial progress.

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CONCLUSION

“THE GHOSTS OF OLE MISS ARE FAR FROM DEAD”

In the fifty years since the University of Mississippi’s integration, administrators and important spokespeople often utilized racial moderation, as observed during anniversary celebrations and commemorative events. The media attention provided the school with opportunities to demonstrate that the school changed after 1962. The university’s administration employed racially moderate strategies to create and control a narrative that tied the integration with post-1962 racial progress in ways that benefitted those with power at the school. At commemorative events, administrators and the public relations department created public relations campaigns to communicate two primary messages to a wider audience. First, the school attempted to shift blame away from the university community by giving justifications for continued racial problems. Second, the university used a variety of methods to demonstrate that the school moved forward after the riot. In demonstrating the progress since 1962, the school cited specific facts and statistics that reflected well upon the school but simultaneously minimized perpetuating racial problems. At the same time, public relations campaigns downplayed evidence that racial problems and self-segregation persisted on campus. By minimizing public attention on the negative, the administrations hoped to improve the school’s public image. The university used racially moderate techniques in commemorative activities to remedy the way many viewed the school after the riot, but the tactics simultaneously stifled open, genuine conversations about race relations and the ways that the school could improve.
“Forward Rebels?” explored three of the most significant years and events related to the integration’s commemorations. First, the twentieth anniversary events in 1982 showed how the administration employed racial moderation to promote a message of progress. The twentieth anniversary allowed the school to attempt to create a more favorable public image, but criticisms from African-American faculty and alumni, as well as statements about lingering racial problems, jeopardized the public relations campaign. Administrators often ignored the critiques, instead of squarely addressing the issues. Second, the planning and erection of the civil rights monument between 1995 and 2006 demonstrated that school officials continued to utilize racial moderation, especially the focus on progress beyond past racial problems. A conflict over the memorial’s message demonstrated that the collective memory of the integration remained contested. Lack of changes in the school’s power structure affected on the memorial’s final message, because the chancellor scrapped the original design created through an open, democratic process and built the monument he desired. Honoring a single hero, Meredith, had benefits and drawbacks related to commemorating an individual’s accomplishments. Third, racial moderation manifested during first presidential debate in 2008, an event hosted by the University of Mississippi. The means that administrators used to attempt to reshape the school’s public memory through the event echoed how racial troubleshooters in the 1960s stressed the state’s progress through public relations campaigns. The debate became a symbol representing the country’s progress and the university wanted to demonstrate its own progress to the world. The debate highlighted the power of civil rights movement memory, in addition to the successes and failures of an attempt to alter the school’s historical memory. The three events molded the discussions regarding race, the integration, and progress at the University of Mississippi in ways that significantly impacted the riot and integration’s historical memory and the school’s culture. The commemorations displayed the
continuities between racial troubleshooting methods in the 1960s and how school spokespeople discussed the racial issues at later commemorative events.

The present study exhibits methodologies and interpretations of the University of Mississippi’s post-integration history that differ from other historical monographs of the school and civil rights memory studies. No previous scholar examined how the University of Mississippi community remembered, portrayed, commemorated, and used the integration story in the fifty years after 1962. By blending sociological theories with historical analysis, this thesis aimed to provide a multifaceted assessment of the integration’s memory and effects. While a number of historians provided important information about the school’s history before and after the riot, none do so through the lens of memory and commemorations. Sociologists often analyze memory within a short time frame, but the present study spans from 1962 through 2008. Memory scholars often neglected the role of civil rights movement memory at schools, colleges, and universities. The majority of civil rights memory studies observed the roles of memorials, street names, museums, and other physical markers, but schools create communities in ways that museums do not. Since universities act as centers of research and training for the next generation and collective memory can significantly influence social, political, and social norms, cultural memory had enormous influence at the University of Mississippi. Civil rights memory studies also largely focus on King and the national movement’s impact upon society and culture, rather than exploring local history. Finally, “Forward Rebels?” attempted to combine various types of commemorations into one assessment of civil rights movement memory at the University of Mississippi. From anniversary celebrations to a memorial to the public relations crusade throughout the presidential debate, the different kinds of commemorations demonstrated various aspects and uses for memory.

The story of the University of Mississippi’s post-integration years is relevant other institutions and locales across the country that experienced racial struggles and conflict, because
racial moderation occurs elsewhere. From everyday politics and social interactions to commemorations of the civil rights movement, people use moderation, token gestures, and strategic compliance to address racial problems. Crespino concluded, “Perhaps it is most accurate to say that since the 1960s, white Americans – from rural Mississippi to the most cosmopolitan communities in American – have practiced their own form of ‘practical segregation.’” Whether in *de facto* segregated neighborhoods and schools or through gerrymandered congressional districts, some white individuals attempt to limit their interactions with or the power of African Americans. The use of racial moderation allowed politicians and other leaders to maintain the same power dynamics that existed before the civil rights movement. With the rise of the New Right in the 1980s, the racial, religious, and political views, as well as means of handling race relations, that Mississippi epitomized in the 1960s became a part of national politics. The University of Mississippi’s recent history acts not just as a story of one flagship institution, but also as a way to better understand contemporary racial politics in the United States.

Although “Forward Rebels?” presented an assessment of the integration’s memory and commemorative events at the University of Mississippi, other questions regarding civil rights memory at the school remain and deserve consideration. First, the events in the immediate aftermath of the riot need further exploration to connect how the language and racial troubleshooting tactics used in 1962 played a role in the later commemorations. Initial research suggests that the university dealt with the riot and integration’s trauma by discussing rebuilding, moving forward, and progressing, an observation that, if further substantiated by evidence, provides greater legitimacy to the arguments in the present study. Second, other commemorative events on campus merit attention. The “Open Doors” event in 2002 celebrating the fortieth anniversary of integration utilized the narrative of progress and racially moderate tactics as well. Interestingly, the

342. Crespino, 271.
event occurred after the civil rights memorial’s design selection but before Khayat altered the plans and press releases, newspaper articles, and a self-guided walking tour brochure advertised the monument’s construction and printed renderings of the design.343 The publicity about the memorial during the fortieth anniversary shows that the University of Mississippi planned to use the CRCI’s monument and suggests that the chancellor’s opinion of the memorial greatly changed between 2002 and 2005, when he replaced the original plans. In addition, further exploration of the years between 1962 and the first commemoration in 1982, as well as the time between 1982 and 1996 would provide a more complete assessment of the integration’s collective memory. Finally, the study of the University of Mississippi fits into a wider history of civil rights memory. A number of schools across the country, from elementary through postsecondary, experienced similar traumatic or highly publicized civil rights events. By placing the University of Mississippi into the context of other schools, similar themes and trends may emerge, or the other institutions will highlight the University of Mississippi’s uniqueness.

The present study highlighted that changes occurred over time, but similar narratives and themes persisted through the years, and events in 2012 provided further evidence that the integration’s memory remains relevant on the University of Mississippi’s campus. The school held a “yearlong celebration of diversity” from September of 2011 through October of 2012 and titled the commemoration “Fifty Years of Integration: Opening the Closed Society.”344 Over two dozen events occurred in the week before and after the anniversary of the riot, including a panel with some


marshals present during the riot and a discussion with students who attended the school in 1962. Attorney General Eric Holder spoke and musician and humanitarian activist Harry Belefonte gave the keynote address. Chancellor Dan Jones issued an official apology to Meredith for the school’s actions in 1961 and 1962. He continued emphasizing the narrative of progress, but couched his statements with more attention on past racial problems and the need for renewed commitment to human rights. For a press release, he said, “On the anniversary of such an important event, it is important to express regret for past injustices, recommit to open doors of opportunity for all, regardless of race or ethnicity, celebrate the progress achieved together and acknowledge that we still live in an imperfect world and must continue to seek to rid ourselves and the world of injustice.”

Cole also spoke about the school’s improvements since 1962. A USA Today article stated, “He [Cole] believes the university is positioning itself to be a voice for racial reconciliation, but acknowledges that challenges exist, including the recruitment of more minorities to faculty and administrative positions. Ole Miss wants to change its image from one mired in old black-and-white footage, he said. ‘We want the world to know we’re a 21st-century university.’” The theme of progress manifested in the fiftieth anniversary events and press coverage, as in previous commemorative events.

Despite the university’s proclamations that the institution changed, an event on the night of Obama’s reelection challenged the notion that the school progressed. On November 6, 2012, before


eleven at night, news agencies called the election for Obama. Just before midnight on a cool night in Oxford, a group of students supporting the Republican candidate, Governor Mitt Romney, gathered in the Grove for a “Romney Rally.”348 As the group of students grew, the crowd consisted of predominately African-American Obama supporters and mostly white, male Romney supporters. University Police Department officers tried to disperse the crowd after midnight, but the group moved to a campus intersection. Someone yelled a racial slur directed toward the Obama backers. The university’s incident report described, “From this point on, the antagonisms switched from being purely political to being racialized with the presidential election serving as a pretext for racially-charged verbal confrontations.”349 Although most individuals simply observed, the crowd swelled to approximately four hundred, as students used social media sites like Twitter to spread inflammatory and sometimes inaccurate statements. False information included that people shot guns, that students overturned a police car, and that police used teargas and tasers. The incident report also stated that passengers in moving vehicles played “Dixie,” chanted “the South shall rise again,” and yelled racial slurs and epithets.350 A few instances of brief physical altercations occurred and two students burned an Obama campaign sign. Students posted photos to Twitter and videos to the hosting website YouTube of the protest and the media used the images in their coverage.351 As an example of the news reach, an article posted on the website BuzzFeed early in the morning of

349. Ibid., 8.
350. Ibid., 10.
November 7 received a total of 112,725 views and 777 shares on Twitter.\textsuperscript{352} Aldrich said that his daughter who lived in China heard about the event.\textsuperscript{353} Some students on social media called the event a riot and many news agencies reused the language, although most university officials called the term an inaccurate description of the events.\textsuperscript{354} Headlines discussing a riot at the University of Mississippi conjured images of the campus on the night of September 30, 1962, and brought to mind the question of whether the school’s claims of progress rang true.

Many connected the recent commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary with the election night protests as evidence that further changes needed to occur on campus. A mass email from the chancellor to the university community stated, “As we have acknowledged throughout this year of recognizing fifty years of racial integration at our university, despite evidence of progress, we still live in an imperfect world.”\textsuperscript{355} Jones “strongly condemn[ed]” the racial epithets used and said school officials felt “embarrassed” by the language.\textsuperscript{356} The school’s incident report said, “In the wake of many successful events commemorating the University’s fiftieth anniversary of integration during 2012, the events of November 6 cast an unfortunate pall over those successes locally, regionally, and nationally… Although not a ‘riot,’ as erroneously suggested by social media and news media outlets, the events carry with them the duty of reflection on racial concerns in the University and society as a whole.”


\textsuperscript{353} Aldrich, interview by McClure, 2013.


\textsuperscript{356} Ibid.
whole.”⁵⁵⁷ Many news outlets noted the fiftieth anniversary events and discussed the 1962 riot in coverage of the November protest.⁵⁵⁸ An open letter from student leaders to the school community expressed, “We’ve made progress as a community and as a university since James Meredith bravely integrated our institution, but election night reminded us we still have a long way to go.”⁵⁵⁹

During interviews that occurred between January and April 2013 with ten individuals who attended the fiftieth anniversary commemoration, nine spontaneously recalled the election night protest and discussed the incident in relation to the anniversary.⁵⁶⁰ Without being prompted, all but one spoke about the protests while answering questions about the fiftieth anniversary, a sign of a clear mental link between the two events for the interviewees. Nancy Hilyer expressed, “I thought, ‘My god, that’s not what I saw there in September.’”⁵⁶¹ African-American Oxford resident Michelle Williams explained, “I gave people at the University of Mississippi more respect and thought that they were more educated than that.”⁵⁶² She believed local anti-Obama sentiment had racial undertones. She continued, “[It was] more about his race, because when they would, say, use the n-word or say “the black” then [they’re] not seeing the person… They didn’t talk about his politics…

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They talked about him as an African-American man.”³⁶³ Aldrich, who described some of the integration events as “cracker jack,” said the November incident showed that more improvements needed to occur on campus. He also reflected, “People with Ole Miss connections were just crestfallen, because we’ve been on such a high the last fifteen years of really growing a quality university. It was like a gut punch.”³⁶⁴ United States Marshal Richard Kirkland Bowden, one of six African-American marshals assigned to Oxford in mid-October 1962, summarized his views on the commemoration and the protest when he said, “I want to give Chancellor Jones the highest compliment for what he attempted to do on the fiftieth anniversary of James Meredith’s admission to the school... I’m certain it educated and enlightened many members of the community, but I’m just wondering if it snowballed off campus and affected the adjacent communities and consequently, subsequently the entire state... Unless it wasn’t put into practice, unless there was the realization that we have to do better than we’ve been doing, it all was for naught.”³⁶⁵ Bowden and the other interviewees, who had largely positive statements about the commemoration, viewed the protest in connection to the anniversary and the progress yet to occur.

The juxtaposing images of the fiftieth anniversary and the election night incident highlight that the riot and integration remained a central, yet contested, part of the school’s cultural memory and public image in 2012. A senior named Lexi Thoman wrote an article called “The Ghosts of Ole Miss are Far From Dead” in the Daily Mississippian and tied the school’s public image and commemoration goals to the 1962 riot and the 2012 protests. She explained, “The nation’s modern understanding of The University of Mississippi, which this entire year had focused on the 50th anniversary of integration and progress in race relations, was eclipsed in an instant. What should

³⁶³. Ibid.
³⁶⁵. Richard Kirkland Bowden, telephone interview by Jillian E. McClure, Silver Spring, Maryland, April 9, 2013.
have signified a new chapter in Ole Miss history has been forgotten. The protesters have reminded
the entire nation of the stereotype that Ole Miss has fought for 50 years to dispel. They perpetuated
the belief that we are racist, that we are ignorant and that we are unwilling to accept inevitable social
change. Each incident that highlighted continued racial problems at the University of Mississippi
and each commemorative event of the integration created conversations about race. Often, the
administration avoided addressing the issues squarely and instead focused on creating positive
publicity. In the fifty years since the riot, the University of Mississippi’s administrators attempted to
combat the negative image during commemorative events, but the history of responding to rather
than preventing problems limited the actual progress that officials claimed to transpire. By
recognizing and limiting racial moderation, the University of Mississippi could achieve the genuine
progress that each commemorative event boasts.

366. Lexi Thoman, "The Ghosts of Ole Miss are Far From Dead," The DM Online, November 9, 2012, accessed
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